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The Pleasantly Problematic Nature of J.D. Salinger's Glass Family Stories

Ceasare Joseph Filipelli
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, filipel2@unlv.nevada.edu

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THE PLEASANTLY PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF J.D. SALINGER'S GLASS
FAMILY STORIES

By

Cesare Joseph Filipelli

Bachelor of Arts in English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts – English

Department of English
College of Liberal Arts
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Cesare Joseph Filipelli

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The Pleasantly Problematic Nature of J.D. Salinger's Glass Family Stories

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Department of English

Donald Revell, Ph.D., Committee Chair

John Unrue, Ph.D., Committee Member

Stephen Brown, Ph.D., Committee Member

Margaret Harp, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Interim Dean of the Graduate College

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Abstract

The following thesis analyzes the problematic nature of J.D. Salinger's principal Glass family stories ("A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Franny," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," "Zooney," "Seymour: an Introduction," and "Hapworth 16, 1924") primarily by means of examining errors in narrative structure, complications in constructing a clearly defined sense of spirituality, and a lack of a functional organization between stories. I argue that although these components of Salinger's Glass family stories ultimately prove to be problematic and account for inconsistencies within the overarching narrative, they are a product of experimentation with form and, as such, should be viewed positively as necessary processes in expanding and traversing standard literary paradigms.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the exception of the recent release of a J.D. Salinger documentary, interest in Salinger's writing in recent years, especially regarding his Glass family stories, has become a near-forgotten focus of American literary criticism. Much of the scholarship related to these stories has remained dormant since the 1980's; however, with the supposed upcoming release of more Glass family stories, amongst other new works, there has been a revival in interest regarding Salinger's body of work. Salinger's Glass family stories have puzzled and intrigued readers for decades by means of their intricacies of narrative, both in form and in function, as well as through their use of unconventional religious and spiritual constructs in forming a conglomerate family faith. By utilizing these unique strategies, Salinger provides a narrative much unlike anything that precedes it. This collective narrative, however, is laden with issues, some of which are minor while others are fundamental to the function of the stories at large.

By looking at the primary Glass family stories as parts of a larger construction, narrative inconsistencies become an unavoidable aspect of reading and examining these stories. Although some of these inconsistencies prove to be minor discrepancies, such as smaller errors in chronology that do not deeply affect the outcome of these stories, others are considerably larger and merit closer analysis, such as the issue of authorship and an inconsistency in character development between stories. Many of the issues in these stories are directly influenced by the nature of their publication history and Salinger's willingness, or lack thereof, to commit to them as pieces of a larger set of stories. That said, the hybrid character/narrator that Salinger creates in Buddy Glass both provides an explanation for many of these issues, while further complicating them. Along with

narrative concerns, there are also issues in Salinger's construction of spirituality spanning across these stories.

The spirituality that Salinger creates in his Glass family stories is just as, if not more muddled than his experimentations with narrative. That said, Salinger's spiritual, religious, and mystic references in these works are varied in background not just for the sake of providing a more complex focus, but to attempt to convey a singular, underlying faith that runs through the narrative and topical center of these stories. The necessity of a comprehensive and complicated faith becomes inseparable from the story's characters as well as the narrative itself. These complexities become pivotal considerations in attempting to construct the amalgam faith that members of the Glass family, namely Franny and Zooey, are also learning to cope with throughout these stories. The most logical approach to viewing Salinger's work here would be to acknowledge spiritual, religious, and mystical instances as they appear in the texts, with an eye toward identifying the purpose that they serve (not by simply applying scripture to these stories directly). Although it seems as though viewing these elements on a case-by-case basis is a necessary act, the ultimate result of these references in Salinger's Glass Family stories is a realization that a direct correlation between a respective faith and Salinger's narrative is less useful than viewing said faith in the context in which it is utilized within each story.

Helen Weinberg suggests in her work "J.D Salinger's Holden and Seymour and the Spiritual Activist Hero" that these stories portray the "most honest modernist vision of the spiritual quest, and its inevitable failure" (79). Be this as it may, the content and structure of these works are not simply a means to an end. They are lush with

complexities of meaning and intention, often clouded by Salinger's refusal to write stories that adhere and conform to familiar narrative organizations and short story cycles. Instead, what we're presented with is a group of stories that have questionable function when placed in a linear sequence. When read in order of publication, which is coincidentally the order that Buddy Glass, the narrator of most of these stories claims to have completed these stories, a disjointed, yet fully functional narrative is created. This narrative is also rife with issues left unanswered, as well as those that are acknowledged directly and discussed by the narrator.

This thesis directly consults criticism, both scholarly and popular, throughout each chapter. These excerpts are most often used as a means of defining a history of reception for these works as well as a means of providing insight from both those who are fond of these stories and others who find them less than satisfactory. By looking at a wide spectrum of Salinger's criticism, it becomes apparent that there is an often misplaced value in criticism of a spiritual nature, favored almost entirely because of Salinger's recognized association with Eastern belief systems. Although a focus on spirituality is dominant in Salinger's critical reception, some of these works also focus heavily on the publication history and organization, or what is often considered as a lack thereof, of these stories. At the end of this overarching narrative, it is not surprising that the reader, much like scholars and literary critics, will likely be faced with more questions than answers – a testament to the expansiveness of these stories.

Chapter 2: Narrative Issues

In creating the major Glass family stories, those that have received near-preferential critical attention (“A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” “Franny,” “Zooey,” “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” “Seymour: an Introduction,” and “Hapworth 16, 1924”), Salinger weaves a web of imperfections that scholars and literary critics alike have taken issue with. Additionally, many have taken the liberty of coming to lucid conclusions about the lives of the Glass family, as little about them as the reader knows. There are many areas of the Glass family stories that are the focus of much scholarly contention in this regard, and for good reason. The way in which Seymour’s life is presented in these stories, the problem of authorship through the conflation of Buddy and Salinger, and the malleable format of the Glass family’s characters, in addition to minor issues, such as errors in chronology, appear to play the largest roles in the problematic construction of the Glass family stories. Likewise, it is the conflicted aspects of these works that have fueled decades of continued readership of Salinger’s short fiction. These issues appear to hinder the stories upon discovery; however, these same issues seem to paradoxically strengthen the quality of Salinger’s writing by means of calling upon the reader to form their own conclusions in regards to meaning and interpretation, while simultaneously bending existing literary forms to create narrative strategies unique unto Salinger.

A Secondhand Glass Family

It seems most appropriate to start with the character that both the Glass family and Salinger’s readers alike cannot escape – Seymour Glass. Although not entirely ignored by

critics, many narrative problems stem from the nature in which Seymour's story is communicated to the reader (by means of storytelling and indirect contact). The finer details of Seymour's existence, or any details for that matter, are often taken as gospel instead of what they really are – potentially unreliable reconstructions on behalf of those who knew or at least encountered him, both immediate family members and others alike. The reader only actually encounters Seymour as Seymour, not dictated by Buddy, on four separate occasions: the first, as far as publication history is concerned, is within his diary in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," the second is in his written feedback regarding Buddy's stories, also in "Seymour: an Introduction," the third is in a haiku in "Seymour: an Introduction," translated from Japanese no less, and the fourth is in the exact reproduction of a childhood letter in "Hapworth 16, 1924" (if Glass family chronology is taken into account, they appear in the following order: his letter, his diary entry, his feedback, and his haiku). The nature of all of these interactions do not account for Seymour firsthand, however. All four of these interactions are based on the writings of Seymour. The way in which the Glass family stories are told, stories within stories, on account of Buddy, is not exclusive to Seymour, however (covered later).

The events immediately surrounding Seymour's death, namely his reasoning for taking his life, have perplexed readers generations after the publication of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." When the secondhand storytelling nature of Seymour's life, on behalf of Buddy, is taken into account, it becomes immediately apparent that his motivation for committing suicide, as dictated by others, is almost entirely conjecture. Although most critical accounts are confidently assertive in these assumptions of his suicidal motives, the assumptions themselves vary in scope and focus. What the reader is left with,

however, is an unclear account of the reasoning behind Seymour's suicide on behalf of Salinger, and varying, often conflicting, accounts of the reasoning behind Seymour's suicide on behalf of many critics. Whether intentional or not, Salinger's construction of Seymour's suicide can indeed be reasonably pinpointed to a few likely causes: an inability to cope with the world around him, an inability to fully garner the attention of those he became close with, and a deterioration of his mental state after returning from the war.

Perhaps the most popular of these causes is the assumption that Seymour is unable to cope with his spirituality alongside his own temptations while living in a society so deeply focused on the material world. This stems greatly from his interactions in "A Perfect Day Bananafish" in addition to the perception of Seymour on account of the Fedder family in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters." Criticism appears split with this focus in that the blame appears to fall on Muriel and the external world in some cases, and Seymour succumbing to his own materialistic temptations in others. Present in both of these readings, however, is a direct conflict with conventions of society (materialism in everyday life and the convention of marriage). In the article "J.D. Salinger: Seventy-Eight Bananas," William Weigand uses "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" as a starting point, and traces the five stories which follow it to come to the conclusion that "The stories demonstrate that although the bananafish is incapacitated by the weight of his experience, he is also afflicted with a psychological conflict between the desire to participate in and the need to withdraw from society" (Weigand 12). This view, unfortunately, does little in the way of clarifying this issue, but instead complicates it further. Weigand is certainly not wrong in this regard; interactions related to Seymour

within the Glass family stories do indeed pose an issue with his functioning within society. We learn that within the few most vivid moments shared of Seymour, his interactions do not always appear *normal*. Perhaps this sentiment is best expressed through his interactions with female characters, both at the beginning and end of his life. The first of these instances, chronologically, is revealed in “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” through the Matron of Honor’s endless berating of Seymour’s personality traits. The reader learns that Seymour, during his childhood, once threw a rock at the face of later-famous singer and once guest on the radio show “It’s a Wise Child,” Charlotte Mayhew. What could be reduced to a simple act of childhood lashing out or simple misbehaving becomes nothing of the sort for Seymour; because he is Seymour Glass, this event becomes a focus of concern for Muriel’s relatives decades later. Likewise, the prowess of Muriel Fedder, “Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948” and Seymour’s wife, is constantly evaluated as a primary factor in the motivation for his suicide. In this case, marriage becomes a pivotal event in defining Seymour, not because of the merging of the lives of two lovers, but because Seymour’s motivations in actually marrying Muriel are, in and of themselves peculiar, in that he considers himself too “happy” to marry at times. He reveals that Muriel’s motivations for marriage are “human-size” and “beautiful” in his diary entry in “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” (84). This is certainly not to suggest that Seymour’s failures in assimilating into a modern society, through these examples of his interactions with female characters, are a byproduct of some carefully constructed homosexuality or anything of the sort, but rather to show that everyday interactions, interactions that would not merit deep, exhausting examination on any grounds for most, become perplexing moments in the life and legacy of Seymour Glass.

Another popular assumption is that Seymour hoped to garner the attention of those unaffected in some way by his being. Scholar Warren French, in a chapter entitled “That David Copperfield Kind of Crap” from his book entitled *J.D. Salinger, Revisited*, insists on a similarity between Seymour and Salinger in this regard. He suggests that “What seems to have bothered Salinger as child is that adults did not listen to him (a view that is also suggested by seven-year-old Seymour’s attitude toward his mother and father in ‘Hapworth 16, 1924’)” (French 32). Prior to this point, he likens Seymour to Teddy McArde and suggests that “we cannot expect the gifted like Seymour and Teddy to survive long in a world, in which, as T.S. Eliot put it in ‘Geronition,’ ‘What is kept must be adulterated’” (French 32). This reading, however, places a large stock in outside factors, particularly the views of others, in relation to an internal issue. This is not entirely unbelievable; however, there is far too much left unaccounted for in the Glass family stories to further develop this theory. A closely related interpretation is that Seymour suffers from the same ailment that Holden Caulfield later would suffer from – a failure to assimilate into everyday adult life. This resembles the previously discussed potential cause because it is often accompanied by an explication on the relationships that Seymour had with his parents and with his wife Muriel. In *Fiction of J.D. Salinger*, Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner suggest that Seymour is “destroyed by his own hypersensitivity pathetically heightened by lack of love” (19). Gwynn and Blotner’s collective work *Fiction of J.D. Salinger* (1958) proves useful as literary criticism that Salinger would have been familiar with, not terribly detached from the time of publication for most of these stories. That said, 57 years later, it would seem as though this criticism, rife with critical “matter-of-fact” vernacular, does little in the way of

expanding the works of Salinger, that is, allowing them to be read in such a way that is conducive to reader interpretation based on textual evidence; instead, it resembles something closer to a “reader’s guide,” with answers for all questions fully intact. That said, Gwynn and Blotner also conclude with their own assertion that “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” “falls below the heights of ‘For Esmé,’” an unconstructive comment inserted into a short section laden with claims that leave little room for alternate interpretation while simultaneously devaluing the viability of their own interpretation, a trait typical of the early criticism of Salinger’s stories. Both of these issues, however, seem to be rooted in a distinct immaturity in Seymour’s characterization. For example, in a section of French’s *J.D. Salinger, Revisited*, independent of the one quoted above, French places Seymour and Teddy in stark juxtaposition (granted, Teddy is an extension of Buddy’s creative thought and not an *actual* member of the Glass family). He describes the duo as the “impatient Seymour” and the “passive Teddy” (87). With the consistency of this viewpoint, and the sheer insistence on behalf of critical readings to attribute these child-like attributes to Seymour as an adult, it is almost surprising that there have not been any major suggestions in this criticism that Seymour may have suffered from some form of autism or Asperger’s, given his intellectual brilliance and largely inept social skills.

Another possibility, coincidentally mentioned almost always in passing, is that Seymour’s mental state had deteriorated considerably after returning from the war. This interpretation is just as viable as any, as mental and psychological damage incurred through wars is certainly not a foreign concept in literary fiction. However, given Salinger’s staunch rejection of psychological analysis, by either professionals or “dabblers,” ala “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” this theory seems to be an

unpopular one. That said, it is understood that in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” Seymour has returned from his stay in a military hospital in which he presumably received psychiatric care following the war. This is determined by Mrs. Fedder’s conversation with Muriel in which she states that “it was a perfect *crime* the Army released him from the hospital...” (8). It is unclear if this is entirely truthful, or merely a fabrication on account of Buddy’s storytelling. Regardless of Salinger’s personal views on the field of psychology, this doesn’t negate the possibility of this outcome as a perfectly viable interpretation existing because of the mentioning of Seymour’s stay in such a place within the text. It could even be said that Seymour’s death is a testament to the failures of psychiatric treatment (albeit an interpretation based more so on pure speculation than on anything in the text, but a viable interpretation nonetheless).

Although this facet of Seymour’s life is sometimes viewed as a fragment of the Glass family stories that has been left incomplete, the lack of clarity on behalf of Salinger in creating Seymour in such a way does nothing short of expanding this story. It becomes clear that the actual reasoning behind Seymour’s suicide does little in the way of affecting his family, yet it is near-relentlessly covered in most scholarly criticism regarding the Glass family stories. This incessant meandering often does little in the way of constructing a more holistic story, and does more in the way of creating issues in interpretation that did not formerly exist. French concludes that Buddy “never discusses Seymour’s motivation; but even though the suicide comes with startling suddenness, it is not really surprising,” which perhaps best explains the depth with which a reader can ultimately interpret Seymour’s death (French 65). French does not rule out any of the previously discussed possibilities, but rather emphasizes the idea that the reader can feel a

tension building within Seymour's storyline (one without a clear resolution in sight). This is a particularly apt comment on a set of stories that very much attempt to capture the struggles of the Glass family as Buddy sees fit. As a result of this, these stories don't have a clear, distinct, or conclusive ending in sight (which in and of itself is often a large cause for discussion).

The secondhand nature of character familiarity in these stories is certainly not limited to Seymour, however. The use of secondhand documents as communicators of information is rampant in Salinger's work. Aside from the general secondhand nature of these stories at large (Buddy's telling or re-telling of these family events), the use of written documents also contribute to this narrative device. In relation to Seymour's death, naturally "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" becomes a problematic re-telling through Buddy's knowledge of the events surrounding Seymour's suicide. "Hapworth 16, 1964," on the other hand, occupies a strange space in this regard as it is the lengthiest document in which the reader encounters Seymour; yet, we encounter him as a young child in the first 1/5th of his recorded life, which is not necessarily indicative of the Seymour that the reader has later become familiar with. Seymour's journal in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" details Seymour's reflections on love and the institution of marriage, providing context for the rest of the story. Buddy's letter to Zooey in the opening scene of "Zooey" sets the tone for the remainder of the same story and proves to be an important piece of writing given the sheer amount of time that Zooey has held onto the letter, while Franny's letter to Lane also sets the precedent for the scenes displayed in "Franny."

Inconsistent Franny

Amongst issues with critical assumptions regarding Seymour, Salinger has also been criticized for the consistency and believability of other Glass family members – namely Franny. John Updike has perhaps been most critical of Franny in suggesting that the Franny readers encounter in “Franny” is not the same Franny that readers encounter in “Zooney”. What these inconsistencies stem from and culminate in is the view that Franny’s inconsistency in character development is problematic and creates a disparity between a child born into the Glass family name and the actualization of her character. Updike is not alone when he fails to understand “how a girl raised in a home where Buddhism and crisis theology were table talk could have postponed her own crisis so long, and when it came, be so disarmed by it.” Franny’s changing state does not just display a disconnect in the development of a single character between stories, but also displays a shift in Salinger’s dedication to his Glass family.

The first step in understanding the discontinuity between the Franny of “Franny” and the Franny of “Zooney” requires examining her character in her first published form, within the short story “Franny.” The reader initially encounters a girl who is neurotic, worrisome, analytical (despite her detestation of analysis), and “hopelessly selfconscious” (6). Franny places a particular interest in her rejection of the ego. Franny’s struggle with the concept of the ego is nearly expected given the family that she was born into; however, as Updike points out, it does seem strange that she had not covered this ground while growing up around her two eldest brothers, while being raised by two entertainers. Once again, this is not necessarily out of the ordinary, but it is peculiar that her brother Zooney seems to have made efforts to traverse this issue and he fails to see

how she has not. That said, Zooney certainly struggles with issues of his own, namely being unkind to and judging others, amongst other problems. Buddy's letter in "Zooney" confirms Buddy and Seymour's educational involvement when he states that the two of them "took over" Franny and Zooney's education "as early and as highhandedly as we did" by means of "regularly conducting home seminars, and the metaphysical sittings in particular" (64, 66). The family radio show "It's a Wise Child" also plays an integral role in further developing the disparity between the Franny that *should* be and the Franny that *is*. By creating the concept of a talk show for intellectually gifted children, Salinger creates a level of expectation for those who are regulars on the show, among whom Franny is one. This is not to say that the Franny that appears in "Franny" or "Zooney" is not intellectually gifted by any means, but rather that her crisis is oddly-timed and spurred by what should have been a rudiment of her spiritual upbringing – the concept of the ego.

One of the distinguishing factors in this same matter is the relationship between Lane Coutell and Franny. This relationship bears a fundamentally similar, albeit reasonably different, resemblance to the relationship between Muriel Fedder and Seymour. Perhaps one of the more highly debated topics regarding these relationships is distinguishing what Franny and Lane see within one another and what Seymour and Muriel see in each other as well. Yet again, the reader encounters little in the way of a backstory regarding Franny and Lane; they are thrust into a short narrative in "Franny" and their togetherness is mentioned only in passing within "Zooney." While the origins of Franny's struggle are introduced and tip-toed around in the short story she shares a name with, many readers initially attempted to create issues that did not necessarily exist in the

narrative. “Franny” is much like “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” in this regard. These problems are often in reference to Franny’s nausea, often mistaken as a pregnancy and later dispelled as such. Although this reading is not completely farfetched while viewing “Franny” as an independent piece of work, it is telling in that it became a primary focus of readership over Franny’s existential struggle. This view obviously changes with the later publication of “Zooney.” Instead of a young woman struggling with a conflicted sense of spirituality, the focus moves toward something more immediately believable to those that adapted this reading – that Franny’s irritation and conflicted temperament is a product of a general sense of nervousness regarding an impending pregnancy. This propensity to place the story’s primary mode of conflict on external means detracts from the actual internal struggle that Franny is having. This seems pertinent as these initial readings attempt to, in some capacity, make sense of the otherwise unlikely relationship between Franny and Lane. If anything, this relationship appears to exist as a kind of coping mechanism for Franny. Since her childhood was certainly an unconventional one, being in a relationship with a young man during her college years seems to be a decision made as an attempt at normalcy, rather than one rooted in general interest and potential love (somewhat akin to the relationship between Seymour and Muriel). Likewise, the portrait of Franny and Lane found in “Franny” could also be captured toward the end of their relationship, after the dropping of a veil of convention for Franny and the immediate clarity which may have ensued. That said, Lane’s short-lived appearance in the Glass family chronicles at large, reduced to hearsay and detestation in “Zooney,” does not fully provide for this explanation.

One of the primary concerns regarding the nature of Franny's character in the Glass family chronicles is the relation of the Glass family stories to each other, both as independent works and works as part of the greater whole. This stems largely from a lack of acknowledgement, on Salinger's behalf, of inter-story interactions, likely intentional, in addition to the critical assumption that these stories *should* be read in a particular fashion (covered at length in the fourth chapter of this thesis). This aspect of the Glass family stories sometimes works in favor of making sense of the family in a larger context, while sometimes creating issues in continuity and narrative structure. For example, when read as an independent work, "Franny" can be removed entirely from Glass family. In the short story, there is no mention of the Glass family name. Without a doubt, "Zooney" acts as the rightful companion piece to "Franny," but was this a product of sheer convenience with Salinger's growing interest in the Glass family in his later career or is this intentional (that is, was Franny planned in advance as part of a larger collection of stories, now recognized as the Glass family saga)? If the former is true, this would confirm that Franny *was* indeed a character independent of the Glass family chronicles that Salinger later decided would be a worthy addition (and would explain the disparity between the two). If the latter is true, then Franny may have simply undergone a creative redirection, also explaining a disparity between the two. In either case, this change may have been a product of mere readjustment within the context of the Glass family, ensuring that the Franny of "Franny" did not develop into too simplistic of a character, doe-eyed and lost within the confines of her little green book, but rather one undergoing a sincere and much overdone spiritual crisis within the discomfort of her family home.

Although Franny is perhaps the most explicit example of a character who may be *different* or *changed* between stories contained within the Glass family saga, if for no other reason than she is one of the most frequently mentioned and present characters in these stories, there are other character changes and omissions that occur over the course of Salinger's composition of these stories. Salinger's recognition of his shortcomings in the eyes of many, which may not have been shortcomings in his view at all, is part and parcel of his unusual and uniquely Buddy-esque mode of approaching story writing. John Wenke, in his work *J.D. Salinger A Study of the Short Fiction*, concisely elaborates on this sentiment in stating that "Salinger views the making of literary art as an ongoing process in which the present tale can alter the contexts of the earlier tales" (65-6). Once again, although this is an unusual approach to storytelling, it is not objectively *wrong* (although Salinger's critics often like to place these disparities on display in order to necessitate some form of criticism on an otherwise uniquely, well-written narrative).

Errors in Chronology and the Incompleteness of the Glass Family Stories

There are other minor assorted errors that appear to add up over the course of the known history of the Glass family, including a few errors in chronology as well as a general incompleteness and an absence of further, often sought after, family details. Both of the above issues are certainly not exclusive to Salinger as a writer; however, he does appear to receive some special treatment in this regard. A focus on missing details within the Glass family stories has become an object of near-obsession for a large portion of his readership. Salinger's selective inclusion and omission of details regarding the Glass family has left much to be desired for some. While a few of these omissions appear to be

intentional and have nearly no implication on the completeness or quality of the story, others become the focus of criticism and a persistent longing to know more about a family whose invention, according to Updike, “has become a hermitage for him.”

These inconsistencies in events that truly have no immediate effect, either positively or adversely on the story, are still relentlessly analyzed, however, in further attempts to trace some chronological thread throughout the stories. These attempts are often made in order to find nuanced meaning that may not have been present without doing so. In “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” neither Seymour nor Salinger, through his narration, makes any mention of any other members of the Glass family. Although the Glass children are mentioned throughout the larger stories which follow “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” this factoid hardly affects the story at all. An insertion of Franny or Zooey (or Buddy, Boo Boo, Walt, Waker, Bessie, or Les) would do little in the way of changing the story for the better. The story would likely feel forced, in that the mentioning of these additional family members would be extraneous and contribute next to nothing in an otherwise carefully structured and well-executed short story. The same treatment can be applied to Walt Glass in “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut.” Although Walt is an absentee focus in the story, it is never explicitly stated that he shares the surname Glass. Because Walt is a lesser-discussed Glass family member, likely because of his death, the omission of the Glass family name does not detract from the success of “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut” as a story. It does, however, provide Salinger with the option to either include or remove this story from the Glass family canon at will, without much reason for concern (until he chose to include him as part of the family in “Zooey”). Yet another example of an inconsistency present in these stories is the disparity between

the exact date of Seymour's wedding as described in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and later in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters." As a pattern has begun to develop with these inconsistencies, the exact date of Seymour's wedding, once again, has little-to-no implication on the events that follow in either story where this information is mentioned. These kinds of uncomplicated narrative hiccups occur often throughout literature and are usually fixed within subsequent editions of the respective work. That said, Salinger takes a different approach in attempting to explain why these errors exist by addressing the reader directly, using Buddy's critical, yet apologetic nature to do so.

French states one of his primary viewpoints clearly in saying that "Salinger is creating myth not writing history" (100). Many readers are left unsatisfied after reading these stories because of this incompleteness and occasional inconsistency (which on most accounts are not weaknesses at all, but stylistic freedoms, if anything). The Glass family stories, as a grouping of stories are, at large, plotless. Events occur, there are occasionally rising and falling actions, but there is no sense of completeness and resolution. In stories where these family members are left to try and make sense of the world around them, there is rightfully no conclusion (much in the same way that many events in reality, don't truly come to a cohesive, clearly outlined conclusion; they simply just end). This is not a weakness, however; if anything, this aspect of Salinger's writing is a testament to the believability of his characters. The Glass family stories do not focus and hone in on major plot events, although "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" has arguably the largest event that occurs within the saga; however, if one reads "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and determines only that it is a story about a man with an insufferable mother-in-law, a simple wife, who likes to talk to children, and ultimately kills himself, it is a fair

assumption that one has most assuredly missed the point of the story. What the Glass family stories lack in major plot movements, they excel in displaying, for some, borderline real characters with problems that the reader may also share. Beyond this, these stories create an aura of believability through common conversation and the relaying of simple character reactions. Something as inconspicuous as a “the sound of a nose being rather violently blown,” in place of a response from Franny, during the scene in which Zooey attempts to help Franny better understand Jesus in “Zooey” does quite a bit in the way of constructing a lifelike conversation between two tense siblings. These instances, although beneficial to believability of these stories at large, do not account for the still existing conflicts between these stories. French concisely elaborates on this point by stating that “The pursuit of a coherent history of the family through these fragments, however, is finally artistically dissatisfying because of the discrepancies in dates and characterization that remain unresolved and the gaping holes in the account” (94). With this in mind, it is not that Salinger does not provide *enough* information regarding the members of the Glass family, hindering their level of believability and existence as well as the overall function of these stories, it is that he provides *just* enough information, which appears to be much more frustrating for readers and literary critics alike.

Salinger/Buddy and the Issue of Authorship

Most, if not all of the above issues stem from a place of authorial intent – for all intents and purposes, a hypothetical brick wall in the way of viable literary interpretation. This treatment seems nearly exclusive to Salinger in that many stories, both alike and completely different from Salinger’s, begin with portions of information that the reader

has no other option but to assume are placed intentionally. French discusses this occurrence in relation to a non-Glass family story of Salinger's, "The Young Folks." On this topic, he mentions that "The story also illustrates a problem that was to recur in even such much admired later stories as "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "Teddy" – the author's demand that the reader pay close attention to seemingly inconsequential details upon which the surprise ending of the stories depends" (French 20). Why then does Salinger's omission of largely unimportant details become such a large focus of reader response and scholarly criticism? Once again, it is necessary to defer to the way in which many approach these stories – as incomplete pieces of a greater narrative, in which these small details appear to become vital, as they are often used to attempt to construct a deeper understanding of an already existing story. This does not justify the painstaking attention to detail that is often paid to these minor narrative constructs, but in a series of stories without commercially satisfying conclusions, save those with controversial endings, it would appear that these smaller details become pieces of a scavenger hunt without any discernible treasure at the end.

One cannot place the blame fully upon readers and critics for actively searching for these details, however. Many of these same Glass family stories are predicated on similar small details which reappear throughout as a means of ending such stories. Unfortunately, the pursuit of these details does little in the way in instilling confidence that every minute detail Salinger places within his stories is of the utmost importance. We can isolate some examples of these minute details that later become key components of their respective stories by looking at "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" in particular. Some examples in this story are Muriel and Mrs. Fedder's discussion about Seymour in which

they make mention of a tree, which we later learn Seymour ran into with Muriel's father's car, as well as Muriel's mentioning of Seymour's "tattoo," later revealed to be the slashing on his wrist, as mentioned in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters." An similar example in "Teddy" exists in the following quote: "It will either happen today or February 14, 1955 when I am sixteen. It is ridiculous to mention even," which eventually proves to be an accurate foresight of his death (276-7). To even further complicate this matter is the lack of consistency within this formula of veiling narrative outcomes within earlier parts of the same story. Salinger does not reserve this device solely for stories directly related to the Glass family, as French mentions, and it is not clear if the installation of these details are deliberate, or simply a convenient happenstance. Although Buddy does not necessarily account for this specific issue within his narration of these stories, he does make it a point to address directly some of his other narrative misgivings.

Buddy makes it known that he is fully aware of the errors that he has made and is making in his stories. These are most obviously identified in Buddy's short asides to the audience preceding his stories. For example, as John Wenke takes note in his work *J.D. Salinger A Study of the Short Fiction*, "in his preface to 'Zooey' Buddy reveals that Zooey, Franny, and Mrs. Glass have each advised him on reconstructing their story. Each also finds something wrong with Buddy's finished product" and later that "...he identifies divergences in opinion that are never resolved" (Wenke 66, 77). The admission and acceptance of an imperfect story on Buddy's behalf is an unusual approach to taking responsibility for these errors on behalf of a narrator. The recognition of these imperfect stories should, in theory, make these errors integral, unchangeable parts of these stories; however, they are still a large focus of the criticism of Salinger's shorter fiction. Salinger

is clever in his way of patching his errors here by using Buddy's prowess as a writer to account for these hiccups. These discrepancies become errors in constructing Buddy's stories, and not errors in Salinger's chronology and narrative construction at large for the Glass family with this narrative device in mind. Wenke supports this idea in stating "Buddy's claim for authorship also reinforces the notion that the Glasses are flesh-and-blood creatures," adding that Buddy's reflective prowess not only strengthens the believability of his role as narrator, but also strengthens the believability of his family members as real people who share concerns about the way in which they are being portrayed in writing (Wenke 66). The most explicit instance of Buddy's acknowledgement of his shortcoming in accurately depicting his family, and perhaps the most jarring as well, is when Buddy admits that the Seymour in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" was "oddly, someone with a striking resemblance to – alley-ooop, I'm afraid – myself" in "Seymour: an Introduction" (131). Given the nature in which "Seymour: an Introduction" was written, through Buddy's endless ramblings about the details of Seymour's life, both important and not, Salinger constructs a character/narrator that the reader can feasibly believe has sincerely made an error, bolstering the believability of Buddy as both a viable narrator and a real person. James E. Miller, in his pamphlet on J.D. Salinger which is part of the *Pamphlets on American Writers* series, in relation to the influx of information brought to light in "Seymour: an Introduction," mentions that "The Seymour that emerges is generally consistent with the Seymour we have come to know already; new material is presented, new complexities revealed, but no genuinely new dimensions are added to his portrait" (Miller 41). Although Buddy takes responsibility for the errors and imperfections that he has created, this doesn't necessarily negate the

fact that some aspects of these stories, namely those regarding character depiction and narrative continuity, are still problematic.

In using these minor details, whether intentionally or not, Salinger does something in the way of baiting the reader into attempting to find what appears to be a deliberately placed object, a peculiar reaction, a strange descriptive word, or something of the sort which may not have any deliberate purpose, aside from acting as part of his narrative prowess. This bears a resemblance to T.S. Eliot's addition of footnotes to a later edition of "The Waste Land," in which he commented that "I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail." In the case of Salinger, an attempted reading between the lines in most stories becomes an act of futility. The hidden door or secret passage that some hope to find in drawing a conclusion to these stories has yet to appear decades later, and will not appear in these stories themselves. There is a distinct possibility that Salinger continued with his interest in these minor details in Glass family stories yet to be released, but as it stands, these stories will continue to remain as they have appeared, devoid of secret details.

By drawing upon the previous idea that the Seymour readers have become familiar with potentially not being an entirely accurate representation of the *actual* Seymour Glass, Buddy's role in these stories becomes amazingly augmented. Although the problematic nature of Seymour's portrayal inevitably sits at the forefront of the criticism of these stories, this gives rise to the questions "how accurate are Buddy's depictions of the rest of the Glass family, and how much of his retellings are products of embellishment?" Granted, these are virtually unanswerable questions, barring the release of subsequent Glass family stories, and even then these questions may go unanswered

still. Buddy's opinions of characters in stories are largely dependent on point-of-view; although this is unsurprising and a bit of a given, this doesn't negate the fact that this is problematic in constructing a cohesive story. Would these stories vary if they were written by Franny, Zooey, or any other Glass family member? The answer is an obvious "yes," but the degree to which they would be altered is indeterminate (regarding content, the inclusion or omission of character judgment, and the relaying of facts, not necessarily narrative structure). Buddy is skillful in his transparency throughout these stories, as far as the reader can tell, but to what degree of his storytelling is subjective? This is yet another unanswerable question in the Glass family stories (a question that may not be important, as Salinger's entrusting of the writing of these tales unto Buddy is a telling consideration).

Buddy's role as a narrator across these stories is not only augmented, but also becomes greatly varied. It almost seems as if Buddy himself does not know what he aims to accomplish by writing these stories about his family and those in direct relation to his family. Perhaps the most discerning trait held by Buddy, the narrator in this regard, is his sheer indecisiveness. Buddy does not attempt to moralize or pass judgment on his family; he simply places his view on the page – enriched enough for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions, and detached enough for the reader to be unsure what to immediately make of these conclusions. Buddy feels a necessity to report the happenings of his family members' lives, but he fears committing to his viewpoints; he fears that he is being too sentimental in his depiction of his loved ones in stating that "If sentiment doesn't ultimately make fibbers of some people, their natural abominable memories almost certainly will" in "Seymour: an Introduction" (200). This often results in a kind of shame

in that he can often be found apologizing to the reader for providing them with the burden of his family descriptions, especially in “Seymour: an Introduction.” For example, although he provides the reader with a bouquet of parentheses as a consolation early in the work, he also states “I’m dismayed and disgusted, really, to find I can’t get into it unless I start with an apology,” before describing Seymour as “Athlete and Gamesman” (224). Likewise, as a writer, he attempts to be passive in every sense, with the exception of the advocacy of his beloved late brother Seymour.

Although Buddy provides his readership with stories which uphold the level of importance he feels toward his late brother Seymour, he is often faulted for not forming a complete image of Seymour’s life, despite having written story after story in which Seymour is the focus in some capacity. Max F. Schulz, in his work “Epilogue to ‘Seymour: an Introduction’: Salinger and the Crisis of Consciousness,” likens this issue to Buddy’s inability to commit to his descriptions of different aspects of Seymour’s life, for fear of making any one piece of information more important than one that either precedes or succeeds another. Schulz concludes that “Despite this refinement of surroundings for contemplation, his portrait of Seymour remains unformulated and incomplete, because he cannot discriminate among his memories” (Schulz 55). Buddy’s failure to describe Seymour’s being with non-physical descriptors quickly turns into a kind of catharsis, or therapeutic incoherence, in which he aimlessly lists Seymour’s physical features, knowingly not describing any important part of Seymour’s life. Even though Buddy draws a significantly descriptive picture of Seymour, Miller suggests that “...there is a lingering doubt about the author’s control, a doubt that is somewhat reinforced by Buddy’s recurrent resemblance to Salinger” (Miller 42). This should not

necessarily be viewed as a narrative failure on Buddy's behalf, although it has left many unsatisfied with the image of Seymour that the reader is ultimately left with in the currently published Glass family stories. The image of Seymour that the reader comes to see is an actualization of how multitudinous Seymour truly was to Buddy and the other members of the Glass family. Seymour is oft-regarded as a Christ-like figure, another personage whose physical depiction is found in droves, unsurprisingly varied and not necessarily accurate; like Christ, Glass family members invest a lot of faith into Seymour – the minor details that Buddy focuses on have a tendency to fall to the wayside. For clarity's sake, this is not to say that Seymour and Christ are interchangeable here – quite the contrary. This is simply to say that it is perhaps most difficult to describe those who are so vast and multitudinous in life as they are in death. Buddy's best attempt at drawing a portrait of Seymour is his creation of a biography in which he tries not to be sentimental, without playing favorites with the descriptors that he knows will define Seymour to everyone who did not know him personally, the product of which is "Seymour: an Introduction," disheveled, disorganized, and doing little in the way of actually describing Seymour after all.

Salinger's struggle with Buddy's injection and rejections of sentimentality is not exclusive to the Glass family stories, however. In discussing one of Salinger's earlier stories, "The Long Debut of Lois Tagett," Warren French notes "The important thing about the tale is that Salinger is here abandoning the fashionable irony of his first published story and displaying a determination to make things work out from a sentimental point of view, even if the result strains credibility – a tendency that many critics later found troubling in the Glass family stories" (French 21-22). Ultimately, the

nexus of Buddy's problems is this same struggle with sentimentality. Based on the short one-sided dialogues that Buddy shares with the reader through his prose, we find a conflicted conveyor of information, torn between wanting to say nothing at all and fulfilling what appears to be a kind of personal need to put words on the page. This hesitance creates a narrator that isn't necessarily unreliable regarding a fair representation of the characters adapted from his life and placed into his stories, but one that may rather be unreliable as far as exhibiting a conventional storytelling prowess, one in which the reader has expectations of a series of stories that amount to something quantifiable. This comparing of Buddy, and thusly Salinger, to the stories and conventions of other authors during this period of publication simply does not work. The domineering force in the early criticism of Salinger's stories attempt to dissect and draw meaning, definitively, from these stories is met with a false sense of confidence, instead of the genuine realization that there are no discernible, undeniable, and definitive interpretations of these stories, much to the dismay of his critics. This confliction is largely due in part to the influence of Eastern philosophy on the Glass family stories. Although the standard-issue American reader today is likely not ignorant to, at the very least, an overly-simplified version of Eastern thought, the advent of an Eastern influence in American literature was not nearly as present and well-understood during the publication of the Glass family stories. On Eastern worldviews, French shares that "Salinger had a rich territory largely to himself," and that, previously, this Eastern religious thought in America had "attracted avant-garde Americans since the days of the transcendentalists in the nineteenth century" (French 92). Salinger's use of various worldviews in his work, in and of itself, is not the issue; much like his depiction of Seymour, the worldview that he creates through his use

of various theological and philosophical systems is every bit as multitudinous and multifaceted.

Chapter 3: Complexities of Faith and Philosophy

Much in the way that Salinger creates a family narrative that is disjointed and at times incongruent from story-to-story, the display of spirituality and religious belief systems present in his work do little in the way of providing a sense of clarity in an already complex, often contradictory body of work. The Glass family religion that Salinger constructs throughout these works does not adhere strictly to the belief systems that it is composed of. There is no sense of cohesiveness in this system of beliefs between individual Glass family children, even. At the end of these stories, the reader is left with a conglomerate faith that takes pieces from multiple, sometimes contradictory or incompatible, belief systems that have been strewn together in such a way that each Glass family member possesses their own personalized, niche set of beliefs that operate in tandem. Criticism surrounding faith and spirituality in relation to these stories often attempts to make sense of Salinger's spiritual constructs and, in doing so, often cites dormant scripture and religious policy as a means of explaining and coming to terms with the ideology that Salinger has created. Unfortunately for both reader and critic alike, this often results in an even more convoluted system than Salinger has constructed within the pages of these stories. By looking at the conflicts of faith, primarily between Seymour, Buddy, Zooey, and Franny, what we eventually encounter is a large conflation of spiritual, religious, and philosophical belief systems that, although occasionally favoring similarities between these three divisions, do not comfortably fit within any one of them in particular.

Salinger and Western Spirituality

Salinger occupies a unique space in American literary canon, in that he is one amongst a limited few authors that introduced and utilized Eastern thought in the landscape of American Literature. Warren French takes note of this and comments on the “Maharishi’s mass marketing of transcendental meditation” that followed nearly a decade after, as a means of further explaining how little Eastern thought was a focus of literature during the publication of Salinger’s work, and how it grew exponentially in the years following (92). In the literary movements that coexisted and developed heavily after Salinger’s initial publications, particularly the literature of the Beat Generation, Eastern thought became a monumental focus. However, one of the downfalls of being a pioneer in this regard is having a wave of initial criticism which is quick to accuse and attempt to make certain Salinger’s intentions with his inclusion of Eastern religious and spiritual concepts.

Because of Salinger’s place as a figurehead in the exploration of Eastern spirituality through his works, much of the criticism in response to these works displays a propensity for making assumptions regarding a collective Glass family religion. Perhaps the most tempting and not coincidentally the most widely used misapplication of Salinger’s construction of faith, by means of trying to disassemble it, is the idea that “X” faith is mentioned in some capacity within a work, therefore this same faith merits direct application to that particular work. Tempting as this may be, this methodology usually resolves nothing within the respective work and, more times than not, provides an even cloudier picture of spirituality within the Glass family stories. These applications happen throughout literary criticism regarding Salinger; however, the three recurring religious

and spiritual distinctions that critics tend to attach to the Glass family are those of a Vedantic, Zen, and Christian nature. An example of this type of faulty religious and/or spiritual application can be explained by looking at Seymour's propensity for Vedanta. Hamayun Mirza uses this line of reasoning in explaining:

Despite the value that Seymour and his teachings provide as examples for his sibling-disciples, he is from the traditional Vedantic point of a view a failed guru. This is because he has not been able to overcome the negative karma that he has accumulated because of his inability to transcend the temptations of the flesh that preclude the attainment of *mukti*, which Salinger's teacher Swami Nikhilananda describes as "liberation from perfection, bondage, separateness, misery, and death." (qtd. in French 68)

Mirza's argument is a compelling one, but like most theorizing on this matter, it is, once again, pure conjecture. Textually, little points to the direction of this argument, aside from an association on behalf of Seymour and Salinger with Vedantic beliefs. The same principal is oft applied through a *religious* or *spiritual* reading of any literary work. Many occurrences in literature at large possess similarities to various religious constructions. It is not a coincidence that many stories throughout history bear a striking resemblance to Biblical tales for example; however, this does not implicitly make them religious stories. It is not that Mirza's argument and others like it do not make sense logically, they do, but it is rather that nothing about this particular view is any more viable than the simple possibility that the faith of Seymour and his family truly is a muddled, messy matter that cannot be cleanly disassembled in such a way that is desirable for scholars and critics. James E. Miller Jr. approaches this critical commonality with extreme caution when he

mentions that “Salinger’s later works must not be read as religious tracts, no matter how tempting the reading lists make such an interpretation” (35). The sheer amount of spiritual, religious, and literary/philosophical influences within these works should be an immediate deterrent from such a reading through this lens, but it appears to be no such thing.

The critical reception of the Glass family “religion” is one met with mixed opinions, with most publications attempting to make sense of what Salinger provides for his Glass family. Warren French is able to succinctly describe the literary and social landscape regarding Eastern thought during the publication of these works in saying that “Most Americans, even in the dreary 1950s, had not reached a state where they thought that the best way to deal with the world’s problems was simply to leave them behind altogether” (French 89). In a post-war nation where conflict was met with assertive action, Salinger’s attempted drift from and rejection of sentimentality through detachment developed in the Glass family stories is a considerable paradigm shift. Because Salinger’s introduction of these Eastern concepts were new to much of his readership, certainly not all of it however, the reception of these stories can be reduced to a plethora of scholars and critics not knowing the way in which to approach criticism regarding them. However, what most of these works share is a tendency to start at the root of these problems – Seymour.

Seymour and Buddy's Proprietary Roles in Defining Spirituality within the Glass Family

As the primary interlocutor of faith in the Glass family, Seymour bears the burden of responsibility regarding introducing many faiths and belief systems to his siblings. Because of this, we encounter the mentioning of myriad religious, spiritual, and philosophical documents, doctrine, and figureheads within the text, more often than not at the hands of Buddy and his narration. Although Buddy and Seymour are often grouped together, and although their age difference of two years is negligible, Salinger does not make his intentions unclear when entrusting Seymour as the primary Glass child that begins his younger siblings on their spiritual paths. Ihab Hassan in his work *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*, considers Seymour the “spiritual center of the Glass clan” (285). Buddy does little in the way of coming in conflict with this thought, referring to Seymour as a “true artist-seer” and “heavenly fool” in “Seymour: An Introduction.” In “Zooney,” Buddy’s letter and brief preface become the anchors to which the story is supported. Before elaborating on Franny’s conflict from “Franny” and before introducing Zooney’s conflicts in “Zooney,” Buddy makes clear his and Seymour’s motivations in an old letter to Zooney in raising them with something akin to a Glass family mission statement in the following excerpt:

Much, much more important, though, Seymour had already begun to believe (and I agreed with him, as far as I was able to see the point) that education by any name would smell as sweet, and maybe much sweeter, if it didn’t begin with a quest for knowledge at all but with a quest, as Zen would put it, for no-

knowledge. Dr. Suzuki says somewhere that to be in a state of pure consciousness – *satori* – is to be with God before he said, Let there be light. (65)

In these few lines, Buddy is able to dissect not only their goal in instructing both Franny and Zooey, but also the cause of both Franny and Zooey's afflictions, in varying degrees.

Buddy then elaborates on this idea in stating:

We thought it would be wonderfully constructive to at least (that is, if your own “limitations” got in the way) tell you as much as we knew about the men – the saints, the arhats, the bodhisattvas, the jivanmuktas – who knew something or everything about this state of being. That is, we wanted you both to know who and what Jesus and Gautama and Lao-tse and Shankaracharya and Huineng and Sri Ramakrishna, etc., were before you knew too much or anything about Homer or Shakespeare or even Blake or Whitman, let alone George Washington and his cherry tree or the definition of a peninsula or how to parse a sentence. (65-66)

Buddy explains that their education was intended to start with an extensive explication of major religious and spiritual figures throughout history, spanning across different systems of faith and philosophy. This seems logical considering that Buddy provides the following answer within a question in “Seymour: an Introduction,” regarding the origins of both his and Seymour's faith: “Would it be out of order for me to say that both Seymour's and my roots in Eastern philosophy – if I may hesitantly call them “roots” – were, are, planted in the New and Old Testaments, Advaita Vedanta, and classical Taoism?” (242). Seymour's approach in this regard seems to have been of an introductory nature and Buddy, while writing to Zooey, seems to assume the role of one put in place to mitigate any damage as a result of these introductions in Seymour's

absence. Buddy hopes to ameliorate any damage done as a product of these teachings, now that Franny and Zooey find themselves in a state of perpetual readjustment and learning in their young adult lives.

Seymour and Buddy's spiritual goals, if they can be called that, are scattered throughout the Glass family stories in small fragments. By piecing these together, the reader can, at best, begin to understand the fundamental workings of their faith. One of the most revealing, if not the single most revealing, statements made by Buddy regarding Seymour's outlook on life and spirituality, found in "Zooey," is as follows: "Seymour once said to me – in a crosstown bus, of all places – that all legitimate religious study *must* lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold" (67). Lucid moments such as these are few and far between in the Glass family stories, and this one in particular acts as a component of the centerpiece upon which the reader can begin to understand the underlying heart of religious study for Seymour, Buddy, Franny, and Zooey. The forefront of Seymour's belief system, and perhaps his ultimate goal, as stated within his diary in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," is to be one with "the main current of poetry that flows through things, all things" (84). Other minor stories mentioned throughout the Glass narrative, such as Seymour sifting through ashtrays and finding Jesus in the process seem to affirm that he was successful to some degree in achieving this.

“Franny,” “Zooney,” and the Makings of an Amalgam Faith

Although “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” “Seymour: an Introduction,” and “Hapworth 16, 1924” provide ancillary support for the never-ending lineage of the Glass family faith, “Franny” and “Zooney” prove to be the two most exhaustive works in giving form to this faith. “Franny” proves to be an abbreviated, concise introduction to the struggles of person and spirit of the Glass youth, while “Zooney” not only continues the path of these struggles, but adds fuel to the spiritual fire by introducing an uninformed bystander in Bessie, an overcritical and equally flawed young adult in Zooney, a physically and spiritually weaker subject of concern in Franny, and an apologetic narrator in Buddy. “Franny” produces a conflict between an outlier and a commoner, Franny and Lane, respectively, while “Zooney” produces a conflict between a family struggling with their spirituality in different stages and varying degrees. Salinger’s placing of a Glass child in the wild within “Franny” is an appropriate starting place for developing these conflicts and defining the beginnings of a Glass family faith, every bit as complicated as it is expansive.

The beginnings of this conglomerate faith within the storyline of Franny and Zooney can be found in Franny’s conversation with Lane in “Franny.” As expected, this conversation is one-sided on behalf of Lane’s propensity to tear-down and over-analyze nearly every word that leaves Franny’s mouth, in addition to everything else in the world according to Franny. The conversation begins when Franny decides to finally address Lane’s questioning regarding her little green book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. In addressing the focus of this work, praying incessantly to become closer to God, she quickly notices that Lane has already become disinterested before she even begins speaking; because of

this, we encounter Franny's longwinded explication on the process of praying incessantly, constructed around a series of similarities to other spiritual belief systems that mentioned directly within the story. She first draws a distinction between the Christian prayer found in *The Way of a Pilgrim* to the nianfo mantra in Buddhism in saying "...because in the Nembutsu sects of Buddhism, people keep saying 'Namu Amida Butsu' over and over again – which means 'Praises to the Buddha' or something like that – and the *same thing* happens. The exact same –" (38). She then continues making note of these similarities by bringing Lane's attention to the Middle English Christian mystic work *The Cloud of Unknowing* in briefly mentioning that "The same thing happens in 'The Cloud of Unknowing,' too. Just with the word, 'God'" (38). After this, she quickly interjects her feelings about these particular instances in saying that "I mean it's so hard to just say it's absolute coincidence and then just let it go at that – that's what's so fascinating to me" (38). This same act of tracing becomes a focus of criticism in determining the *meaning* of these similarities by attempting to piece together other similar instances throughout the other Glass family stories (covered in chapter four). Franny continues, in a rather large excerpt from the same conversation, and explains that these similarities between belief systems are source of fascination for her:

"I just think it's a terribly peculiar coincidence," she said, exhaling smoke, "that you keep running into that kind of advice – I mean all these really advanced and absolutely unbogous religious persons that keep telling you if you repeat the name of God incessantly, something *happens*. Even in India. In India, they tell you to meditate on the 'Om,' which means the same thing, really, and the exact same

result is supposed to happen. So I mean you can't just rationalize it away without even –" (38-39)

Franny's efforts in displaying her genuine interest and passion for these coincidences are done so in vain, as her attempts at stopping Lane's rationalization do little in the way of avoiding his inevitable desire to determine the "outcome" of these prayers. He aligns himself with the pedantic approach to spirituality that Franny detests when he says "All that stuff... I don't think you leave any margin for the most elementary *psychology*. I mean I think all those religious experiences have a very obvious psychological background – you know what I mean... It's interesting, though" (40). Lane's approach from a place of reason is the final upsetting act that leads Franny to excuse herself before her collapse. The preceding conversation is a display of Franny's construction of her spiritual upbringing – aware of the similarities between these different religious, spiritual, and mystic belief systems, but unaware of how to reconcile her views on them aside from a lingering interest in their similarities. This conversation is also part and parcel of defining the *different* Franny mentioned in chapter two of this thesis. It is unsurprising that she is fully aware of these similarities; however, it is surprising that she does not know what to make of them (although it is a possibility that she is withholding any further description, knowing full well that it would be wasted on Lane). After her series of pardoned bathroom visits and her subsequent fainting and breakdown, the story ends with Franny silently mouthing the Jesus prayer in Lane's absence. Aldous Huxley, in his work *The Perennial Philosophy*, shares his view on struggles met when attempting to lead a spiritual life when he mentions that, "Sometimes crisis alone, without any preparatory training, is sufficient to make a man forget to be his customary self and

become, for the time being, something quite different” (Huxley 42). This suddenness of this change in Franny explains the nature of her crisis and the reason for which Bessie is so terribly concerned. Franny’s spiritual crisis aside, this tracing of similarities introduced in “Franny” is not exclusive to this work, however, as this same focus is elaborated on and made more complex by Zooey’s conversations with both Franny and Bessie in “Zooey.”

“Zooey” takes the religious and spiritual themes introduced in “Franny” and further complicates them with elongated explanations of some of the previously mentioned spiritual works while introducing new works as a means of further defining and simultaneously skewing the Glass family worldview. Both Buddy’s preface to the work and his letter to Zooey, read in full at the beginning of the novelette, are the among most explicit passages explaining the extremely varied nature of Franny and Zooey’s spiritual upbringing (the others being Zooey’s conversation with Bessie in addition to the conversation between Franny and Zooey before Zooey phones Franny, under the guise of Buddy, after the climax of their discussion of her intentions with the Jesus prayer). Buddy’s contestation of the type of story he writes is telling, in that the multiplicative and often confusing nature of spiritual concepts referenced in this work do not have an undeniable, singular purpose. Buddy states, “I say that my current offering isn’t a mystical story, or a religiously mystifying story, at all. *I* say it’s a compound, or multiple, love story, pure and complicated”(49). Passages similar to the ones above also manage to provide brief glimpses of the surface of Seymour and Buddy’s spiritual education and the passing on of this education to Franny and Zooey as well.

Zoey's opening dialogue with Bessie in "Zoey" provides for some of the most extensive explanations of faith within the Glass family stories at large. Zoey runs the gamut regarding different elements of both his and Franny's faith, touching on elements of many influences, but not heavily delving into any one aspect in particular. Phrases such as "Enlightenment's supposed to come *with* the prayer, not before it" not only bear the burden of attempting to explain Franny's spiritual struggle, but guide both the reader and Bessie alike through the spiritual conundrum that the younger Glass children find themselves in (112). During this same explanation, Zoey reveals what he feels is the role of prayer is at large, in a non-sectarian context which allows the role of prayer in general to become, only slightly, clearer to both the reader and Bessie. Zoey's bluntness is jarring at times, but most of these moments of extreme sarcasm are sprinkled with hints of honesty and truth regarding Bessie's inquiries into the lives of her younger children. Zoey is not shy to delegate blame to Seymour and Buddy regarding the current state of affairs for Franny struggles as well as his own that have surfaced during this conversation, later unleashed upon an undeserving Franny. In continuing with his rant to Bessie on how Seymour and Buddy have ruined the lives of Franny and himself, he mentions that "Not that anybody's interested, but I can't even sit down to a goddam *meal*, to this day, without first saying the Four Great Vows under my breath, and I'll lay any odds you want Franny can't, either" (104). Although this conversation reveals the degree to which Zoey's personal faith has been integrated in the workings of his everyday life, it also begins the shift from an overly critical expression of Bessie's viewpoints, to one that, albeit still critical, displays both humor and insight simultaneously.

Salinger sometimes uses this type of sarcastic humor to offset what would otherwise be a preachy dialectic on Zooey's behalf, bolstering not only the believability of the Glass family in the process, but also giving strength to the approachability of these concepts within the text. These moments of humor most often come at Bessie's expense. Zooey's unconstructive and snide remarks toward Bessie aside, he first likens the Four Great Vows to a sports-like chant: "Yay, team. I know I can do it. Just put me in coach" (104). He then replies to Bessie's suggestion that Franny visit a "very devout Catholic psychoanalyst" by following up with "I don't care if he's a very devout Buddhist veterinarian" (106-7). These humorous assertions, aside from providing some comic relief, also interrupt larger points that Zooey could potentially be making. This is best displayed through Zooey's abbreviated explanation of Franny's crisis and Bessie's subsequent misunderstanding. Buddy makes it a point to address an issue introduced in "Franny," continued in Zooey – the misplaced immediacy of spiritual practice to those unfamiliar with leading a religious life. He does so, however, by taking Lane's mundane inquiry from "Franny," "I mean what *is* the result that's supposed to follow?" regarding the Jesus prayer, and transposes a similar inquiry onto Bessie, while making certain to insert a sense of humor, largely absent from "Franny" (39). Bessie asks, once again regarding the Jesus prayer, "How long do you have to do it?" (114). Zooey, with smug vigor, responds:

Oh, not long. Till the painters want to get in your room. Then a procession of saints and bodhisattvas march in, carrying bowls of chicken broth. The Hall Johnson Choir stars up in the background, and the cameras move in on a nice old

gentleman in a loincloth standing against a background of mountains and blue skies and white clouds, and a look of peace comes over everybody's – (114)

Instead of large, cohesive explanations of what cleanly constructs Franny and Zooey's faith, these moments of comedy act as dividers, separating what would otherwise be a dense, spiritual narrative, into something that truly resembles a "prose home movie."

Moments such as these are used in the narrative to combat the overbearing sense of logic and reason often placed upon the spiritual practices of the Glass family children, in an attempt to explain their obsession while simultaneously destroying the hopes of any conclusive analysis of a Glass family faith.

In this same conversation with Bessie, Zooey attempts to help Bessie understand, in a strictly unconventional sense by means of endlessly berating and insulting her, the religious and spiritual ploy of both Franny and himself. He does this by attempting to make her abandon thoughts rooted in the conventionality of a religious upbringing, as displayed by Bessie when discussing Franny's intentions in reading and reciting the Jesus prayer, demonstrated in the following excerpt: "But none of you children were brought *up* Catholics, and I really don't see –" (94). While the theme of "unknowing the differences" is present within "Zooey," this same thought can easily be applied to Zooey's attempts at correcting Bessie's viewpoints on the religion of her children, now changed from their upbringing, in saying "You're off... You're off. You're way off. I told you that last night. This thing with Franny is strictly non-sectarian" (94). Bessie's appearance is virtually nonexistent outside of this work, appearing only in small references among the remaining stories, namely in "Hapworth 16, 1924." Although both Zooey and Bessie do not agree much with one another, they both prove to be integral

persons in each other's growth. Bessie's role is uninvolved with the spiritual working of the Glass family, yet, through her ignorance of their studies, she is sometimes able to achieve what Zooey often cannot. By being removed from their spiritual lives, she gains the ability to see things as they truly are (that her children were once happy, but this is no longer the case). The burden of wit and intelligence present in many of her children has not rendered her crass and unkind – the same cannot be said of Zooey.

Zooey notes that Buddy and Seymour are responsible for Franny's recent breakdown. He claims that they turned Franny and himself into "freaks" because they exposed the two of them to Eastern philosophy from such an early age. Regardless of this opinion, Hassan, commenting on Seymour mentions that although he is a "Scapegoat to vulgarians, the Seer is still to freaks a redeemer" (286). Franny and Zooey cannot escape the influence of Seymour, and it appears as though they don't intend to. This predicament extends into Zooey's professional career, later explained in the discussion of Seymour's Fat Lady. Zooey's profession, much like Franny's hobby, is acting. This mention of this theme of acting or pretending to be someone that they are not is likely not included coincidentally within these works. Even from an early age when both Franny and Zooey, amongst the other Glass family children, starred in the radio show "It's a Wise Child," they were on public display (much like actors). Whether Salinger uses this motif to explain the troubles associated with acting as oneself or as an attempt to reconcile the outward self and inward spirituality is unknown, although it would seem ignorant to pass these instances off as unrelated and irrelevant. Although they are the most heavily focused upon Glass family children, Franny and Zooey are joined by the likes of Boo

Boo, Walt, and Waker, all of whom have differing personal views regarding spirituality as well.

The religious outlook of the less focused upon Glass children (Boo Boo, Walt, and Waker) appear on the backdrop of these stories. That said, their views are not given much in the way of a thorough explanation in the same way that the views of Franny, Zooey, Seymour, and Buddy are. What little detail is paid to the views of the other Glass family children still provides a general outline for beginning to explain their faith. This detail is often criticized and accounted for in scholarship regarding the incompleteness of the Glass family stories. Zooey does mention, however, that “Everybody in this family gets his goddamn religion in a different package,” before briefly speaking about the religious focus of his elder siblings Boo Boo and Walt (153). He explains that “Walt was a hot one. Walt and Boo Boo had the hottest religious philosophies in the family,” a peculiar statement, given the sheer expansiveness and differing religious views between the Franny, Zooey, Seymour, and Buddy (153). Zooey continues: “He had a theory, Walt, that the religious life, and all the agony that goes with it, is just something God sicks on people who have the gall to accuse Him of having created an ugly world,” possibly that implying that Walt felt that the lives that the Glass family children lead have been spurred by God’s wrath (153). Zooey moves away from Walt’s standpoint to explain Boo Boo’s, albeit briefly, in mentioning that “Boo Boo’s convinced Mr. Ashe made the world,” referencing Francis Kilver, an English clergyman, and his diary in which one of the children responds to the question ‘Who made the World?’ with the answer being “Mr. Ashe” (153). Beyond these few examples, and the knowledge of Waker’s priesthood,

there is little else within the Glass family stories explaining a larger family context beyond the primary Glass children.

A Conflation of Faith and Seymour's Fat Lady

Although many of the Glass family members are guilty of conflating religious, spiritual, and philosophical outlooks on life, by association if nothing else, the purest, most condensed elaboration on this matter is spoken by Zooey before his meditative break from Franny in "Zooey." The thesis of his argument is that he believes that Franny does not understand Jesus. He begins this argument with a fundamental view of why he thinks it is worth delving into this point: "I'm bringing it up because I don't think you understood Jesus when you were a child and I don't think that you understand him now. I think you've got him confused in your mind with about five or ten other religious personages and I *don't* see how you can go ahead with the Jesus Prayer till you know who's who and what's what" (163). For better or for worse, he mentions that she is guilty of the same crime that the majority of the population is guilty of: "I've never tried, consciously or otherwise, to turn Jesus into St. Francis of Assisi to make him more 'lovable' – which is exactly what ninety-eight per cent of the Christian world has always insisted on doing" (165). By insisting that Franny is praying to a Jesus that she doesn't understand, he is able to come to terms with his own struggles of judgment and being critical of others. Salinger's introduction of the Fat Lady complicates these matters due in part to Zooey's description of the Fat Lady, in which he relays Seymour's own conflation of beliefs. With this in mind, Zooey's accusation of Franny is a critique of her attempt to

make Jesus more likeable by placing him on a pedestal, above everyone else. She fails to realize that he *is* everyone else; he *is* the Fat Lady.

Seymour's "Fat Lady" is a foundational focal point for a collective worldview when viewing "Franny" and "Zooney" as two parts of a larger whole. Put simply, the Fat Lady, as expressed by Zooney, is "Christ himself." Although this doesn't appear to broaden interpretation beyond a Christian context, Christ here is used to express that every person, the likes of Professor Tupper to any member of the Glass family is worthy of fair treatment, devoid of judgment. This use of God is not necessarily a Christian one, but Zooney, through a lesson taught by Seymour, allows it to be used as an all-encompassing term to describe a larger cosmic force that operates throughout all spirituality. This concept mirrors other all-enveloping uses of God in other works of Salinger's short fiction such as in "Teddy" in which Teddy pours God, milk, into God, a cup or, stepping outside of the Glass family stories, in "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," in which Smith realizes that "Everybody is a nun." This delegation of wisdom on account of Zooney is appropriate as this actualization first existed in Seymour, later Zooney, and now within Franny. The concept of a transitory Christ that is, to some, unknowingly present within the self and others is compatible with Aldous Huxley's explanation of a similar concept within *The Perennial Philosophy*, mirrored in the following excerpt: "For, as all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy have constantly insisted, man's obsessive consciousness of, and insistence on being, a separate self is the final and most formidable obstacle to the unitive knowledge of God" (Huxley 36). Zooney emphasizes this form of looking inward for spiritual knowledge earlier in the novelette when he asks the question "...who in the Bible besides Jesus knew – *knew* – that we're

carrying the Kingdom of Heaven around with us, *inside*, where we're all too goddam stupid and sentimental and unimaginative to look?" (170). In his letter to Zooey, Buddy reveals his own sense of self-discovery, a "vision of truth" as he calls it, when he comes to understand what Seymour insisted on as the goal of religious study. The goals in dispelling these illusions of reality here is to better understand the interconnectivity of all things, living or not, in the world and to understand their relation to a Godhead or the natural Ground of things. Beyond the notion of the "Fat Lady" being both God and everyone simultaneously, Zooey begins to understand why both Seymour and Buddy advised him to continue to pursue his life passion, acting, with a particular and emphatic zest. Buddy mentions that "The fact is, if you want to know, I can't help thinking you'd make a damn site better adjusted actor if Seymour and I hadn't thrown in the Upanishads and the Diamond Sutra and Eckhart and all our other old loves with the rest of your recommended home reading when you were small" (60). Through this, Zooey's initial conflict and coming to terms with being an actor appears to be at ends because, by nature, acting does not appear to be a selfless profession. That said, what Zooey is reminded of, through Seymour's Fat Lady analogy, is that the action is mostly irrelevant, so long as it is approached with right intention.

Pursuing anything with vigor for the Fat Lady displays a devotion and dedication to God transitively through pursuing anything worthwhile in one's life. The Fat Lady also plays an integral role concept of compassion or equal love within the Glass family spiritual education. The immediate example given is when Zooey mentions to Franny that even her religion instructor, Professor Tupper, who she is not terribly fond of, is the Fat Lady and ultimately deserves to be respected on that basis alone, if nothing else. It is

likely that Zooey feels that the people that he has been especially critical of, Bessie earlier in the day and Franny during the course of this conversation, are equally deserving of this detached compassion. This sentiment puts Franny at ease considering one of her primary afflictions is that she is helplessly critical of the world around her and everyone else within it. Through her attempts to be understanding of and sympathetic towards others, Franny recognizes that her criticisms of her own family as well as society at large may be harsh, regardless of if that is how she truly feels.

Outcomes of Salinger's Construction of Spirituality

The ultimate outcome of Salinger's deliberate, complex, and sometimes random development of personal faith for his characters is a messy reflection of those trying to lead spiritual lives in a society that, at large, does not value spirituality as much as members of the Glass family have come to. Salinger's Glass family stories are a reflection of the difficulty in leading a religious and/or spiritual life in a modern society that is not entirely compatible with the multifaceted Glass family faith as well. This viewpoint is often used in conjunction with American society specifically, and rightfully so considering that these stories indeed occur in America and excerpts relaying these ideas exist within these stories. In "Teddy," while meditating on his past and future reincarnations, Teddy casually mentions that: "I wouldn't have had to get incarnated in an *American* body.... I mean it's very hard to meditate and live a spiritual life in America" (188). Although American society is referenced specifically, the same idea could easily be applied to Western society in general.

The sum of the faith constructed in these Glass family stories is a faith that borrows from many faiths, and at the same time, resembles no one faith more than another. This is juxtaposed with the convention that one is simply born into a singular faith, as determined by family lineage (as Bessie displays in “Zooney”). Seymour exemplifies the conflict in selecting and adhering to a particular religious or spiritual sect by abandoning this tradition and compulsion altogether. One of Seymour’s boldest actions, aside from the obvious taking of his life, is abandoning the idea that one faith will sufficiently satisfy one’s spiritual needs. By not having to choose one faith, Seymour is able to create a conglomerate faith, every bit as complicated and muddy as it is expansive.

Thematically, detachment, and furthermore the rejection of sentimentality is rampant throughout most of the Glass family works – not only it’s abandonment as an attempt to construct a better narrative on Buddy’s behalf, but as an attempt to lead a purer life on behalf of Seymour, Buddy, Franny, and Zooney. Although Buddy’s attempts at rejecting sentimentality are met with careful detail in his critiques of his own work, Zooney, unsurprisingly, is outspoken on the matter (although he sometimes catches himself being guilty of being oversentimental as well). It appears that no Glass family member is able to fully escape this malady. In one of the few passages in the Glass family chronicles referencing their often unmentioned brother Waker, Zooney remarks to Bessie that “He’s so emotional – priest or no priest. If you tell Waker it looks like *rain*, his eyes all fill up,” further emphasizing the idea that sentimentality knows no spiritual or religious bounds, whether a member of the priesthood or a member of the Glass family (94). Zooney also accuses Franny of being overly emotional and admits that he too was an

“Emotional Young Person,” much like she is at that moment in her life (157). Franny is just as critical of Zooey during her phone call to “Buddy” and mentions that “He’s so *bitter* about things. He’s bitter about *religion*. He’s bitter about *television*. He’s bitter about you and Seymour...” (189). Zooey sees the error in his ways and realizes that he is overstepping his bounds in his treatment of others. He states: “I have no goddam authority to be speaking up like a *seer* the way I have been. We’ve had enough goddamn seers in this family” (193). Seymour is also cognizant of the dangers of sentimentality. In “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” Seymour, in a diary entry, uses R.H. Blythe’s definition of sentimentality: “that we are being sentimental when we give to a thing more tenderness than God gives to it” (78). Although trying to quantify the Glass family’s spirituality is near-useless in further understanding these stories at large, it is apparent that a struggle with detachment is a unifying theme throughout these works.

Tracing the lineage of the Glass family’s literary influence becomes equally futile, if not more so, than attempting to disassemble an irreparably tangled construction of spirituality that is also present within Salinger’s work. Salinger’s insistence on including literary references of every shape and size is another means of defining a Glass family faith, particularly for Seymour and Buddy. There is no shortage of literary references throughout these stories that are every bit as varied as the religious references found throughout them. This is glaringly apparent in “Hapworth 16, 1924,” as the roughly the last third of the story is bonafide listing of works that Seymour and Buddy wish to read during their stay at camp. Systematically breaking down the subject matter of these works, either similar or different, with a keen eye toward general associations does little to provide clarity as to why they are mentioned and included. That is not to devalue the

inclusion of the names and works of the authors mentioned within the Glass family stories, however. These works have obviously had some sort of lasting influence on the lives of the Glass children, but without much in the way of elaboration on Salinger's part, aside from the brief annotations that Seymour provides in "Hapworth 16, 1924," minor clarifications on Buddy's behalf, the patchwork of quotes on the beaverboard within Seymour and Buddy's old room, as well as other minor moments such as Boo Boo's elaboration on the Sappho poem she includes on Seymour's mirror, piecing these works together does not unlock *new* meaning in the way that some readers hope that it will. These quotes and excerpts vary greatly, ranging from Epictetus to Kafka, and nearly everything between. These brief passages act as minor conveniences sprinkled sparingly throughout most of these works, much like the way in which a person may reference a relevant quote in an everyday conversation if it contributes to a point that they are making. It is only natural that Buddy, a writer, draws influence from other writers and furthermore, comments on them (namely Kafka and Kierkegaard in "Seymour: an Introduction," as he uses two key quotations of theirs to open his own work). It may seem odd to include literary works within a chapter regarding spirituality; however, consulting Seymour's criticism of Buddy's own writing does much in the way of shedding light on the importance of writing in Buddy's spirituality. In critiquing one of Buddy's stories and addressing Buddy's concerns regarding what he feels are shortcomings in his own writing, Seymour begins a series of questions, not comments, to account for these concerns, starting with the following question: "What is it but a low form of prayer when or Les or anybody else God-damns everything? I can't believe God recognizes any form of blasphemy. It's a prissy word invented by the clergy" (179). Seymour begins to reveal

that the religious outlook many recognize is not, or should not be, predicated on minor offenses of language, but right intention. Seymour, in addressing Buddy's later concern regarding the burden of his influences, inquires "doesn't each of our individualities begin right at the point where we own up to our extremely close connections and accept the inevitability of borrowing one another's jokes, talents, and idiocies?" (183). With this in mind, it appears that Buddy's borrowing from various authors, religious figures, and spiritual mystics is used as a means of sufficiently explaining concepts which he cannot. Once again, through Seymour's critique of Buddy's work, he asks yet another question, this time the focus of which is the intention behind Buddy's writing: "When was writing ever your profession? It's never been anything but your religion" (186). In the same way that acting is Zooey's calling in life, writing is Buddy's. It becomes the means through which he can communicate with others and learn from his own mistakes. Although these passages appear to be moments of clarity, they also complicate facets of religion and spirituality mentioned in the works that precede them, as they are almost expected to at this point.

Ihab Hassan claims that "the Glasses tell us far more about the darkness of love and self-hate than about the conditions of an urban Jewish family in mid-century America," and rightfully so (278). The building blocks of the Glass family's worldview aside, it is important to remember that these stories deal more so with the trials and tribulations of the human spirit, than the intricacies and specificities of religious doctrine. Although the Glass family faith is part and parcel of each of these family members and the way in which they live their lives, these amalgam faiths are vehicles for trying to solve existential issues that no one member of the Glass family has answers to – not even

Seymour. It is appropriate that in the closing pages of “Seymour: an Introduction,” Buddy does not hesitate to quote Book XXVI of the Texts of Chuang-tzu in saying that “The sage is full of anxiety and indecision in undertaking anything, and so he is always successful (240). Hassan continues this thought through the example of Seymour’s game of marbles, with the entirety of the Glass family stories in mind: “As Seymour reveals to Buddy during a game of marbles, the great Zen Master Archers are those who teach us not to aim at the target. Straining for aim is an invitation to chance; our willful involvement with ends blinds us to the means” (285). Trying to assemble a faith from something as immobile as text, literally that is, will often yield unfavorable results. The words of the Glass family are as malleable as the ideas that are presented within these same stories. Although the means by which each Glass family member comes to terms with his or her spirituality is rife with conflict and a series of unclear pathways, Salinger makes clear the unfettered value of a “sacred human conscience,” pure and complicated (123).

Chapter 4: Organization and Attempts to Unlock Different Meaning

The unclear form and order of the Glass family stories has been one of the most contested areas of Salinger's criticism. There have been numerous attempts to construct *new* meaning and potentially find *hidden* meaning through organization and re-organization of the primary Glass family texts. *New* meaning, in this usage, refers to a construction of meaning that is not implicitly part and parcel of the source text(s), whereas *hidden* meaning refers to meaning that requires additional effort in reading texts carefully. Given the problematic nature of the interconnectivity between Glass family stories, many have attempted to make further sense of Salinger's choices regarding the order in which he published these stories as well as his choice in constructing the chronological history of the Glass family. Although moving, adjusting, or reordering these stories may give a different meaning to the overall narrative, no new meaning is created; these are often attempts to unearth something that may be, and likely isn't, hidden in the texts. Whether the desire to organize these stories is a part of human nature or just a compulsion by scholars, critics, and readers alike, it would appear as though many of these possible readings stem from an inability to understand the way in which the Glass family stories function on account of a lack of commentary regarding the matter on Salinger's behalf. As these stories certainly do not conform to a kind, common, and familiar structure, it seems as though many have taken this as an opportunity to *make* them function in such a way that is more coherent within an already recognizable literary paradigm, often to a fault. That said, some scholars, namely Warren French and Eberhard Alsen, have been able to shed light on innovative, unorthodox ways to read these stories that expand or contort meaning, but do not necessarily attempt to create *new* meaning

(even these readings are faced with and acknowledge problems of their own). This ambiguity of narrative structure becomes a strength for Salinger, however, as it allows his works to be read in unconventional ways that are not limited by an immovable, affirmative organizational structure, like the works of many others.

Glass Family Stories as a Composite Novel

Eberhard Alsen's study *Salinger's Glass Stories as a Composite Novel* has proven to be not only one of the most comprehensive works regarding the form that the Glass family stories take, but also one of the most humble works regarding the subject matter. His purpose in conducting his study is "not to press a specific interpretation but to increase the reader's enjoyment and understanding of the Glass stories" (xiv). By including this safety warning in his preface, he allows his interpretations to be read in parallel with a conventional interpretation of Salinger's Glass family stories. Where many other critics are quick to cite opinion as fact and pass judgment without second thought due to Salinger's unconventional release and structuring of these stories, Alsen fully acknowledges that Salinger's works are indeed problematic given their incompleteness. He also claims that "the series," referring to the Glass family stories, "has a wider latitude of meaning in its uncompleted form that it could possibly have if Salinger arranged the stories in a fixed pattern" (x). Alsen's preface to this work also takes Salinger's publication history, both related to the Glass family stories and his other works, into account when determining the reason why so many have come to expect a Glass family novel, or another document, designed to make sense of these already existing Glass family releases. He mentions: "During the years that the Glass stories

continued to come out in irregular intervals, Salinger's readers speculated that he would eventually pull them together into a novel. After all, the appearance of his first novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), was also preceded by the publication of a number of stories about its protagonist" (ix). In lieu of an actual Glass family novel, the end result of this expectation is two groupings of short stories and novelettes in *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters and Seymour: an Introduction*. Although these collections are devoid of any considerable additions from their original publications, many have taken this as an invitation to organize them in order to create a makeshift novel, to no definitively effective avail. Alsen finds that there are two primary sequences in which the Glass family stories can be read in this regard. He elaborates in saying:

One is the order in which they were published, which is also the order in which Buddy claims to have written them; and the other is the order suggested by the chronology of events in the stories. Arranged one way, the stories focus on Buddy's struggle to understand Seymour by writing about him; arranged the other way, they focus on Seymour's quest for God. (xii)

Although Alsen's two suggested readings are indeed the ones that are most deserving of immediate consideration, his suggestions of what they ultimately portray err on the side of oversimplification. Alsen, arguably one of the least biased Salinger scholars, if for no other reason than because he is able to provide a satisfactory rebuttal for each of his major suggestions, even notes in his work that regardless of the way in which these stories are read according to the stipulations in his study, both provide an incomplete organization of stories – an unavoidable consideration.

Glass Family Stories Organized by Order of Publication and Order of Events

Viewing the Glass family stories in the order in which they were released to the public, as Alsen notes, is a particularly important consideration, as this order reflects the initial standard for the way they were originally read and, according to Buddy, also reflects the order in which they were written. The release history for the major Glass family stories is as follows: “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” (1948), “Franny” (1955), “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” (1955), “Zooney” (1957), “Seymour: an Introduction” (1959), and “Hapworth 16, 1924” (1965). The publication dates of the minor Glass family stories merit mentioning as well, as they determine the level of foresight and the committal (or lack thereof) to Salinger’s pursuit of these stories. The publication dates of the minor Glass family stories are as follows: “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut” (1948), “Down at the Dinghy” (1949), and “Teddy” (1952). It is this initial release order which is the cause for much conflict between these stories, as some of the narrative issues which occur, covered in chapter two, are a direct result of the publication history (namely a secondhand depiction of the Glass family, Buddy’s conflicted role as narrator, among others). By tracing the overarching narrative through each story, it becomes apparent that because of a general uncertainty regarding the function of certain stories, this ordering brings light to the overall incompleteness of the Glass family stories.

“A Perfect Day for Bananafish” becomes the default starting point for an introduction to the Glass family when accounting for these stories in their original order of publication. However, it is unclear how far into the future Salinger planned for Seymour and the Glass family during this first publication. Outside of Seymour and Muriel, there is no mention of any other recurring characters within the other stories.

Seymour's suicide immediately becomes defining factor in the struggles of the Glass family with this organization. Without a precedent for this story or any of the characters involved, Salinger is able to publish this story safely, without an obligation to follow it with additional stories or any other form of clarification, as it can comfortably act as an independent work. The same can be said about the story that follows, "Franny." With this order in mind, Seymour's death becomes the unavoidable, lingering issue that the Glass family must face throughout the stories that follow, with the exception of "Franny" and the three other minor stories mentioned.

"Franny," as the next story in order after the introduction, and subsequent farewell, to a Glass family member's life in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is met with issues existing regardless of its place within the chronicles, particularly a lack of integration into newly developing Glass family stories, not to be heavily constructed until the succeeding work "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters." Independently, "Franny" functions well without an early reader's knowledge that it would be the precedent for "Zooney," namely due to no explicit mention that Franny is a Glass family member within the story. By introducing Lane and providing a backstory, albeit a short one, regarding his strained relationship with Franny, "Franny," as an independent work, does not require the addition of subsequent information for it to function. Starting with Franny's letter and ending with a conversation about the Jesus prayer with Lane, the insertion of any additional contextual information would, in hindsight, detract from the success of this work. Although the characters appear as complete entities within the story itself, they are created in such a way that they can be easily expanded with the addition of new contexts and more information about Franny's spiritual malaise in future publications. "Franny"

acts as an insurance policy and a means of testing this kind of story “in the wild,” in that if the story was unsuccessful, it would have failed as an independent work without baggage, to be left alone; because it was successful, Salinger was able to develop ideas covered within the work further in later stories. With the addition of “Zooney,” however, “Franny” becomes an integral piece of the overarching Glass family narrative, as it provides the groundwork for struggles covered over the course of an entire novelette.

“Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” then becomes the narrative glue between “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” and “Franny,” in that the primary defining features of subsequent Glass family stories begin to take form – notably Buddy’s narration, the outlining and definition of family members, both primary and ancillary, and a further explanation of Seymour’s struggles over the course of his life. “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” and “Franny” are completely devoid of any mention of Buddy, causing the reader to assume, and rightfully so, that they were created by Salinger alone. It is not until “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” that the reader begins to learn of Salinger’s “alter-ego and collaborator” for later literary expression with the creation of Buddy Glass. “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” holds monumental importance within the greater context of the Glass family stories because it provides insight into Seymour’s life, largely absent from “A Perfect Day for Bananafish.” Although narrative tension is projected through a few well designed events in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” (namely Muriel’s conversation with her mother, Seymour’s conversation with Sybil, and Seymour’s lashing out at the female hotel guest in the elevator before he takes his life), further context is provided for Seymour’s struggles through an explanation of the peculiar behavior he exhibits surrounding his wedding (being too “happy” for

marriage, for example), his diary entry (in which the reader gains a glimpse of his personality and learns of his previous attempt to commit suicide), and the Matron of Honor's derogatory opinions of him (namely that the Fedders, with the exception of Muriel, think poorly of him). At this point in the publication history, Salinger corners himself and is almost forced to commit, by his own will if nothing else, to the writing of subsequent stories after not necessarily altering the stories that precede this one, but placing them within a grand scheme in which they play different parts.

“Zooney” builds further upon the Glass family narrative that begins to take shape in “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters.” Salinger accomplishes this by including a significant preface written by Buddy in which he begins to take responsibility for conflicting issues in his writing and acknowledges its conflicted reception as well, revisiting a previous character in Franny, continuing her storyline immediately after the reader has last seen her, and introducing the volatile catalyst for action in the story's title character, Zooney. Buddy's involvement as a provider of context within Glass family stories to come becomes apparent, given his involvement early in this story with both his preface and his letter to Zooney. Whereas the beginnings of a Glass family faith begin to take shape, albeit briefly, within both “Franny” and “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” “Zooney” takes this integral theme and unleashes it in full force over the course of the narrative. This faith is not mentioned in passing or meant to be merely accepted as a static element of the work, but Salinger develops what is previously mentioned largely in passing in and allows Bessie, Zooney, and Franny to make this asymmetrical faith begin to take form, as malleable and foreign as it may be.

“Seymour: an Introduction” becomes a slight step away from the story-structure of its preceding works and begins to resemble the explicatory nature of Buddy’s prefaces in which he acknowledges his audience in “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” and “Zooney.” In this regard, “Seymour: an Introduction” makes “Zooney” the inevitable pinnacle of recognizable form within the Glass family stories, even with its abnormalities. “Seymour: an Introduction” distances itself from the meticulous narrative planning of the previous stories and more closely resembles an elongated, disjointed journal entry. Although “Seymour: an Introduction” appears to be a step back from the developing form of the previous stories, Buddy’s articulation of his brother and their upbringing is a step forward in drawing an honest picture of their lives and personal struggles. Myriad childhood stories and cascading irrelevant descriptions of Seymour flood from the pages of this narrative. The story does not act as a clear sequel to any of the previous works with this inevitable organization; instead, it functions as a work created to clarify missing details from the previous works, while expanding the depth of the Glass family and ultimately creating a desire for even more unknown details in Salinger’s readership.

“Hapworth 16, 1924’s” place in this organization has proven to be one which, much like “Seymour: an Introduction,” provides the reader with an overwhelming amount of detail that does not amount to much in the greater context of the Glass family stories. Based on the chronological release of these works, it does not seem out of place that an early episode in Seymour’s life concludes the Glass family saga, considering that this same saga begins with the final episode of Seymour’s corporeal life. As a closing piece, barring future Glass family releases, “Hapworth 16, 1924” primarily sheds light on

the upbringing of Buddy and Seymour, as well as Boo Boo, Walt, and Waker to a lesser degree. Conveniently, we begin to learn of Buddy's propensity, later turned compulsion, to write at a somewhat advanced level at age five. "Hapworth 16, 1924," however, is not devoid of its own issues as a piece within the Glass family saga at large. Based on Buddy's claim of responsibility for having written "Teddy" in "Seymour: an Introduction" and his acknowledgment that, "A few years ago, I published an *exceptionally* Haunting, Memorable, unpleasantly controversial, and thoroughly unsuccessful short story about a "gifted" little boy aboard a transatlantic liner..." we begin to see a young Seymour that bears a striking resemblance to Teddy himself (205). With this innocuous comment of Buddy's in mind, French notes "Buddy/Salinger does not say why the story is considered unsuccessful, but one would suppose it was because readers publicized their missing its point, which Salinger had gone to elaborate pains to point out" (84). The candidness of Teddy's character, especially in comparison to the pieces of Seymour that the reader encounters weaving in and out of these stories, is often a focus of criticism regarding these works. That said, the Seymour of "Hapworth 16, 1942" is articulate beyond comprehension, yet that is not the most surprising similarity between this Seymour and Teddy McArde. Seymour is able to estimate the length of his life and does so with nonchalance, much like Teddy. Without much more detail regarding this matter, the reader is forced to accept this observation of Seymour's and continue along in the narrative. At large, "Hapworth 16, 1942" is an appropriate ending piece for the Glass family stories, regardless of its anticlimactic nature. Although often received poorly because of its distinct lack of closure, it manages to establish the foundation for the stories that precede it with an essence of believability. It is able to establish a sense of

ethos through providing the picture of a young Seymour, and Buddy in spirit, by tracing a set of influences congruent with the Seymour and Buddy that come to be known in the preceding stories. Before the reader reaches the beginning of the letter, Buddy, in explanatory act is able to do without his depictions and attempted literary portraits of Seymour and let a picture of Seymour be drawn through the purest means available, one of Seymour's own letters, reproduced in full without any embellishments. The Glass family chronicles then end "With 50,000 additional kisses from the two looming pests of Bunga-low 7" and Buddy's return to the room in which Seymour is composing this same letter (51).

Based on the abbreviated run-through of the major Glass family stories above, we encounter a set of stories that function well enough as parts of a greater whole; they are imperfect, but their function is by no means a failure. When examining these stories as part of a larger collection, the beginnings and endings of these stories become an unavoidable aspect of their construction. Tracing through these stories, in an extremely condensed, rudimentary, and potentially pedantic form, the linked beginnings and endings of these stories are as follows: "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" begins with a phone conversation between Muriel and her mother and ends with Seymour's abrupt death; "Franny" begins with Lane reading Franny's letter and ends with Franny mouthing the Jesus prayer, in a presumably assimilated state; "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" begins with Seymour reading a Taoist tale of a superlative horse to Franny and ends with Buddy's realization that Muriel's father's uncle has left his apartment; "Zooney" begins with Buddy's preface and acknowledgment of differing opinions of his story and ends with Franny and Zooney making amends and coming to terms with

Seymour's Fat Lady; "Seymour: an Introduction" begins with Buddy's brief foreword to Seymour's letter and ends with a Buddy's final comment on Seymour and a suggestion for sleep; and "Hapworth 16, 1924" begins with Buddy's extremely brief introduction to the letter and ends with the letter's conclusion and farewell from camp. It becomes apparent that these works, regardless of their function as a whole, do not provide for a clear link between each story – that is, one that seamlessly bridges one story to the next (although "Franny" and "Zooney" are the closest in this regard). These stories are episodic due to their ability to grant brief, lucid glimpses into particular moments of the collective lives of the Glass family, but that does not necessarily imply that each succeeding piece requires the previous piece to not only exist, but also provide a clean transition between the two. Although consulting an order of events regarding these stories as an alternative to viewing them in their published progression would appear to make these stories fit more seamlessly, it does not succeed in doing so.

When looking at the Glass family stories according to the order in which the events within them occur, we are able to see a slightly more cohesive narrative in that we can place the events of these stories together as if they were some sort of incomplete jigsaw puzzle; however, it becomes glaringly apparent that Buddy's narrative does not favor this construction because "Seymour: an Introduction" acts as a massively disorganized recollection of the no longer living Seymour, referencing events occurring early in their lives, such as Buddy and Seymour's race to the drug store as well as their game of marbles. The same can be said of "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," although to a lesser degree. Granted, this story is centered on a central event, Seymour's marriage reception, the story makes reference to events occurring earlier in the Glass family

history, such as specific appearances on “It’s a Wise Child” and Seymour’s assault of Charlotte Mayhew. The ordering of stories according to a chronological series of events then becomes the following: “Hapworth 16, 1924,” with the primary events occurring before any others, although it was the last to be relayed to Buddy’s audience, “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” based on the story’s central event, “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” informing Seymour’s death which influences the lives of the characters that follow in these stories, “Franny,” providing an introduction to this Glass family member and her struggles, “Zooney,” an elaboration of Franny’s struggles and the introduction of her brother Zooney and mother Bessie, and “Seymour: an Introduction,” providing a reflection on Seymour’s influence on his family, particularly Buddy. Based purely on the fact that some of these stories do not fit comfortably within perhaps the most logical organization speaks volumes for the success of the newfound function of these stories. Alsen’s claim that this reading displays Seymour’s quest for God is not a comfortable assessment, as this storyline could potentially conclude after the third work in this sequence, causing the last three works to be convoluted, ancillary works created to explain Seymour’s motivations through his impact on the lives of others. Although a semblance of a series of stories, much like the initial organization by means of publication history, can be constructed by working through the above, there are still holes in the narrative that remain unanswered, the same issues in the initial reading and discussed in chapter two (which isn’t entirely surprising, since the content of these works does not change). Beyond these two readings, however, some have decided to look at Salinger’s other stories as a means of explaining narrative themes that operate inside and outside of Glass family works.

Glass Family Stories as Part of a Larger Cycle of Stories

In addition to the most common organizations for these stories, according to publication history and in chronological order according to the events in the stories, is the application of Forrest Ingram's "short-story cycle," to the Glass family stories, which accounts for an additional form of interpretation. Ingram's definition of a "short-story cycle," taken from his work *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre* for this critical approach is as follows: "A story cycle is a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader's experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others" (13). Ingram, in his study, only mentions Salinger's stories in passing, however, noting that:

Salinger's Glass family stories and Fitzgerald's Basil Duke Lee stories, though linked by repetition of characters, have not been collected into a single volume. I have chosen to exclude from my discussion this kind of cycle (a twentieth-century counterpart to the ancient epic cycle) because it does not raise the question of specific aesthetic pattern, and so cannot help us to discover to what kind of structure the term "cycle" applies. (16)

Regardless of Ingram's exclusion of the Glass family stories in favor of cycles such as James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Albert Camus' *L'Exil et le royaume*, and John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven*, amongst others, Warren French decides to apply Ingram's ideas in his chapter "A Nine-Story Cycle," within his larger work *J.D. Salinger, Revisited*. As the title of French's chapter implies, the only Glass family stories, both major and minor, considered in this cycle are those contained within the collection *Nine Stories* ("A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Down at the Dinghy," "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and

“Teddy”). French posits his argument so that *Nine Stories* presents a “variety of characters at various points on the road to enlightenment” (64). Although this construction suggests some degree of creative interpretation, French clarifies his stance further by mentioning “Salinger is, however, not providing an episodic history of the progress of one soul but an account of the process of spiritualization and the obstacles to it, especially in the United States, through portrayals of representative types, which, as already cautioned, he most likely did not preconceive as forming a collective history” (68-69). With this in mind, the characters within each of these stories act as archetypes, displaying different points of progression in the process of enlightenment. This interpretation is viable if for no other reason than it is an inevitable reading, given the publication history, lack of exclusiveness in grouping some of the Glass family stories, and the mere mentioning of different tenants of Eastern philosophic thought.

French’s organization of these Glass family stories into this “Nine-Story Cycle,” however, does not function perfectly because of a direct application of religious and/or spiritual ideas either mentioned or alluded to in these texts as a means of attributing meaning to these stories outside of what meaning already exists. French does not necessarily view these writings as independent stories that have simply been collected and bound under the title of *Nine Stories*, but instead views them within a “progression based upon the slow and painful achievement of spiritual enlightenment... in dealing with Salinger, of successive stages that a soul would pass through according to Vedantic teachings in at last escaping fleshly reincarnations” (63-4). The stories are presented within *Nine Stories* without any additional explanation for their selection within the text. The only addition is Salinger’s inclusion of the Zen koan before the collection’s table of

contents, reproduced here: “We know the sound of two hands clapping. But what is the sound of one hand clapping? (1). The addition of a Zen koan only adds to the ambiguity that is present throughout this collection of stories. Even the most deliberate explication on this koan would do next to nothing to support this reading.

French’s approach does not claim to connect these nine stories or at least the four major and minor Glass stories to the six major works (of which, “A Perfect a Day for Bananafish” is included). This interpretation is worth consideration in that it operates outside of the common organizational structures that the primary Glass family stories are presented with. Even with this innovative construction involving the Glass family stories, French admits that “The final story in the cycle has also raised problems; in fact, problems of such magnitude that even the sphinxlike author who has adamantly refused to discuss his works has obliquely funneled a response to critics of “Teddy” through his alter ego Buddy Glass” (84). This proves, if not definitively then something close to it, that these stories have problems that are inescapable, regardless of the way in which they are read. With French’s approach in mind, this creates an overlap for “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” in that it operates in three distinctly different ways: the first being its place as the introductory Glass family story according to publication history, the second being its place as the final Glass family story to include a living Seymour according to the chronology of events, and the third being independent of the above two roles in that it operates as a demonstration of a soul that has not successfully progressed through spiritual enlightenment. This is an impressive feat for a story contained within twenty-four pages. Of course, it can act independently of all of the above interpretations and still function as a freestanding story in and of itself.

Alsen warns of the dangers in adopting this type of reading of the Glass family stories in saying “Salinger’s decision not to impose a final shape on the Glass series – or his decision not to complete it – suggests that we ought not to interpret the significance of the stories in terms of any preconceived notions about the relationship between form and meaning in conventional short story cycles (233). By utilizing French’s strategy for reading these stories, the importance of an ending becomes both pivotal and problematic. The only logical ending to these stories in this reading would be one that concludes with the attainment of spiritual enlightenment – an ending that would have not only been the arguably highest point of literary anti-climax, but also one that would be virtually unwriteable in coherent terms, even for Buddy (lest Salinger found a way in which he could depict moksha, a liberation or release from saṃsāra, or karmic rebirth, with success). That said, French’s attempt to read these stories through a different lens is certainly not made in vain; if anything, it is a testament to how creatively ambiguous Salinger’s stories happen to be.

A Lack of Order and a Widening of Possibilities

Although these stories can be twisted and contorted in such a way that is more desirable for the reader, implicit meaning does not change – only interpretation does. The stories still exist in the same form that they have existed since their original publication, regardless of any invented organizational shift. In the same way that a cup of coffee serves a different purpose if drunk or spilled in one’s lap, these are matters of user involvement that do not change the source element(s). Salinger does little to interfere with these various interpretations. He does mention, in a few brief dust jacket comments

in early editions of *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: an Introduction*, no longer included in current Bay Back Books pressings of his work, that "...I have several new Glass stories coming along - waxing, dilating - each in its own way, but I suspect the less said about them, in mixed company, the better," which is more cryptic than it is revealing as far as his intentions were concerned with the organizational state and role of his already published stories (Alexander 225). John Paul Wenke, commenting on the Glass stories at large in *J.D. Salinger: A Study of the Short Fiction*, and without a consideration of a particular organization mentions, "Crucial to any approach to the Glass stories is a recognition of Salinger's refusal to recast standard literary forms..." (Wenke 77). With this in mind, it is not only Salinger's narrative structures in each individual story that does not necessarily adhere to familiar forms of his time, but it is his lack of an explicitly deliberate or intended organization of these stories that also reject familiar forms. Without a definitive comment on the way in which these stories were meant to be read, this formlessness becomes a defining attribute of the Glass saga.

It is important to recognize that Salinger would have been cognizant of these forms as well, as he was obviously an educated writer and more so because of Salinger/Buddy's sheer insistence to not only mention literary works that vary greatly in nature, scattered throughout these stories, but to also make specific references to narrative devices and character roles within these works (the mention of Banquo's ghosts in "Zooney," Kafka's falsifying of characters as they are written into existence, and Kierkegaard's self-aware clerical error that revolts against its creator are just a few examples). Salinger was aware of these forms, and uses them as a means of justifying and explaining errors in his own writing and as a means to push convention aside in order to

further play with these same forms (his offering of a bouquet of parentheses in “Seymour: an Introduction” is a minor example that immediately comes to mind). Salinger explains, through his narrative conduit Buddy, that he is certainly not ignorant to the structure of his Glass stories, as they stood during their publication and initial reception. Salinger goes so far as to comment directly on the primary topic of this chapter before he decides to write at length about his brother Seymour in “Seymour: an Introduction.” He provides a brief glimpse into his intentions in writing “Seymour: an Introduction” in the following excerpt:

My original plans for this general space were to write a short story about Seymour and call it “SEYMOUR ONE,” with the big “ONE” serving as a built-in convenience to me, Buddy Glass, even more than to the reader – a helpful, flashy reminder that other stories (a Seymour Two, Three, and possibly Four) would logically have to follow. Those plans no longer exist. Or, if they do – and I suspect that this is much more likely how things stand – they’ve gone underground, with an understanding, perhaps, that I’ll rap three times when I’m ready. (124-125)

This unusual acknowledgment of form and sharing of intentions with the reader, although providing more information than most authors would, especially directly within the contents of a work, does not actually clarify any structure but simply grants the reader brief access to a chief character’s creative process.

Buddy’s acknowledgment of the various shortcomings of these stories is the closest evidence readers have to an explanation of elaborate organization and form. Ihab Hassan, commenting on “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” suggests that “in the

story the powers of spirit overreach the resources of form” (280). This same sentiment is easily applicable to the latter Glass family stories as well. The spirit, however, is the very reason why these stories are not only believable, but also why they resonate with many. In the same way that lives of his readers are rife with contradictions and not cleanly organized, the lives and details of the Glass family are also contradictory and unorganized. Hassan continues describing Buddy’s responsibility and acknowledgment of these flawed forms by saying “We cannot but feel that in this novelette Salinger has come close to realizing the full contradictions of his vision,” and yet nothing is done to reconcile these contradictions (283). Fixing the past, would not do much in regards to the story at large, with the exception of correcting minor inconveniences that have become part and parcel of these stories. Any revisions made by Salinger, by means of backtracking and attempting to fix already existing errors, and thus acknowledging further contradictory elements of these works, would only lessen the effectiveness and overall meaning attached to the saga as a larger body of work. In place of these potential revisions, Salinger moves forward and publishes “Zooey,” acknowledging errors in reception through Buddy’s self-awareness as a writer. It is not entirely surprising that Buddy, Salinger’s supremely cognizant narrator, comments on the conflicted nature of his own work. Wenke delves deeper into Buddy’s role in observing that “The implication is that literary art is most mimetic when it reveals its own inconclusiveness, especially when it a present-tense, first-person narrator points out that the uncertainty of his account has already stirred divergent opinions” (Wenke 77). Hassan elaborates on this same variable, observing that “If these contradictions seem to be still unexorcised, it is because of the form of the novelette – its internal shifts and spurts – does not appear entirely

conscious of its purpose” (Hassan 283). Hassan brings to light an issue that is symptomatic of “Zooney,” yet becomes an issue for the collection of these stories at large – a lack of an established purpose regarding the interconnectivity of these works. Most, if not all, issues stem from this lack of defined purpose or intention (not in Salinger’s creating of these stories, but rather in regards to publishing order and organization at the conclusion of the saga). Consulting Salinger’s own comments on his work does not make this sentiment any less problematic; if anything, his comments make this problem even more present. Perhaps the most important consideration when attempting to view the Glass family stories as a collective work is Salinger’s intention, or lack thereof, at least explicitly, in publishing these stories a series. In referencing the outcome of Salinger’s lack of clarifying detail regarding a suggested reading of his work, Alsen comments: “Ultimately, what matters is not what Salinger’s plans for the form of the Glass series may have been but what effect he has created by deciding to not publish any more Glass stories and not to arranged the already published ones in a definite pattern” (233). Without the introduction of any new Glass family stories, the problematic organization of these stories will remain the same.

As mentioned in chapter two, some interpret these stories as being plotless, which may prove to be a useful consideration when attempting to decipher why so many have attempted to place these stories within a coherent, cohesive order. With the explicit commenting on the shortcomings of these stories on Buddy’s behalf in mind, Max F. Schulz, in his "Epilogue to "Seymour: an Introduction," notes that “Both Seymour and Buddy are writers as well as Zen neophytes; and literature and Zen – despite the cosmic paradox of such great Chinese Taoist poets as Chuang-tzu – seek irreconcilable goals”

(56). This is not to say that because Buddy has something more than a lingering interest in Zen, that these stories by extension are Zen stories in which there are direct correlations between Zen practice and the published narratives, but rather that it should not be entirely surprising that these stories do not resemble many others like them (lest their purpose is equally undefined as those of the Glass family stories). The only safe, unassuming conclusion that readers can come to is that, put simply, these stories are connected by nature of proximity and family relations.

Ultimately, examining Salinger's Glass family stories as a means of expanding them and potentially creating altered meaning should not be viewed as pedantic processes in trying to make sense of Salinger's work, but rather they should be viewed as almost necessary processes in order to rediscover what the reader has known all along – that these stories are flawed and largely unsatisfying for those who hope to find some sense of definitive closure. Alsen's work displays that no reading is completely safe from the organizational curse of the Glass family stories – there are dangers in reading them as independent pieces as well as dangers in reading them as a collective work. Salinger's disassembling and toying with literary forms is without question a necessary consideration regarding the structure of these stories. It is no coincidence that the narrative forms that Salinger refuses to adhere to have been mentioned throughout all chapters of this thesis, as they permeate the stories on narrative, spiritual, and organizational levels.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Salinger's Glass family stories are problematic on multiple levels; that said, "problematic" is not synonymous with "lesser." These works convey a self-constructed spirituality that is able to borrow wisdom from all walks of life. Salinger, through his Glass family stories, attempts to do what many others would not dare. The result is far from flawless; however, he creates a set of stories that readers have accepted the function of, even in their unfamiliar presentations. The form of Salinger's Glass family stories sometimes resemble the semantic geometry that Buddy mentions in his preface to "Zooney," in which "the shortest distance between any two points is a fullish circle" (49). The ways in which these stories are written, both individually and as a collective work, defy convention, allowing the reader to approach them in ways that are equally unconventional. That said, the various readings discussed in this thesis are not mutually exclusive, nor are they incompatible with one another or the narrative at large.

Critical reception of these stories also varies greatly. On one end of this large spectrum is an outspoken readership that is not particularly fond of what Salinger has done with his Glass family; on the other end is a readership that enjoys these stories unconditionally. Somewhere along the middle of this spectrum is perhaps the largest group – those who read Salinger's works with hesitance, for fear of taking a misstep in interpretation or understanding. It is my hope that with this work I am able to display, in some capacity, how these issues, large and small, should not be condoned as errors or deemed weaknesses, but acknowledged for what they are, inescapable components of Salinger's Glass family narrative. Although these stories are atypical to say the least, they have solidified their place in the American literary canon without comparison.

With the advent of *Salinger*, the documentary film/book released by David Shields and Shane Salerno, it is understood that there will be multiple published posthumous works released over the course of the next five years (2015-2020). Among these works is rumored to be a religious manual on Vedanta and a collection of five short stories, currently speculated to be under the title of “The Complete Chronicle of the Glass Family.” However, the extent of what will be covered in these stories is a product of conjecture at the time of writing this thesis, although it is largely understood that these stories will provide a more candid view of Seymour. Whether this popular view has originated solely on behalf of Salerno and Shields or whether this is an educated guess on behalf of critics and reporters alike is unclear at the present time. Considering the nature of Salinger’s last published work “Hapworth 16, 1924,” this is not entirely unbelievable, but the nature of this work is not necessarily indicative of what is to follow, if anything at all. At this point in time, no official statement has been released by the Salinger estate. For the time being, these stories will remain as they are – gloriously imperfect.

The beauty of this collective narrative is that it is difficult for readers to confidently understand the entirety of, or even portions of, Seymour’s life as well as the lives of his siblings (although this same predicament has driven decades of congested scholarly speculation). Because the boundaries of these characters are not clearly defined and “Hapworth 16, 1924,” as a final work, is an inconclusive ending to a successive series of stories which comprised Salinger’s later repertoire of work, this same predicament can be and often is viewed as a weakness. However, it is simultaneously one the reasons why Salinger’s legacy, and Seymour’s alike, has been so far-reaching, now decades detached from the original dates of publication of these stories. Truth be told,

with the exception of any new information garnered from yet-to-be-published stories owned by the Salinger estate, it would take a considerably convincing argument to come to the conclusion that these current Glass family stories truly *end* (and why should they?). If anything, these stories reflect the ever-living present that Salinger likely would have hoped to convey in some facet of his storytelling. If a reader hopes to construct a timeline of the Glass family, they could do so with a fair amount of success; however, it is a near-impossibility to construct every relevant detail necessary for the success of articulating such a timeline (on account of Salinger only scratching the surface of the tales of some of these family members). The Glass family cannot be accounted for in such a way that recurring characters of other literary collections are, such as John Updike's Rabbit series, because their existence is not presented in a clearly divided, linear fashion. J.D. Salinger cannot be comfortably compared to his contemporaries because he is not Saul Bellow, not Jack Kerouac, not any other writer; J.D. Salinger is J.D. Salinger. The sooner Salinger critics as well as his readership at large can reconcile his work within the greater context of the American literary tradition, the sooner he will be able to be recognized as an outlier in the canon that he is part of (as are many of the others that he is joined by). Many of his contemporaries composed novels and stories of varying lengths, not "prose home movies" and other self-invented genres. The tendency to compare author-to-author appears to almost always be well-intentioned, but not always useful. That said, irresponsibly "gluing" these stories together in such a way that they bleed into one another, for convenience's sake is an act of futility. This isn't to say that they these stories do not operate together; they most certainly do. However, divisions exist within these stories and trying to ignore them, either actively or by attempting to piece them

together where one cannot clearly do so, does little in the way of unlocking any hidden meaning that is already existent within these stories.

Ruminating on “Hapworth 16, 1924” as the last published work of Salinger’s, Warren French comments, “It would seem that once Salinger had assumed Seymour’s own voice, he would have planned to unveil his consecutively more mature statements, we shall probably never be able to confirm this surmise” (95). This is perhaps the most pertinent statement made in French’s chapter “The House of Glass,” as the circumstances of Salinger’s death and proposed release schedule of subsequent documents has been unearthed. Given the fifty year gap in time between publications, and the subsequent deluge of negative responses, both critical and popular, to “Hapworth 16, 1924,” the release of five additional stories may have unprecedented effects on the Glass family legacy that Salinger has left behind. The literary world is hardly bereft of works published and received posthumously, but the release of these stories can and likely will set a precedent for altering the roles of previously published works by one of America’s most prominent 20th century authors. Undoubtedly, these stories will be judged critically as individual works, but perhaps more importantly, they will potentially alter the works that preceded them (works that are not only part and parcel of Salinger’s bibliography, but works which consumed the author’s attention for his remaining years, regardless of the non-published state of these works). Granted, it is unclear if the moniker that these works are presently falling under will indeed provide a satisfactory grand context for the currently published works, or if Salinger’s latest Glass family stories will leave both readers and critics with more questions than answers.

While discussing the following questions asked of Buddy by Seymour in “Seymour: an Introduction,” “*Were most of your stars out? Were you busy writing your heart out?*” James E. Miller acknowledges that “he [Seymour] seems to suggest that *insight* and *feeling* – in their deepest senses – must be involved in great writing; and for the reader they become those elusive, indefinable qualities that are profoundly moving and illuminating” (Miller 41). The same can be said about J.D. Salinger and his Glass family stories. The conglomerate character whom Max F. Schulz in his work “Epilogue to ‘Seymour: An Introduction’: Salinger and the Crisis of Consciousness” passionately refers to as J.D. *Buddyfrannyzooeyseymour-Salinger*” becomes just as indefinable as their faith in that they function in ways both known and unknown to the reader (yet, they all appear to serve some instructional purpose, whatever that may be) (53). William Weigand suggests that “The important question in Salinger is why these intelligent, highly sensitive, affectionate beings fight curious, grueling battles, leaderless and causeless, in a world they never made,” and an important question it is (Weigand 6). Regardless of the answer, it hasn’t stopped very many from being drawn to them, decade after decade.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Ceasare Joseph Filipelli

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Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairman Dr. Donald Revell, Ph.D.

Committee Member Dr. John Unrue, Ph.D.

Committee Member Dr. Stephen Brown, Ph.D.

Graduate Faculty Representative Dr. Margaret Harp, Ph.D.