# THE JOURNEY INWARD

## A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED AMERICAN NOVELS ABOUT ADOLESCENCE BY J.D. SALINGER, SAUL BELLOW, SANDRA CISNEROS AND CARSON McCULLERS

# ABSTRACT


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# Introduction

## The Transfiguring Self of the Adolescent World

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

The thematic center of the proposed thesis will focus on the adolescents' cynicism and rebellion against the dubious values of the adult world followed by their intensified search for and exploration of inner life. By analyzing these American texts we see a pattern emerge that is partially explained in the Joseph Campbell excerpt: "The whole sense ... of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women ... The paths the adolescents follow on their personal journeys are indeed "the symptoms of [their] grasp of life."[1] This study proposes to examine the different images of adolescents given by writers in different times and situations: in

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951, hereafter cited as CR) Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953, hereafter cited as AM) Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984, hereafter cited as HMS) and Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946, hereafter cited as MW). The determining factors in the journey of the young 'misfits' into adulthood is the personal language of the adolescents, through which the authors create a relationship between a confiding narrator and a listening reader. This bond becomes a tool for inviting the reader to identify with the narrators' position in the world, where adolescents try to come to terms with the bewildering culture that surrounds them. The narrators' perceptions of the outside world and how these are transformed into their own self-awareness form the core in each novel. What follows is based on the general proposition that the novels' uniqueness resides not only in the rich complexity of its themes, but also in the poetic intensity by which these themes are realized. The study analyzes the coherence of the writers' particular vision of the world, which is essentially the vision of their s/heroes — of Holden Caulfield, Augie March, Esperanza Cordero, and Frances Addams.

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

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

Women writers have struggled for centuries to gain the right to explore, and assert the validity of woman-space and experience. Novels of female adolescence

have been considered limited and dismissed as too feminine conveying only "a narrow corner of human existence."[3] By including both male and female authors, this study aims to show: "how radically similar their literary origins were how they work with closely related assumptions, materials, and sentiments."[4] The study makes us question hard-and-fast definitions of literary genres and traditions by emphasizing the way in which "a society that rigidly differentiates between male and female gender roles limits the full development of women and men alike."[5] The "pattern of experience" that holds true for women in the fiction of adolescence will re-establish a balance and help understand coming of age in contemporary America.

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

The title of the thesis, with its reference to both journey and imagination, sets up a tension: the movement inward versus breaking out. The adolescents' are caught in a conflict between "that outward existence which conforms, and the inward life which questions."[6] Here, space is defined as both a quiet place, in the teeming contemporary life, and as a lack of limits or boundaries, a borderless vastness to be

explored at will. There are two essential movements — one outward and one inward. The outward movement describes the effort of youth for release, and freedom. To fulfill this part of the plan, authors involve protagonists in experiences played out in a "series of widening concentric circles:"[7] the familial context, gender roles and realities within the family and the community, identity in the schools, and linguistic identity, and to understand how that ambience influences them in public. The central characters seek to break his/her bondage to these spaces, yearning to find a cure for loneliness, and achieving the freedom to face and deal with the world on his/her own terms. On the other hand, the inward movement explores the inner life of protagonists. The adolescents move outward into the broader world, but have to retreat within, polarities that impinge on the imagination and launch them on an inward journey. This imaginative search for an existence that goes beyond what is given constitutes the true *Bildung* of the protagonist, and possibly also the education of the reader, and reflects again the particular artistic sensitivities of the individual authors. As such, all these novels are a story of borders both demarcated and permeable, borders outside the self and others created within. The texts therefore illuminate the many borders that appear such as physical boundaries, economical disparities, and gender based demarcations — and the protagonists' attempts to not only cross, but also to erase these borders. The thesis will analyze the intersecting or overlapping sections of the "separate gender spheres theory"[8] between the male/public realm and the female/private realm. There is an attempt to re-evaluate perceived differences by blurring or shifting boundaries by including these novels that emphasize the connectedness rather than to create an artificial either-or situation. Therefore rather than limiting these texts to one category or another, these novels raise consciousness about the importance and unique nature of adolescents in literature by analyzing the

ways in which texts probe and challenge oppressive gender-bias and socio-cultural ideologies. Thus these coming-of-age novels cut both a wider and a longer path through the bewildering experiences of childhood and adolescence and their journeys chart a course from denial to despair to something like hope. These novels must then be read as an effort not so much to render the protagonists' *life as lived*, but as a *quest* and *a labor of self-creation* that complements and extends their writing and at the same time as a discursive re-invention of their identity. So the boundaries of the books are mutable.

These novels of adolescence are grounded in the disjunction within the protagonist's experience of the "prose of concrete circumstances on the one hand, and of the poetry of the heart's potential on the other."[9] The narratives are made up not simply of beneficent experiences, but also welcome the "poetry" of the individual's inwardness; hence the tension which is sustained and enacted through the narratives — is not resolved. The recollecting voice of these adolescents are able to document precisely the disjunction referred to above — and to suggest the alternative (but unrealized) possibility that there need be no such absolute gulf between poetry and prose, between the complex inwardness of the inner man and of his actual life in society. The vision, the complete perception of human totality, exists outside ordinary time; it can be glimpsed as in a dream; it can be formulated discursively, but it cannot be possessed as an abiding and effective recipe for everyday living.

Apart from the obvious differences in social and chronological situations in the chosen novels, there is a common concentration on the delicate and sensitive character of the young adolescents, on whose psyche all external elements — incidents as well as people — leave an indelible mark. Stated broadly, the pre-occupation of American novels of adolescence has been from the outside world to an inner self. All

the four novels convey one coherent view of growing up, and this is developed in three stages: first, primary, ignorant perceptions of the adolescent, a gradual sophistication of these perceptions as they mature, and an evaluation of these, leading them to the final expression of an *awakened* self. Each text begins with the obsessed vision of folly of the egoist, and proceeds by correcting that 'faulty vision,' refracting it through the physical world. So, the action of the texts is to bring home to the protagonists, how blind they have been to physical reality, to people, and to relationship. The argument in this study will focus on how the life of the spirit, can assume centrality. The fictional technique derived from this connection with the spiritual realm is what can be termed, *the awakening scene* (to borrow the title of Kate Chopin's novella *The Awakening*) and consists of brief, "flashes of recognition"[10] The journey is largely an internal experience of such moments of passionate conviction, moments of privileged spiritual insight. The adolescents undergo a radical revision of thought moving to a "restructured vision"[11] far more profound in scope than the faulty, egocentric vision they begin with. Appropriately enough, such scenes end with an inner vision rather than a superficial view or a facile conclusion. The adolescents emerge, finally as

> Pilgrims, too: journeying through a mysterious and hostile world, a world both chaotic and conformist, on their various eccentric pilgrimages — towards some shrine of honor and value and belief.[12]

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

For these reasons, the effort here has been to locate clues about the measure of a work in its relatively impersonal structure — to discover the spiritual dimension towards which the technical devices of the structure, as well as other fictional

features, are directed. This the writers accomplish through the use of what Virginia Tiger calls the "ideographic structure":

> The ideographic structure seems, at first reading, to create two contradictory perspectives on the same circumstances since the coda reverses the expectations which the first movement has built up... the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader ... In forcing the reader to build the bridge between contradictory perspectives, the ideographic structure forces the reader to ... encounter, by the imaginative impact of words, those experiences, which conventionally words do not reach ... the primacy of spiritual experience itself.[13]

The *ideographic structure* used in these novels suggests the following features: first, it consists of two parallel interconnected and simultaneous narrative movements' — one positive and one negative. The focus is on the adventure of these protagonists, which leads them to discover the mode of spiritual life. Whereas the first part of the movement portrays a linear external/social formation of the protagonists, a formation that results in an increasing sense of alienation, the second part of the movement involves internal/psychic process. This second part of the movement takes them beyond social boundaries, beyond patriarchal space, and centers upon the personal psychic sphere: the quest into their own unconscious for psychic wholeness. Following the plots' major movement, there is a coda ending in each of these novels, which reverses, and often contradicts the implications of the first movement. Secondly, the structure involves two different perspectives on the same situation: that emerging from the first movement and that emerging from the coda. Thus the coda's surprise is integral to the final theme of each novel. In the first narrative movement events are seen from the adolescents' faulty point of view, while in the coda, events are seen from the enlightened consciousness —"restructured vision" — of the novel's protagonist, or another character's point of view. Though superficially contradictory, the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader from hints collected and assembled imaginatively. By making the reader forge the link between the main body

and the coda of the text, writers force an awareness of a spiritual dimension, since this is the explanation that will provide the link between the two parts. Thus, although the novels do not openly explain events in spiritual terms, they demand from the reader a spiritual interpretation.

A reading of these texts via the frame of the Bildungsroman highlights how adolescents write themselves as subjects, stage their development, and understand their lives. While the Bildungsroman suggests an organic unfolding and a harmonious integration of all aspects of the self, when used in the context of the American genre, it is redefined by turning attention away from organic integration in order to express the acute conflicts and complexity that characterizes life. These writers turn away from patterning the adolescent quest story on the traditional male-defined generic paradigm of individual accommodation to socio-cultural values and gender role expectations to portray the *Bildung* of an adolescent as a process of self-discovery that is a conscious quest for authentic selfhood. Four different *Bildung* experiences are outlined that present a movement "from the recognition of restrictive social roles through a rejection of arbitrary standards, to the generation of a counter-figure who creates a new role and a new, positive lifestyle into which she [he] becomes integrated."[14] These novels illustrate the process of transcending borders and boundaries by devising a method of illustrating both the new opportunities for independence and paradoxically the modern-day prejudices still stifling growth. The adolescents live for what they believe in, and they do this by looking within themselves to discover who they are. They reject the expectation of others, and through self-discovery attempt to claim their real selves. Their stories focus on the intricacies, the paradoxes, and the difficulties of maturity. Finally, of course, the characters in novels live and move and have their being in the readers mind,

exploiting memories, which supply the evidence of common experience, common humanity. Departures from the traditional structure will be discussed more fully as the female Bildungsroman of self-discovery and self-definition is defined. The problem of "creating oneself" amid the pressures and restrictions of society are as great for women as for men. That the pattern of maturation for women has been different from that for men in our society is important to note. Evoked mainly by sociological and psychological factors of contemporary reality, the theme of alienation has developed to such a degree that the possibility or idea of any true Bildung is questioned or parodied. If the word Bildungsroman ultimately escapes precise definition, or neat translation, its meaning should nonetheless emerge clearly from an account of the novels themselves, and the steady recurrence of certain common motifs in them.

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

The other motif is the emphasis on the unity and inter-connectedness of all life — what can be identified as the holistic (as opposed to the mechanistic) view of life. There is always an abiding faith, in fact — a yearning for such a view. These include, but are not limited to the quest for what can be called "the human touch,"[15] a kind of

sympathetic human community. These novels are ultimately a study in the 'spiritual picaresque,' a quest for a new faith — "the faith of modern adolescents in their power to shape their own destiny" (Spiller, 1962, p.1).

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

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

In this chapter based on *The Catcher in the Rye* Salinger captured the voice of adolescent anxiety, and the disorientation of a generation searching for authenticity in a culture deemed by the novels protagonist Holden's dismissive reckoning as *phony*. Phoniness is one of Holden's favorite concepts for describing the superficiality, hypocrisy, pretension, and shallowness that he encounters in the world around him. The actual setting of the book is Holden's mind, and the connection between his writing and the structure he brings into existence through the writing has therefore been emphasized. The novel is built on two movements: the nervous breakdown of

Holden is followed by an examination of the reason. We learn that about a year before the narration takes place something has happened that caused him to end up at the California sanatorium, and this "something" is what he wants to share with the reader. Within this part of the story, Holden frequently flashes back to experiences and people from earlier in his life. The first-person narration invites readers to share his feeling that he is an outsider observing a world he cannot accept — or completely reject. A very important aspect of Holden's personality is his adherence to his own personal integrity. It is no coincidence that Holden's journey takes him through a cross-section of American society: the school, bars, city streets, family, etc; Salinger aims to show how widespread this phoniness has become. Holden is also in a movement: at the same time both leaving the innocent childhood and entering the world of grown-ups. To him, innocence means freedom, since he feels unable to function in the affectation that he believes permeates, and even poisons the adult world. The lack of genuineness in adult life and relations disgusts Holden and makes him an outsider. Not only does he seem to position himself as an outsider, but he also goes as far as to create an image of himself as a 'savior.' There is actually an element of romanticism in his identity crisis. Holden's fantasy — the metaphor of the fall — standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling over into adulthood is based on a misunderstanding of Robert Burn's lyrical poem "Comin' through the Rye" ("If a body *meet* a body comin' through the rye" not, "If a body *catch* a body"(CR, p.115 emphasis added). As the catcher in the rye, Holden hopes to protect children from falling and by extension, from growing old and losing their innocence. Holden's whole perspective is centered on this basic misapprehension of his own role in society. With this wish, and search for idealism Holden assumes, although not in a biblical sense, but rather in a more symbolical form, the position of a

martyr. Holden attempts to escape into a series of ideal worlds, fails, and is finally brought to the realization of a more impersonal ideal, that only through selflessness, the extension of forgiveness, and the appeal to others outside the self can people, as Holden realizes — "miss everybody" (CR, p.214). He finally identifies in some way with the people he has spent so much time criticizing and realizes that man and the world, in spite of all their imperfections, are to be loved. This is a truth gained from his experiences "a restructured vision," and the most important kind of freedom — an internal one. In the end, Holden has not accepted the falseness of society, instead, we find him still in that original position against it, except that he consciously accepts it. Its direction, in other words, is toward family and community, reconstructed and redefined. "Holden's quest takes him outside society; yet the grail he seeks is the world, and the grail is full of love."[16] It is not through mysticism, but through love that the Salinger hero at last re-enters the world. The novel's resolution transcends sociological indictment in affirming individual responsibility.

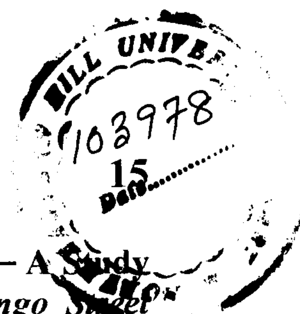
## Chapter II: The New American Adam: A Study of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)

In the epilogue of *The American Adam*, R.W.B. Lewis contends that Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, which won the National Book Award in 1954, is written in the tradition of the earlier American Adamic myth because Augie is "as youthful, innocent, optimistic and adventurous as are the earlier Adams."[17] This chapter will show that Bellow deviates from Lewis's traditional concept of the American Adam applicable to the nineteenth century writers,' and creates a distinctly new and different character: a modern Adam with a new attitude towards experience. In as far as Augie seeks paradise; he may be compared to the traditional Adam. But rather than imagining paradise as the fulfilment of the American dream, Augie

envisions paradise as an escape from modern American dilemmas, and does not discount the possibility of a new Eden. However, Bellow asserts that it is impossible to escape reality by imagining paradise, and that one must adapt to the world rather than attempt to flee it. Augie is situated in a context in which hopefulness and belief in the endless availability of new beginnings — so characteristic of the American Adam — are no longer credible. When Huck Finn as the prototypical adolescent Adam "lights out for the territories," he is not only moving forward in time and space but in the hopeful pursuit of ideals that have been strengthened from being tested by the challenge of experience. In marked contrast, when Augie confronts his own morality, any perception of hope for individual distinctiveness is dashed by his recognition of contemporary chaos and anonymity. Bellow's heroes, then, find the complexities of their dilemma not only in an alienation from society; they are also confronted by a kind of conflict within themselves, which creates an even more insoluble problem. In any case the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself, and that definition includes the power of the imagination. Bellow's special contribution lies in his ability to locate the effort to survive in the modern world within the society.

Augie acknowledges the presence of disappointment, pain, and absurdity in human life, but refuses to accept the clichés of alienation, anxiety, doom, and despair as inevitable to the human condition. He offers a mystical vision of human possibility. Man has to base his existence on "the axial lines of truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, and harmony" (AM, p.454). Search for an affirmative attitude does not necessarily end in finding — the axial line of life. The goal is not then, some idealized mode of life, but an anchor of assurance amidst all the buffeting inevitables in real life. Our last view of Augie is traveling along the very edge of Europe, laughing at the idea of himself as "a sort of Columbus," (AM, p.536) discoverer of a new-found land,

laughing above all at the enigma and the paradox that is man. In Augie's view of himself as Columbus, Bellow intends an "illumination for his protagonist — while both seem to have failed, their hope, vision, judgment, and courage are realities of their natures, which give to them powers and potentialities that allow them the possibilities of a better fate"[18] — worthwhile, "higher, independent fate" (AM, p.424). Augie's laughter and his joyous acceptance of the human condition issue from "a sweeping comic vision of life, which embraces and reconciles the tragic sense and then *transcends* it"[19] (Emphasis added). This sense of humor is a gift that enables him to see things clearly, and protects him from falling into complete depression over what he finds is a corrupt world. Augie seems closer to the mixed experience of the novel when he realizes that life is a state of Becoming, a movement between idealism and the daily facts, between "the pointy, star-furnished air and oatmeal and laundry tickets and all the rest" (AM, p.194). Striving for completion, therefore, is a lifelong process that is never accomplished. However, while Augie has failed to accomplish the American dream — "this universal eligibility to be noble" (AM, p.29), it does not lead him to despair; it leads him to a balanced sense of the comedy of existence — of the human being struggling for importance and the forces of life resisting but never quenching the individual's hope. To be involved with life, and people means to hold on to such principles as freedom, fairness, and personal integrity, but it also means that one must constantly adjust the application of these principles to daily circumstances that challenge and change a person. Bellow probably is saying, and rightly, that the "American Dream is a faith which, like any other, can only be maintained stubbornly in spite of the evidence."[20]



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## Chapter III: A) Dreams of Girlhood: A Space of her own — A Study of Sandra Cisneros': *The House on Mango Street* (1984)

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

*The House on Mango Street* and *The Member of the Wedding* offer new alternatives and interpretations of women's destinies, and specific insights into the complexities of women's growth and independence. Unlike their male counterparts, Cisneros and McCullers observe the space of the home to understand how that ambience influences young girls in public. The protagonists struggle to find meaning and validation and succeed, on two levels: first, as a single individual who was able to survive; and second, as a representative narrative that exemplifies the struggle of many American women against racial and sexual oppression; a centering upon personal, rather than patriarchal space. The chapter will concentrate on particular pivotal moments in the lives of Esperanza Cordero and Frances Addams connected to maturation and self-discovery. Their journey involves literal and emotional wandering and their awareness derives from the movement away from oppressive structures. By depicting their journey out of the "cramped confines of patriarchal space"[21] a notion that applies to the social as well as the literary sphere, female writers are transforming the very concept of *Bildung* and creating a discourse based on distinctive paradigms of self-development.

*The House on Mango Street* is dedicated a las Mujeres, "to the women"— all the female characters whose lives have enriched that of the protagonist, and who represent a diversity of challenges and perspectives. The structural unity of the forty-four vignettes of the novel is achieved by the first-person narration of the female "I",

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

Two narrative threads connect the stories: the personal and private story of her own search for identity, about creativity and becoming an artist, and the public and collective story of the individuals in the Latino neighborhood on Mango Street. Esperanza actively researches, questions, and negotiates her own meaning in community. She reads the neighborhood and other women who have some insight and self-determined lives, despite some difficulties with men and with illness and lets their examples, encouragement, and prophecies enhance her original readings. She

rejects the role models which her society offers her and consciously chooses to forge her own identity through writing; and in so doing, she symbolically chooses the American translation of her name (hope) over the Spanish (waiting). Esperanza's initial wish for an illusive *real house*, one she can point to, is thus in the course of her narrative transformed into a more defined desire for a place that transcends the mere physical living quarters. At the end of her narrative — *her story* — she has created for herself "a new house, a house made of heart" (HMS, p.64) predicted by the local fortuneteller. Shifting from a literal to a metaphoric register, her "house" becomes not a structure but a spiritual sanctuary she carries within — a home for herself through her inner life, and her writing. Esperanza finds her literary voice and discovers "Her power is her own. She will not give it away" (HMS, p.89). She recognizes, and Cisneros validates, the empowerment that comes through writing and remembering. *The House on Mango Street* was at first taken as an exclusively Chicano literature, but now has become a part of the American literary canon transcending cultural, and gender-based boundaries through the sheer power of its astute observations and implicit lessons.

Best known of all McCullers' works because it has reached audiences as a novel, a play, and a motion picture, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) charts a young, confused twelve-year-old tomboy's difficult passage from a childhood of innocence and freedom to an awareness of the limitations and constraints of her position in her culture. Although this story is told in a third-person narrative, it is filtered through Frankie's consciousness — her "inner psychic rhythms."[22] A concern for man's "spiritual isolation," (*The Mute*, p. 124) his revolt against that isolation, and his need to achieve a perfect communion with others was the basis of almost everything Carson McCullers wrote. She has successfully explored what she termed

the "solitary region of simple stories and the inward mind" (*The Mute*, p.251). She was particularly interested in the "paradox of shared isolation,"[23] a term that describes the relationships among the three main characters — Frances Addams, Berenice Sadie Brown, and John Henry West — and their community as well. The setting itself serves as the metaphor for such *spiritual isolation*. She begins this novella by establishing the dreariness, and sadness of a setting, which seems estranged from all other places in the world: "The kitchen was silent and crazy and sad" (MW, p.22). For life here is hopelessly inward, separated, and estranged. Selfhood means only confinement in the solitude of one's own heart. The novel is divided into three parts, a structure that calls attention to the rhythm of the novel which follows the familiar journey of adolescent initiation. The urgency which drives Frankie to become "a member of the wedding" is the conviction that "all other people had a we to claim, all other except her" (MW, p.42). She is seeking an ideal love, not a physical one, which joins all people — as Frankie puts it, "the we of me"(MW, p.42) the 'we' of companionship and belonging that Frankie longs for but is unable to find. Its implications are the universal problems of illusion versus reality and the nature of man himself. Frankie's longing at once for escape and belonging, makes her consider her role as a "member of the wedding" to mean that when her older brother marries, she will join the happy couple in their new life together. This fantasy transforms Frankie's twelve-year old perspective regarding herself, her relationships, and her small southern hometown. In her ideal world, "people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls; whichever way they felt like and wanted" (MW, p.97). What Frankie is dreaming of is possible only in her imagination. The author portrays Frankie's illusory existence in order to dramatize all that threatens to destabilize her isolated view of herself, and her community. The events precipitated by the wedding destroy her illusions, forcing her to reconsider

everything she holds to be true — about human nature, and about individual power. As Frankie attempts to grow up and seek membership into the adult world, she discovers that certain life rules encumber her. The most important rule has to do with the fact that married couples only include two people, shutting Frankie out of her dream of becoming a threesome with Janice and Jarvis. Frankie's primary identification with the masculine world of her brother and her father can be attributed in part to her mother's death when she was born. According to Frankie, power and authority are masculine attributes and to be a girl is to be marginalized and excluded. But being fiercely independent, Frankie resists any kind of limitations placed upon her. An important part of her development is her growing comprehension that she will be forced to enter the world of women, a world that holds no attractions for her. It is not the responsibility of womanhood that she reluctantly must take up but the decision, which confronts her, *the decision to be a woman at all,* accounts in large part for Frankie's fear and forms a major thematic concern of the novel. Frankie is, "then hovering between the two sexes and has the problem not only of sex awareness, but also of sex determination" (Eisinger, p.250) in the sense that she is a girl who does not want to be done out of the privileges of boys. As a child, by adopting masculine attributes, Frankie is attempting to seize the social power that is denied to females. It is this *masculine* or *tomboy* power that Frankie is not willing to give up, even when she reaches adulthood. Girls turning into women are taught to be *feminine* or *passive,* thus losing their power, but a boy becoming a man is taught to be *masculine* or *assertive,* thus gaining power. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it. The end is a brief coda that reports the events after the wedding when Frankie painfully discovers the reality of the situation, and has replaced her old aspirations with new ones, and has even changed the very nature of her dreams.

Frankie's old dreams of flying planes, of being able to switch genders whenever she wished, of joining the wedding, are examples of her protests against the powerlessness of women. They are projections of her desire to be an autonomous adult. Frances, as she is finally called, wants to write poetry, and travel with a new friend Mary Littlejohn who introduces her to the privileges of white society, and she even comes to relish the superiority she feels it bestows upon her. Her new dreams are socially acceptable and easily within her reach. Finally, Frankie's ideals are defeated by the demands of social norms, and her own inward confusions. "She is defeated by society on all the main issues before she can even begin, but still there is something in her and in those like her that cannot and will not ever be destroyed."[24] Frankie's final fantasy in the novel suggests the tenacity with which she will cling to her desire for belonging. In the past, she beat herself with her fists, but she now dimly sees that she must strike out against those figures of power who would deny her dream. Ambiguity rather than clear distinctions informs the divided world which Frankie inhabits. The world of the adolescent child is, after all, only a promise of life to come in adulthood. If McCullers implies any solution besides racial equality to the social injustice, and personal isolation, and despair she portrays in her novels, it is a move towards a more integrated view of conventional gender roles; towards the more androgynous world Frankie envisions. We are asked to look inward to the heart, rather than outward to political, and economic structures in society for any final answers to human problems. The revelations contained in the novels of McCullers' works are the variety and complexity of humanity, and how ultimately love and life are richer if differences of color and gender are accepted as inherent aspects of the species. After establishing a dichotomous relationship between male power and female powerlessness, these writers respond by asserting female power and analyzing how women create their

own space, vision and language. The feminine space is opened up as a new structure for survival, a *space of her own*.

## Conclusion — Traversing Boundaries: A Shared Experience

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

The experience of reading serves as a final resource to define a texts essential nature. In effect, this study has attempted through close investigation of individual texts, to arrive at some preliminary understanding of the shared common modes of novels of adolescence: an important bond of shared assumptions, shared techniques, and shared demands on the reader and to show "...how heavily the path ahead is obscured by fog, how infinite are the number of directions which the course of events may take."[27] Beneath all the problems of adolescents and responsibility lies the issue that most profoundly concerns the writers: "the relative power and validity of inner versus outer reality."[28] The novelists, although they describe protagonists at various stages between introspection and apparent unawareness of inner experience, testify to the shaping power of the psychic life. Augie's lack of forethought and speculation and concern of consequences get him in trouble. His fantasies about the women who attract him determine many of his actions; more important, his consistent

imagining of obligation to others seems to lead to his maturity. The jovial, mocking tone of his narration insists on the possibilities of imagination as directed by art to affect understanding and action. The novelistic enterprise involves the attempt to form reader's imaginations; it reflects the redirection and increased control of Augie's fantasy life. He himself as a character comes dimly to understand the importance of his imaginings to his actions. The case is more obvious with Frankie, whose elaborately developed fantasies ultimately come to control her vision of life. In a simple sense the plots of all the fictions considered here involve a pattern of wish-fulfillment for the central character. They get to write their story and to demonstrate their own reality. Here is the most fundamental optimism of this novelistic mode which affirms the possibility of the stable identity of the individual and his/her ultimate power to shape the world he/she experiences. To tell one's story, as these men and women tell it, thus becomes an affirmation of power, even when the story contains emphatic defeats or evidence of limitation or revelations of folly. To set down a frank interpretation of personal experience declares autonomy and demonstrates the dominance of inner life, although the narrator's announced concern may be with external happening. In this study as in life, the claims of society counter those of the psyche. Frankie embodies the most definite statement of society's power to control and to destroy individual dreams, but every writer in this study recognizes at some level, the problem involved in the individual's efforts to establish a viable relation to his social context. That the solution is often escape — in a psychic sense — only emphasizes the insolubility of the problem. Holden and Augie, Esperanza and Frankie come to terms with the demands implied and stated by their social world but not without authorial recognition of the cost in freedom and self-assertiveness. The possibility and the usefulness of autonomy, of separateness, thus pre-occupy at some

level of consciousness all the writers. Stating their self-definitions, the writers not only strike some balance between the opposed principles of selfhood and society, but they also express the instability of any such balance. To convey questionings and convictions, writers require "artifices of sincerity and truthfulness" (Spacks, p.310). They depend upon artifice — shaping, inventing, selecting, and omitting — to achieve their goal of conveying vital truths. To tell a story of the self is — as this study has argued in various ways — to create a fiction. We have discovered the unity of action in these novels; it derives from the central character's singleness of expectation, desire, or will: to discover, defend, assert, and manufacture the self. To compare these four novels of adolescence is to invite contemplation of the multifarious and often surprising affinities that exist within the context of manifest difference. This, finally, is the center of the perception achieved by such a comparative study. Selfhood and consistent identity, whether by sheer illusion-making or through collaboration with experienced reality, is the final achievement of the literary imagination in these novels. It provides the ground on which the complex relationship of subjective vision and verifiable truth enacts itself.

The essential role of these artists has been to awaken a concern, for "the human essences forgotten in a distracted world." They plead for "the transcendence of art" as "an attempt to find in the universe what is fundamental and enduring" and to lead us "to sacred states of the soul."[29] A person's remaining hope is to return to his *inner self*. Despite the burden of alienation, one can read these novels as attempts to counter despair by a renewed faith in the self. All these novels are presented both structurally and thematically neither to resolve a problem nor to conclude an action but only to evoke the keenest *moments of realization*. The reader follows the growth of these protagonists as they move forward with their internal awakening and finally

become conscious of their own strength. As such, the novels of adolescence become mirrors in which we view not the surface but the interior of our being. In a very real sense the journeys have not ended. To complete them one has to continually break down the walls and discover doorways — new areas of life and experience, about which one has remained ignorant.

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# THE JOURNEY INWARD

## A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED AMERICAN NOVELS ABOUT ADOLESCENCE BY J.D. SALINGER, SAUL BELLOW, SANDRA CISNEROS AND CARSON McCULLERS

**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**


SUMITA D. KHARKONGOR

SUPERVISOR
Prof. TEMSULA AO

**Department of English**
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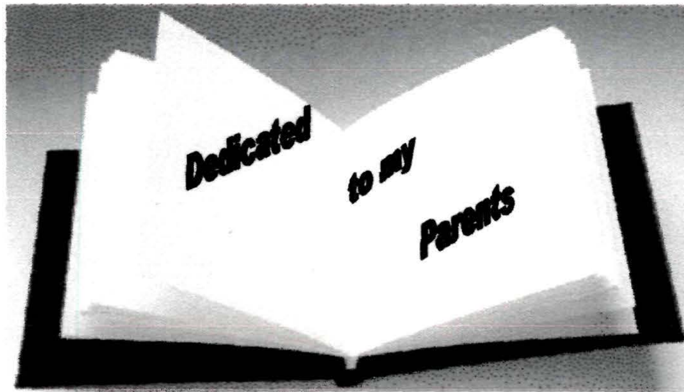


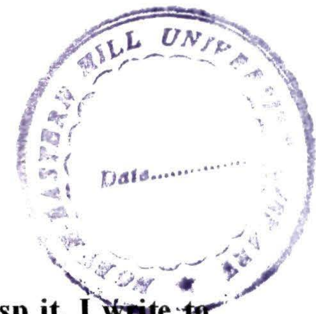
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**By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories that others have miswritten about me, about you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. GLORIA ANZALDUA**

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**October 2008**

## DECLARATION

I, Sumita (Dutta) Kharkongor, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/ institute.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

S. Kharkongor
6.10.08
**Sumita (Dutta) Kharkongor**
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6.10.08
**Prof. Temsula Ao**
(Supervisor)
*Professor of English,*
*North-Eastern Hill University*
*Shillong.*

6/10/08
**Prof. Esther Syiem**
(Head)

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**Sumita (Dutta) Kharkongor**

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## Abbreviations

The Adventures of Augie March ..............AM

The Catcher in the Rye...........................CR

Dangling Man......................................DM

Franny and Zooey.................................FZ

The House on Mango Street.....................HMS

The Member of the Wedding..................MW

Nine Stories.........................................NS

# Introduction

## The Transfiguring Self of the Adolescent World

The novel of adolescence is a modern social construct; it is characterized by conflict, whether it is antagonism between the youth and society, or inner ambivalence about values of the adults. There is a new emphasis on *inwardness,* or the adolescent consciousness. Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit in the social world in which they live. The problematic aspect of this particular period of human life is the ideal ground for the dynamics of a conflict, which is fought both on a psychological, and on a social level. Edgar Friedenberg remarks: "Adolescent conflict is the instrument by which an individual learns the complex, subtle, and precious difference between himself and his environment."[1] The image of man which recurs most frequently today is man in his isolation and loneliness, and Melville echoes this when he describes the Islanders in the Pequod as: "Isolates I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of man, but each Isolato living in a separate continent of his own."[2] In this century we are all, in our loneliness, "displaced persons."[3] It is an apt description of the alienated man in the fractured world of today. Life becomes more complicated and

less easily formulated, and adolescents are the first victims and representatives of this change as they experience it for the first time, after leaving a sheltered childhood, and embarking on the difficult task of becoming adults. In a society, which makes little sense to the sensitive adults, the problem is even more confounded for the growing adolescent, the so-called maladjusted, the *misfits* in society. In this regard, one may accept the following statement by Franco Moretti on the relationship between social unrest, and its literary expression through the Bildungsroman genre:

> The more a society is and perceives itself as a system still unstable and precariously legitimized, the fuller and stronger the image of youth. Youth acts as a sort of symbolic concentrate of the uncertainties and tensions of an entire cultural system, and the hero's growth becomes the narrative convention, or Fictio that permits the exploration of conflicting values.[4]

The thematic center of the proposed thesis will focus on the adolescents' cynicism and rebellion against the dubious values of the adult world followed by their intensified search for and exploration of inner life. This study proposes to examine the different images of adolescents given by writers in different times and situations: in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). By

analyzing these American texts we see a pattern emerge that is partially explained in the Joseph Campbell excerpt: "The whole sense ... of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women...." The paths the adolescents follow on their personal journeys are indeed "the symptoms of [their] grasp of life."[5] The determining factor in the journey of the young misfits into adulthood is the personal language of the adolescents' through which the authors' create a relationship between a confiding narrator and a listening reader. This bond becomes a tool for inviting the reader to identify with the narrators' position in the world. The narrators' perceptions of the outside world and how these are transformed into their own self-awareness form the core in each novel. What follows is based on the general proposition that the novels' uniqueness resides not only in the rich complexity of its themes, but also in the poetic intensity by which these themes are realized. The study analyzes the coherence of the writers' particular vision of the world, which is essentially the vision of their s/heroes — of Holden Caulfield, Augie March, Esperanza Cordero, and Frances Addams.

Keats who knew, more than anyone else, the agonies of adolescence has an interesting passage, in his *Preface to Endymion*, which is of great relevance here:

> The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature *imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life*

> between, in which the soul is in ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted; thence proceed to mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters.[6]

In this study the focus will be on these sensitive adolescents who talk of their agonizing "moral toothaches,"[7] and try to come to terms with the bewildering culture that surrounds them. The quality of sensitive innocence, which they retain beneath their defiant mannerisms, seems to develop into a note of spiritual mysticism. It is the courage of adolescents, manifested in different ways, which these writers celebrate in their fiction.

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

the writers' intent is to present "the plight of the idealist in the modern world. The idealist sees a difference between what is and what ought to be, and is bothered by that vision into some sort of action."[8] He has a number of alternatives facing him. If he is to remain an idealist, he must either strive to find his ideal world, or attempt to reform what *is* into what *ought to be.* That is, his idealism can be either personal and escapist, or impersonal and social. He can, of course, become disillusioned about the possibilities of attaining his end, and as a result, abandon, modify, or change his ideal.

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

> The patterns of American fiction, which we have so far constructed — and considered universal — patterns dealing with the nature of innocence and with the nature of adolescence and experience — apply in reality to the male in America.[9]

Women writers have struggled for centuries to gain the right to explore, and assert the validity of woman-space and experience. Novels of female adolescence have been considered limited and dismissed as too

feminine conveying only "a narrow corner of human existence."[10] By including both male and female authors, this study aims to show: "how radically similar their literary origins were how they work with closely related assumptions, materials, and sentiments."[11] The study makes us question hard-and-fast definitions of literary genres and traditions by emphasizing the way in which "a society that rigidly differentiates between male and female gender roles limits the full development of women and men alike."[12] The "pattern of experience" that holds true for women in the fiction of adolescence will re-establish a balance and help understand coming of age in contemporary America.

Ihab Hassan's *Radical Innocence* is a full study of American adolescents in which Hassan claims that their innocence has not given way to experience, but rather has become more radical, going to the roots, becoming increasingly anarchic and visionary. He speaks of the adolescent self that refuses to accept, "the immitigable rule of reality — that is, the human condition."[13] Hassan continues, "The hero in our time has become both victim and rebel, the lonely adolescent or youth, exposing the corrupt adult world where the dramatic emphasis is on the loss, the pain and bitterness of growth, the fall from uneasy grace."[14] The protagonists of this study are those "strange children" who play such an important role in contemporary American fiction. Although one assumes

that Hassan is talking about male adolescents', his comments can be applied to female adolescent protagonists' as well because the young heroines seen here can also be characterized as 'rebel-victim'; they too make gestures of protests. Hassan's modern hero makes "an existential choice to be a victim by taking the stance of a victim." The young heroine, on the contrary, is "a real victim" because her female body, "by immitigable rule of society dooms her to subservience."[15] The loss of innocence inevitable in growing up has a different implication for girls than for boys' existentialists. For the girl, "existential anguish is a luxury: she has no time for protesting the unchangeable. But that does not mean that her outstanding quality is not radical innocence" (White, 1985, p.192). Moreover, "not all novels of adolescence include initiation; in fact, the protagonists may actively avoid or refuse it" (Hassan, 1961, p. 274). If the s/hero is initiated at all, the initiation often occurs suddenly at the end of the novel, and is ambiguous in nature.

One of Walt Whitman's famous poems — *Song of the Open Road* — provides the subtitle of this thesis, analyzing the novels as a journey or quest. Throughout the pages of literature journey is a repeatedly, recurring archetypal phenomenon. A considerable part of the subject matter of literary rebels, in American literature, past and present is linked to the road. The road appears in American literature as a rebelliously

identifying image of yearnings. The act of wandering itself seems to provide a degree of exile from, and violation of established society, and therefore symbolizes an implicit defiance of established order. Their awareness derives from the movement away from repressive structures. Their "journey involves literal and emotional wandering."[16] The journey is not so much in geography but in time and in spirit, from a physical displacement and a temporal movement, transcending into the realm of the spiritual. Further, these novelists have discovered on the road, above everything else, an "archetypal paradigm," of the sense of experience in the postwar period: "of experiences as life on the road, life as a sometimes haphazard journey out and along a treacherous, and promising open road whose end is beyond any man's sight, a journey possible only for those who retain a vulnerable openness to experience."[17]

The title of the thesis, with its reference to both journey and imagination, sets up a tension: the movement inward versus breaking out. The adolescents' are caught in a conflict between "that outward existence which conforms, and the inward life which questions."[18] The two forces, inner and outer, come into conflict in the course of the quest in the form of societal and ideological influences. Carol Christ has depicted a similar characteristic in women's spiritual quest, as "a movement toward overcoming the dualisms of self and the world."[19] Only the inner

directedness will guide to overcome the dualism of self and the experience of an awakening from "nothingness" to accomplish the "sacred task" of Bildung. Here space is defined as both a quiet place, in the teeming contemporary life, and as a lack of limits or boundaries, a borderless vastness to be explored at will. There are two essential movements – one outward and one inward. The outward movement describes the effort of youth for release, and freedom. To fulfill this part of the plan, authors involve protagonists in experiences played out in a "series of widening concentric circles."[20] In the lived reality of daily existence, space has to be negotiated in several areas: the familial context, gender roles and realities within the family and the community, identity in the schools, and linguistic identity, and to understand how that ambience influences them in public. The central characters seek to break his/her bondage to these spaces, yearning to find a cure for loneliness, and achieving the freedom to face and deal with the world on his/her own terms. On the other hand, the inward movement explores the inner life of protagonists. The adolescents move outward into the broader world, but have to retreat within, polarities that impinge on the imagination and launch them on an inward journey. This imaginative search for an existence that goes beyond what is given constitutes the true *Bildung* of

the protagonist, and possibly also the education of the reader, and reflects again the particular artistic sensitivities of the individual authors.

These novels of adolescence are grounded in the disjunction within the protagonist's experience of the "prose of concrete circumstances on the one hand, and of the poetry of the heart's potential on the other."[21] The narratives are made up not simply of beneficent experiences, but also welcome the "poetry" of the individual's inwardness; hence the tension which is sustained and enacted through the narratives – is not resolved. The recollecting voice of these adolescents are able to document precisely the disjunction referred to above – and to suggest the alternative (but unrealized) possibility that there need be no such absolute gulf between poetry and prose, between the complex inwardness of the inner man and of his actual life in society. The vision, the complete perception of human totality, exists outside ordinary time; it can be glimpsed as in a dream; it can be formulated discursively, but it cannot be possessed as an abiding and effective recipe for everyday living.

If the child symbolizes the invincible spirit, the adolescent is often presented as an archetypal image of growth in literature. The word adolescence comes from the Latin <u>adolescere</u> meaning "*to grow up,*" and this study will focus on adolescence as a developmental process of spiritual growth, and examine those stylistic and technical means that

have been used to convey this sense of inner growth. In these novels, there is therefore a modified form of the Grail Legend and Resurrection myth. The argument in this study will focus on how the life of the spirit, can assume centrality. These writers try to construct a spiritual myth relevant to contemporary man, as it is through "myth that the imaginative substance of religious belief is expressed, communicated and enhanced."[22] All the four novels convey one coherent view of growing up, and this is developed in three stages: first, primary, ignorant perceptions of the adolescent, a gradual sophistication of these perceptions as they mature, and an evaluation of these, leading them to the final expression of an *awakened* self. Each text begins with the obsessed vision of folly of the egoist, and proceeds by correcting that faulty vision, refracting it through the physical world. So, the action of the texts is to bring home to the protagonist, how blind they have been to physical reality, to people, and to relationship. The fictional technique derived from this connection with the spiritual realm is what can be termed, "the awakening scene," (to borrow the title of Kate Chopin's novella *The Awakening*) and consists of brief "flashes of recognition."[23] In the "awakening scene" the protagonist is forced through some ambiguous purgation — often in darkness, closed room, a kitchen, psychiatric couch — to encounter his own central organizing principle or

*Being* — "original spirit, the *Scintillans Dei*" (Tiger, p.19) — of the unique character. The reflections of the adolescents' give to these places a special quality: it is an archetypal place of renewal in their mind. In his study of the Bildungsroman, Buckley considers a "gradual imaginative enlightenment"[24] essential to the hero's initiation. Throughout the entire narratives there is a gradual unfolding of the "illuminating incident, to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation,"[25] and by implication the meaning of the entire story. The adolescents undergo a radical revision of thought moving to a "restructured vision"[26] where it becomes impossible to deny with certainty the existence of a spiritual dimension crossing the material dimension. The suggestion, and this is at the thematic level only is that there may be a space where the two worlds — the spiritual and the materialist — intersect, a space closed to the "eye of logic" (Tiger, p.145). The riddle posed in the awakening or the coda of the text is intended to resurrect this "dead eye of logic" in order to make the protagonists' and the reader cast "the new eye of the spirit,"(Tiger, p. 145) over all that has occurred and emerge momentarily into transfigured totality or a beatific vision. The convergence of these two perceptions in the protagonists' "new eye of the spirit" becomes a representation of their restructured vision. The journey is largely an internal experience of such moments of passionate conviction, moments of privileged spiritual

insight. It constitutes a healthy action, a gathering up of powers to enable the adolescents' to leap forward more effectively, a process like that which Daly defines as the "qualitative leap" empowered by "the light of those flames of spiritual imagination and cerebral fantasy [that] can be a new dawn."[27] Appropriately enough, such scenes end with an inner vision rather than a superficial view or a facile conclusion. The novels' total structure brings about a similar fusion in the reader's focusing of events. To this end, the novels employ the 'awakening scene' and the 'ideographic structure' where ego encounters its inner being.

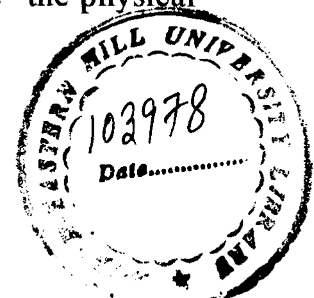
For these reasons, the effort here has been to locate clues about the measure of a work in its relatively impersonal structure — to discover the spiritual dimension towards which the technical devices of the structure, as well as other fictional features, are directed. Structure here is not regarded as a framework upon which the author hangs his plot, characters, themes, style, etc. It is rather seen as an organizing principle, an organic attribute that is internal and articulated by the text. The reader encounters this structure as he reads, and internally journeys to become aware of performing a "re-creative activity of restructuring the text" (Redpath, p.14). This the writers accomplish through the use of what Virginia Tiger calls the "ideographic structure":

> The ideographic structure seems, at first reading, to create *two contradictory perspectives on the same circumstances*

> since the coda reverses the expectations which the first movement has built up... the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader ... In forcing the reader to build the bridge between contradictory perspectives, the ideographic structure forces the reader to ... encounter, by the imaginative impact of words, those experiences, which conventionally words do not reach ... the primacy of spiritual experience itself. (Tiger, p.17)

The *ideographic structure* used in these novels suggests the following features: first, it consists of two parallel interconnected and simultaneous narrative movements' — one positive and one negative. One movement leads towards *communion* (positive movement — realizing true self\ identity\ freedom\art), and one towards *alienation* (negative movement — breaking with all bonds\ loneliness\exile). The principal theme in these novels can be stated as: Adventure of the mind: communion or alienation. This is set off by other counter themes, which develop and elaborate on the principal one. The focus is on the adventure of these protagonists, which leads them to discover the mode of spiritual life. Whereas the first part of the movement portrays a linear external/social formation of the protagonists, a formation that results in an increasing sense of alienation, the second part of the movement involves vertical internal/psychic *Bildung* process. This second part of the movement takes them beyond social boundaries, beyond patriarchal space, and centers upon the personal psychic sphere: the quest into their own unconscious for psychic wholeness. This turn toward the interior

spaces of the mind, a fluid, permeable ego boundary entails risks and psychological danger and as Annis Pratt observes, is as likely "to lead to madness as to renewal."[28] They undergo experiences that may ground the adolescents in a new understanding of themselves and their position in the world, yet the authors do not reveal how these experiences may change their life or their concept of self. Therefore, this "ego flexibility and relational thinking"[29] suggests only a *potential* path toward an authentic self, and helps create a new space of psychological, spiritual, and social relationships. Following the plots' major movement, there is a coda ending in each of these novels, which reverses, and often contradicts the implications of the first movement. Secondly, the structure involves two different perspectives on the same situation: that emerging from the first movement and that emerging from the coda. Thus the coda's surprise is integral to the final theme of each novel. In the first narrative movement events are seen from the adolescents' faulty point of view, while in the coda, events are seen from the enlightened consciousness —"restructured vision"— of the novel's protagonist, or another character's point of view. Though superficially contradictory, the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader from hints collected and assembled imaginatively. By making the reader forge the link between the main body and the coda of the text, and between what Tiger calls "the physical



world which contemporary man accepts and the spiritual world, which he ignores but which does not ignore him," (p.16) these writers force an awareness of a spiritual dimension on the readers, since this is the explanation that will provide the link between the two parts. One sees in this world, what in his essay William Golding calls, "the thumbprint of mystery,"[30] where reality "freed from learnt meanings and rigid system occurs as a spiritual event — close, incommunicable" (Tiger, p.18). In this study, the term spiritual refers to that ambiguous area of belief: "the magical, mysterious, powerful, terrible, dangerous, and awesome" (Tiger, p.20). Thus, although the novels do not openly explain events in spiritual terms, the paradoxical structure of each novel, somehow lead the reader to accept — at least in the imaginative realm — "paradoxes of existence, which are symptoms of the spiritual world" (Tiger, p.209) and which the protagonists are shown as being unable to perceive or accept. However, this empty space filled by the readers' new perspective is only another 'picture' or 'ways of looking' (Redpath, p.212) at the novel. The "pictures" say Gregor and KinKead-Weekes "are visualizations not conceptualizations... [It] renders... the life of the senses and instinct since the impression the reader receives of the outside world is of a series of still images."[31] To read is to read at several different levels simultaneously, to perform the activity of identifying these levels,

interpreting them in conjunction with the other codes of the texts, and then to fuse them into the structure of the novel. The process of reading makes the reader aware of himself, and of his existence extending beyond the covers of the books: "a consciousness in a world in which, [the novels] are merely artifacts created by another consciousness" (Redpath, p.138).

Much critical attention has been dedicated to the split between the male focused, and the female-centered Bildungsroman. When Margaret Fuller prophesied in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* a "ravishing harmony of the spheres,"[32] her vision was based on the shifting gender roles within her own milieu. In the contemporary period, writers challenge conventional borders in an effort to express evolving notions of selfhood, and the difficulty of encapsulating a life through writing. There has been a move away from separatism to reconciliation, or *a blurring of the spheres*. In fact, Linda Kerber rightly shows how the boundaries are becoming "fuzzier."[33] As such, all these novels are a story of borders both demarcated and permeable, borders outside the self and others created within. The thesis will analyze the intersecting, or overlapping sections of the gender spheres between the male/public realm and the female/private realm, especially in terms of the blurred, or shifting boundaries between the spheres. As most border theorists agree, the idea of the border

becomes even more fertile when we "liberate it from the notion of space, [or from a specific locale] to encompass [among others] notions of sex, class, gender, ethnicity, identity, and community."[34] The texts therefore illuminate the many borders that appear such as, physical boundaries, economical disparities, and gender based demarcations — and the protagonists' attempts to not only cross, but also erase these borders. There is an attempt to re-evaluate perceived differences by including these novels that emphasize the connectedness rather than to create an artificial either-or situation. Novels of female consciousness tend to present increased possibilities for adolescents' integration in society, and more flexible gender roles. Therefore rather than limiting these texts to one category or another, these novels raise consciousness about the importance and unique nature of adolescents in literature by analyzing the ways in which texts probe and challenge oppressive gender-bias, and socio-cultural ideologies. The belief in the permeability of boundaries embodied in the works examined here seems to also be an attempt to extend the sphere of the women without overriding the integrity of others. "The female envisioned (or hoped-for) is one with vastly increased responsibility."[35] Thus these coming-of-age novels cut both a wider and a longer path through the bewildering experiences of childhood and adolescence, and their journey "moves from darkness toward light,

toward hoped-for illuminations in the future."[36] The writers do not recover one-dimensional and stereotyped protagonists. Rather, they carefully penetrate the interior worlds of the adolescents, to trace how they move and cope with obstacles in their world. The self and its creation lead the readers through the inner and outer directedness of each protagonist. By the novel's end, the road has brought a resourceful adolescent to the threshold of effective manhood or girlhood — in his/her own terms. These novels must then be read as an effort, not so much to render the protagonists' *life as lived,* but as a *quest,* and *a labor of self-creation* that complements and extends their writing, and at the same time as a discursive re-invention of their identity. So the boundaries of the books are mutable.

Consciously or unconsciously, the four writers independently structure their novels on the pattern established by the Bildungsroman genre, a German term meaning novel of transformation, the growth of a character from childhood to maturity. This human striving for integrity or wholeness, (whether achieved or not) fits into the context of the Bildungsroman tradition. This German term, however, comes with "a historical baggage of association of positivism, white male superiority and a sense of the self as a unified entity ... It proposes the growth of a subject from one fixed state of mind to another: immaturity and maturity.

It also implies a sense of progression."[37] This clearly clashes with the American experience and ideology, and so these American narratives of Bildung must be separated from the classical ones. The term Bildung "embodies a double process of inner developing and outer enveloping, what the German call Anbildung and Ausbildung" (Theander, 1955, p.8). The term 'Anbildung' signifies "knowledge brought from without", what belongs "to the public sphere of knowledge": a social enveloping of the individual. 'Ausbildung' on the other hand, "belongs to the private sphere," (Kertzer, p.97) what comes from within the individual: it describes how the strengths and talents of the individual emerge. The maturation processes discussed in the following pages, especially in female narratives of Bildung, clearly depict societies, which ignore their responsibilities of "enveloping," and the subjects' desperate attempt to "develop" in spite of racial and gendered oppression. These writers turn away from patterning the adolescent quest story on the traditional male-defined generic paradigm of individual accommodation to socio-cultural values and gender role expectations to portray the *Bildung* of an adolescent as a process of self-discovery that is a conscious quest for authentic selfhood. Four different *Bildung* experiences are outlined that present a movement "from the recognition of restrictive social roles through a rejection of arbitrary standards, to the generation of a counter-

figure who creates a new role and a new, positive lifestyle into which she [he] becomes integrated."[38] These novels illustrate the process of transcending borders and boundaries by devising a method of illustrating both the new opportunities for independence and paradoxically the modern-day prejudices still stifling growth. The adolescents live for what they believe in, and they do this by looking within themselves to discover who they are. They reject the expectation of others, and through self-discovery attempt to claim their real selves. Their stories focus on the intricacies, the paradoxes, and the difficulties of maturity. Finally, of course, the characters in novels live and move and have their being in the readers mind, exploiting memories, which supply the evidence of common experience, common humanity. Departures from the traditional structure will be discussed more fully as the female Bildungsroman of self-discovery and self-definition is defined. By appropriating the genre for the female version of the Bildung process, the women writers challenge and expand this genre. The problem of 'creating oneself' amid the pressures and restrictions of society are as great for women as for men. That the pattern of maturation for women has been *different* from that for men in our society is important to note. Women's fiction reflects an experience radically different from men's because their drive towards growth as persons is thwarted by society's prescriptions concerning

gender and their own inward confusions. The tools they acquire in their Bildung, or formation, is necessarily different. Linda Huf argues:

> The artist heroine who fights for the rights of woman against the wrongs of man invariably ...learns that she has inner foes as formidable as outer ones. Because she has internalized society's devaluation of herself and her abilities, she must slay enemies within her own ranks: fear, self-doubt, and guilt.[39]

Gender limitations often confine female protagonists to the home, interpersonal relationships, and their influence in the domestic sphere to domesticity and passivity, to socio-cultural entrapment, and then later to an awakening to a self-effacing existence illustrating "the heroine's inward, vertical movement toward self-knowledge."[40] This awakening leads the female protagonists to seek authenticity and selfhood beyond the social confines of patriarchal structures. "If women say again and again that society denies them clear paths to fulfillment," writes Patricia Meyer Spacks, "... they also affirm in far reaching ways the significance of their inner freedom...."[41] The final effects of the suppression of growth in women emerge in reality as the suppression of half of the self for every individual, male or female. The novels discussed here propose a different *solution* — devotion to the life of spirit, and artistic growth. Adrienne Rich speaks to this need for affirmative visions of the future: "if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of *alternatives*."[42] (Emphasis added)

For an autonomous self-definition resisting old roles while imagining new ones is essential. Evoked mainly by sociological and psychological factors of contemporary reality, the theme of alienation has developed to such a degree that the possibility or idea of any true Bildung is questioned or parodied. If the word Bildungsroman ultimately escapes precise definition, or neat translation, its meaning should nonetheless emerge clearly from an account of the novels themselves, and the steady recurrence of certain common motifs in them.

Several thematic motifs will therefore be discussed. One such motif is the transfiguring self, the belief that it is possible for human beings to transform themselves. It is a belief rooted in the triune mythic drama of birth, death, and rebirth. Stories, particularly, what can be termed "transforming stories," play an important role in provoking, and providing insight into the turn around of the soul from unreflective to reflective living. In these novels adolescents are trapped in a moral dilemma, often of their own making, and become "prisoners of consciousness"[43] when they attempt to resolve it. The journey through the "chambers of consciousness"[44] reflects the crisis of the self or the conscience. We are not so much informed as lead to infer the crisis of consciousness in these novels. Adolescents do not totally identify with their social or cultural position, and this in turn makes them, on one hand,

suffer from frustration, and on the other hand, deprive them of the capability of transforming themselves on the basis of an inner motivation for change. The personality crisis is the result of the fact that attempts to connect to others always seems to fail: they find nothing that relates to them. Thus they become outsiders in society. If life as it is offers cause for despair, and if the individual is both product and producer of this life, then the individual must be redeemed. Through his redemption society will be redeemed. The emphasis is on the creation of a self in each novel, and the structures of these texts demonstrate the necessity of breaking down the "vertical wall of the self, and selflessly extending oneself to others" (Redpath, p.124). Each protagonist in the end experiences an *awakening*; far more profound in scope than the egocentric vision they begin with. Characters achieve a heightened and spiritualized view of reality, and in the process abandon their old attitudes and assumptions. The self seeks not for extinction, but for transmutation. The transmuting or the transfiguring self (change to something nobler) is more capable of, and conducive to the needed adaptability, and ultimately leading to redemption. So the novels affirm not the present individual and the present society, but their "possibilities." Completing the journey of transformation, what the adolescents manage to do is "to come in touch with the inner workings of their beings, to achieve non-intellectual

enlightenment — what Zen Buddhists call *satori* — that blessed state of illumination."[45] According to Allan Watts, "Zen Buddhism is not a religion, not a philosophy but a way, an attitude with intuitive spiritual enlightenment as its goal."[46] To transform themselves ethically, and achieve well-being, these protagonists seek both inward, analytic means, as well as, external, communal care through reconnection with others, especially with the family. To exist is to change; to change is to mature; to mature is to go on 'creating oneself' endlessly. The central concern of these protagonists is their continuing quest for certitude, for a point of rest, which reflects an order and harmony of mind. The entire effort is described by one critic as "a quest for personal identity and inner peace" (Swales, 1978, p.14).

Another familiar motif, somewhat akin to the transfiguring, is that of the quest for authentic self-development. This process is both environmental and psychological, and it entails coming to terms with multiple social and cultural forces, external as well as internal, that infringe upon the path toward an understanding of the individual self. Two independent quests operate throughout the narrative. The major quest involves the protagonists' search for spiritual freedom in contemporary social chaos. Rites of passage are depicted either as the adolescent protagonist's coming of age, striving to gain maturity, and a

vision of their own future, or as the awakening to the reality of the social and cultural role, and the subsequent attempts to re-examine life and shape it in accordance with a new found consciousness. Generally the young protagonist is at first shaped by his environment, but becomes conscious of its pressure, and tries to find his own identity, meaning and value, freedom and truth that provide spiritual nourishment to the estranged self in a seemingly chaotic world. These novels finally espouse an existential authenticity of the self.

The other motif is the emphasis on the unity and inter-connectedness of all life — what can be identified as the holistic (as opposed to the mechanistic) view of life. There is always an abiding faith, in fact — a yearning for such a view. These include, but are not limited to the quest for what can be called "the human touch,"[47] a kind of sympathetic human community. These novels are ultimately a study in the spiritual picaresque, a quest for *a new faith* — "the faith of modern adolescents in their power to shape their own destiny" (Spiller, 1962, p.1).

Careful analysis of the structures of these novels demonstrates how all elements of the novel — character, plot, style, setting, and symbol — are integrated in the larger purpose of presenting the failure of communication, the isolation, and the violence prevalent in modern

society. The novels' characters demonstrate the roots of these general conditions in the nature of the individual personality. Human beings can be selfish, uncommunicative, immature, sexually frustrated, and essentially alienated from their society. No communication can exist when each person creates only a self-centered and self-deluded view of the world around him. A society composed of such individuals' drives man further into himself. Locked in the prison of his isolation, and tortured by the pains and shocks of life, man attempts to escape from this condition into an imagined world of perfect fulfillment. This search for personal realization must necessarily be social because he must communicate with, and love other human beings. Man's social world is imperfect because of personal failings, and his personal existence is painful because of the tension between self, and an imperfect society. There are, of course, extreme variations among these writers. They are, after all, novelists haunted by the elusive nature of human truth and the underlying themes in their novels gives coherence to the variety and surprises they have found in the world around. This world is often beset by terrifying moments of self-doubt in the fierce shadows inside oneself or other people. We are then ultimately taken on shattering voyages of terror into the depths of the spiritual isolation that underlies the human condition.

It is the journey motif in the novels that accounts in great part, for the episodic nature of what are frequently unconnected human encounters. In a broad meaning of the old word, these are picaresque novels. The American style of the Bildungsroman is a combination of the German Bildungsroman, and the Spanish picaresque. The American Bildungsroman follows the pattern of moral growth for the protagonist as he discovers his identity in conflict with social norms. They focus on the adventures of persons who are 'picaros.' However, Critic David H. Miles sees the transformation of the Bildungsheld from "picaro: that is, rogues, outlaws misfits — persons whose defining quality is an inability or unwillingness to behave according to the strict moral and social codes of the day into — the confessor."[48] Blended into the story is also the picaresque element of the hero being a traveler who has an outsider's perspective on what he encounters. The picaro does not treat his fantasies as if they were realities, but regards each new role as one possibility out of the many available to him, useful for solving a particular problem, and perhaps interesting for the new insight it may offer, but in no way a limitation to be accepted. Picaresque life is not lived in search of the one true way, but is rather an endless series of roles to be played in response to ever-changing circumstances. The adolescents discover that they are not "a single, consistent entity, but a 'mosaic' whose picture is constantly

reforming" (Kertzer, p. 35). The metaphysics of the picaresque world is relativistic and fluid. Picaresque behavior is governed by an internalized acceptance of universal flux as the basic nature of the world. Indeed the focus on *process*, rather than programme is itself a prime characteristic of the post-modern style, reflecting a world where flux is more obvious than fixed purposes. Post-modern youth, at least in America, is very much in *process*, unfinished in its development, psychologically open to a historically unpredictable future. The term *identity* suggests fixity, stability, and closure that many of the youth are not willing to accept. This fluidity and openness mark all aspects of their lives. They are non-ideological, hostile to doctrine, and formula. Their vision of the personal and collective future is blurred and vague: later adulthood is left deliberately open. In essence, youths no longer live life as a journey toward the future, but as a condition. Following the picaresque tradition, the survival that they seek is moral, and spiritual. A positive energy can be felt in the rhythms of their lives even when they explore frustration and indirectness. The human spirit is dauntless, which ultimately succeeds in working its way out of even the grimmest human circumstances. These adolescents' are "martyrs in the eternal search for idealism. They try at least, painful as it may be, to find their own realistic place in society."[49]

They emerge, finally as *pilgrims,* too: "journeying through a mysterious and hostile world, a world both chaotic and conformist, on their various eccentric pilgrimages – towards some shrine of honor and value and belief" (Spiller, 1962, p.149). The shrine, in these novels usually remains out of sight, but it does give a sense of purpose to their encounters, and a sense of form to the novels. It takes the form of a celebration of the self, and of a spiritual belief in social, political, and personal change. Most of all, it is achieved in the creative act itself: in the writing of the texts.

The authors' own writings about their novels and material from interviews have been used in exploring their approach to fiction, reality, and to some rather more philosophical issues dealt with in the various novels. This is done through an analysis of the prose style in order to explore how, "the verbal resonance of language itself contributes to a novel's imagined world" (Tiger, p.35). This however presents a paradox which David Lodge identifies in *Language of Fiction*: "It is the irony of our position as critics that we are obliged, whatever kind of imaginative work we examine, to paraphrase the unparaphrasable."[50]

These working definitions and introductory remarks indicate the parameters of this thesis, and shape its structure as a "fugue"[51] (a musical composition featuring several repeating themes). Like a voice in a fugue,

each one of the main characters is an entirety in himself, but his personality takes on a new richness when contrasted and woven in with the other characters in the book. In several of the chapters, reference is made to the other works of these writers, which allows similarities to be highlighted, and perhaps, more importantly, emphasize apparent contradictions that can be resolved when viewed in terms of each other. Though each of the chapters discusses only one of the writers, the chapters together establish a comparative strategy: it can be seen that the tensions in each of these very schematic books, as well as the repetitive structures are remarkably similar, and yet the resolution of the tension and the purposes of the repetition are quite different. Each, in fact, is sophisticated and complex, with deep roots in contemporary American literary tradition. The thesis is divided into the following chapters.

**Chapter 1: Dreams of Manhood: A Study of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)**

In this chapter based on *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) Salinger captured the voice of adolescent anxiety, and the disorientation of a generation searching for authenticity in a culture deemed by the novels protagonist Holden's dismissive reckoning as *phony*. He stands as a critic of society, taking a stance against phoniness: hypocrisy, obscenity, and passivity. The actual setting of the book is Holden's mind, and the connection between his writing and the structure he brings into existence

through the writing has therefore been emphasized. The novel is built on two movements: the nervous breakdown of Holden is followed by an examination of the reason. We learn that about a year before the narration takes place something has happened that caused him to end up at the California sanatorium, and this "something" is what he wants to share with the reader. Within this part of the story, Holden frequently flashes back to experiences and people from earlier in his life. The first-person narration invites a reader to share his feeling that he's an outsider observing a world he cannot accept — or completely reject. In this position, he demonstrates the need for maturity as well as the need for honesty. A very important aspect of Holden's personality is his adherence to his own personal integrity. It is no coincidence that Holden's journey takes him through a cross-section of American society: the school, bars, city streets, family, etc; Salinger aims to show how widespread this phoniness has become. Holden is also in a movement: at the same time both leaving the innocent childhood and entering the world of grown-ups. To him, innocence means freedom, since he feels unable to function in the affectation that he believes permeates, and even poisons the adult world. Not only does he seem to position himself as an outsider, but he also goes as far as to create an image of himself as a 'savior.' There is actually an element of romanticism in his identity crisis. Holden's

fantasy — the metaphor of the fall — standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling over into adulthood is based on a misunderstanding of Robert Burn's lyrical poem "Comin through the Rye" ("If a body *meet* a body comin' through the rye" not, "If a body *catch* a body" (CR, p.115 emphasis added). As the catcher in the rye, risking his life at the edge of the cliff in order to protect the children is a metaphor for saving the innocence at the cost of his own safety. Holden's whole perspective is centered on this basic misapprehension of his own role in society. With this wish, and search for idealism Holden assumes, although not in a biblical sense, but rather in a more symbolical form, the position of a martyr. Holden attempts to escape into a series of ideal worlds, fails, and is finally brought to the realization of a more impersonal ideal, that only through selflessness, the extension of forgiveness, and the appeal to others outside the self can people, as Holden realizes — "miss everybody" (CR, p.214). He finally identifies in some way with the people he has spent so much time criticizing and realizes that man and the world, in spite of all their imperfections, are to be loved. This is a truth gained from his experiences "a restructured vision," and the most important kind of freedom — an internal one. In the end, Holden has not accepted the falseness of society, instead, we find him still in that original position against it, except that he consciously

accepts it. Its direction, in other words, is toward family and community, reconstructed and redefined. "Holden's quest takes him outside society; yet the grail he seeks is the world, and the grail is full of love."[52] It is not through mysticism, but through love that the Salinger hero at last re-enters the world.

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

In the epilogue of *The American Adam*, R.W.B. Lewis contends that Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, which won the National Book Award in 1954, is written in the tradition of the earlier American Adamic myth because Augie is "as youthful, innocent, optimistic and adventurous as are the earlier Adams."[53] This chapter will show that Bellow deviates from Lewis's traditional concept of the American Adam applicable to the nineteenth century writers', and creates a distinctly new and different character: a modern Adam with a new attitude towards experience. In as far as Augie seeks paradise; he may be compared to the traditional Adam. But rather than imagining paradise as the fulfilment of the American dream, Augie envisions paradise as an escape from modern American dilemmas, and does not discount the possibility of a new Eden. However, Bellow asserts that it is impossible to escape reality by imagining paradise, and that one must adapt to the world rather than attempt to flee it. Augie is situated in a context in which

hopefulness and belief in the endless availability of new beginnings — so characteristic of the American Adam — are no longer credible. When Huck Finn as the prototypical adolescent Adam "lights out for the territories," he is not only moving forward in time and space but in the hopeful pursuit of ideals that have been strengthened from being tested by the challenge of experience. In marked contrast, when Augie confronts his own morality, any perception of hope for individual distinctiveness is dashed by his recognition of contemporary chaos and anonymity. Bellow's heroes, then, find the complexities of their dilemma not only in an alienation from society; they are also confronted by a kind of conflict within themselves, which creates an even more insoluble problem. In any case the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself, and that definition includes the power of the imagination.

Since Augie does not wish to assume a structure of personality designed by someone else, he seeks the freedom to develop his own lifestyle, and to understand life without being imposed upon by his “Reality Instructors,”[54] who try to convince him that power is the ultimate and only response to the human condition. The story becomes in part a parable about a capitalistic American culture, in which masculine striving for dominance and power, has all but excluded love, the soul, beauty, and poetic visionary state. Augie acknowledges the presence of

disappointment, pain, and absurdity in human life, but refuses to accept the clichés of alienation, anxiety, doom, and despair as inevitable to the human condition. He offers a mystical vision of human possibility. Man has to base his existence on "the axial lines of truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, and harmony" (AM, p.454). Search for an affirmative attitude does not necessarily end in finding — the *axial line* of life. The goal is not then, some idealized mode of life, but an anchor of assurance amidst all the buffeting inevitables in real life. Our last view of Augie is traveling along the very edge of Europe, laughing at the idea of himself as "a sort of Columbus," (AM, p.536) discoverer of a new-found land, laughing above all at the enigma and the paradox that is man. This sense of humor is a gift that enables him to see things clearly, and protects him from falling into complete depression over what he finds is a corrupt world. Augie's final discovery seems closer to the mixed experience of the novel when he realizes that life of the human soul is a movement between idealism, and the daily facts. Striving for completion, therefore, is a lifelong process that is never accomplished. To be involved with life, and people means to hold on to such principles as freedom, fairness, and personal integrity, but it also means that one must constantly adjust the application of these principles to daily circumstances that challenge and change a person.

## Chapter III: A) Dreams of Girlhood: A Space of her own — A Study of Sandra Cisneros': *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
## B) Dreams of Girlhood: Breaking Boundaries — A Study of Carson McCullers': *The Member of the Wedding* (1946)

*The House on Mango Street* and *The Member of the Wedding* offer new alternatives and interpretations of women's destinies, and specific insights into the complexities of women's growth and independence. Unlike their male counterparts, Cisneros and McCullers observe the space of the home to understand how that ambience influences young girls in public. The chapter will concentrate on particular pivotal moments in the lives of Esperanza Cordero and Frances Addams connected to maturation and self-discovery. By depicting their journey out of the "cramped confines of patriarchal space"[55] a notion that applies to the social as well as the literary sphere, female writers are transforming the very concept of *Bildung* and creating a discourse based on distinctive paradigms of self-development.

*The House on Mango Street* is dedicated a las Mujeres, 'to the women'— all the female characters whose lives have enriched that of the protagonist, and who represent a diversity of challenges and perspectives. The structural unity of the forty-four vignettes of the novel is achieved by the first-person narration of the female "I", and central consciousness of the novel Esperanza Cordero, who resists entrapment within socio-

cultural norms and expectations. It is through the very act of constructing, and telling her own story, like Holden Caulfield, that Esperanza resolves the contradictions that inform her life. The young girl's memoirs are, however, not the day-to-day record of a pre-adolescent girl, but rather a loose-knit series of lyrical reflections, her struggle with self-identity and the search for self-respect amidst an alienating and often hostile world. As an aesthetic process, the apprehension of the world of Mango Street becomes a metaphor for identity. The consequence of this aesthetic process is that the reader is directed less toward the singularity of the places, events and persons of Mango Street than toward the "I" that writes them. Esperanza, probes into her world, discovers herself and comes to embody the primal needs of all human beings: freedom and belonging. The tapestry that is woven by the constant imagistic movement of the narrator's perceptions and thoughts is a narrative of self-invention by the writer-speaker. The structure of this text, therefore, begins as a frame for self-invention and as the writing progresses so does the subject. She is, in the most direct sense of the word, '*making herself*' and in '*a space of her own.*' By writing, this young woman has created herself as a total subject and not merely playing out a gender role or signifying a disembodied voice.

Two narrative threads connect the stories: the personal and private story of her own search for identity, about creativity and becoming an artist, and the public and collective story of the individuals in the Latino neighborhood on Mango Street. Esperanza actively researches, questions, and negotiates her own meaning in community. She reads the neighborhood and other women who have some insight and self-determined lives, despite some difficulties with men and with illness and lets their examples, encouragement, and prophecies enhance her original readings. She rejects the role models which her society offers her and consciously chooses to forge her own identity through writing; and in so doing, she symbolically chooses the American translation of her name (hope) over the Spanish (waiting). Esperanza's initial wish for an illusive *real house*, one she can point to, is thus in the course of her narrative transformed into a more defined desire for a place that transcends the mere physical living quarters. At the end of her narrative – *her story* – she has created for herself the "home in the heart"(HMS, p.64) predicted by the local fortuneteller. Shifting from a literal to a metaphoric register, her "house" becomes not a structure but a spiritual sanctuary she carries within – a home for herself through her inner life, and her writing. Esperanza recognizes, and Cisneros validates, the empowerment that comes through writing and remembering. *The House on Mango Street*

was at first taken as an exclusively Chicano literature, but now has become a part of the American literary canon transcending cultural, and gender-based boundaries through the sheer power of its astute observations and implicit lessons.

*The Member of the Wedding* charts Frankie Addams' difficult passage from a childhood of innocence and freedom to an awareness of the limitations and constraints of her position in her culture. Although this story is told in a third-person narrative, it is filtered through Frankie's consciousness — her "inner psychic rhythms."[56] A concern for man's "spiritual isolation," (*The Mute*, p.124) his revolt against that isolation, and his need to achieve a perfect communion with others was the basis of almost everything Carson McCullers wrote. She has successfully explored what she termed the "solitary region of simple stories and the inward mind" (*The Mute*, p.251). She was particularly interested in the "paradox of shared isolation,"[57] a term that describes the relationships among the three main characters — Frances Addams, Berenice Sadie Brown, and John Henry West — and their community as well. The setting itself serves as the metaphor for such spiritual isolation. She begins this novella by establishing the dreariness, and sadness of a setting, which seems estranged from all other places in the world: "The kitchen was silent and crazy and sad" (MW, p.22). For life here is hopelessly inward,

separated, and estranged. Selfhood means only confinement in the solitude of one's own heart. The urgency which drives Frankie to become "a member of the wedding" is the conviction that "all other people had a we to claim, all other except her" (MW, p.42). She is seeking an ideal love, not a physical one, which joins all people — as Frankie puts it, "the we of me" (MW, p. 42). It is by thus identifying themselves with something larger than themselves that all of her characters' become conscious of their individual identities. Frankie's longing at once for escape and belonging, makes her consider her role as a "member of the wedding" to mean that when her older brother marries, she will join the happy couple in their new life together. This fantasy transforms Frankie's twelve-year old perspective regarding herself, her relationships, and her small southern hometown. In her ideal world, "people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls; whichever way they felt, like and wanted" (MW, p.97). What Frankie is dreaming of is possible only in her imagination. The author portrays Frankie's illusory existence in order to dramatize all that threatens to destabilize her isolated view of herself, and her community. The events precipitated by the wedding destroy her illusions, forcing her to reconsider everything she holds to be true — about human nature, and about individual power. As Frankie attempts to grow up and seek membership into the adult world, she discovers that

certain life rules encumber her. The most important rule has to do with the fact that married couples only include two people, shutting Frankie out of her dream of becoming a threesome with Janice and Jarvis. Frankie's primary identification with the masculine world of her brother and her father can be attributed in part to her mother's death when she was born. According to Frankie, power and authority are masculine attributes and to be a girl is to be marginalized and excluded. But being fiercely independent, Frankie resists any kind of limitations placed upon her. An important part of her development is her growing comprehension that she will be forced to enter the world of women, a world that holds no attractions for her. It is not the responsibility of womanhood that she reluctantly must take up but the decision, which confronts her, *the decision to be a woman at all,* accounts in large part for Frankie's fear and forms a major thematic concern of the novel. Frankie is, "then hovering between the two sexes and has the problem not only of sex awareness, but also of sex determination" (Eisinger, p. 250) in the sense that she is a girl who does not want to be done out of the privileges of boys. As a child, by adopting masculine attributes, Frankie is attempting to seize the social power that is denied to females. It is this *masculine* power that Frankie is not willing to give up, even when she reaches adulthood. Girls turning into women are taught to be *feminine* or *passive,*

thus losing their power, but a boy becoming a man is taught to be *masculine* or *assertive,* thus gaining power. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it. The end is a brief coda that reports the events after the wedding when Frankie painfully discovers the reality of the situation, and has replaced her old aspirations with new ones, and has even changed the very nature of her dreams. Frankie's old dreams of flying planes, of being able to switch genders whenever she wished, of joining the wedding, are examples of her protests against the powerlessness of women. They are projections of her desire to be an autonomous adult. Frances, as she is finally called, wants to write poetry, and travel with a new friend Mary Littlejohn who introduces her to the privileges of white society, and she even comes to relish the superiority she feels it bestows upon her. Her new dreams are socially acceptable and easily within her reach. Finally, Frankie's ideals are defeated by the demands of social norms, and her own inward confusions. Ambiguity rather than clear distinctions informs the divided world which Frankie inhabits. The world of the adolescent child is, after all, only a promise of life to come in adulthood. If McCullers implies any solution besides racial equality to the social injustice, and personal isolation, and despair she portrays in her novels, it is a move towards a more integrated view of conventional gender roles; towards the more androgynous world Frankie

envisions. We are asked to look inward to the heart, rather than outward to political, and economic structures in society for any final answers to human problems. The revelations contained in the novels of McCullers' works are the variety and complexity of humanity, and how ultimately love and life are richer if differences of color and gender are accepted as inherent aspects of the species. After establishing a dichotomous relationship between male power and female powerlessness, this chapter suggests that by asserting female power women can create their own space/vision and language. The feminine space is opened up as a new structure for survival, a *space of her own*, of personal growth, and of creativity.

**Conclusion - Traversing Boundaries: A Shared Experience**

As a summary of the argument throughout, in all the novels discussed, there seems to be a marked evolution from externally imposed structures, to internally realized structures. The motif of the *journey inward* and the experiences it yields is the link that connects these texts, providing the impetus for this study. Each novel represents the individual vision of the artist, his direct impression of reality. The uniqueness of each story has provided moments of vision, leading to epiphany, transcending the gender and socio-cultural polarities destructive to self-realization. In doing so, these writers have made of the adolescent novel a

pathway to the authentic self, and to our innermost being. In addition, it is also noted that it is not solely a search for identity *per se* that engages these writers, but rather an exploration and articulation of the process leading to a purposeful *awakening* of these protagonists. It is precisely because the protagonists' journey is largely an internal experience, and the *awakening* is a result of changed consciousness, that the voyage is ultimately symbolic. Though all these adolescents to some extent fail in achieving wholeness, it does not in any way negate their internal journeys as worthwhile endeavors. These adolescents live for what they believe in, and they do this by looking within themselves to discover who they are. The adolescent spirit now seems able to wrest affirmation out of despair, and will continue to do so, as long as family, hope and love remains. In a very real sense the journeys have not ended. To complete them one has to continually break down the walls and discover doorways – new areas of life and experience, about which one has remained ignorant.

## End Notes

[1] Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (first published 1969, New York, 1970), pp. 20-34.

[2] Quoted in *Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier* (Harper, New York, 1958), p.72.

[3] Stuart Barton Babbage, *The Mark of Cain: Studies in Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapid, Michigan, 1960), p.40.

[4] Franco Moretti, op. cit., Ch.4, "The Conspiracy of the Innocents" p.185.

[5] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1949 rep. 1973). Quoted in "The Hero's Journey – Life's Great Adventure", Jane Upton Hall, Westside High School. Houston Teacher's Institute 2001. <http://hti.math.uh.edu/curriculum/units/2003/03/index.php>

[6] *Keats Poetical Works*, Ed. H.W. Garrod (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1973), p.54.

[7] F.J Hoffman, "The Fool of Experience: Bellow's Fiction" in *Contemporary American Novelist*. Ed., Harry T, Moore (Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p.81.

[8] Clinton W. Trowbridge, *The Symbolic Structure of The Catcher in the Rye* From *Sewanee Review* 74, No. 3. July-September 1966 (The University of the South) pp.681-93.

[9] Lillian Schlissel, "Contemplating the American Eve," in *American Women and American Studies*, Ed., Betty Chmaj (Pittsburgh: KNOW, Inc., 1971), p. 258.

[10] Chester E. Eisinger, "Carson McCullers and the Failure of Dialogue" *Fiction of the Forties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.258.

[11] Paul Lauter, "Teaching Nineteenth-Century Women Writers" *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*. Ed., Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1993), p.296.

[12] Charlotte Goodman, "The Lost Brother, the Twin: Women Novelists and the Male-Female Double Bildungsroman," *Novel*, 17 (Fall 1983), p.31.

[13] Ihab H. Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961), p.6, henceforth cited as Hassan, 1961.

[14] Ihab H. Hassan, "The Character of Post-War Fiction in America," in *Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views*, Ed., by Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), p 31.

[15] Barbara A. White, *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction* (Greenwood Press, 1985), p.191, henceforth cited as White, 1985.

[16] Mary G. Mason and Carol Hurd Green have also studied women's autobiography in the context of the "journey." *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women* focuses on the Anglo-American tradition.

[17] *A Time of Harvest: American Literature, 1910-1960*, Ed., Robert E. Spiller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p.147, henceforth cited as Spiller, 1962.

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[20] "A Coming of Age Story" *Literary Masters: Thomas Wolfe*, Eds., Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman, Vol.13. The Gale Group, 2001. *Enotes.com* January 2006 <http://www.enotes.com/wolfe-masters/>

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[22] Virginia Tiger, *William Golding: The Dark fields Of Discovery* (Marion Boyars. London, 1974), p.15. (All subsequent citations are to this edition and henceforth cited as Tiger).

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[32] Margaret Ossoli Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Reprint New York: Norton, 1971, [1855]), p.37.

[33] Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History" *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997), p.198.

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# Chapter I

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

Although J. D. Salinger's total creative production has been relatively small, his impact and influence, — and his artistic achievement — have been enormous. Since its publication in 1951, *The Catcher in the Rye* has caused considerable controversy. The fact that a novel of such radical social opinion, and observation was written in a time of conservatism in America made it all the more controversial. Much that we associate with the 1950s has formed Salinger's hero-narrator Holden Caulfield, and filters through him, including attitudes about sexuality, materialism, and respectability. In Holden's vocabulary, phony stands for a shallow materialism, an elevation of form over substance, a worship of superficiality, and a manipulative attitude towards others. He tries to explain to us not only what is offensive, disgusting, and repulsive to him in human behavior, but also what goes against prevailing notions of modesty and decency. "The things that Holden finds so deeply repulsive are things he calls phony," writes Dan Wakefield, "and the phoniness in every instance is the absence of love, and, often, the substitution of pretense for love."[1] Salinger's protagonists' are continually sickened by the materialism, and inhumanity surrounding them, and what they do, and what he does through them, is endlessly search for moral and spiritual

enlightenment, and the possibility of love. The central characteristic of Holden is therefore, "the adherence to a powerful abiding illusion, while around him swirls a corrupt, hostile, essentially phony world."[2]

Many critics, authors and scholars over the years have discussed, interpreted, disparaged, and praised Salinger's novel. For many years this book headed the list of challenged literature, the classic story of a teenager's quest for maturity. "Obscene" is the usual cry, based on the use of rather "vulgar" and "bad" language — words of the four-letter variety: damn, hell, and one resounding f-word. "Blasphemous"[3] they claim because of the boy's caustic comments about religious hypocrisy. The way Holden Caulfield sees the world is stated in the novel's most famous line: "If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn't rub out even half the 'Fuck you' signs in the world" (CR, p. 202). It is ironic that this sentence is the one that is most responsible for the various banning of the novel in the years following its appearance. Words by themselves are neutral, and not corrupting, especially ones that carry little or no religious or sexual connotation for most young people today. In using the F-word, Salinger shows us most of all what a moral kid Holden truly is. Holden feels helpless when he encounters profanity scrawled on the walls of Phoebe's school, a school that he envisions protecting and shielding children from the evils of society, and in amongst the Museum of Natural

History display. In a desperate act, he tries personally to eradicate all the graffiti in New York City, so the children will not have to see the obscenities. These scenes illustrate Holden's desire to protect children from getting a "cockeyed" version of sex from "some dirty kid" (CR, p. 201). Obviously sex for him is an act of love between two people who respect each other. He does not use the word himself anywhere in the book, and is fighting to keep alive a flickering vision of a "nice and peaceful place" (CR, p. 204), beyond the threatening streets. It offers a contrasting glimpse of the two worlds — the "nice and peaceful" and the "phony" — with which Salinger was principally concerned. Salinger's fiction dramatizes a progressive series of alternatives to the problem of remaining spiritually 'nice' in a 'phony' world. In a way, the vulgar words may symbolize the end of innocence, and Holden's inability to wipe them out when he encounters the words scratched in stone reflects the impossibility of preserving childhood's innocence. Holden acknowledges this impossibility, and is thus forced to seek out a more realistic goal for himself.

Salinger's small book, though limited in focus and ambition, is an extraordinary achievement, containing rich examples of American culture, and values. *The Catcher in the Rye* has endured because it is a significantly original work, full of insights into the essential truth of

Holden's existence. It is a perfect example of the lean reserves of the American writer who is reduced to personality, even to what Flannery O'Connor once called the "mystery of personality,"[4] an impression of it, instead of the drama of our social existence. To be able to make this assertion, however, requires an examination of the corpus of Salinger's work: one novel, two short novels, and thirty short stories, published over a period of almost two decades.

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

> Human characters are involved in the basic human conflict between love and what Salinger's Esmé calls squalor—that is, evil, trouble, inhumanity, and sin—and in which the

> characters and conflict are embodied in original and memorable symbols that are often humorous [...][5]

The central theme of Salinger's work is stated explicitly in, *For Esme–with Love and Squalor.* Salinger quotes a passage from Dostoevsky: "Fathers and teachers, I ponder what is Hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love" (NS, p.105). Salinger thus diagnoses the absurdity of the world in one simple way: if we cannot love, we cannot live. The short stories reinforce the theme that Salinger introduced in the novel and that resonated in his own life: the sensitive, alienated man in search of innocence and love in a world of corruption, a man who wants to escape the *phonies.* Salinger's short stories are all variants on the theme of "emotional estrangement."[6] Many of his short stories, center on members of the Glass family and their relationship with one another. Salinger also explores issues of spirituality, through his characters, offering two basic choices. Through Seymour, the elder Glass brother, Salinger reflects on suicide as a viable choice for those too emotionally fragile to survive life's challenges. The subject of *Nine stories* is the opposition of the phony and the seeker after authenticity. The nine stories all portray responses that individuals make to the inevitability of having to cope with the phony world that Salinger, like both Holden and Seymour despises. Warren French in *J.D. Salinger, Revisited* calls the collection a: "progressive account [of] ... nine crucial

stages in the purification of the lust and ego-ridden soul from the torments of the earthly wasteland as it strives to reach the ego-free state."[7] Salinger is however, not providing an "episodic history of the progress of one soul but an account of the process of spiritualization and the obstacles to it, especially in the United States" (French, p. 68). Each short story ends in puzzlement, beginning with *A Perfect Day for Banana Fish.* There are two major scenes in the story, the first in which Muriel Glass talks long distance from Florida with her mother in New York about the peculiar behavior of her husband Seymour, and the second in which Seymour takes the child Sybil on an inflated rubber float and tells her the tragic story of the "banana fish" who die of "banana fever" (NS, p.16) after swimming into a hole, as "they behave like pigs" gorging themselves on so many bananas that they cannot get out. Seymour identifies with the fish and the fever that kills them. Seymour's description is a metaphor for the problem of living in the world. It is not just his wife Muriel and her mother; it is experience in its entirety and everything in it — positive and negative — can result in banana fever. Most of Salinger's fiction, struggles with the question of how to behave inside the *banana hole* (another imprisonment) of experience. Seymour's *banana fish* represents his creative self, longing to complete his individuality and manhood. The self, however, seems to be doomed

because it cannot differentiate between kinds of experience; it is a glutton. Seymour wants to love everyone, but he cannot separate this love from self-love. Seymour believes in engaging in a spiritual fast, refusing the material world. The child Sybil offers another answer. The banana hole is not something to be avoided or feared. She treats it as a given reality, as desirable. It is significant that she sees a banana fish with "six" (NS, p.16) bananas in its mouth, eating, not fasting. How can one experience something without partaking of it? At the close of the story, Seymour sits on the twin bed opposite the one on which his wife Muriel is sleeping, puts a gun to his head and fires a bullet through his temple. Seymour's further disillusionment with the next generation could be an important reason why this "a perfect day for banana fish" (NS, p. 15) is the moment for leaving the world. Seymour has found he is unable to cope with the phony world and opts out, but suicide is not an acceptable alternative to dealing with disillusionment. Although Seymour shares with Holden Caulfield an acute sensitivity to the physicality of the world, his Sybil does not serve (as Phoebe serves) to deflect him from self-destruction. The question that remains is not so much why he kills himself, but why Sybil's influence was not enough to keep him from doing so. The Glass family saga begins with Seymour's suicide, and Salinger spends much of his later career writing his way around and back

— freezing himself — to that day in 1948 to show how Seymour failed, but how the rest of us can be influenced by the Sybil's of the world.

In *Franny and Zooey* (1961), Salinger presents the youngest member of the Glass family, Franny's situation on a weekend, in painful conflict with her sense of self and the world. She is uneasy with the superficiality of her surroundings, and her profound wish for a spiritual dimension that would give her life substance beyond all of the grasping and self-assertion that threaten to engulf her. Salinger reflects on acceptance and endurance as a second choice, by embracing others or practicing a personal spirituality. The pattern that Franny follows, from nausea to joy, from withdrawal to return, is the same as we witness in Holden Caulfield. This is the first time; however, that Salinger has created a female for tracing out the pattern: "I'm sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody" (FZ, p. 30). With this prophetic exclamation this modern adolescent heroine, announces herself. Here is the state of mind of many a young individual apprehensive of the loss of individuality and selfhood, disgusted with the apparently inescapable conformity, and at the same time afraid of the alternative of being left alone. Salinger is more concerned with those who struggle against such conformity. *Franny and Zooey* deals with a frustrated person who is sick of ego: "I'm just sick of ego, ego, ego. My own and everybody else's.

I'm sick of everybody that wants to get somewhere" (FZ, p.29). When Franny thinks of giving up the stage, she makes this point when she claims that she is sickened and disgusted by ego, and repelled by the universal drive to *get somewhere.* Franny's struggle throughout the novel is unquestionably the condition of her burdensome ego, and the burden of the living Glass children is the same. Once more, Salinger provides his characters a way out of their spiritual abyss. It comes in the form of a parable, a device he frequently uses to impart mythic truths and visions. We learn that Seymour talked about the parable of the Fat Lady during the years that the Glasses performed as child prodigies on a radio talk show called "It's a Wise Child" (FZ, p. 53). He insisted that before the show the children shine their shoes — synonymous, perhaps, with preparing to do their best — for the Fat Lady, a reference to the lonely, bereft members of their listening audience. Zooey invokes the image with a stirring explanation of the Fat Lady's identity: "We're the Tattooed Lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, till everybody else is tattooed, too" (FZ, p.139). Zooey comments: "There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady...that Fat Lady really is ... Christ Himself (FZ, pp. 201-202). It is her task to act for God, to act so fully that no point of separation exists between what Franny is doing and any other conception of herself. Salinger wishes to

tell us there is no difference between Franny and the Fat Lady, impossible, as that is to imagine. Franny and this cancerous Fat Lady with "thick legs, very veiny legs" (FZ, p.201) rocking in a chair on some unidentified porch — the exceptional Franny and the unpleasant associations of this Fat Lady — are not separate. They are exactly part of the same thing.

Franny's only support in this crisis is a little devotional book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, (FZ, p.32) which focuses on a simple prayer to compose spiritual unrest: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" (FZ, p. 36). Her description of the meditative way stresses the loss of all personal devices and social impingements. Through Zooey, however, she learns that her use of the prayer has handicapped rather than helped her spiritually, because of her distorted notions of Jesus. In saying the prayer, she has been trying to lay up spiritual treasures for herself much like the people she criticizes are trying to lay up material or intellectual treasures for themselves. "This is God's universe" Zooey tells Franny, "not yours." And he asks: "...who in the Bible besides Jesus knew — knew — that we're carrying the Kingdom of Heaven around with us, inside, where we're all too goddam stupid and sentimental and unimaginative to look?" (FZ, p.171) the only reason to say the Jesus prayer is to develop "Christ-consciousness. Not to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting

place with some sticky, adorable divine personage" (FZ, p.172). Franny finally admits to Lane, her boyfriend that "if you keep saying that prayer over and over again — you only have to do it with your *lips* at first — then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self-active"(FZ, p.37). After she has fainted and been revived, the story ends with her lips soundlessly moving, presumably a signal that she is at least striving toward some remote "satori," (FZ, p.65) that blessed state of illumination. "Smiling at the ceiling" (FZ, p.202) she dozes off, in mystical union with a divine human race that shares her vulnerability. This is the intuitive knowledge that at last replaces Franny's revulsion with joy, and brings a smile to her lips — the smile of return. Franny finally manages to transcend her ego-ridden soul and the squalor that surrounds her. Christ in Salinger's story is everyone: universal love is necessary. Later, while talking in the living room with Franny, Zooey himself glances out of the window and sees a little drama in progress: a small girl in a red tam is hiding behind a tree from her dog wearing a green collar; "the anguish of separation" is followed by the "joy of reunion" (FZ, p.152). From this little but intensely suggestive vignette Zooey draws the inspiration to lead Franny to see the anguish of her own separation and the need for a reunion of joy. Salinger's main aim is to have his Glass children achieve the liberated moment, that is, experiences fully lived in which there is no separation

between self and other. Moreover, the spiritual rather than the physical determines the self as Buddy tells Zooey about meeting a little girl who had two boyfriends. When Buddy asks her the names of her boy friends, she replies Bobby and Dorothy (FZ, p. 64). For Buddy the moment becomes a remarkable one, almost an epiphany. At first sight the reader may not be aware of its significance, but when examined in the light of other events, it can clearly be seen that Salinger has intended the child's statement as profound, the blending of one of the most fundamental of dualities, that of sex. The little girl, Buddy saw, instinctively realized what Seymour once told him: "All legitimate religious study must lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold" (FZ, pp. 67-68). In fact Zooey tells Franny:

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

Salinger's men find they are facing the same problems, as do their sisters: they find themselves "unlearning the differences." Accepting differences within the self is difficult at its best in the literature of this decade when the prevailing attitude is one of conformity and the individual who resists is *maladjusted*, a *misfit*, which leads us to the deaf-

mute — "he sees things as beautifully related. The mute knows how to love; he is at peace with all aspects of reality. Seymour and Holden see things as beautifully isolated."[8]

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

agonizing over whether he will apply himself or not unlike Holden. Salinger has created in him a complementary figure to Holden; he displays a capacity "to transcend the phony world, but chooses to remain in it, to make his own decisions and to stand by them" (French, p.82).

*Nine Stories*, whose writing coincided with the writing of *The Catcher in the Rye*, is prefaced by a familiar Zen koan: "We know the sound of two hands clapping / but what is the sound of one hand clapping"? This eastern thought alluded to, suggests that Salinger considered it an alternative to the superficiality and materialism of the world he portrays. If the artist communicates by writing, then the religious man communicates by silence: this is the paradox of Zen. Thus the *sound of two hands clapping* is the sound of relationship. The search for *the sound of one hand clapping* comes to an end in the spiritual life. The enlightenment that would allow such a sound to be heard would reveal a world without distinctions, a world of unlimited freedom as *unlike a banana-hole as possible*. Zen recognizes that all boundaries are artificial. Thus art is the way of the imagination and Zen is the way of the soul. Salinger is primarily interested in the souls of his characters. As the fiction following *A Perfect Day for Banana Fish* indicates, Salinger seems to believe that finding a solution to the problem often involves revisiting the problem, within the family. That is, after all, where one

learns how to behave and as Franny finds out, "one is entitled to the low grade spiritual counsel [the family] is able to give...At least you know there won't be any goddam ulterior motives in this madhouse" (FZ, pp.195-196). Whereas initially Holden Caulfield runs away when he is in trouble, Franny goes home. In a vast world full of misunderstanding and estrangement, the sensitive innocent must turn towards the family to find the intimate love and communication that is so lacking in the outside world. It is through the family that they retain their equilibrium, balancing their moral integrity against the social pressures of the outside world. Thus the family becomes the place where self and society meets, where the moral and ethical realms are reconciled. The Glass family is a striking affirmation in an era dominated by disintegrating families. Set in an ambivalent milieu *Nine Stories* deal with genius, spiritual integrity, moral corruption, and the occasional ability of innocence to transform lives. Consequently, Salinger's characters, withdraw into illusory alternatives whenever possible. Holden withdraws in *The Catcher in the Rye*, although he recognizes a need to return and to compromise. Each character tries to hold onto the world of the imagination as long as possible. But hope, when it comes in *Nine Stories*, is not just in the form of the grand affirmation. It comes in the little things: a girl's appreciation of wax and olives, her tactile pleasure with sand; Esme's conversational

lilt and her brother's love of riddles; a boy's thrill over a story told on a snowy night concerning kidnapping Chinese bandits; the small pleasure of Teddy, the boy genius, keeping lists in his pockets of things to look up at the library — these are the moments of affirmation in Salinger's fictional universe. These are the moments that make the exile worthwhile. Perhaps there is no artist more qualified than Salinger to lead us on a journey of "squalor and redemption."[9]

The essential element in the short stories according to Bernice and Sanford Goldstein is the "breaking down of barriers between supposed opposites, artificial barriers created by abstracting and intellectualizing human beings."[10] When the barriers are removed, enlightenment is produced in the form of some positive act. The stories move from conflict toward enlightenment, the conflict centered on the self-contained ego removed from others and other events. That self-contained separate ego leads to actions Salinger recognizes as "phony" — that is, actions removed from the experience by judging the experience, criticizing it, dissecting it. Others are removed from the self, and the self is traditionally reinforced as a separate entity continually removed, separated, isolated. Conflict and turmoil, judgment and criticism, all these support a separated ego, which the protagonists' must overcome before they reach some kind of awareness. They become enlightened when they

cease to isolate themselves as separate egos and so merge with experience that "there is not a hair's breadth between will and action" (Goldstein).

Specific parallels can be drawn between Holden and Salinger's other protagonists from his short stories to show how their patterns fit together. Holden Caulfield resembles Salinger's other protagonists, whose common trait is that they are hypersensitive individuals who carry deep scars from interacting with the flawed world around them, a world characterized by phoniness. Salinger's short stories dramatize a progressive series of alternatives to the problem of remaining spiritually 'nice' in a 'phony' world. Esme differs from the defeated Seymour in that she remains resolutely in Holden's world without being corrupted by its 'phoniness' or resigning herself to putting up with things as they are. Her story is the rare ones of the victory of the 'nice' world over the 'phony' (French, p.78), and she remains as potential role model for achieving compassion through an acquaintance with squalor. Salinger shows that there remains a possibility of surviving within the material world without becoming dehumanized. "There remains even in the wasteland a possibility of innocence, but readers have a tough time recognizing it" (French, p.83). The gallery of Salinger's characters — Holden, Seymour, Franny and Zooey, De Daumier-Smith, Esme — suffer a sickness of the soul, but through the *renewal* of their mind survive. They all withdraw,

but they also return. The inevitable disillusioning truth of Salinger's world is that to survive one must accommodate oneself to a squalid world. But the characters can achieve increasing levels of transcendence from the complex world of squalor and earthly distraction. Seymour alone, among Salinger's suffering heroes, makes the ultimate withdrawal. Salinger tried to evoke an alternative life-style in the Glass family stories; these tales are more idealistic than *Catcher.* Outside the Salinger milieu Holden Caulfield can be compared with the protagonist of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Like Huck Finn, Holden is also seeking, albeit metaphorically, a home, a place where he can be accepted and can truly belong.

Though he was writing consistently, for American Magazines, *The Catcher in the Rye* brought Salinger recognition. Salinger not only captured the perennial confusions of adolescence, but also the spiritual discomforts of an entire age. In short, *The Catcher in the Rye* is yet another instance of the ways in which great literature can be at one and the same time culturally specific and universal. That the novel does not lack, in intricate symbols or a refined sense of style and language will be demonstrated in the detailed examination of the book, focusing on the nature of the maturing process, and an investigation of those stylistic and technical means that have been used to convey this sense of maturation to

the reader. The deceptive simplicity of the novel's picaresque story belies its structural intricacy or its deep spiritual import. In developing the narrative, Salinger has interlocked multiple patterns at the thematic, episodic, verbal, and symbolic levels with careful artistry. These motifs can be shown to indicate a certain spiritual perception, which represents a world-view which is essentially Salinger's. The individual in his confrontation with life is depicted as evolving to an understanding that the ideal is that which accommodates the spirit of involvement and detachment.

If one thinks of a plot as a series of events that build one on another toward a climax, then the plot of *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of its least significant aspects. It can be summarized in a few paragraphs, but there's much more to the novel than its story. The physical action of the book takes place in 1949 at two locations. The first seven chapters are set at Pencey Prep, a private school for boys in eastern Pennsylvania. Life at Pencey is dreary, regimented, artificial and, of course, expensive. This happens, however, to be only the latest of a series of schools from which Holden has been expelled. Understandably he is in no hurry to encounter his parents, but he is also reluctant to linger a moment longer than necessary at Pencey: "It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam

Cadillac some day" (CR, p.131). Holden, in his wish to "feel some kind of good-bye" (CR, p.4) before he leaves Pencey, shows himself to be concerned with the authenticity of his own feelings. Further evidence for society's call to phoniness is found in Holden's remark: "I'm always saying 'Glad to've met you' to somebody I'm not at all glad I met. If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though" (CR, p.87). Here, he implies that society forces a person to be false as a means towards survival. He wants to use his imagination to feel more connected to the world and to his own emotions.

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

> ... all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon

> we had that summer...It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie. (CR, p.39)

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

In *Franny and Zooey*, Franny, on the brink of a breakdown, says that the one person she wants to talk to is her dead brother Seymour.

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

Several days before he's expected home for Christmas vacation, Holden leaves school, takes a train ride, and the rest of the book takes place in New York City where he lives, where he wanders around aimlessly for several days, spending money his wealthy grandmother has sent him, instead of going home. Holden has a series of adventures and misadventures that are akin to the archetypal journey as rite of passage into maturity. Though Holden is friendly with many people at school, and though he has several friends in New York, he is constantly lonesome and in need of someone who will sympathize with his feelings of alienation: "I'm lonesome as hell. No kidding." (CR, p.149) The person he feels closest to is his ten-year- old sister, Phoebe:

> You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life...She's *only ten...* if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you're talking about . . . you can even take her anywhere with you. (CR, p. 67)

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

his hatred of the phonies in his school, and how meaningless he feels everything to be, he contemplates a retreat within himself:

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

Here Holden goes on to share his naïve vision of how to survive in this false world. He simply asks Sally to run away with him to a log cabin in the countryside to withdraw from that society to a primitive kind of existence. Holden's solution is a return to nature and a romantic dream. It is a dream about a world of natural and "pristine innocence, some personal integrity."[13] His vision of himself as "the catcher in the rye," accentuates this dream. Deep inside he knows this probably will not happen (the fact that Sally keeps trying to change the subject surely does not help): "I was getting excited as hell, the more I thought of it, and I sort of reached over and took old Sally's goddam hand. What a goddam fool I was" (CR, p. 118). They get into a fight since Sally really does not understand what he is talking about and even Holden himself concludes the passage by saying that he is a "madman" (CR, p.134). He makes his dream of the future — to run away to New England and live off the land — depend upon Sally Hayes's cooperation. He lacks the courage to pursue this dream (a dream that a later generation would pursue) but he can

blame Sally for the loss of this dream. Thus, trapped in utter frustration, he loses his sanity because he cannot face that demoralizing truth. Inability to make compromises where they should be made is what leads him to a sanatorium. Holden's fantasy of going out west reflects two aspects of his personality. First, he wishes to ostracize himself from society, as seen by his deaf-mute idea. It also reflects the old American Dream of striking new ground out West. Perhaps Holden is using this journey as a substitution for something more difficult: seeking out a new frontier in himself. And so, in desperation, as the novel nears its conclusion, Holden decides to attempt a compromise withdrawal from the world, a withdrawal similar to the kind he considered early in the novel when he asked Ackley about how to "join a monastery" (CR, p.50). On the verge of a nervous collapse, Holden changes his mind and decides to rejoin his family. When this section reaches a climax in Chapter 25 Salinger carefully places Holden on the psychiatrist's couch in California, "this crumby place," (CR, p.1) and the rest home where Holden is imprisoned as the result of his problems, apparently on the way to some kind of recovery from his nervous breakdown. This information is important, for it helps to establish the mood and point of view of the narrator. The fact that Holden is in a psychiatric hospital certainly influences the way the story is told, read, and understood. In other words,

the setting in this first chapter, which serves as the front-end of a frame narrative, is extremely important. The hospital or rest home setting is the overall structure on which the story is built. It is in this outside frame, from a vantage point several months and several thousand miles away, that Holden makes his final comments on the whole matter. In terms of the narrative, this chapter completes the frame that was begun in chapter one. The novel has come full cycle, and the plot is completed; the reader is left with the impression that a whole story has been told, even though Salinger does not answer all the questions about his protagonist, Holden Caulfield. At the novel's close, Holden isn't sure whether he'll be able to handle things better when he leaves the institution, and he's sorry he told his story at all. These are the bare bones of the story, but there's much more to the novel than its story. It's a rich psychological portrait of a boy who has few of the tools necessary to face the world on his own.

The novel is written in a realistic manner, and the rendition of New York life is a triumph of realistic observation accurately represented as a metaphor for the increasingly commercial world, devoid of feelings: the atmosphere of shabby hotels or of Central Park on a winter day is brilliantly conveyed. New York, as seen by Holden, is an Eliotean wasteland. It is a place of sexual perverts and sterile relationships. The hotel where he stays is "lousy with perverts" and "a man and a woman

squirting water out of their mouths at each other" (CR, p.62). Sex in this society has ceased to be a re-creating regenerating, relation-establishing force. In New York Holden's nightmarish efforts to escape from himself through liquor, sex, nightclubs, movies are fruitless. Misadventure piles on misadventure, but he bears it all with a grim cheerfulness and stubborn courage.

When Holden is explaining to Mr. Antolini why he left Pencey, he gives the example of what his Oral Expression class is taught to call "digressions" (CR, p.183). The teacher, Mr. Venison spent most of his time arguing the importance of sticking to the point and avoiding digression. The trouble with this idea, Holden maintains, is that he likes listening to a speech better when someone digresses. He says this of Mr. Venison: "He could drive you crazy sometimes, him and the goddam class. I mean he'd keep telling you to unify and simplify all the time. Some things you just can't do that to" (CR, p.185). The scene is intended as another example of how modern society restricts conversation. "[The speech] didn't have to do with the farm — I admit it — but it was nice" (CR, p.184) Holden comments, implying that not everything has to be unified and simplified. The same thing is true of Holden's own story — it is not unified and simplified; it is in itself an extended digression leading in fits and starts toward a *movement of illumination* that is not the result

of logical, ordered thought. Although the book takes place during only three days, Holden's story is filled with what tell us about things that deeply affected him. Such an important part of his life goes on inside his head and it happened years earlier, that the present physical setting becomes almost incidental to the story being told. *The Catcher in the Rye* could take place almost anywhere in the world. That's because the true setting of the book is Holden's mind — an interior monologue spoken by Holden. The subjective point of view is an integral part of Salinger's exploration of that mind. An important aspect of the novel is the construction of a center of consciousness, the structuring of 'I', and the formation of an identity to express itself. The main movement of the action like *Franny and Zooey* is the shift of the "I" from artificial ego to a more authentic self. The novel seeks to link the protagonists' external reflections to the internal 'I', which must comprehend the nature of what it sees. The primary action of the novel is the connection between the narration of Holden and the structure he brings into existence through this. Thus, Salinger uses storytelling as a moral focus for the protagonist's life and his identity. Through his own writing, Holden seeks to unify vision, knowledge, and truth. There is also an emotional reward: the confessional nature of his writing leads him to a better understanding

of himself. Through the telling of the story, "Holden has given shape to, and thus achieved control of, his troubled past."[14]

An important relationship also exists between this deliberately structured 'I' and the reader, for although so much concentration is focused on Holden, the reader becomes the second protagonist in the text. The novel does not describe the world of the reader; rather, it draws the readers into themselves and traces a microcosm (Redpath, p.26). This microcosm is the consciousness of the protagonist and, by extension, the consciousness of the reader. A major feature of Salinger's structure is the "centripetal quality," (Redpath, p.26) the inward concentration on the world it envisages. The inwardness contributes to the opacity of the novel, but it is also where the meaning of the work lies. The novel does not try to escape its limits as text by moving the reader into the world beyond the book; it draws him into the book and into himself. It demarcates limits to recede into and this explains the narrow confines of Salinger's world. Inside this world we glimpse the consciousness of an adolescent. Salinger's novel is unquestionably concerned with ways of seeing, as they compel us to re-see adolescent nature. Readers forge the link between the main body and coda of the text, adding a spiritual dimension. The shifting perspectives, flashbacks and confined settings, parallel cinematic techniques. Holden's three-day odyssey is a symbolic

journey to the underworld where he is made spiritually conscious. Holden's reason for writing is to conduct a search and Salinger's motive is to show the "therapeutic value" (Redpath, p.129) of the search. Salinger deliberately displaces chronological sequences which all relate to Holden's search for lost innocence, than to the novelist's indirect presentation of his central preoccupations: the nature of that imprisonment in the cell's self, the operation of failure or success in and after that, and a paradoxical pattern of ideas about identity and selflessness, creativity and quietness. Questions of good and evil, sanity and insanity, achievement and success are of secondary importance here compared to the realization that he or she possesses a self, a core of individuality, which is indefinable.

Rather than proceeding in a straight, chronological line, Holden wanders — first announcing that he will relate the story of his exhausting, even mad adventures during a weekend sojourn in Manhattan last Christmas and then pausing to include more information about his older brother D.B. We first encounter D.B. in the novel's opening paragraph, in which Holden introduces him as having once been a regular writer but having since become a "prostitute" (CR, pp.1-2) Hollywood scriptwriter, and thus fallen. In other words, D.B. has stopped writing stories for himself, but instead for Hollywood — in essence, he no longer abides by

his personal integrity. Holden furthermore reveals that his favorite book is D.B's *The Secret Goldfish* (CR, p.1) where the theme foreshadows Holden's consistent passion for the innocence and authenticity of childhood. It is about a child who buys a goldfish and does not allow anyone to look at it because he has paid for it with his own money. We also learn about Holden's aversion to falseness. The movies have ruined D.B., just as Holden remains convinced that the movies ruin everybody else. As far as he is concerned, movie actors are acting. He is disgusted by the affectation in the films he sees — for example he says that actors "never act like people. They just think they do" (CR, p.117). They do not believe the lines they so carefully rehearse because, in the theater and motion pictures, illusion is more important than reality. Holden abhors movies and shows because they are larger than life, because they generate a sort of passiveness among society. He is depressed when someone says *good-luck* because the statement implies that fortune supersedes human effort. He hates movies because a movie is nothing more than a false portrayal of reality on a screen, and yet he can imitate them because in imitation the movie is taken out of context. Holden's seemingly contradictory statement: "I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them" (CR, p.29). The imitation, to Holden, is more honest than the portrayal on the screen. Holden cannot understand how people

actually appear to accept and even like what they see. He complains about his friends who "laughed like hyenas at stuff that wasn't even funny" (CR, p.37) and is also deeply disturbed by the fact that his older brother D.B. has become a sellout to Hollywood and how easily impressed people seem to be by this.

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

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copper field kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. (CR, p. 1)

This opening sentence of *The Catcher in the Rye* establishes two things: Firstly that it is no ordinary autobiography since we only get to hear the important things — that is, what Holden believes is important and relevant. Here, he emphasizes to the reader that the following narrative will be completely subjective, from his own point of view — he will tell only what he wishes to tell. We are to hear the truth: Holden's truth. Holden is not a traditional narrator; he eschews details about his birth, his parents, and "all that David Copper field kind of crap" (referring to Charles Dickens' novel by the same name). Secondly, Holden justifies ignoring this traditional setup by saying "I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth." The skepticism inherent in that casual

phrase, "if you want to know the truth," implies a full, sickening realization "that as a matter of fact in the world of Holden Caulfield very few people do."[15] What we find out about directly in the novel is, of course, what has happened to Holden Caulfield; but we also find out what has happened generally to human ideas on some simple and ultimate questions in the years following World War II. Holden is actually speaking to the psychoanalyst in the story, but at the same time, he appears to be directly addressing the reader. Frankness is one of Holden's most engaging qualities as he starts his story with an extended flashback to the day he left Pencey just a few days before Christmas in 1949. Flashbacks are used to provide a sense of movement in time. These movements are used to underline the character's connections with social difficulties. We know that he has problems at school and that he has failed most of his subjects, but at the same time this failure seems to have nothing to do with lack of intelligence. On the contrary, he is verbal, quick-witted and humorous. The opening paragraph sounds the thematic dichotomy between the world of vision and the world of reality that the book explores. But it seems more significant, and more apparent, that the first paragraph establishes the 'I' who writes, who doesn't want to be thought of as one of those "splendid, clear-thinking, young men" (CR, p.2) his school claims to mold. Holden objects to the catalogue at Pencey,

which shows a student on a horse jumping over a fence. According to Holden, the school did not even own a horse, and the students were anything but splendid. He believes the school "serves steak on Saturday nights so Sunday's visiting parents will think the meals are always like that" (CR, p.35). Holden sees the school as manufacturing a public image that belies reality, a situation not uncommon with educational institutions. And he finds that phoniness, that hypocrisy; not only in the world of his personal contacts, but in the world of art as well. He detests phony books, phony music, phony movies and plays. He sees Hamlet as "a sad, screwed-up type guy" and wants him played that way instead of like "a goddam general" (CR, p.117). Likewise he is bothered by the way people "clap for the wrong things" (CR, p.84) and hence corrupts the promising artist. Evidently, he does not feel much fellowship with the other students at Pencey, and the starting-point of Holden's story, the very day he leaves school, says much about his relation to them. It is important to notice that when Holden flashes back to the day he left Pencey Prep; he is pictured alone, standing on top of Thomsen Hill. He has risen above the pettiness of Pencey and looks down on it, both literally and figuratively. He is standing on the top of a hill, looking down on a football field where a big game is going on, where almost the whole school has gathered together to watch. Holden's self-chosen distance and isolation from the spectacle is

striking: "It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win" (CR, p. 2). The scene is a telling image of the feeling of not belonging, not participating but standing and watching, from a distance or from the outside. Holden is incapable of improving in school because he feels too distant from it. He cannot identify himself with either students or teachers. His history teacher says: "Life is a game boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules" (CR, p.8). But Holden is not a player. However, the reader is left to question whether the problem is truly with Pencey or rather Holden. Whatever the case, we learn that Holden is highly critical of others. There is also a sense that something is missing in his judgments. For example, he concludes that Pencey is a terrible school because "there were never many girls at all at the football games" (CR, p.3). Perhaps all the criticism is merely a front. As an indirect result of his constant criticism, Holden finds himself distant from everything. He wants to leave town with a positive thought about the school, even though he has been expelled. He thinks hard to come up with a pleasant memory and recalls an evening football game with friends. He is satisfied that this recollection is positive enough. As a result, he can proceed on to call on *old Spencer,* his history teacher, who asked him to stop by before leaving school. He expresses admiration for the elderly teacher, who "if you

thought about him just enough and not too much, you could figure it out that he wasn't doing too bad for himself" (CR, p.7). Evidently he respects the old man enough to pay him a visit on a Saturday night. While visiting with the teacher, it is apparent that Holden is simply not a student. The teacher criticizes his lack of effort and even reads from one of Holden's reports, which is unacceptably completed. It is significant that Holden himself writes a note on the bottom of the work, which reveals his sensitive side. Despite his discomfort, Holden listens politely to the teacher's chastisement and the reading of the pitifully inadequate history essay he wrote on the last test. At the end of the paper, Holden had added an apology to Spencer for doing poorly; "so he wouldn't feel too bad about flunking me" (CR, p. 15). He apologizes for not doing well on the report and confirms that he is to blame for his failure, not the teacher. In other words, Holden is very aware of his own lack of effort, but does nothing to correct it. In schoolwork, like in life, Holden seems bored and unchallenged. Even in the old man's room, he is *unsafe:* He hates the pervasive smell of "Vicks Nose Drops" (CR, p.10). He blushes when Mr. Spencer reads his answer about mummies on a history test. The mummies reinforce imprisonment. Incidentally Holden would also like to stop his development toward adulthood by physically preserving his body from change, as is illustrated by his interest in the Egyptian mummies, who

were treated with "secret ingredients ... so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries" (CR, p.11). Spencer, in a question that echoes throughout the book, asks Holden, "What's the matter with you, boy"? (CR, p.10) As Spencer tries to lecture him, telling him that he flunked history because he simply did not know anything, Holden's mind begins to wander in a stream-of-consciousness manner, to a question of his own, one he returns to time after time in the novel. He wonders what happens to the ducks in the lagoon near Central Park when winter comes. Here, of course, the ducks are the endangered innocents; ice, winter, and death are the threat; and the man in a truck is the potential savior. The situation is Holden's, as well as the ducks'; through most of the novel he looks for rescue from his wintry life or plans to fly from it. Whereas Holden continues to brood obsessively on the ephemeral (the vanished ducks, with their unconscious associations to his brother's death and to the impending *death* of his own innocence), Horwitz the taxi driver aggressively calls his attention to the fish frozen in the lagoon, which embody constancy: "They live right in the goddam ice. It's their nature, for Chris sake. They get frozen right in one position for the whole winter" (CR, p.82). Horwitz thus establishes that the fish are by nature capable of achieving a complete lack of movement — by a method, however, of no use to Holden, as Horwitz reveals when he adds: "If you was a fish,

Mother Nature'd take care of you, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just die when it gets to be winter, do ya"? (CR, p.83) Unfortunately, Holden is not a fish. Mother Nature has not fulfilled his need. Being warm-blooded, he shares the plight of the ducks; his getting "frozen right in one position for the whole winter" is no solution to his dilemma. On the contrary, when Holden, with wet hair, begins to feel ice forming on the back of his head, he realizes that he could catch pneumonia, a disease of the lungs. The ducks and their pond are symbolic in several ways. Their mysterious perseverance in the face of an inhospitable environment resonates with Holden's understanding of his own situation. In addition, the ducks prove that some vanishings are only temporary. Traumatized and made acutely aware of the fragility of life by his brother Allie's death, Holden is terrified by the idea of change and disappearance. The ducks vanish every winter, but they return every spring, thus symbolizing that change is not permanent, but cyclical. Finally, the pond itself becomes a minor metaphor for the world as Holden sees it, because it is "partly frozen and partly not frozen" (CR, p.154). The pond is in transition between two states, just as Holden is in transition between childhood and adulthood.

The development of the "catcher" theme is most clearly revealed in five related pictures of life, through which Salinger describes the

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

To Holden, innocence means freedom, and he feels the whole adult world is artificial, and the only people who act genuinely are children. That Holden himself sees childhood as the source of good in human life is indicated in the title of the novel. At one point in his wanderings through New York, he sees a father, a mother, and their six-year-old son who had all apparently just come out of church. The parents are talking to one another, paying no attention to the child who is walking in the street,

next to the curb, with traffic zooming by dangerously close. Disturbed and fascinated by the scene, Holden gets close enough to hear the boy singing a song, "[...] if a body catch a body comin' through the rye" (CR, p.173). Late that night, he sneaks into his parents' apartment to see Phoebe and tries to explain to her why he has left school by saying that he did not like anything that was happening at Pencey. She replies by suggesting that perhaps his problem is just that — he does not like "anything, that's happening" (CR, p.169) that he does not want to become *anything* (a lawyer, for instance, like his father), and that he does not want to do *anything*. Holden pauses, and then he tells her what he would like to be. He asks her if she knows the song the boy in the street was singing. Wise child that she is, she of course knows that it is a poem by Robert Burns and, furthermore, that Holden has the words wrong. It actually goes, "if a body meet a body coming through the rye"— a significant difference, because it indicates Holden's subconscious desire to *rewrite*, to change an order of things that he finds unacceptable. His reply to Phoebe is one of the most famous passages in the novel:

> Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids and nobody's around — nobody big, I mean — except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff... [t]hat's *all* I'd do *all* day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye ... I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. (CR, p.173)

This symbol merits close inspection as the source of the book's title. Holden tries to escape the influences of this world by using his imagination to form a fantasy: he attempts to create a *make believe* substitute for the actual world, one in which, even though he has become *big*, he is capable of preserving the state of childhood. As critic Edwards Duane points out, "the narrator in the Burns poem considers kissing the one he meets in the rye."[16] Holden's version changes it from a poem about love to a poem about death. The song asks if it is wrong for two people to have a romantic encounter out in the fields, away from the public eye, even if they don't plan to have a commitment to one another. It is highly ironic that the word *meet* refers to an encounter that leads to recreational sex, because the word that Holden substitutes — catch — takes on the exact opposite meaning in his mind. Salinger presents the pathetic condition of the world through the imagery of falling. Holden's fantasy — the metaphor of the fall ('fall' in the Christian concept is loss of innocence) — standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling over into adulthood is centered on this basic misapprehension of humanity. As *the catcher in the rye*, Holden hopes to protect children from falling and by extension, from growing old and losing their innocence. With this wish Holden enters, although not in a biblical sense but rather in a more symbolical form, the position of a

martyr, which in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* is described as “one who sacrifices his life, station, or what is of great value for the sake of principle or to sustain a cause.” This vision is not the only example of Holden's acts of martyrdom. As Richard H. Rupp points out, "In each relationship Holden is indeed a catcher in the rye, extending his life for others and protecting them."[17] Despite people's phony behavior, he feels a genuine sorrow for them and, even though they hurt him, he constantly forgives them. He consoles his teacher for having to fail him. He agrees to write his roommate Stradlater's English essay homework, just to later get into a fight with him because Stradlater does not like it. This fight does also concern Holden's suspicion of a sexual affair between Stradlater and Jane Gallagher, and one can see Holden as a martyr for the loss of Jane's virginity. He seems to be the only one at Pencey who takes the time to listen to the complaints of the constantly whining Ackley, an annoying boy in Holden's school who appears to be somewhat of a loner.

Holden, in his anger at the phoniness of Pencey Prep and other institutions imposed upon the young by the old, wants a world populated by sweet children whose skates need lacing and by nuns who can teach English literature: “Books not necessarily with a lot of sexy stuff in them, but books with lovers and all in them ” (CR, p.110) and be untouched by the sexual overtones in it. Ironically, Holden is unable to prevent his own

fall, which looms large over him. The problem with all of this for Holden is that he is sixteen; he cannot remain a child — he cannot stand at the edge of the cliff and be the catcher; he must fall off into adulthood. But the painful fact that he has to let go of childhood makes him desperate to seek for a place in adult relations where he can belong and where there is no affectation, where he does not have to become *phony* just like all the rest. Ihab Hassan stresses, "Revulsion and holiness make up the rack on which Salinger's art still twitches."[18] How to maintain a sense of the holy in the midst of obscenity is what Holden is striving for. Like Holden and Seymour, modern man must go his appointed rounds, realizing the closing affirmation at the end of *Seymour: An Introduction*: "all we do our whole lives is go from one little piece of Holy Ground to the next" (p.213), turn from the fallen world of aggression, selfishness and phoniness to a tenuous higher world of (to use Fitzgerald's phrase) "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life."[19] Holden retains an honest sensitivity — a type of *holy innocence* that recurs as one of the central values in Salinger's later short stories.

Holden sees the tension between stasis and motion in terms of a succession of *falls* — all of them leading backwards to the Biblical Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve's fall into the tragic condition of human experience. Holden's dream (like this conventional notion of the

life/death opposition) is informed by the many acts of picking up the fallen — as opposed to catching the falling — that occur throughout the novel. A particularly resonant instance of picking up concerns a phonograph record that Holden buys as a present for Phoebe, but drops and breaks before giving to her. His dream of recapturing the past is summed up in the phonograph record. A phonograph record preserves music *under glass*. The moment is caught, but of course, times change, so the music is never really the same. When the record gets broken, it is the dissolution of a dream. The song can only be remembered, as Allie is remembered, even though time, meanwhile, is working its effect on memory. "The fictional song on this record, by Estelle Fletcher, the authentic Negro vocalist who sings 'Little Shirley Beans' (CR, p.114) concerns a girl who has lost two of her front teeth."[20] Like the fictional fallen record, the girl in the real song falls and is not caught. Given this parallel, it follows that the broken pieces of the record can be understood to represent the fallen. The shattering of the record seems to represent the failure of Holden's attempt to exist in the world on the terms of his idealism: in the park, lonely, depressed, and fearful of illness and possibly even death, the tension between reality and his ideal version of it bring him to the point of nervous breakdown. Significantly, Holden picks up these broken pieces and gives them to Phoebe despite their condition.

Phoebe responds, "I'm saving them" (CR, p.163); the fallen girl can be understood to merit the same treatment: to be picked up and saved. Phoebe takes from him the remnants of his idealism and the fragments of his personality and accepts the burden of *saving the pieces*. Mature in her own way, and at home in the world, she will, through her love, be the means by which Holden will begin to move towards maturity. Her affection allows him to relinquish his plan of escaping to the West and to return home; and her love creates for him a bridge to the environment from which he has been running.

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

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

In Holden's eyes, Mr. Antolini's heroism in this scene qualifies him as "the best teacher ... [he] ever had" (CR, p.174), and even after Antolini attempts to seduce him, Holden retains his respect for his teacher because of Antolini's treatment of James: "I mean I started thinking that even if he [Antolini] was a flit he certainly'd been very nice to me. I thought ... how he was the only guy that'd even gone near that boy James

Castle I told you about when he was dead"(CR, p.195). Given Holden's reaction to Antolini's advances — and his casual use of the epithet *flit* — Holden clearly ascribes conventional notions of corruption to Antolini, yet nonetheless Holden views him as a savior. James Castle's suicide thus deeply informs the development of the theme of falling in *Catcher,* and indeed, Holden conceives of his ideal of the catcher in the rye almost immediately after relating this episode. Considering how falling (death, corruption, and betrayal) thus fuse into the process of salvation, it is significant that at the time of his fall, James is wearing Holden's sweater as if he were disguised, in a sense, as Holden.

From a psychological point of view the fall has been seen to express a dimension of human existence, which is powerfully present from the beginning to the end of life. The fear of falling is one of the earliest forms of anxiety in the human psyche, and it is never fully overcome. In a certain sense, all life is falling — a falling before and away from one's aspirations, one's ideals, one's hopes, and one's intentions. Falling short is a reality even if the ideas of an aboriginal fall and inherited guilt seem unimaginable. The imagery, dealing mainly with the act of falling, functions to suggest the fear of the loss of wholeness of mind, and more traditionally, the fear of aging, of loss of innocence of vision, and finally, of death.

Salinger has provided the reader with a series of episodes, which thematically speaking portray the plight of an idealist who sees the difference between what he would have the world be and the world's reality. One of the best descriptions of such an instant occurs in chapter 5 when Holden is waiting for Ackley to get ready to go to town. He looks out of the window of his room, opens it, and packs a snowball from the snow on the window ledge. He begins to throw it at a parked car, but doesn't because the car looked "so nice and white." Then he aims at a fire hydrant, but stops again because that also looks "too nice and white" (CR, p.36). Finally he decides not to throw it at anything and closes the window. This brief and simple episode illustrates — almost symbolizes — Holden's compulsive longing for perfection. The scene suggests not only that his refusal to blemish the landscape is a simultaneous refusal to endanger that which is pure and innocent — snow, of course, being traditionally a symbol of purity and innocence — and the vision of the snow-covered object satisfies the boy's desire for some state which is perfect, silent, uncorrupted, aesthetically and emotionally complete. What Holden sees through the window is for him a visual embodiment of what he unconsciously seeks: "a state of *being* which is distinct from the flux of this world of *becoming*,"[21] with its corruption, violence, noise, decay, and death. Unlike the snow at Pencey — pure, white, great for making the

snowballs of childish innocence — Holden soon learns that even the snow, general all over New York, is different, it virtually disappears, leaving only a biting chill in its wake. In short, the desolate urban landscape serves both as backdrop and signifier for Holden's personal decline. Holden prefers the innocence and secrets of childhood to the world of getting and spending where writers give up goldfish for Hollywood glamour. When Holden is thinking about his innocent and sweet summer with Jane, he happens also to be sitting in a "vomity-looking chair in the lobby" (CR, p.80). This sort of tension between Holden's often-innocent thoughts, and his increasingly seedy surroundings and experiences is evident throughout the novel.

From the opening pages of this novel the world is seen to be "fragmentary, distorted, and absurd — in Holden's own special vernacular, phony...."[22] It is an environment in which real communication on a sensitive level is impossible, and when Holden unsuccessfully tries to explain his spiritual pain to Sally Hayes, there is certainly more than a coincidental suggestion of Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock in the frustrated cry, "It is impossible to say just what I mean."[23] For example, in the incident when Holden gathers his courage, places a phone call to Sally, and sets a date with her for the afternoon. He tells her about his plan to run away out West and suggests that she join him. She scoffs

at his foolishness and walks out, leaving him again rejected and lonely. When Holden, upset with Sally's rebuff, tells her "you give me a royal pain in the ass" (CR, p.133) he also laughs at her. In the midst of his *madman* apologies, Sally's somewhat pompous indignation undermines his serious intention, and he laughs. Holden comments: "I have one of these very loud, stupid laughs. I mean if I ever sat behind myself in a movie or something, I'd probably lean over and tell myself to please shut up. It made old Sally madder than ever." (CR, p.134) In retrospect Holden is able to see what he only half comprehended when he was with Sally — that he shares the responsibility for this one more failure in his frantic attempt to communicate with people and break out of his isolation. In his retrospective examination of the episode, Holden says: "If you want to know the truth, I don't even know why I started all that stuff with her... I probably wouldn't have taken her even if she'd wanted to go with me" (CR, p.134). Holden thus exposes his own deception and his own phoniness, and is one more step on the way to the kind of involved awareness that will enable him at the end, after he has finished reconstructing his tale, to say:

> About all I know is, I sort of *miss* everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody. (CR, p.214)

In less concrete words: "If one is aware of the human comedy, one must love individual human beings."[24]

As for his language, the symbolic verticality of the 'I' is a wall that divides Holden from others, and he needs to understand the true nature of his being and what is required of him to find a way through that wall. Only through selflessness, the extension of forgiveness and the appeal to others outside the self can people, as Holden realizes – "miss everybody" (CR, p.214). This knowledge is a difficult, profound, and mature knowledge that lies at the novel's center of gravity. It involves both recognition that there can be no self-monopoly of innocence and a discovery that there can be no shield from complicity. Salinger uses an effective method for organizing this narrative of self-discovery. At the core of the story, Holden undergoes an *awakening*, and a startling transformation: from an existence in which his nature is dangerously divided, to a *moment of realization.* To perceive this transformation, one must examine closely the particular dilemma in which Holden finds himself, his various failures to cope with this dilemma, and the peculiar solution he attains by the end of the novel. Three preliminary steps need to be taken before we can catch sight of Salinger in the act of crafting the final episode: we must first examine how he characterized the society which has instilled in Holden his "deformed conscience"; next, we must

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define, from Salinger's perspective, what having a "sound heart"[25] means within this society; and finally we must note the moment in which Holden's sound heart defeats his faulty conscience. Only then will we be ready to walk with Holden up the road from New York to the Psychiatrist's couch and recognize that the journey is more than movement through space — "it is a movement from innocence to knowledge, from self-ignorance to self-awareness, from isolation to involvement" (Personal Portrait, pp.129-37). A closer look at the social conventions of this world reveals that they are generally based on distortions of reality, regulated lies that society instills into each of its members. Holden's almost unbearable sense of loneliness impels him to seek the society of others, until he confronts the dire consequences of their living according to regulated lies, and is driven once more to loneliness. This pendulum movement between these alternatives illustrates the principal dilemma experienced by Holden within the world of the novel: whether to become a part of society by allowing its conventions to prevail within him, or to live according to his own *sound heart* in an essentially lonely existence. During the course of the novel, Holden does manage at times to avoid this dilemma with the companionship of one other person — Phoebe. Throughout most of the novel, from the beginning until the time Holden meets Phoebe at the Zoo,

Salinger develops the conflict existing in Holden's nature between the natural urgings of Holden's *sound heart* and the voice of his *conscience*, which asserts the lies that society has instilled. Faced with his impending movement into the spiritually impaired state of adulthood, Holden considers various means of escape from the world's influences to preserve his childhood. For example, Salinger begins by introducing Holden as a totally naive boy who accepts whatever he is told as true until his own experiences confirm or deny it. Holden admits to lying, but his motives are usually to protect others' feelings or to get out of awkward situations. He doesn't want to tell his elderly teacher the true reasons for ending the visit, so he makes up a plausible excuse to exit gracefully. His lies are either well intentioned or harmless and often absurdly amusing. Holden claims he left his last school because of the behavior of the headmaster, who would politely shake hands with a boy's mother who was "fat or corny-looking, but would spend half an hour with well-to-do, attractive parents" (CR, p.14). As Holden makes his way down the road through various social settings, his most effective defense against people who live falsely with themselves and with others proves to be his capacity to lie. Holden blatantly tells his readers: "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful. If I'm on my way to the store to buy a magazine,

even, and somebody asks me where I'm going, I'm liable to say I'm going to the opera" (CR, p.16).

Having reached the age of sixteen, Holden uses lying as his regular manner for coping with people *in a tight place*, for his experiences thus far in life have taught him no other approach. We begin to perceive how Salinger defined the nature of Holden's *sound heart* as we observe how Holden uses lying and telling the truth, not simply to insure his own survival within a generally false society, but also in sympathetic response to the feelings of others. For example, he tells the reader he likes to travel at night when the train is empty. However, given his mental state on this particular night, he finds that the empty train only reinforces his loneliness. On the train to New York he meets a woman who appears to be the mother of another Pencey boy, Ernest Morrow. Holden knows that Ernest is known to be a typical bully, "the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey" (CR, p.54), but in order to protect Mrs. Morrow from realizing her son's true nature he lies and says that "he's a very sensitive boy" (CR, p.55). Thus, in this act "he sacrifices the truth for the cause of the innocence of maternal love" (Rupp, p.115). When he calls himself Rudolf Schmidt, it is a textbook attempt to run away from his identity. It is significant that he chooses the name of the lowly janitor; he is so depressed he cannot imagine himself to be anyone better. In fact, he

assumes a second identity, even worse than the first; for he tells Mrs. Morrow he is going in to the city to have an operation on "this tiny little tumor on the brain" (CR, p. 58) and that he can't visit her son. For the time being, it would seem that an artificial life with a brain tumor is preferable to his real one. But he remains, however he might wish to the contrary, Holden Caulfield, and the self he is led to discover a human self and an involved self that cannot, finally, break what Hawthorne once called the "magnetic chain of humanity."[26] He cannot deny the love within him when he begins to miss all the people he has told about.

Sexuality and sexual maturity often occupy a young person who may follow his sexual development with both fascination and frustration, since puberty in a way is the ultimate sign of a personal change. Holden's sexual experience is limited — he admits to the reader that he is a virgin. He also admits that he often thinks about sex: "In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw" (CR, p.62). But when he thinks about doing *crumby stuff* he doesn't like the idea. "Sex is something I really don't understand too hot. You never know where the hell you are" (CR, p.63). Late at night in a bar in a swanky hotel, Holden runs into a former schoolmate, now attending another school, who claims to know all about sex, especially homosexuality. He recounts to Holden all the famous people in the United States he is sure are gay or lesbian and tells

him that a person can turn into a homosexual "overnight" (CR, p.14). But his conversation with his old school-friend Luce also reveals that his own conception of sexual relations does not conform to what he appears to find in real life: "You know what the trouble with me is? I can never get really sexy — I mean *really* sexy — with a girl I don't like a lot. I mean I have to *like* her a lot. If I don't, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all. Boy, it really screws up my sex life something awful. My sex life stinks" (CR, pp.147-148). This is not merely a moral condemnation of sex without love, but can be read as his view that such sexual encounters are phony. When a girl tells him to stop, he says, he stops. He never wants to hurt or offend. "I mean – she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is I stop" (CR, p.92). Stradlater, Holden's roommate at Pencey, is self-confident, vain, and sexually experienced. When Holden realizes that Stradlater is dating his childhood-friend Jane Gallagher, a girl he really liked he becomes upset: "She had a lousy childhood. I'm not kidding. That didn't interest Stradlater, though. Only very sexy stuff interested him" (CR, p.32); the affectation in Stradlater's flirtations is sickening to Holden. He starts to question if Stradlater genuinely likes Jane or if all he wants is only to have sex with her, and the argument soon turns into a fistfight. He values sex that comes from caring for another person and rejects its sordidness. In the elevator up to his room at

Edmont Hotel, the elevator man asks Holden if he is "interested in having a good time" (CR, p.90). After a confused moment, Holden realizes that the man, named Maurice, wants to send him a prostitute. Without really thinking, Holden agrees and before the girl arrives, he nervously brushes his teeth and changes his shirt. When she knocks on the door, he trips over his suitcase getting to it. She isn't any older than he —"a skinny little thing with a high, squeaky voice." He has mixed emotions: "I was a little nervous. I was starting to feel pretty sexy and all, but I was a little nervous anyway. If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am" (CR, p.92). He changes his voice and tone, trying to act manly: "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jim Steele" (CR, p.94), but soon begins to realize that he does not want to go through with the deal, although he does not really seem to know why. He hangs her dress in the closet so it won't wrinkle. The act of carefully hanging the girl's dress in the closet becomes a palpable evidence of the artificiality of the situation: "I thought of her going into a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell — I don't know why exactly" (CR, p.96). He then tries to make casual conversation, feeling "much more depressed than sexy." When she approaches with serious intentions, he panics, tells her he has just had "an

operation very recently" (CR, p.96) and therefore is not in the mood but apologizes profusely, and pays her "a five-dollar bill" (CR, p.97) to leave. But the evening's troubles are not over. After a while, the girl comes back with Maurice, asking for more money. At first, the offended Holden tearfully and angrily maintains his rights but he gives in when Maurice starts to beat him up. Afterwards, when he lies on the floor, a funny thing happens that he seems to enjoy the idea of getting beaten up for justice:

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

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

In place of authenticity Holden finds an endless appetite for the glamour of appearance, for the vanity of effect and approval. The story

that he writes for Stradlater about the poems on Allie's baseball mitt is rejected by his "unscrupulous" roommate because it doesn't follow the rules of the English composition assignment: "You don't do one damn thing the way you're supposed to ...Not one damn thing" (CR, p.41) says the infuriated Stradlater. Holden, of course, resists the rules in order to explore his own nascent artistic integrity, while around him those with more claims to respect than the obtuse Stradlater betrays talent and spirit alike by modeling themselves on one another and tries to conform their behavior to the regulations of a standardized *performance.* People like Stradlater imagine that they are not good at writing compositions because they are not sure where the commas go, but Holden knows better: creative writing requires the special relationship between author and subject that Eudora Welty once characterized as "the heart's field."[27] This is true whether one is writing a novel or a "descriptive as hell" (CR, p.28) composition.

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

Radio City which reduces religion to a mere spectacle for cheap entertainment:

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

The movie that follows the stage show (and which has been identified as James Hilton's *Random Harvest*) is an equally commercial deception, an artificial substitute for the love and generosity, which Americans have forgotten how to express. After his experience with the Radio City Christmas, Holden feels more agonizingly frustrated and alone: "I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented ... If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will" (CR, p.141). Later Holden's nausea is total when after leaving Antolini's apartment, as Holden is wandering in a daze about the streets; he comes upon a small vignette that seems to sum up the weird incongruities of modern life as he has encountered it: "[...] I passed these two guys that were unloading this big Christmas tree off a truck. One guy kept saying to the other guy, "Hold the sonuvabitch *up*! Hold it *up* for Chrissake!" (CR, p.196) — The language is not a blessing but a curse. Holden starts to laugh and then he is overcome by nausea —

his dual reaction to the duality of the world. As the humor in his monologue shows, Holden perceives the comic nature of human life, yet this comedy is often the result of a depressing juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, a juxtaposition that is central to Salinger's art. Holden explains that "all the children in our family are atheists" (CR, p.100) because his parents are of different religious persuasions (foreshadowing the Irish-Jewish Glass family). He claims he likes Jesus, but not the Disciples, who were not much use while Jesus was alive and just kept letting him down. Holden used to get into arguments with a Quaker schoolmate about the Disciples and whether or not Judas went to Hell after his betrayal of Jesus. He says he would "bet a thousand bucks that Jesus never sent old Judas to Hell ... any one of the Disciples would've sent him to Hell [...]" (CR, p.100). Holden dislikes the Disciples because of their faithlessness when danger arose. Loyalty for him is a very strong value, for his own predicament stems from the belief that he is letting down his family and is unworthy of their love. Thus Holden's point of view is not clouded by specific religious commitments, and he can love the nuns whom he meets in Grand Central Station even though he feels that Catholicism usually throws up insurmountable barriers to communication. He enjoys talking to two friendly nuns with cheap suitcases that sit next to him at the train lunch counter, teachers on their

way to a new placement. He insists on giving them $10 as a contribution and, grateful that they didn't ask if he was a Catholic. Their humility and gentleness epitomize for him what religion should be. When people begin to talk religion it ends up to be an exercise in hypocrisy, as Holden realizes while listening to Ossenburger's sermon. Just as he loves the nuns for their simplicity and honesty, he sees through the selfish religious pose of "this guy Ossenburger" (CR, p.16) an undertaker who contributes a dormitory wing to Pencey. In his profession, for example, Ossenburger runs discount funeral parlors that take advantage of grieving families, though he stresses to the students that they should have integrity and pray devoutly. More disturbing to Holden than Ossenburger's phoniness, though, is the school's hypocrisy. If Ossenburger hadn't given Pencey money to buy a new dorm, none of the parading or speeches would occur. Holden's idyllic vision gives place to the picture of an irrational universe. The natural chaos of existence, in Salinger's fictional world is not so much seen as a quality or constituent of the cosmos as it is traceable to man's consciousness and the division within. We conclude, therefore, by stressing that Salinger uses Holden's consistent nature to unify the seemingly disparate parts of the novel as establishing in common the resilience of Holden's *sound heart* among the many deforming influences of his world.

Salinger continues Holden's pendulum movement between the alternatives of a distorted life in society and an unbearably lonely existence to emphasize that Holden has persisted thus far in not submitting to a conventional life. After trying unsuccessfully to remain isolated from society, and after experiencing the dangerous inadequacy of society's approach to life, Holden is left by Salinger, in the closing lines of the novel, with a final incident that illustrates for Holden the futility of attempting any retreat from this world. We approach this moment by starting at the point where Holden meets Phoebe in front of the Museum of Art and meets two small boys who ask where the mummies are. As they near the tomb of the mummies, the two boys become frightened and run off, leaving Holden by himself in a setting re-collective of the biblical madman, who withdrew from the world to live "in the tombs" (CR, p.99). Holden experiences a moment of peace in the museum tomb of the mummies. That such a reassuringly ordered universe is an improbable dream is emphasized by the fact that, he sees the words "Fuck you ... written with a red crayon or something, right under the glass part of the wall, under the stones" of the Egyptian tombs. He says that when he dies he is positive that his tombstone will give his name and date of birth and death, and then "right under that it'll say, "Fuck you" (CR, p. 204). Holden now recognizes that he will never be able to escape this

corrupting world, not even within a tomb or a grave — in other words, in death. Once Holden realizes that he cannot escape the world's corrupting influences, he leaves the tomb, goes into the bathroom in the museum, and faints. This event, since it occurs in a bathroom (a place that has earlier been given spiritual significance in *Franny and Zooey*), is meant to signify the fall of Holden's childhood spirit, as is also suggested by the ensuing change in his relationship with Phoebe after he leaves the bathroom and meets her out in front of the museum. This is 'a fortunate fall," (DLB173, Salinger, p.240) which results from his realization of the essential obscenity of life itself, the fall from adolescence into adulthood. But he survives, although he is not sure why: "I was lucky, though. I mean I could've killed myself when I hit the floor, but all I did was sort of land on my side. It was a funny thing, though. I felt better after I passed out. I really did" (CR, p.204). Holden gains this new awareness as a result of "re-experiencing" his own childhood. The solution to Holden's dilemma lies in his being able to perceive, with both sides of his nature, that everything in reality has two faces: that the ice in the lagoon in Central Park can both preserve and kill. When he decides to leave for the West, he wishes first to return Phoebe's Christmas money. Planning to tell her in a note to meet him at the museum, he goes to Phoebe's school, where he experiences the sense of everything being exactly the way it

was when he was a student there. Thus, when he sees a boy going toward the bathroom, he notes that the boy is carrying the same kind of wooden pass that Holden used to carry. And when he sits on the stairs to write the note, he remarks that the stairs smell the same now as they did then. By re-experiencing his childhood in relationship to that of Phoebe's generation, Holden is able to associate childhood, not only with the past, as something waning and ending, but also with the future, as something beginning and becoming. Holden has thus far remained trapped in time, unable to recognize anything permanent within human existence, because of his inability to perceive that both the past and the future may be found in the present moment. Continuing now in this new direction, he eventually reaches such a moment: as he watches Phoebe on the carousel, his sense of the past and his sense of the future become completely integrated, and he finally experiences an immutable conception of childhood. In writing *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger may have been influenced by the writings of Carl Jung, especially *The Integration of the Personality*[28] as is suggested by the many parallels existing between these two works. The carousel, which plays such a central role in the completion of Holden's development, fits Jung's description of a "mandala," a symbol of integration or wholeness: "Mandala, a Sanskrit word, means circle or magic circle. Its symbolism embraces all

concentrically arranged figures, all circular or square circumferences having a center, and all radial or spherical arrangements" (Jung, p.95). As a mandala figure, the carousel would also be included by Jung within a particular class of archetypes, which he labels *archetypes of transformation*:

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

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

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

By the time they reach the carousel and Holden watches Phoebe going around on her first ride, he reveals that he has gained a new

perspective concerning her movements and her eventual fall. Holden sees the harmony and beauty of the universe in a *flash of realization* as he sees Phoebe grabbing for the gold ring on the Carousel. As he watches her, Holden worries that she might fall, but he recognizes now that it would be wrong to interfere: "The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it . . . If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (CR, p.211). Moreover, he has a transcendent moment as he realizes that he cannot protect her from falling — from the carousel but also from the rye field, symbol of childhood innocence. Indeed he is beginning to discern the implausibility of being the "catcher in the rye." By extension, he is perhaps recognizing that he himself must leave the rye field and take his place in the fallen world of adults. What we see here is controlled manipulation of language, compressed metaphor and image, poetic intensity and sensibility. The lyrical in Salinger is not merely a question of texture, image or metaphor, but an informing element of his work, communicating a tragic sense of human destiny, of growing up. Holden's hunting hat, at this moment, reinforces the idea that Holden has become intellectually capable of giving up his desire to be the catcher in the rye. Phoebe put the hat back on Holden's head for a while as it began to rain. When Holden says, as he sits in the downpour — which constitutes a baptism, a rendering free

through knowledge "drenched in Scott Fitzgerald's all-absolving rain"— (*Fitzgerald* 1967, pp.4-6) — that his neck got soaked, he is apparently referring to the now exposed *back* of his neck, the point being made indirectly that Phoebe has put the hat on him with the peak forward, not backwards as a catcher would wear it. The fact that Holden likes to wear his cap with the peak reversed not only provides us with an ironic visual picture of the catcher ideal but also dramatizes for us the very direction of Holden's search. The reversed peak, then, suggests his idealization of and yearning for the childhood condition. It also, both literally and figuratively, emphasizes his own childishness, for it is partly because Allie had died while still a child that death is associated with goodness and innocence in Holden's mind. Thus the reversed peak also reminds us of what must be the outcome if Holden continues to look to the past — his own death. As he comes nearer to literal as well as figurative death in the course of the novel, the death images predominate. The peak of his cap points to the dead civilization of the Egyptians, to the death in life image that Holden imagines for himself in the form of his deaf-mute ideal, and to the mummies that symbolize that state. His fainting spell after visiting the tombs is a figurative death; his meeting with Phoebe outside the museum is the beginning of his re-birth. Holden realizes by this point that it is *bad* to keep a child in childhood. As he has learned from

watching Phoebe's anger wane with the passing of time and events, Phoebe must be allowed to experience her world if her one-sided nature is to develop beyond its present state. It is *bad* to interrupt her movement forward, even though it will result in the eventual fall of her inexperienced, innocent spirit, for the only alternative to this process would be to keep her in the same state, unmoving, un developing, as though she were in a "glass case"— an eternal child, but an incomplete and lifeless human being. Therefore, Holden becomes capable of accepting the necessity for movement within a child's existence. Even though it steadily brings the child into greater contact with corrupting influences, the child will never attain a complete existence unless it continues, *becoming* within this world. This change within Holden's outlook is strikingly illustrated at the end of the novel when all of the movements developed symbolically throughout Holden's narrative are brought together in a manner acceptable to Holden: that is, by the movements of Phoebe on the carousel. Salinger has made "*movement*, usually in a straight line — a *forward* movement suggestive not only of aging, but of proceeding from one state of being to another, and a movement *up* suggesting the uncorrupting isolation of spiritual heights, and *down*, a deeper immersion into worldly experiences."[29] As Phoebe rides upon her horse, her actions illustrate every one of these symbolic

movements (CR, p. 451): she goes forward, a suggestion of her nature changing, but in a circular motion, which keeps her essentially in the same place; and, at the same time, the horse she sits on continues moving her up and down. As a result, all of these characteristic motions, with all of there opposite qualities, are harmoniously blended within the immediate moment for Holden's perception as he watches Phoebe on the carousel riding her horse around. As the various aspects of Phoebe's ride are more closely examined, we discover that Salinger has fashioned the carousel into a symbol embodying such a host of opposite qualities that it approaches, as a literary creation, "the inexhaustible complexity of reality." Having noted the interplay of opposite motions established above, we could look now at a sampling of the other ambiguities associated with the carousel. For example, as Holden approaches the carousel with Phoebe, he remarks that it is playing the same music that it played when he was a child that the little children now riding it were having the same experience he had. Within Holden's immediate perception of the carousel, we find a sense of the past — in Holden's remembrance and re-experience of his own particular childhood — and of the future, as suggested by the presence of the little kids — childhood, in other words, as a general state, is continuously evolving. Salinger uses two colloquial phrases throughout the novel to establish an additional

ambiguity associated with the carousel. At a different time in his narration Holden mentions, "...horsing around . . . it was very childish" (CR, p.35). In other words, "horsing around" is equivalent to playing the fool. Phoebe, on the carousel, is literally "horsing around." As noted earlier, her going *around*, if contrasted with movement in a straight line, suggests permanence in the childhood state she is experiencing at that moment. But a second phrase used in the novel implies a limitation to that experience, for although she may be "horsing around;" she is also, at the same time, "riding for a fall." The song that the carousel plays for the children as Phoebe first rides is "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" (CR, p.211) (a title that brings to mind those earlier references to the debilitating effect of cigarette smoke upon one's breath, or spirit). Thus, the carousel, as a symbol of enduring childhood, plays a song suggestive of its eventual corruption. As noted before, Phoebe's going *around*, rather than straight ahead, suggests that she exists, while on the carousel, "within an unchanging, timeless state." However, as her name establishes, Phoebe may be associated with the moon — and as the moon goes *around*, it constantly changes, moving through phases that have been used for ages as a standard of time. Furthermore, as Hazle Weatherfield, she was associated with dry weather; as Phoebe, however, she is also related to wet weather, again through her connection with the moon, which has

been traditionally viewed as having control over the rain. Two colors are brought together as Phoebe rides the carousel: blue and brown. Since she is still an innocent child, the blue of her coat might possibly suggest the height at which she exists in spirit: above the earth, in the sky, or the heavens — where one would also see the moon; the horse she rides is brown, a color we may associate with the earth. If these two colors are indeed suggestive of the heavens and the earth, then they might be viewed together as another effective illustration of the dependency of human existence upon a blending of spirit and matter. As a result, the dilemma that he has faced throughout his narration is resolved, for he is capable now, as he sits in the rain, of accepting the world as it is. Holden feels a profound harmony between himself and the world. Salinger uses Holden's "aesthetic" response to Phoebe on the carousel to dramatize the resolution of Holden's dilemma: "the finally achieved integration of Holden's divided nature." Holden reveals that his response at this moment is an *aesthetic* one: he "felt so damn happy" because "she looked so damn nice" (CR, p.213). William Glasser notes that an "aesthetic response is, by nature, a blending of sense perception, emotion, and intellect."[30] It is not dependent upon one's being conscious of a reason for responding so — as Holden says, "I don't know why." It is elicited only when one perceives something, which gives pleasure. His consolation is a truer

vision — *a restructured vision* (Redpath, p.54) and the most important kind of freedom — an internal one. In watching Phoebe go round and round on the carrousel, in effect going nowhere, he sees her "in the timeless continuum of art on the verge of changing, yet unchanging, forever safe, forever loving, and forever innocent." Holden's progress at the end of the novel is arguably elusive. He is unable to promise that he will apply himself in school; he claims he "misses" everyone he told about, even the mean people, suggesting that he still mourns the passage of time. As Alan W. Watts explains it in *The Way of Zen*,

> When the disciple comes to the final point where the koan absolutely refuses to be grasped, he comes also to the realization that life can never be grasped, never possessed or made to stay still. Whereupon he 'lets go,' and this letting go is the acceptance of life as life...."[31]

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

On the final page, Holden refers to his becoming sick after he went home. The nature of Holden's sickness was clarified at the beginning of the novel, for when Holden introduced his narrative from the unidentified place he is in, he refers again to his loss of breath from smoking too much and to his having grown considerably in height during the previous year: "That's also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these god dam checkups and stuff" (CR, p.5). Having finally attained a solution to

his dilemma, Holden is now attempting to recover, at least partially, from the particular physical impairment caused by his experience of growing up within a corrupting world. He is out West — but no longer wishing to isolate himself from people — because the dry and sunny climate is beneficial to his immediate condition. Avoiding the rain temporarily, apparently in a sanatorium for lung diseases, Holden is recovering from his loss of breath.

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

For the first time and in the mirror of his own *composition* Holden sees himself with clarity. Despite the contrariness of his signing-off —"I'm sorry I told so many people about it" (CR, p.214) — his *composition* represents nothing less than a journey to psychological health. In the end, he has not accepted the falseness of society, instead,

we find him still in that original position against it, except that he consciously chooses it but in a healthier way. Its direction, in other words, is toward family and community, reconstructed and redefined. Salinger's gospel is a positive one, showing "how exposure of the sensitive soul to the darkness of this present age can lead not only to sickness but also to healing."[32] To the psychiatrist's question whether he is going to apply himself when he gets back to school, his answer is: "It's such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it" (CR, p.213). Holden seems to imply that he knows what he is doing only at the exact moment he is doing it, not at some point in some arbitrarily designated future. He knows that the reality outside the asylum is in a state of flux, in a state of constant change, and one cannot approach it with preconceived notions if one is honest. One has to face each situation as one encounters. Salinger's protagonists manage to attain in their own fashion some freedom in the blending of self and other, the removal of abstraction and analysis, the avoidance of criticism, the absorption in the moment.

The ambiguity of the novel's ending itself provides "a kind of answer in its fusion of the binary oppositions"[33] through which we come to understand Holden. Critics sensitive to this quality of blurring have found insight in the perspective of Zen Buddhism, In their pioneering

study "Zen and Salinger," Bernice and Sanford Goldstein observe "Holden's Zen-like identification with the very people he criticizes" (p.68). They also point to the underlying unity in the novel, which according to Zen master Daisetz Suzuki, "Takes us to an absolute realm wherein there are no antitheses of any sort."[34] It seems a striking evocation of what George Eliot called: "A keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, which if we had them would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat and cause us to die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."[35] Such "lambent moments," are a novelist's equivalent of "the poet's lyric impulse."[36] We are ultimately left with "the awareness of something not argued over but directly apprehended" (*A Moving Target*, p.190). Perhaps this open-ended effect, which forces the reader to decide Holden's future, is one of the keys to his popularity and the continuation of what Holden Caulfield becomes. His compassion is only a fumbling awareness, about the loss of a dream or an illusion; the belief that he was a catcher in the rye. Holden weeps for the loss of innocence but it is however not because of the transformation from child-like goodness to adolescent depravity. It is rather, the growing awareness of darkness, of the evil in man's heart that was present in the children all along. To acknowledge the presence of this darkness in one's own heart is a necessary but devastating condition of growing up, of

becoming fully and yet flawed human. Innocence, Holden realizes, is the fruit of the disciplined self that has come truly to understand itself. Perhaps, this is the type of "wise innocence"[37] — defined here as an effort to live one's life untainted by compromise and untouched by complexity, which great literature may restore to us.

The novel's remarkable achievement is its imagistic pattern. Through a wide range of images, the novel conveys the complexity of Holden's motivation and experience. The individual grows up in an illusory world built through his senses and rational intellect. Ever since he acquired rational consciousness, he has assumed the role of a pattern maker. Holden is an extreme case of autonomous consciousness seeking to preserve itself at all costs. But he ultimately sees a cosmic pattern emerging and setting at naught his dogmatic imposition, and realizing the authentic bond in the relationship of individual man to individual man. Holden, as he quests for order and pattern is faced with a reality altogether different from his original conception of it. Moreover, the privileges of authorship, in addition, has given Holden his occasion for the first time to illicit pattern and order, from what throughout his troubled young life has overwhelmingly been flux and loss. Writing, too, has ended his isolation by giving him access to a community that will read and respond to him. Above all, he has achieved his desire to be a

true artist, writing from the fullest wellsprings of his being and so "un-prostituted" — the term he uses about his Hollywood screenwriter brother, D.B. Acknowledging the *author* in Holden thus becomes a critical necessity if we are to understand the full measure of both the tale he tells and of himself as teller. Holden is talking, not simply to an analyst, but to the reader and his reason for doing so was established earlier by Mr. Antolini, when he described for Holden "the kind of information that will be very, very dear to your heart" (CR, p.189). Holden will discover, Mr. Antolini says, that many people before him have also been troubled and confused by human behavior and by the corruption of the human spirit from experiencing this world. Fortunately, Mr. Antolini tells him, some of them wrote down their troubled thoughts and feelings: "You'll learn from them — if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you" (CR, p.189). Holden is talking directly to anyone who might be as troubled as he was about the nature of this world in which everyone exists. He offers his narration of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a record of his troubles for anyone who might wish to learn from his experiences. As Mr. Antolini says, "it's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry" (CR, p.189).

The abiding value of Salinger lies in this, that beyond conclusions, and arguments, he was passionately interested in the mystery of *existence.* This mystery he finds as every man must find, in his own way. "Intimations of Mystery"[38] are what the present times need. The seeing or "epiphany' as Joyce[39] stated, should be the adequate understanding of a work of art, where readers are left with suggestions rather than answers. We live along the lines of the book about the problems of growing up and experience in its pattern a total explanation. Yet not everyone sees the same outlines, hence, the various opinions; the result is self-evidently like that of poetry. Therefore music serves ultimately as a metaphor for the achievement of the novel as a whole. Booth remarks perceptively: "Wherever understanding is maimed, our life is threatened; wherever it is achieved, our life is enhanced."[40]

Holden and Phoebe, Franny and Zooey, Esme and De Daumier-Smith with their intuitive vision of reality are the messengers of light in a world of gloom and darkness. What the world needs is a Holden-like concern, a concern for the good of all, and a reaffirmation of faith and order on moral and spiritual levels. Holden's homiletic vision a nostalgic longing for the innocence of children is often blurred by the agonizing awareness of the nightmares of the present. Salinger's artistic responsibility hints at a kind of moral accountability to this age and to

fellowmen whose conscience he is supposed to awaken. Camus has said, "The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread"[41] no less is true of Salinger's art. This interpretation is one of an infinite number of possibilities in the vast interplay of "possibilities we call reality" (Redpath, p. 37). The readers' subjectivity does not close the novel to other interpretations, but ensures that the interpretive quest opens up, takes on new twists and turns in the "labyrinth that is truth" (Redpath, p. 38).

## End Notes

[1] Dan Wakefield, "The Search for Love," in *Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait*, Ed., Henry Anatole Grunwald (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 180.

[2] Mario D'Avanzo, "Gatsby and Holden Caulfield" *Fitzgerald Newsletter* (Summer 1967), pp.4-6, henceforth cited Fitzgerald, 1967.

[3] June Edwards, *Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools: Religion, Morality, and Literature*, Ed., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998 Mahwah, New Jersey London. Pp.39-42. A shorter version of this chapter was published in 1983 as "What's moral about 'The catcher in the rye'?" *English Journal*, 72 (4).

[4] Alfred Kazin. *Harper,* Oct. 1959, p. 130.

[5] Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *The Fiction of J.D. Salinger* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p.3. See also *For Esme with Love and Squalor* (New Yorker XXV1, 8 April), pp.28-36.

[6] David L. Stevenson, *Nation.* March 9, 1957. p. 216.

[7] Warren French, *J.D. Salinger, Revisited* (Twayne Publishers 1988), pp. 66-67, henceforth cited as French.

[8] Irving Malin, *New American Gothic* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p.32.

[9] To borrow the title of Helen Mondloch, "Squalor and Redemption: The Age of Salinger." *World and I.* Volume: 18. 11. November 2003.

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

[11] "In Memoriam: Allie Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*," in *Mosaic,* Vol. XV, No. 1. Winter, 1982, pp. 129-40.

[12] Carl F. Strauch, "Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure —A Reading of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 2. Winter 1961, pp.5-30.

[13] Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., "J.D.Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff," in *Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait,* Ed., Henry Anatole Grunwald (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 197, henceforth cited as Personal Portrait.

[14] "The Psychological Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye.*" *PMLA* 89, No.5. October 1974, pp.1065-74.

[15] Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller Jr. "J.D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff" *Western Humanities Review* 10:2. Spring 1956, pp. 129-37.

[16] Edwards, Duane, "Don't Ever Tell Anybody Anything." *Holden Caulfield.* Ed., Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1990), pp. 105-13.

[17] Richard H. Rupp, *Celebration in Postwar American Fiction 1945-1967* (University of Miami Press. 1970), p. 115, henceforth cited Rupp.

[18] Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 288.

[19] John Berryman's definition of a masterpiece (found in his excellent essay on "Gatsby" in The Freedom of the Poet) Quoted in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Novelists since World War 11* Volume 173 *J.D. Salinger*, by Warren French (University of Wales, Swansea), p.241, henceforth cited as DLB 173, Salinger.

[20] Spike Jones, "All I Want for Christmas (Is My Two Front Teeth)" Don Gardner. Warner Brothers Music, 1947. Quoted in "The Burning Carousel and the Carnivalesque: Subversion and Transcendence at the Close of the Catcher in the Rye" Journal article by Yasuhiro Takeuchi; *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 34, 2002.

[21] Alfred Adler, *The Problem Child* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963). R. J. Huber, "Adlerian Theory and *The Catcher in the Rye*" From *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Non-Freudians*, a *Casebook*, Ed., Joseph Natoli (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1984), pp. 43-52 clearly summarized Adler's statement. See also J. Irving, "*The Catcher in the Rye*: An Adlerian Interpretation," *Journal of Individual Psychology* 32 (1976), pp. 81-92. "Holden Caulfield, Self-Appointed Catcher in the Rye: Some Additional Thoughts." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 33(1977), pp. 250-56.

[22] David D. Galloway, "The Love Ethic" in *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* (revised edition, University of Texas Press, 1970), pp. 140-69.

[23] *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* T.S.Eliot (Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York 1936), p.6 *Prufrock and other Observations* "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

[24] Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *The Fiction of J.D. Salinger* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), pp. 28-31.

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

"Introduction" to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. xvi.

[26] Martin Green, in his *Reappraisals: Some Commonsense Readings in American Literature* (reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.; © 1965, 1963, by Martin Green), Norton, 1965, pp. 197-210.

[27] Sanford Pinsker, *Innocence under Pressure* (Twayne Publishers NY 1993), p.43.

[28] Carl Jung, *The Integration of the Personality* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939). All subsequent citations are parenthetically cited Jung.

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

[30] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans., by Reginald Snell (Yale University Press, 1954), p. 99. See also William Glasser, *Michigan Quarterly Review* 15 (1976), pp.432- 57.

[31] Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Pantheon, 1957), p. 75.

[32] Kenneth Hamilton, *J.D. Salinger: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 1967), p. 39.

[33] For a discussion of binary oppositions and Western thought, see Louis Montrose, "New Historicisms" *Redrawing the Boundaries* Ed., Stephen Greenblatt and Giles B. Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992 p.396), pp.392-418.

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

[35] Kerry McSweeney, "Salinger Revisited," in *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1. Spring 1978, pp. 61-8.

[36] William Golding, "Belief and Creativity" *A Moving Target* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p.196, henceforth cited as *A Moving Target.*

[37] *Span Magazine*, "Literature in a Technological Age." April 1986. This essay by Cleanth Brooks is excerpted from the Jefferson Lecture in 1985.

[38] Quoted by Anthony Storr in the essay "Intimations of Mystery" in *William Golding: The Man and his Books* by John Carey, p.145.

[39] Sydney Bolt. *A Preface to James Joyce,* Preface Books (Longman, 1981), P.36. There is a detailed discussion of the term 'epiphany.'

[40] Wayne Booth, *Critical Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) Quoted by Philip Redpath in *William Golding: A Structural Reading of his Fiction*, p.216.

[41] Albert Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans., Justin O'Brien (1942; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.112.

## Chapter II

### The New American Adam: Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)

Praised for his vision, his ear for detail, his humor, and the masterful artistry of his prose, Saul Bellow, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, is among the major representatives of Jewish-American writers. In this capacity Bellow:

> Brings to the post war scene a vision of life which incorporates his Jewish heritage, the long, historical experience with suffering, scorn, rejection, and the tempering of the soul to confront, live with and *transcend* the suffering and trouble in the very atmosphere of human existence.[1] [Emphasis added]

Although he most often writes about Jewish-American immigrants or their children, the scope of his fiction is universal. The Swedish Academy praised Bellow for creating stories about:

> A man who keeps on trying to find a foothold during his wanderings in our tottering world, one who can never relinquish his faith that the value of a life depends on its dignity, not on its success, and that the truth must triumph at last, simply because it demands everything except — triumphs. That is the way of thinking in which Saul Bellow's 'anti-heroes' have their foundation and acquire their lasting stature.[2]

*The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Herzog* (1964) and *Mr Sammler's Planet* (1970) — each won the National Book award. *The Adventures of Augie March* is the third of Bellow's novel and is his celebration of the American experience. "Are human beings free moral

agents capable of real choice, or merely products of biology, culture and history"? [3] This is the question that Augie March puts to himself in *The Adventures of Augie March*. While the nature of Augie's quest grows out of Bellow's earlier fiction, the shape of his third novel is a marked departure from the tight formal construction of his two prior books *Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947). *The Adventures of Augie March* was a breakthrough, a surge of creative energy, different in tone and style. The book is a picaresque narrative chronicling the adventures of Augie from his childhood in Chicago to his adult years in Mexico and Europe. "*Dangling Man* hardly ventured beyond the consciousness of its narrator; *Augie March* covers continents and the whole range of American society."[4] Robert Penn Warren called it "rich, various, fascinating, and important."[5]

Bellow began his fiction-writing career by arguing against the values of an established tradition, that which admired physical strength and stoicism. He advocated an alternative approach, which commended the virtues associated with the heart and the emotions. Bellow has never diverged very far from this central position, since the idea of exploring the inner emotions of his characters and providing the justifications for their humanistic feelings remain his basic themes. Bellow finds a chance for "selfhood" in the modern world despite literary realism's "myth of the

diminished man and disparagement of modern civilization." His strongly felt belief in the possibility of maintaining selfhood in a world that levels individualism is a major theme throughout his work. He immerses his protagonists in "a multiplication of facts and sensations,"[6] which threatens to suffocate their selfhood.

In his essay *Some Notes on Recent American Fiction*, Bellow writes

> Destroying the enemy — false conceptions of self — brought on by Christianity and its successors in the Enlightenment — are not enough. The old idea of the self has been abandoned, and we are in need of knowing who we are and what we are. Modern writers do not know, argues Bellow, and the mystery remains.[7]

Daniel Fuchs comments: "Bellow sees his characters in their personal realities, sees them as selves, or better, souls, whose thoughts move with the inevitability of emotion."[8] *The Adventures of Augie March* is about the formation of an identity, of a 'soul'. Like Keats, he is certain of nothing but "the holiness of the heart's affection;" he has not lost belief in the self or even the soul (Fuchs, p. 9).

Thoughtful yet humorous, his work pursues the timely question of what it is to be fully human in an increasingly impersonal and mechanistic world. Bellow firmly rejects the modern concept of the absurdity of human existence. Instead, his protagonists struggle for a kind of spiritual balance to enable them to exert the will and imagination

necessary to control their lives. Bellow's whole effort has been toward the restoration of a balance in modern consciousness. Literature, Bellow believes, interprets the chaos of life, gives it meaning. Chester E. Eisinger provides an excellent summary: "[Bellow] Knows that man is less than what the Golden Age promised us, but he refuses to believe that man is nothing. He is something, Bellow says, and saying it he performs an act of faith."[9]

In Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man,* his main character, Joseph, recognizes that he shares his lot with all mankind and poses the question, "How should a good man live; what might he do? And plans a colony of the spirit or a group whose covenants would forbid spite, bloodiness, and cruelty."[10] This question reverberates throughout Bellow's novels, as the protagonists embark on quests to discover the meaning and purpose of their existence searching for the ground of moral and intellectual truth upon which to base their conduct in the world. When Bellow's Joseph complains that emotion, inner life, is suppressed in "an era of hard boiled-dom" (DM, p.9), he is valuing emotion in a way, which makes sense when describing Bellow's career as a whole. "Full of modern disgust and self-pity, he is cast as a victim, yet he has the energy to write in the confessional style, and the principal virtue of the psychological age in which he is living — honesty" (Fuchs, p.11). Here is

established, Bellow's first link to the Romantic 'I' of Goethe and Wordsworth, "who felt no shame at making a record of their inward transactions" (DM, p.9). Similarly, in *The Victim*, the central character overcomes apathy in a tawdry urban landscape. Yet the real break from modernist apathy occurs in *Augie March*, for Augie does not have to choose dignity; it is the quality of the world he inhabits. The city, the neighbourhood, the family, and the affair — all have reality. In the opening pages Augie states the principle clearly and never loses sight of it:

> What did Danton lose his head for, or why was there a Napoleon, if it wasn't to make a nobility of us all? And this universal eligibility to be noble, taught everywhere, was what gave Simon airs of honor.... (AM, p.29)

Simon is Augie's older brother, but "the universal eligibility to be noble" is a statement of the American dream. All of Bellow's heroes want to embody what in the simplest terms can be called "true nobility." Both Simon and Augie don't "make it". But that is not the point, for it is an ideal not a promise. Bellow has sought in his fiction for ways to recover the civilized self, assuming that, for all that has gone wrong with our civilization, we can still learn within its context how to live decent, satisfying really human lives showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections. Precisely, revision, not rejection or

revolution, has characterized the relationship of Bellow's fiction to both literary and moral traditions.

In *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow employs his usual themes, characters, and images, but he is able to transform — or, better yet, expand — them so that they assume new life. In his introduction to *Great Jewish Short Stories*[11] Bellow isolates two fundamental qualities of the Jewish imagination. One quality is the tendency "to over humanize everything, to invest all things in the universe with intense human meaning." In an interesting scene, Thea accuses Augie of over humanizing everything: "Oh, you screwball! You get human affection mixed up with everything, like a savage. Keep your silly feelings to yourself" (AM, p.347). The other is "the ability to respond to the human condition in a manner that teeters between laughter and trembling." The Jewish imagination accepts the predicament in which all mankind (and Jews, specially) finds itself in and yet it opposes this terrible fact a comic sense of life. Starting with *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow began to write a new kind of novel, which opened into an exuberant and positive comedy. Augie acknowledges the way in which most people accept the terrible human condition. At the end of his adventures, Augie does not learn how to act, but he does have a faint inkling of why Jacqueline with her dream of Mexico refuses to lead a "disappointed life" and why he

himself travels all through Europe: "That's the animal ridens in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up" (AM, p.536). The Jewish comic sense of life is mysterious and inexplicable and he cannot understand its secret origins. It is this bounteous humor that loudly and emphatically asserts the difference between Bellow's first two novels and *The Adventures of Augie March.* Augie is aware of the darkness in which mankind exists; he knows about human disappointment and deformation, and yet he bounces merrily along. His laughter and his hope and his joy issue from a sweeping "comic vision of life, which embraces and reconciles the tragic sense and then *transcends* it."[12] This shift to comedy also marks the beginning of a new phase that was to give a significant dimension to Bellow's concern with the problem of affirmation. The most distinctively Jewish element in the novel is Augie's new attitude toward experience in America:

> Instead of the blindness of affirmation and the poverty of rejection, Augie March rises from the streets of the modern city to encounter the reality of experience with an attitude of satirical acceptance, ironic affirmation, and comic transcendence of affirmation and rejection.[13]

In *The Writer as Moralist* Bellow argues:

> Either we want life to continue or we do not . . . If we do want it to continue . . . in what form shall life be justified? To answer this question is the writer's moral Function.[14]

This is Bellow's main question, and his answer is an anguished *yes*. Augie, like all Bellow heroes, is his representative in determining whether life can go on. Augie articulates the dilemma:

> [There's] too much history,... too much example, too much influence, too many guys who tell you to be as they are, and all this hugeness, abundance, turbulence, Niagara Falls torrent. (AM, p. 455)

Bellow reassesses the human situation within this torrent. In an article in the *New York Times Book Review* Bellow said that the writing of Augie March had been a spontaneous act: "It just came to me...the great pleasure of the book was that it came easily. All I had to do was be there with buckets to catch it. That's why the form is loose."[15] To Bernard Kalb, Bellow revealed the sense of freedom he experienced:

> In 'Augie' one of my great pleasures was having the ideas taken away from me, as it were, by the characters. They demanded to have their own existence. It was liberation for me.[16]

Writing *Augie March* was, for Bellow, a freeing of his energies, an act of liberation from certain artistic inhibitions and repressions, a discovery of the "true country of his fiction, its shape and substance" (Rodrigues, p.75). The novel is Augie's "song of the open road, a song of himself, a celebration of America with its variety." (Rodrigues, p.75) Bellow favours a prose style in which he can "talk his characters into existence," (Warren, pp.22-23) reflecting his casual dependence on plot

and his emphasis on dialogue, monologue, and *inner voice.* As his protagonists speak to each other and to themselves, the reader is drawn into their struggles with self and society.

The open-endedness of the novel accounts for its episodic character, its length, and the unrelatedness of several adventures to the main theme. The "repressive manner of the earlier novels", Bellow said, could not encompass "the variety of things I knew intimately in Chicago as the son of immigrants."[17] But he felt he had gone *too far* in throwing off restraints, an awareness that accounts for flaws in the novel, perhaps an overextension of its imaginative reach. These flaws cause a thematic and structural imbalance that several critics have noted. Leslie Fiedler called it "overly expansive"[18] and Richard Chase felt disappointed because Augie was left "wavering and dangling at the end."[19] Such criticism is valid, but is likely to destroy the richness of experience and solidity of specification. It is, therefore, best to treat the novel on its own terms and to see it as an important stage in the development of the style and manner for which Bellow was to receive the praises of critics.

*The Adventures of Augie March* must be read as a multilevel work if one is to comprehend its significance fully. First, exploiting the freedom of the picaresque form, Bellow created an expansive narrative style new to American fiction in the 1950s. While Saul Bellow was not

the first to reintroduce the picaresque, having been preceded by J.D. Salinger with *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Ralph Ellison with *Invisible Man* (1952), he was the first to consciously choose the genre as a frame for his narrative. Bellow commented on the kind of form he had used: "I kicked over the traces, wrote catch-as-catch-can, picaresque. I took my chance." (Breit, 1953, p.24) The archetypal character isolated by R.W.B. Lewis in his review of nineteenth-century American literature was:

> The image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry ... an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources where society is deemed the element which provides experience.[20]

Lewis contends that the *The Adventures of Augie March* is written in the tradition of the earlier American Adamic myth because Augie "is as youthful, innocent, optimistic, and adventurous as are the earlier Adams" (p.198) and "takes on as much of the world as is available to him, without ever fully submitting to any of the world's determining categories." He "struggles tirelessly . . . to realize the full potentialities of the classic figure [of] the simple genuine self against the whole world" (p.198). But it would be incorrect to assume that *Augie March* is a picaresque novel in the purest sense of the term. It is a study in the

"spiritual picaresque"[21] (picaresque, meaning *a novel of the road*) a later form of the traditional Bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel in which the pícaro is 'consciousness' rather than simply a mindless rogue. As such Bellow attempts to reconcile the Bildungsroman and picaresque elements in this novel of "mixed intentions" (Fuchs, p.59) by making the rogue to develop, and move through its first illusion to the truth which, at the end of the road, it discovers to be its fate. Theologian Carol Christ makes a distinction between the *social quest* and the *spiritual quest* by defining the social quest (corresponding in function to the Bildungsroman) as a "search for self in which the protagonist begins in alienation and seeks integration into a human community where he or she can develop more fully and the spiritual quest as the self's journey in relation to cosmic power or powers. Often interior, it may also have communal dimensions."[22]

One way of making this distinction is to perceive Bellow's attitude to the various settings in the novel. Unlike his earlier novels, which are specifically set in Chicago and New York *Augie March* does not limit its action to one particular place. Augie characterizes himself as "an American, Chicago born" (AM, p. 3) and describes his upbringing in Chicago. Chicago is his home, but the willingness to roam feeds his desire to learn from the chaos surrounding him. He glories in urban life

because it is chaotic and rootless, and because it allows him to be the sole judge of what he can do with his life. Very soon, he moves into wider circles of experience, which take him to New York, Mexico City, Paris, and other places. The change of settings contributes significantly to the shaping of Augie's consciousness and character so much so that after his Mexican interlude it is not difficult to see that a substantial change has affected his personality. But in spite of the number of experiences that he undergoes in different places his quest is essentially directed at his own self. The "change he seeks is not in his environment but in himself."[23] He is, thus, different from the hero of the picaresque novel who, in Robert Alter's words, "is what he is; sometimes splendidly, sometimes ignominiously, but always confidently...himself."[24] That Augie has a greater affinity with the Bildungsroman can be seen from the fact that Augie views his life from an altered perspective, from the point of view of a changed person. Expressing his realization that reality is so complex that it cannot be defined with certainty he confesses, "You do all you can to humanize and familiarize the world, and suddenly it becomes more strange than ever... I see this now. At that time not" (AM, p. 285).

Although the novel concludes with Augie's initial steps toward self-assessment, the overall tone that informs the narrative is that of a man who has retrospectively learned from his experiences or from the

reflections that the experiences have inspired. Bellow is constantly aware of the dualities of existence and appearances. He suggests that the quest for truth is difficult, ever-present task — one must take into account various deceptions. Augie comes to realize through experience that it is not possible to come to terms with life unless the darkness beneath social niceties is perceived and experienced. For example, his contemptuous attitude to social esteem is tinged by his insight into its veneer and artificiality:

> It takes some of us a long time to find out what the price is of being in nature, and what the facts are about your tenure. How long it takes depends on how swiftly the social sugars dissolve. But when at last they do dissolve there's a different taste in your mouth, bringing different news, which registers with dark astonishment and fills your eyes. And this different news is that from vast existence in some way you rise up and at any moment you may go back. Any moment; the very next, maybe (AM, p.362)

Such an experience is a necessary precondition for the *education* of the Bildungsroman hero because it makes him aware of the variety and depth of life. In the frame of reference to Bellow's novels, such an understanding is an important stage in the process of self-discovery in which the protagonist is involved. Augie's retrospection is set forth in twenty-six chapters. The first four chapters, which constitute a block by themselves, concentrate on Augie's childhood. The early part of the story contains stories of the lives of several Jewish families, Augie's own

March family, especially his beloved and colourful Grandmother Lausch, the Einhorns, and the wealthy Magnus family into which Augie's brother Simon marries. Chapter 8 deals with the Renling phase in Augie's life. The first thirteen chapters, which make up half the novel, record the influences on Augie's life, the varieties of people and places he is involved with, and the picaresque adventures he experiences.

Although born into poverty, with two brothers, one of them mentally handicapped and a *weak-minded* mother, Augie refuses to be shaped by his circumstances or environment, trying on and casting off a wild variety of occupations, experiences, and associations in his quest for identity and freedom. In an article for *The Guardian* in 1995, British writer Martin Amis summed up Augie's vocational adventures:

> During the course of the novel Augie becomes (in order) a handbill-distributor, a paperboy, a dime store packer, a news-vendor, a Christmas extra in a toy department, a flower-deliverer, a butler, a shoe-salesman, a saddle-shop floorwalker, a hawker of rubberised paint, a dog-washer, a book-swiper, a coal-yard helper, a housing surveyor, a union organiser, an animal-trainer, a gambler, a literary researcher, a salesman of business machines, a sailor, and a middleman of a war profiteer.[25]

In short, Augie is trying on identities. He is not interested in a career but in experience. When the Depression begins to affect everyone, he resorts to occupations that are outside the law, but his sense of basic morality is always strong. Despite the squalor of his surroundings and the

vexations of the city, Augie maintains an optimistic view and is unbeaten by life. As he says, he "lacked the true sense of being a criminal, the sense that [he] was on the wrong side of the universal wide line with the worse or weaker part of humankind" (AM, p.45). It simply "wasn't in [his] nature to fatigue [himself] with worry" (AM, p.12). In incident after incident the reader perceives that Augie's dormant integrity comes in the way of his total reliance on his "reality instructors" – as a budding crook he is a failure, and as a young businessman selling newspapers at a Chicago train station he finds it hard to cheat his customers as instructed. Augie's inability to accept the Machiavellian stratagems leads him to confess, subsequently, that his character, his sensitive *good* nature, is his fate. A remarkable series of strong characters try to take him over and fit him into their schemes. These schemes include everything from handling prize-fighters, stealing books, smuggling immigrants and selling army surplus in Europe, to organizing new CIO unions, guarding Trotsky in Mexico, training a moody eagle Caligula, to hunt giant lizards and regenerating mankind by abolishing boredom. The projects are either accompanied or interrupted by affairs with strong-willed women who are wonderful lovers and often very rich besides. In the first eight chapters of the novel, they offer Augie the lessons of power as the ultimate and only response to the human condition. The next four chapters, relatively short,

deal chiefly with Augie's talks with his friends in Chicago. Chapter 25 focuses on Augie's experiences during the war and the novel ends with a chapter about Augie's travels in postwar Europe.

Augie, the omniscient narrator, asserts, in the novel's celebratory beginning:

> I am an American, Chicago-born — Chicago, that somber city — and go at things as I have taught myself, free style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. (AM, p.3)

And it is soon clear that Augie realizes that America and adventure go together, an identification, which functions as both method and insight. As an idealistic youth, Augie is optimistic about his future and approaches all prospective experiences with an unflagging adventurousness. The only qualification to his enthusiasm is that he questions how his desires can be fulfilled in Chicago, "that sombre city" (AM, p.3). As an Adamic figure, Augie regrets the fact that Chicago, with its deep city vexation and deep city aims, disallows "the nature-painted times, like the pastoral of Sicilian shepherd lovers. He regrets that the city and the crowd yield results with . . . difficulty" (AM, p.84) for what he desires is happiness, "the misery-antidote" (AM, p.84), which he fails to discern in Chicago. Augie longed very much for excitement, and he sees himself as an innocent youth untouched by the vice and shortcomings of

the city or "the weariness of maturity" (AM, p.84). There is no one-way of seeing Chicago. The approach to the city, via Gary, is lyrically evoked, compared to the "like greatness of place" (AM, p.90) of winter London and Alpine Torino. Despite all the teeming life it contains, or because of it, Chicago itself is not particularly the subject of lyrical effects. The description of the city is more threatening than anything else. Augie recalls that the "EL pillars" are "like a terribly conceived church of madmen" where, "worshippers crawl their carts of rags and bones" (AM, p. 330). The "insight is Blakean" (Fuchs, p.74):

> And sometimes misery came over me to feel that I myself was the creation of such places. How is it that human beings will submit to the gyps of previous history while mere creatures look with their original eyes? (AM, p.330)

And even more sombrely, alone, in the hospital, recuperating from his Bizocho hernia (always the mixture of the ridiculous and the serious), Augie contemplates Chicago as "the Ezekiel cauldron of wrath; stoked with bones... you're nothing here. Nothing" (AM, pp.458-459). Therefore, because Chicago fails to accommodate his idealistic desires, Augie yearns for the "early scenes of life . . . beginning with Eden" (AM, p.84). Speaking through the threatening Atlantic panorama, Augie wants to "beat the dark to Bruges where he can see the green canals and ancient palaces" (AM, p.536). He still wishes, escaping the Darkness, to comfort himself with creations of human order. At the same time, as a voyager, he

sees himself as a kind of explorer in the "terra incognita" (AM, p.536) – the world not under human system or control. Augie's learning to confront the Darkness is an important part of his search; for to confront the Darkness is to stop construction of one's private "tower of Babel" (AM, p.152) it is to enter the "shared condition of humanity." Here, as elsewhere in the novel, "chaos and civilization struggle to occupy the same subjective space. From Chicago to the Venice of the West, this land-locked Columbus will hope to discover the human" (Fuchs, p. 77).

The Chicago of Augie March is "magnificently alive in its multitudinous variety" (Rodrigues, p.75). It is in this modern and urban wasteland that Augie sets out to solve the enigma of mankind, to find out what a human being is. The vigor, authority, excitement, and completeness of Augie's Chicago springs in part from Bellow's passionate involvement with, and love for the city he grew up in. Here is the language not of a mere spectator, but of a participant. Chicago is not viewed "as an object, but as an organism with an electric vitality of its own, where a man can experience the terror of the contemporary human condition, and the insignificance of the shriveled self" (Rodrigues, p.77). Augie is not a mere witness; as Chicago-born, one who has roamed its crowded, colorful streets, the city is part of his being. And because he is completely involved with Chicago, he can make it spring to vivid life.

The first two paragraphs of chapter 2 convey the feel of the prose, its pace, its rhythms, and the darkness in which all mankind has to live:

> Now there's a dark Westminster of a time when a multitude of objects cannot be clear; they're too dense and there's an island rain, North Sea lightlessness, the vein of the Thames. That darkness in which resolutions have to be made — it isn't merely local; it's the same darkness that exists in the fiercest clearness of torrid Messina. And what about the coldness of the rain? That doesn't defeat foolishness in its residence of the human face, nor take away deception nor change defects, but this rain is an emblem of *the shared condition of all*. It maybe means that what is needed to mitigate the foolishness or dissolve the deception is always *superabundantly about* and insistently offered to us-a black offer in Charing Cross; a gray in Place Pereires where you see so many kinds and varieties of beings go to and fro in the liquid and fog; a brown in the straight unity of Wabash Avenue. With the dark, the solvent is in this way offered until the time when one thing is determined and the offers, mercies, and opportunities are finished. (AM, p.201 emphasis added)

The first paragraph endeavors to highlight an awareness of darkness that is everywhere together with a sense of the accompanying rain that somehow acts as a solvent. "The rain can be accepted, by way of the American naturalists, as an emblem of the shared condition of all mankind" (Rodrigues, p.59) and indicates perhaps that what is needed to redeem us is "superabundantly about." To recognize the two kinds "of linguistic units, the narrative-descriptive paragraphs and the speculative ones" (Rodrigues, p.60) that compose the novel is to see that structurally Augie March is "a lumpy amalgam" (Rodrigues, p.60) of the picaresque and the Bildungsroman. Augie writes out his memoirs presenting a

chronological account of his adventures from childhood to manhood. Unlike Joseph, (DM) who is continuously aware of days drifting slowly by, Augie is so immersed in his experiences that he is uncertain about chronology: his growth into manhood and maturity is never fixed in terms of years. The reader is not provided with ages but dimly, not insistently, is made aware of historical time against which Augie's adventures are set. The "oxymoron" (Pifer, 1990, p.62) in this passage suggests how Augie's vision transcends logic as well as sensory data to find clarification and illumination in darkness. Just as the dark obscures from sight the superficial appearances of an apparently solid material universe, so Augie's intuition of humanity's fallen condition, a shared darkness, dissolves like a "solven" or "rain" the illusion of his own permanence on earth. Even physical darkness, the black of night, reminds us of the subjugation of all finite existence to death — "when one thing is determined and the offers, mercies and opportunities are finished." How much more keenly, then, does recognition of a more profound darkness hold out a "black offer," the possibility of a "true vision of things."[26] Is it nature that "insistently offers" this "gift of true insight"? Or is there an unseen presence behind the "multitude of objects" and phenomena crowding our physical perception? In any case, the "darkness" is ambivalent, illogical, and contradictory. It clarifies through blackness; it

illuminates by exposing the depth of our ignorance. It sheds the radiance of mystery upon the black doom of mortality. An affinity exists, moreover, between this "black offer" of a "true vision" and that other "gift," the "gratitude" for life that often emerges from Augie's dark experience of disaster. His near-fatal accident in Mexico — when he falls from the horse while hunting with the eagle, Caligula — brings him dark awareness of "the price of being in nature, and what the facts are about your tenure." The "social sugars dissolve" upon contact with the bitter taste of deaths immediacy; and the "news" of mortality "registers with dark astonishment in Augie's freshly opened eyes" (AM, p.362). Yet there is something regenerating as well as bitter in the process: "true vision" also restores to one's cluttered eyesight "the air, a light gold, thin but strong before daily influences took it." The spiritual history of humankind is universal and particular, recorded in the past but very much alive in the present. Augie's "adventures" in the modern world thus constitute his "earthly pilgrimage" (AM, p.478) through a landscape both ancient and contemporary — a New World Babylon. What is uniquely meaningful in each individual's life is, at the same time, discoverable to all: the "gift of creation, the legacy of their shared condition." "There always is" — says Augie, implicitly affirming Bellow's "primordial person" — "a *me* it happens to" (AM, p.519, Bellow's italics). Like

Henderson and Herzog in the later novels, Augie seeks to recover this knowledge, to discover what his author calls the "primordial person" within. This primordial self, Bellow tells an interviewer in 1984, exists within each of us. "He is not made by his education, nor by cultural or historical circumstances." To this "primordial person" the novelist traces the "invariable, ultimately unteachable [knowledge] native to the soul."[27]

Augie's adventures are an intellectual "quest after self-awareness."[28] The recall of his past is not a form of nostalgic indulgence. The act of writing is for Augie as it was for Holden an enactment of the process of self-discovery. The digging up of the past demands "a frantic exploration of the self, for therein is one's history buried" (Rodrigues, p.60). It involves hard work:

> Hard, hard work, excavation and digging, mining, moiling through tunnels, heaving, pushing, moving rock working, working, panting, hauling, hoisting. And none of this work is seen from the outside. It's *internally done.* (AM, p.523 Emphasis added)

Much of the excitement and intensity of the narrative derives from the way Augie relates to particular experiences or adventures. It is thus that experience acts as a point of reference to his character and fate. Bellow frequently employs the terms, character and fate, to express the essential particulars of Augie's wanderings. When the novel begins, Augie quotes Greek philosopher Heraclitus' aphorism, "a man's character

is his fate" (AM, p.3) only to reverse it later by saying that "a man's fate is also his character" (AM, p.514). "The learning is in the transposition. Man's fate is that he shall inherit, be stuck with, his character. The movement, which the transposition represents, is the movement from the naturalistic to the existentialist, from what is determined to what is accepted or chosen." (Aldridge 1956, p.131) Augie struggles to break through to life and to achieve his possibilities and most importantly, his individual potentiality. Choices are made (or *not* made); consequences follow. Choices, one after another — often orderly, but sometimes not — make up the plot of the novel. Initially Augie would have the reader believe that whatever constitutes his self or character is, that which accounts for what happens to him. He would, of course, prefer his character to dominate his fate, so that his self is not submerged by the strange happenings of his life. Augie at the end of the road simply comes into his destiny, although, as it happens, it is not the destiny, the alternative to the "disappointed life," (AM, p.536) which he sought. Like Holden Caulfield he

> ...remains uncommitted, suspended, as it were, between native innocence and hard-earned knowledge, poised for the next adventure, which though it may not actually repeat a former escapade, guarantees no final knowledge of repose.[29]

In David Riesman's terms, in *The Lonely Crowd* Augie appears, at first glance, to be an "inner-directed" man holding out against the

conformist pressures of an "other-directed"[30] society, but it would be truer to say that he is "inner-directed" in temperament but not in aim and that he is holding out against an "inner-directed" society of strongly ambitious and acquisitive aims, the kind of society which was there until roughly the beginning of World War II.

In *Distraction of a Fiction Writer* Bellow writes that he — as does all novelist— "begins with disorder and disharmony, and he goes toward order by an unknown process of imagination."[31] One needs to be aware of the structural strategies that Bellow the artist has deployed in his effort to impose "some kind of order on his seemingly uncontrolled, bewildering, sprawling panoramic novel" (Rodrigues, p.61). The nature of the theme precludes the discovery of an organizing principle in a sequence of causally connected events. But the novel has a tough centre, a consistent line of development, in the character and quest of Augie March. Part of Bellow's artistic strength comes from his clever fusion of Anglo-American literary traditions with Yiddish traditions; and Augie March the picaresque hero who tells his own story is what is known in Yiddish folklore as a "schlimazel" — that is, the comic victim of a series of misadventures. In so far as the 'schlemiel' is a comic hero, he is promised a 'happy ending', if not in the normal sense than at least in his

own 'self-appraisal.' He never fails in his final self-acceptance; otherwise the whole premise of "the loser-as-victor would be destroyed."[32]

Augie's quest for a better fate,— worthwhile, "higher, independent fate" (AM, p.424) — is a self-apparent theme, but the novel also explores with considerable complexity the conditioning "rough forces" (AM, p.536) of life, all that compels, conditions and shapes man, particularly, the shaping power of other human wills. Almost all the major characters in Augie March and almost all the major incidents, significant though they are in themselves, are even more important as *influences* on Augie. Their impact on Augie the picaro is strange: "All the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born, and there they were to form me, which is why I tell you more of them than of myself" (AM, p.43).

Growing up and out of his native Chicago, Augie embarks on adventures that take him to Mexico and Europe as well as through "the length and breadth of America" (AM, p.152). By keeping on the move, moreover, he can elude the snares of countless "reality instructors — these big personalities, destiny molders, and heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big wheels and imposers-upon, absolutists" (AM, p.524) who are always trying to fit him into their schemes. The novel dramatizes the struggle of Augie with society, with "reality-instructors" and, ultimately, with himself.

In *Herzog*, Bellow has his protagonist, Moses Herzog, confronted by cynical characters, whom he calls "Reality instructors" because they seek "to teach" and "to punish" Moses with "lessons of the Real."[33] Though the term "Reality instructors" primarily is related to Herzog, it can also be applied to the cynics in *The Adventures of Augie March*. In fact, much of the tension in the novel develops from the struggle of Augie to resist social regimentation, to remain "in opposition." He states, "No, I didn't want to be what [Einhorn] called determined... and wouldn't become what other people wanted to make of me" (AM, p.117). Primarily, Augie resists being beaten or tormented or made cynical; he chooses to maintain a youthful optimism even in the face of tribulation. He says, "...we were chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers, all of us...I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being by and large too larky and boisterous to take it to heart" (AM, p.12).

The notion of confronting the protagonist with 'reality instructors,' who try to re -mould his personality and conduct on the basis of their own view of reality, seems to have been borrowed by Bellow from Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*.[34] The individual at the center of each relationship is termed a "Machiavellian" because of his ability to employ his ideas and personality for the purpose of manipulating and controlling others. The Machiavellians (the novel was

originally titled *Life among the Machiavellians*) with their "ideal constructions" (DM, p.19) are an absolute contrast to Augie and his search for a worthwhile fate. Externally, these "Machiavellians" appear to be composed and authoritative. Old, eccentric, crippled, or highly neurotic, they seem capable of influencing the fate of others to their advantage. Augie has been fascinated by the Machiavellians from his childhood. Each of them represents traits, which attract as well as repel him; these people significantly enlarge his experience of the world, but he also detects blemishes in their character that he would like to do without in himself. Each of these *Machiavellis* would like, Augie notes, to enlist him in his particular *version* of reality. "Stimulated by all these people, guided later by his own observations, reflections, and intuitions, Augie arrives at a number of truths, the most crucial one being that one should be a person, a human being, that one should have a fate and not a mere function" (Rodrigues, p.63). Augie insists on remaining an amateur and refuses to be "an expert, a specialist with a function" and instead turn to the "resources of actual experience" from life. As Lional Trilling has pointed out, Bellow is "in the tradition of American Personalism which insists that a person has a fate rather than a function, and power of enjoyment and love rather than achievement."[35] Augie's attitude to experience is one of openness. He accepts it without pre-meditation, as he

has no clear idea of its intrinsic worth. His problems arise as he is alive to all possibilities, and can readily be drafted by others to serve their needs: "That's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others ... I certainly looked like an ideal recruit" (AM, p.402) he says, but these "reality instructors" are foils and it must be borne in mind that they nearly always have their own needs in view. They have no glimpse of any reality but their own, and Bellow's central characters eventually learn that reality is indeed nothing that can be taught but something that must be known for itself. Bellow's protagonists finally know that they can never accept anyone else's reality until they have accepted their own. Since Augie does not wish to assume a structure of personality designed by someone else, he seeks the freedom to develop his own lifestyle and to understand himself without being imposed upon by his "reality instructors." This is the central faith, which sustains his quest for freedom and lends it whatever formal organization the novel has.

Augie manoeuvres his way out of these occasions because; though he cannot give exact name and shape to his own private holy grail — "the axial line of life" (AM, p.454) where energy, nobility, and love converge, and where he will at last meet a fate good enough for him — he can recognize and refuse all false or inadequate versions of it. In a world eager to recruit, Augie March is the un-recruitable man; and for all the

comic scrapes he gets into, he retains what Whitman called "the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself" (Spiller, 1962, p.146). A man named Einhorn sums it up when he says to Augie: "All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You've got opposition in you." And this was true, Augie reflects; "I did have the opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance and to say 'No'" (AM, p.117). Resisting their instruction, Augie persists in his quest to discover, as he says, "what I was meant to be" (AM, p.310). By the end of the novel he has not reached his goal, but the quest continues. Although married and living in Europe, Augie remains, in all senses of the term, "a traveling man" (AM, p.519). Eventually, he defines his identity not in terms of religion, race, or nationality, but in terms of human essence. Maybe the major conflict of life is not between society and the individual, but within the individual himself.

> In yourself you labour, you wage combat, settle scores, remember insults, fight, reply, deny, blab, denounce, triumph, outwit, overcome, vindicate, cry, persist, absolve, die, and rise again. All by yourself! Where is everybody? Inside your breast and skin, the entire cast. (AM, p.523)

As do Bellow's other heroes, Augie like Joseph comes to terms with his impulse towards striving, towards becoming:

> All the striving is for one end ... We are all drawn toward the same *craters of the spirit* — to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace. (DM, p.154 emphasis added)

Augie March begins as a picaresque novel of one man's pilgrimage, but also includes the travels and findings of a multitude of other travelers whom Augie meets on his life's journey, who also journey to 'the craters of the spirit.' And in final effect, none of Bellow's heroes actually resigns himself to his sufferings. "Painfully they climb again and again out of the craters of the spirit, ridiculing their defeats with a merciless irony, resolved to be prepared with a stronger defense against the next assault that is sure to come."[36]

The three dominant Machiavellians are Grandma Lausch, with her tough tactics for survival in this cruel world; William Einhorn, who preaches and practices "lessons and theories of power,"(AM, p.98) and Mrs. Renling, who wants to save him from the rat race and construct a different Augie in order "to consolidate what she affirmed she was" (AM, p.151). It all starts for Augie when he comes, under the influence of Grandma Lausch, his first Reality Instructor, a stern old lady from Odessa, a boarder in the March home, who, though "not a relation at all," (AM, p.5) appropriates command of the house. Mrs. Lausch tries to bring them up according to the standards of Czarist Russia of fifty years earlier. Augie describes her as a "Machiavellis" (AM, p.4) that enjoys making the Marches "take a long swig of her mixture of reality." Primarily, her mixture of reality is "one more animadversion on the trustful, loving, and

simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough, a fighting nature of birds and worms, and a desperate mankind without feelings" (AM, p.10). She preaches cynicism and ruthlessness as the only means of survival, while debunking Augie's type of optimism and innocence. Throughout Augie's youth, she commands his home by advocating her ideals: "scheme, devise, and intrigue in all her languages" (AM, p.5).

Grandma Lausch, the reader infers, originally entered the home of the Marches as a boarder but eventually took over its management through the force of her personality. In the power she wielded over the family and the stratagems she devised to use the children to extract benefits from public institutions can be seen the seeds of Augie's built-in resistance against power reposed in individuals, and his desire to enter into relationships with others in such a way that his own individuality and identity may not be compromised. In making a bid for self-sustaining independence, he refuses to allow his identity to be disguised by anything that is false or by anything that will force him to deviate from his real purposes. He is, in effect, on the lookout for some inner order by which he may define his life, a new order that may give content to his freedom and to his adventurous spirit. It is an order, which all Bellow heroes look for in one way or another:

> Our period has been created by revolutions of all kinds--political, scientific, industrial. And now law from slavery in

> many of its historical, objective forms has freed us. The next move is up to us. Each of us has to find an inner law by which he can live. Without this, objective freedom only destroys us. So the question that really interests me is the question of spiritual freedom in the individual—the power to endure our own humanity.[37]

Augie refers to Grandma Lausch as "one sovereign who knew exactly the proportions of love, respect, and fear of power in her subjects" (AM, p.6). Highly unsentimental and alive to self -interest, she saw the feeling of love as a deception, which in the long run injured more than offered any good. Augie's problems appeared to demonstrate to her the troublesome fate of people who were handy with their affections: "The more you love people, the more they mix you up. A child loves, a person respects" (AM, p.9). When Augie is older and leaves the house to work, he escapes Grandma Lausch's cynical dogmatism, but encounters another Machiavellian instructor, William Einhorn. Though Einhorn is a nearly complete cripple, he is as ingenious in sexual intrigue as all the others in this novel. Initially, Einhorn is not a Machiavellian cynic advising deceit and cunning. Augie admits that,

> Einhorn had a teaching turn similar to Grandma Lausch's, both believing they could show what could be done with the world, where it gave or resisted, where you could be confident and run or where you could only feel your way and were forced to blunder. (AM, p.67)

But Einhorn's instructions, at first, enforce Augie's inherent optimism. Einhorn, a semi-corrupt entrepreneur who revels in the American system

of free enterprise, compares the businessman to "the conqueror, the poet and philosopher" and assumes that business offers "a world of possibilities" (AM, p.67). By working for Einhorn as an all-purpose secretary, Augie flourishes under the atmosphere of hope and accomplishment pervading Einhorn's home and offices. Einhorn preaches optimistically about "the machine age and the kind of advantage that had to be taken of it," and Augie gladly receives the lectures "from the learned signor" (AM, p.72). However, Einhorn's optimism is shattered by the stock market crash, in which he "was among the first to be wiped out" (AM, p.106). Having lost his wealth and position due to the crash, Einhorn also loses his sense of hope in the "possibilities" of America and preaches a version of cunning and deceit even more sinister than Grandma Lausch's hoping to teach Augie of the Void. Augie states that Einhorn now intended.

> [T]hat as there were no more effective prescriptions in old ways, as we were in dreamed-out or finished visions, that therefore, in the naked form of the human jelly, one should choose or seize with force; one should make strength from disadvantages and make progress by having enemies, being wrathful or terrible; should hammer on the state of being a brother, not be oppressed by it; should have the strength of voice to make other voices fall silent — the same principle for persons as for peoples, parties, states. (AM, p.183)

Einhorn is contemptuous of "the universal antheap" (AM, p.457), the mass of mankind: "'Look here, because they were born you think they

have to turn out to be men'"? he asks Augie (AM, p.307). Augie states that if he had truly been Einhorn's disciple instead of an innocent optimist, he would have approached any important decision by asking himself: "What would Caesar suffer in this case? What would Machiavelli advice or Ulysses do? What would Einhorn think"? (AM, p.60)

After Einhorn, Augie is forced to endure the cynical instructions of Mrs. Renling, an influential and wealthy woman, owner of a smart men's store, who seeks to control Augie by adopting him because she is keen to have a son who would be regarded as a fashionable man about town. Augie is undoubtedly tempted by the possibility of leading a rich and comfortable life: "The situation was that I was enjoying what a rich young man enjoys, he says, and arranged my feelings accordingly, filling in and plastering over objections" (AM, p.137). But what prevents Augie from accepting his new role is his independent nature: he finally realizes that it would be impossible for him "to be built into Mrs. Renling's world, to consolidate what she affirmed she was" (AM, p.151). Mrs. Renling desires to show Augie off as a protégé. She is not able to understand what Augie understands instinctively – that to possess another person completely is to deny his innate freedom. Renling, whose vocation seems to be to coach and instruct constantly pesters Augie with what he calls

"damnation chats" (AM, p.137). Like the previous "reality instructors," she seeks to demean Augie's persistent "splendour of morning" attitude by calling "out her whole force of rights, apocalypse death riders, church porch devils who grabbed naked sinners from behind to lug them down to punishment, her infanticides, plagues, and incest" (AM, p.137). It is inevitable that Augie must step out of the magic-circle that Mrs. Renling has built around him. Just when Mrs. Renling is about to entrap him, Augie bounces away, asking: "Why should I turn into one of these people who didn't know who they themselves were"? (AM, p.151) Augie manages to ignore her pessimistic instructions and maintain his optimism, just as he manages to ignore his brother's reality instructions. Augie's brother Simon also tries to draw him into his own orbit — and not for reasons of pure brotherly affection. Although Simon, as compared to his younger brother, has achieved greater worldly success, he is intrigued by Augie's ability to live without the usual necessities of a comfortable life. He feels a need not only to guide Augie in the tricks of acquiring wealth, but also to master his life and dictate to him the rudiments of a prosperous life that most people cherish. Simon would obviously feel more secure if Augie were fashioned after his own image, as a prototype of the ordinary wealth-seeker. Augie is dissuaded from following Simon's example because of his desire to lead a free life and also because of his keen

awareness of his elder brother's vulnerability to the kinds of spiritual compromises that have to be made in the pursuit of riches. Though Simon tells Augie to make himself "hard," Augie avoids Simon's cynical outlook, in which he "didn't fundamentally believe" (AM, p.239). Einhorn made Augie aware of his opposition, his ability to "hurl a secret No!" at people's ideas while appearing to agree with them, is the attribute that allows him to resist his persuaders: "I never had accepted determination and wouldn't become what other people wanted to make of me" (AM, p.117). Again and again Augie's spirit of resistance manifests itself. He responds to the contemporary conditions and searches for transcendence over them, justifying Bellow's claim: "I felt it is time to write about people who make a spirited resistance to the forces of our times."[38] This *spirited resistance* is the theme of all his novels. Ultimately Augie refuses to yield to the authority of these earthly powers, wielded individually or collectively. To the machinations of the Machiavelli — and to the "Niagara Falls torrent" of statistics, data, news and information that threatens to drown his inner life and "feelings" in a flood of facts — he opposes a transcendent vision of human life and destiny (axial lines AM, p.455). This ancient vision of existence is evoked, on the most obvious level, by the numerous biblical images and allusions interwoven throughout Augie's narration. By invoking the Bible's ancient wisdom —

that earthly power is fleeting and trust in its authority misplaced — the allusive texture of Augie's narration consistently undermines the authenticity of each "version" of reality promoted by the Machiavellis.

The Chicago adventures do not tell Augie where he belongs, but they condition and prepare him for the visions, insights, and intuitions that descend on him toward the end of his *pilgrimage.* The ranges of Augie's experiences up to the time of the Mexican adventures with Thea are wide and various. "Refusing to be a specialist, refusing to be imprisoned in any single job or to be trapped by a construction of any one else's devising, Augie is open to all varieties of people and places" (Rodrigues, p.67). He is at home anywhere and everywhere in Chicago: "I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself." (AM, p.113)

Augie goes to a pier to wait for his brother Simon, who is planning a vacation near the resort at which Augie and Mrs. Renling have stayed. While he waits for his brother to disembark from a ship, he watches other vacationers and describes them as "Tough or injured, . . . bearers of things as old as the most ancient of cities and older; desires and avoidances bred into bellies, shoulders, legs, as long ago as Eden and the Fall" (AM, pp.147-148). The implication is that these vacationers have suffered the ramifications of the fall from Eden and thus are "tough and

injured." By juxtaposing these characters with Augie, Bellow underlines Augie's role as an innocent Adam.

An interesting scene in the novel, which further reveals that Augie is living in innocence before the fall, occurs when Augie first encounters Thea Fenchel. Augie has gone to a resort with Mrs. Renling where he sees and falls in love with Esther Fenchel, Thea's sister. Esther pays little attention to Augie, but Thea is attracted to him. One evening, Augie goes into an orchard to brood over Esther, and in this Eden-like setting, Thea intrudes and tries to seduce him. Beneath the *orchard leaves* she kneels beside him, seductively touches his feet and ankles with her thighs, and says she has fallen in love with him. Augie, always the innocent fantasist, is astonished that she would challenge his love for Esther by professing her own love for him. He stands up to leave and says to her, "Now, Miss Fenchel . . . You're lovely, but what do you think we're doing? I can't help it. I love Esther" (AM, p.146). Thea, however, is adamant and attempts to pursue him. Recognizing her intentions, Augie had to escape from the swing and get away in the orchard. He retreats further into the garden to avoid consummation of desires. In doing so he exemplifies the type of innocence, characteristic of the early American Adam.

The encounter with Thea Fenchel and his adventures with Caligula in Mexico drive Augie for the first time to a crucial investigation of his

own character and destiny. Augie, who has always refused commitment, who has never entangled himself with another human being, falls powerfully and absolutely in love. It is a strange situation for this determined searcher for an independent fate to be in: "The great astonishment of this state was that the unit of humanity should maybe be not one but two" (AM, p.323). "I was never before so taken up with another human being," he confesses. For the first time he surrenders his self to another: "I went where and as she said and did whatever she wanted because I was threaded to her as if through the skin" (AM, p.315).

For a while Augie almost abandons his quest for an independent fate to help Thea realize her dreams of greatness. However, despite Augie's attempts to remain innocent, optimistic, adventurous, and unbeaten, a number of devastating events finally shatter his idealism. First, his friend Mimi Villars becomes pregnant, attempts to have an abortion, procures the services of an incompetent doctor, and almost dies. Like the other instructors, she berates Augie about how he

> ...wasn't mad enough about abominations or aware enough of them, didn't know many graves were underneath [his] feet, was lacking in disgust wasn't hard enough against horrors or wrathful about swindles. (AM, p.209)

She, too, tries to teach him her cynical viewpoint and tries to drag him down into the mire of nihilism. Augie, however, rejects her instructions. Though she asserts, "most people suffer," Augie can only

tell her "about how pleasant [his] life has been" (AM, p.254). He maintains an optimistic concept of life, he is unable to believe that "all was so poured in concrete and that there weren't occasions for happiness" (AM, p.255). An acquaintance of Augie's sees him helping Mimi, assumes he is the father of the child, and runs to tell Lucy Magnus, Augie's fiancée, that Augie has been unfaithful. Though Augie is not the father but only has attempted to aid Mimi, Lucy and her parents break off the engagement. Next, Simon, who has chosen Lucy for Augie because she is wealthy, is offended that Augie has compromised himself and lost this chance of an economically promising marriage. In his anger, Simon more or less disinherits Augie and says he never wants to see him again. Though Augie is able to stand up under the pressures rather well, he suffers a final indignity, which crushes his optimism. He is caught in a squabble between the members of the restaurant workers' union CIO, and legal representation of the AFL (AM, p.289) and is beaten by agitators, and has to hide to avoid being killed.

In contrast to the Machiavellians, who would impose their own constructions and controls on people are those "whose lives have been fixed for them and those obsessed by and lost in a theory or project of their own" (Rodrigues, p.64). They are object lessons warning Augie not to imprison himself in any 'ideal construction.' On the simplest level is

Jimmy Klein, Augie's boyhood friend, who becomes a store detective and has surrendered himself to the will of others; "I go where they put me and do what they tell me" (AM, p.266). Two of Augie's friends, Hooker Frazer and Sylvester, align themselves with communist ideology. Frazer becomes one of exiled Trotsky's secretaries, while Sylvester believes in the communist dream:

> That humiliated, bandy-legged, weak-haired, and injured-in-the-eyes Sylvester, however, the subterranean draftsman and comedy commissar of a Soviet-America-to-be, teaching himself the manner and even the winner's smile and confidence, why, he was going to blast off the old travertine and let the gold and marble shine for a fresh humanity (AM, p.213)

He becomes one of Trotsky's bodyguards. Augie sees the ravages written on Sylvester's face: it is "severe, melancholy, duty-charged and baffled" (AM, p.375) before leaving Mexico for Chicago, Augie comes to realize the deadly pressure ideology and ideologists exert on a human being:

> My next idea was how nothing was more dreadful than to be forced by another to feel his persuasion as to how horrible it is to exist, how deathly to hope, and taste the same despair. How of all the impositions this was the worst imposition. Not just to be as they make you but to feel as they dictate. If you didn't have the strongest alliance you surely would despair at last and your mouth would drink blood. (AM, p.417-418)

Augie, who refuses to allow any theory to rule his life, runs into two theoreticians caught in the grip of their own obsessions; Robey, the eccentric millionaire, crazy about Great Books, is busy putting together a

guide and a program for mankind. Basteshaw, brilliant, crazy, a genius, offers Augie a theory of human boredom and a vision of the new brotherhood of man, which his experiments will achieve. Augie can respond to the fervent desires of both men (both are modern parody versions of visionaries such as Campanella and Thomas More), but can see the damage that their utopian dreams inflict on them. With his blood-streaked eyes, his sullen lips and his belly-heavy walk, his five marriages and his stinginess, Robey is a warped idealist. Augie finds him one-day "standing on a kitchen chair, wrapped in his bathrobe, pumping Flit into a cupboard while hundreds of roaches rushed out practically clutching their heads and falling from the walls. What a moment that was! He wildly raised hell as he worked the spray gun, full of lust" (AM, p.444). And the cold inhumanity of Basteshaw, who wanted to rescue all mankind from endless suffering, both shocks and enlightens Augie: "I realized how much he was barren of or trying to be barren of in order to become the man of his ideas" (AM, p.512). Both theoreticians open Augie's eyes to "the comic horror of being a mere slave of an idea" (Rodrigues, p.65). But Augie continues to drift away from these attempts to transform his life and conduct. After giving up his assignment as a union organizer, he confesses:

> I couldn't just order myself to become one of those peoples who go out before the rest, who stand and intercept the big

> social ray, or collect and concentrate it like burning glass, who glow and dazzle and make bursts of fire. It wasn't what I was meant to be. (AM, p. 310)

After these traumas, Augie loses much of his innocence and states that he "was no child now, neither in age nor in protectedness, and [he] was thrown for fair on the free spinning of the world" (AM, p.285). Though his "reality instructors" had been unsuccessful in shaking his optimism, the traumas he suffers eventually force him to realize that life is brutal and that no one can remain as idealistic and youthfully innocent as he had been. Augie recognizes that his initial innocence has been destroyed, and he finds that "in any true life you must go and be exposed outside the small circle that encompasses two or three heads in the same history of love. Try and stay, tough, inside. See how long you can" (AM, p.285).

Once Augie concludes that he has lost Eden, he no longer is like the early American Adam; Bellow proceeds to depict Augie as a modern Adam who is defeated by life and who seeks to escape the world by imagining a new Eden in which he can hide. Before, he had retreated into the garden to escape being seduced by Thea so that he could maintain his youthful innocence. Now, Augie has to seek a new Eden in which he can retrieve the innocence he has lost.

Ironically, Thea offers him his first vision of escape in Eden. Thea plans to go to Mexico to get a divorce, and she "assumed that [Augie would] go to Mexico with her" (AM, p.313). Augie, having been wounded by reality, "never seriously thought of refusing" primarily because he thinks Mexico will allow him to escape his traumas. He concludes this because Thea has suggested that in Mexico they will experience "something better than what people call reality" (AM, p.316). To this suggestion, Augie thinks, "Very good and bravo! Let's have this better, nobler reality" (AM, p.316). That Mexico will be paradisiacal for Augie is further indicated through what Thea's house in Mexico is called "Casa Descuitada... — Carefree House" (AM, p.343). The implication is that Mexico will obliterate Augie's cares by allowing him to return to innocence in a new Eden.

However, as Patrick Morrow states, Bellow is a hopeful artist who has come to "believe that man's living within society is preferable to self-imposed alienation."[39] Bellow asserts that it is impossible to escape reality by envisioning paradise and that one must adapt to the world rather than attempt to flee it. To emphasize this assertion, Bellow surrounds Augie's trip to Mexico with portents and eventually depicts Mexico as a pseudo-paradise, which is actually hellish. For instance, even

before Augie departs for Mexico, he is made uneasy by his friends' warnings not to go.

> Nobody, then, gave the happy *bon voyage* I'd have liked. Everybody warned me . . . I argued back to myself that it was just the Rio Grande I had to cross, not the Acheron, but anyway it oppressed me from somewhere. (AM, p.323)

This portentous atmosphere is further heightened when it is learnt that Thea, the temptress earlier in Augie's life, plans to travel to Mexico with snake-catching equipment. In fact, once Augie and Thea are in Mexico, Thea spends much of her time collecting snakes or visiting 'snaky' areas. After a while, she has collected so many snakes and deposited them at her home that Augie says their porch became "a snake gallery" (360). He quite understandably observes with pleasure Thea's snakes as they shed: "Toughest of all was the casting of the skins.... But then they would gleam out, one day, and their freshness and jewelery would give even me pleasure, their enemy, and I would like to look at the cast skin from which they were *regenerated* in green or dots of red like pomegranate seeds or varnished gold crust" (AM, p.369 emphasis added). Augie refuses to see a world of "deterministic ugliness and low opinions" (Dutton, 1982, p.46). The final portent surrounding Augie's supposedly paradisiacal venture into Mexico is that Thea takes with her an eagle, which she plans to train to hunt iguanas. Though the eagle is Thea's idea, the chore of handling it is relegated to Augie. Forced to spend a great deal

of time with the eagle, which he names Caligula, Augie becomes almost possessed by it. Just as Thea is a snake-like temptress who corrupts Augie's paradise, Caligula, "who glides like a Satan, is a demonic intruder into his Eden." The eagle becomes almost a reminder to Augie of his mortality. As he says,

> In the most personal acts of your life you carry the presence and power of another; you extend his being in your thoughts, where he inhabits. Death, with monuments, makes great men remembered like that. So I had to bear Caligula's gaze. (AM, p. 335)

Rather than finding Eden in Mexico, Augie has to live with the satanic eagle whose gaze he must endure. The combat between Caligula and Thea (for the eagle's body and soul), the wonderfully precise passages describing the eagle soaring off to satisfy his beautiful trainer and miserably failing her, crystallize a notion about the will to power and dominance that is central to nearly every one of Augie's adventures. These incidents that cloud Augie's quest for paradise prove not only to be portentous but turns his stay in Mexico into a disaster. Not only does he suffer an accident in which his skull is cracked, he and Thea began to drift apart. Thea leaves him alone at her "Casa Descuitada," (AM, p.343) and for days he feels like one of the damned. He finds no solace in the new Eden. In fact, his escape in paradise leaves him even more wounded

than he was before he left for Mexico. Being left alone there most of the time, he says

> And suddenly my heart felt ugly, I was sick of myself. I thought that my aim of being simple was just a fraud, that I wasn't a bit goodhearted or affectionate, and I began to wish that Mexico from beyond the walls would come in and kill me and that I would be thrown in the bone dust and twisted, *spiky crosses of the cemetery, for the insects and lizards.* (AM, p.401)

Perhaps one of the reasons why Augie suffers so in Mexico is that his expectations are excessively romantic. He assumes that Mexico will be paradisiacal; when this assumption proves fallacious, he is destroyed. If he could learn to adapt to reality rather than seek escape from it, he possibly could have avoided such pains. When Thea, outraged because Augie had helped Stella Chesney escape from her current love, outraged further when Augie reveals what he really thinks about her hunting, runs away, Augie feels utter desolation and despair. His friend Iggy suggests that Augie had to experience suffering before he could get anywhere: "you got to get knocked over and crushed like this. If you don't you'll never understand how much you hurt her. You've got to find out about this and not be so larky" (AM, p.400).

Augie begins a "terrible investigation" (AM, p.401) into his own nature. He cannot harmonize his desire to be simple and free, unencumbered by money or profession or duties, with his genuine desire

to please people and be a sincere follower of love: "An independent fate and love too – what confusion!" (AM, p.401) he exclaims painfully. Thea was right when she told him that love would always appear strange to him no matter what form it took. He seems primarily moved by the need for love. Thea puts it more emphatically and indignantly: "You want people to pour love on you, and you soak it up and swallow it. You can't get enough. And when another woman runs after you, you'll go with her. You're so happy when somebody begs you to oblige. You can't stand up under flattery" (AM, p.317). His desire to please people, he now realizes, did not spring from a real love for them, but from his need for protection: "While as for me, whoever would give me cover from this mighty free-running terror and wild cold of chaos I went to, and therefore to temporary embraces"(AM, p.403). Real love seems foreign to Augie because he is not able to reconcile his ideals with reality. His idea of love, high and noble, is barren and uncreative; indeed it is self-damaging because it is not based on the real condition of its object — the human condition.

After Thea leaves him, he comes close to recognizing his penchant for fantasy and begins to adapt to life. He states "my invention and special thing was simplicity. I wanted simplicity and denied complexity" (AM, p.402). At this point in the novel, he realizes that he has desired to

hide from the complexity of life. With this realization, he decides to find Thea, ask for her forgiveness, and start a more realistic life with her. However, the more he thinks of her, the more he dreams of a perfect, paradisiacal life that the two could share:

> Imagining how this would be, I melted, my chest got hot, soft, sore, and yearning. I saw it already happening. It's always been like that with me, that fantasy went ahead of me and prepared the way. (AM, p.403)

Rather than adapt to reality, Augie again chooses to fantasize about life with Thea. Though Augie and Thea never get back together, his dreams of paradise continue. How could Augie have fallen for someone so domineering? Augie says, "I had to accept her version of everything, this being the obstinacy of assertion I spoke of. Also it was evident that she was used to having what she wanted, including me" (AM, p.316).

To sum up, the affair reveals a more intense Augie, but one who remains essentially confused, unable to find solutions. It turns out that even in love Augie's quest for noble identity must remain inconclusive. Augie returns to Chicago a sadder, if wiser, man. He has lost some of his 'larkiness.' In spite of his deeper awareness of the darkness that surrounds man, he still retains like other Bellow protagonists his faith in human existence. Before leaving Mexico he arms himself with the important insight that it is impossible to live "without something infinitely mighty and great" (AM, p.413).

In his journey towards a worthwhile fate, Augie is enlightened by his encounters with a number of people. Together these encounters "spell out the truth that society today does not encourage anyone to have a fate of one's own. Instead society demands an expert" (Rodrigues, p.65). Augie tells Clem Tambow after his Mexican experiences: "In the world of today your individual has to be willing to illustrate a more and more narrow and restricted point of existence. And I am not a specialist" (AM, p.436). Aware of the dangers of being a specialist, Augie takes a quick, ironic look at him, but cannot determine who he is. He sees a figure that is ever restless, always circling around in an elliptical orbit, never stopping to be defined: "Lord, what a runner after good things, servant of love, embarker on schemes, recruit of sublime ideas, and good-time Charlie!" (AM, p.432) Later in the novel, he tells a friend of his that he hopes to buy a piece of property and settle down on it and start a school. Because his friend is sceptical of the idea, Augie attempts to remove his friend's doubts. Augie states that his idea is not fantastic:

> Oh, I don't expect to set up the Happy Isles. I don't consider myself any Prospero. I haven't got the build. I have no daughter. I never was a king, for instance. No, no, I'm not looking for any Pindar Hyperborean dwelling with the gods in ease, a tearless life, never aging. (AM, p.456)

However, despite his claims to the contrary, what he envisions is a paradise in which he will have a chance at beating "life at its greatest

complication and meshuggah power" by starting "lower down and simpler" (AM, p.457). What he actually desires is a pastoral Eden:

> What I had in my mind was this private green place like one of those Walden or Innisfree wattle jobs under the kind sun, surrounded by velvet woods and bright gardens and Elysium lawns sown with Lincoln Park grass seed. (AM, p.515)

As the novel evolves, Bellow makes Augie remain vulnerable, not become masterful. Though humour is Augie's major defence, he does not know enough to always see the joke. He is hardly married for two days when he sets out on a new adventure across half the world. At the end of the novel, he is found conducting black market trading while his wife, Stella, pursues her career in acting elsewhere. The goals he had set for his wedded life have disappeared: he does not even hope to build the foster home that he had dreamed about: "now my foster-home and academy dream was not a preoccupation but one of those featherhead millenarian notions a summer butterflies... Other preoccupations are my fate, or what fills life and thought" (AM, p.516). His life continues to spin into and out of new adventures. He has not found "a secure tether or a still point, but he has been able to view his moral situation with a certain amount of clarity" (Kulshrestha, p.104).

In Chapter 10, Augie reflects on the difference between daily life and what he calls "triumphant life," which can only be touched at rare moments. He believes that there are two ways of approaching life. One

can accept the reality of every day occurrences and thus submit to drudgery and the commonplace, or one can rise above normalcy and seek a more "triumphant life." That Augie assumes life can be divided into only these two categories hints at his naiveté. That he chooses to ignore what he considers normalcy and yearns for adventure emphasizes his role as the youthful optimist. He says,

> I had no eye, ear, or interest for anything else — that is, for usual, second-order, oatmeal, mere-phenomenal, snarled-shoelace-carfare-laundry-ticket plainness, unspecified dismalness, unknown captivities; the life of despair-harness, or the life of organization-habits which is meant to supplant accidents with calm abiding. Well, now, who can really expect the daily facts to go, toil or prisons to go, oatmeal and laundry tickets and all the rest, and insist that all moments be raised to the greatest importance, demand that everyone breathe the pointy, star-furnished air at its highest difficulty, abolish all brick, vault like rooms, all dreariness, and live like prophets or gods? Why, everybody knows this *triumphant life can only be periodic*. So there's a schism about it, some saying only this triumphant life is real and others that only the daily facts are. For me there was no debate, and I made speed into the former. (AM, p.194 Emphasis added)

What Augie does is describe a dichotomy between reality and fantasy; he ironically states that no one can really believe in the "periodic" triumphant life, but that one should surely accept "the daily facts" propounded by "reality instructors" such as Lausch, Einhorn, Renling, Simon, and Villars; then he asserts that he does choose triumph over reality, adventure over normalcy, and optimism over the "despair-

harness." Augie seems closer to the mixed experience of the novel when he realizes that life is a state of becoming, a movement between idealism and the daily facts, between "the pointy, star-furnished air and oatmeal and laundry tickets and all the rest."

Augie's preoccupation is with the nature of humanity — with love, reality structures, and the axial lines. Augie March makes his most famous thematic statement when he talks about "the axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy" (AM, p.454). When Augie questions what makes one's existence necessary, and decides that reality comes from being accountable (which he also considers being the ultimate in helplessness)

> Everyone tries to create a world he can live in, and what he can't use he often can't see. But the real world is already created, and if your fabrication doesn't correspond, then even if you feel noble and insist on there being something better than what people call reality, that better something needn't try to exceed what, in its actuality, since we know it so little, may be. (AM, p.378)

Kayo Obermark's insight that love is the only protection against the overwhelming conditioning forces of life, explains,

> What you are talking about is moha — a Navajo word, and also Sanskrit, meaning opposition of the finite. It is the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces. Love is the only answer to moha, being infinite. I mean all the forms of love, eros, agape, libido, philia, and ecstasy. (AM, p.450)

Augie elaborates on his idea of the axial lines of life, for it is they which seem closest to the love which Kayo sets forth as the answer to *moha:*

> I must have had a feeling since I was a kid about these axial lines which make me want to have my existence on them, and so I have said 'no' like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders, just on the obstinacy of my memory of these lines, never entirely clear. But lately I have felt these thrilling lines again. When striving stops, there they are as a gift. I was lying on the couch here before and they suddenly went quivering right straight through me. Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony! And all noise, grates, distortion, chatter, distraction, effort, superfluity, passed off like something unreal. And I believe that any man at any time can come back to these axial lines. (AM, p.454)

The paragraph sounds the thematic dichotomy between the world of flesh "being" and the world of spirit "becoming." The above quotation is long, but one needs to examine it closely. In the first place, it is the key passage — a statement of theme — for the entire novel. One can find such apt statements in each of Bellow's novels, as though he had built the novel around the statement. In the second place, it is the passage, more than any other, in which Augie sees the condition of falling into blessedness, into grace. "When striving stops", Augie tells us, "the axial lines are there as a gift." A man can come back to them, but not through striving. He must wait. Augie is doubtlessly looking for something lasting, something durable, and something akin to what Kayo calls the infinite, as opposed to the finite. One must view the axial line of Bellow's

vision of the world as a "radically religious perspective," which Nathan A. Scott sees in Bellow: "What we confront, in other words, in this whole body of fiction is a radically religious perspective on the human reality."[40]

Man has to base his existence on the axial lines of truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, and harmony. These thrilling lines had passed through the center of Augie's being as a child. Augie believes that these lines demand to be rediscovered in later years and are miraculously bestowed upon anyone who stops hunting furiously for them: "At any time life can come together again and man be regenerated" (AM, p.454). Augie offers a mystical vision of human possibility:

> [Man] will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy. Even his pains will be joy if they are true, even his helplessness will not take away his power, even wandering will not take him away from himself, even the big social jokes and hoaxes need not make him ridiculous, even disappointment after disappointment need not take away his love. Death will not be terrible to him if life is not. The embrace of other true people will take away his dread of fast change and short life. (AM, p.455)

This act of faith marks the climactic moment of Augie's search for humanness. It reveals Augie's (and Bellow's) "sacramental reverence for the gift of life" (Rodrigues, p.71). It implies that everyone vibrates with intimations of immortality in the lost world of one's childhood, intimations that can be recovered again. Augie acknowledges the

presence of disappointment, pain, and absurdity in human life but refuses to accept alienation, anxiety, doom, and despair as inevitable to the human condition. "He ends with a dream of a colony of the spirit wherein man can truly be himself, redeemed from his fear of death by the warmth of human brotherhood" (Rodrigues, p.65). He cannot achieve it unless he unlocks his imprisoning self. Self must be transfigured, even if the process is hindered by society's coercive influence. The novel therefore involves endless self-questioning and "re-figuration — a re-figuration — itself conditioned by history and our changing maps of consciousness."[41] This human transformation is necessary for social re-birth. In this novel Bellow has shown the vision of the intersection of the conscious mind and emotions in the life of Augie. In his discussion of the "axial lines of life" Augie mentions Osiris, the god torn apart by his followers. Osiris is an ideal because the devoured god is somehow regenerated. The previous images in the novels suggest that life is dangerous, ugly, and heavy. Thus Bellow's characters consider themselves imprisoned. *The Adventures of Augie March* contains many prisons — we wonder if Augie can avoid them more successfully than Asa (*The Victim*) or Joseph (DM). On the first page Augie tells us that he will knock at the door of life — "sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent" (AM, p.3). He shuns confinement but finds that there are many doors, which remain

closed, even after the knocks. Several institutions are significant in this respect: the Home to which George is sent — that home with "wired windows, dog-proof cyclone fence, asphalt yard, great gloom"(AM, p.57) the home for the blind where Mama is sent; Grandma Lausch's institution; and the university with the old-world-imitated walls. Perhaps the very existence of such prisons of the spirit compel Augie to picture life a bit differently towards the end of the novel when he says: "We left what company we were in and went privately to take a few falls with our select antagonist, in his secret room like inside a mountain or down in a huge root cellar" (AM, p.419). Everyone has an inner room and no matter what preparations for life he finally makes, men are always within "the walls of his being" (AM, p.455). So we leave him still a traveller, a Columbus: "Why, I'm a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hands and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze" (AM, p.536). "Will he discover America or be shipwrecked? The question is open — like his crisscrossing, happy voyages."[42] At the end of the novel, the strange ride with Jacqueline to the Normandy coast shows us an Augie who knows that his dream can never be translated into reality. Augie has also acquired an understanding of the minute movements of his own being:

> I said when I started to make the record that I would be plain and heed the knocks as they come, and also that a man's

> character was his fate. Well, then it is obvious that this fate, or what he settles for, is also his character. And since I never have had any place of rest, it should follow that I have trouble being still, and furthermore my hope is based on getting to be still so that the axial lines can be found. When striving stops, the truth comes as a gift — bounty, harmony, love and so forth. Maybe I can't take these very things I want. (AM, p.514)

Augie rightly infers that his life would reach fulfillment to, what he calls, the axial lines, but the novel offers little hope or prospect of such a fulfillment or realization. The only affirmation that the novel offers is located in Augie's intuitive grasp of the terms of spiritual fulfillment. At the end of the novel, he is still involved in experience, but he has taken stock of his situation and his 'possibilities.' There is little doubt that he is frustrated by his inability to work out any satisfactory conception of self: at every turn he finds that he is being shaped not by powers within himself, but by social pressures, by chance, by the force of other personalities, in short, by those factors which are broadly said to constitute fate. Bellow makes his position clear when Augie closes the story: "I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America" (AM, p.536).

All of which is to say that Augie knows his ideals are right, in spite of his less-than-high fortune. In Augie's view of himself as Columbus, Bellow intends an "illumination for his protagonist — a

discovery of likenesses between himself and another explorer. While both seem to have failed, their hope, vision, judgment, and courage are realities of their natures, which give to them powers and potentialities that allow them the possibilities of a better fate."[43] Bellow leaves it to the reader to understand that Augie's failure lies not in his high ideals but in his refusal to live them through positive action and personal involvement — and in his seeming willingness to be used by those who are actively involved but who do not possess his vision of existence. From Augie's perspective, the world exists to teach him how to devote his daring to the pursuit of success and self-discovery. It does not matter where he serves as life's pupil, whether in the poolroom of the wheelchair-bound Einhorn or drifting in a lifeboat in the Atlantic after his merchant ship has been torpedoed. "All the consciousness there was to me seemed a hairlash in the crushing water universe" (AM, p.495). But his sense of the frailty of individual consciousness does not lead him to despair; it leads him to a balanced sense of the comedy of existence — of the human being struggling for importance and the forces of life resisting but never quenching the individual's hope. His mission is to keep faith with a vision of himself as the American in search of the world, as much a Columbus as modern life will permit.

Because a number of characters in the novel see that Augie is a dreamer who will not adapt to reality, they try to wean him from his excessive idealism. Unlike the "reality instructors" who tried to force their cynicism on Augie, characters like Padilla and Clem Tambow simply try to teach Augie to be more realistic. Padilla tells Augie that

> You want too much, and therefore if you miss out you blame yourself too hard. But this is all a dream. The big investigation today is into how bad a guy can be, not how good he can be. You don't keep up with the times. You're going against history. Or at least you should admit how bad things are, which you don't do either. (AM, p. 431)

Padilla recognizes that Augie is detached from reality and is unable to adapt to the world. He does not necessarily want to drag Augie down into the *mire* or the *Void* as did the reality instructors; he simply wants Augie to get in step with history and at least see the world clearly. Padilla tells Augie that his dream about human greatness is too ambitious to be realized. Clem Tambow tells Augie practically the same thing. He pokes good-natured fun at Augie's "campaign after a worth-while fate" (AM, p.432). He states that Augie's ambitions are too general and that Augie is "not concrete enough." He says to Augie, "What I guess about you is that you have a nobility syndrome. You can't adjust to the reality situation" (AM, p.434). Because of this, Tambow fears that Augie is "going to ruin [himself] ignoring the reality principle and trying to cheer up the dirty scene" (436). He believes that Augie "should accept the data

of experience" (AM, p.436). Clem Tambow, who has been reading psychology, suggests that Augie cure himself of his nobility syndrome, his belief in Man, by taking some of Freud's medicine. Augie himself does not define his dream, but he senses its power within him all through his adventures. Augie dreams of "a good enough fate" (AM, p.28); he has a restless desire "to be taken up into something greater than [himself]" (AM, p.204). But he refuses to be goaded on by others; sensing the needs of his own being, he insists on setting his own pace, "I never tried to exceed my constitution. In any case, when someone like Clem urged me and praised me, I didn't listen closely. I had my own counseling system. It wasn't infallible, but it made mistakes such as I could bear" (AM, p.204).

Considering Augie's experiences in Mexico, one can assume that it would be better for him to overcome his naive idealism and see the world clearly. However, Augie is never able to adapt to life. On the contrary, despite his traumatic experiences throughout the book, the novel ends with Augie "grinning again" (AM, p.536). Patrick Morrow says that Augie's comments at the end of the novel reveal that Augie has succeeded in adapting to the world, "accommodating through the comic, specifically by his good-natured grin" (Morrow, 1967, p. 402). Hassan supplies a different interpretation when he says that the novel offers "no proper ending" (Hasan, 1961, p.311). Whereas Patrick Morrow assumes

that Augie's "good-natured grin" (AM, p.402) allows him to adapt successfully to the world, Hassan states that at the end of the novel, Augie is still un-initiated. The implication of Bellow's ending is that for Augie there is always some unknown land, some distant horizon that is fertile ground for his imagination and for his desire for escape to a paradise. At the end of the novel, Augie is searching for peace and happiness; though he might be *a flop* like Columbus and end up *in chains*, as a modern American Adam he will not discount the possibility of a new Eden. The last paragraph of *The Adventures of Augie March* contains the statement of hope on which the novel ends. Augie is in Europe, motoring to Bruges, and in the last half of the paragraph after gazing at all the absurdities of existence — including his own position — he understands the ultimate purpose of humor. "The laughter is against human hope, but also is that hope"[44]:

> ...Is the laugh at nature — including eternity — that it thinks it can win over us and the power of hope? Nah! Nah! I think. It never will. But that probably is the joke, on one or the other, and laughing is an enigma that includes both. (AM, p.536)

"Comedy then, is an enigma because it transcends categories of pain or joy; it resolves ambivalence in a mysterious way" (Malin, 1969, p.133). Bellow has remarked too on the power of the comic in the Yiddish tradition: "Laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that

it is not easy to determine the relations of the two" (*Jewish Stories*, pp.9-16). What strikes one about this final passage is that Augie is willing to wager on the unknown. He shares in a common humanity refusing to believe that nature and eternity can win out "over us and the power of hope" (AM, p.536). The analogy to Columbus says much about hope and belief concerning the nature and state of man; it is in fact an analogy based on a Kierkegaardian leap of faith. "A leap of faith is the act of believing in something without, or in spite of, available empirical evidence." It is an act commonly associated with religious belief as many religions consider faith to be an essential element of piety. The phrase originated with Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th century Christian philosopher who believed that the only way to accept genuine Christianity is through a leap of faith, through complete understanding that one's faith is independent of reason or evidence. In order to fully understand what Kierkegaard meant by a leap of faith, one must understand what Kierkegaard means by "leap." In Kierkegaard's book *The Concept of Anxiety*, he describes Adam's qualitative leap into sin. "Adam's leap signifies a change from one quality to another, mainly the quality of possessing no sin to the quality of possessing sin" Kierkegaard maintains "the transition from one quality to another can take place only by a leap." This means that when the transition happens, you move directly from one

state to the other, never possessing both qualities. Kierkegaard developed a philosophy based on the idea of the importance of the individual and individual choice. He also said that it is especially important for people to have a meaningful existence. And meaning, he said, comes from whether or not people sense that their lives have a permanent significance. The problem is, though, that most people believe that their lives have importance only temporarily. He said:

> If you are aware of the importance of your existence, you will eventually feel dissatisfied with a life devoted to art and pleasure; then your own impermanence and insignificance will fill you with despair. At this point, you can either try to go on living in despair, or you can try to lead a more ethical, responsible existence, the second stage of development. When you start to lead a more responsible existence, you start to introduce an idea of permanence to your life. This sense of permanence is only partial and creates conflict that leads to despair again. You can only reach the third stage through a leap of faith because there aren't any rational reasons for making this move. You have to make it without any philosophical or conventional religious excuses. This is because what is most important is the truth that only you can know. Making this leap of faith is the way out of despair and it gives you a sense of the permanent significance of your life.[45]

Thus, he advocated the "leap of faith" in which a person makes a passionate commitment to something without objective certainty. For Kierkegaard, the "leap of faith" was a passionate choice to believe in the Christian God apart from evidence that this God existed. For Bellow like Kierkegaard, existence is not a passive state but rather an active

engagement with the world and with one's life. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual and personal responsibility in discerning appropriate courses of action has come to be viewed as a cornerstone of the twentieth-century Existentialist movement. Indeed society will only be enhanced if one is able to forsake nostalgia for the past and worries about potential disaster, and concentrate on the true goodness that exists inherently within us all.

As ego-centred as Augie is, occasionally something comes from within the depths of him, suggesting that the real business of life has nothing to do with being a successful functionary. Rather, the real business of life, Augie discovers, like Joseph in *Dangling Man* lies in carrying the burden of self: "Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life and the essence of his being here. Maybe he was supposed to make them and suffer from them on this earth." (*Seize the Day*, p. 56) Such a realization is essential to Augie overcoming his egoism — to his taking his hands off himself and thereby submitting to life. Again Joseph (DM) says, "I am somewhat afraid of the vanity of thinking that I can make my own way toward clarity' (DM, p.166), but he remembers having read Spinoza concerning the preservation of self: "He didn't say one's life. He said oneself... He did not mean preservation of the animal." Recognizing that it is the soul, spirit, or mind that Spinoza

meant by self, Joseph remarks: "It is our humanity that we are responsible for it, our dignity our freedom" (DM, p. 167). Augie also comes to realize that grace is not to be had through striving. From *Dangling Man* to *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the Bellow hero has been faced with the challenge of reconciling the views he has of himself with those that others have of him. He must decide whether to conform to the pattern of existence that surrounds him, or to explore new possibilities. He may ultimately not discover what he seeks, but the search itself is of prime significance. In *Dangling Man, The Victim, The Adventures of Augie March,* and *Seize the Day* only ambiguous resolutions are attained.

In the end, Augie March is still alienated from his fellow men, still another 'dangling man.' But at least he has followed his pilgrimage in search of perfect love to the realization of the inadequacy of this false faith. His heart was reaching out for identification with his imperfect fellow man with whom he had been raised in suffering and in joy. Only one more step and he would cease to be a "dangling man." Carl Jung's descriptions of transformation or "individuation" process are helpful in understanding Augie. Jung defines *Wiedergeburt* as involving transformation of an individual so that all of his or her faculties are brought into conscious play. This may involve a "renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality which is renewed is not

changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality, are subjected to *healing, strengthening, or improvement*" (Emphasis added). The ego, as Jung defines it, "extends only as far as the conscious mind," whereas the self comprises "the whole of the personality, which includes the unconscious as well as the conscious component. The Ego is thus related to the self as part of the whole."[46] Whatever is experienced in the inner journey must be understood to be at the same time individual and collective, the materials of the unconscious deriving from the repository that Jung spent his lifetime in codifying what he termed as intrinsic organization in "definite recognizable patterns." The resolution that Bellow's heroes move towards springs from a triumph over the ego rather than the simple destruction of it. They go beyond their own striving for absolute perfection and in so doing experience the sense of a new reality. The external world comes to them not as a paradigm of death, but as a mystery. This mystery has little to do with hope or despair or with any intellectual formulation of these states. Bellow's heroes see that their commitments, like Bellow's, are to something "far more rudimentary than any position or intellectual attitude might imply"[47] What they arrive at is not an "explanation" but a sense of "mystical" sense of wonder at life and reality which is independent of any final judgment of good or bad. "In the end, you can't save your soul and life

by thought," Augie is told by Einhorn, the earliest and most important of his mentors, "but if you think, the least of the consolation prizes is the world" (AM, p.117).

Bellow's intellectual heroes are acutely aware of the reasons for their alienation from the rest of society, but they are unable to think their way through to an accommodation with it. "Thinking leads only to more thinking — not to action." Bellow expanded on this idea in his acceptance speech upon receiving the National Book Award for Fiction in 1965 (this time for *Herzog*):

> There is nothing left for us novelists to do but think. For unless we think, unless we make a clearer estimate of our condition, we will continue to write kid stuff, to fail in our function, we will lack serious interests and become truly irrelevant.[48]

Augie is a new kind of American hero who still demands a certain kind of freedom. Not death, life's natural and inexorable limitation, but "disappointment," the steady smothering of a man's best talents and efforts, is what Augie renounces: "Not that life should end is so terrible in itself, but that it should end with so many disappointments in the essential. This is a fact" (AM, p.412). Although Bellow's protagonists are unable to accomplish anything that significantly reshapes their world, a number of them do manage to save themselves by coming to an accommodation with the world as it is. Often, this accommodation

requires a new sense of self and of the protagonist's relation to the human community.

The quest for freedom, knowledge, and love are merely versions of the real; they give the quest its form without determining its end. What we do recognize, in the end, is that reality eludes the versions we make of it, eludes and transcends them. What remains when all our seeking is done amounts to this; "the inestimable gift of awareness, of life willing and overreaching itself. This may be an axiomatic statement, but beyond this the heroes of bellow cannot go."[49] Freedom is the provisional goal of their quest, but freedom forces upon them knowledge of the self they did not bargain for, and self-knowledge discloses to them a world intelligible only in love. Perhaps the best summary of the moral pattern is Bellow's play *The Last Analysis*, which delightfully transposes virtually all the major themes of his fiction into a farcical key. Every one of Bellow's heroes suffers, like Bummidge in the play, from "humanitis," which as Bummidge's secretary explains is when "the human condition gets to be too much for you."[50] Every man is his own analyst, Bummidge suggests, and this is pretty much the condition of each of Bellow's protagonists. It is not so much the avowal of life that is important, but the analysis of lives. Their allegiance to essential values requires them to asses their place in society. All of the stories end with no sense of finality, as if each

man's suffering represents a phase rather than a realization. From the standpoint of schlemiel-literature, Salvation for the schlemiel is always partial and personal. Bellow does not affirm the objective presence of goodness, but merely the right and the need to believe in it as one component of the human personality. Saul Bellow affirms an American reality that is "new, promising, changing, dangerous, and universal."[51] Augie will not discount the possibility of a new Eden as a modern American Adam. "An ideal construction... This is the only possible way to meet chaos" (DM, p.19). Augie is confronted with the vision of a future in which there will be no fulfillment of an earthly utopia. The garden path, which was supposed to lead to a New World, has instead led to this brink of nothingness.

The end of the novel captures wonderfully the doubleness of Nature: it offers darkness and light, heaviness and motion. It suggests hopefully that pastoral comfort lies ahead, if Augie can "beat the dark" where he can see "the green canals and ancient palaces" (AM, p.536). Augie is admired for his knowledge of the limits of his understanding and for his measurable honesty to self. So Augie's reality laid in a vision of life as triumphant, a goal that he is ever speeding toward. He is the soul of cultural optimism and great self-destiny — to him; all is possible, even in a chaotic world. Bellow is not saying, "Look at man with all of his

endowments, to these depths he comes" (Dutton, 1982, p.50). Instead he is saying that man comes to these depths only through his mistaken goals and wasted abilities. Bellow endows Augie with all of the weapons needed to achieve a better fate, "to overcome ignominy," if he will only see the "contradictions between his ideals and reality" (Dutton, 1982, p.50). At the end of his story Augie indicates: "It must be clear, however, that I am a person of hope" (AM, p.529). At the end of the novel, Augie has benefited from his experience, but, as one critic has observed, he is no more suited to "the established forms of American life...than Huck or Holden" (Hassan, 1961, p.311). Only by "shedding systematic formulations of reality can the individual discover," as Bellow suggests, a "personal connection to the creative mystery underlying appearances." Bellow searches for "human significance," (Reader's Encyclopaedia, p.82) in a seemingly senseless, chaotic world. Augie, the New American Adam is precisely what he tells us he is in the novel's opening: "Chicago-born" (AM, p.3), the American in quest of the independent self. Ultimately, Augie, like other Bellow protagonists, fumbles his way toward richer, albeit tentative, human truths: "It was only an intimation of understanding. A promise that mankind might — might, mind you — eventually, through its gift which might — might again — be a divine gift, comprehend why it lived. Why life, why death? A promise filled with

qualifying might's is, perhaps the best we have — it is certainly the most that Bellow's honesty will allow for — but given the gloomy modern conditions, such promises are infinitely precious".[52] And there can always be a journey to see a newer world that may be clearer and richer as a result of having looked at and been moved by images of others and thereby to understand one's own individual identity. If it is true that the self has been eroded or even erased in this post modern world, then perhaps images such as those in this book may indeed help us discover more about who we are and where we are going as we enter the twenty-first century. Mr. Bellow probably is saying, and rightly, that the "American Dream is a faith which, like any other, can only be maintained stubbornly in spite of the evidence" (Podhoretz, 1979, p.18). In the foreword to Allan Bloom's widely debated book about the decline of higher education in America, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Bellow summarizes: "In the greatest confusion [of our age] there is still an open channel to the soul . . . and it is our business to keep it open, to have access to the deepest part of ourselves — to that part of us which is conscious of a higher consciousness, by means of which we make final judgments, and put everything together."[53] Whatever our views on these matters, we cannot but admire the honesty, and intelligence with which Bellow has pursued the quest to restore the soul to American literature.

## End Notes

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# Chapter III

## A) Dreams of Girlhood: A Space of her own - A Study of Sandra Cisneros': *The House on Mango Street* (1984)

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

Adolescence is certainly one of the most difficult and interesting stages in the progress of human life. Adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behavior, or identity, because it has always meant the process of developing a self rather than any definition of that self. "However if adolescence has never concretely specified an age range, it has been gendered and sexed."[1] In the case of adolescent girls, there are even more complex transformations and traumas both on the physical and on the psychological level. In the quotation by Lillian Schlissel cited in the introduction, about the patterns relating to the nature of male adolescence she also says, "We have still to discover the patterns of experience that hold true for women" (p.258).

While the rebellion of "angry young men" is justified because society does not provide them with worthwhile goals, there are claims that the question of "how to be useful and make something of oneself does not apply to girls. A girl does not have to; she is not expected to make something of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any

other natural or creative act."[2] In order to have a clearer idea of the different meaning adolescence assumes respectively for boys and for girls, a perceptive comment by Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, 1949) — the so-called Bible of Feminism is to be noted:

> The universe does not wear a similar aspect for the adolescent boy who is permitted to give imperious notice of his existence and for the adolescent girl whose sentiments have no immediate effectiveness. The one constantly questions the world; he can, at any moment, rise up against whatever is . . . The other simply submits; the world is defined without reference to her, and its aspect is immutable as far as she is concerned.[3]

The expected norm of behavior of an adolescent girl is therefore — as assessed by Beauvoir to be — obedience, submission, passivity, simply because she is not going to master the world as a boy imagines to do. In women's writing the self is particularly problematic, not only because women writers have had to construct their own versions of femininity in opposition to generations of male portraits but because women's roles and circumstances continue to change radically. "Instead of settling for being a warped half of a person, which is the equivalent to a self-destructive non-person, the emerging woman is casting off role definitions and moving toward androgynous being."[4] Although most women novelists address similar preoccupations in their writings they employ vastly different discursive strategies. They may tell similar stories, but the form, vision, and tone with which they approach their

objective reflect the heterogeneity that exists in their novels. Evidence of this difference arises when we compare changes, which take place in the protagonists' from their initial disillusionment to a final sort of resolution in Sandra Cisneros *The House on Mango Street* and Carson McCullers *The Member of the Wedding.* Both works tell of the losses and hardships in the lives of the female characters, and how these women find the strength to survive. They struggle to find meaning and validation, and succeed on two levels: first, as a single individual who was able to survive; and second, as a representative narrative that exemplifies the struggle of many American women against racial and sexual oppression. Like the theme of survival, the theme of self-discovery is very prominent in American literature. In fact, it can be argued that self-discovery turns out to be the overriding theme in both these works.

In this chapter the term 'feminine adolescence' has been used with a degree of independence from any specific age category. The girls who are called adolescent here are not necessarily teenagers rather; they are defined as in transition or in process. By choosing an adolescent girl as heroine — and thence, as the main view point — these woman authors succeed in emphasizing the perennial contrast between individual ambitions and social rules, between the young woman's dreams and the drab necessities of collective life — be it family or society at large. One

notices different reactions of young girls to the rules imposed upon their lives as adults, while confronting the strictures of society; (particularly harsh on women) these young heroines try and define their own personalities.

In contrast to the masculine version of Bildungsroman in which the male's journey is usually external, the female journey is largely an internal experience of brief moments of epiphany or "flashes of recognition."[5] According to Rita Felski, this type of novel "emphasizes spatial and symbolic patterns rather than temporal and open-ended dimension of narrative; it is mythical rather than historical."[6] It is precisely because the female protagonist's search is inward, and her awakening is a result of changed consciousness, that her voyage is symbolic. The chapter will concentrate on particular pivotal moments in the lives connected to maturation and self-discovery. In contrast to the Bildungsroman, in which the male leaves home to 'slay the dragons,' the female on a journey of self-discovery seeks surroundings that are not a threat to her: "a place that echoes rather than threatens her sense of self" (Felksi, p.135). Cisneros and McCullers thus keep their heroines in a female space and, by ascribing to it immense importance, these authors have cleverly inverted another masculine prerogative. The home/kitchen becomes the hub for the action in the novels. In *The Female Novel of*

*Development and the Myth of Psyche,* Mary Anne Ferguson emphasizes the fact that the male hero retains a sense of integrity and dignity, although as a learner he may have appeared foolish. His adventures send him out into society, and by the end of his journey he is able to look back on his exploits with an ironic gaze. The female character is, however, initiated "at home through learning the rituals of human relationships."[7] However, both the male and female authors share in the belief that there is "a coherent self, faith in the possibility of development, insistence on a time span in which development occurs, and emphasis on social context."[8] The sterile and airless feminine space —'vicious cycles'[9] — is transformed into new open structure for survival, *a space of her own,* of wisdom, of personal growth, and of creativity.

According to Felski, the major problem faced by women is generally attributed to socially constructed gender roles: "the starting problem posed is invariably that of the restrictive nature of female social roles" (133). Reflecting the diversity of authors, genres, themes, and techniques in this postmodern era, contemporary women's writing in America takes many forms. Often feminine writing, in an attempt to counter the dominant patriarchal voice, appropriates, and then reformulates a traditional male genre from the perspective of the marginalized female.

As seen in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Mexican author Sandra Cisneros borrows from the general configurations of the traditional Bildungsroman (a journey that traces the protagonist's path toward self-fulfillment) and applies them to her own novel. The principal technique employed by Cisneros to subvert the masculine genre of Bildungsroman in order to present it as a feminine novel of self-discovery is parody, one of the dominant characteristics of Latino feminine writing of recent years. Cisneros challenges the conventions of the Bildungsroman by weaving Esperanza's quest for selfhood into the fabric of the community. Such a dual focus is usual in Cisneros's works, in which a multiplicity of voices illustrates the ways the individual engages in the discourses and social practices of Chicano culture. Additionally, by focusing on the 'socialization' processes of the female in Chicano culture, Cisneros explores racism in the dominant culture as well as patriarchal oppression in the Latino community.

*The House on Mango Street and The Member of the Wedding* belong to the rubric of the female Bildungsroman enunciated by Ellen Morgan as a form:

> Admirably suited to express the emergence of women from cultural conditioning into struggle with institutional forces, their progress toward the goals of full personhood, and the effort to restructure their lives, and society according to their own visions of meaning and right living.[10]

In order to understand why *The House on Mango Street* fits so well in the category of the female Bildungsroman, one must define the paradigm and get an understanding of what makes up this focused sub-genre. First, there is the 'awakening,' when Esperanza becomes increasingly aware that she is different and begins to question her Mexican-American heritage. This leads to Esperanza questioning her value as a human being and the social status of her race. Esperanza must learn to cope with her second-class status as a Mexican-American as well as her inferior status as a woman. Second, as she encounters an awakening of her femininity, she gains self-awareness through her relationships with a network of Mexican-American women, a key element of the female Bildungsroman, which guides and supports her in becoming self-reliant in a patriarchal society. This network provides her with moral guidance in the face of racial and gender discrimination. In turn, these building blocks help transform her into a mature, independent woman. In *The House on Mango Street* there is an ironic twist to the guidance of mentors, for often Esperanza is guided by examples of women she does not want to emulate, such as Sally and Rafaela. Third, she explores her feminine values and begins redefining her identity as she matures. Finally, as she reaches a point of maturity and independence, she concludes her journey of self-discovery. She reaches this pinnacle

with the help of the women who have guided her. By taking these specific characteristics of the female Bildungsroman and analyzing the character of Esperanza, one can see that contrary to the Bildungsroman, which is linear in nature, Cisneros created "an awakening" of the character — "the woman's awakening is distinguished by its circularity — her need for repetition"[11] Indeed, Felski suggests, "the heroine must become what she once was, recover an identity, which is complete and self-contained, rather than contingent, and historically and socially determined" (141). The narrative has a plot line that would qualify as one variety of "consciousness-raising novels" which Lisa Maria Hogeland defines as narratives whose "protagonist moves from feeling somehow at odds with others' expectations of her, into confrontations with others and with institutions, and into a new and newly politicized understanding of herself and her society."[12]

It is through the process of making "a story for my life" (HMS, p.109), that is, the imaginative re-creation of her own experiences and interactions with her environment, that the narrating "I" begins her search for meaning and a new way of being in the world. The work centers on a Hispanic adolescent, though this time the girl is named Esperanza Cordero, a name which is not only an ethnic marker but also a gender-specific identity. Humiliated by her family's poverty and dissatisfied

with the repressive gender values of her culture, she longs for a room of her own and a house of which she can be proud. Esperanza uses, not New York like Holden, but a house in Chicago, to examine her society and the cultural oppression that weighs on her as a young Chicano teenager. With the female "I' as the central consciousness, she has control over her own life and her own story through the act of narrating. By this process she actively participates in the process of her self-formation and gradually comes to an understanding of herself and her relationship to the community on Mango Street. This process is closely linked to her development as an artist in the process of discovering and narrating her experiences within the community; a development that turn the novel into what one may call "a portrait of the artist as a young woman", that is, a *Kunstlerroman* a novel that "culminates in the artist's literal or imaginative withdrawal to the inner life which leads to a discovery of his or her vocation" (Hirsch, 1983, p.46). It is through the process of telling her own stories that she discovers the power of her own creativity. Collectively these stories reveal a female Bildung process that moves from rejection of prescribed roles to the recognition of creativity as a path toward a self-defined identity.

Esperanza also has a series of awakenings about what it means to be a Hispanic female in a segregated and racist patriarchal society. But

she did not make her transition into womanhood alone. Cisneros also raises the consciousness of the community of women that help guide her along on her journey by making them predominant characters within the text. By giving voices to this community of women, Cisneros breaks from the patriarchal literary structure by making the male characters weaker and by not giving them an overall influence on Esperanza's journey into maturity.

The book's action is defined by three major themes: the girl's desire to find a suitable house (essentially a move away from the barrio), to find her identity, and to become a writer. Identity is crucial, for it not only means coming to terms with her Latino ethnicity, but also arriving at a gender consciousness not circumscribed by the gender determinants of her culture. Chicanos perceived a parallel between their people's discrimination and exploitation by the dominant white society, and their own gender discrimination and subjugation by a traditional Hispanic patriarchal culture. Consequently, Esperanza is "twice a minority;"[13] she is doubly marginalized because of her ethnicity and her patriarchal society. As will be seen, the themes are inextricably interrelated; the resolution of the themes of house and identity is to be achieved by her role as writer. Unity is a concept that fascinates Esperanza, who views it variously as order or art. There are two kinds of unity in the collection: first, the unity

of Esperanza's life as she matures from childhood to maturity, and, second, the artistic unity of this collection of stories — which are intertwined by chronology, characters, and houses, as well as what can be termed "a lattice-work of cross-references"[14] of images and motifs. Thus, Esperanza like Holden Caulfield uses storytelling as a moral focus for her life and her identity, and as a means of achieving the aim of her memoir: self-definition. Spiritual awareness and imaginative vision are two ways of expressing what Esperanza hopes to acquire by narrating her story, for life is "a quest for meaning and value"(Kertzer, p.34). These concepts point to Esperanza's career as a writer. She wants to perfect the power of imaginative recall until it can roam freely through the past and forge an over-arching vision, which is sympathetic, creative, and human. This is the vision of reality that Cisneros evokes in all her books and the way Esperanza defines herself: "The sum of one's life is oneself" (Kertzer, p.35). But she discovers that "she is not a single, consistent entity, but a mosaic whose picture is constantly reforming" (Kertzer, p.35). Cisneros parallels self to narrative: "The self is a history of living, or a story that we tell about ourselves" (Kertzer, p.35). The other side of this identity dilemma is the community in which the individual lives. In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza, struggles to find her identity through the history

of her name, the stereotypical influence from other women on Mango Street, and her literary voice.

*The House on Mango Street* that won Cisneros the *Before Columbus American Book Award* in 1985 was praised for the lyrical narrative structures, vivid dialogue, and descriptive precision. "The reality of Hispanic life rarely enters mainstream American writing," remarked Jenny Uglow, adding, "Cisneros sets out to fill the blank page and let her people speak."[15] Thus Cisneros proves faithful to her purpose, as she defined it in a 20 May 1991 interview: "in my stories and life I am trying to show that U.S. Latinas have to reinvent, to remythologize, ourselves."[16] Yet she remains aware of the price exacted by a revisionist approach to traditional mores, recalling in the *Americas Review*, 1987 "We accept our culture, but not without adapting ourselves as women."[17] For a Hispanic the question of cultural identity often involves language. Cisneros asserted in the 4 August 1991 *Chicago Tribune* that "if you're bilingual, you're doubly rich. You have two ways of looking at the world."[18]

*The House on Mango Street* represents a unique work of prose that defies previously existing categories of literature. Cisneros's willingness to experiment in different genres leads to stylistic and thematic crossovers. A marked departure from the traditional novel form,

Cisneros had called the stories 'vignettes,' that is, "literary sketches, like small illustrations nonetheless hovering in that gray area between two genres." Julian Olivares quotes Cisneros on her intent:

> I wanted to write stories that were a cross between poetry and fiction... Except I wanted to write a collection which could be read at any random point without having any knowledge of what came before or after. Or that could be read in a series to tell one big story each story contributing to the whole like beads in a necklace... I wanted stories like poems, compact and lyrical and ending with a reverberation.... (Notebook, 1987, pp.69-73)

Each vignette stands alone as a complete piece, while the forty-four vignettes together make up a composite story that traces the development of Esperanza's self-identity as a Chicano writer who resists the limitations of traditional roles imposed upon women in the Latin-American community. Cisneros reflects Esperanza's reality: For her Mango Street, is a collection of stories and characters, and each story means something on its own but gains greater meaning when seen in light of the others. People are like this too: they are valuable as individuals, but more valuable as part of a community. The stories, like the people in her neighborhood, interact with each other, and with each interaction the stories deepen in significance. The chapters are intensely lyrical, written in a prose highly charged with metaphor. Each section has a title, and each could stand alone as an autonomous piece, like a prose poem. Esperanza's voice unifies the pieces, however, and creates a continuing

narrative. Thus is the foundation laid for the internal journey that Esperanza must traverse in order to do battle against time-honored traditions.

The novel begins with the story of the same title: *The House on Mango Street*:

> We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Pauline, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot...By the time we got to Mango Street we were six — Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me... (p.3)

> They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year...But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. (p.4)

The most important symbol in the novel is the titular house, which represents young girls' dreams for their own happy homes but also the prison that many homes are, guarded first by domineering fathers, and then by domineering husbands. The main conflict is the clash between Esperanza's dream— the American Dream — of owning a spacious, private, and secure house like the ones she sees on TV — and her Mango Street reality. She doesn't want to belong — not to her rundown neighborhood, known for its harsh realities, and not to the low expectations the world has for her. But she discovers that she does not belong to the race or class of people who live in such houses and that

power and peace come from recognizing one's place in and one's duty to the community.

Throughout the book there is a tension between Esperanza's ties to the barrio and her impressions of another kind of life, on the other side, in the place where people have real houses. The house becomes, essentially, the narrator's first universe. She begins here because it is the beginning of her conscious narrative reflection. She describes the house from the outside; this external depiction is a description and presentation of self: "I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to." (HMS, p.5) This she believes will reverse the bleak circumstances of her life, making her complete and thus valued by others. Julian Olivares states,

> Mango Street is a street sign, a marker that circumscribes the neighborhood to its Latino population of Puerto Ricans, Chicanos and Mexican immigrants. This house is not the young protagonist's dream house; it is only a temporary house. The semes that we ordinarily perceive in house, and the ones Bachelard assumes — such as comfort security tranquility esteem — is lacking. This is a house that constrains, one that she wants to leave; consequently, the house sets up dialectic of inside and outside of living here and wishing to leave for there.[19]

Cisneros draws on the house as a symbol for a variety of thematic concerns: the house symbolizes the American Dream of middle-class comfort that the people of Esperanza's community fantasize about but will likely never achieve, and also symbolizes the realm of literature,

expressing Esperanza's desire to become a writer. At other times, the house functions as a symbol of female confinement within the traditional, prescribed gender roles as wife and mother. Esperanza's childhood home also represents a family history and cultural heritage, which are both enriching and confining to an adolescent girl with high aspirations. Through this complex symbolism and the variety of characters and stories Esperanza reveals in her narrative, Cisneros explores themes of economic oppression, ethnic identity, female sexuality, and the power of storytelling to reconcile the past with the present and future. In the course of her development as a young writer, Esperanza struggles to negotiate conflicts between individual self-determination and community identity, between the private space of the home and the public sphere of the streets, between her Mexican heritage and her participation in American culture. Additionally, she experiences a battle between the comforts of the familiar neighborhood and the urge to break free from its limitations, as well as between traditional gender roles and her emergent feminist consciousness. Drawing heavily upon her childhood experiences and ethnic heritage as the daughter of a Mexican father and a Chicano mother, Cisneros's fiction and poetry address the impoverished conditions of barrio life, the cultural suppression of minorities in America, the struggle

for self-identity in a pluralistic society, and the influence of culturally determined gender roles on the formation of character.

For Esperanza the notion of house — a space of her own — is critical to her coming of age as a mature person and artist. Ramón Saldívar says that "this novel emphasizes the crucial roles of racial and material as well as ideological conditions of oppression."[20] At the beginning of the novel, Esperanza explains how her parents talk about moving into a real house that would "have running water and pipes that worked" (HMS, p. 4). Instead she lives in a run-down flat and is made to feel embarrassed and humiliated because of it. Before her family moved into the house on Mango Street, Esperanza's teachers had made denigrating remarks about their living conditions. One day while she is playing outside, a nun from her school walks by and stops to talk to her.

> Where do you live? She asked
> There, I said pointing up to the third floor.
> You live *there*?
>
> *There*. I had to look where she pointed — the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing (HMS, p.5).

Later in the novel, in a similar occurrence, a nun assumes that Esperanza lives in an even worse poverty-stricken area than, in fact, is the case. She wants a house she can "point to," that is, one she can point to as hers without feeling "like nothing" (5), one that does not destroy her

sense of self, clearly connecting the house with her own self-perception. By rejecting the house of her parents she rejects a structure that threatens her sense of self and takes the first step toward claiming her right to self-definition. Thus, though far from perfect, the families' new home according to Ellen McCracken "represents a positive objectification of the self, the chance to redress humiliation and establish a dignified sense of her own personhood."[21] Esperanza forges her identity through the metaphor of the house: "both a symbol of the socio-economic condition in which Esperanza finds herself and a symbol of human consciousness."[22] Her longing for her own house underscores her need for something uplifting and stable with which she can identify and therefore suggests "a positive objectification of the self." By pointing to this dilapidated house, she points to herself. Olivares says "thus the house and narrator become identified as one, thereby revealing an ideological perspective of poverty and shame" (1988, pp.162–63). Cisneros also successfully dramatizes both the individual and the communal significance of owning a house. Such a basic human desire and need is especially crucial for economically oppressed minorities. The house Esperanza dreams of beyond her family home will still have a communal function. She vows that

> One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come

> in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house. (HMS, p.87)

The penultimate vignette, *A House of My Own*, echoes the essay *A Room of One's Own*, by early-twentieth-century feminist writer Virginia Woolf. In Cisneros's rendition of Woolf's assertion that a woman needs a room of her own in order to become a writer and Esperanza's journey towards independence merges the central themes of writing and a house of her own. In a distinctive motif Cisneros also establishes a link between the image of the house and creativity, not only in the bedtime stories Esperanza's mother tells, but also in the daughter's wish: "a house all my own ... a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (HMS, p.108). Minerva, barely two years older than Esperanza, writes poetry when not dealing with her two children and an abusive husband. In fact, Esperanza realizes that Minerva's writing allows her to transcend her predicament. The house Esperanza longs for, certainly, is a house where she can have her own room and one she can point to in pride, but, it is as Olivares mentions, "fundamentally a metaphor for the house of storytelling": "...what I remember most is Mango Street" (HMS, p.110) because of it she became a writer. Esperanza will leave Mango Street but take it with her always, for it "is inscribed within her" (Olivares, 1988, p.167-69) and "*las comadres*"

(godmothers or women close to the family circle) tell Esperanza that her art must be linked to the community:

> When you leave you must remember always to come back for the others. A circle, you understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street… You can't forget who you are. (HMS, p.105)

Writing then empowers Esperanza and strengthens her commitment to the community of Chicanos. Indications of Esperanza's formation as a writer and predictions of her eventual move from home and Mango Street are given in two stories related to death, suggesting perhaps that creativity is not only a means of escape from the confines of Mango Street but also an affirmation of life and a rebirth. In the dialogue Esperanza relates with her aunt in *Bad Girl*, the twenty-third piece, she reveals that she writes poetry, and with the subsequent stories it becomes clear that these are the memoirs she has written of her first year's experience of living in the barrio, in the little red house on Mango Street:

> You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of.
> No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here (HMS, p.106)

Esperanza's poem reflects her desire to be someone else, her dissatisfaction with herself:

> I want to be
> Like the waves on the sea,
> Like the clouds in the wind,
> But I'm me (HMS, p.60)

She desires to be like "the waves on the sea/like the clouds in the wind" two natural forces that are constantly redefining themselves, always shifting their shape and altering their movements. Esperanza doesn't want to be held to one way of being. It is through writing, as her aunt tells her, that she will achieve her social and gender liberation:

> That's nice. That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn't know what she meant. (HMS, p.61)

Though Esperanza confesses she didn't know what Aunt Lupe meant at that time, this book is evidence that she eventually understood, she has been freed, and that she has finally found a real house — "a new house, a house made of heart" (HMS, p.64) where she and all the people from Mango Street reside. A real house is not something material, but rather something spiritual: It is only within her heart — within herself — that Esperanza will find her true home. When one's home is in the heart, one can be at home anywhere. Esperanza elects to build a real house, but distinct from Augie and Holden, this is just what she has accomplished — a house within her heart, where she and all the people from Mango Street still live. Though these books represent different times in American history, the narrative pattern, style and language are strikingly similar and this leads to — "a literary continuity."[23] So that what Cisneros picks up, is

an archetypal continuity, which is cultural as well as literary. Aunt Lupe knew the power that words, shaped into stories and poems, have to keep one free from what hurts and haunts. The vignette concludes with a cryptic: "And then we began to dream the dreams" (HMS, p.61).

Esperanza finds her literary voice through her own cultural experience. "She seeks self-empowerment through writing, while recognizing her commitment to a community essential in connecting herself with the power of women."[24] Her literary voice allows Esperanza to find her own identity and use her experience on Mango Street as a building experience. She states, "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much... [Mango] does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free" (HMS, p.110). For Esperanza, writing ultimately helps her to fully comprehend herself and the members of the Mango Street community. Esperanza's desire for a real house can thus be seen as a desire for an understanding and acceptance of the self. For Esperanza, a house represents status, security, and a rise above poverty. A real house would give her privacy, and it would give her a space of her own where she could forge her identity. In this sense the house becomes a metaphor of the space for writing. Esperanza Cordero is clearly conscious of self-exploration through writing. The need for a house and to be a writer is actually inseparable. The house she imagines and

describes becomes her symbol for freedom and artistic expression. It also ties her to her community and is the source of her identity and her stories. How artistic creation strengthens identity and provides dignity is an important theme of the novel. Esperanza knows she requires a space for autonomy in order to create her fiction and her self apart from the traditional role of women in her culture. In the final vignette, *Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes*, Esperanza tells her readers "I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (HMS, p.109). The conclusion of the novel then ends with the same words that make up the opening of the book — in a paragraph that begins, "We didn't always live on Mango Street" (p.109). Cisneros brings the story full circle, ending the work with the culmination of Esperanza's coming-of-age — the writing of the book itself. Unlike the boys' quests, however, this novel is put together in one way to show Esperanza's growth, but in another to imitate the part-by-part building of an edifice. Indeed, the house on Mango Street does not just refer to the place Esperanza is trying to leave, but to the novel itself as a house which Esperanza as character and Cisneros as author have built together. From the first moment Esperanza realizes that the color of her skin makes her different, and the self-satisfaction she feels writing down her

feelings, the reader is led through her journey of growth and transformation.

Consequently, she wants to point to another house and to another self. And as she longs for this other house and self, she also longs for another name. But she will find that in growing up and writing, she will come to inhabit a special house to fit into, and find comfort in her name. Ultimately, Esperanza's ability to see beyond her immediate surroundings allows her to transcend her circumstances and immaturity. The conclusion is that, in essence, Esperanza takes within her the memories from the house as she also carries her mementos from Mango Street, her "bags of books and paper" (HMS, p.110). These are "her roots, her inspirations, and the kernels"[25] of what Cisneros sensed, years ago in a seminar at the Iowa Writers Program where she participated in a discussion of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*[26] and realized that her unique experience of the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, and gender separated her from other American writers.

Though Esperanza is painfully aware of the racial and economic oppression her community suffers, it is the fate of the women in her barrio that has the most profound impact on her. As she begins to develop sexually she apprehends that the fate of these women might be hers too. She ponders on the consequences of choosing marriage over education,

the possible loss of the emotional liberation attained through writing words. All this adds to the sense of confusion associated with adolescence. So in a general way Cisneros's novel belongs to a feminine tradition in which culture and literature are important. But for her, far more significant as literary models are Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield, primarily because they are adolescents growing up in culturally oppressive worlds. Cisneros's protagonist, like them, is innocent, sensitive, and considerate of others, but extremely vulnerable. Like them, Esperanza speaks a child's language, and develops mentally as time goes on. She knows how she feels, and learns from the inside out what in Holden's term is "phony."

Esperanza recognizes immediately, in *Boys and Girls*, that boys and girls live in separate universes where communication, particularly name-calling and humiliation, maintains that separateness. From experience, however, she begins to recognize how gender distinctions continue into adulthood, for young girls, in a guise that appears to be both the object of their dreams – marriage and family – and the source of their pain and subjugation. The house indicates a gender trap fortified by the cycle of poverty from which women and children suffer because of their economic dependence on men. And while there are young women who cast off the passive role allocated to them, they must endure

resulting difficulties. Cisneros examines the shifting boundaries of gender and genre and reassigns new roles to women as instigators in social and political change. Thus, women's history is not perceived as a separate discipline; instead, the stories of both genders are interwoven. For example, Esperanza yearns for a private space, yet she weaves her tale of growing up with snapshots of women entrapped in houses, exploring in this way the indeterminate area between privacy and entrapment. Similarly, her attitude towards the public site of the barrio is ambivalent. Both houses and local communities are fixed; like borders, they enclose people within the safety of familiar or intimate territories, but can, at the same time, become prisons.

Though full of characters that lack power — socially, politically, economically, and sexually — the novel is not a story of despair, but of hope, which is what the narrator's name, Esperanza, means in English. But the identity she seeks must be freed from the gender oppression of her culture. In the vignette *My Name* the fourth piece, Julian Olivares points out, "Esperanza traces the reason for the discomfiture with her name to cultural oppression the Mexican males' suppression of their women" (p.163). Esperanza's name represents her most basic struggle with her Spanish-American identity. She says: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness; it

means waiting" (HMS, p.10) — a reference to the sadness and waiting of her great-grandmother after whom she was named. She was "a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier" and tamed her, so that: "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow ..." (HMS, p.11)

Here we have not the space of contentment but of sadness, and "dialectic of inside and outside. Of living *here* and wishing to leave for *there*" (Olivares, 1988, emphasis added) The novel captures the dialectic between self and community in Chicano writing. The woman's place is one of domestic confinement, not one of liberation and choice. Esperanza also reveals that she is named after her great-grandmother, who like Esperanza was born in the "Chinese year of the horse — which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female." She exposes this as a lie since "the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (HMS, p.10). The multiplicity of meanings that intersect in her name is further underscored by the female legacy the name Esperanza carries in the family. Named after her Mexican great-grandmother, Esperanza is linked through her name to her cultural past and to her identity as a woman within a particular socio-cultural context. The inheritance

symbolizes the strong family bond of Latinos in their effort to keep the family names alive. This story of her namesake, of a strong and rebellious woman who nevertheless had to succumb to patriarchal coercion and control, makes her conscious of the position women in general hold within her own cultural framework. Esperanza links her great-grandmother's fate, her confinement, her sadness and lost hope, with her own name, that is, her self, making her name synonymous to her culture's definitions of gender roles, definitions she can only reject: "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (HMS, p.11). She thus makes a clear distinction between the wild great-grandmother she would have liked to have known, and the socio-cultural system that subdued her. By accepting her name, but refusing to accept a heritage of female confinement, Esperanza carries on a legacy of rebellion against patriarchal definitions of female selfhood. Esperanza is already aware of the patriarchal society that wishes to rob her of her strong will and independence. She feels restricted by her name, as if someone else has predetermined her identity. Her attempt to decode the meaning of her name becomes an attempt to come to terms with her bicultural identity. The very pronunciation of her name changes with language and cultural context. Her name is thus a sign of a complex bicultural context that requires her to negotiate among opposing cultural

meanings to come to terms with her own self. As the female heroines of the *Bildungsroman* move with faltering steps toward their identity, their progress is deterred by patriarchal "naming," which includes even the personal names they receive at birth and at marriage. "Women have called the process of giving form to their experience through words a new naming."[27] Thus, Esperanza would like "to baptize [herself] under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (HMS, p.11) Her choice of name, Zeze the X, indicates that what she wants is a name that carries no contradicting cultural connotations; it is, culturally speaking, a "hollow" name she would have to invest with meaning and identity, and unlike her name "Esperanza," it is not "culturally embedded in a dominating, male-centered ideology" (Olivares, 1988, p.163). However, it is not so much the name that Esperanza wants to change, but the history and expectations that come with it. She wants to reinvent herself, and she can do so, she thinks, by giving herself a new name. This preference ultimately forces Esperanza to leave Mango Street, in search of a more promising future. To Esperanza her name embodies contradictory meaning – hope for womanhood that represents empowerment as opposed to oppressiveness, sadness and waiting. Ultimately that hope for empowerment extends not solely to womanhood

but to humanity in general. Furthermore, Esperanza's surname 'Cordero' meaning, 'lamb,' operates symbolically in the text, but in an ironic manner. She refuses to sacrifice her gender to a patriarchic society. "This desire is indicative of her refusal to be externally defined either by her house, by her socio-economic circumstances, or by her name, that is, by traditional patriarchal values, in her quest for a self-defined identity" (Eysturoy, 1996, p. 98).

In subsequent works — including the collection of stories *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) and the volumes of poetry *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987) and *Loose Woman* (1994) — Cisneros continued to explore common themes that focus on Hispanic women, divided cultural loyalties, feelings of alienation, sexual and cultural oppression, degradation associated with poverty, family violence, artistic creativity, and personal identity. In her prefatory poem to *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, Cisneros asks, "what does a woman (like me) inherit that tells her how to go"? This question about the cultural inheritance of Mexican American women and how it shapes their perceptions of the choices available to them is central to Cisneros' work. Throughout her poetry and fiction, she has depicted the material and ideological forces that circumscribe Mexican American women's lives. Like Cisneros herself, her female characters often must come to terms with a cultural tradition that they

love but also view as oppressive because of the limited conception of appropriate behavior for women available within Mexican narratives and culture.

*The House on Mango Street* is dedicated *a las Mujeres* 'to the women.' and Cisneros offers the reader great insights into the lives of her female characters. One of the most enduring themes of the book is the 'socialization' of females within Chicano society based on the fixed roles of the family. Cisneros explores the dynamics of women's lives within this precarious and male dominated society, where the conditions of females are predetermined by economic and social constraints. For most women in the neighborhood, these constraints are too powerful to overcome. However, Esperanza possesses the power to see beyond her circumstances and the world of the ghetto, while those around her fall prey to it and perpetuate its cycle. Esperanza's mother is typical of the Hispanic woman grounded in this way of life. The image of Ruthie is of a female literally trapped and unable to escape Mango Street, escape her mother's living room, for that matter she is only one of the many symbols in the book of the trapped female. Her mother is typical of the women in Latin American communities whose life is defined by marriage, family, children, and traditionally female activities. Esperanza's mother, who is a first generation Mexican-American, wishes for her daughters a better life

outside the cycle of subjugation that characterizes her own, and she views education as the ticket out of that way of life. She wants Esperanza to have what she did not — an education and a career, something more to live for than just a man — "Got to take care all your own," (HMS, p.91) her mother says (got to be independent). Mama proclaims to Esperanza, "I could've been somebody, you know?" (p.90) — explaining that she left school although she was "a smart cookie then" (HMS, p.91) because she was ashamed that she did not have nice clothes. What made her mother quit school was shame. This brings to mind the vignette *Chanclas*, which translates as old shoes, also has the Spanish-American meaning of good-for-nothing which is exactly how Esperanza felt at the baptism party in her new dress and old shoes. She almost quit because she was ashamed of her shoes. This chapter is important because Esperanza learns to overcome that shame. Once she forgets about her shoes and begins to dance, she herself begins to feel attractive. The shoes become incidental, not elemental, to her beauty. She must learn to avoid shame, to be happy because "Shame is a bad thing...It keeps you down" (p.91). The work captures the universal pangs of otherness — what Cisneros, in her introduction to the tenth anniversary edition, has called "the shame of being poor, of being female, of being not-quite-good-enough." It suggests

from where that otherness comes and shows how it can become a cause for celebration rather than shame.

Esperanza's mother wants her to be a survivalist in a segregated community. Laying down the moral roots of her being, her mother teaches Esperanza to be self-reliant in the face of adversity, a type of instruction that is a component of the female Bildungsroman. Serving as an anchor in Esperanza's life, she provides guidance and love — lessons in living. Her mothers' lessons were vital to Esperanza; this is the measure of what a human being can be in Esperanza's child-eye view, and this type of woman is what she wanted to become.

Cisneros uses a combination of poetry and storytelling to portray Esperanza's world. Her figurative and imagistic language, is seen especially in the vignette *Hairs*, Esperanza's mother's hair, which she likes best, is "like little rosettes, like little candy circles" (p.6) and it "is the warm smell of bread before you bake it" (p.6) It is significant that her mother's hair is her favorite and makes her feel safe, for it is from her mother that Esperanza will learn her "place" — her role as a young Chicano girl and woman. However, her hair "never obeys barrettes or bands" (HMS, p.6) and this suggests that Esperanza may not obey all her mother's traditions. Her mother strongly believes that the education of females help bring about social changes and moves women into a

different sphere where they are no longer subjected to domestic positions, a goal that Esperanza wanted to achieve.

In *Those Who Don't,* Esperanza addresses two of the largest themes of the novel: stereotyping of Mexican Americans resulting in prejudice. Esperanza notices that people "who don't know any better" (HMS, p.28) — non-Hispanics — are afraid in Esperanza's neighborhood. They assume that because Hispanics are "different," they are "dangerous" and ready to "attack (strangers) with shiny knives" (HMS, p.28) — who enter their neighborhood. But Esperanza knows better. Her familiarity with the people in the neighborhood — and the color of the people in her neighborhood — takes away Esperanza's fear. Were those who don't know better to spend some time in her neighborhood, they would no longer be afraid. Unfortunately, color seems to be what draws the boundaries in the neighborhoods around Mango Street. When Esperanza leaves the familiar sight of brown faces and enters "into a neighborhood of another color," she, too, is frightened. She acknowledges the sad fact that this is, unfortunately, a part of human nature, something that has happened before, is happening now, and will continue to happen — "that is how it goes and goes." Perceptions are hard to change and prejudice dies hard. In this passage, it is apparent that Esperanza is beginning her journey of transformation by questioning her Mexican-American

heritage. She internalizes this difference and considers – "all brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight" (HMS, p.28).

Esperanza must start to evolve from what she has learned and begin to put to use that knowledge to build her own worth. As Cisneros works with Esperanza to stimulate her self-worth, the reader can now begin to follow her growth as she moves forward with her internal awakening and watch her as she learns to be an intellectual individual. Following her awakening, Esperanza begins the struggle of overcoming the pain of realizing that her physical appearance places her outside the social ideal. This awakening leads to the introduction of the second characteristic of a female Bildungsroman – guidance from a network of strong Mexican women. By prominently displaying the female characters in the text and having the male characters less intrusive in the development of Esperanza, Cisneros breaks from the patriarchal literary structure to create a network of women that replace the traditional male roles. This contributes to the journey toward self-awakening as Felski argues, "encounters with other women also form a central part of the discovery process...the group of women providing the organic and

harmonious community, which opposes the rationalized world of male society" (135).

Esperanza learns from a network of women who teach her traditional moral values, independence, education, and self-reliance. Of these female characters, her mother is the one who has the strongest influence on Esperanza as has already been discussed. The next character in this network of women to help Esperanza with empowerment is Alicia. Like Esperanza, Alicia desires something more than the traditional role for the Chicano woman. In *Alicia Who Sees Mice*, a vignette both lyrical and hauntingly realistic, the narrator describes her friend's life. Because her mother has died, Alicia, the oldest, has "inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness," and she must study late into the night, beginning only after her "woman's work" is done. Alicia

> ...studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin... studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers (HMS, pp.31-32)

Alicia must arise early to make her father's

lunchbox tortillas:

> Close your eyes and they'll go away, her father says, or You're just imagining. And anyway, a woman's place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears early just in time to rise and catch the hind legs hide behind the sink, beneath the four-clawed tub, under

> the swollen floorboards nobody fixes, in the corner of your eyes. (p.31)

Here we note "a space of misery and subjugation, a Latino's perception of life all magnificently crystallized in the image of the tortilla star" (Olivares, 1988). To Alicia Venus, the morning star does not mean wishing upon or waiting for a star to fall down as it does for Rafaela. For Alicia, it means having to get up early, a rolling pin and tortillas. Here we do not see the tortilla as a symbol of cultural identity but as a symbol of a subjugating ideology, of sexual domination, of the imposition of a role that the young woman must assume. Alicia's father denies the reality of the poverty and her intelligence and desire for independence by telling her she's imagining "the mice, which scurry under the swollen floorboards nobody fixes" (HMS, p.31). Despite this pressure from her father — or perhaps because of it — Alicia perseveres. Alicia's father represents the patriarchal system that could, in a moment, take away her opportunity to control and improve her life. At the end of the story, the narrator lauds Alicia for being a good girl, for studying, and for seeing the mice her powerful father insists do not exist. The mice symbolize Alicia's persistence as she attempts to escape her father's domination and control. At the same time, she must also deal with her real potential for failure as a young woman entirely responsible for full-time work in and

out of the home, in addition to her responsibilities to herself at the university.

In *Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays*, the girls are saddened by the fate of a young bride who arrives at womanhood only to be physically locked inside, isolated from family and friends, by a possessive husband:

> On Tuesdays Rafaela's husband comes home late because that's the night he plays dominoes. And then Rafaela, who is still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much, gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at. (HMS, p.79)

Rafaela "who drinks and drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesdays and wishes there were sweeter drinks, not bitter like an empty room," (p.80) wishes for romance and the freedom of the outside world. Here Venus and the implication of sex and marriage as escape is de-romanticized, is eclipsed by a cultural reality that points to the drudgery of the inside.

There are two types of girls in Mango Street. There are those few who strive for an education, like Alicia and Esperanza, but most want to grow up fast, get married and get out. But those, like Minerva and Sally, usually have to get married, and they leave a father for a domineering husband. Sally, an older girl on Mango Street, introduces Esperanza to sexuality and the supposed glamorous myth associated with femininity.

In *Sally*, Esperanza develops an image of painted eyes and forbidden beauty. However, in *Linoleum Roses*: Esperanza sees Sally, who falls into the same trap as most of the other women on Mango Street, as some one who "got married…young and not ready but married" as Esperanza says, "to escape" – to escape her father, his beatings, " that's why her skin is always scarred" (92) his prison of a home, and his shame "he thinks I'm going to run away like his sisters who made the family ashamed. Just because I'm a daughter;" to escape the eyes of all those "waiting for her to get into trouble" (HMS, p. 101) Sally is transferred from one kind of confinement to another where:

> [Her husband] won't let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working.
>
> She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the things they own: the towels and the toaster, the alarm clock and the drapes. She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake. (HMS, pp.101-102)

Esperanza does not want to become trapped in the same situation in which Sally finds herself and views Sally's situation as a cautionary lesson. "Linoleum Roses is a trope for household confinement and drudgery," (Olivares, 1988) in which beauty; femininity, garden (the outside) and rose as a metaphor for woman is ironically treated. The roses decorate the linoleum floor that Sally will have to scrub. This is an

image of her future. The image of the final line, the ceiling smooth as wedding cake, resonates through the story in an ironical twist, a picture of despair. Such images as tortilla star and linoleum roses are the type of imagery that perhaps only a woman could create, because they are derived from a woman's perception of reality; that is to say, that this imagery is not biologically determined but that it is culturally inscribed.

One threat to young girls that Cisneros explores is the reality of sexual violence against women. Two stories specifically address this subject in vivid though not graphic terms: *Minerva Writes Poems* and *Marin*, from the story of the same name, who is too beautiful for her own good. She is trapped inside all day and at night is allowed to go as far as the front yard. Her boundaries are clear, yet within her boundaries she rebels. She smokes, wears make-up and short skirts, flirts and dances alone under the streetlight. She plans to marry a nice man she'll meet on the subway to Puerto Rico, someone who'll take her "to live in a big house far away" (HMS, p.26) from Mango Street. What Marin doesn't realize is that marriage brings with it its own boundaries, both figurative and literal. Still Marin waits, says Esperanza, "for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (p.27). Marin is waiting for someone else to take her away, for someone else to change her life, instead of making the change on her own.

*In Minerva Writes Poems*, a young girl, a little bit older than Esperanza refuses to leave her husband, even though he beats her, because he is the father of her two children. The vignette is filled with images of circles. Minerva who's "luck is unlucky" (p.84) is caught in a cycle. Her husband beats her, and she kicks him out. When he apologizes, she lets him return — and he beats her again. He is the husband "who left and keeps leaving" (p.85). Minerva asks Esperanza an important question: What can she do? Esperanza's answer is "There is nothing ***I*** can do" (HMS, p.85 emphasis added). She understands that only Minerva has the power to help herself. She is in the cycle; she must break it. There is, however, something Esperanza can do, and is doing: sharing poems with Minerva. If Minerva keeps writing, there is hope that she will break the cycle. In fact Esperanza realizes that Minerva's writing allows her to transcend her predicament. Cisneros' short story, *Woman Hollering Creek*[28] as companion to the novel, presents possibilities for a young married woman resisting a husband who treats her badly.

Esperanza sees, as Olivares notes, "the woman's place is one of domestic confinement, not one of liberation and choice" (163). And so, slowly, cumulatively, story-by-story, Esperanza comes to realize that she must leave Mango Street so that she will not be entrapped by poverty and shame or imprisoned by patriarchy. Other women may have a powerful

influence over Esperanza, but only she can decide which path to take in life. This journey towards empowerment lies within the individual woman. Esperanza continues on her journey towards womanhood, but now the challenge is much higher. She needs to summon all of her inner strength and understand her femininity to become an adult. As Esperanza continues to mature, she learns who she is as a woman and tries to establish her own unique female identity.

Adolescent myths and superstitions about sexuality surround Esperanza. She believes that beauty is a form of power: it allows women like Nenny, who has "pretty eyes," "to pick and choose" (HMS, p.88). Esperanza isn't beautiful — "I am an ugly daughter. I am the one nobody comes for" (HMS, p.88) — but she wants to be like the women in the movies: "the beautiful and cruel women" who are independent and powerful because their beauty gives them control over men. In *Hips*, for example, Esperanza and her friends imagine the day they will have hips and learn to move them to attract men, to dance, and to rock children to sleep. "The bones just one day open... One day you might decide to have kids, and then where are you going to put them?" (p.50)

Her biological transformation marks a crucial point in Esperanza's self-development, as it is then that she begins to note not only her own sexual difference but also its implications for her as a woman. She looks

enviously at Sally as an image of maturity — how to put on make-up, how to dress — "My mother says to wear black so young is dangerous, but I want to buy shoes just like yours" (HMS, p.82). Sally becomes Esperanza's guide to what to her are the secrets of womanhood, with the implication that Sally also becomes the transmitter of cultural values in respect to how girls are supposed to relate to boys. She boldly experiments with the trappings of womanhood by wearing high heels in *The Family of Little Feet*. The symbolic importance of the clothes to the girls is shown one day when the girls are given a bag of high-heeled shoes that Esperanza calls "magic high heels" (HMS, p.40). When Esperanza, Nenny, Lucy, and Rachel put on the shoes they felt like "Cinderella." They spend time learning how to cross and uncross their legs and how to walk down to the corner "so that the shoes talk back to you with every step" (p.40). Esperanza says "the men can't take their eyes off us" (HMS, p.40) and the girls don't seem to mind this treatment either. They enjoy it, because they are too young to understand that they are denigrated as objects, not people. They strut around the neighborhood acting like the older girls until a homeless man accosts them. After fleeing, the girls, quickly take off the shoes with the intention of never wearing them again, discovering that acting sexy is more dangerous than liberating. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and Tey Diana Rebolledo argue,

"Esperanza seems to understand the limitations of living just for male attention and the loneliness and passivity in feminine self objectivity" (1985, p.84).

*The Monkey Garden* used to be a sanctuary for Esperanza, but in this vignette, it becomes a symbol of her childhood and innocence, something she must leave behind. Esperanza wants to run with the others, although she is "getting too old to play the games" (HMS, p.96). Sally has "her own game now," (96) a game Esperanza doesn't understand, as she has already crossed a line Esperanza does not want to cross. She is angry when Sally decides to play Tito's game, where she must offer her body to get her keys back. It indicates Sally's readiness to move on and become a woman, something Esperanza is not ready to do. Esperanza's attempt to save Sally makes her look ridiculous to Sally and the boys, and she feels ashamed. She hides in the garden and cries. When she gets up, to her feet, they don't "seem to be [hers] anymore. And the garden that had been such a good place to play didn't seem [hers] either" (HMS, p.98).

Esperanza is not ready to be initiated into 'womanhood,' but in *Red Clowns*, she is literally forced into it. Esperanza's brushes with sexuality are dangerous and negative in this vignette, and she feels betrayed by the way her friends, the movies, and magazines portray love. The initial

presentiment, however, that something is wrong in the way the adolescent boys interact with Sally is confirmed when Esperanza, left alone by Sally and her boyfriend in an amusement park, is confronted with male power and is attacked and raped by a group of boys near a carnival. To Esperanza the reality of this brutal sexual initiation stands in sharp contrast to what she had been told about sexual relationships:

> Sally, you lied. It wasn't what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn't want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it's supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me? (HMS, p.99)

This vignette is an indictment of a society that glorifies sex, leaving the young ones like Sally unaware of the dark, aggressive side of male sexuality. The "diatribe" is directed not only at Sally but also at the community of women who keep the truth from the younger generation of women in a "conspiracy of silence." The protagonist discovers a conspiracy of "two forms of silence: silence in not denouncing the real facts of life about sex and its negative aspects in violent sexual encounters, and complicity in embroidering a fairy-tale-like mist around sex, and romanticizing and idealizing unrealistic sexual relations...."[29] As if the violence alone were not difficult enough, we learn that one of the boys had whispered about his victim "I love you, Spanish girl" (HMS, p.100), but what he does to her shows not love but self-love and violence conveying racist as well as sexist domination. No one has warned

Esperanza of the brutal power of male sexuality, to control and destroy her own sexual development. Esperanza not only loses her virginity, she also loses part of her identity and independence. This is the lie they have told her. After the rape by the neighborhood boy, she feels ashamed. Once again, she questions her femininity and her sexual orientation. She is confused by her feelings because she expects something more, something that makes her feel like a woman. The sexual encounter is to be on her terms and under her control. This last question is central to Esperanza's sexual initiation, as it shows that she feels violated, not only physically by the boys, but also psychologically by a framework of omnipresent cultural myths that shroud the reality of patriarchal violence in idealistic romance. The theme of the silent, voiceless victim, the woman that is afraid to denounce her attackers, is reiterated:

> Sally, make him stop. I couldn't make them go away. I couldn't do anything but cry. I don't remember. It was dark. I don't remember. I don't remember. Please don't make me tell it all. (HMS, p.100)

Esperanza's sexual initiation is thus an initiation into knowledge about herself as a sexual subject who has been manipulated by a framework of cultural myths. By telling her own version of her sexual initiation, however, Esperanza creates a text that stands in direct opposition to the cultural texts, the storybooks, magazines, and movies

"that told it wrong," thus refusing to participate in the conspiracy of silence which force women into sharing in their own oppression.

After observing characters such as Sally, Minerva, and Rafaela, who, through early and abusive marriages are trapped in the neighborhood and into identifying themselves through their male connections, Esperanza decides to rebel — to wage "a quiet war" (HMS, p.89) — against the patriarchal society that expects her to suppress her individuality and "grow up tame" (HMS, p.88). She says, "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (HMS, p.89). She will not fill the traditional female role. Instead, she will behave like a man, leaving her dishes at the table instead of clearing them away. Esperanza, in *Beautiful and Cruel*, says, "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (HMS, p.88). This is a powerful image given the marriages Esperanza sees around her, she views waiting for marriage like waiting for the guillotine, and marriage as a form of slavery. As critics Gonzales-Berry and Tey Diana Rebolledo have aptly pointed out, "young Esperanza is a courageous character that must combat the socialization process imposed on females; the character breaks from the tradition of the usual protagonist of the female Bildungsroman by consistently rejecting

the models presented to her and seeking another way to be Chicana" (1985, pp.109-119).

Despite the cumulative threat the house and Mango Street present to her sense of self, she begins to imagine herself beyond Mango Street, determined to "make the best of it" (HMS, p.33). Estranged by the social implications of living in this environment, Esperanza disavows her relationship to Mango Street — "I don't ever want to come from here" (HMS, p.106) — identifying herself with the only piece of nature present in the barrio, four trees "who do not belong here but are here." The quotation from *Four Skinny Trees* illustrates optimism despite the limitations. "Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be." (HMS, p.75) The four trees, like her have "skinny necks and pointy elbows" (HMS, p.74). Others, like Nenny, do not appreciate those trees, but for Esperanza, "they teach" (HMS, p.75), helping her to realize that like them she is here and yet does not belong. Esperanza, like the trees, is trapped. While Esperanza is trapped on Mango Street, the trees are trapped in concrete. And like the trees Esperanza, who thinks in images, must continue to reach. This identification with a small part of nature in this urban environment exemplifies the primacy of nature in female development. In her longing to escape her present circumstances,

Esperanza sees the trees as role models for her own liberation: "their strength is secret" (p.74) and they "grow despite concrete," (p.75) thus symbolizing Esperanza's own struggle to grow in a hostile environment, her desire to reach beyond the concrete, beyond class and race boundaries, for self-definition. The desire to leave Mango Street is the desire to lay new roots. Her goal, like the trees, is not to forget her reason for being and "send ferocious roots beneath the ground...never quit their anger. This is how they keep" (HMS, p.74).

In her attempt to deconstruct socio-cultural lies by telling the truth, Esperanza turns her narrative attention to the women on Mango Street. Realizing that their fate can be hers, she begins to examine their lives in order to come to an understanding of her own relationship to the socio-cultural world of the barrio. Perceived from Esperanza's female perspective, this environment takes on distinct characteristics, in that she, in her evolving consciousness about herself as a woman, becomes increasingly aware of the contradictions between her emerging female self and the circumstances that inform women's lives on Mango Street. Indeed, Esperanza is very different from the other women in the text. She has a reason to be concerned about her future role as a woman; she does not want to be stuck with the same options as Sally or her grandmother in the segregated South where tradition dictates who she is to become.

Esperanza wants to break from this mould. She does not want to be caught up in the generational stigma of being the domesticated woman. Her independence as a Mexican-American woman must break new ground. This is part of her self-identity. She has learned from them and not made their mistakes. So she is not trapped like her mother, Alicia, or Sally, or the others. Esperanza comes to realize, in examining the lives of the women on Mango Street, that a woman's house is often a confining patriarchal domain rather than the house of liberation she imagines for herself. Her initial wish for an illusive real house, one she can proudly point to, is thus in the course of her narrative transformed into a more defined desire for a place that transcends the mere physical living quarters. She wants not only a house but also a life that is unconfined by a father or a husband or prescriptive social expectations, a non-patriarchal space in which she can create for herself her own destiny. Gradually, Esperanza comes to see that the pressure on women in Chicano families comes from a system she simply, though painfully, has to leave. This act reflects the life of Cisneros herself, who says she had to leave home in order to write about "those ghosts inside that haunt me" (Notebook, 1987, pp.72-73)

Before Esperanza only wanted a house, but now her dreams have added a new dimension. She is sounding more confident about her

success and she has added an altruistic or selfless side to her dream. She breaks a cycle she has been caught up in. Until now she has been trying to forget who she is and where she came from. Now, she says when she gets her own house, she won't forget and will let 'bums' sleep in the 'attic' of her house "one day because [she] know[s] how it is to be without a house" (HMS, p.87). In *Bums in the Attic*, the economic disparity between people who live on hills and those who live in the barrio is clear. She has realized that "people who live on hills...forget those of us who live too much on earth" (HMS, p.86). She is the example for other Chicano women whom Cisneros would have us take to heart. Indeed, as the witch woman Elenita predicted earlier, Esperanza elects to build "a new house, a house made of heart" (HMS, p.64), a home for herself where she will have freedom for her inner life and space for her writing.

Finally, in *The Three Sisters*, "One of the Comadres asks Esperanza, "What's your name... Esperanza, I said" (HMS, p.104). Esperanza for the first time makes no apologies for her name, nor does she express desire for another. She identifies her name as "Esperanza." At this point she has begun to recognize the complexity of herself and the possible connotations in her name. She uses the name given to her so she can maintain her ties with her matrilineal past worlds and include present world meaning which were previously excluded: a radical, non-

individualistic gesture. By recognizing her social location and controlling how she constructs herself, Esperanza can then construct her house "clean as paper before the poem" (HMS, p.108) loose from static and oppressive cultural ties. Several worlds influence Esperanza, but she never ceases to be the young-Chicano-in-Chicago world and her self-affirmation creates her confidence to declare Esperanza as the new radical name. Her identity, after the process of the text, accurately recognizes her social location and allows her to develop her personal interests.

The realization of the possibility of escape through the space of writing, as well as the determination to move away from Mango Street, are expressed in *Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes*: "I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (HMS, p.109). The ending of Mango Street is very significant in terms of literary continuity. Just prior to the end, at the funeral for Rachel and Lucy's baby sister, she meets their three old aunts who read her palm and her mind: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand?" (HMS, p.105) They tell her she cannot forget who she is and that if she leaves she must come back. The circle is an important symbol in the novel as a whole. A circle is endless — it has no beginning and no end; it is complete; it is entirely equal and whole.

There is no beginning and no end, but rather a continuous return. The future is always connected to the past.

Esperanza thought that by leaving Mango Street and living in another house, one that she could point to with pride, she would leave behind forever an environment she believed to be only temporary. Esperanza will move away from the confining space of house and barrio, but paradoxically within them she has encountered a different sort of space, the space for writing. Through her creativity, she comes to inhabit the "house of storytelling" (Olivares, 1988, p.104). Esperanza longs for a House of her own: "Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own." It is not a house she inherits from a father or inhabits with a husband, and there is "nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after" (HMS, p.108). It is not a house where she will play the traditional role of homemaker and housekeeper. Instead her house will have only her things: "my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories" (HMS, p.108). It is clear, nonetheless, that a magical house is constructed through the creative imagination: "a space for myself to go, clean as paper before *the* poem" (HMS, p.108 emphasis added). It is significant to note not before *a* poem but *the* poem: *the poem to come.*

In the end the girl recognizes that she both belongs and does not belong to Mango Street. By the novel's end Esperanza has realized that her writing is one way to maintain the connection to Mango Street without having to give up her own independence. She will tell the stories of “the ones who cannot out” (HMS, p.110). Esperanza wants to leave but is unable, so she attains release from her confinement through her writing. Yet even here she never leaves Mango Street because, instead of fantasizing, she writes of her reality.

Gonzales and Rebolledo confirm that “the house is symbolic of consciousness and collective memory, and is a nourishing structure so that the narrator comes to understand that, despite her need for a space of her own, Mango Street is really a part of her, an essential creative part she will never be able to leave; consequently, she searches in (as narrator) and will return to (as author) her neighborhood for the human and historical materials of which [her] stories will be made” (1985, pp.109-119). In the elevated plane of her art Esperanza transcends her condition, finding another house, which is the space of literature. Yet what she writes about “third-floor flats, and fear of rats, and drunk husbands sending rocks through windows, anything as far from the poetic as possible reinforces her solidarity with the people, the women, of Mango Street” (Notebook 1987, pp. 69-73). This story itself is a symbolic return

to Mango Street. Esperanza needn't physically come back, though she will. Instead, by sharing her story Esperanza will give strength to others. The novel, then, completes the circle; it is Esperanza's return. One reason for this is her writing, which has made her strong. She plans to put it down on paper and then "the ghost does not ache so much" (HMS, p.110). What this means relative to other women's novels are that she reverses a trend. She is strong (something Mexican women should not be), perfectly aware of the problems with a patriarchal culture, and because of her love for her people, vows to return, and it is the writing, which gives her the strength. Thoroughly aware of the abusive nature of her culture, she comes to the decision that though she does not want to go back till "somebody makes it better" (HMS, p.107), she nevertheless chooses to return for the sake of the others. She is strong and, in contrast to Holden, feels drawn back, not just because she needs people, like Holden, but because they need her.

Esperanza's vision is not merely limited to the Mexican community, though Esperanza clearly represents the social, economic, and political situations of Mexican-Americans. More universally, though, Esperanza might be seen as the innocent set upon by the world, for Cisneros writes not only about the local human soil but also that of the entire country. "For the ones who cannot out" (HMS, p.110). Strictly

speaking, the sentence is ungrammatical, since 'out' is not a verb. Cisneros has chosen to break perceived rules of grammar perhaps because there is a relation between breaking grammar and breaking out of Mango Street. As Jayne E. March observes, "writing is essential in connecting Esperanza with female power; her promise to share that power with other women is fulfilled by the text itself.[30] Her writing helps her to make sense of the world around her and the women who are a part of that world. It is offered to "the ones I left behind" (110) and it offers the possibility that a woman can achieve anything in life if she can locate the strength and courage to leave confining situations and discover who she truly is. Cisneros's use of the journey is on one level an escape from an impossible circumstance, while on another each is a further step in Esperanza's journey toward awareness.

It may seem that Holden's and Augie's are really journeys while Mango Street is limited to a house and therefore "set— the opposite of a geographical quest."[31] But when, one looks at the patterns of the novel, what the boys go out to see simply comes past Esperanza. She is a girl and does not have the cultural opportunity to leave as they do. What is more important is that Mango Street continues a paradigm of growth where a young person encounters an outside world, evaluates it in relationship to herself, and then forges an identity, something that

includes her sexuality and the prominence of writing in her life. Ellen McCracken says that this character breaks new boundaries with her outward movement into "socio-political reality."[32]

Although the book has closure, it is also open-ended in that it does not tell us whether Esperanza finds her ideal home. By the end of the narrative, Esperanza recognizes that she must someday 'return' to Mango Street empowered as a writer. The return will not necessarily be literal but rather symbolic, described as a circle. Dedicating her book A Las Mujeres/to the woman, Cisneros has come back for she argues, "the world of thousands of silent women...needs to be, must be recorded so that their stories can finally be heard." (76)

The book's dedication and the very last line of the book form a circle symbolic of remembering always to come back. Esperanza emerges from her journey a complete person – a hero, who has battled her inner dragons and won. By the end of the book, Esperanza finds her literary voice and discovers "her power is her own. She will not give it away" (HMS, p.89). This is an extremely powerful statement. Esperanza is referring to movie stars, but she also sees this as a characteristic within herself. This shows her contrast to the rest of her neighborhood, who just accept their present situation. Cisneros' genius has enabled the reader to accompany Esperanza on her journey towards self-realization.

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

Despite a small literary output, Carson McCullers has generally been viewed as a novelist who produced an important body of work in the Southern gothic genre. All her novels are set in Georgia where she grew up maintaining that authors always reflect the place of their birth and cannot escape from its "voices and foliage and memory."[34] Though she kept her vow not to live in the South she repeatedly returned and retained an antagonism toward it as a region where one might be regarded as worth "no more than a load of hay."[35] It shows that her treatment of southern life has never been sentimental. More importantly, she used the harsh symbolism of southern life to re-create the universal failures and anxieties of the modern world. McCullers, who made personal alienation the explicit single concern of all her fiction, treats the solitude of the heart with both objectivity and compassion. The contemporary gothic novels are tales of tormented souls who view the world as a maze. A typical modern gothic theme involves rites of passage for the innocent into a violent world. In the grotesque world of McCullers' fiction her eccentric characters suffer from loneliness that she interpreted with deep empathy. The same futile quest for unity in love is a recurring theme in McCullers' fiction. This theme illustrates Fiedler's statement about modern Gothicism in the American novel "the primary meaning of the Gothic romance, then,

lies in its substitution of terror for love as a central theme."[36] The figure at the center of McCullers' novel, in her confusion and desperation, is unable to find solace in another soul and therefore is terrified at her enforced solitude and inadequacy. This difficulty of belonging is one of McCullers' central themes; frequently overshadowing her concerns with identity, gender, and race. The theme of the modern gothic novel is, then, "spiritual isolation." Tennessee Williams sees the American gothic novel linked to the French Existentialist novel, with the common denominator being "a sense, an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience."[37] In one of her essays (Esquire, Dec. 1959), McCullers has stated her conscious concern with this theme:

> Spiritual isolation is the basis of most of my themes. My first book was concerned with this, almost entirely, and all of my books since, in one-way or another. Love, and especially love of a person who is incapable of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my selection of grotesque figures to write about — people whose physical incapacity to love or receive love — their spiritual isolation.[38]

It is this dreadfulness in our lives that has been the primary theme of McCullers' five novels. With skillful subtlety, with suggestions and forthright statements, by means of well realized characters and revealing episodes, she "circles her theme, coming closer and closer to its core, until she has encompassed and exposed its meaning."[39] However, the "Gothic" label misses the essential point that McCullers is ultimately "the

artist functioning at the very loftiest symbolic level," and if one must look for labels her work can be called "metaphysical."[40] McCullers, therefore, used the physical incapacity of her grotesque figures as a symbol of their spiritual incapacity to love or receive love. In *The Member of the Wedding* Frankie's "physical incapacity" is used primarily as "a symbol of [her] spiritual incapacity ... [her] spiritual isolation. She is not just the comic loser.... [She is] lonesome and McCullers' lonesomeness are intended eventually to figure our own."[41] Moreover she tries to link this to the existential crisis of mankind and also the sociological crisis of the South exacerbated by racial strife.

In her stories characters who are often disabled (either emotionally or physically) attempt desperately to gain attention and compassion from those around them. The same fundamental pattern exists in all McCullers' major works. But it is a pattern with a strange vision of life, in which, "an eternal flaw exists in the machinery of love which alone has the power to liberate man from his fate of spiritual isolation."[42] McCullers is her own inspiration for these stories. She led a difficult physical life with severe illness — strokes, heart disease, paralysis, and eventually cancer and was confined to a wheelchair for many of her later years. Indeed the novels are set within a framework of sickness and death which thus become the symbolic symptoms of the society, for failing to realize the existence of

time and the necessity of change. McCullers is a master of realistic narrative, revealing much insight into the tangled inner lives of human beings. Richard M. Cook perceptively notes how “she spoke for people who, in their trapped inwardness, could not speak for themselves, who loved without hope of being loved.”[43] She had a “double vision,” what most of her characters tragically lack. It enabled her to see the “secret inwardness” and also the awkward sometimes frightening and often amusing outwardness” of people. Her vision of human loneliness is a vision born of love (Cook, 1975, pp.126-27). In her most successful works McCullers could, as she once claimed, "become her characters, enter their lonely lives, the places where they lived. And without letting us lose sight of their awkward, sometimes frightening and often amusing outwardness, she let us see into their secret inwardness” (Cook, 1975, p.128).

Frankie Addams has, in the words of Berenice, fallen “in love with a wedding,” (MW, p.82) the result is not only suffering but violence. McCullers is also able to portray an uncertainty of identity and terror of the future beneath Frankie’s foolishness and irritability. Her best fiction transcends the idiosyncrasies and paradoxes of the provincial American South to address the complex metaphysical dilemma of the human condition.

Despite this suffering that inexorably dominated her life, she produced what Virginia Spencer Carr calls "an impressive literary legacy"[44] — five novels, two plays, twenty short stories, two dozen pieces of nonfiction, and some poetry. Evaluation of this varied body of work reveals that even though she does not specify it as such, her grand theme is actually that of self-discovery, or its close variation — self-definition. In nearly every work conflict occurs within an individual who longs for close identification with others, but at the same time struggles for freedom, lack of responsibility, and self-centered control of outside forces. Again and again, McCullers creates central characters that are lost and are trying to find their way towards a fuller understanding of themselves as well as the world in which they live. In this way they become both private human beings and involved participants. One of the amazing things in considering McCullers is not only how many variations she created out of this theme "of spiritual isolation" in story after story, but also how early that vision was formulated. It is to be found in her very first story, *Sucker*, written when she was a seventeen-year-old schoolgirl. There the title character, Sucker, is an orphan, and therefore unrelated to the family with whom he lives. Sucker desperately wants to be loved, to become a member of the family.

The title of McCullers' highly acclaimed first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), might be a description of the core of every book. For her the truth of the fable is the truth of the heart. The novel is not concerned with abstractions about the structure of society or with ideological conflicts in the contemporary world. She has banished these sociological and intellectual matters from her fiction, narrowing its range in favor of memory and mood, and above all, feeling. "The function of the artist," she has written, "is to execute his own indigenous vision, and having done that, to keep faith with this vision."[45] If to keep faith is to pursue consistently a single theme, then she has succeeded in operating in "a narrow field" but was able to "plough deep furrows."[46] For everywhere in her fiction she works at variations on the theme of 'spiritual isolation. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* focuses on deaf-mute John Singer, who befriends four alienated characters who believe that only he can understand their plight. The novel also centers in the experiences of the adolescent Mick Kelly, a thirteen-year old girl who sacrifices her dream of becoming a concert pianist to take a job at Woolworth's department store. *Reflection in a Golden Eye* (1942) is a psychological horror story set in a military base. Both of the books have been filmed. *The Square Root of Wonderful* (1958) was considered one of McCullers' least successful works, but provides insight into her life and techniques. Many

critics viewed the play as McCullers' attempt to reconcile feelings of loss, guilt, and hostility resulting from the death of her husband, James Reeves and her mother. McCullers produced, *Clock without Hands*, in 1961. On August 15, 1967, she suffered a major stroke, slipped into a coma, and died on September 29. A posthumous publication of her uncollected writings, edited by her sister, Margarita Smith, appeared under the title *The Mortgaged Heart:The Previously Uncollected Writings of Carson McCullers* (1971).

In an appraisal of her life and work accompanying her front-page obituary in the September 30, 1967, *New York Times*, Eliot Fremont-Smith wrote of the impact of her first novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in what could also be an assessment of McCullers' lasting influence:

> It is not so much that the novel paved the way for what became the American Southern gothic genre, but that it at once encompassed it and went beyond it . . . The heart of this remarkable, still powerful book is perhaps best conveyed by its title, with its sense of intensity, concision and mystery, with its terrible juxtaposition of love and aloneness, whose relation was McCullers' constant subject . . . McCullers was neither prolific nor varying in her theme . . .This is no fault or tragedy: to some artists a vision is given only once. And a corollary: only an artist can make others subject to the vision's force. McCullers was an artist. She was also in her person, an inspiration and example for other artists who grew close to her. Her books, and particularly 'The Heart,' will live; she will be missed.

McCullers was also awarded a Gold Medal by the Theatre Club, Inc. as the best playwright of the year. March 1946 saw the publication of

her fourth major work, *The Member of the Wedding*, which again won high critical acclaim. She adapted the novel for the stage where it became a Broadway hit in 1950, winning the *New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.* In 1952 the play was turned into a successful motion picture. The book is framed around the main frustration of Frankie Addams, a young, confused twelve-year-old adolescent living in the American south in 1944, and who wants to escape her limited female/domestic sphere and act like a tomboy. The daughter of a jeweler, like McCullers and a mother who died in childbirth, she is precocious and stubborn, but also naïve and unaware of the reasons for her own emotions. The main action of the book, which begins on the last Friday in August and ends two days later, revolves round her obsession with her brother Jarvis's wedding on Sunday to Janice Evans. She seeks union with them and through them with all mankind. She is determined to forge an identity that transcends the self. Considerable biographical significance is attached to McCullers' acknowledgement that the intensity informing the novel represented her mature "working through of old adolescent conflicts and regrets."[47] McCullers saw this novel and the play which developed from it as "poetic compositions" comprised of "fugue-like passages" (McDowell, 1980, p.81). In the elusive changes of mood, the relationships among characters, in the interplay among themes and metaphors, she sought; she said

"precision and harmony"[48] much as a poet would. Lawrence Graver also observes that the novel is divided into three parts, a structure that calls attention to the rhythm of the novel. He explains: "the rhythm... follows the familiar journey of adolescent initiation: the stirrings of dissatisfaction, jubilant hope founded on misplaced idealism, and disillusionment accompanied by a new wisdom about the limits of human life."[49] Other critics have likened this three-part structure to that of a sonata, a type of musical piece that often has three parts. Based on biographical information about McCullers, these commentators believe that in *The Member of the Wedding* the author bridges her passion for music with her passion for writing. Ultimately, "the universality of music pervasively informs metaphor and background in McCullers' work more than does a sense of her geographical region" (McDowell, 1980). One explanation is that McCullers has constructed the plot in such a way that the three-part structure pulls events into convergence. In doing this she might be representing the omniscient power of God through the omniscience of the author, seeing God in terms of an author figure. In fact she points out "writing is a search for God" and her belief coincides with what William Golding has said, "God is of all things an artist who labors under no compulsion but that of his infinite creativity."[50]

In part 1, under the ambiguous diminutive of Frankie, she has enjoyed the relative freedom of childhood as a tomboy. But now that she is nearing thirteen and is almost 5'6", she is outgrowing that stage in her life. Even McCullers was sensitive about her height (5'8"), and accentuated the difference in her appearance by dressing eccentrically. Her lifelong sense of herself as different and consequently as isolated pervades all of her books. Frankie's rapid growth causes her to worry that she may be a freak, like those that so fascinate and repel her at the sideshow. Throughout the novel, Frankie is caught between the injunctions of those in authority in her life, who demand that she exercise common sense and reason -- "From now on you walk the chalk line or you'll have to be taught" (MW, p.53), and her own desperate need to fantasize about a connection with "something greater than [herself]."[51] When she finds out that her older brother, Jarvis, and his girlfriend, Janice, have made plans to get married, Frankie becomes acutely aware that she is alone: "The trouble with me is that for a long time I have been just an 'I' person." As she watches the young couple, she realizes that most people have "a we." Frankie is in love with the bride and her brother and desperately wishes to accompany them on their honeymoon, believing that such an act will alleviate her loneliness and enable her to discover what she terms "the we of me" (MW, p.42). She suddenly

realizes who she is and where she is going. Seeing her role as a member of the wedding party as the perfect solution to her solitude, she begins to imagine that she will leave her old life behind and start a new one with the newlyweds, going with them "to whatever place that they will ever go" (MW. p.43).

Part 2 takes place the day before the wedding as the exuberant Frankie makes her plans to leave; she bids farewell to her town as though it has been poised to hear from her in her new identity as F. Jasmine Addams: "She decided to make herself some visiting cards with *Miss F. Jasmine Addams, Esq.*, engraved with squinted letters on a tiny card" (MW, p.51). Her insistence on the right to take a new name lets Frankie reinvent herself. The persona of F. Jasmine is an attempt to explore and preserve her androgynous options. Frankie had made up the name Jasmine to strengthen the bond (alliteratively) with her brother and his bride, Jarvis and Janice. As the instability of her name indicates, she is beset by the question of identity.

Part 3 is a brief coda that reports the events after the wedding when Frankie painfully discovers the reality of the situation and finally accepts her formal given name, Frances, and with it her legal and socially prescribed identity as a young woman. Barbara White notes "the irony that in gaining her membership, Frances appears to have lost her self."[52]

But, as with Mick (*Lonely Hunter*) this loss may be the price of negotiating the distance between childhood and womanhood.

Like Esperanza (*The House of Mango Street*) Frankie must also overcome a patriarchal society, struggle with problems of awakening sexuality, death and family displacement to establish a sense of self-confidence. She too relies on a network of women to guide her through her evolution into independent womanhood. Her constant companions are Bernice, an African-American maid who knows the harshness of the outside world that Frankie longs to see, and John Henry, Frankie's 6-year-old cousin. With great complexity and realism, McCullers embodies the same problems of adolescence as in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Both novels focus on the failure of the adolescence to adjust to the confusions of the adult world and 'belong' to a group of people. But there is one major difference. Frankie is looking to growing up so that she can fit in with the people around her while Holden wants to avoid adulthood completely as he sees the adult world as being false and corruptible.

Other themes, which relate more directly to the Gothic, can be found in McCullers' treatment of taboo. Homosexuality and perversion are often explicit in her work, and the mental imbalance of these characters is symbolized by their physical infirmity. Although McCullers depicted homosexual characters, the theme of homosexuality was set into

a broader context of alienation and dislocation in modern culture. These characters are so tormented that they feel compelled to perform such actions as Jake Blount's driving a nail through his outstretched palm (*Lonely Hunter*), Sherman Pew's hanging his friend's dog by a clothesline (*Clock Without Hands*), and Alison Langdon's cutting off her nipples with garden shears (*Reflections in a Golden Eye*). These are violent actions and often the criticism is raised that McCullers' novels contain too many such scenes. The inclusion of such atrocities is prompted by both the central theme and the symbolic method of her work. In a sense the theme of her novels is violation — the ravaging of the spirit by a cruel universe. By means of theme, symbol, and style McCullers has thrown some light upon "the dark corners of the mind"[53] and human experience. McCullers seems to have been concerned with a larger vision in which the abnormal is used for a functional purpose. Her novels are grotesque in form only: repulsively hunchbacked or frightfully oversized characters, but inwardly not evil. The original Gothic novels employed grotesquely featured people as personifications of the evil in the world; McCullers' monsters, however, are ugly because their appearance is a projection of their internal suffering. Instead of being the menace, they are the victims of such menace. Hugo McPherson notes in an article, which appeared in Tamarack Review, "her characters, like Kafka's and Truman Capote's, are

the ill prepared and the ill equipped; they seek not victory over life but a secure haven, and the struggle is not a glory but an almost unbearable violation of the self."[54] The unfortunate characters are so affected by these deformities or maladies that they withdraw into the world of self. Such loneliness and frustration are portrayed in another set of characters as well. Supplementing the freaks in her novels are the self-conscious adolescents. Members of this group are equally isolated, belonging neither to the child's world or the adult's.

A third classification in the novels is of characters belonging to minority groups: the violated Negroes and persecuted Jews who suffer in their segregation. In their search for identity, which becomes inwardly directed, these characters are like the heroines of the Gothcists, whose flights were from "out of the known world into a dark region of make-believe."[55] Having failed to understand man's inhumanity to man and their own personal dissociation, her characters resort to daydreaming, and are plagued by horrible nightmares – a fate far worse than physically battling the rigors of the universe; for as Fiedler exclaims, "The final horrors are neither gods nor demons, but intimate aspects of our own minds" (Phillips, 1964, pp.59-72). All of McCullers' characters are doomed to solitary confinement within the self, of being caught, or left out as an alien in a strange land, symbolized in the corresponding images

of the “prisoner caged in a stone cell with iron bars before the windows” (MW, p.123) and of the chain that both connects and isolates people. Sometimes they make pitiful attempts at escape — as in the child Frankie’s running away from home down the state highway or Bernice Sadie Brown's replacing her bad eye with one of light blue glass in *The Member of the Wedding*. Another source of escape is the recourse to the inner room — a very private place full of plans in other words, the inner self. Frankie’s retreats into the “inside room”[56] of imagination provide some relief, as do the restless rambles about her small southern hometown. The seashell on Frankie's desk stands for the warm wash of the Gulf of Mexico (MW, p.11) her glass snow globe reminds her of cool Alaska, and the wedding proves more attractive because it takes place in “Winter Hill” (MW, p.7). Lying also embellishes uneventful life, which provides a form of vicarious pleasure. Yet inevitably, man is brought back from fanciful flights. Such attempts to change one's situation, to avoid reality, are futile. Without exception these wishful dreams are thwarted by the onslaughts of reality and only the nightmares materialize. “What she conceives to be the truth about human nature is a melancholy truth: each man is surrounded by a ‘Zone of loneliness,’ serving a life sentence of solitary confinement.”[57] Although her novels do not deal directly with physical imprisonment, her characters are "caught" both

symbolically and literally in a variety of ways. Frankie resists a "jail you could not see" (MW, p.157). She is estranged from family, friends, the town, even trees and flowers, and struggles to break from the confines of her kitchen, the backyard, and her ambivalent self. Her solution to the problem, which would allow her the membership she craves, is destined to fail.

*The Member of the Wedding* is rich in symbolism, which gives the novel greater depth. Marguerite Young, called McCullers "a poetic symbolist, a seeker after those luminous meanings, which always do transcend the boundaries of the stereotyped, the conventional, and the so-called normal."[58] Symbolic uses of colors, seasons, the family kitchen, the Frankie — Berenice — John Henry triad, names, and music give the reader another pathway of insight into Frankie's confused psyche. McCullers uses these symbolic elements in such a way that they do not intrude upon the story or seem superimposed on the narrative; rather, they flow naturally from the story while encouraging the reader to investigate them further. In the end, the reader not only understands the character better but also has a better idea of who she will become, which is what Frankie seeks to know herself. Further, a deeper understanding of Frankie as a typical angst-ridden adolescent enables the reader to better understand the human experience in general. Leslie Fiedler has stated in

*An End to Innocence* "images of childhood and adolescence haunt our greatest works as an unintended symbolic confession of the inadequacy we sense but cannot remedy" (Phillips, 1964, pp. 59-72). In *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) the use of the adolescent as a symbol for that sense of inadequacy and helplessness is intentional. McCullers sees the figure of the groping adolescent as another symbolic realization of a life of fear. Fiedler writes "the child's world is not only asexual, it is terrible: the world of fear and loneliness, a haunted world." To this group belong Mick Kelly of *The Heart is a lonely Hunter*, Frankie Addams of *The Member of the Wedding*, and Sherman Pew of *Clock Without Hands* who belong neither to the adult world nor to the world of childhood. Like Sucker, they rebel; their rebellion is against such natural phenomena as menstruation, sexuality, and premature death. McCullers' chief characters possess an ambiguous and troubled sexuality. Some of the characters have asexual names like Mick and Frankie, who hesitate between boyish and girlish behavior in reaction to the restrictions of American womanhood. She hovers between thinking of herself as a boy (short hair, short pants) and a vamp (her fancy dress-up garb in which she barely escapes being raped) and solves her problem by trying to be a member of her brother's wedding, part of an adventurous threesome who will travel through the world together. The awakening occurs, of course, when she

finds that the bride and groom have other plans and that she is consigned to the waiting room of adolescence until she conforms to feminine norms. The self-chosen nickname of Frankie is a feeble effort on the part of the adolescent to assert her individuality in a patriarchal culture, as is the crew cut, which makes her a neuter being. Others are inverted sexually, their deviation further isolating them from the normal world. Like Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*, Carson McCullers at thirteen renamed herself dropping the Lula, her feminine first name in favor of her gender-neutral middle name.

At the beginning of the novel, McCullers writes: "Standing beside the arbor, with the dark coming on, Frankie was afraid. She did not know what caused this fear, but she was afraid" (MW, p.8). Frankie is plagued by many nightmares and terrible visions. It is for this reason that the novel can be called Gothic. Frankie's fears are the fears of all human beings, and the last name of Addams indicates her archetypal function in her initiation into worldly knowledge. Frankie, who until age twelve has been comfortably unconventional, running with the neighborhood kids in the small southern town, presenting shows underneath "the scuppernong arbor" (MW, p.8) now suddenly feels like "an unjoined person who [hangs] around in doorways" (MW, p.3), who has emotions she cannot put to words, who feels: "afraid of these things that made her suddenly

wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening, or staring up into the sky: alone. She was afraid, and there was a queer tightness in her chest" (MW, p.24). The introductory page gives us the pattern for the whole novel: expansion and entrapment.

Displaced and unattached, Frankie belongs to no group that she values or that values her. Frankie feels the eternal outsider. She cries in anguish over her plight:

> She was an I person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a we to claim, all other except her. When Bernice said we, she meant Honey and Big Mama, her lodge, or her church. The we of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a we to belong to and talk about .The soldiers in the army can say we, and even the criminals on chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had had no we to claim. (MW, p.42)

Frankie watches the soldiers who travel in loud groups about the town, and envies their strong camaraderie. The girls with whom she associated in the past have now barred Frankie from the clubhouse where they have parties with boys, telling her she's too young and mean. Further they are "spreading it all over town that Frankie smells bad" (MW, p.12). She not only is excluded from the girls' club because she is bigger and seems older than the rest, but she has also been turned out from her father's bed, which she used to share as a child. Despite Royal Addams's gruff nature and apparent insensitivity to his daughter's needs, McCullers

treats him sympathetically. Addams is, in fact, as close a rendering of her own father as the author dared put on paper. Frankie notes that her father "walked the dawn-stale kitchen like a person who has lost something, but has forgotten what it is that he has lost. Watching him, the old grudge was forgotten, and she felt sorry" (MW, p.52). Spurned by her father and the girls her age, Frankie seeks solace in the company of John Henry, her little cousin. This relationship is unsatisfactory, since John Henry is too young to share many of her interests. Frankie's feelings for him are partly motivated by her quest for a father figure, since her own father is too busy running his jewelry store. John Henry partially fills this gap in her life, and Frankie thinks he looks "like a tiny watchmaker" (MW, p.9). Frankie has felt neglect and isolation to the point that she wails, "I am sick unto death" (MW, p.17).

One dream, which frightens Frankie, is of a beckoning door, which slowly begins to open and draw her in. "I dreamed there was a door, I was just looking at it and while I watched, it began slowly to open" (MW, p.127). What lies beyond that door — maturity, truth, knowledge — is a mystery to her, and the unknown frightens her. Frankie is afraid of her own growth. Having grown four inches in the past year, she towers above her classmates and is fearful that she will become a Freak "and what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would

be a Freak" (MW, p.19). Figuring that at this rate she will ultimately be over nine feet tall, Frankie fears that she will soon only be welcomed in the traveling fair that comes to town, where she will take her place with the Pin Head, the Alligator Boy, and the Half- Man Half-Woman, who all seem to look "at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: We know you" (MW, p.20). Frankie feels the grotesques have recognized her own freakish and guilt-ridden soul.

Her fears, when combined with the rejection of her former friends, create in Frankie a strong desire to be normal, though she is not at first clear about how that might be achieved. Frankie's visit to the carnival's Freak House, where she has been terrified by the knowing eyes of the grotesques she sees that it is not the only place that frightens the girl: "the jail had scared and haunted her that spring and summer" (MW, p.123). She also feels the ghastly looking prisoners know her for what she is — and that she too is trapped, though she is free to move about and they are not. The very existence of the jail house haunts her: "the criminals were caged in stone cells with iron bars before the windows, and though they might beat on the stone walls or wrench at the iron bars, they could never get out" (MW, p.123). Frankie imagines herself so trapped, and her confidante, Bernice Sadie Brown, reveals to her that it is the human predicament. Bernice feels the burden of the color of her own skin,

symbolized by her last name 'Brown'. She brings to Frankie her pessimistic philosophy of man's fate, simply by remarking, "they were born ... and they going to die." (MW, p.120)

Berenice and Frankie have discussion about being "loose" or "caught' in the world. Frankie tries to communicate her feeling of being trapped to Berenice, who expresses it eloquently:

> We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. (MW, p.119)

Berenice is describing people being caught in their own individual identities and being ultimately isolated. It is usually forgotten, however, that Berenice goes on to define a special way of being caught. She says she is caught worse:

> Because I am black... Because I am colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done draw completely extra bounds around all colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself. So we caught that first way I was telling you, as all human beings is caught. And we caught as colored peoples also. Sometimes a boy like Honey [Berenice's foster brother] feel like he just can't breathe no more. He feel like he got to break something or break himself. Sometimes it just about more than we can stand... He just feels desperate like. (MW, p.119)

Berenice says this to express understanding of F. Jasmine's ruminations over the notion of being sectored away from other people, trapped in a cell that cannot bond with others in the world. From

Berenice's perspective, this means also to be caught as a black person in a world that discriminates against minorities. Berenice says that one is caught in the sense that one is born black or white and cannot change that. Being a black woman, she knows that her color further traps her because of discrimination. So F. Jasmine points out a kind of dichotomy in the situation Berenice has articulated. Frankie says about people,

> People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don't know what joins them up. Yet at the same time you almost might use the word loose instead of caught. Although they are two opposite words (MW, p.119)

Frankie's responses to Berenice are significant. To the first statement she says she "doesn't know" but to the second that she knows how Honey feels. "Sometimes I feel like I want to break something, too. I feel like I wish I could just tear down the whole town" (MW, p.120). In other words, Frankie believes she is caught in a special way other than the first one Berenice explained. Berenice, having accepted the female role, does not mention the extra bounds drawn around women, but Frankie feels them keenly. Frankie sees how at the same time one is caught in one's entrapment because of the inability to connect with other people. The overwhelming feeling of disconnectedness serves as a challenge to F. Jasmine to break the rules of society and to live by her own laws. This moment also serves as a powerful statement against the separation of the

races and makes a statement for unity. Further, we need to look at the role Berenice serves in the story. She is a voice of reason, the wise antidote to Frankie's antics. At the time this book was written, there was great prejudice against blacks, particularly in the south. So it also makes a larger social statement about the state of racist discrimination in the 1940s American south. McCullers works to challenge stereotypes by creating an intelligent character who is black. She uses Berenice to articulate a stand against a world in which old societal rules are so engrained that they are stifling and harmful. It puts F. Jasmine's transition from childhood to maturity on the same plane as society's need to mature beyond petty racist discrimination of the 40s, while also allowing for sharp, often penetrating commentaries about society and its entrenched hypocrisies. It makes F. Jasmine's struggle timeless. In the same way that she is trying to connect with other people, and break down boundaries, so is Berenice wishing to end the division between black and white and to find a husband to love in the way she once loved Ludie, her dead husband. But her strength is derived from an essential grounded ness: she's nestled in her church community and her Christian vision of the world.

In the course of the summer Frankie is haunted by three gruesome deaths of acquaintances. McCullers describes these deaths in very graphic

terms, the verbal intensity matching the strong impressions made upon Frankie's mind. The first of these is the senseless murder of the Negro boy, Lon Baker, in the alley directly behind her father's jewelry store: "On an April afternoon his throat was slashed with a razor blade, and all the alley people disappeared in back doorways, and later it was said his cut throat opened like a crazy shivering mouth that spoke ghost words into the April sun" (MW, p.92). The silent flapping mouth of Lon's throat parallels Frankie's own inarticulate attempts at communication. The death of her Uncle Charles is more immediate to Frankie, and his ghastly passing heightens her awareness of mortality and her own insignificance in the cosmos. She fears death: "He looked like an old man carved in brown wood and covered with a sheet. Only his eyes had moved ...She had stood in the doorway staring at him— then tiptoed away, afraid" (MW, p.76). Again Frankie is aghast not only because of the pain involved in dying, but also because of the hopeless inability of the dying to communicate to the living. She remembers those she has known who have died who "feel nothing, hear nothing, and see nothing: only black" (MW, p.94), and she is struck by the terrible finality of it all. Although she had declared earlier that she would shoot herself in the head with her father's pistol if the bride and her brother did not take her with them, she couldn't pull the trigger because "deadness was blackness, nothing but

pure terrible blackness that went on and on and never ended until the end of all the world" (MW, p.153).

The greatest shock however comes with the death of John Henry, her only young friend. Sickly and frail, John Henry in his confinement had become associated in Frankie's mind with her own isolation. The two of them seemed to share the same condition as recluses and even outcasts. She not only pities John Henry because he is sickly; she also pities him because in the doomed John Henry she sees herself: "He looked at her with eyes as china as a doll's and in them there was only the reflection of her own lost face" (MW, p.158). Frankie ponders her new knowledge of mortality as well as her increasing inventory of sexual facts and realizes that she must protect John Henry's innocence, to keep him a child as long as possible. John Henry gets meningitis, which first makes him blind, and ten days later the illness kills him. After his death, Frankie remembers John Henry the way he was before the illness and not his sickly "solemn, hovering and ghost-gray" (MW, p.159) self. With the loss of this rapport, Frankie finally feels that any meaning to her life has vanished. All that remains is the spirit of John Henry, which seems to visit her. Time and again she is to recall his torturous death: "John Henry had been screaming for three days and his eyeballs were walled up in a corner, stuck and blind. He lay there finally with his head drawn back in a buckled way,

and he had lost the strength to scream. He died the Tuesday after the Fair was gone" (MW, p.162).

This last statement reveals much of what Frankie has had to learn. After the fair — the brief pleasantries of life — comes the blackness of death. While many readers find his death unexpected, his passing is highly symbolic of the passing of Frankie's childhood years. Standing in the kitchen, she feels that she can sense his presence. She will not forget her childhood years, but she realizes that they are in her past. Moreover when Berenice said, "I don't see why he has to suffer so...the word *suffer* was one [Frankie] could not associate with John Henry, a word she shrank from as before an unknown hollow darkness of the heart" (MW, p.161 emphasis added). *The Member of the Wedding* is more than a novel of one girl's initiation into knowledge; it is impossible to read the account of John Henry's death and still regard the work as simply a charming account of adolescence as many critics have done. In it's cataloging of death scenes the novel plays upon the universal fear of death, a characteristic theme of Gothic novels.

There are two major components in the theme of the novel: The Rules of Life that Separate One Person from Another. The first is the concept of division between people. In the very second sentence of the book McCullers writes that "this was the summer when for a long time

[Frankie] had not been a member" (MW, p.3). McCullers title, most obviously, refers to Frankie's only desire in life: to belong. This, she believes, will reverse the bleak circumstances of her life, making her complete and thus valued by others. This signals to us that Frankie's attempt to find unity with other people serves as the main conflict of the novel. McCullers skillfully explores the poignancy, pathos, and banality of life, especially through Frankie's marginalization by her own sense of difference and alienation in her town. Berenice helps Frankie to understand with greater empathy what a struggle it is for minorities to deal with the division between the races: "But they done draw completely extra bonds around all colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself" (MW, p.119). The second element to the theme has to do with life's universal rules. As Frankie attempts to grow up and seek membership into the adult world, she discovers that certain life rules encumber her. The most important rule has to do with the fact that married couples only include two people, shutting Frankie out of her dream of becoming a threesome with Janice and Jarvis: "Fool's hill. You have a whole lot less of sense than I was giving you credit for. What makes you think they want to take you along with them? Two is company and three is a crowd. And that is the main thing about a wedding"(MW, p.78).

The novella is also filled with descriptions of dividing lines, of rifts between people, of split personalities. "Her father went back behind the gray sour velvet curtain that divided the store into two parts, the larger *public part* in front and behind a small dusty *private part*" (MW, p.65 emphasis added). This quote describes the jewelry store Mr. Addams works in, when Frankie visits him and learns about Uncle Charles's death. The duality described in this quote represents several things. It signifies the shift between adulthood and childhood. Frankie is in a kind of indeterminate state waiting on the dividing line between the two points. And the duality speaks of the difference between the public and private selves, as well as the conscious and unconscious. Frankie changes her name to F. Jasmine to create the surface impression of childhood. However, we know that inside she is still a child, creating wild illogical fantasies that will inevitably disappoint her. She is someone who has very little understanding of her unconscious motivations or instinctual fears. All of these serve as metaphors for the fact that there is a gulf between Frankie and the rest of the world. Other examples are the fact that Big Mama describes Honey as someone God never finished and "he was eternally unsatisfied" (MW, p.129). Honey Brown who "just can't breathe no more," (MW, p.119) is Frankie's double in the novel. Frankie feels a kinship with him because she senses that he is in the same divided state

that she is. On the one hand, Honey works hard studying music and French; on the other, he "suddenly runs hog-wild all over Sugarville and tears around for several days, until his friends bring him home more dead than living" (MW, p.128). Honey could "talk like a white schoolteacher" (MW, p.128) but he often adopted his expected role with a vengeance; "speaking with a colored word, and a dark sound from the throat that can mean anything" (MW, p.128) that even his family couldn't understand. Honey spends only part of his energy trying to overcome or protesting against the limitations placed on him; the rest of the time he accepts society's label of "inferior" and punishes himself.

Frankie exhibits this same psychology. She frequently "hates herself," and her attempts at rebellion against the female role are mainly symbolic. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, the young girl "is too much divided against herself to join battle with the world; she limits herself to a flight from reality or a symbolic struggle against it."[59] Beauvoir mentions four common forms of "symbolic struggle": odd eating habits, kleptomania, self-mutilation, and running away from home. While Frankie never carries these behaviors to extremes, she indulges in all four types. She eats greedily, pilfers at 'five-and-ten,' hacks at her foot with a knife, and tries to run away. It is characteristic of these acts that, like Honey's rampages, they are ineffective — the young girl is "struggling in

her cage rather than trying to get out of it" (Beauvoir, 1988, p.333). At the end of the novel we find Honey in an actual prison and Frankie in a jail of her own making. The adult Honey laughs at her solution to racism that he go to Cuba and pretend to be "a Cuban" (MW, p.131). Frankie's principal 'flight from reality' is her creation of a fantasy world, escaping to the haven of her dreams where she can fly airplanes and see the whole world. Her favorite pastime with Berenice and John Henry is their game of criticizing God and putting themselves in the position of creator: "They would judge the work of God, and mention the ways how they would improve the world." Frankie agrees with the basic modifications Berenice would make. The world would be "just and reasonable" (MW, p.96): "There would be no colored people and no white people to make the colored people feel cheap and sorry all through their lives. No colored people, but all human men and ladies and children as one loving family on the earth... no Jews murdered anywhere,... no war and no hunger" (MW, p.97). Frankie makes a major addition, however. "She planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted" (MW, p.97). This plan provides a neat symbolic solution to Frankie's conflicts. John Henry frequently illustrates this ability to change back and forth by suddenly showing up in Frankie's cast off dresses and playing with dolls. Bernice says "Lily Mae

fell in love with a man named Juney Jones. A man, mind you. And Lily Mae turned into a girl. He changed his nature and his sex and turned into a girl" (MW, p.81). Biff, (*Lonely Hunter*) is shown becoming so after his wife dies. He takes over some of her feminine habits, discarding the clearly defined role, which had previously confined him. If McCullers implies any solution besides racial equality to the social injustice and personal isolation and despair she portrays in her novels, it is a move toward the loosening of conventional gender roles, towards the more androgynous world Frankie envisions when she wishes people could "change back and forth from boys to girls." Even as a child before her family and society insists on her feminine gender role, Frankie is aware that she has individual power. In their study of tomboyism in American culture, Sharon O'Brien and Louise Westling[60] explain that tomboyism is considered a stage to be outgrown because girls must learn to replace active 'masculine' behaviors with passive 'feminine' behaviors. Frankie and Mick share artistic temperaments and serious ambitions as tomboys until "safe conformity triumphs" and they are forced to give up their boyish ways and creativeness. The adolescent girl, in McCullers' fiction, has the problem not only of "sex awareness but also of sex determination. It is not the responsibility of womanhood that she reluctantly must take up but the decision to be a woman at all that she must make."[61] This

decision to be a woman confronting Frankie accounts in large part for her fear and forms a major thematic concern of the novel. However, Frankie is "hovering between the two sexes" (Eisinger, p.250) in the sense that she is a girl who does not want to relinquish the privileges of boys. Frankie exists in a divided state: while she hesitates to stay in childhood, she cannot fulfill her desire to be grown-up without accepting her identity as female, and she already suspects that her gender will be confining. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it. Frankie's reluctance to remain a child is shown in her outrage at being given a doll by her brother Jarvis and his fiancée. She also resents being addressed as a child and peppers her own language with such grown-up phrases as "sick unto death" (MW, p.17), "son-of-a-bitches" (MW, p.12) and "irony of fate" (MW, p.14). But merely labeling Frankie as a tomboy overlooks a larger issue in society: power. Men have power in the world, women do not, and Frankie wants power. As a child, by adopting masculine attributes, Frankie is attempting to seize the social power that is denied to females. It is this masculine or tomboy power that Frankie is not willing to give up, even when she reaches adulthood. Girls turning into women are taught to be feminine or passive, thus losing their power, but a boy becoming a man is taught to be masculine or assertive, thus gaining power. Frankie's personality and behavior are not the result of

individual psychological causes; her behavior is the result of a larger societal issue — a patriarchal society in which women are subjected to suffering causing immeasurable frustration in them. The only time that Frankie felt complete was when she was a child, when she could be both feminine and masculine. The gender construct of a tomboy represents her longing for the time when she could be both feminine and masculine — when she would feel the full joy of being alive. This description signifies a new beginning for Frankie, and the possibility is there for her to go on and rebuild her life, guided by the attributes of caring, loving, nurturing, and yet being strong and determined when the need arises. The ending of McCullers novel is positive with regard to Frankie's achieving gender completeness — both masculine and feminine — making her a complete, complex female. The terms of Frankie's life then will be easy because she is now a whole person. McCullers speaks to our patriarchal society — with its rigid dictum of separate spheres for men and women and corresponding enforced gender roles emphasizing the need to expand and blur the boundaries and categories of male/female and masculine/feminine. Perhaps Jung's most important contribution to psychology is his recognition that a fully developed individual personality must transcend gender.

When F. Jasmine questions Bernice as to why it is illegal to change one's name without the consent of the court, the cook responds, "You have a name and one thing after another happens to you, and you behave in various ways and do things, so that soon the name begins to have a meaning" (MW, p.113). The sense of the awful mystery of life is particularly acute in the conversations between Frances and Berenice. Berenice's theme is, simply, the prevalence of a random determinism: "Things will happen,"(MW,p.115) as she puts it, and we are inextricably woven into the patterns that bring those things to us. They are trapped in the pattern, but the pattern is inscrutable; "somehow," says Frances, "I can't seem to name it." Frances has three names, each symbolic of a stage in the pattern of her life. In one sense, her behavior in each stage gives meaning to the name imparting a certain shape or color to a portion of the pattern. In a larger sense, however, it is the pattern that produces behavior and, through that, controls us. No matter how one might change externals, it is only when ones innermost feelings are altered that one truly changes and grows. Frankie functions on both universal and gender-specific levels, as her names suggest. As Frankie, she is an "adolescent everyman" in her awkward, agonized movement toward maturation. But at the same time, she bears the "special burden of girlhood,"[62] which complicates her transition to adult status. The most obvious sign of Frankie's projected

change of identity from child to adult is her revision of her name from Frankie to F. Jasmine. While Frankie is a child's name, F. Jasmine sounds older. Frankie chooses Jasmine partly because the initial *Ja* matches the *Ja* of *Jarvis* and *Janice*, but Jasmine, associated with sweet fragrance and pale yellow flowers, has obvious, romantic, feminine connotations. Growing up necessitates shedding a masculine name, clothing, and acquiring feminine ones. In many ways Frankie wants to make this change. With the name F. Jasmine she vows to give up being "rough and greedy" (MW, p.83). Most important, she attempts to change her appearance.

Frankie feels there is no escape from her fate, and she hates her environment, thinking she "lived in the ugliest house in town," (MW, p.41) viewing the sunshine as "the bars of a bright, strange jail" (MW, p.80). Through such imagery the author deliberately gives us another trapped, suffering and helpless female. Frankie's problem is that same sense of spiritual isolation, which blights all the McCullers characters: "Between herself and all other places there was a space like an enormous canyon she could not hope to bridge or cross" (MW, p.157). The sense of being trapped is developed in greater detail where the very setting of the novel is symbolically designed to reflect Frankie's feelings of being limited and restricted. The kitchen of the Addams home is a place of

confinement and dread for Frankie. Spurned by the other girls because of her unusual size, Frankie finds herself continually sitting in the dark kitchen whose very walls she hates. The kitchen is Frankie's private hell, “a sad and ugly room,” and is most often described by McCullers as “gray” (MW, p.6). Frankie often feels she will go berserk if she has to remain there any longer. Indeed the kitchen is like “a room in the crazy-house” (MW, p.6) because John Henry has covered the walls with queer and childish drawings which run together in confusion: “The walls of the kitchen bothered Frankie — the queer drawings of Christmas trees, airplanes, freak, soldiers, flowers” (MW, p.9). Such varied drawings make the walls a projection of the world itself. Frankie in her confinement seems to sense this, staring at the walls and commenting, “The world is certainly a small place” (MW, p.6).

McCullers first introduces her theory of love, a theory, which predominates in her succeeding book, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. Berenice rambles on to Frankie about the unpredictable nature of man in choosing a beloved: “I have knews men to fall in love with girls so ugly you wonder if their eyes is straight. I have seen some of the most peculiar weddings anybody could conjecture. Once I knew a boy with his whole face burned off so that....” (MW, p.80) Here McCullers tells us that in matters of love the appearance of the beloved is less important than the

reciprocity of the emotion. The important thing is the release from isolation, which the act of loving gives to the lover. Even Berenice has suffered as a result of her seemingly perfect union with Ludie Freeman. Since his death she has felt a terrible void: "Sometimes I almost wish I had never knew Ludie at all. It spoils you too much. It leaves you too lonesome afterward" (MW, p.93). But being mortal, Ludie too had to die and cause grief to his beloved.

Berenice's search for love parallels Frankie's, though in a later stage of life. But Berenice possesses the worldly knowledge that Frankie lacks. Berenice helps expand the novel's theme of the separation between two entities. She is herself split. She has one dark eye and one glass blue eye, thus her physicality has both black and white attributes. The blue glass eye she has bought gives her "a two-sighted expression" (MW, p.27), which is the physical symbol of her psychic perception. This split plays on the major theme of division and reveals her inner conflict: she is torn between her desires to remain young and free or to settle down with T.T. Berenice's blue glass eye is like Frankie's dream of the impossible wedding, a dream of almost heavenly harmony on earth. She does not precisely dream of turning white, but her blue glass eye is a terrible commentary on the color line and the arbitrary divisions, which isolate people from each other. Frankie's innocence is contrasted with Berenice's

experience of four marriages. Her last three marriages have left her unsatisfied. She hysterically calls out for Ludie Maxwell Freeman. These subsequent marriages were desperate attempts to replace him. She marries Jamie Beale because he has a mangled thumb like Ludie. She marries Henry Johnson because he wears Ludie's pawned greatcoat. "What I did," confesses the miserable Berenice "was to marry off little pieces of Ludie whenever I came across them. It was just my misfortune they all turned out to be the wrong pieces" (MW, p.107).

Both Frankie and Berenice have one opportunity for momentary escape from their dreadful ennui and frustration. The announcement of a wedding for Frankie's older brother Jarvis excites their imagination, especially Frankie's. Love-hungry, she decides that she will join her brother and his bride and travel to Alaska with them, away from the heat and confinement of the South. McCullers, like Hemingway, uses the snowy North as a symbol for escape to a pristine and pure ideal. She writes of a "no exit world," (Hughes, 1961, p.75) and it is not accidental that all her novels are set in the slow; unbearably hot and monotonous summer months when the town turns "black and shrunken under the glare of the sun," (MW, p.3) and the sidewalks seem to be on fire, in fact, an inferno. In *Member,* as in her other novels, McCullers uses heat to suggest boredom and restriction and cold to suggest liberation. Frankie

dreams of snow and ice where Jarvis and Janice blend with her ideals because he was stationed in Alaska and Janice comes from a town called Winter Hill. But the reality of Frankie's environment is the deadening heat. McCullers references to heat and stasis create an effect of constriction, almost suffocation that parallels Frankie's feeling of tightness in her chest — "her squeezed heart beating against the table edge" (MW, p.6). The more aware women become, the more they feel with Sylvia Plath that they are encased by social stereotypes in the "bell jar as a glass cage of 'femininity' and powerlessness in which many women sit, in and out of asylums, and from which many are trying to escape."[63] Since the search for identity puts greater pressures on women than it does on men, these women choose to create their own alternatives and escape into brave new worlds. The "bell jar" image also occurs in *The Member of the Wedding* where Frankie perceives her environment as "the world seemed to die each afternoon and nothing moved any longer. At last the summer was like a green sick dream, or like a silent crazy jungle *under glass*" (MW, p.3 emphasis added). *The Member of the Wedding* portrays the hot summer of an adolescent girl's experience, which at the very end of the novel gives way to a chilly autumn. The seasonal motif suggests the possibility of renewal; perhaps "spring will return" for Frankie.

Though Frankie fears Big Mama she turns to her supernatural powers in her search for answers to the ultimate question of human suffering, the problem of evil and death. She learns that she will indeed take a journey the next day, but that she will eventually return. But Frankie is not satisfied with the answers she gives her, and she is left with her feeling of "the sense of something terribly gone wrong" (MW, p.147). The old sense of separateness returns and she tells Berenice:

> Doesn't it strike you as strange that I am I, and you are you? I am F. Jasmine Addams. And you are Berenice Sadie Brown. And we can look at each other, and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I, and you are you. And I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you. (MW, pp.114-115)

Frankie tells Berenice that she wants to know everybody in the whole world and that going off with Janice and Jarvis after the wedding will make it happen. Her obsession to be joined in a "we of me" with her brother and his bride is extended now to include the whole human race, and she is determined to become the sum of all she imagines. Frankie's need for a close family experience is partially fulfilled because as a bridesmaid, she would finally be "a member of the wedding," and would be given an identity that allows her the "we of me":

> At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together. And finally, after

> the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid. (MW, p.46)

Frankie finds meaning in her life in the belief that she is a member at last. This exemplifies the very nature of Frankie's main struggle: which is to find unity with other people. "The day before the wedding was not like any day that F. Jasmine had ever known" (MW, p.44). Frankie's sudden feeling of belonging to something affects her entire perspective.

> A last difference about that morning was the way her world seemed layered in three different parts, all the twelve years of the old Frankie, the present day itself, and the future ahead when the J A three of them would be together in all the many distant places. (MW, p.61)

This is the state of F. Jasmine's mind as she is leaving the Blue Moon bar for the first time on Saturday afternoon. It is to be one of the most defining and life changing day in her life. The focus on an acute moment of development is a hallmark of a Bildungsroman. So here is F. Jasmine, on a kind of preliminary journey through the town, getting ready to make an even more important journey to Winter Hill to attend the wedding. She expects salvation through her brother Jarvis and his intended bride Janice, "the two prettiest people I ever saw" (MW, p.30). Her decision to improve herself before their wedding, and her resolve to go with them to "whatever place they will ever go" (MW, p.43) after the ceremony, lead Frankie to remake herself into a more acceptable woman. Apart from her name, Frankie's most obvious tomboy badges are her crew

cut and her typical costume of shorts, under vest, and cowboy hat. As F. Jasmine she wears a pink organdie dress, heavy lipstick, and Sweet Serenade perfume. She cannot alter her hairstyle immediately but she knows what women should look like; "I ought to have long bright yellow hair" (MW, p.18) Frankie thinks.

Frankie looks toward a perfect intuitive and wordless understanding in the three-person wedding she envisions that will unite her with her brother and his bride. So when Frankie realizes that she is a member at last, a member of the wedding, it serves as an important *moment of realization* and an indication of her future character development: "So these were the main reasons why F. Jasmine felt, in an un-worded way, that this was a morning different from all mornings she had ever known. And of all these facts and feelings the strongest of all was the need to be known for her *true self* and *recognized*" (MW, pp.61-62 Emphasis added). The above quote is also a kind of meta-analysis of the structure of the novella itself. F. Jasmine reflects that her life is divided into three parts: the past, the immediate present, and the future. This may seem self-evident, but it points to the huge importance of this isolated part of her life as a defining moment in her development. This moment is all about moving forward up and out all the way into adulthood. Frankie has been thinking about the fact that the couple is

together in Winter Hill, while she is separate from them, alone at home. But she finds comfort in the notion that she still belongs to them in some way: the physical separation seems trifling. But this turns out to be utterly delusional because events do not happen as she envisages. Frankie's plan to join the young couple on their honeymoon however is doomed to failure, as are all fantastic plans for escape in the five McCullers novels. Her dream is destined to fail, of course, as surely as the soft August moths are caught in their "irony of fate", as Frankie refers to their plight, "when, attracted by the light, they press against the window screen and die" (MW, p.14). Frankie is totally unrealistic in her plans, thinking the move will end all her worries. She fails to realize she must work out her own future without the couple as a crutch. From beginning to end the wedding is a nightmare. The chance never comes for Frankie to announce her intentions, and when she is dragged screaming from the honeymoon car, her dream is crushed. Frankie's plan to join the wedding is a non-realistic way of solving her conflict, "a flight from reality." She realizes that "all that came about [at the wedding] occurred in a world beyond her power" (MW, p.144).

After Frankie returns home she concludes that though the wedding has not provided an escape, she will still leave town:

> Every day she wanted more and more to leave the town: to light out for South America or Hollywood or New York

> City. But although she packed her suitcase many times, she could never decide to which of these places she ought to go, or how she would get there by herself. (MW, p.26)

The night that Frankie returns from the wedding, bitter and angry, she writes her father a farewell letter in which she explains that she can stand her existence no longer. She takes the pistol from her father's bureau drawer and heads for the train station with a vague idea of jumping on any freight car that happened to come along, but the station is closed and there are no trains expected until morning. When she runs away from home after the wedding, Frankie merely goes through the motions of protest and attempted escape. She knows before she reaches the street corner that her father has awakened and will soon be after her. Her plan of hopping a boxcar seems unreal even to her: "It is easy to talk about hopping a freight train, but how did bums and people really do it"? (MW, p.152) Her feeling of isolation is intense that evening as she slips out into the streets. After walking the "night-empty streets" (MW, p.152) until she ends up in the alley where the youth was found that spring with his throat slashed, she decides to wait for the train at the bar of the Blue Moon. The alleys are gloomy and she imagines the long dark car she sees to be that of a terrible gangster. Alone and frightened, she prays for company: "There was only knowing that she must find somebody, anybody that she could join with to go away." She admits to herself that

she is "too scared to go into the world alone" (MW, p.155). When Frankie tries to run away from home, she discovers that she does not have the necessary resources to leave by herself. The details of 'hopping freight,' for instance, lie outside the realm of her preparatory experience. She does not have to be prevented from hopping freights; her greatest restriction is that she does not know how or really want to. Barbara White has suggested "*The Member of the Wedding* is less a novel of initiation into acceptance of human limits than a novel of initiation into acceptance of female limits" (White, 1986, p.141). "Weddings are, traditionally, the destiny of girls and with marriage a girl officially becomes an adult" (White, 1986, p.104). But Frankie has changed her female destiny, for this wedding does not entail any of the restrictions that she has perceived in womanhood. Her proposed marriage is not to one man because in her society that implies submission; nor does Frankie attempt to acquire in her brother and sister-in-law a new set of parents, for then she would be a child again. Frankie's dream involves being "neither a wife nor a child but an adult equal."[64] In reality Frankie is already a member of something – she has "the terrible summer we of her and John Henry and Berenice; but that was the last we in the world she wanted" (MW, p.42), because a black woman and a child do not raise her status. Her brother Jarvis is a soldier, one of those envied beings who gets to see the world; his fiancée,

whom Frankie has met only briefly, at least has the distinction of being "small and pretty" (MW, p.29). According to Frankie's plan, the three JA's — will travel together. She will no longer be trapped in her kitchen but can climb glaciers in Alaska and ride camels in Africa. The elusive fantasies of her "wedding frame of mind," (MW, p.74) momentarily ease for Frankie the fear and distress of the past months. They replace her earlier fantasy of perfect membership attainable through the sharing of her blood as a Red Cross donor. She had then imagined her individuality lost "in the veins of Australians and fighting French and Chinese as though she were close kin to all these people" (MW, p.24). In that fantasy she saw herself decorated for contributing her life's blood to "join the war," while army officers sharply saluted and addressed her with respect as Adams, because her act of courage made her one of them. Frankie will now be able to fly planes and win medals, and all three JA's will be equally famous and successful. This fantasy makes Frankie feel a "lightness" in the place of that old constriction in her chest; it gives her a sense of "power and entitlement" — "Under the fresh blue early sky the feeling as she walked along was one of newly risen *lightness, power, entitlement*" (MW, p.55 emphasis added).

Frankie's desire to be a soldier or a pilot, or Mick's (*Lonely Hunter*) to be an inventor or a composer could be fulfilled only by a boy; these

goals are simply defined as unacceptable for girls. Nor is Frankie's ambition to travel and gain experience in the world unattainable for a boy. The comparison of Frankie with Holden Caulfield by James Johnson has relevance here. Holden's basic conflict resembles Frankie's — he does not want to remain a child but has reservations about the phoniness of adults (he projects these doubts into his dream of being catcher in the rye and catching children before they fall over the cliff into adulthood). But if Holden's "displacement" appears greater than Frankie's, it is merely a measure of his "greater freedom."[65] He can at least venture into the world and test it by experience. Johnson includes Frankie and Holden as examples of modern adolescent characters that flee their homes and undertake journeys. Yet "Frankie's hour of running away hardly measures up to Holden's experience." The barriers to Frankie's entering the world are not entirely external. Frankie and Mick are "protected" (that is, banned) from experience and Mick especially is expected to preserve close ties with the family. But generally the girls fail to journey into the world because of their own passivity. Frankie and Mick wait for something to happen to them — they do not think in terms of making something happen. They dream but seldom act. Even Frankie's desire to be a member stresses identification with the world rather than participation in it. In Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden wants

adult privilege and male power, but he fears becoming a hypocrite, as he associates adulthood with phoniness. Frankie experiences the same conflict: she too has reservations about phoniness. But for Frankie this conflict is secondary — almost a luxury, one might conclude — because she cannot accept her gender role. All the female novelists of adolescence portray gender role conflict as fundamental in their heroine's growth to womanhood. In fact, hypocrisy is one of the traits they object to. However, they are too preoccupied in dealing with femininity to worry overmuch about the phoniness of adults. Both the girls in this study want to be adults but not women. When they discover that women are defined as inferior, they become resentful and afraid. They fiercely resist whatever they see as evidence of women's secondary position in society (for instance, sex and marriage). McCullers' Frankie speaks for all: 'I don't want to grow up if it's like that."[66] The adolescent heroines have something else in common: literary critics have not received them with the same warmth as Augie March or Holden Caulfield. While Holden has been viewed as typical, if not superior, Frankie Adams is "a monster and ... a misfit, maladjusted personality, and true freak."[67] Clearly these heroines voice a protest that, unlike Augie's and Holden's, critics do not want to hear.

Frankie also resembles Holden (*The Catcher*) and Esperanza of (*Mango Street)*, being troubled by sexuality. Throughout the novel Frankie skirts the periphery of sexual experience, and there are several acts of sexual initiation contained in the novel. Frankie refuses to believe those "nasty lies about married people" (MW, p.12) told by the girls in the club. She had a physical contact with a male and it caused her much mental anguish: "In the MacKean's garage, with Barney MacKean, they committed a queer sin, and how bad it was she did not know. The sin made a shriveling sickness in her stomach, and she dreaded the eyes of everyone" (MW, p.25). Her sexual experiences of the summer culminate in her jaunt through the town, when a drunken soldier tries to seduce her in a dark room over the Blue Moon Cafe. Were it not for her journey, she never would have begun to finally learn about sex. As a result, she grows and changes. She fights with her assailant and manages to knock him unconscious with a bottle. She flees the scene and for weeks is possessed by the fear that she has killed a man. After F. Jasmine hits the soldier over the head, she has something of an epiphany in which she connects the moment to all of the other encounters she has had with sex. She has a distinct feeling of uneasiness, which she connects to times in her kitchen, "when, after the first uncanny moments, she realized the reason for her uneasiness and knew that the ticking of the clock had stopped" (MW,

p.137). But she realizes that there is now no clock to shake and wind. The clock represents her sexuality, her biological clock, and her oncoming menstruation. We know that she has finally reached a certain development by the end of the novel because "the ringing of the bell" (MW, p.163) interrupts her. The bell becomes the announcement that she has progressed through time and has made it into sexual maturity.

Frankie like Holden does not undergo a complete sexual initiation through intercourse, as does Esperanza. Frankie's flight from sexuality is both mental and physical. Frankie's failure to gain insight into sexual experience shows that "initiation no longer entails knowledge and commitment" (Hassan, 1961, p. 321). Not all novels of adolescence include initiation; in fact, the protagonists may actively avoid or refuse it (Hassan, 1961, p.274). Hassan believes this to be characteristic of the novel of adolescence. In fact, there is no evidence in *The Member of the Wedding* that Frankie is homosexual (or heterosexual, bisexual, or asexual). In the play she adapted from the novel McCullers presents Frankie in the last scene swooning over Barney Mac Kean, the boy she previously hated. In the novel no clue is given as to what her sexual preference will eventually be. But Frankie does not fail to gain insight into heterosexual experience. Although she manages for a while to keep her separate glimpses of sex from falling together, near the end of the

novel she gets a sudden flash of understanding: "these separate recollections fell together in the darkness of her mind, as shafting searchlights meet in the night sky upon an aeroplane, so that in a flash there came in her an understanding" (MW, p.155). When Frankie suddenly puts together the sexual facts she previously refused to connect and thinks she might as well ask the soldier to marry her, we realize that she is giving up her rebellion and submitting to her female fate. At this point the jail image, part of the motif of constriction in the novel, recurs. A policeman discovers her at the Blue Moon — "her father having slicked the Law on her" (MW, p.159) — and asks where she "was headed." Frankie wishes the policeman who comes to fetch her would take her to jail, for "it was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see" (MW, p.157). Significantly, her moment of recognition comes after her plan to join the wedding has failed; it is associated with her consequent feelings of helplessness and resignation. Frankie now resigns herself — "the world seems too enormous and powerful for her to fight" (MW, p.18).

Frankie's attitude toward sex is not unusual; resistance to sex is almost universal in novels of female adolescence. The reason is always the same: adolescent heroines view sex as domination by a man. They may, like Mick Kelly, in *The Lonely Hunter* worry about losing their

virginity but they fear most strongly, as Mick does, losing their autonomy. McCullers treats an adolescent girl's association of sexual intercourse with male domination and loss of personal choice and power in an early short story entitled *Like That.* In his survey of novels of adolescence James Johnson puzzles over Frankie's encounter with the soldier, wondering why her experience lacks the "positive quality" of Stephen Dedalus' sexual initiation. Stephen's first sexual experience in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the opposite of Frankie's. Stephen, hardly the "man's man (Gary Cooper) suddenly become[s] strong and fearless and sure of himself"[68] Frankie, on the other hand, does not know "how to refuse" the soldier's invitation to his room; she thinks she is unable to leave, and when he grabs her, she feels "paralyzed" (MW, p.136). In similar circumstances Stephen receives a sudden influx of power, while Frankie feels loss of power. McCullers has Frankie express her conflicts in fantasies, as with her dream of a world where people could instantly change sexes. Frankie knows this dream is impossible. She finds society's condemnation of androgyny, reflected in her own world; after all, one of the freaks at the fair is the Half-Man - Half-Woman. Frankie thus projects all her desires and fears into a fantasy that she imagines might be more socially acceptable — she will join her brother and his fiancée and become a "member of the wedding." But

paradoxically, Frankie's plan to join the wedding is also a desperate attempt to preserve her identity. Her wedding fantasy is a symbolic way of resolving her conflict of wanting to be an adult but not wanting to be a woman, not wanting to grow up.

Frankie demands to be kept "safely in orbit," not hurtling "loose and alone" (MW, p.157) as the world whirls faster. Just as she can no longer count on time moving predictably, she can no longer count on the stars staying in their course. Though freedom tempts her, she resists it, because she fears unrestricted individuality. Such freedom would, like John Henry's refusal to follow the rules of the card games, preclude control, design, and pattern. These she perceives as existing only where people are assimilated in orderly units — clubs, armies, or even marriages. While she tells her friend Mary Littlejohn at the close of the book that she plans to be a great poet, she immediately qualifies it with her "safer ambition" — to be "the foremost authority on radar" (MW, p.159). Though bored with routine and highly imaginative, she wants less, at least at this point, to be a leader or an uncharted adventurer than to become one whose understanding of the laws of physics can keep planes and people from being "loose" in space. Frankie's insistence on assured patterns, on repetition, or on circling around a fixed center dominate much of the book's imagery with metaphors such as radar, motors,

musical rhythm, musical themes card-game rules, and military regimentation. Her most reassuring possession is the old motor in her bedroom. When she is agitated, she turns it on and finds comfort in hearing its rhythmic hum and watching the gears move synchronically. Playing cards are components in the theme of rules and regulations, because card games are governed by rules. In the first game, Frankie is exasperated with John Henry for not being able to follow the rules when he refuses to put a jack next to a queen. What Frankie is really upset about is sex, because she knows that John Henry understands the sexual connection between the jacks and the queens. As we later learn, he once removed the jacks from the deck, and then the queens as well, so they could keep the jacks company. This in turn ruined the game, literally because the deck was not complete, but figuratively because he took the sex out of the game. This indicates that sex is a fundamental quality of the game of life.

Music figures prominently throughout the story, and its use is symbolic of Frankie's inner turmoil. Visiting John Henry one evening, she overhears someone playing blues on a horn. She is swept up in the music and is disturbed when the music suddenly stops. She tells John Henry that it will resume in a minute, but it never does. Frankie grows frantic if music lacks regular thematic pattern or stops short of a final

measure or note on the scale. Unfinished music disturbs Frankie deeply because it seems to confirm her sense that the world is unpredictable and that it does not always finish things on its own. It is not, of course, simply Frankie who is unfinished; it is her life as well that seems always on the verge of some sort of fulfillment. Equally, the unfinished music suggests the frustrating enigma of life in general, the way in which it keeps edging up on an answer, seems about to "lay a tune," but always stops short. On the day before the wedding as Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry sit and talk in the kitchen Frankie is distracted by the tuning of the piano in the next room. The tuner plays repeatedly the scale up until the seventh note, and then hesitates there, unable to finish. Frankie thinks it strange that:

> If you start with A and go on up to G, there is a curious thing that seems to make the difference between G and A all the difference in the world. Twice as much difference as between any other two notes in the scale. Yet they are side by side there on the piano just as close together as the other notes. (MW, p.109)

The noise irritates them, but at the same time, it gives them a kind of existential enlightenment about life, whether they realize they have made this connection or not. The quote describes dissonance, the feeling or sense that something has not come to a resolution. In this case, the literal description is a musical one, such as the disconcerting feeling of hearing a musical scale that is incomplete, resting on the final note before finishing. It serves as a metaphor for the weekend described in the

novella. Because Frankie is in a period of dissonance, she feels ill at ease, confused and disconnected with the world. She has a desperate desire to move forward in her life, to find the adulthood that is just out of reach. So she has to find a way to take a step forward to find a kind of resolution that will bring her inner peace. Then, and only then, will she be released from the dividing line that traps her during the main events of the story. This remark touches on the dissonance that plagues her very existence. And what she desires is unity, or consonance. She marvels that only one step can divide her from that feeling.

The quote also brings to mind a similar concept used by Virginia Woolf in *To The Lighthouse*. In the novel, an aging professor named Mr. Ramsay is fixated by the metaphorical notion that he can never reach the letter *R* when going through the alphabet. The alphabet represents his intellectual progression and *R* represents the apex of knowledge that he can never attain. But it also serves as a representation for his own-self since his last name begins with *R* — which he can never really know. So he lives in a world of dissonance, dissatisfaction. Woolf describes Mr. Ramsay's intellect in similar terms as McCullers:

> It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, like the alphabet is arranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say the letter *Q*.[69]

Woolf uses the novel to point out the fallacy of thinking about intellectual pursuits in a linear fashion. Like McCullers, she uses time shifts to break up the notion that we should always expect to walk through life in a straight, predictable line. Only by seeing life as something of a circle, can we escape the gnawing feeling of dissonance. It all comes together, considering that a musical scale is itself circular and linear at the same time. It is moving forward in a logical line, but always coming home every eight notes. In other instances, however, music has the ability to calm and reassure her. Describing the summertime interactions of Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry, McCullers writes in part two "Often in the dark, that August, they would all at once begin to sing a Christmas carol, or a song like the Slit belly Blues. Sometimes they knew in advance what they would sing, and they would agree on the tune among themselves. Or again, they would disagree and start off on three different songs at once, until at last the tunes began to merge and they sang a special music that the three of them made together" (MW, p.123). Here, music clearly represents order and comfort for Frankie because even when she and her closest companions disagree, music enables them to harmonize.

In a rapid denouement, McCullers describes the following three months. This is a time when "there were the changes" (MW, p.158) she

writes. In that time, Frances turns thirteen and when Frankie does find someone to love, it is not a teenage boy, but rather the artistic Mary Littlejohn who is two years older than Frances. Mary's Catholicism fascinates Frances:

> The Little Johns were Catholics, and even on this point Bernice was all of a sudden narrow minded, saying that Roman Catholics worshiped Graven Images and wanted the Pope to rule the world. But for Frances this difference was a final touch of strangeness, silent terror that completed the wonder of her love. (MW, p.160)

The fear of Catholicism and the Catholic ritual was, of course, the basis of a number of the earliest Gothic romances. Frankie clings to Mary because she does not think she will ever be loved by, or be able to love, a man. Frances tells Berenice as they prepare to leave the kitchen for good that she and Mary are planning "to travel around the world together" (MW, p.159). But, in the meantime, they attend the fair, which is in town, though they avoid the house of the freaks. The old familiar kitchen has been renovated, the house has been sold, and Frankie and her father are moving to a home in the suburbs that they will share with John Henry's parents. Frankie has not spoken once of her brother's wedding since that fateful day and devotes her time now to poetry, radar, school, and her new friend, Mary Littlejohn. They receive a letter saying that Jarvis is in Luxembourg. Frances imagines that she will pass by there when she tours the world. As she gazes out the window, awaiting the arrival of her

friend, Frankie notices that the "last pale colors" of the day appear "crushed and cold on the horizon. Dark, when it came, would come on quickly, as it does in wintertime," (MW, p.163) interjects the narrator. "I am simply mad about" — but Frances leaves the sentence unfinished, for "with an instant shock of happiness, she hears the ringing of the bell" (MW, p.163). Desperate to escape the "caught condition" of which Bernice has spoken, Frankie allows the "shock of happiness" to divert her attention from that which she is "mad about." However, given the deterministic theme that runs evenly through this and other works by McCullers, there is no reason to believe that Frances' newfound contentment will be anything but short-lived.

"The changes" McCullers mentions could be any number of things: Frances's newfound friendship, her lack of interest in the freak house, and her maturity. But most fundamentally, the word "change" probably suggests that she has finally had her first period and has entered her childbearing years. The bell that rings in the last sentence is like the clock that announces her biological clock has started to tick forward. McCullers uses vivid primary colors with subtle clues to describe both the physicality of the characters and the landscape around them. She constructs the action of the story within that "green and crazy summer" (MW, p.3). First of all; green is a metaphor for spring, or the freshness of

youth, or Frankie's youth. Green represents her dissatisfaction and her feelings of being stuck. She marvels at the pale green moths, which have the ability to go anywhere they like, yet continue to return to the same window every night. Secondly, in the end of the story, Frankie interprets a near-sexual experience with the Soldier as crazy. Youth and sex personify the time period. McCullers repeatedly describes the vivid colors in the landscape around Frankie. She repeatedly reminds us of eye color. But she almost never uses the color red. This seems to imply a certain fear of the color, and of menstruation. During her attempts to donate blood Frankie had imagined the doctors would say that she has "the reddest and the strongest blood" (MW, p.23). This points to the fact that she realizes that her blood carries with it a certain vital force. The color eventually becomes sexual when she announces to the redheaded soldier that red is her favorite color.

By the novel's end she finally accepts her formal given name, Frances, and with it her legal and socially prescribed identity as a young woman. Lawrence Graver claims that Frankie has gained "new wisdom about the limits of human life" (1969, p.33). Both Frankie's mother and John Henry are dead, and Berenice moves on to marry for a fifth time in her never-ending search for fulfillment. Berenice's departure signals the total collapse of Frankie's family. Frankie will continue to be an overly

tall, self-conscious and unloved person in the years to follow. Alone at night Frankie is isolated and always will be. The trip around the world with Mary Littlejohn is merely another dream like that of the wedding. Her dream of becoming a member of the whole world remains a fantasy of her immature imagination.

The parable of the restless organ grinder and his monkey, forever wandering like minstrels throughout the book, are representative of humanity: "They resembled each other – they both had an anxious, questioning expression ...They would look at each other with the same scared exasperation, their wrinkled faces very sad" (MW, p.66). This description, remarkable for its metaphysical fusion of horror and compassion, might serve as a symbol of McCullers' art. And "this fusion represents an achievement equaled by few other contemporary American writers" (Clancy, 1951, p.243).

Berenice, too, is in the process of making changes. She has given "quit notice" (MW, p.158) to the Addams family and plans to marry again. Though Berenice still longs for another marriage to match her perfect union with Ludie Freeman, she, unlike Frankie, is not willing to relinquish her freedom and individuality. She argues forcefully in favor of attaining independence — even of becoming a cashier in the restaurant owned by her prospective husband, where she will feel important in high-

heeled shoes and tap her foot as she watches the customers: "If I was to marry T.T., I could get out of this kitchen and stand behind the cash register at the restaurant and pat my foot" (MW, p.93). Because she recognizes that blacks have been more constricted by society than whites and because middle-aged people are more enmeshed in routine and dull responsibility than the young, she maintains that being caught is even worse than being loose. Blacks, she contends, are eager to "widen and bust free" (MW, p.119). Nevertheless she like Frankie acknowledges the disadvantages of independence when she comments on the inevitable loneliness of the so-called free personality. Her wisdom, won from longer experience than Frankie's, has embraced the paradoxical reality that, if one can lose oneself in a good family or marital identification with another, one can fully discover and save oneself. She wistfully recalls, "When I was with Ludie, I didn't feel so caught" (MW, p.120). Ludie Freeman's surname is surely symbolic. In the antithesis of her memory of a perfect wedding and Frankie's anticipation of one, the reader recognizes the vulnerability of those who choose to give up individuality in order to exist only as members of a family. The longing for freedom will remain alive in such a sacrifice of personal freedom, but the strength to reach for it may be impaired. Bernice gained a spiritual unity through her marriage to Ludie, but she achieved it at the cost of her self-sufficiency. At his

death, part of her was torn away and buried with him. Similarly, after the wedding at Winter Hill, Frankie continues to bear the pain of separate existence, but she can look ahead to the attainment of the freedom and independence, which a part of her has continued to demand: "The wedding had not included her, but she would still go into the world" (MW, p.149).

In the presentation of Berenice, the focus often shifts from the psychological tragedy implicit in her widowhood to the configurations in American society — economic, racial, and family which further entraps her. We know that she is, as she says, "more caught" because she is a black middle-aged person, a woman, a widow, a divorcee, a victim of beatings, and a poor person. Honey, her half-brother, may often be in jail because of some personal deficiency; but he is also in trouble because racial intolerance, discrimination, and poverty drive blacks to crime. But Berenice is, in most of the book, a symbol of affirmation; and she fights for happiness rather than resigning herself to the life of a victim. She fights against being viewed as stereo typically old, vigorously refusing to let Frankie call her an old woman. When Frankie reminds her that she has been thirty-five for the last three years, Bernice angrily retorts, "I still can ministrate" (MW, p.84). She may, at first, appear to be a romanticized maternal figure, but she eagerly leaves her employer's house to meet her

friends "to eat supper at the New Metropolitan Tea Room and sashay together around the town" (MW, p.27). She asserts, "I got as much right as anybody to continue to have a good time so long as I can... I got many a long year ahead of me before I resign myself to a corner" (MW, p.84). Even in her despair over John Henry and Honey at the close of the book, she does not withdraw from making firm decisions. If she cannot find another Ludie, she settles for any measure of happiness she can find. She settles for a life with T. T. Williams, which promises a measure of congeniality and of independence. As Frankie and Berenice speculate in circular conversations about such abstractions as freedom versus determinism, isolation versus a desire for community, and living dangerously versus living cautiously, their views on individual identity reflect still another theme — a continuing confusion about the nature of time. Frankie wins neither of her conflicting goals — to become perfectly joined and to become independent. Frankie cannot go with Jarvis and Janice and be perfectly joined, nor can she become perfectly free by running away from home. She also settles for compromise with a new friend and a new school. Similarly, Berenice cannot find Ludie alive and become a member again of that perfect wedding, nor can she "bust free" (MW, p.119). But when Bernice and Frankie talk about the mysteries of individuality and the vastness of the universe, they become so intent on

sharing the other's insight that they feel in awe of each other when they recognize their closeness. Berenice is strongly moved, for example, when Frankie hesitantly divulges the momentary vision she had the day before the wedding: Jarvis and Janice were "in Winter Hill preparing for the wedding," but Frankie saw them, "for a few seconds, walking beside her" (MW, p.75). Berenice is overwhelmed by Frankie's revelation; because she has herself at times had a glimpse of her dead first husband, Ludie, walking beside her. She had thought that she was the only human being in the world to have such a supernatural experience. If one central theme of the book is Frankie's need to achieve a sense of identity with others, this sharing of a supernatural experience marks the closest approach to the imaginative conjoining of Frankie and Berenice. It is followed, in fact, by a kind of communion ceremony. Frankie reaches over and takes one of Berenice's cigarettes. She allows her to do so and for the first time, Frankie sits smoking with an adult. They momentarily understand what it is to attain the "we of me" (MW, p.42). This key moment, put in contrast to the unbridled hope of her first beliefs about the "we of me,' allows Frankie to finally mature and become more adult-like, because, with her childhood fantasies of running away from her surroundings gone, she can become more realistic and rooted: two key elements to becoming an adult.

We can see Frankie at the novel's end as having achieved what some may consider a healthy balance between two extremes. But Frankie/F. Jasmine/Frances has gained and lost her individuality in the process towards this transition. No longer can she dream of being a pilot or a soldier, of hopping a freight, unacceptable goals for normal girls in the postwar period; she is now "just mad about Michelangelo" (MW, p.159), "looking forward to having a laundry room in their new house, cutting sandwiches into fancy shapes" (MW, p.159). As of now, Frankie has taken small steps on her way to becoming an independent woman. Her independence as a woman must break new ground, and she set forth to do this. This is part of her self-assertion. By having a rational and mature sense about her predicament, Frankie fulfills part of the characteristic that makes up the female Bildungsroman. This maturity strengthens Frankie's self-identity and helps push her forward as an adult as she tries to make rational decisions on her own. She does not look to Berenice for advice; this is her battle. Armed with the support of the life lessons learned from others, perseverance and the "sense of empowerment", Frankie achieves a certain level of maturity. Critics such as Patricia Hill Collins view this "sense of empowerment" as a "change in consciousness." In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins states that, "this changed consciousness would be a natural progression on the next

stage to maturity."[70] Frankie is fighting as an adolescent and as a woman to discover her self-identity; she is now in the process of being self-reliant in a patriarchal segregated society. With the help from other women, she will be able to achieve her goals. As Collins states, however, "this journey towards empowerment lies within the individual woman." Frankie continues on her journey towards womanhood summoning all of her inner strength to understand her femininity. As Frankie begins to mature, her growing bond with Mary, her communication with other women, and her image of herself in society all come together at this point. As she emerges from the story, the encounter with her identity has resulted from the dialectics of the personal and the collective, and depends on "a dawning sense of solidarity with other members of [her] class and race."[71] Nancy Chodorow observes that as a result of different childhood experiences, women's and men's inner object worlds are different— "women define themselves and experience themselves more relationally, whereas men feel more autonomous."[72] In contrast to the young male hero who at the end of the Bildungsroman comes into a complete sense of integration and freedom, the female adolescent is carefully schooled to function in society, to surrender her freedom and her sense of individuality. At the end of *The Member of the Wedding* Frankie seems certainly happy, having released the tension of not

belonging; but the final irony of the novel is that having gained her membership, Frankie has lost her self. McCullers does not hold Frankie accountable, any more than she does Mick, for this loss of self. Frankie has done exactly what has been expected of her, what she has been educated to do. This is the price women presumably pay in the pursuit of individualism, or in the pursuit of Virginia Woolf's dream of "a room of one's own" (1929). "If the book maintains its precision to the end, it can hardly present the characters achieving harmony, because their hopes are too contradictory to be reconciled." (McDowell, 1980, pp.94-95) The phrase "instant shock of happiness" (MW, p.163) represents the only kind of affirmation that matters: affirmation in the face of doubt, in the midst of pain, affirmation of life in the midst of living. While the closure of this text may represent a gesture toward resolution of conflict and aesthetic finality, its very abruptness and incompleteness undermine such an authorial intention. For just when the reader "expects the falling action to unravel and explain"[73] the book ends. The closure is unresolved, baffling reader expectations for clarification and completion. Consequently, "the stories are deliberately anticlimactic and inconclusive" (Kertzer, p.16). McCullers' affirmation is that "a Creator has formed an incomplete humanity, one that can only trust that there is sense in creation. Some good, rather than total good, is the meaning available for man."[74] This is

the affirmation that Frankie achieves at the end of the novel. McCullers offers no magic formula, nor are there easy answers or "happy ever after" endings in her works. Her characters do not save the world. The epiphany they experience is that the variety and complexity of humanity are what make life worthwhile. That, ultimately, love and life are richer if, instead of being blind to differences like color and gender, differences are accepted as inherent in our species.

The coda indicates that Frances' certitudes collapse internally simply because such a pattern is too blunt to express or reveal the complexities of truth. McCullers is deliberately ambiguous about the end; though the door opens (both spiritual and physical) it opens to the world of mystery and ambiguity. Frances opens new doors in herself only by first going through a region of conflict. In the last analysis, Frances' experience seems to tell her that the outer life is parallel to the inner life, for the further one goes into one's own rooms; the more one discovers that they are inhabited by all humanity. In fact what Big Mama predicted: "a trip with a departure and a return and later a sum of money, roads and trains" (MW, p.129) will eventually materialize. The inadequate 'Being' that is Frances' original spirit will continue developing: "Things will happen" (MW, p.115).

The examination of women characters in this chapter reveals that the protagonists have some insights to offer as they take on adult responsibility for themselves and for the world around them. The evolution of women revealed in these fictions does go beyond the individual. Perhaps it is time that these role models become "human" and that the social definition comes more in line with "the way life happens by itself." That is what this chapter projects through the women characters. In these troubled times, if the next generation is to "succeed" both its women and men must take adult responsibility for the survival of human society. To become empowered through self-knowledge, even within conditions that severely limit one's ability to act, is essential. These two writers have provided us moments of epiphany, of vision, when we witness a quality that altogether transcends the gender polarities so destructive to human life. In so doing, they have made of the woman's novel a pathway to the authentic self and to our innermost being.

Despite the fact that these women authors come from different national backgrounds and histories, they share an interest in the way their female protagonists of American heritage tackle similar problems of racism, class conflict and patriarchy in an urban American context. Cisneros' and McCullers' texts give voice to centuries not only of silent bitterness and conflict but also of kindness and sustaining love. The

revisionist view of the world that the respective protagonists emerge with is a deep and, at times, a mystical affirmation of the transcendent value of self and existence accompanied by a clear sense of the sacredness of the social contract. Both these novels are every bit as strong, as literary, and as meaningful as the traditional male Bildungsroman. At the same time, they take different paths, preventing a single or stereotyped view of coming-of-age experience. Both characters dramatize the crisis of identity, which faces girls as they leave childhood and enter into an understanding of what the world expects them to become. Both celebrate the search for the real self and cultural responsibility in the face of different oppressions. Yet both texts show that women's literature has come of age; they announce, "I am."[75] That announcement should not go unheard.

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# Conclusion

## Traversing Boundaries: A Shared Experience

He holds him with his glittering eye —
The wedding-guest stood still,
And listening like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.[1]

Ultimately, the appeal of every literary artist must be that of Coleridge's Mariner. This study has tried to describe the effect of the *glittering eye* as it has revealed itself in the particularities of individual works; and in this final chapter the perspective is on the kind of *will* that these writers have explored. This study has tried to understand the imaginative texture of these novels of adolescence even when the aim of art is quite different from the "clear logic of a triumphant conclusion."[2] The real achievement of a work of art is indeed that it fuses and resolves all the forces around it, personal and general, into a unified experience. John. W. Aldridge says, "The novelist begins always with the meaning, which he, as a unique sensibility brings to the experience he has chosen as his material."[3]

Each novel represents the individual vision of an artist, his direct impression of reality. Consequently, the *unique sensibility* of these writers enhances the scope of this study. This is a quality that altogether transcends the gender and socio-cultural polarities destructive to self-realization. The many similarities among the presentations yield common,

human concerns while the differences reveal the subtler pressures exerted on special groups and regions within American society. As can be seen from this study the novels take on new dimensions through their adolescent characters that are central to all the novels, and this study explores what is more or less an adolescent milieu. The writers chronicle the steps that the adolescents take in order to gain control over their lives and destinies. In so doing, these writers have made of the adolescent novel a pathway to the authentic self. The social context as well is challenged by new questions, and "the way life happens by itself"[4] rather than the way it is defined for us by "all those lies": "They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong" (HMS, p.100) In short, the adolescents' radical individuality seems to call the entire social fabric into question challenging its very premise about issues of equality, of class, and gender. As these adolescents mature, their assertion of self often evolves into an assertion of their values as well as a challenging of the "lies" they have been told. Potentially, therefore, this self-discovery of adolescents' male and female promises the rediscovery of social balance opposing the destructive dualism of the prevalent system. This study approaches the human condition in its social context through the fictional American adolescents. Women find themselves in a world of questionable values in which ironically they have to play the role of

"caretaker" of these values. While the Bildungsroman suggests an organic unfolding and a harmonious integration of all aspects of the self, when used in the context of the American genre, it is redefined by turning attention away from organic integration in order to express the acute conflicts and complexity that characterizes life. These novels illustrate both the new opportunities for female independence and paradoxically the modern-day prejudices still stifling women's growth. They reject the expectation of others, and through self-discovery attempt to claim their real selves. Alienated by mass society, each with an array of failed relationships, these protagonists discover within themselves something like Augie March's "axial lines of truth, love peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony urging them outward again to human contact" (AM, p.524). "The pages reveal the tactics [adolescents] adopted the weapons they chose, the victories they sought – and finally won."[5] In addition, the theme of movement or journey provides the progressive drive in these stories revealing that the issues the novels raise are *universal* enough, *timeless* enough, to transcend the boundaries of age, place, or condition.

The novelists included here do not give us their works as an object to be held up statically to view, or as a text that by its very nature will elicit contradictory responses that demolish any possibility of a basic reading. For: "Nothing, no power, will keep a book steady and

motionless before us, so that we may have time to examine its shape and design."[6] They offer us, instead, the opportunity to undergo an imaginative experience, to recreate a set of happenings that have been selected and arranged according to some particular significance they imply. The happenings may be extensive, but they recognize them as forming the basic experience of the novel, and expect the readers to do so too. We therefore sense in these narratives, an intense and sustained thoughtfulness, as these novels are presented both structurally and thematically neither to resolve a problem nor to conclude an action but only to evoke the keenest *moments of realization* possible, which the writers have presented with "faithfulness to the most candid perceptions, and to the implications of language."[7] The effect is almost like music or poetry: "to give us the essence of experience transfused and heightened, and expressed in such fashion that we may contemplate it at the same instant that we are swayed by it."[8]

These works focus on a number of metaphoric foci, which emerge without the authors necessarily trying to tie them down to a fixed and single defining label. But a "stubborn idiosyncrasy"[9] is paradoxically, one of the elements they have most strongly in common; it is, what their central characters and what they, as authors, most determinedly aim at: "A kind of genuine stubbornness, a personal idealism, and an idealism

that lies beyond axiological or moral categories"[10] is seen. It is an idealism that celebrates autonomy as a fundamental individual right. It is an idealism of the self that Mihaly Csikszentmilahalyi has identified as "the autotelic self — a self that has self-contained goals."[11] It is a self that fiercely asserts and guards the validity and integrity of its own experience, validity and integrity that requires no other validation except that the self be wholly content. This is a kind of radical disposition, which shows an openness to experience, a deliberate vulnerability to life.

Apart from the obvious differences in social and chronological situations in the chosen novels, there is a common concentration on the delicate and sensitive character of the young adolescents, on whose psyche all external elements — incidents as well as people — leave an indelible mark. Stated broadly, the preoccupation of American novels of adolescence has been from the outside world to an inner self. Jung has suggested that one learns about life by first turning inward: "proceed from the dream outward." It is a search for a fully realized self and place within the community; it is a search for "the dream (that) is the truth" (Radiant Daughters, p.48).

The traditional Bildungsroman focuses on an outward, linear movement that allows the male protagonist to achieve self-realization through becoming a contributing member of society. The writers

discussed here emphasize the psychological impact of adolescents, focusing their attention on their reactions to the external ambience with an insight into their minds. In the texts examined here, writers offer several examples of protagonists' whose development unfolds through separation from oppressive social and familial structures. In this sense, one can compare the four examples of novels of adolescence, as incorporating plot elements similar to those of the Bildungsroman, and as mirroring — through their adolescent protagonists — the development and transformation of society, the dissolution of values, the increasing materialism and egocentrism diffused in human behavior. Notwithstanding dramatic moments of crisis and disappointment these adolescents gradually react in a positive manner, and fight their own battle for survival, thus becoming responsible adults. In all these cases, the adolescents grow up through dramatic trials and traumatic disappointments. Without much help or affection, either from family or society they have had to struggle towards maturity. The journey of the young inexperienced protagonists' along the initiation path sometimes evokes sympathy, and at other times disapproval of their choices, while observing their reactions to the trials imposed by life. As it happens in every traditional Bildungsroman, every event becomes automatically attracted into the orbit of personality, and every episode becomes

meaningful only when the protagonist is shown to attain a psychological maturity. As Franco Moretti remarks:

> Trial, in the Bildungsroman, is instead an opportunity: not an obstacle to be overcome while remaining 'intact', but something that must be incorporated, for only by stringing together 'experiences' does one build a personality.[12]

In this sense, every event, every betrayal, every disappointment becomes a means for the young adolescent to accumulate experiences, to change personality, and to increase self-knowledge as well as knowledge of society and facts. Viewed in this light, the ending chosen by each author defines the growth reached by the adolescent and mirrors in some way the author's own view of the contemporary world. Thus, in the end, each adolescent is less naïve and more discerning.

The planned framework of this study is the concept of a *journey*, but also how this *journey* becomes a metaphor for carving a legitimate space for adolescents in their community, struggling for a new pattern of order. These novels present us with a multi-layered plot involving the patterns of quest. This quest to define their true selves is what is attempted in each of the chapters in this book. Each story emerges from the quest for a pattern, a quest, which determines the novel's spiritual outline, and the experience of a pattern-less world. It is argued here that the protagonists try to rediscover a creative possibility within the invisible layers of their selves. A major feature of these novels is, therefore, their

inward concentration on the world they map out. The concept of self in these novels opens with the collision between the adolescents evolving self, and society's fixed idea of that self. This eventually leads the adolescent to self assertion resulting in the possibility of a new authentic way of living. The adolescents present themselves as the ones who wholeheartedly embrace that most cherished of American doctrines: individualism. They divide their consciousness into their dream world, on the one hand, a place where feelings are liberated, and a vision of conventional society on the other hand, a stoical acceptance of facts. The vitality and hopefulness characterizing the adolescents' attitude toward the future conflict with the expectations and dictates of society. But in the end they are facilitated to a great extent by this very expectations and dictates of society to validate their awakened selves.

The psychosocial concerns which affect the lives of adolescents as they progress from childhood to adulthood are: the development of identity, the growth of autonomy, the search for intimacy and the establishment of peer relationships based on trust, openness, and a similarity of values; the management of one's developing sexuality; and the need to achieve, and be recognized for one's achievements. Similarities and a recurrent pattern appearing in each of the works have been arranged thematically, as follows: self-realization — including

identity questions, self-discovery, and self-knowledge; sex roles — including male/female roles and role models; inner and outer directedness — including psychological, sexual, ideological, and societal. The foregoing themes are related to the adolescents' personal quest which manifests itself as a spiritual quest. By means of the *ideographic* structure and its contradictory perspectives, as well as the point of view and symbolic episodes such as the *awakening scene*, the reader encounters imaginative truths, which are themselves complex, mysterious, even incomplete.

The dominant theme is alienation the causes of which are frequently obscure, but always complex. Sometimes society seems at fault with its record of racial prejudice, and patriarchal domination. But sometimes the fault seems to lie deeply in the turbulence of the spirit of the protagonists resulting in the failure of personal relationships. The study further examines the connecting themes that run throughout the stories, and chronicles the protagonists' development toward self-realization. It analyses their physical and sexual journeys from possessed objects to self-directed, insubordinate humans, and also explores the mental and spiritual changes that accompany these efforts. The protagonists go through a series of experiences and discoveries, and through changes of perspective enlarge their horizons of understanding

and find their true selves. It also explores the characters' attempt to understand sexuality, freedom, and personal space without being labeled or defined by others. It finally illustrates the importance of writing as an instrument for liberation. After tracing the protagonists' movements through various developmental stages on the road to maturity and self-realization, it becomes apparent, particularly in the postmodern period, that the representation of a coherent self which these writers seek to portray always remains a process.

Each chapter begins with a discussion of plot, followed by an analysis of the novel's characters. The search for who they are is universal, but unique to each individual. This quest for self-knowledge is at the heart of every journey. The writers' skill at character development allows the reader to watch as characters slowly gain a sense of self, and a set of values on which they can base a future that makes sense to them. As they interact with the people in their lives, they learn from those encounters. The first aspect of the journey inward takes the form of an acute consciousness of the world of the ego, and of a consequent turning away from societal norms that the authors graphically and specifically detail. But they move toward self-awareness, and develop a substantive core of beliefs that eventually allow them to make a different kind of place for themselves within their family, and in the world. Additionally,

the characters' slow transformation into an independent young adult becomes more believable because the writers are able to project the characters' future self in their early actions. For instance, although Holden/Augie/Esperanza/Frances are definitely driven by natural forces, concerned about their looks, influenced by their friends, and feel defiant towards parents, even early in the stories they are shown to be adolescents with many positive characteristics. These glimpses of their personalities and strengths are inherent in the plot tensions, and further illustrate just how little the parents know about their children. The protagonists' willingness to take a stand, to grow, and to base their future on the values which they themselves try to develop, forms the core of the novels. This is why the relevant role of the *tutor* has also been stressed in these novels. An adult figure — other than a mother or father — helps and defends the adolescent in the vicissitudes of growing up, offering advice and friendship. Berenice proves to be such a tutor for the young heroine Frankie, Antolini for Holden, Einhorn for Augie, the women of her neighborhood for Esperanza. They are either attached to these chaperons and tutors, or abandoned to their own musings and mistakes since it is up to them to make their own choices in life.

An important aspect of the novels in the study is the construction of a center of consciousness, the structuring of a linguistic 'I'. The French

psychologist, Jacques Lacan believes that "it is when a child recognizes himself in a mirror that the 'I' is precipitated."[13] To find out what the 'I' really is, is the central preoccupation in these novels. Initially the 'I' is a vertical wall excluding all that do not contribute to the self. But the novels demonstrate the necessity of breaching this wall, and selflessly extending oneself to others. The main movement of the action is the shift of the 'I' from artificial ego to a more authentic self. The novels seek to link the protagonists' external reflections to the internal 'I', which must comprehend the nature of what it sees. Salinger's classic of adolescent rebellion, tells of how sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield rebels against all that he perceives as phony in upper-middle-class 1940s society. The first-person narrative, recounted from an unspecified psychiatric facility where Holden is convalescing after a nervous breakdown, describes his flight from *Pencey* preparatory school and his subsequent experiences in New York City shortly before Christmas. Salinger's small body of fiction is unified by a preoccupation with several core themes: the exploitation of childhood innocence and integrity by insensitive, superficial adults; the longing for kinship and unconditional love amid the alienation and absurdity of modern life; and the quest for spiritual enlightenment in a materialistic world. Holden's conflict of conscience, centers largely upon his desire to protect the young and vulnerable from the perils of what he

understands as adult corruption, particularly in the form of inauthenticity. Holden's struggle to reconcile this with his inevitable maturation is intimately linked to his despair over the hostility and apathy of modern society. His naïve concern for the winter well-being of the ducks in Central Park and his exasperation at the presence of obscene graffiti signify his preoccupation with the preservation of innocence and integrity at both a personal and social level. *The Catcher in the Rye* is the story of a quest, a search for truth in a world that has been dominated by falsity. It is the search for personal integrity by a hero who constantly falls short of his own ideal, who, in fact, participates in the very falsity he is trying to escape. The hero's internal and external conflict forms the dramatic core of the novel. The drama is further intensified as his vision of inner and outer falsity becomes more and more overwhelming. The significance of the catcher image lies in three things. First of all, it is a savior image, and shows us the extent of Holden's spiritual idealism. Second, it crystallizes for us Holden's concept of good and evil; childhood is good, the only pure good, but it is surrounded by perils, the cliff of adolescence over which the children will plunge into the evil of adulthood unless stopped. But finally, the image is based on a misunderstanding. The title of the novel refers to a Robert Burns lyric that Holden significantly misquotes and adopts as his personal motto.

Both Holden's nihilistic view of life as it is and his notion of what life ought to be is based on a misunderstanding of man's place in the universe. In this central metaphor is condensed the essence of the novel, though not until the end does Holden fully understand the significance of the difference between "man catching" and "man meeting." Holden realizes, vision or consciousness is pure only when it is disinterested, when it is motivated by the desire for knowing rather than getting. Man has the "gift of incisive vision, never of the whole of reality, but of surfaces and fragments."[14] Holden's behavior with Phoebe proves to us the genuineness of the catcher image. When tested, his love for Phoebe and his desire to save her innocence is far greater than his hatred for the world and his determination to abandon it. His love of good is stronger than his hatred of evil. And so, paradoxically, he is saved through saving. The important thing he realizes is that these are the conditions of life and rather than to attempt the impossible man should meet man, form a relationship of love and understanding with him, and in so doing help him toward his goal just as Holden is doing here with Phoebe. In the final chapter where he misses everybody, even Maurice shows the effect on Holden of his altered catcher ideal. The concern to communicate, to establish a relationship with man, has led to the love of man. The novel's resolution transcends sociological indictment in affirming individual

responsibility. What he attains is a new vision, and is liberated from his idealistic notions. Looking back from such an enlightened position, he can see that what he took for reality at a given time and in a particular situation was only illusion. Holden does his growing up amid turbulent forces and conflicting loyalties. His indictment of the public school system, with its rampant prejudice, and destruction of human dignity, is as stinging as other adolescents but Holden in telling his story seems to come back to normal, so that the very telling has the effect of giving him strength. It is not clear how Holden will relate to his phony world again, except that he consciously chooses it, perhaps because he needs people, no matter what they are like. So the action of the novel is precisely to bring the two windows of his eyes together and focus that wonder and terror fused with all the languages of explanation, but going beyond them all. The whole book is a preparation for that single moment of visual perception that must be wholly 'objective' before it is anything else, but finally holds so much in such fusion of opposites that it is beyond words, and can only be caught, in a flash, by the "Blakean eye of innocence."[15]

"The challenge of composing order constitutes the very essence of human condition,"[16] and is the basic problem of modern man. On the social level it is seen in the form of violence resulting from the clash between different types of order. It is also experienced in the form of evil

resulting from not only over-assertion of the ego, but irrational faith as well. There is the "natural chaos of existence," again there is the fallen man's sense of separateness, or alienation from the universe. In the process of seeking order, man imposes his will on others like Augie's "reality instructors" or exploits the universe egotistically like Holden's "phonies." The basic problem of modern man is "learning to live fearlessly in the natural chaos of existence without forcing artificial patterns on it."[17] Both Salinger and Bellow (in different ways) introduce their comically ill-equipped young heroes not merely to assorted individuals and situations, but rather to individuals and situations that are clearly representative of the great sources of power and control in our times. Bellow working on a larger canvas keeps his protagonist running through extraordinarily jumbled situations that reveal the contemporary force of race, of education, of technology, of sex, and of politics. Augie writes out his memoirs presenting a chronological account of his adventures from childhood to manhood. This recall of his past is not a form of nostalgic indulgence. The act of writing is for Augie, as it was for Holden an enactment of the process of self-discovery.

In theme and in style, *The Adventures of Augie March* bears out the validity of Bellow's observation: "We are not born to be condemned but to live."[18] To Bellow it is wrong to believe that contemporary man is

condemned to live a dreadful life; the only thing he is condemned to be "in this world is human."[19] In his opinion, art is "the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness" (1960, p.414). Each of Bellow's heroes represents the same desperate struggle for life, for a more refined consciousness. According to Bellow, Art offers a "compensation of the hopelessness or meanness of existence" (1960, p.414). Breaking from the modern novel's concern with form and structure, Bellow's has the shapeless, episodic structure of the picaresque novel. Out of the apparent chaos, however, emerges an order imposed by sheer exuberance for living, a vibrant affirmation of the joy contained in infinite variety, and ceaseless experimentation. Consequently the novel exhibits a steady and evolving preoccupation with the emergence of Augie who, through his fierce determination to live, rises above the overwhelming conditions of life and achieves a heroic stature. But although Augie is above all else determined to remain a free man, he is by no means indifferent to the claims of the world around him. What he does, however, is to sift ideas and experiences through his consciousness, impatiently rejecting whatever he believes to be temporary or irrelevant: "And all great experience would only take place within the walls of his being" (AM, p.455). He arrives at two conclusions not in logical fashion but in his own intuitive way. One idea is out of Thoreau, that "the reason

for solitude can only be reunion," the other, that it is tiresome "to have your own opinions on everything" (AM, p.447). Despite his apparent passivity, Augie holds fast to certain deep beliefs. He is on the side of life and people; he will never give up. Bellow's great contribution lies in his ability to *socialize* the effort to survive in the modern world. In effect, Bellow's novel moves in a pattern of incompletion, but toward the ultimate completion, which is to have "sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete [one's] own life."[20] One needs to remember that Bellow speaks, not of the grand affirmation or of the "beatitude" of some contemporaries, but of sufficient power, the strategies of survival that govern the "affirmation of life," and keep it from getting out of hand. Augie discovers the comic possibilities in man's tragic condition, and at the end, "got to grinning again" (AM, p.536). Experience always felt to the utmost — this becomes the measure of affirmation in Bellow's version of modern society. In both books, there is a kind of logical order to the events encountered, and so there is a pattern of sorts within the experiences undergone. It is not a fixed and final design, and it is, in any case, a design darkly tinged with irony. It serves to explain the frailties of the heroes by making manifest the irrelevance of moral commitment — irrelevance, at least, to the contemporary sources of power and control. But that manifestation only makes the moral commitment of these comic

heroes, and implicitly of their authors, all the more compelling. And in their handling of these paradoxical situations, these writers reveal how, even in a world in which the moral order has succumbed to the disruptive and the possessive, fiction can still achieve that narrative order — that internal artistic order which is *form*, and on which the life of fiction must always depend. Conversely, through the form and order they have created by their narrative art, we ourselves are able better to measure the disorders of the actual world we must, somehow, continue to live in.

Adolescents who are experiencing identity exploration, but still have not made any commitments, are in "the prime danger of this age" a status called a "psychosocial moratorium."[21] Such a moratorium, according to Erickson is a good thing, provided it does not go on for too long. To successfully resolve the normative crisis of adolescence, one needs both the exploration, and the commitment. "The identity status associated with both exploration and commitment is identity achievement."[22] These writings, by re-enacting this myth reminds us of Erick Erickson's theory of the adolescent identity crisis — the sense that the full potentialities of the self have never been found in the level of *being,* and so life seems to lack meaning. Somewhere in the experiences of childhood is the reason for the damned-up sense of the inauthentic. Something is wrong with the contemporary soul, and these writers give us

a clue — it has to do with *being,* and the failure of love. Through the Bildungsroman structure and the adolescents' own consciousness these novels create an adolescence in the process of 'Becoming' rather than as a character who is in a state of 'Being.' Glikin reports that "stagnation would be the result of an exclusive upholding either as a mode of existence for the individual."[23] The amalgamation of both Being and Becoming are vital to each of the protagonists. Implicit in the narrative structure, is the ever-flowing consciousness of the main characters, affirming "this dynamic aspect of human experience."[24] In following how the young adolescents move from their ego-centered world to the outside world, we can trace the interdependence of inner and outer directedness. Asking crucial questions concerning their inner directed life, and in looking for answers, allowing for a consciousness of choice, is one of the hallmarks of *Bildung* for the adolescents. To accomplish this promise, they reach out to others — and to the outer directed world. After "painful soul searching,"[25] Holden makes a sort of accommodation to a world he can adapt to, at which time he has left adolescence and entered maturity. Holden's journey is more than a movement through space — it is a movement of affirmation. Similarly Marcus Klein has traced a pattern in Bellow's fiction in which "the sensible hero journeyed from a position of alienation to accommodation."[26] Holden's progress from identity

confusion, to a "psychosocial moratorium," and finally to commitments that qualify as "identity achievement" carries him along the same line of development followed by all the adolescent protagonists. Along the way, the rest of the community grows as well. Among the other important messages of the study is the notion that development occurs within a social system. The changes experienced by one family member influence other family members, for good or ill. The changes are by and large positive ones for all members of the community.

This study also exemplifies how fiction embraces a poetics that transcends traditional boundaries of genre and gender. The fact of selecting two female writers and the particular attention given to the feelings and reactions of adolescent girls create many exceptions to the male prototype and give us a chance to consider the relevance of such a theme in a study of this nature. Although the traditional term Bildung has been adopted to indicate the developmental process, its implications are quite unorthodox when it comes to women characters. Deceived, disappointed, deeply introspective, and deprived, these female adolescents wander through the maze of contemporary experience, shouldering the burdens of being stranded in a hostile, often meaningless world; they embark on "an endless and cyclical journey" — a long series of circular reflections on the past, connected to the present by the

character's circular and always repetitive reflections — "impelled by nostos without realized destinations: for them, there is no promised land, no home."[27] Since women are alienated from time and space, their plots take on cyclical, rather than linear form, and their houses' and landscapes' surreal images and symbols appear as fragments in women's fiction. One discovers in women's novels a clear sense that they have "neither a homeland of their own nor an ethnic place within society." Their quests for being are thwarted on every side by what they are told to be and to do, which is different from men: "when they seek an identity based on human personhood rather than on gender, they stumble about in a landscape whose signposts indicate retreats from, rather than ways to, adulthood."[28]

In existential terms, their desire for responsible selfhood, for the achievement of authenticity through individual choice, comes up against the assumption that a woman aspiring to selfhood is by definition selfish, deviating from norms of subservience to the dominant gender. If authenticity depends upon totality of self — the greatest possible exercise of our capacities for significant work, intellectual growth, political action, creativity, emotional development, sexual expression, etc — then women are supposed to be less than total selves. Men can choose Sartre's quality of '*mauvaise foi*', the '*bad faith*' of avoiding human responsibility: "for

women it is not a matter of choice but a precondition for social acceptance" (Pratt, 1981, p.6).

Sandra Cisneros and Carson McCullers give significance to human action justifying the female protagonists' observations and validating the steps they take. As an Argentinean feminist says: "The domestic is not an inferior compartment of existence but a tactile, sensuous relationship with things."[29] That relationship demonstrates value, the value of the woman in her community, a person who should not be so easily erased from cultural history. The reader gains the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of human experience and to participate in the reconfiguration of identity. Sandra Cisneros and McCullers capture the image of women who need to create their own path, not only within their culture and society, but also in fiction. They therefore replace the traditional ending of the female quest story by presenting a different developmental process, and alternative destinies for the protagonists. Through the liberating act of writing and aesthetic development, the protagonists of *The House on Mango Street* and *The Member of the Wedding* become conscious of their female identity, and through their writing and art affirm their bond to the community. Each narrative is grounded in the protagonist's conscious exploration of the contradictions between internal and external definitions of the self,

between socio-cultural values and gender role expectations and the female self. The narrating "I" articulates her own experiential perspectives on her own Bildung process, and becomes, through the act of articulation, an active agent of her own self-education. The central theme of each narrative is thus the narrator/protagonist's articulation of her own growing consciousness of her position as a woman within her particular socio-cultural context, an understanding that enables each protagonist to imagine herself beyond patriarchal confinement of the female self. Here the narratives, unlike in the traditional Bildungsroman, do not follow a linear process that leads the protagonist from adolescence to maturity, rather each narrative is composed of fragments of insights and experiences that in some way heighten the protagonist's consciousness about her own development as a woman within a particular socio-cultural context. According to one description of the Bildungsroman, the learning and growth process of the protagonist can be charted through its most characteristic feature — its "elusiveness, alternations of insights, its sense of confusion and inconsequentiality."[30] The loss of self and its discovery becomes one of the distinguishing characteristics of the female Bildungsroman, while marked by "elusiveness" and "alternations of insights." The road from "nothingness to selfhood is traversed in the quest"[31] and precedes awakening for the

woman questing — a "coming to oneself"[32] — as a potential inherent in the individual and in the vision she has of her society as a Utopian one. Even while these writers attached themselves to a traditional genre, they elaborated upon the older structure, challenged its assumptions, and finally fashioned it into *Bildungsroman* representative of women's consciousness. This is seen in the close relationship which we find existing among the two heroines. Although separated in time and space they share a common bond in the thematic material examined here. By breaking into the traditional genre, the female heroine has brought new meaning to *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman.*

A series of vignettes in *The House on Mango Street* show that the protagonist wished to escape both into a real house, and into "the house of fiction."[33] To tell a story of the self is 'to create a fiction.' Esperanza's search for a *real* house is at the same time a quest for self-expression, for a liberating self-creation that dismantles traditional male-defined myths and texts that have locked the Chicano into confining stereotypes. Her own quest for a *real* house is thus a quest for a new Chicano text, one that names her own experiences and represents her as a Chicano in all her subjective complexity, one that does not make her "feel like nothing" (HMS, p.5). As the author's alter- ego, Esperanza knows she requires a space for autonomy in order to create her fiction and her self apart from

the traditional role of women in her culture. This is what Esperanza, whose name means 'hope', dreams of. Two narrative threads connect the stories in the novel: the personal and private story of Esperanza Cordero, and the public and collective story of the neighborhood on Mango Street. Esperanza's personal transformation is rooted in her observations about the people in her neighborhood, which provide her with a community education. From each member of her community, she learns what to become and what not to become. The house the protagonist longs for, certainly, is a house where she can have her own room and one that she can point to in pride, but, as noted through this discussion of the poetics of space, it is fundamentally a metaphor for "the house of storytelling."[34] The desire for a physical home evolves into a spiritual and political home, one that will allow Esperanza freedom, but will allow her to remain loyal to her *barrio,* and one that will emerge through the written word. In effect, *The House on Mango Street* is the house of stories through which Esperanza/Cisneros gives voice to her neighborhood and accomplishes her journey. Esperanza records, as a writer, not only her own personal journey towards transformation, but also that of her neighborhood, a neighborhood that represents the collective story of Latino neighborhoods across the United States.

Esperanza makes a clear link between language and identity when she turns to the act of narrating her experiences on Mango Street. She uses her own experiential perspective as a strategy to escape social oppression and the threat this oppression presents to her own sense of self. Naming her own experiences is a way of defining and validating these experiences as well as her own perspectives. It is, at the same time, an affirmation of her being that is grounded in language, in a new naming of self and her socio-cultural reality. Esperanza has come to understand that the "real house" she has been searching for is an un-confining creative space. Telling her own story, the narrating "I" participates in the process of her own self-formation, while she at the same time creates a poetic space that stands as an alternative to the confining conditions on Mango Street. Yet in the course of telling her stories she comes to recognize the significance of Mango Street in her life, and that it forms an inextricable part of her own self. In the end when Esperanza envisions her own departure from Mango Street, it is with the intention of returning for those she leaves behind. Through her role as a writer, however, her *Bildung* is not merely individual, but takes on communal significance, as she, with the text, is reaching back to the women on Mango Street so that her own liberating self-creation may in turn become a symbolic *Bildung* experience for those "who cannot out." The communal significance of

Esperanza's *Bildung* is further underscored by the fact that, while her primary concern is for the women who cannot escape marginalization, the text goes beyond an exclusive portrayal of the oppression of Chicanos to name and give voice to other outsiders in the community. Personal identity and public behavior are always linked. Society both forms and de-forms character, because it is both a hindrance to self-realization and the context in which self-realization must occur. That is, Esperanza wants to escape from Mango Street, because she feels that it stultifies her, but she always carries Mango Street with her in memory and in her own evolving personality. Esperanza's character reveals her existence within her community by seeking to define her own path. As with the male heroes, it is the protagonist's own introspection and discovery toward fulfillment that matters.

Esperanza, through her spirit and imagination, invents new possibilities for her life, possibilities that give her a freedom and power to reach beyond the limits of her neighborhood. Cisneros gives us a voice whose story introduces us to an American life richer in human relationships than in material wealth, a voice that engages with the challenges and joys of that disparity. Esperanza also builds a new space by imagining a house that moves "toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes."[35] Neither private nor communitarian,

the house she imagines belongs to "the realm of the beyond"[36] it is porous, an interior space, which is experienced as open; it is a creative site of introspection, and at the same time a space of intimacy and connection, a refuge for all those without a roof. Thus, Esperanza's imaginary dwelling crosses customary boundaries and becomes a bridge, "this bridge we call home."[37]

Like her narrator who does not wish to inherit the ready-made house of her barrio, Cisneros redefines "the rented cultural space of the Bildungsroman"[38] She borrows from the general configurations of the traditional male Bildungsroman, and applies them to her novel. The fictional *house* she builds with her Chicano and feminist perspective, in other words the textual container of these vignettes, accommodates within its flexible walls a multiplicity of worlds simultaneously. Thus, this blurring of boundaries also offers new models of reading literary texts, which challenge totalizing interpretive paradigms. For Cisneros, identity is achieved, or happens, circularly. It requires engagement with society and culture. She advocates an ethic that involves both loyalty (coming back) and change (getting out): "I have gone away to come back" (HMS, p.110). The goal of Esperanza is to fashion an identity for herself, which allows her to control her own destiny, and at the same time maintain a strong connection to her community. As the central consciousness of the

text, the narrator/protagonist is the agent of his/her own story who takes on narrative authority in respect to what aspects of his/her life and his/her experiences are meaningful to his/her own Bildung process. Crucial to this process of discovery of self within a socio-cultural context is the narrator's conscious exploration of the contradictions between the internal perception of self and the external definitions, contradictions that the narrator/protagonist interprets through his/her own experiential perspective. In the section called "My Name," the protagonist says "it was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine..." and ends by saying she'd like to baptize herself "under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X Yes Something like Zeze the X will do" (HMS, p. 11). Her chosen name seems to indicate a variable to be expressed, indicative of an identity to be shaped. In the meantime she feels herself to be like an X, an indeterminate personality in search of an identity. It suggests her self-determination, her desire to be her own person, and also her love of language. By naming herself, she creates a new and autonomous inner self, exemplifying Elaine Showalter's remark, "The act of naming and self-naming has long been fundamental to cultural identity and self-assertion."[39] Unlike Frankie who wants a total gender transformation in order to acquire power denied to her as a female, Esperanza's desire to re-

baptize herself and assume a different name can be viewed as a step towards self-assertion within her given environment. Esperanza rejects the role models which her society offers her and consciously chooses to forge her own identity through writing; and in so doing, she symbolically chooses the American translation of her name (hope) over the Spanish (waiting). This shows us that Esperanza has a voice she can use to speak out, and although she is taking small steps now, she will likely come to find her strong voice soon. By giving Esperanza this voice, Cisneros is expressing optimism, optimism that the situation can change and that Esperanza has the potential to *become.*

In *The Member of the Wedding* Carson McCullers shows that adolescence is "a haze of loneliness and groping shot through with private fantasy and furious outbreak against a complacent adult society."[40] She embodies the same problems of adolescence, and its confrontation of the evils of experience in her novel which resembles *The Catcher in the Rye*, in that it focuses on the failure of the adolescent to adjust to the confusions of the adult world. Frankie Addams, embodies in exaggerated form all those traits of immaturity which other novels have described more normally, and thereby rivets our attention on them the more firmly. Frankie's feeling of desperate isolation and alienation drives her to identify herself with her older brother and his fiancée, until she

tries to join them on their honeymoon. But "this grotesque situation merely emphasizes the confusion of all adolescents, and of all maladjusted members of human society."[41] She is unable to make her imaginary and her real worlds meet. Her friendly "inside room"[42] is furnished with her dreams and aspirations while the "outside room" of the world leaves her puzzled and perplexed. The focus is again on the alienation of the individual, with race and gender identification continuing to be the primary examples of how our society isolates its members. Pitted against the overpowering forces of nature and society, individuals find that they have only each other to give value to life. With D. H. Lawrence, Carson McCullers believed that "we need one another and that we attain our very individuality itself in living contact, the give-and-take of human relations. Lawrence felt that without such relationships, we are nonentities."[43] McCullers' protagonists' find such a moment of pure love, a sudden illumination, and, like Frankie, feel that someone or something is "the we of me" (HMS, p.42). Then, no matter how "evanescent the instant, the experience brings a sense of warmth and togetherness that makes the barest solitudes endurable, that gives the heart a brief respite from aloneness" (Kohler, 1951, p.58).

McCullers described herself as attempting in this novel to write "a lyric tragicomedy in which the funniness and grief coexist in the same

line,"[44] an effect she really strove for in all of her fiction and which was central to her artistic aspirations, but which was never more completely realized than in this novel of adolescence. As the *New York Times* proclaimed editorially upon her death, she was "the vibrant voice of love and loneliness in the Southern novel" (DLB vol.2, McCullers, p.324).

These writers are ultimately concerned with exploring what Hawthorne called the "labyrinth of the human heart,"[45] and what they have found therein has not always provided cause for rejoicing. The only way in which one can communicate with one's fellow "prisoners of consciousness"[46] is through love: this affords one a certain measure of relief, but the relief is incomplete and temporary since love is seldom a completely mutual experience and is subject to time. What they conceive to be the truth about human nature is a melancholy truth: A flaw exists in the very nature of love, and frustration is the lot of man. Even though these protagonists entertain "unreal visions"— the world is perhaps too painfully mutable for each — "there is something admirable in their fidelity to an ideal world each contemplates."[47] They are noble protagonists dreaming their dreams and pursuing their ideals in a cruel visionless world. We are simply presented with a vision that affirms the need for wholeness "as though the possibilities of greatness-of-wholeness — still existed."[48] The adolescents grow older, more mature, and more

"human" with an increasing awareness, and appreciation of the qualities that enable the individual as well as mankind to 'survive': "how to survive whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure victims of something,"[49] is the permanent issue in these novels. These novels of discovery present a new narrative model that includes the survival of the protagonists an *awakening* to characterize the adolescents' consciousness of their potential independence. Despite the experiences of alienation, one can read these novels as attempts to counter despair by a renewed faith in the self. All these authors have created a fiction of hope. In the accounts given by these writers, the achievement of self-assurance, the realization of one's potentials, the choice of a certain future, and the projection of naive attitudes all contribute to the final maturing. They are ready to embark on life like responsible, reasonable adults even though difficulties, prejudices, and unforeseen obstacles come in their way. Different as these protagonists are in character and temperament, in the same way as the four authors chosen for study, they are all concerned with one principal activity, i.e., learning. They all learn to see life from a different point of view, and are all taught to look more perceptively with fewer ideological restraints into themselves. Most of all, they transform their difficult circumstances through art by using their inherent creativity. Thus, through a literary discovery, Esperanza utilizes the power of the

written word to rewrite her history, just as Cisneros uses her art to re-tell the story of Mexican women, whose portrayal in male literature has often been misleading. Frankie abandons her frigid detachment. On the other hand Holden and Augie, understand better both themselves and the nature of their society. The ordeal experienced in different ways by the various characters — more significantly stressed in the case of the two heroines, Esperanza and Frankie — is a sign of their spiritual growth.

The experience of reading serves as a final resource to define a texts essential nature. Beneath all the problems of adolescents and responsibility lies the issue that most profoundly concerns the writers: "the relative power and validity of inner versus outer reality."[50] The novelists although they describe protagonists at various stages between introspection and apparent unawareness of inner experience, testify to the shaping power of the psychic life. Augie's lack of forethought and speculation and concern of consequences get him in trouble. His fantasies about the women who attract him determine many of his actions; more important, his consistent imagining of obligation to others seems to lead to his maturity. The jovial, mocking tone of his narration insists on the possibilities of imagination as directed by art to affect understanding and action. The novelistic enterprise involves the attempt to form reader's imaginations; it reflects on the redirection and increased control of

Augie's fantasy life. He himself as a character comes dimly to understand the importance of his imaginings to his actions. The case is more obvious with Frankie, whose elaborately developed fantasies ultimately come to control her vision of life. In a simple sense the plots of all the fictions considered here involve a pattern of wish-fulfillment for the central characters. They get to write their story, to win control of the readers, and to demonstrate their own reality. Here is the most fundamental optimism of this novelistic mode which affirms the possibility of the stable identity of the individual and his/her ultimate power to shape the world he/she experiences. To tell one's story, as these men and women do, thus becomes an affirmation of power, even when the story contains emphatic defeats or evidence of limitation or revelations of folly. To set down a frank interpretation of personal experience declares autonomy and demonstrates the dominance of inner life, although the narrators' announced concern may be with external happening. In these novels, as in life, the claims of society counter those of the psyche. Frankie embodies the most definite statement of society's power to control and to destroy individual dreams. But every writer in this study recognizes at some level, the problem involved in the individual's efforts to establish a viable relation to his social context. That the solution is often escape — in a psychic sense — only emphasizes the insolubility of the problem.

Holden and Augie, Esperanza and Frankie come to terms with the demands implied and stated by their social world but not without authorial recognition of the cost in freedom and self-assertion. All these adolescents with their intuitive vision of reality affirm in far reaching ways the significance of their inner freedom, a kind of 'escape through imagination.' This "escape through imagination is not escapist but strategic, a withdrawal into the unconscious for the purpose of personal transformation."[51] The denouement of the Bildungsroman, a generally open-ended conclusion, only reveals the *potential* for forming adolescent life in accordance with their convictions and desires. A distinctive "I" implies the adolescents own value system and developmental goals which are ultimately realized in terms of community and empathy rather than achievement and autonomy. The possibility and the usefulness of autonomy, of separateness, thus pre-occupy at some level of consciousness all the writers. Stating their self-definitions, the writers not only strike some balance between the opposed principles of selfhood and society, but they also express the instability of any such balance. To convey questionings and convictions, writers require "artifices of sincerity and truthfulness" (Spacks, 1976, p.310). They depend upon artifice — shaping, inventing, selecting, and omitting — to achieve their goal of conveying vital truths. To tell a story of the self is — as this study

has argued in various ways — 'to create a fiction.' We have discovered the unity of action in these novels; it derives from the central character's singleness of expectation, desire, or will: to discover, defend, assert, and manufacture the self. These novels show that the same existential problems that affect the contemporary men affect women, too. To compare these four novels of adolescence is to invite contemplation of the multifarious and often surprising affinities that exist within the context of manifest difference. This, finally, is the center of the perception achieved by such a comparative study. Selfhood and consistent identity, whether by sheer illusion-making or through collaboration with experienced reality, is the underlying obsession and final achievement of the literary imagination in these novels. It provides the ground on which the complex relationship of subjective vision and verifiable truth enacts itself.

Amidst the welter of possible interpretations, these writers make us experience mystery in the universe, by making us experience mystery in their work of art. The "mystic meaning"[52] of events is not in the events themselves or determined by them, but in the observer. It seems these writers, in their own way, came to share Goethe's reflection that "the acting man is always without conscience, no one has conscience but the observing man."[53] If nothing else, the novels at least show the "birth of a

conscience."[54] These writers show how adolescents oppressed by violence, racism and sexual discrimination embark on an odyssey which takes them away from a state of being victimized to a consciousness that allows them a glimpse "into the mechanism of existence."[55]

At the end of these narratives, underlying the typical ambiguity is an assured sense of the seriousness of life. The most comforting note is that there has been a catharsis and a revelation of the *shared condition* of existence. The least comforting is the promise that while the anxiety of human pain remains, there is an attending loss of innocence. The novels endings seem to suggest that the loss of the belief in human innocence is a necessary step toward redemption, and that suffering precedes the essential knowledge that must be acquired. The novels subtly yet persistently invoke new possibilities for human behavior. In these troubled times, if the next generation is to *succeed* both its women and men must take adult responsibility for the survival of a human society.

Dostoyevsky summarizes a persistent and paradoxical problem of the modern intellectual rebel when he has Ivan Karamazov reply to his saintly brother, "Rebellion? I'm sorry to hear you say that ... one can't go on living in a state of rebellion, and I want to live."[56] Rebellion, one can argue, is its own justification and, since man is never free enough, the social order never fair enough, and the cosmos never meaningful enough,

the defiance of adolescents remains permanently desirable and necessary. In insisting on the value of their defiance one should not, of course, deny the importance of their *messages*, which takes such directions: as the pleasure of the instinctual life, the endless falsity and corruptibility of all institutions, the inadequacies of all ideologies, the value and rightness of the individual against the collectivity. If existence is worth affirming, then defiance against the perpetually arbitrary limits imposed on life, also constitutes meaningful and pleasurable living proper to these brave young adolescents. All these stories can be seen as "a shaft driven straight into the heart of human experiences."[57] Clearly the insights offered by these adolescents' become perceptions, which are important to all of us. Fiction as Miles has asserted: "does not only reflect and record experience; it defines and delineates it too."[58] Further, he asserts "to go outward; to develop a sense of community, to look to moral rather than to emotional dimension; to make the right choice, and to make it work, these are not only the tasks of women but of all writers" (p.6).

The selection of adolescents and their *journey inward* may seem arbitrary and the study does not make any claim to a definitive conclusion. Perhaps someone else would interpret these same novels differently, because meaning is polysemous, based on a fusion of the reader with the text. Or perhaps changes in the structure of masculinity

and feminist lie within the changing audience rather than a changing text. Our knowledge, like the adolescent himself, remains perplexed and limited. Whatever the ultimate destiny of these characters, the authors do not have them bow out with simple answers to the difficult questions of being human. They know there aren't any such answers. Each writer succeeds in establishing a rapport of feeling, an aura of "shared experience." In effect, this study has attempted through close investigation of individual texts, to arrive at some preliminary understanding of the shared common modes of novels of adolescence: an important bond of shared assumptions, shared techniques, and shared demands on the reader and to show "...how heavily the path ahead is obscured by fog, how infinite are the number of directions which the course of events may take."[59] The synthesis, or final element, of the dichotomy between loss and restoration does not occur within the individual novel or even in the field as a whole but in the mind of the reader. It is the development of different kinds of introspection and the astonishing variety of the journey devised for each new wanderer that is the measure of the writers' genius and the constant delight of the readers. These new generations of young people show their shared sense of a quest, of a journey through darkness to light. It is a *journey* or pilgrimage, "a winding path toward the light, leading through stretches of beauty,

bleakness and gloom,"[60] and ending in the glow of "the changeless centre"[61] **of each protagonist in a "journey towards stillness"** (Richardson, IV, 470). Such is the identity the adolescents seek: "a unity and persistence of consciousness."[62]

These novels of adolescence are too complex and many-sided to be reducible to a thesis and a conclusion. If there is any conclusion derivable from these novels, it is that it welcomes opacity, remembering Eliot's words:

> Knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies
> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.[63]

As these adolescents free themselves from being "typecast as masculine and feminine, and embrace the best characteristics of both genders, they rise to a higher level of self-perception and understanding never before realized" (423).[64] Self-realization comes for them through achieving a wholeness and unity of being. As they mature, their inner directed light continues to reconcile the inner and outer world: veering from despair to joy, from fear of failure to happiness in the sheer fact of **existence. These writers have impelled their adolescents into lives of** action, defining themselves and their society by the choices they make; wanderers who weave themselves as "connecting string[s] into the tapestry of episodic life, helping us see the pattern as well" (Radiant

Daughters, p.171). No longer attracted to wide vistas of freedom, they seek an inner freedom leading to an "artistic reflection" wherein the true goal of their journey is revealed. The quest has led them to some unknown vista, and true to their inner directed light they create their life. The essential role of these artists has been to awaken a concern, for "the human essences forgotten in a distracted world." They plead for "the transcendence of art" as "an attempt to find in the universe what is fundamental and enduring" and to lead us "to sacred states of the soul."[65] A person's remaining hope is to return to his *inner self.*

## End Notes

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## APPENDIX

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of the Candidate: | Ms. Sumita (Dutta) Kharkongor |
| Degree: | Ph.D. |
| Department: | English |
| Title of Dissertation: | *The Journey Inward: A Study of Some Selected American Novels about Adolescence by J.D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Cisneros and Carson McCullers* |
| Date of Payment of Admission: | 21st April, 2005 |

Approval of Research Proposal:

1. BPGS: 13th April, 2006
2. School Board: 16th May, 2006

Registration No. &: Date 1042 of 16.5.2006

Extension (If any): Nil

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# Brief Bio-data

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|---|---|
| Name: | Ms. Sumita (Dutta) Kharkongor |
| Regd No: | 1042 of 16.5.2006 |
| Father's Name: | Mr. Subodh Chandra Dutta |
| Husband's Name: | Mr. Markus Kharkongor |
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| Academic Qualification: | MA/M.Phil. |
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