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MATERNAL & SPIRITUAL HEALING IN J.D. SALINGER'S *NINE STORIES*

by

EMILY PITTMAN HOSTE

(Under the Direction of Olivia Carr Edenfield)

ABSTRACT

After World War II, spiritual and emotional healing was needed in America, despite a dependence upon materialism and conspicuous consumption for success. J.D. Salinger's short-story cycle, *Nine Stories* (1953), explores what loss and trauma look like from all sides of war—mother, child, soldier, lover—all are harmed by war. *Nine Stories* emphasizes the need for nationwide spiritual healing and suggests that mothers offer the necessary antidote to consumeristic America. In fact, eight of Salinger's *Nine Stories* employ one of three types of mothers: the self-serving and ineffectual mother; the spiritual, often surrogate maternal guide; and the ideal mother. While the ineffectual mothers demonstrate the possible future of America in their inability to see beyond the consumeristic value of life, the effectual mothers in the cycle operate as spiritual guides to characters by displaying the possibility of living fulfilled, hopeful lives in materialistic post-war America. The final story is ultimately tied together by the protagonist's ability to transcend the need for a mother as he comes into the world fully enlightened. A study of mothers in Salinger's *Nine Stories* provides a new antidote for materialistic society through the healing power of the ideal mother who represents maternal grace.

INDEX WORDS: J.D. Salinger, Nine Stories, Mothers, Maternal, Maternity, Women, Healing, Spirituality, Religion, Post-War, Post-World War II, Consumerism, Materialism

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by

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MASTER OF ARTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MOTHERS & THE HOMEFRONT

In early American literature, mothers frequently played the role of common housewives, sometimes as shrew figures. These women frequently remained silent and were portrayed only as raising children, maintaining the domestic sphere, and satisfying their husbands. In popular short fiction such as Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," (1819) Dame Van Winkle is associated strictly with the household tasks and is never praised until Rip wakes up and realizes she is gone. This limited role was a common reality for women and mothers in early America; however, as the canon expanded, other writers began to focus on the multifaceted nature of maternity. Mothers quickly became figures associated with selflessness, healing, and spiritual guidance. The sacrificial mother is demonstrated in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) by Douglass's mother's selfless love. Maternal guides were seen as moral and spiritual leaders for their children, most popularized in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). Contrarily, ineffectual mothers, as depicted in *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin, suggested that maternity was not the only role for women to play and challenged heteronormalized roles. Alongside these prototypes of American mothers, surrogate mothers are also placed in literature to fulfill characters' need for guidance, healing, or love. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, writers like Sarah Orne Jewett center mothers at the heart of their stories. Jewett's short-story cycle, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, (1896) uses matrilineal love, hospitality, and emotional nourishment to solidify human connections between women throughout the text, demonstrating the association of mothers with spiritual fulfillment. Jewett's theme of maternity urges one to consider the power of mothers in settings outside of the peaceful, safe Maine town in which *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is set. As America grew into one of the most powerful nations in the twentieth century, literature of the time began to flourish and created new maternal

perspectives within this idealized land of freedom. Mothers were positioned at the center of families and, in effect, society as the culture of the 1900s hinged upon successful nuclear families. Therefore, when the World Wars demolished the structure of modern life, mothers were called upon to repair the damage.

Traditionally, America has been feminized as a woman, suggesting that Mother America exists as a safe home for her citizen children; however, during World War I and II, Mother America exchanged her children for violence and did not effectively guide their transition back into society. The neglect that soldiers felt upon their return home from war damaged the public's perception of women. Although American women were encouraged to work outside the home during both wars, they were still pushed into restrictive gender roles as wife and mother. After soldiers' returned home, the media and public turned women, especially mothers, into scapegoats, placing the blame for maladjustment on their shoulders—not Mother America or war itself. Mothers, who tried to help their children recover from their trauma, found conflicting solutions on how to help their sons readjust. Rebecca Jo Plant explains the two opposing arguments circulating among the American public after World War II: "pathological mothering had contributed to the high incidence of neuropsychiatric casualties among American troops"; however, "returning veterans would need supportive mates to help them regain their emotional equilibrium. Whereas the former chastised women for imperiling the mental health of American men by nurturing too much, the latter urged women to help restore the mental health of American men by nurturing more" (1). As the rate for younger-aged marriages rose after the war, wives were praised for assisting their husbands' adjustment; however, mothers often were blamed for their sons' post-traumatic stress disorders. In 1940s popular culture, Plant continues, "veterans' attachments to their mothers tended to be depicted as neurotic and regressive, whereas

their attachments to loyal young girlfriends and wives tended to be portrayed as healthy and mature" (1). The tradition of depending on mothers for guidance, healing, and restoration shifted to a romantically tied relationship of husband and wife; however, the wife's role was quickly equated to or replaced by the psychiatrist.

The healing power of mothers in post-war America was diminished by reliance upon the psychiatrist. Due to the extreme trauma experienced by the veterans of war, psychoanalysts searched for a reliable cause for soldiers' maladjustment, which was directly tied to their supposed lack of masculinity. The more a man struggled to adapt to life after war, the less masculine he was perceived. In fact, young men were attacked in the media as not being strong enough to withstand the effects of war, further isolating recovering veterans. Julia Grant explains that use of the term *sissy* began to rise after World War I: "the 'real' or 'regular' boy emerged as a psychological ideal, while 'sissies' were frequently characterized as sickly, timid children who were overly dependent on their mothers" (829). This term emasculated soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder and placed blame on mothers for their sons' inability to adjust. Although these men fought the most brutal and violent war in modern history, those who had trouble adjusting upon their homecoming were disregarded and mocked.

To solve the mental health crisis of veterans, psychiatrists suggested separation of mother and son upon the soldier's return. As Plant explains, psychiatrists quickly "embodied the paternal authority" in the post-war home (4). The compassionate, effectual mother was replaced by the young wife and doctor. Elaine Tyler May argues that this disregard for the older generation was not strictly out of spite, but out of hope for moving forward as a society by "self-consciously" avoiding "the paths of their parents" and embracing "the advice of experts in the rapidly expanding fields of social science, medicine, and psychology" (29). By depending upon

breakthroughs in science for healing, the younger generation was severed from the older, leaving older mothers cast aside and blamed for society's downfall.

Popular literature of the post-World War II era also attacked mothers and reinforced the idea of new sciences, sociology, and psychology to lead America through the war's aftermath. Philip Wylie's bestselling book, *Generation of Vipers* (1942), attacked women—mothers, most frequently—and blamed societal issues on what he calls *Momism*. Essentially, Momism was considered a plague of overbearing mothers who spoiled their children's psyches, in effect ruining America's present and future. Wylie presented this idea by arguing that America's politicians and leaders of society were weak and submissive because of their mothers; in fact, Wylie placed blame on mothers for almost every issue in twentieth-century America. Mari Jo Buhle explains Wylie's beliefs, stating that "Mom has so thoroughly debased the nation's men" that the leaders of America "no longer possess the (masculine) will to fight for democracy" (126). Therefore, mothers were consistently encouraged to resist affectionate relationships with their children because if a child were too coddled and diverged from the accepted norm, mothers would ruin the American family and consequently, America herself.

Even in the domestic sphere, bearing and raising children, mothers were still under attack from writers like Wylie. As Buhle explains, psychologists even connect Freudian theories to Wylie's Momism, arguing that mothers either set their sons up for success or failure in their infancy:

> Mothers were the first to respond to the infant's instinctual needs. By gratifying or frustrating these basic demands, mothers in effect furnished the rudimentary lessons in love and hate, security and fear…Moms, in mishandling their sons' instinctual strivings,

> routinely cause a multitude of developmental problems that show up in men and, equally important, in the society governed by these men (134).

The conflicting expectations for mothers suggest the flawed system in place for the veterans recovering from war. Mothers were unsure if they should stay away from their sons, or nurture them more frequently.

Dependence upon psychiatrists ultimately failed American society and left returning veterans and modern families searching for healing in a materially centered country. This brokenness in society led to further spiritual and emotional discontent as America shifted to a commercial, consumeristic nation. Articles about material consumption and the power of business were published across the nation, including these words from J. O. Downey in 1942: “Big business won the last World War and it is winning this World War” (332). This focus on industry as the power and success behind America was the same suggestion of the American Dream, first constructed by Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography and later coined by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* (1931). Adams defines the American Dream as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (404). America, existing as a land of freedom and promise, pushed industry to grow through laborers’ will to work hard and, most importantly, make money. As more money was made and consumer-based businesses thrived, American society became obsessed with the material. Advertisements for department stores grew in popularity; consequentially, people were consistently surrounded by capital and encouraged to acquire material possessions to gain higher socioeconomic status, or at least *appear* more affluent by purchasing luxury goods. Thorstein Veblen defines this pattern of materialism as “conspicuous consumption,” in which he argues that “the utility of consumption as an evidence

of wealth is to be classed as a derivative growth" (49). In the post-war American economy, the accumulation of capital indicated one's success. The American Dream pushed citizens to purchase houses, cars, and luxury goods—all as evidence of their alignment with the norms of modern society. Conspicuous consumption led society to a false sense of success and fulfillment and encouraged a cycle of spending and monetary comparison that only left most feeling empty. As consumerism increased, the public opinion of women became more spiteful. While much of the labor on the American homefront was completed by working women, the American Dream urged men alone to achieve financial success and left women in heteronormative roles: bearing and raising children, maintaining the household, and serving one's husband. Women's role in the home was crucial for the well-being of children, and in effect, veterans facing PTSD as they readjusted to the ever-shifting American society.

As cultural and societal standards were formed, challenged, and upheld in post-World War II America, many families began to seek an unwavering form of fulfillment in hopes of understanding the trauma experienced in the war and at home. May states that after the war, church attendance drastically rose, with an increase in membership from "64.5 million in 1940 to 114.5 million in 1960— from 50 percent to 63 percent of the population (100 years earlier only 20 percent of all Americans belonged to churches)" (29). These numbers demonstrate the desire to make sense of the state of the world: as many Modernists questioned the existence of God, citizens of America also questioned how God could allow such violence and loss to happen, and so turned to religion for answers. This same question of spirituality remained at the center of post-war literature, suggesting that the need for reparation extended to most of the American population.

Two of the most renowned post-war American writers, Ernest Hemingway and J.D. Salinger, both offer mothers as a vessel for spiritual and emotional healing in their short fiction. Writing prior to Salinger, Hemingway's employment of mothers as spiritual guides offers a new perspective for post-war thinking. Instead of rejecting healing mothers after World War II as society seemed to do, he created mothers who could spiritually and emotionally revive America. Salinger follows Hemingway's suit, using the motif of mothers throughout his cycle *Nine Stories*. Hemingway's influence on Salinger has been noted over the years. Brad McDuffie references a letter Salinger wrote to Hemingway in 1946 in which Salinger's "sensitivity and feeling of indebtedness to Hemingway seem to overwhelm him as he attempts to express his gratitude." Expressing such indebtedness to Hemingway suggests that Salinger is also greatly affected by his work, and the two even met and corresponded a few times during and after the war. In the same letter, Salinger confesses to Hemingway that "The talks I had with you were the only hopeful minutes of the whole business" (92). This personal and artistic connection between the writers demonstrates the same importance of human connection portrayed in their works, as both Salinger and Hemingway experienced the horrors of war. Salinger, like Hemingway, captures the aftermath of war and the trauma experienced while venturing back into society. Jeffery Meyers compares their war writing tactics, stating that "Hemingway's violence was more forceful and direct, Salinger's rather precious and pretentious, oblique and subdued…Salinger portrays the aftermath rather than the reality of battle" (134-35). In Salinger's work, the war is often not mentioned directly but lies in the background; however, Salinger portrays the same type of spiritual and emotional devastation from war that Hemingway explores.

Hemingway's short-story cycle *In Our Time* (1925) portrays mothers as spiritual healers with varying effectiveness. Short-story cycles operate as an intertwined set of stories, each

individual story complementing the themes and motifs of the others. Short-story cycles pose questions to be explored throughout the text and sometimes provide solutions to the initial question, often in the final story. *In Our Time,* in part, asks how one can heal from the brokenness of war. To offer a solution to one's suffering, the stories often employ a mother or mother figure to teach a lesson, to serve as a spiritual guide, or to heal those in need. Hemingway mentions mothers or maternity in over half of the stories in *In Our Time*, highlighting their importance of mothers and women in society, in spite of their ineffectualness. Therefore, the characters instead turn to Mother Nature, or find restoration through healing rituals that work against the fragmentation of war.

Salinger, influenced by Hemingway, connects mothers to the hinderance or furthering of spiritual healing in *Nine Stories* through their response to living within materialistic America. *Nine Stories* asks a question similar to the one considered in Hemingway's *In Our Time*: how can one recover from war *and* society's obsession with consumption? Ruth Prigozy states that, like many other post-war texts, *Nine Stories* seeks to "explain what had happened to us materially and spiritually after our wartime victory" and "heralds that period in our nation's history that has been since characterized as frighteningly conformist, spiritually bankrupt, and intellectually adrift–the American 1950s" (118). American society was consumed by materialism and negated the power of spirituality while relying on psychiatrists to repair the detrimental effects of war. Susan Zeiger argues that, during World War I, "the middle-aged American 'Mom' was the predominant image of womanhood" (38). America after World War II turned to materialism and the American Dream to sustain the nation while so many people were suffering. In reaction, Salinger portrays the consequences of living such a life as *Nine Stories* emphasizes the need for spiritual healing nationwide. Dominic Smith argues that, as other writers were insisting that the

war must be forgotten, “Salinger’s stories seem to usher in an entirely different sentiment: the war has been internalized; men are broken and brutalized; corruption of the spirit can only occasionally be undone by the antidote of innocence, often in the form of children” (645). By and large, each person affected by war, either at home or abroad, still carried the trauma and grief within. *Nine Stories* explores what loss and brokenness look like from all sides of war—mother, child, soldier, lover—all are harmed by war.

Eight of Salinger’s *Nine Stories* employ one of three types of mothers: the self-serving and ineffectual mother; the spiritual, often surrogate maternal guide; and the ideal mother. While the ineffectual mothers demonstrate the possible future of America in their inability to see beyond the consumeristic value of life, the effectual mothers in the cycle operate as a spiritual guide to characters by displaying the possibility of living a fulfilled, hopeful life in materialistic post-war America. The cycle’s motif of mothers is ultimately tied together in the final story by the protagonist’s ability to transcend the need for a mother as he comes into the world fully enlightened. A study of mothers in Salinger’s *Nine Stories* provides a new antidote for materialistic society through the healing power of the ideal mother who represents maternal grace.

CHAPTER 2

THE SELF-SERVING MOTHERS

J.D. Salinger exposes the greed and spiritual deprivation of post-war American society by creating self-serving mothers as a symbol of consumerism throughout *Nine Stories*. Instead of acting out of love and providing continual comfort and nourishment for their children, these characters—Mrs. Carpenter and Muriel's mother in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" or Eloise Wengler in "Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut"—act selfishly and dwell on the material. These inherently non-maternal mother figures parallel the same Mother America who has abandoned her children for war and set her cares upon the material world. These mothers stand in to set an example for everything their daughters and sons should avoid becoming and expose the dangers of a wholly consumeristic, spiritually barren nation.

There are two, if not potentially three, selfish, ineffectual mothers in the opening story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"; however, Salinger first sets the scene of a desolate, hopeless hotel room in the opening paragraph to establish the spiritual deprivation of post-war America. This technique of establishing the tone and emotion of the cycle in the first paragraph is another example of Hemingway's influence on Salinger. Donald Junkins explains the emotional and thematic effects of this technique in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain": "Hemingway juxtaposes the seemingly monotonous rhythm with the repetition of the thematic word–not ideationally thematic, but implicatively thematic. The rain does not denote anything but setting, but it connotes sadness. Hence, the opening paragraph functions as a cryptic description…and as a foreshadowing of the explicit statement of the woman trapped in a kind of spiritual and perhaps physical neglect" (19). Salinger employs this same repetition with material objects to establish a hopeless, spiritually desolate landscape. Although Junkins is analyzing Hemingway's story, the same foreshadowing of characters trapped in spiritual neglect occurs here and continues

throughout the cycle. The opening lines of the story create a hell-like setting and focus attention on materialism, aligning the tone with Seymour's feeling of entrapment in post-war society. The first line of the cycle states that there are "ninety-seven New York advertising men in the hotel" who are "monopolizing the long-distance lines," establishing a focus on the obsession with money and material before the storyline begins (3). To further this obsession with consumerism, Seymour's wife, Muriel, is characterized by her association with frivolous things: she reads a "women's pocket-size magazine called 'Sex Is Fun—or Hell" then she washes her "comb and brush," removes a stain from her "beige suit," plays with the button on her "Saks blouse," tweezes a hair from her mole, and finishes "putting lacquer" on her nails (3). The magazine she reads not only suggests that Muriel aligns with the 1940s societal norms for women, but also draws a significant connection to hell. The narrator also states that it is "hottest day" in Florida, further characterizing Muriel and American post-World War II society as hell-bound (5, 3). McDuffie explains that "Florida itself suggests a failed materialistic paradise that seems more like hell…This subversion of expectations—in which 'paradise' is hellish—sets the scene (and the background) for Seymour's suicide" (20). The post-war United States lacks spirituality and emotional nourishment and feels like a societal hell for characters like Seymour who see beyond the material world. Muriel focuses only on appearance and material objects while her conversation with her mother displays the cycle of spiritual deprivation and consequences of ineffectual mother-figures in post-war America.

The narrator establishes Muriel and her mother as consumeristic and self-serving through their obsession with material objects and their constant judging of others. These women discuss fashion with the utmost importance while dismissing human beings and their struggles. Their ability to shift from discussing Seymour's symptoms of post-traumatic stress to frivolous topics

like fashion suggests that these women are incredibly ineffectual toward Seymour and cannot make meaningful connections with one another. Muriel's mother asks, "How *are* the clothes this year?" while insisting that Seymour is a lost cause (12). There is not an emotional or spiritual connection between Muriel and her mother, or either of them with Seymour. Instead, they focus on appearance and assumptions that form from conspicuous consumption. Muriel shows that she is no different from her mother, telling her, "You should see what sits next to us in the dining room…They look as if they drove down in a truck" (12). Her constant judgement of others reveals her selfish nature and refusal to see beyond the material world. The current group of vacationers are living in what should be considered the American Dream in which people of working classes can participate in all the nation has to offer, including Muriel's high-class beach vacation. However, this dream is not Muriel's idea of societal progress. Their participation in high society disturbs her because they do not look classy enough, so she chooses to judge and mock them.

Even when they discuss Seymour, Muriel's mother focuses only on his flaws and trauma, insisting he has no control over himself; however, they are so affected by their materialist beliefs that they are the ones harmed by their ignorance of the spiritual and are unable to sustain authentic human connection. James Finn Cotter argues that despite being described as out of control by his mother-in-law, Seymour "alone possesses self-control, protecting himself against the sun, playing the piano in the bar instead of drinking, and finding time for profitable conversation with Sybil" (87). Seymour, unlike his mother-in-law and wife, knows how to connect with other people, which ultimately brings the opportunity for spiritual fulfillment. Ironically, even though Muriel and her mother assume the worst and judge Seymour, he is the one who ultimately knows how to form meaningful relationships. Muriel, who has inherited her

nature from her mother, is so deprived of spiritual and emotional nourishment that she is completely burned "all over, dear, all over," also further emphasizing the hell-like setting (10). It is not Seymour who suffers from a loss of control but Muriel and her mother. They have bought into the idea of conspicuous consumption and act as if the material determines everything about themselves. In turn, they focus on appearance and physical flaws of others from a disconnected perspective

Mrs. Carpenter is the mother of the inquisitive, excited, and hopeful four-year-old girl, Sybil Carpenter, who befriends Seymour. Although Mrs. Carpenter is only in the text for a page, Salinger leaves explicit details that suggest she is a definitive symbol of materialism, more often caring for her comfortable luxury and martinis than her daughter. The first evidence of Mrs. Carpenter's poor mothering is exposed in her failed efforts to contain Sybil and to diminish her childlike spirit: "Pussycat, stop saying that. It's driving Mommy absolutely crazy. Hold still, please" (10). Sybil is on the beach, full of excitement and anticipation as she waits to see her new friend, Seymour Glass. Sybil attaches herself to Seymour because he understands and values her feelings as she is still untainted by the world of materialism around her, unlike her mother who ignores her question of "Did you see more glass?" (10). Mrs. Carpenter disregarding her inquiry about seeing more suggests that, like Muriel, Mrs. Carpenter does not and cannot "*see more*" of the world around her (10). Instead, she is consumed by martinis, suntans, and silk handkerchiefs, as McDuffie argues: "The contrast Salinger makes here is between what Sybil learns to see 'up close' from her mother and her friend and from Seymour Glass, who will teach her to 'see more'" (23). By reemphasizing the effects of conspicuous consumption through Mrs. Carpenter's conversation, the same themes of ingenuine human connection and spiritual ignorance are exposed. Mrs. Carpenter is no different than Muriel or Muriel's mother. Their self-serving nature

works in opposition to the core healing function of mothers in this cycle, exposing the spiritual deprivation and the need for healing in American society.

The final statement from Mrs. Carpenter reveals every detail needed to understand her relationship with Sybil; she sighs and says, "All right…Now run and play, pussy. Mommy's going up to the hotel and have a Martini with Mrs. Hubbel. I'll bring you an olive" (11). Typically a symbol of peace, this olive is contaminated by liquor, making this gift of food a poor and distorted source of nourishment for Sybil. Food acts as a symbol of hospitality and connection; however, Mrs. Carpenter is neither trying to connect with nor care for her daughter because the olive will be soaked in liquor. This taints the idea of nourishment; instead of offering sustenance and peace, this olive acts as attempted reparation for leaving Sybil alone on the beach. Giving her the olive then makes Mrs. Carpenter think that she is not neglecting Sybil because she will return with a small token of food in exchange for her absence. This same neglect is prevalent as she forces Sybil to "*hold still*" and never provides spiritual or emotional nourishment for her (11). Mrs. Carpenter does, however, offer some physical yet temporary form of physical protection as she puts "sun-tan oil on Sybil's shoulders, spreading it down over the delicate winglike blades of her back" (14-15). Unlike Muriel, Sybil has protection from the sun; however, preventing her from sunburn only cares for her immediate physical needs. Finally, Sybil solidifies this distance and lack of connection between her and her mother when the narrator describes her as being "Set loose" and "immediately [running] down" the beach as her mother leaves. Not being nervous or timid without her mother, obviously Sybil is frequently left to her own independence, as Mrs. Carpenter spends her energy on clothes and drinks. However, Sybil's freedom here suggests that she could have the ability to reject her mother's consumeristic lifestyle. Bernice and Sanford Goldstein agree, stating that "the uniquely 'real' world of Sybil

contrasts painfully with the self-conscious, ego-burdened, phony world of adults" (177). Her freedom in running along the beach to meet Seymour displays her world of opportunity and, ultimately, her ability to *see more* and connect with others. These women directly oppose Seymour's spiritual enlightenment and display the risk of Sybil falling into this spiritual depravity, which Seymour fears.

Sybil's conversation with Seymour Glass displays her childlike innocence and how she remains untouched by the materialism surrounding her; Sybil is the hope of a newborn American population that pushes against the consumeristic norm. Seymour warns Sybil about being overcome with consumerism through the metaphor of bananafish, hoping to prevent her from becoming like her mother. He says, "They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim *in*. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas" (16). Here, Seymour makes an analogy about how people behave selfishly, like pigs, when they only pursue materialistic things. Seymour has seen Sybil act selfishly through her jealousy of Sharon Lipschutz, another little girl staying at the hotel. Sybil asks Seymour to push Sharon off the piano bench instead of letting her sit with him. To teach her a lesson on compassion, Seymour tells her what he likes about Sharon compared to Sybil: "You probably won't believe this, but *some* little girls like to poke that little dog with balloon sticks. Sharon doesn't. She's never mean or unkind. That's why I like her so much" (22). Seymour emphasizes to Sybil that caring for others sets her apart from people like Muriel. Instead of bullying people based on appearance as Muriel, her mother, and Mrs. Carpenter do, Seymour wants Sybil to treat people with kindness. To further enlighten Sybil, Seymour then tries to explain to Sybil the dangers of becoming a bananafish: "Naturally, after that they're so fat they can't get out the hole again. Can't fit through the door…They die" (16). Like the

bananafish, when people become so engulfed in the desire for material objects and neglect what Seymour views as important—like emotions, spirituality, and human connection—they become trapped in consumerism and lose the ability to connect with those around them. Seymour fears that Sybil will become like a bananafish as she claims to have seen a bananafish with six bananas in its mouth (16). McDuffie explains the hope that Seymour has for her to be spiritually renewed and free of American selfishness: "Peace comes through the 'tragic life' of the bananafish, which for Seymour represents the division between the material and spiritual worlds. From a material point of view, the bananafish can be seen as redemptive" (30). Mrs. Carpenter's selfish example of mothering, along with Seymour's explanation about the bananafish, work together to push Sybil away from the materialistic world and prevent her from being entirely self-serving like her mother, Muriel, or Muriel's mother.

While many critics like Anthony Kaufman argue that Seymour's suicide is a form of punishment for Muriel, it operates as the cycle's central question: how can one, broken from the spiritually desolate world, find healing and hope? Kaufman asserts that Seymour's death is "an accusation: against the self-absorbed, non-understanding Muriel, against the adult world represented by her mother, Mrs. Fedders, and the psychiatrists—none of whom can understand or help him. Shooting himself while sitting too close to the sleeping Muriel is the supremely hostile action" (111). While Kaufman acknowledges the selfish nature of the women in the story and the lack of answers from psychiatrists, Seymour does not shoot himself to punish Muriel. Muriel is so infatuated with the material world that they seem to have no connection. She knows where every beauty product and piece of clothing she owns is, but she has lost the one referenced gift Seymour gave her, the book of German poetry. Muriel's neglect of the poetry shows that art and meaningful creations are cast aside and replaced with material things. Losing the book

suggests that they have no deeper connection in their marriage, so Seymour would not be committing suicide to spite her. Instead, as James Finn Cotter argues, "Seymour is in control of his fate. All the trivial details of his previous behavior may add up to what a psychiatrist calls a death wish but what a Buddhist believes is nirvana" (87-88). Seymour's death is a push into a new life, one unburdened by war trauma and materialistic American society.

By evaluating the nature of Seymour's suicide, his death can be seen as merely physical and that it marks a new spiritual beginning. This idea is further instilled into the text through the religious language used in Seymour's suicide. The narrator explains that Seymour "looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple" (26). Aiming at his right *temple* suggests an alignment with the spiritual world and can be seen as a final act of worship before passing into spiritual rebirth. Cotter agrees:

> The echoes of a religious act in a sacred place must be deliberate on the author's part. Like the Suicide of Rilke's poem, Seymour doesn't 'want any more' of this nauseating existence. A phony life only makes him vomit…Seymour's death…is merely physical, means deliverance and even reincarnation. Since bananafish nourish their bodies but not their souls, their 'tragic' death is by rights spiritual and irrevocable (88).

Although he looks at Muriel before pulling the trigger, it is not out of hostility but perhaps pity and despair. Seymour knows that Muriel is hopeless in her spiritual fulfillment as he calls her the "Spiritual Tramp of 1948" (7). Muriel laughs at this name, suggesting that she is content in her spiritual ignorance and causes Seymour to lose hope for her ever seeing beyond the material world.

Muriel, her mother, and Mrs. Carpenter portray the spiritual devastation of the post-World War II era. These women all operate underneath the hypnotization of American

consumerism. They cannot articulate feelings or words over the concerns that truly matter like a mentally ill husband or why a daughter would be so attached to a complete stranger. Instead, they fill their conversation with meaningless topics revolving around silk and martinis. Seymour, entirely aware of the spiritual wasteland around him, desperately tries to break Sybil from the seemingly matrilineal consumerism and self-involved nature of American mothers. McDuffie agrees: "Seymour's actions are disquieting and it would seem that this is the point. The disquiet is meant to wake up Muriel (and the reader) to the material and spiritual wasteland of the modern world (30). Muriel, her mother, and Mrs. Carpenter symbolize the detrimental effects of conspicuous consumption and the necessity of compassion. This same need for healing and spiritual fulfillment continues as a prevalent theme throughout the rest of the cycle as the motif of mothers and mother figures appears in almost every story.

Like Mrs. Carpenter, Eloise in "Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut" also places her own desires above the emotional nurturing that her daughter, Ramona, needs. Eloise is consumed by her obsession over her lost love, Walt Glass, and is blinded by grief. Eloise does not at first glance seem as superficial as the other mothers in *Nine Stories*; however, her refusal to *see* Ramona and her dismissal of Ramona's emotions hinder her ability to care for her daughter. She projects her dissatisfaction for her husband, Lew, onto their daughter because of their resemblance and cannot see the detrimental effects that her own emotional and spiritual barrenness has on Ramona. William Weigand suggests that Eloise's story "contains the first clear explanation of banana fever: it is the sense of what is missing that causes suffering" (9). Eloise's eventual breakdown suggests both the familial destruction caused by the war and highlights the importance of emotional and spiritual nourishment from maternal figures for children, all of which she is missing herself.

At the beginning of the story, Eloise is standing in the driveway, waiting for her old college roommate, Mary Jane, to arrive for a visit. Immediately upon her arrival, they begin to talk about frivolous topics, focusing on their previous college life and gossiping about other girls. Immediately, Salinger ties Eloise and Mary Jane to the same artificial world that Mrs. Carpenter lives in by pointing out their interest in dyed hair and cigarettes (29). The conversation between the "girls," as the narrator declares them, reveals their romanticization of the past and Eloise's refusal to nurture Ramona. When Ramona first enters the story, Mary Jane states three times that she is "dying to see her" while Eloise can only call her name with her eyes closed shut, suggesting her inability to *see* her (34-35). McDuffie claims that even Mary Jane "seems to know and care more about Ramona and Lew than Eloise" (48). Every question Mary Jane asks about Ramona receives a similar reply: "God! Not that I know of," "God knows," "Oh, God! Who knows?" (35-42). Because she focuses on the material and neglects the spiritual, her words can be interpreted as an outcry to God. These remarks both accentuate the distance between Eloise and Ramona and Lew, further demonstrating the need for spiritual fulfillment. As Eloise does not know why she suffers from grief and cannot interpret the war, God knows the reasons behind all her pain. McDuffie explains that Eloise's responses are "essentially a confession and lead directly to her epiphany at the conclusion of the story" (49). Eloise's confession, then, demonstrates her deprived emotional and spiritual state, which could lead Ramona to follow the same path.

Mothers in *Nine Stories* are directly connected to the need for spiritual fulfillment. Before seeing Eloise interact with Ramona, Salinger plants the idea of holy mothers at the center of the story as the girls discuss Mary Jane's brooch: "'Where'd you get that thing?' 'This?' said Mary Jane…'I had it at school, for goodness sake. It was Mother's.' 'God,' Eloise said, with the empty

glasses in her hands. 'I don't have one damn thing holy to wear'" (30). Eloise, as spiritually and emotionally empty as her highball glasses, immediately connects mothers to God and holiness. Eloise's statement deems mothers holy, despite her refusal to embrace her own child. McDuffie examines the juxtaposition of the housekeeper, Grace's, role in the story as a reminder of Christ and argues that "Eloise's material luxury has damned her," "she will need to put on the proverbial Robe of Christ" in order to successfully heal from Walt and connect with her daughter (51). Eloise does not feel full of grace and certainly does not offer grace to her daughter.

Because Eloise has neglected her own spiritual desolation, she is directly hurting Ramona and passing on her discontentment. Jimmy Jimmereeno is Ramona's beau, her own version of Walt, who is essentially Eloise's imaginary lover. Despite Eloise's idealization of her love for Walt, she denies Grace's request for her husband to spend the night instead of returning to the city in the ongoing storm. Eloise later refuses to pick up Lew from the train station, too. McDuffie explains that Eloise "treats her own story about her courtship with Walt and his accidental death as if it were sacred. Yet while both Eloise and Ramona's stories about their 'beaus' are self-serving, Grace's story explores the nature of denying oneself and serving other by following Christ" (51). As McDuffie notes, Salinger connects the need for spirituality and selfless love directly to Eloise through Grace. Her name perfectly describes what Eloise needs to give Ramona: grace must be found for the mothers of war. Eloise's dissatisfaction with her life is not her own doing but a consequence of the war. Therefore, she must be extended grace in her longing for Walt, but she must also extend grace to her daughter to save herself and Ramona from spiritual and emotional drought.

Eloise's inability to express her emotions furthers her need for spiritual and emotional healing while she continues to neglect the same needs for her daughter. Ramona frequently

irritates Eloise when she does not listen because Eloise feels as if no one wants to listen honestly to her, especially Lew. Discussing husbands, she tells Mary Jane, "you can tell them stuff, but never honestly. I mean never *honestly*" (45). Eloise lives in a fantasy world, one that she struggles to explain to anyone. Mary Jane and Lew both only want to hear about Walt's war experience, and no one will listen to Eloise's grief as she tells stories about their relationship. She recalls a significant moment in which she falls and Walt holds her twisted ankle, saying "Poor Uncle Wiggly" (43). Uncle Wiggly is a cartoon rabbit in children's books that suffers from rheumatism, connecting Eloise to a childlike fantasy world in which she and Walt can be together. Similarly, in this story, Eloise is the character who is disabled by grief. Julie Ooms agrees: "Eloise, who clearly loved Walt, has been unable to speak to anyone about him for a long time…even when she does, she is unable to fully articulate all that he seems to have meant, and still means, to her" (3). She is paralyzed by her mourning and trapped in a fantasy world. When she thinks about Walt, she wants to share "his idiosyncrasies, the little personal things she loved him for," as Ooms explains (3). However, as Mary Jane insists on knowing how Walt died, Eloise is forced to remember this painful experience and the grief his death still causes her. She tells Mary Jane that "Walt and some other boy were putting this little Japanese stove in a package…it was full of gasoline and junk and it exploded in their faces. The other boy just lost an eye" (48-49). The ridiculous nature of Walt's death amplifies the destruction of war, as it still punishes Eloise, years later. While the other boy is still alive, Walt is dead, and Eloise cannot come to terms with this in her grief. However, the Eloise's minimization of the other boy "just" losing an eye speaks to her own inability to see. Ooms agrees: "The exaggeratedly un-heroic nature of Walt's death allows it to hyperbolically illustrate Salinger's refusal to tell hero stories about the veterans of the Second World War" (5). Ooms continues, stating that Walt died "in

vain, and his absence acts as a grieving fist shaken at his–and perhaps also, Eloise's–wasted life" (5). Walt's death acts as a reminder of the futility and violence of war which has left Eloise unable to express her emotions and pushes her to a breaking point. However, her emotions and inability to process grief greatly impacts Ramona in ways Eloise is slow to recognize.

Ramona suffers from a lack of maternal love and nurturing. She consistently seeks attention from Eloise and even mirrors her mother's actions in hopes of connecting with her. Ramona sees her mother live dishonestly, entirely consumed by the past, and begins to recreate this in her own fantasy world with Jimmy and Mickey. Olivia Carr Edenfield explains that "Because Ramona lives outside of her mother's affections, she seeks it, in the same way that her mother does, from her own imagination" (239). Ramona clings to her imaginary boyfriend because it is the same example that Eloise has established for her. Ramona even kills Jimmy, explaining that "Jimmy was runned over and killed" (54). Jimmy's imaginary death demonstrates Ramona's need for attention from Eloise specifically as she kills her boyfriend just as Eloise mourns for Walt. Ramona hopes to have something in common with her mother, some type of connection they can share, so Ramona kills Jimmy. McDuffie agrees, stating that "When Ramona comes back into the house, she seems to think that by saying Jimmy is dead that Eloise will listen to her and perhaps console her" (52). She is mirroring her mother's grief over Walt in her saying that Jimmy has died, hoping to earn attention and love from Eloise. The most concerning detail about Jimmy's death, though, is that Eloise plants the idea of death in Ramona's mind by telling Mary Jane to tell her boss she is dead, as if death is an imaginary game to play and lie to tell. Jimmy's death is a cry for attention, like Eloise's stories about Walt, but neither girl succeeds in gaining affection for their loss. Instead, Eloise continues to ignore Ramona's emotions.

Eloise's neglect of Ramona stems from her own refusal to be honest with herself and Lew; she does not love him and therefore sees Ramona as an extension of a man she belittles. Her strict association of Ramona with Lew dismisses her own feeling of responsibility as a mother because Ramona "looks like Lew" (35). Ramona becomes a constant reminder of losing Walt and the discontentment she feels toward her life. Edenfield continues, "Isolated, Eloise lives in the past, unwilling or unable to let go of her former self, a girl who had good qualities that she now desires. Discontented, she rejects both her husband and her daughter as she resists being the wife and mother she ought to be" (231). She can only see Ramona's relation to Lew and is stuck reminiscing on the past, further separating her from her daughter. Instead of focusing on her daughter's emotions and need for fulfillment, Eloise is overwhelmed by her own obsession with her past and Walt. Edenfield explains that Eloise "shuts herself off, unwilling to make an authentic connection with her husband or child" (232). Without letting go of Walt, Eloise can never truly be a good mother for Ramona; instead, she remains unstable and insecure for the remainder of the story.

Eloise's final display of emotion and her body language provide a glimpse of hope for both mother and daughter. When Eloise suddenly wakes to the phone ringing, Salinger specifically describes her as walking "steadily, almost languidly, toward the phone" (51). Trying to regain her balance in her present life, she clings to memories of Walt for balance. However, after talking to Lew on the phone, Eloise is suddenly walking "less steadily" as she is reminded again of her marriage and the isolation she feels from her family. As she goes into Ramona's room, she continues to struggle with her balance, holding onto the light switch "as if for support" (53). For the first time in the story, Eloise stands completely still in her daughter's doorway, "looking at Ramona" for a moment (53). Edenfield explains that seeing Ramona replace Jimmy

Jimmereeno with Mickey Mickeranno "proves an ironic catalyst that will move Eloise to examine herself and her relationship to her child" (241). Instead of seeing Ramona replace Jimmy, Eloise refuses to see and yanks Ramona into the middle of the bed to erase her new beau. After waking Ramona and becoming frustrated with her ability to move on from death so quickly, Eloise is struck by the reality of her daughter's emotional state and the need to move past her love for Walt. She holds Ramona's glasses and presses them against her cheeks, suggesting her inability to see her daughter.

However, Eloise cries as she holds the glasses, displaying her longing to *see more* despite her dissatisfaction with life. She longs to see and care for Ramona but refuses to put the lenses over her eyes. Instead, she goes downstairs, "losing her balance" and "staggering" while she asks Mary Jane, "I was a nice girl…wasn't I?" (56). Eloise hugs her daughter's glasses as a sign of wanting to nurture and care for Ramona, but she is reminded again of Walt as she cries, "Poor Uncle Wiggly" and chooses to remain in her past fantasy world, which is evident in her decision to put the glasses "lenses down" on the table (55). However, Ramona's need for the glasses suggests, as Edenfield states, "both her mother's and her own inherited inability to see beyond their immediate pain and isolation" (241). Furthermore, it is important to note that while Eloise does not wear the glasses, Ramona successfully uses the lenses to *see more*. This ability provides a glimpse of hope that she can break her mother's cycle of myopia. As long as Eloise desires to feel like her old self, the "good girl," who loved Walt, she remains trapped in her heartbreak and is unsure of how to love her daughter, or herself.

Eloise, although an ineffectual mother, suggests the maternal desire to care for one's child. While she is depressed and filled with dissatisfaction for her husband and daughter, still, she kisses Ramona when she cries and longs to be a "good girl," a good mother (56). Eloise's

struggle stems from the death of Walt, pointing blame at the war. Although she is self-serving in the narrative, the root cause of her depression is the war. Walt dies in a freak accident, suggesting the stupidity and needless deaths that occur in and around battle. Eloise, at home, must adapt to the changing culture along with the news of her lover's death. Eloise's pain is not due to mistakes she has made, forcing the blame to land on Mother America and the abandonment of her children for war. Her life, like Walt's, becomes a casualty of war.

CHAPTER 3

THE SURROGATES & ABSENT MOTHERS

The absence of, or neglect from, mothers further amplifies the need for spiritual and emotional healing. In both "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" and "The Laughing Man," minimum interaction with characters' mothers and parents emphasizes the neglect of children's need for fulfillment while also allowing surrogate mother figures to guide characters through the harsh terrain of the material world. Like Mother America to her citizens, these children experience neglect from their own parents and rely on guidance from others. Both "Eskimos" and "The Laughing Man" employ spiritual guides in the form of young male characters, such as Franklin and the Chief, to fulfill the role of the mother figure while "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" establishes a maternal spiritual guide in the form of a young girl and "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" portrays a spiritual awakening due to the power of memory and a mother's love.

"Just Before the War with the Eskimos" follows a young girl named Ginnie on her journey home from playing tennis with her friend Selena. Salinger begins this story by focusing on the material; however, in this story, the fifteen-year-old girls are already affected by societal greed, unlike many other child heroes in Salinger's fiction. Ginnie takes issue with the fact that she is the one "getting stuck—every single time—for the whole cab fare" (58). Ginnie is characterized by her expectations of Selena's family; she has imagined her life to be perfect, complete with a "perfect servant" (57). When Ginnie asks Selena to pay her back, Selena tells her that they must go into her house to retrieve money from her mother. Quickly, Selena informs Ginnie that her mother is very ill, saying: "She virtually has pneumonia" (60). The first few pages of the story reveal that Selena's mother is not operating as she needs her to. Selena's mother must stay in bed all day, not visibly acting as an effectual mother in the text. However,

soon a different spiritual guide appears to save Ginnie from her materialistic nature, suggesting that Selena is nurtured by a surrogate mother figure.

As Ginnie waits for Selena to return with the money, she meets Selena's brother, Franklin, who inspires Ginnie to *see more*. When Franklin enters the room, he is described as "the funniest-looking boy, or man—it was hard to tell which he was—she had ever seen" (63). Franklin's suspension between boyhood and manhood suggests that he exists in the realm of childlike imagination and spirituality while simultaneously living as an adult. Sarah Marshall argues that this reveals Franklin as a "prophet, a truth speaker who hangs suspended between childhood and adulthood, a position which allows him to serve as a guide, a bridge between the two" (268). Franklin's duality creates the perfect spiritual guide to direct Ginny away from snobby materialism and onto a spiritual pilgrimage. In the same way, James E. Bryan breaks down each aspect of Franklin's characterization and connects his spiritually specifically to Jesus Christ. He explains that Franklin's appearance "may be a caricature of an El Greco-type crucified Christ. He has an abnormal heart condition (perhaps signifying his heretical ability to love in a loveless world) and he served the war effort in an airplane factory. His time of service, thirty-seven months, recalls the Christ ministry; and airplane-making may be a startling metaphor for the Christ mission—the implementation of spiritual levitation" (228). Franklin represents a new form of spirituality in a broken, consumeristic world and will act as both spiritual guide and surrogate mother to Ginnie.

Franklin meets Ginnie with kindness and hospitality, further supporting his role as a spiritual mother, as he encapsulates the perfect servant, Christ. Ginnie is intrigued by his nature as he worries about the cut on his "goddam finger" (62). Ginnie's vision of the "perfect servant" in the Graff household comes to light as McDuffie explains that "Franklin's cut contrasts with

the symbolism of the servant bringing 'a can of tennis balls' rather than 'a glass of tomato juice.' The significance of Ginnie's vision comes through the fact that she gets to use the Graff family's tennis balls every week for free, and through Franklin (who is carrying his cut in place of the tennis balls or tomato juice), Salinger invokes the 'perfect servant,' Christ" (72). Franklin is immediately presented as a spiritual figure when he meets Ginnie, refocusing her misconception of the Graff family's wealth on the actual people in the household and encourages her to reconsider her assuming perspective and consider the power of human connection. Ginnie slowly becomes more aware of her selfish nature as she is spiritually guided by Franklin.

Franklin frequently uses religiously connotated words, like *goddam* and *Christ*, to assert his position as the perfect servant. His language intrigues Ginnie more as he tells her, "Christ, I'm bleedin' to death. Stick around. I may need a goddam transfusion" (63). Franklin's role as a spiritual guide creates Christian imagery. Marshall explains that these words from Franklin act as a "secular prayer, with Franklin recognizing his inexorable progression toward death and an intense need for new life, a transfusion of the blood of Christ" (269). Like Christ, Franklin seems to be aware of death and still chooses to nurture Ginnie despite his own finger bleeding. Bleeding, he tells Ginnie he may need a transfusion when really, she is the one who will receive his gift of sacrament and be spiritually nourished. McDuffie presents this argument, explaining that "Salinger implies that Ginnie needs a 'transfusion' from the blood of the 'perfect servant'" (72). Franklin from this point through the end of the story engages Ginnie in meaningful conversation, slowly pulling her away from the material world and toward the spiritual.

Through their conversation about her, Ginnie reveals that she may be judgmental and uncompassionate due to conspicuous consumption and needs spiritual guidance. Along with Ginnie's desire for Selena's cab fare and her assumptions about Selena's family, Ginnie also

mirrors her sister, Joanie's, personality when Franklin claims her sister is "Queen of the goddam snobs" (64). Franklin explains that he wrote Joanie eight letters and she did not respond to any of them, suggesting that she lacks human connection and, perhaps, compassion. Ginnie taking her sister's side demonstrates her ability to follow Joanie's path. Franklin, however, demonstrates his pacifist ideals through his distaste for the war and all the "goddam fools" who walk to the draft board (72). By rejecting the war, Franklin does not accept the consequences of Mother America's choice to abandon her children for violence. Instead of buying into the consumerism of the post-World War II era, Franklin promotes compassion and revokes judgment as he guides Ginnie to an understanding of spirituality.

Franklin operates as the ideal mother figure to fulfill Ginnie's spiritual hunger. The narrator describes Franklin twice within a page looking out the window and down at the street, suggesting that Franklin has a higher perspective than Ginnie and is spiritually fulfilled. Marshall argues that Franklin's posture as he "observes what he identifies as the absurd movements of humanity" from the window, is "an allusion to the cross, which is simultaneously a symbol for Christ, the God-made-flesh, and for a crossroad, a point where decisions must be made" (271). Franklin operating as a Christ-figure and spiritual guide pushes Ginnie toward her spiritual pilgrimage, encouraging her to choose spirituality over the material. Preparing her for transformation, he looks down at the street, mirroring a Christ-figure peering over the world, and then tells Ginnie to "open your ears, for Chrissake" (72). *Seeing more*, for Ginnie, is not enough. To connect with those around her and rebuke the consumeristic world, she must open her ears to other perspectives for spiritual fulfillment, even if she is proven wrong—like her assumptions about Selena's life and thinking that her sister is not snobbish. After instructing her to listen, Franklin offers her half of his chicken sandwich as a sacrament. He tells her simply to "take it,

for Chrissake" (73). Again, Franklin's repetition of "for Chrissake" suggests to live for Christ, to open one's eyes to a spiritual world beyond the material. Here, though, referencing Christ also elevates the sandwich to a holy level. Bryan argues that "Franklin *means* for Christ's sake…Salinger has transfigured a mundane situation into the Holy Sacrament. The chicken sandwich is the Eucharist" (228). After bleeding, Franklin offers this token of hospitality and nourishment to Ginnie, perhaps to save her from the effects of consumerism. As she takes the offering, Franklin is "standing over her," further mirroring an elevated Christ figure (73). However, as she bites the sandwich, she swallows "with difficulty" (74). The task of opening her ears to the spiritual realm is challenging because it dismantles the consumeristic world in which Ginnie lives. Despite this difficulty, Franklin meets Ginnie with understanding as she struggles to swallow the sacrament: "Selena's brother nodded. He looked absently around the room, scratching the pit of his chest" (74). He seems to be aware of the difficulty in rejecting the physical to achieve spiritual fulfillment and nods to show his care towards her. This same care is furthered by his motion of scratching his chest, over his heart, as he tells her "Jesus…Take it easy, now!" (74). His final words to Ginnie suggest his support and encouragement of her spiritual beginnings. As he calls out to Christ once more, he spiritually nurtures Ginnie and transforms her into a young girl who can begin to *see more* than the material.

Ginnie's progression away from consumerism and toward spirituality is presented as she leaves Selena's house. First, when Selena offers her the money she demanded minutes before, Ginnie declines, saying, "I don't want the money anyway" (80). Her statement here suggests a pattern that will continue after she leaves. Ginnie is shifting her focus away from money and toward spiritual fulfillment. Instead of accepting money, Ginnie wishes to come back that night to see Franklin again, suggesting her openness to spiritual growth. Ginnie brings up Franklin in

conversation at the end of the text, centering the narrative on him and subsequently, on Christ as Ginnie leaves the story thinking of Easter chicks. Considering trashing the sandwich half that Franklin gives her, Ginnie changes her mind and places it back in her pocket. The narrator explains her decision: "A few years before, it had taken her three days to dispose of the Easter chick she had found dead on the sawdust in the bottom of her wastebasket" (82). Like this Easter chick, American society has become a spiritual wasteland; however, Ginnie saw the beauty and innocence of the Easter chick among the trash and refused to throw it out, showing her possible hopeful future beyond consumerism. Marshall argues that this moment reaffirms the "childlike faith and hope that she once had" (278). Instead of throwing the chick away, choosing to keep it for three days signals her instinctual desire for rebirth as Christ rose again on the third day. Just as a younger Ginnie hoped for her chick to rise from the dead, she sees the possibility of a spiritual rebirth in her own life; she just needs to keep this holy gift Franklin has given her and open her ears and eyes to spiritual nourishment.

The next story in the cycle, "The Laughing Man," also presents a surrogate mother who cares for a group of children when their own parents are absent. "The Laughing Man" revolves around a club of these nine-year-old boys called "The Comanche Club"; here, these boys would play a variety of sports and hear stories about a masked vigilante character the Laughing Man. The true hero to these boys, though, is their Chief, John Gedsudski, who plays the role of the boys' guardian and spiritual guide. However, the Chief's efforts are crushed by the weight of classism and responsibility, ultimately leaving the boys with no spiritual guide. The narrator of this story explains the risks and devastation caused when one lacks spiritual nourishment and direction.

"The Laughing Man" provides two different perceptions of reality: one from the childlike imaginative point of view, one from the narrator's current adult perspective. McDuffie explains these dual perspectives in the story, stating that "Salinger juxtaposes the narrator's childlike perceptions with those of Gedsudski, who apparently creates the Laughing Man in his own image…Just as Salinger is always seeking the median between child and adult *in Nine Stories*, he invites us to read and interpret 'The Laughing Man' from both perspectives" (90). Comparing the imaginative to reality highlights the need for spiritual and emotional fulfillment in both the Comanches and Gedsudski as he reveals pieces of his own instability in the Laughing Man story installments. Despite his attempts in participating in and, ultimately, leading the imaginative Comanches, the Chief can no longer keep the boys away from harsh realities of the world.

The narrator telling this story is a man looking back on his childhood in the Comanche Club, revealing that his time with the Chief was extremely formative, remaining in his mind since he was nine years old. He begins by recalling crucial details of the boys' home life and relationship with their parents: "Every schoolday afternoon at three o'clock, twenty-five of us Comanches were picked up by our Chief…We then pushed and punched our way into the Chief's reconverted commercial bus, and he drove us (according to his financial arrangement with our parents) over to Central Park" (83). Knowing that these twenty-five boys immediately leave school with the Chief every day after school suggests that he serves as a paternal figure in their lives. Every day spent with the Chief is more time away from home, severing the opportunity for human connections with their families; however, the parents pay Gedsudski to watch them daily, showing that they are too preoccupied to watch their own children. The narrator continues, stating that even on "Saturdays and most national holidays, the Chief picked us up early in the morning at our various apartment houses and, in his condemned-looking bus,

drove us out of Manhattan" (84). The Comanches' parents seem to have no desire to care for their children during the week, weekend, or holidays, suggesting that they meet only the bare minimum for parental care.

The Chief, however, is characterized as "an extremely shy, gentle young man of twenty-two or -three, a law student at N.Y.U., and altogether a very memorable person" (85). While the Chief is described lovingly, the boys' parents are only described by their financial agreement with the Chief and their overall absence from the boys' lives. The Chief also resides in a lower socioeconomic class from the boys, considering the poorer description of his bus and his employment with these wealthy parents. The narrator continues listing Gedsudski's characteristics, describing him as "an impartial and unexcitable umpire at all our bedlam sporting events, a master fire builder and extinguisher, and an expert, uncontemptuous first-aid man. Every one of us, from the smallest hoodlum to the biggest, loved and respected him" (85). Gedsudski is characterized as a highly involved parent. He cheers them on at their ballgames, teaches them classically masculine skills like fire building, and cares for their physical wounds when needed. The Comanches turn to the Chief, the perfect surrogate, to care for them as their parents ignore them.

The Chief, furthering his role as caregiver, also operates as a storyteller. The narrator describes the experience as something the "Comanches relied heavily and selfishly" upon as they would fight over the seats nearest to the Chief on the bus ride home. These tales of the Laughing Man have a profound impact on the boys' lives as the narrator states, "You could always take it home with you and reflect on it" (87). Even years later, the narrator still reflects upon and remembers the story of the Laughing Man and the Chief himself, displaying the power and influence Gedsudski has. The internal story itself focuses on the crimes and compassions of the

Laughing Man as he frequently crosses borders between China, France, and wherever he pleased, earning great favor and fortune within the story and with the Comanches. The narrator himself admits that he "regarded myself not only as the Laughing Man's direct descendant but as his only legitimate living one. I was not even my parents' son in 1928 but a devilishly smooth impostor, awaiting their slightest blunder as an excuse to move in—preferably without violence, but not necessarily—to assert my true identity" (92). The narrator identifies more with a fictional, masked vigilante than he does with his family because of the connection he makes with the Chief. The Chief, along with his creation of the Laughing Man, shapes each boy's life, creating immense spiritual and emotional bonds as their surrogate mother.

The ultimate shift in "The Laughing Man" occurs as the Chief becomes involved with a young, wealthy girl named Mary Hudson whose femininity and sexuality challenges both the Chief and the Comanches. Salinger uses Mary's position in the field to portray the sexual, adult relationship between Mary and Gedsudski, establishing the pull for Gedsudski to abandon the imaginative and fully enter adulthood. Her introduction and progression into the Comanches' lives is quick—first with a photo on the bus—to a girl who suddenly demands to play in their baseball game. To the boys, Mary Hudson brings unwanted feminine energy to the Comanche Club. The narrator recalls their response to her wanting to play, explaining that "Where before we Comanches had simply stared at her femaleness, we now glared at it" (96). Their perfect, imaginative, masculine world is shaken by Mary's presence. Despite their anger, the Chief puts Mary on the narrator's team. The narrator then explains his excitement and astonishment as Mary hits a double, lands on third base, and waves smiling at him: "Her stickwork aside, she happened to be a girl who knew how to wave to somebody from third base" (98). Mary Hudson continues hitting, getting on base each time, and she "seemed to *hate* first base; there was no

holding her there. At least three times, she stole second" (99). The two depictions of Mary's hitting juxtapose the childlike perception of what happened, through the narrator's original retelling, then is followed by the narrator's current understanding now that he is an adult, focusing on what *seemed* to happen. McDuffie explains that "From the point of view of the narrator and the Comanches the scene reads innocently, but from an adult's point of view, the fact that Mary hates to stay on first base hints at her sexual experience" (91). Mary is quick to advance around the bases, demonstrating her mature sexuality and foreshadowing the pregnancy that eventually ends her and the Chief's relationship.

Many critics argue that Mary's connection to sexuality here, along with other images of baby carriages and the home, suggest that she is pregnant and plans on having an abortion. The Chief's inability to take on a fatherly role devastates both his, and the narrator's, imaginative and real worlds while Mary decides the baby's fate. Salinger leaves multiple clues to Mary's pregnancy, first as she is described twice in relation to baby carriages. McDuffie analyzes these instances and argues that "there are subtle indications that Mary is going to get an abortion, because she is sitting in foul territory and smoking a cigarette…While at first she is 'sandwiched between' them as she smokes, the second time she wants the narrator, a child, to leave her alone" (93-94). Mary pushes away this idea of children and further divides her relationship with Gedsudski. McDuffie realigns the internal story of the Laughing Man with Mary and Gedsudski's unborn child: "the events in the fictional world appear to blend with the real world, and, in turn, childhood with adulthood. It would seem that, in the end, the Chief cannot save the Comanches from the fate of the Laughing Man any more than he can save his own child" (95). The Chief cannot parent Mary's child or care for the Comanches anymore. Mary's abortion

destroys Gedsudski's hopeful view of the world and leads him to shatter the imaginative, childlike world of the Comanches.

After Mary Hudson leaves the baseball field, the Chief is crushed and can no longer function as the spiritual guide the Comanches need. He tells the final installment of the Laughing Man, putting his own feelings of devastation into the internal narrative. The Laughing Man chooses to die when he learns that his best friend, Black Wing, was killed by his enemies. He rejects healing from his other friend, Omba, and dies with his final act of pulling of his mask. The Laughing Man's mask, like the Chief's, is to protect and fit in with material society while having compassion and the ability to see beyond. The mask prevents a loss of imagination among the real world. Goldstein explains that the Chief "is at that stage in life where he too questions the meaning of his existence" and when he kills the Laughing Man, he "strips away the mask of laughter, of irrational exuberance, of the transitional jerk where one can cross the border from China into France, where in effect one can hear the sound of a single hand" (175). Losing Mary Hudson crushes the Chief's spirit and leads him to kill his imaginative hero, subsequently murdering the Comanches' imagination. The narrator, along with other boys on the bus, are traumatized by this ending. He explains that when "Billy Walsh, the youngest of all the Comanches, burst into tears," no one told him to "shut up" (110). The boys are heartbroken and confused as to how such a powerful hero could choose to die out of mourning.

The death of the Laughing Man turns their world upside down; instead of a world of imagination and power, the boys are forced to see a reality of classism and loss that they are too young to understand. This sticks with the boys, as the narrator proves years later, and suggests that without a steady spiritual guide, one will be left spiritually desolate, emotionally broken, and isolated. As the he tells of his arrival home that evening, he says, "I arrived home with my teeth

chattering uncontrollably and was told to go right to bed" (110). The narrator's parents are so oblivious to their son's emotional state that they send him straight to his room. Instead of questioning why his teeth are chattering and what happened, they ignore his emotional and spiritual needs and send him to deal with his trauma on his own. Furthermore, Richard Allen Davison explains that Salinger places emphasis on the parents' decision to ignore the narrator in the final draft of *Nine Stories* when compared to the story's original publication in *The New Yorker,* which simply states that the narrator "had to be put to bed" (301). Salinger deliberately rewords this phrase to the narrator being "told to go straight to bed," further exposing the parents' apathy (110). The death of the Laughing Man traumatizes these boys and reinforces their feelings of being ignored by their parents. Davison agrees: "Both Gedsudski's revenge and the Laughing Man's sacrificial death serve to externalize the boys' reactions to parental neglect or indifference...The Comanches' own home environments exude parental rejection" (11). Gedsudski, causing the Laughing Man's story to end brutally, exposes the Comanches to a real world of suffering and inadvertently reminds them of their parents' inability or refusal to connect with them.

"For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" uses maternal healing in the form of a spiritual, surrogate mother in a child named Esmé. The narrator, a young veteran writing about his encounter with Esmé from six years prior, exists among spiritual deprivation for much of the internal story. He briefly explains his experiences in the war, describing his training process in the British Intelligence, and ultimately discloses that he was "to be assigned to infantry and airborne divisions mustered for the D Day landings" (133). Historian Thomas D. Morgan describes D-Day as "the largest armada in history" consisting of "about 5,000 ships, smaller landing craft, and thousands of planes and gliders" that "brought the equivalent of over nine

divisions" together in battle (30). Knowing that the narrator is about to embark on what will become the most historic battle of World War II, he anticipates what is to come: "I remember standing at an end window of our Quonset hut for a very long time, looking out at the slanting, dreary rain, my trigger finger itching imperceptibly, if at all" (133). The narrator gazes out the window seeking perspective in his situation. He sees the rain, an embedded spiritual motif, and acknowledges his imperceptiveness in relation to the war. He cannot see beyond his current perspective as he anticipates death and violence, so he looks out the window for clarity. He, quickly, "with nothing special in mind," goes out into the rain and meets Esmé (133).

Salinger employs water imagery to portray Esmé's spiritual presence and how it permeates the narrator. When he first sees Esmé, he walks through the "wettest part of town" as Esmé's spiritual nature engulfs the narrative and setting. The initial description of the "slanting, dreary rain" operates negatively prior to the narrator meeting Esmé (133). At first, the rain prohibits the narrator from seeing clearly and leaves him to think about the impending battles; soon, however, rain becomes a sign of spiritual growth after it is connected to Esmé's spirituality and guidance. Quickly, everything around the narrator will be rain-soaked, signaling his journey toward nourishment through Esmé's overwhelming presence. When he first sees Esmé, her description aligns with the rain's ability to positively overwhelm the narrator: "The child nearest to me, on the end seat in the first row. She was about thirteen, with straight ash-blond hair of ear-lobe length, an exquisite forehead, and blasé eyes that, I thought might very possibly have counted the house. Her voice was distinct from the other children's voices, and not just because she was seated nearest to me. It had the best upper register, the sweetest-sounding, the surest, and it automatically led the way" (136). The narrator describes Esmé as an outstanding young girl, not simply by her appearance, but in her ability to lead the way. While her "exquisite forehead"

and “blasé eyes” suggest her extraordinary intelligence, the narrator is also fascinated by her seemingly unamused expression. He describes her as a guide to the younger children with her sweet but confident voice. Esmé’s natural ability to lead others affirms her role as a spiritual guide, or mother figure, for the narrator. However, as the narrator leaves the church, it starts “raining even harder,” foreshadowing the healing, spiritual flood headed his way (137).

Prior to his second encounter with Esmé, the narrator further reveals his need for nurturing through his lack of human connection with his family at home. He briefly describes “stale letters” from his wife and mother-in-law in which his wife tells him about small details at home. His mother-in-law also asks for him to send her cashmere yarn the first chance he “got away from ‘camp,’” which further demonstrates the same American materialism seen in the preceding stories (137). Unaware of the dangers and trauma he will endure, his family attempts to connect with him but are unsuccessful and leave him spiritually and emotionally devastated. Directly following this reminder of the narrator’s need for connection, Esmé enters the tearoom with “soaking wet” hair and spiritual offerings (138).

The narrator watches Esmé and her little brother, Charles, for a short period of time, making note of her leadership qualities. He is hesitant, though, as he thinks, “She stared back at me…then, abruptly, gave me a small, qualified smile. It was oddly radiant, as certain small, qualified smiles sometimes are. I smiled back, much less radiantly, keeping my upper lip down over a coal-black G.I. temporary filling showing between my two front teeth” (139). This exchange characterizes the narrator as unsure and guarded while displaying Esmé’s confidence and kindness. As the narrator feels as if he must hide his teeth, Esmé boldly decides to approach the narrator, and suddenly she is “standing” beside him with “enviable poise” (139). She quickly reveals herself to be a spiritual leader through her actions and characterization. The narrator

describes her not as a “smart aleck” but as “a truth-lover or a statistics-lover,” demonstrating her maturity and painting her as trustworthy (139). He opens up to her as she proves to be a “small-talk detester,” and he finds company in the midst of isolation away from his nation and family (140).

Esmé’s honesty and caring nature leads the narrator to relax emotionally and escape his loneliness. Esmé connects with the narrator over their discussion of her late parents, leaving her as the mother figure to Charles even though they live with their aunt and have a nanny (143). Esmé takes this role very seriously and proves herself to be a strong guide as Charles listens only to her. Her instinctive mothering nature is evident as she tells the narrator, “I purely came over because I thought you looked extremely lonely. You have an extremely sensitive face” (144). Her perception of the narrator here is not an insult but a concern. She expresses an emotional and caring response to his need and decides to help him if she can. The narrator is honest here and tells her: “I said she was right, that I had been feeling lonely, and that I was very glad she’d come over” (144). His desire for perception and understanding is soon found with Esmé as she does not ignore his involvement in the war but also does not press him for details. Instead, she engages in meaningful conversation with him and provides a path to human connection.

Salinger begins their connection with an essential motif of hospitality and nourishment—food. In this scene, food is almost non-existent; however, the communal setting of the tearoom suggests that they are making human connection as they sit around the table together. The narrator even states that ordering his tea was the “first time all day” that he had spoken to anyone, reinforcing his isolation (137). While he eats a small portion of cinnamon toast, Esmé “eats like a bird,” suggesting that she is incredibly anxious from processing her grief and acting

as Charles's mother figure. (141). With their connection established around the table, they discuss real, difficult issues, and both the narrator and Esmé offer guidance to each other.

Setting the example for creating meaningful relationships, Esmé explains that she's "training" herself to be "more compassionate" because her aunt describes her as a "terribly cold person"; however, it is not coldness that she emulates but spiritual perfection (144). Like Teddy, Esmé is often misinterpreted by adults who lack spiritual wisdom. Junkins describes her as projecting a "quality of formal, if not wholly rational empathy" while John Hermann claims that Esmé has a "lack of compassion, of affection" (263). Esmé, like other children in the cycle, exceeds childlike expectations. She is full of compassion despite her seemingly mature conversations. Junkins's assessment is on point. When questioned, the narrator reassures Esmé that she is not cold, "absolutely not—very much to the contrary, in fact" (144). The narrator does not misinterpret but instead admires her emotional maturity. Esmé continues to connect with the narrator through this maturity as Esmé explains that her father was "s-l-a-i-n in North Africa" (146). To prevent from hurting Charles and bringing his loss to the present, she spells out the word "slain." Her protection of Charles paired with her honesty establishes the type of genuine connection the narrator craves; she is caring for her brother while acknowledging the hurt she has experienced. Esmé pushes her grief away, claiming to only keep her father's watch "as a memento, of course" (151). She puts Charles's needs first, compartmentalizing her grief to stay strong for him. Furthermore, the pain she feels amplifies her compassionate nature, suggesting that she feels deeply and cares for others. Her connection to and love for her father suggests that she is reminded of her father by the narrator's presence. She tells the narrator about her father, describing him as "a man who was intrinsically kind" (149). Esmé wishes to portray her father's characteristics, telling the narrator that she looks exactly like him, and consistently tying him into

their conversation. The narrator appreciates her ability to feel deeply these emotions and meets her in the middle by offering her any personal information she wants from him. Following her example, the narrator eventually learns how to work through his own trauma with the tool of human connection.

When Esmé departs, her request for the narrator to write her a story full of squalor further demonstrates her care for him. She tells him that she is "extremely interested in squalor" because she is learning to live without her parents while acting as a mother to Charles, suggesting that she can handle the difficult realities of the world (151). In the same way, she is drawn to the narrator; he is lonely and, soon, will be overwhelmed with squalor. Similarly, Prigozy explains that Esmé is overwhelmed by "the stunning loss of her father in the war," which furthers the "bond of loneliness between Esmé and the narrator" (124). They each need the other to move past their isolation as Esmé is struggling with her responsibility as a mother figure and the narrator seeks to escape loneliness. He agrees to write her and welcomes her letters, cutting her off as she asks because he is eager for fulfilling connections. His longing to escape isolation is heightened as Esmé leaves and the narrator explains that "it was a strangely emotional moment for me" (154). He is overwhelmed with emotion because Esmé has offered genuine connection that allows him to feel less lonely for a few moments. Esmé returns briefly so Charles can say goodbye, and she tells him, "I hope you return from the war with all your faculties intact" (156). Her acknowledgement of the possible effects of his future battles does not make him nervous but encourages him as he thanks her. She uses the hurt from losing her father in war to connect with the narrator and displays the sincerity of her hope for him. The narrator appreciates her offerings of healing; then, she "slowly, reflectively" leaves the tearoom, (156). Esmé's reflection suggests that their conversations also had a lasting impression on her.

In this internal story, Sergeant X portrays the depravity of war and the desperate need for spiritual and emotional healing while incorporating the power of human connection in Esmé's effect on Sergeant X. The narrator begins by introducing Sergeant X as a "young man who had not come through the war with all his faculties intact" (157). The Sergeant stands in the story as the narrator's avatar to distance himself from the reality of his post-traumatic stress disorder. Eberhard Alsen explains that "The narrator not only disguises himself as 'Staff Sergeant X' but he also switches to a third person omniscient point of view. The reason for the disguise and the switch in point of view is that the narrator has not come through the war with all his faculties intact. He has suffered a nervous breakdown and he apparently doesn't want to talk about that experience in the first person" (86). As a form of scriptotherapy, the narrator discloses traumatic experiences and current struggles in his life to Esmé through the story and letter.

Sergeant X uses specific descriptions of his mental state to amplify further his need for spiritual healing. He explains that these attacks come on "abruptly, familiarly, and, as usual, with no warning" as he "thought he felt his mind dislodge itself and teeter, like insecure luggage on an overhead rack" (1158). To fix this, he "quickly did what he had been doing for weeks to set things right: he pressed his hands hard against his temples. He held on tight for a moment" (1158). The religious relation to the word *temple* offers insight to the narrator's mind; specifically pressing his hands to his temples suggests a spiritual alignment. However, his trauma simply cannot be healed by this action; the relief exists only in brief moments. Sergeant X begins to spiral and become more enveloped in his depression and trauma until he is forced to see a hopeful future.

Because Sergeant X is so overwhelmed by post-traumatic stress, he even struggles to write, showing that he has, as McDuffie explains, "been changed so dramatically that he is not

the same person" (135). He has even lost his ability to write as he tells of his arrest of a "thirty-eight-year-old, unmarried daughter" for being "a low official in the Nazi Party" (159). He looks at one of her books, Goebbel's *Die Zeit Ohne Beispiel,* with the inscription stating, "Dear God, life is hell" (159). He continues, describing the words as appearing "to have the stature of an uncontestable, even classic indictment" (160). He begins spiritually fighting these words, "trying, against heavy odds, not to be taken in" by this idea of a hell-swallowed life. Sergeant X, "with far more zeal than he had done anything in weeks," writes a response: "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love" (160). Sergeant X struggles with this idea that love and human connection can provide healing because after he writes this phrase, he finds the words to be "almost entirely illegible" (160). He knows that spiritual and emotional healing can save him from being swallowed in his trauma, but he cannot provide this healing for himself.

That necessary healing ultimately comes from Esmé in the form of a gift that guides him toward spiritual and emotional healing. When he reads the enclosed letter, Esmé writes that she has been "justifiably saddled with one responsibility after another" (171). Still, she explains how much she has wanted to write him, reinforcing her caring nature. Her ultimate demonstration of love comes in the form of a sentimental gift. She sends him her father's watch, telling him, "I am quite certain that you will use it to greater advantage in these difficult days than I ever can and that you will accept it as a lucky talisman" (172). Although she clings to the memory of her father's death and takes on many of his characteristics, she selflessly chooses to gift his watch to Sergeant X, hoping to bring him luck and comfort.

Even though the watch's "crystal had been broken in transit," X does not care because it is the nurturing gesture that gives him hope and healing. Paul Kirschner writes that Esmé's letter

"touchingly evokes all her beseeching reserve; but her father's watch, above all, objectifies that faculty which keeps all others intact, and whose absence, the Sergeant now knows, is Hell. His ecstatic sleepiness…betokens a restored inner world" (69). The gift, the perfect demonstration of kindness and sacrificial love, provides the human connection Sergeant X needs to continue moving forward past the trauma of the war. As he sits with the watch "in his hand for another long period," he "suddenly, almost ecstatically…felt sleepy" (173). The rest and nurturing X needed comes directly from the connection to Esmé, who serves as his spiritual guide. The narrator explains how this sleepiness directly correlates with the hope of healing: "You take a really sleepy man, Esmé, and he always stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac—with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact" (173). Directly speaking to Esmé brings the narrative back to the present as the narrator tells these final words to Esmé, suggesting that Sergeant X finds the healing he needs after resting in Esmé's gift of healing. McDuffie argues that "the last statement, addressed *to* or *for* Esmé, reveals the narrator has regained the ability to write again and, therefore, has overcome the squalor, or hell, of being 'unable to love'" (137). Tom Davis points out that the final paragraph closes in the present because the watch operates as "a symbol of time overcome by love" and that it "has destroyed Sergeant X's hell" (44). The watch, symbolizing the power of love, correlates directly with the act of giving the gift itself; Esmé selflessly gifts her father's watch as a gesture of healing because she herself has experienced great loss from losing both her parents, damaging her own faculties. She transfers this gift to the Sergeant because he is experiencing similar pain, and she ultimately provides him with the support and care he needs to recover. With rest, nourishment, and hope, the narrator heals his spirit, mind, and emotions that stem from his trauma—ultimately—saving his life.

The penultimate story in the cycle, "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," follows the spiritual journey of a young man after the loss of his mother. The narrator, reflecting on this time of grief, tells of a few weeks of his life in which he masked himself as Jean De Daumier-Smith while instructing a correspondence course at an art school in Canada. Only nineteen, Jean hides behind his lies to contain his mourning and live in his ignorant selfishness until he experiences a spiritual transformation. However, his insincerity is caused by his grief. McDuffie agrees, stating that "all of the narrator's actions in the story should be viewed in light of the grief he experiences over the death of his mother" (164). Her death is central to the story; everything Jean does, feels, and thinks revolves around his grief. By learning to face his loss, the narrator sees beyond the material and begins to heal after his "Experience"—which is sparked through the memory of his mother.

The narrative begins with the narrator dedicating his story to his late stepfather, Bobby, and detailing their situation in New York City only three months after his mother's death. Immediately, death is the focal point as the narrator expresses his gratitude for Bobby in the present before shifting to his past and his mother's death. The narrator explains that he moved from New York to Paris but that he took the "big move" to Paris "untraumatically," while " the move back to New York, nine years later, three months after my mother died…threw me, and threw me terribly" (199). Shifting from America to France did not affect the narrator the first time, seemingly because his mother was still with him, but losing her destroys his outlook on the world. Not only has the narrator lost his mother, but he now has no sense of home in a mother nation. He has lost his home, mother, and the language he feels that he communicates best with, furthering his isolation. Therefore, he understandably becomes extremely pessimistic and views life in the city through a frustrated lens. However, losing his mother also leads the narrator to

isolate himself, which only furthers his feelings of loss. But as the narrator feels completely alone, he also wishes that the city would be empty: "I prayed for the city to be cleared of people, for the gift of being alone—a-l-o-n-e…and in no time at all everything I touched turned to solid loneliness" (201). This longing suggests that although he feels alone, trapped in his grief, he is still overwhelmed and frustrated that other people in the city seem to be enjoying life and do not understand his grief.

The narrator reveals the great love he has for his mother as he remembers his feelings of loss. While attempting to isolate himself, he is staying in a hotel room with Bobby and is struck by the discovery that they were both "in love with the same deceased woman," and he says "it was no help at all" with their relationship or with processing his feelings (203). The narrator grows more and more frustrated with his stepfather as he begins to date another woman, Ms. X, who the narrator fantasizes about wanting to be with him instead of Bobby. This section of the narrative serves to expose the devastated state of the narrator. He is completely engulfed in himself, which is evident as he paints seventeen self-portraits. Although he seems inherently selfish, he is a nineteen-year-old boy struggling with identity and has lost his home and his mother. He paints these portraits in an attempt to claim his sense of self, not out of pride. Not knowing how to handle his grief, he masks himself as Jean De Daumier-Smith, the great-nephew of Honoré Daumier, so he can apply to be an art instructor at Les Amis Des Vieux Maitres. He chooses to escape to Canada in hopes to recover the feeling of home he had in France. He explains that he prefers to speak French because he is "able to express himself very precisely" (233). He needs to communicate, to express his grief but has no one to talk to, again reinforcing his disconnection from his country and his mother. In his deceptive letter to the primary instructor at Le Amis, M. Yoshoto, he claims to be mourning the death of his wife, not his

mother (205). This fact not only demonstrates his desire to appear older, but also proves that the narrator is greatly consumed by the death of his mother and that her absence even penetrates his lies. However, he now further masks his grief through his persona as Jean and, despite his excessive lies, is hired and leaves for Canada. His time at Les Amis Des Vieux Maitres will soon redirect Jean to come to terms with his mother's death through spiritual transformation.

Still grieving when Jean arrives in Montreal, he is focuses mostly on his appearance and concealing his lies to M. and Mme Yoshoto, reinforcing his anxiety. He describes himself wearing a suit that he "has a damned high opinion of" and tries to appear older with a three-week-old mustache (211). Anxiously seeking the approval of M. Yoshoto, Jean tries to appear mature and independent while he internally feels so broken and helpless without his mother. He feels the need to talk "incessantly" to conceal his true, grief-stricken self, despite M. Yoshoto saying "five words the whole way" (212). He thinks it was urgent to "not only to reiterate my earlier lies…but to elaborate on them" (212). Jean's focus on preserving his persona centers the narrative on his struggle with identity and shows that he is desperate for acceptance and connection. However, to overcome his grief and make meaningful human connections, Jean must first acknowledge his state of isolation and lack of identity.

As Jean begins to work with the Yoshotos, he is discouraged by the paintings his students submit; however, the first two paintings and his reactions to them portray Jean's negative perspective of the world prior to spiritual transformation. The first student is a housewife whose professional name is Bambi Kramer and favorite artists are Walt Disney and Rembrandt. She explains that she wishes to emulate their style in her work. Similarly, his second student, R. Howard Richfield, submits satiric drawings. The cartoonish description of both students' work is ironically exposing Jean's own artificially crafted persona. McDuffie explains that every allusion

to artists in this story works to “bring Jean’s confrontation with himself as an artist beyond mere paint on a canvas” (165). He must disregard appearance and the material to *see more* from his students’ art and his own life. Despite his condescension toward Kramer and Richfield’s cartoons and satire, he dubs himself De Daumier-Smith, while the artist Honoré Daumier primarily worked with caricatures. He is frustrated with their work because it mirrors the same construction of self he is attempting and struggling to maintain. McDuffie continues, explaining that as Jean rejects Kramer and Richfield’s work, he “unconsciously rejects himself” (165). He unknowingly hates the phony life he is building and needs to connect with someone. As Jean is frustrated with Richfield and Kramer’s work, he imagines complaining to Yoshoto, saying, “My mother's dead, and I have to live with her charming husband, and nobody in New York speaks French, *and there aren't any chairs in your son's room*. How do you expect me to teach these two crazy people how to draw?” (225). Jean is overwhelmed by his current state of loss and is further discouraged by his lies as he rejects the fake version of himself. He feels alone and cannot accept that his mother is gone, as McDuffie connects his inability to find a chair to “Jean’s conflict with death” (164). He cannot sit with the idea of his mother’s death and feel the weight of his loss, so he creates this world of lies and is confronted with his loneliness. However, Jean is initiating his spiritual journey by subconsciously rejecting his lies and masked persona.

Jean’s grief-stricken outlook on the world prevents him from connecting with others, furthering himself from spiritual and emotional healing; however, when he sees the paintings of a nun named Sister Irma, Jean is overcome with joy and desires a connection with her. Jean’s spiritual transformation slowly takes form and is foreshadowed through Sister Irma’s painting of "a highly detailed depiction of Christ being carried to the sepulchre in Joseph of Arimathea's garden" (228). Jean is drawn to this image as he identifies with the two women portrayed—Mary

Magdalene and another woman who seems to be calling someone, he thinks perhaps her child or even the viewer of the painting. Jean identifies with Mary Magdalene and the other woman because, as McDuffie writes, they "reflect his internal strife. The woman might be said to represent both his mother and Sister Irma; the two will become mirrors of each other in the story" (167). Jean becomes obsessed with the painting, writing to Sister Irma and asking her if he correctly identified Mary Magdalene because her face is slightly distorted. Jean's sparked interest in Mary Magdalene is significant because she is believed to be the first person Christ appears to after the resurrection, suggesting that Jean is on the verge of witnessing a great spiritual transformation of his own. Similarly, as Mary Magdalene is believed to be healed of demonic possession, Jean will soon have the power to overcome his grief and reach spiritual healing. First, he must, as McDuffie states, "see beyond his narrow view of the world as he seeks to overcome his grief" (165). His love for Sister Irma's painting is the initial step in his transformative process; however, he becomes obsessed with the physicality of the painting. He focuses on the flaw in Mary's face, staying up all night trying to fix it. McDuffie analyzes Jean's fixation, explaining that the "flaw in Mary's face corresponds with Jean's flaw, his self-obsession. In this way, Jean's desire to correct the flaw in Sister Irma's art illustrates one of the central lessons of his pilgrimage, seeing beyond the material world" (167). Jean's materialistic and external perspective prevents him from connecting with others and, ultimately, from facing his grief from the loss of his mother.

Quickly, Jean tries to encourage Sister Irma to embrace her artistic ability and wishes to build a connection with her. He writes her a very long letter, detailing his love for her painting and asking if she is allowed to see visitors. Jean solely focuses on Sister Irma's work to keep him happy. Sister Irma becomes a source of restoration for Jean as he holds her work as "warm

against my chest," claiming that he "had never felt more relaxed" (230). Holding her image of Christ near to his heart suggests a spiritual connection being created. Alex Shakespeare argues that "In Sister Irma, he may indeed see a surrogate mother—a motherly image of ideal purity and sincerity that would redeem him of his own confused identity" (376). Sister Irma provides Jean with hope, connection, and maternal comfort that he misses. By holding her work to his chest, he is literally taking Sister Irma's painting of grace to heart and foreshadowing his spiritual transformation. Connecting specifically with a nun suggests that Jean needs Christ to see that his mother has not simply vanished. By clinging to Sister Irma, Jean subsequently clings to Christ's hope that death is not the end and that he will see his mother again. However, Jean's fantasy of connecting further with Sister Irma is broken when M. Yoshoto gives him a letter from her convent stating that she can no longer be a student. This loss of Sister Irma's work devastates Jean; however, his pain leads him to healing.

Jean reaches the ultimate peak in his spiritual transformation when he confronts his loss in a mystical moment set in a store window. Jean experiences a three-day journey of spiritual epiphanies which McDuffie connects to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (169). On Wednesday, Jean spends the evening drawing Sister Irma's painting of Christ from memory, keeping the death of Jesus on his mind. Then, on Thursday, Jean experiences an epiphany while looking at the display in the orthopedic appliance shop's window. He explains: "I stopped on the sidewalk outside the school and looked into the lighted display window of the orthopedic appliances shop. Then something altogether hideous happened. The thought was forced on me that no matter how coolly or sensibly or gracefully I might one day learn to live my life, I would always at best be a visitor in a garden of enamel urinals and bedpans, with a sightless, wooden dummy-deity standing by in a marked-down rupture truss" (240-41). Jean is confronted with the

weight of life and death through his perspective of the world. He views God and the world with such a negatively distorted lens because he is still struggling with his mother's death. McDuffie argues that "Jean's vision brings him into a confrontation with the emptiness of his unthinking conception of God" and "his existence apart from Him" (169). Jean finally recognizes that his perspective is affected by his loss. It is not the world that is at fault, but Jean for pushing away his grief for so long. Shaken by this experience, Jean flees to his room and "lay awake for hours, shivering" (241). The only image that brings him peace is imagining him and Sister Irma walking the convent grounds "where suddenly, and without sin," he would put his arm around her waist; however, he says that the "image was too ecstatic to hold in place, and finally, I let go, and fell asleep" (242). Sister Irma stands in as a moment of peace and reconciliation for Jean and God. She reminds him of grace and love, both of which he currently lacks. As he drifts to sleep, though, he is buried by the weight of his epiphany, mirroring the burial of Christ and awaiting spiritual resurrection.

The third and final day of Jean's spiritual pilgrimage manifests in the same store window from the night before after Jean learns that Sister Irma is no longer allowed to be a student of Les Amis. He is quickly devastated and translates his loss into frustrated, hateful letters to his other students, telling them that "they had absolutely no talent worth developing and that they were simply wasting their own valuable time as well as the school's" (243). Just as Jean's own grief has distorted his view of the world, he negatively affects his students' lives. However, he realizes that this is not a lasting sense of fulfillment as he states that mailing these letters gave him "short-lived" satisfaction (243). Jean's pessimism cannot sustain his lies and the weight of his grief for much longer. Jean then decides to write Sister Irma another letter, asking her what his previous letter contained that upset her or the convent. However, Jean never mails this letter and

comes to his own realization about life and grief. When telling her that the worst thing about being an artist is that it makes "you slightly unhappy constantly," Jean retells the most joyful moment of his life, which revolves around his mother. He tells her, "The happiest day of my life was many years ago when I was seventeen. I was on my way for lunch to meet my mother, who was going out on the street for the first time after a long illness, and I was feeling ecstatically happy." This memory serves as another display of love from Jean to his mother. However, he continues, explaining that this happiness was quickly shaken when he suddenly "bumped into a chap without any nose" (245). This man, with his distorted face, upsets Jean because it strikes the physical appearance he values so much. He cannot separate this joyous memory of his mother from the man's noseless face just as he cannot separate his loving memories with his mother from his grief over her death. The nose is the face's most prominent feature, just as a mother is a prominent, necessary figure for a nineteen-year-old boy. He is disturbed by this man's face because the reality of loss scares him; just as the man lost his nose, he lost his mother. The beauty of his story is found in fact that his happiest moment is centered around his strong love for his mother. But now, Jean's spirit is devastated by loss, leaving him unable to use this memory to heal from her death.

After writing this letter, Jean reads it repeatedly over dinner, treating it as a sacred text that he prefers to read "by candlelight" (247). However, instead of eating at the fancy restaurant in his suit like he planned, Jean reads the letter at the same lunch bar he found solitude in the week before. He reads the letter, finds it "a trifle thin," and hurries back to rewrite it while thinking of plans to visit Sister Irma. He states that these thoughts do not give him "the sort of life" he needs and finds himself standing in front of the orthopedic appliance shop once again. The narrator suddenly breaks the narrative to explain that he's about to "touch on an

extraordinary experience, one that still strikes me as having been quite transcendent, and I'd like, if possible, to avoid seeming to pass it off as a case, or even a borderline case, of genuine mysticism" (249). This break in the narrative demonstrates Jean's genuine change because of this "Experience." The narrator is still affected by it, which is evident in his decision to retell the story. Establishing the seriousness of this Experience, he then recalls the scene portrayed in the store window: "I was startled to see a live person in the shopcase, a hefty girl of about thirty, in a green, yellow, and lavender chiffon dress. She was changing the truss on the wooden dummy…I stood watching her, fascinated, till suddenly she sensed, then saw, that she was being watched" (249-50). The woman in the case, as McDuffie explains, "seems to be representative of Sister Irma, but she could just as easily be his mother" (171). Jean's shock and reaction to her suggests his longing for human connection and healing. However, the girl, representative of his mother, is behind glass and he cannot reach her. This symbolic wall between them is heightened as the girl is startled and falls while the narrator explains his perspective: "I reached out to her instantly, hitting the tips of my fingers on the glass" (250). Just as he cannot connect with Sister Irma, or physically connect with his mother, Jean is stuck in his grief, outside the glass. McDuffie agrees, stating that "Jean cannot help the girl from falling any more than he could stop his mother from dying; in fact, his attempts have caused her to fall. In this way, Jean must recognize his complicity in the girl's fall and in 'losing' Sister Irma" (172). Jean finally sees his inability to prevent his mother's death as the girl falls, which in turn, initiates his great Experience.

Jean's Experience gives him the ability to handle his grief, recognize his broken perspective of the world, and reconnect with others—ultimately bringing him spiritual and emotional healing. The Experience is prompted by the girl's fall, which invokes the idea and, perhaps, the spiritual presence of his mother. Unable to reach out to the girl or his mother, the

Experience begins: “the sun came up and sped toward the bridge of my nose at the rate of ninety-three million miles a second. Blinded and very frightened—I had to put my hand on the glass to keep my balance. The thing lasted no more than a few seconds. When I got my sight back, the girl had gone from the window, leaving behind her a shimmering field of exquisite, twice-blessed, enamel flowers” (250). The light of the sun drastically alters his perspective; instead of a dark, lonely, world of pessimism, the sun brings light into his eyes and gifts him a new way of seeing. The sunlight directly moving toward the bridge of his nose alludes back to the man without a nose and, as McDuffie explains, "allows him to see beyond the material world and through Mary Magdalene’s eyes wearing ‘no part of grief’ or unhappiness” (172). Jean’s blindness here alludes to Saul’s transformation to Paul in the Bible; Saul was blinded by God and given a new purpose and identity as Paul, who becomes a prominent figure in Christianity. This shift in identity mirrors Jean’s own transformation. From having no identity, Jean is gifted with grace through this Experience. Now able to see after this Saul/Paul like blindness, Jean reaches out to the glass for balance. This posture connects back to his reaching out for the girl, and in turn, his mother. Holding onto the glass for balance suggests Jean’s need for spiritual understanding and grace. He is finally reaching out to his mother and finds balance within his grief. Shakespeare agrees, stating that “he is beginning to reach out to the world beyond himself. He is beginning to embrace his involvement with the rest of humanity—to break out of a youthful solipsism into a more mature view of the world” (381). Recognizing the grace extended to him through the gift of his Experience, he is filled with hope as he sees the flowers in the window and can believe that his mother is not gone forever.

Following his Experience, Jean recognizes that he has been selfishly using Sister Irma to fill the void from losing his mother. He decides to free her and, in effect, soothes his grief-

stricken perspective. In his journal, he declares: "I am giving Sister Irma her freedom to follow her own destiny. Everybody is a nun" (251). He now can see everyone as full of grace and in need of understanding. By letting Sister Irma go, Jean symbolically lets go of the pain from his mother's death. Similarly, McDuffie explains, "His ability to see everyone as a nun—as Sister Irma, and by association his mother—reveals the sense of grace that he has found" (173). Jean now is free to move forward, trusting that his mother is not fully gone, and seek human connection, which he finds with Bobby back in America. Jean no longer has to feel lonely in his pain, but instead, can separate the memories of his mother away from death and cling to the positive, joyful days they experienced together. His new perspective is foreshadowed in the title as Shakespeare explains that "the word 'period' assures us that De Daumier-Smith's blues are just a passing phase. As Picasso's Blue Period was followed by the Rose Period…Jean also turns to a rosier view of life" by the end of the text when he is home with Bobby and becomes intrigued by "American Girls in shorts" (384). His appreciation for these women does not stem from objectification but, instead, ties these girls to nuns. If everyone is a nun, then he asserts that everyone is deserving of compassion and grace. Because of his undying love for his mother and acceptance of her death, Jean transcends his materialistic and grief-stricken view of the world in exchange for a world of extended grace.

CHAPTER 4

THE IDEAL MOTHER

Throughout *Nine Stories*, the only perfect mother is in the very heart of the cycle: Boo Boo Tannenbaum, mother of four-year-old Lionel and the hero of "Down at the Dinghy." Boo Boo acts as the cycle's only ideal mother and a spiritual guide for how to preserve love and human connection in oneself and how to shield one's child from the plague of consumerism and inevitable hurt in post-war America. Boo Boo is not consumed by materialism; instead, her nurturing love and spiritual awareness stands in opposition to all other ineffectual women, despite her consumeristic surroundings. Boo Boo acts as a motherly compass to provide a hopeful future for the children in the surrounding stories like Esmé—who follows this narrative—or Sybil, who is inevitably tied to Boo Boo through Seymour.

"Down at the Dinghy" begins with two of the family's maids—Mrs. Snell and Sandra—obsessing over material objects, creating another image of consumerist America. Sandra is immediately described as having an "enormous waistline" recalling the metaphorical use of bananafish to suggest an overindulgent materialist society (111). Mrs. Snell, similarly, is characterized by her love for a black Carnegie hat that she wore all summer "through record heat waves," despite its faded label (112). These women represent the materialistic hell the cycle has warned against. Each item they possess, although they are hand-me-downs, serves this purpose—the hat, the leather handbag that is "extremely worn" with an "impressive label," and Stork Club matches—all labeled as high-end luxury, but physically worn and falling apart. These women value labels and the material; they cannot see beyond the consumeristic world. This characterization is only furthered throughout the text as Sandra belittles Lionel's father with a label and as she cannot understand Lionel's emotions.

When Lionel is first mentioned in the text, Mrs. Snell and Sandra are complaining that Lionel is always "pussyfootin' all around the house" and that they can never "hear" him when they are gossiping about his mother or father (75). Sandra, who is trying to convince herself that she is not worried about upsetting Lionel, says, "I mean ya gotta weigh every word ya say around him" (75). Sandra is correct; Lionel is a very sensitive boy. However, Sandra is always annoyed by his behavior and worried that she will be fired; she cannot see the beauty of his compassion and innocence, as she is so obsessed with her own appearance and status. Joyce Caldwell Smith bases her argument around Lionel's sensitivity as she evaluates him through a Lacanian lens, focusing heavily upon emotion and his reaction to harmful words. She argues that Lionel is "more perceptive than Sybil, having encountered and recoiled from verbal insults since he was two" (480). Lionel feels the weight of people's harsh words despite not fully understanding the meaning of the words themselves.

Lionel frequently runs away from home when he is hurt by the harsh world surrounding him. As Boo Boo explains, Lionel has been "hitting the road regularly since he was two. But never very far" (78). His reason behind running away is always harsh or mean words, like someone saying, "you stink, kid" (79). This time, Lionel runs away because Sandra calls his father an anti-Semitic term—"a big-sloppy-kike" (86). Often in Salinger's work, children are more perceptive to the world than the adults around them; Lionel is no different. Being so young, he cannot express and articulate what this word means. He does, though, understand the tone and sound of the slur when Sandra says it. Unable to articulate his feelings to his mother, he does all that a child can do—cry—and he feels the weight of Sandra's mean tone being directed at his father even without a complete understanding of it. Michael Renganeschi links Boo Boo to Beatrice from the *Divine Comedy* and states that

> Lionel, in his childhood innocence, represents a sort of ideal enlightened figure…who is often unable or unwilling to communicate with people from Mrs. Snell and Sandra's world. Unlike 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish' or 'Teddy,' 'Down at the Dinghy' emphasizes the importance of bridging these two worlds through compassion, care, and understanding: where Seymour…can find no solution but to escape this world, Boo Boo and Lionel are learning to live in it (319).

Even when Lionel does not understand why someone is being cruel or what they are saying, he takes the emotions behind words to heart and needs Boo Boo's guidance to navigate. Lionel has not experienced harsh violence, but understands the emotions behind hurtful words like "You stink, kid" and "kike" (79, 86). Smith agrees in her explanation of Lionel's reaction to this word: "Although Lionel does not even know the [slur], its impact is clear to him" (480). Lionel's emotionally perceptive personality recognizes that Sandra is trying to belittle his father, and it upsets him. Smith continues, stating that the slur's "powerful linguistic threat highlights the prejudice against Jews at that time, in both Europe and the United States, penetrating Lionel's psyche and causing him to question both his father's identity and his own" (480). He perceives people's anger and spite and internalizes them, even when they are not directed at him, because he is so perceptive of emotions and full of compassion—like his mother.

Further proving the importance of Lionel's caring and sensitive personality, Dominic Smith ties Salinger's child characters to the state of America within the story. He writes, "Salinger's stories seem to usher in an entirely different sentiment: the war has been internalized; men are broken and brutalized; corruption of the spirit can only occasionally be undone by the antidote of innocence, often in the form of children" (645). Lionel, thanks to Boo Boo's guidance, acts as a beacon of hope for the younger generation of men. As many children in

Salinger's works, Lionel is enlightened with emotional knowledge and takes on the power of emotions more perceptively than most typical four-year-olds. His sensitivity is a gift to the consumeristic world, despite Sandra's opinion. Maintaining human connection and focusing on spirituality and emotions instead of material objects is the key to surviving in the post-war world—as his mother will teach him later in the story.

The first description of Boo Boo solidifies her identity as the ideal mother: "She was a small, almost hipless girl of twenty-five, with styleless, colorless, brittle hair pushed back behind her ears…Her joke of a name aside, her general unprettiness aside, she was—in terms of permanently memorable, immoderately perceptive, small-area faces—a stunning and final girl" (77). Boo Boo does not obsess over designer clothes, like her maids, or worry about her outer appearance. Her description here is the complete opposite of the stylized images preferred in American culture. Instead, she is excessively and emotionally perceptive, like Seymour wishes Sybil to be, and Boo Boo is not consumed by self-serving desires like so many other women in *Nine Stories*. She is a young "girl," suggesting that she, as John Wenke notes, "retains the spirit of innocence" and can connect with Lionel on a level that other adults cannot despite her own participation in the war (77). Because she has been able to shield herself from corruption and has not changed the way she sees the world, she has a deeper understanding of Lionel's feelings, actions, and how to connect with him. Bryan agrees: "With characteristic dispatch, Salinger has described Boo Boo's exquisite sensitivity, set her off against the farcical style-consciousness of Mrs. Snell and Sandra's meanness…For all the ostensible demerits Boo Boo's appearance might carry to the undiscerning eye, her beauty is so complete that nothing could be added or taken away. That beauty, as Salinger indicates, reflects an inner grace which is on full display as she sees her child through crisis (176). She is a strong and capable woman and mother because of her

selfless love and grace for her child despite her having to adjust to life after her involvement in the war and her ability to remain spiritually grounded despite existing in a wealthier class. Bryan continues, "If there is no more solid evidence that Lionel is on his way to greater maturity, that he will be firmer when the next shock comes, one finishes the story with the conviction that—piloted by Boo—he will surely manage" (178). Boo Boo's strength and ability to withstand the world, specifically remembering her brother Seymour's fate, extends a hand to Lionel and pulls him from his fear to embrace him with understanding.

When Boo Boo comforts Lionel this time, he has run away because of Sandra's use of the slur. He now hides in his father's boat and refuses to come out. As Boo Boo tries to step into the boat to help Lionel, he tells her that "Nobody can come in" (125). However, she playfully talks to her son, knowing he will slowly open up and tell her why he has run away. She portrays her patient love for Lionel as he keeps refusing her and she says, "I have to get up close" to really help Lionel manage his hurt. When she asks him to tell her why he ran away, Lionel answers her by flinging a pair of goggles into the lake. Boo Boo, instead of reacting in anger, simply tells him that these goggles "once belonged to your Uncle Seymour," to which Lionel responds, "I don't care" (127). Still, his mother does not overreact and punish him; however, she uses this moment to teach Lionel how to discern between the dangers of conspicuous consumption and the emotional value of material through an item's association with loved ones.

By allowing Lionel to throw the keys and goggles into the water, Boo Boo is teaching him that he must, as Smith explains, "defer or eliminate the gratification that possession brings" (489). Lionel learns how to toss materialism away and focus on what matters most—for him, he loves eating pickles and spending time with his family. Both characters express a distaste toward the material world except when the items are tied to someone they love. McDuffie discusses the

significance of the items Lionel throws into the water and emphasizes the connection to those he loves: "both the goggles and the keys are representations of the material world and only have significance because of the people that Boo Boo and Lionel care about" (113). The value of objects only comes from the association with people, not because it elevates one's power. The keys are tied to his father; the goggles are a reminder of his Uncle Seymour. So, when he tosses the keys into the water, as McDuffie continues, Lionel "reveals the way Sandra's words have made him feel. Just as Sandra has disregarded his father, he disregards Boo Boo's feelings about the goggles" (113). It is not the items that ultimately matter in Boo Boo's mind in this moment; her son quickly hurts her because he is hurting.

Boo Boo does not act out against Lionel despite him throwing the goggles that belonged to her late brother in the water; instead, she perceives his hurt from Sandra's careless words and responds with love. She still puts her son above material items because, like McDuffie explains, Boo Boo understands that it is necessary to "see-more through Lionel's act of tossing Seymour's 'underwater goggles' into the lake. Lionel's actions are an 'answer' to why he is running away after he promised he would not. Once he throws the keys into the water, Salinger hints at the fact that the key to the story is to see through Seymour's eyes" (118). Knowing the consequences of the consumeristic world through Seymour's death, Boo Boo lets his discarding of Seymour's goggles into the lake be a lesson. Boo Boo wants Lionel to reject the effects of conspicuous consumption; not all material is bad, but the consequences of materialism like casting judgment are exclusive and damaging. By letting go of Seymour's goggles, Boo Boo teaches Lionel that the material is not important.

The name Boo Boo also works metaphorically to demonstrate the role of the ideal mother. Boo Boo is a childlike word to describe wounds, and this suggests her childlike spirit

and her ability to teach Lionel how to tend to emotional wounds and even takes them on herself. Smith also evaluates Boo Boo's name, stating that

> Whereas the name Beatrice is laden with literary overtones, the mother's nickname, Boo Boo, is not at all erudite; instead, it is a nonsensical term important in shielding children from injuries, both physical and emotional. This childish term employed to reduce alarming lacerations, wounds, or abrasions to less frightening 'boo-boos' and to protect children from emotional upheaval is a fitting nickname for Lionel's mother, whose primary job seems to be to foster the Imaginary as the child develops (486-87).

As the word "boo-boo" shields children from the reality of pain, Boo Boo tries to teach Lionel how to handle his pain and challenges in the world, like the existence of antisemitism. Similarly, Renganeschi analyzes the allusion of Boo Boo's full name, Beatrice: "By reading the story through the lens of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, we can begin to see Beatrice 'Boo Boo' Glass Tannenbaum take on the role of her namesake. She becomes a guide for Lionel, who must, as Dante must, navigate two worlds: one of hellish ignorance and bigotry and one of compassion and love" (316-17). A spiritual guide, Boo Boo leads Lionel through his childhood, attempting to protect him from all the pain and hurt for as long as she can—until Lionel reaches his own agency at the end of the story.

In their final conversation, Boo Boo's selfless love helps Lionel communicate his needs and teaches him how to handle his hurt. After Lionel admits that he heard Sandra call his father a "kike," Boo Boo responds, "Well, that isn't too terrible" (86). However, this slur *is* terrible; Boo Boo is simply minimizing the weight and meaning behind the word to comfort Lionel. She asks, "Do you know what a kike is, baby?" and he simply says, "It's one of those things that go up in the air…with string you hold" (86). Lionel does not know the meaning behind the hurtful words

Sandra says but cannot bear the idea of someone being mean to his father. Lionel's misinterpretation mirrors the ridiculous nature of antisemitism and translates a derogatory slur into a toy, as McDuffie argues: "he puts the absurdity of the label into perspective and offers a 'pure perception' of how racism takes something beautiful and defiles it" (115). Lionel's translation of "kike" into "kite" further amplifies his own innocent spirit and need for guidance. The kite also suggests his childhood innocence and his anxiety of loss as a kite can easily slip out of one's hands and drift away. Lionel may translate his father as a kite into a fear of having to one day live without him if his father can simply float away on a fragile string. Lionel wishes to remain in his world where it is safe and runs away from Sandra's words.

Boo Boo does not explain the slur Sandra uses or correct his childlike view of the world. Instead, she encourages Lionel and creates his own perfect world in which they will go get his father in the car, which suggests autonomy, and ride in the boat with his Daddy—a world without antisemitism, materialism, and mean words. This deliberate choice protects Lionel and shows Boo Boo's strength and confidence in her identity as a mother. As soon as Lionel begins to cry over Sandra's words, Boo Boo "lowered herself into the dinghy" as a humble, caring mother. She then sits "in the stern seat, with the pilot on her lap, and she was rocking him and kissing the back of his neck" (128). Boo Boo takes control of the stern to redirect Lionel's pain and bring him comfort. The stern seats in a boat set the direction and speed for the rest of the boat, just as Boo Boo is guiding Lionel. By allowing him still to act as the pilot, she encourages him to see the world as a child playing pretend while giving him autonomy.

The final paragraph of the story establishes a hopeful tone to Lionel and Boo Boo's end, suggesting that Boo Boo operates as a successful antidote for America's spiritually deprived post-war society. Similarly, Bryan analyzes the ending of the story, discussing how the boat

imagery affects the greater themes of the text: "the boat Lionel is piloting is a fresh application of the ship of life metaphor, the name 'dinghy' bespeaking the smallest, most insignificant of seagoing vessels…The child will need his parents' help to venture out, and the story significantly ends on the promise of sails set and a voyage with the family" (175). Boo Boo is certain of what will guide Lionel from childhood to adulthood and knows it is not the harsh truth, but the help of his father and a loving mother who cares for his emotional and spiritual well-being. McDuffie also argues that the final "image of the family sailing, untethered, upon the water into the horizon and the sunset brings the three central planes of the story—home, sky, and the lake—back into focus and reflects the balance between what is seen in the sky and under the water. This balance is ultimately a reflection between the material and spiritual worlds" (119). Boo Boo reestablishes balance within her son's world by teaching him to overcome the materialism of Sandra and Mrs. Snell, disabling the antisemitic slur, and reminding Lionel to see beyond his present hurt and race toward the safety and healing powers of their family. The final lines of the story leave traces of hope for Lionel as he sprints back toward the house, ultimately declaring that "Lionel won" (130). With Boo Boo as his mother and his race won, these words suggest that Lionel will overcome the antisemitic remarks, hateful words, and consumeristic society while spiritually *seeing more* through his mother's guidance.

Boo Boo Tannenbaum is the ideal mother and woman. In the cycle, Boo Boo is the only woman who successfully remains unphased by consumeristic society and focuses entirely on the love she that has for her family. Boo Boo's compassionate words and selfless actions display the healing power of maternal love so many characters in *Nine Stories* lack. By evaluating Boo Boo as the ideal spiritual mother, she can be seen as a roadmap for how to survive in a post-war America by preserving love and significant human connection. Boo Boo is not materialistic or

uncertain because she acts in opposition to all the other ineffectual mothers in the cycle by focusing on compassion and emotion despite the consumeristic world around her. A “stunning,” “final,” compassionate, and certain woman—Boo Boo is the antidote for post-war spiritual devastation, the ideal mother (77).

CHAPTER 5

CONNECTING THE CYCLE THROUGH "TEDDY"

The final story in the cycle, "Teddy," connects each narrative through the spiritual enlightenment of a ten-year-old boy named Teddy. Teddy is the only character of *Nine Stories* to surpass the need for a maternal guide; instead, he embodies the realized notion of mother and pushes against the materialistic world through his spiritual fulfillment. As short-story cycles often answer the issues presented at the beginning of the cycle, "Teddy" offers insight to Seymour's suicide and how one can overcome the materialistic society of post-war America. Kenneth Slawenski explains that "Teddy" was "crafted especially to finalize the destination of *Nine Stories*' journey. Through 'Teddy,' readers reach a place where the power of love through human connection has been transformed into the power of faith through union with God" (250). Teddy's story connects each moment of and longing for human connection in the cycle to spiritual fulfillment, just as each mother and mother figure hinders or encourages spiritual healing. By ending *Nine Stories* with "Teddy," Salinger brings understanding and, perhaps, closure to Seymour's suicide. Teddy's positive view of death allows for an alternate understanding of Seymour's choice, while also offering a method of *seeing more*, beyond the material world.

The story begins with Teddy's father, Mr. McArdle, to establish the consumeristic family and environment of the cruise ship on which Teddy's family is vacationing. Immediately connecting "Teddy" to "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the narrator describes Mr. McArdle as having a "sunburned, debilitated-looking body" and an "inflamed-pink, right arm," like Muriel (253-54). This burn suggests that he, too, is burned from the hellish effects of materialism. Mr. McArdle initiates the story's narrative by asking Teddy to get down from standing on his suitcase to see out of their room's porthole. However, the narrator explicitly states that Teddy is

standing on top of his father's "new-looking cowhide Gladstone" to better "see out of his parents' open porthole" (254). Mr. McArdle emphasizes the brand and price of his bag three times within the first few pages, demonstrating his obsession with material value. He, unlike Teddy, does not see beyond the physical; instead, Mr. and Mrs. McArdle lack the higher perspective that Teddy holds. His father's love for luxury items stands in opposition to Teddy's humble description: "He was wearing extremely dirty, white ankle-sneakers, no socks, seersucker shorts that were both too long for him and at least a size too large in the seat, an overly laundered T shirt that had a hole the size of a dime in the right shoulder, and an incongruously handsome, black alligator belt" (254). Material items and appearance do not matter to Teddy. The only specifically nice object in his appearance is the "handsome" belt that does not suit his personality. Furthermore, the emphasis on his small figure seems to suggest that Teddy is not like the bananafish in Seymour's parable. He does not overconsume and become trapped in materialism like his father.

The details of Teddy's descriptions suggest his precocious nature, and, in effect, his spiritual fulfillment. Teddy is simply unlike other boys, as the narrator explains in Teddy's position on his father's suitcase: "Teddy was not leaning out of the porthole quite so far or so precariously as small boys are apt to lean out of open portholes—both his feet, in fact, were flat on the surface of the Gladstone" (254-55). Teddy's posture here is emphasized. He rejects the material by looking beyond to the ocean. Even when he turns to face his father, his position is again emphasized: "Teddy turned around at the waist, without changing the vigilant position of his feet on the Gladstone" (255). Teddy refuses to accept the over-materialistic world of his parents and continues to *see more*. He remains in the cabin with his head out of the porthole,

successfully navigating both the spiritual and materialistic world through his ability to see beyond.

Teddy's relationship with his father displays his role in the family as a mature caregiver, while using his father's personality to demonstrate the tension and drastic differences between father and son. Mr. McArdle's job is to speak on daytime radio, and the description of his voice suggests his dominating behavior and insecurity: "a third-class leading man's speaking voice: narcissistically deep and resonant, functionally prepared at a moment's notice to out-male anyone in the same room with it, if necessary even a small boy" (255). His "third-class" voice suggests that he is trying to maintain a higher standing through material items like the suitcase. He tries to assert his dominance over Teddy and even reflects his own insecurities about his marriage onto his son. However, Mrs. McArdle furthers her husband's frustrations by obsessing over Teddy. The tension in their marriage is portrayed in Mrs. McArdle's posture toward Mr. McArdle: "She was lying on her right side, her face, on the pillow, turned left, toward Teddy and the porthole, her back to her husband" (256). From this position she has no perspective and only aims to bother Mr. McArdle. She then continues to irritate her husband by telling Teddy to stay on Mr. McArdles' bag and that he should, "Jump up and down" to "Crush Daddy's bag" (256). She takes Teddy's side, further encouraging Mr. McArdle's insecurity and bitterness. Mrs. McArdle, here, is like Mrs. Carpenter in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Both women are entirely superficial, but they also each ignore their children in significant ways. While Mrs. Carpenter ignores Sybil's question about "see more glass," Teddy's mother focuses only on his attention toward her and how the public will view him (10). Her emotional and spiritual ignorance leave Teddy cut off from from human connection; however, Teddy has exceeded the need for his mother's attention and sustains his own spirituality. Beyond establishing their family

dynamic, Mr. and Mrs. McArdle's argument foreshadows the need for rejecting the superficiality of the material world. Mrs. McArdle's dispute with her husband over the bag exposes her expectations for his masculinity. She says, with her eyes closed, "If that bag can't support a ten-year-old boy, who's thirteen pounds underweight for his age, I don't want it in my cabin" (257). This jab at Mr. McArdle's expensive bag suggests that Mrs. McArdle likes to exacerbate her husband's shortcomings.

When someone dumps a "whole garbage can of orange peels out the window," Teddy portrays the extent of his enlightenment: "It's interesting that I know about them being there. If I hadn't seen them, then I wouldn't know they were there, and if I didn't know they were there, I wouldn't be able to say that they even exist" (261). He then is interrupted by his mother before he can continue, eventually saying that soon, the only place the orange peels will continue floating is inside his mind. He says, "that's where they started floating in the first place" (262). Teddy displays his intelligence, maturity, and enlightened beliefs while also invoking the Vedantic idea of *maya*, which Bryan explains: "All manifest things of both mind and body, this teaching holds, are created out of ignorance" (354). In other words, *maya* is the illusion of the physical world taking priority over the spiritual, ultimately preventing one from *seeing more*. The orange peels Teddy watches floating in the water suggest that they are only imagined in his mind, like an illusion. Bryan continues, connecting *maya* to Teddy's family: "What his family perceives of him is not reality but *maya*—peelings which have masked the essence" (354). His parents cannot see him for who he truly is and only see the physical world. In fact, his mother completely ignores him as he talks about the oranges. This ignorance reflects the same dismissal Mrs. Carpenter gives Sybil as Mrs. McArdle ignores the important conversations that lead to human connection but seeks attention and physical affection out of selfishness. Bryan agrees,

explaining that parents “follow their selfish designs. Their possessiveness blocks the love that ‘sees into the life of things’ so that what they do see is merely a reflection of their own egos” (354). Instead of listening to Teddy’s interest in the orange peels, she interrupts and asks where Booper is—not out of genuine concern but because she does not want her “bothering people” or getting sunburned again (262). Mrs. McArdle is concerned about appearance and public perception and therefore cannot connect with Teddy because of her focus on the external. As he leaves, he informs his parents he may only exist in their minds, like an orange peel, foreshadowing his death and existence in their memories.

Teddy’s philosophical words about the oranges also separate him from his family, suggesting that he is self-sufficient and spiritually fulfilled. He tells his mother that his six-year-old sister, Booper, was “adequately covered” after getting sunburned the day before, revealing that Teddy is the only member of the family who is not sunburned, subsequently establishing that he is the only one not consumed by the material world. (261). Instead, Teddy acts as a caregiver for his self-obsessed parents. His mother constantly begs for his attention, asking him to “give Mother a kiss” and trying to encircle “Teddy’s waist” with her arm before he slips away (263). Her need for attention suggests that she is ineffectual and is not truly caring for Teddy. Teddy seems to realize this as he “perfunctorily” gives her a kiss on the cheek (263). He is not interested in fueling her desire for attention, but he does care for her needs. He picks up his father’s pillow from the floor and leaves it for him in case he wants it, cleans his father’s cigarette ashes from the floor, and centers the ashtray on the table. McDuffie argues that his placement of the ashtray creates this image of a camera on the table, suggesting “an attempt to help him see beyond the surface planes of the material world” (190). Teddy, as he looks out the porthole, seeks for his parents to see beyond the physical and align themselves with the spiritual

realm. After caring for his parents, Teddy then leaves to find and look after Booper. These simple actions demonstrate the function of the family; Teddy cares for his family while he is entirely independent. He does not need to rely on his parents because he already embodies the characteristics of an enlightened maternal guide and knows how to navigate materialistic post-war society.

Booper soon appears in the story, operating as a parallel symbol of the possible effects materialism can have on young girls like Booper, or as Seymour worried, Sybil. Booper is cruel to those around her and acts selfishly, like her parents. As Bryan explains: "Booper is the product of her parents' mutual hostility: like the camera she carries, she is only reproducing, reliving, what she has seen and heard" (358). Only six years old, she is already corrupted by the consumeristic world and her parents' refusal or inability to create meaningful human connection with their children. Booper mirrors this disconnect in her bullying. When Teddy finds her, she is with a young boy named Myron who she calls a "carcass" and the "stupidest person" in the ocean (268-69). Myron's family is a victim of war as his father died in battle, and Booper makes fun of Myron because he did not know he would be an orphan if his mother died, forcing him to imagine a life without the one parent he has left. Booper suggests an intelligence that is not inherently spiritual; she appears smart, but she is not enlightened like Teddy. Instead, she is cruel. McDuffie suggests that although "Booper's words seem cruel at first," they should be "read with the understanding that she does not really know what she is saying" (193). Booper asserts her own fears about control onto Myron. She knows she is controlled by her parents, just as Mr. McArdle tries to control Teddy, and so Booper tries to control Myron. However, juxtaposed to Booper, Teddy quickly and kindly reassures Myron that he is not stupid. Finally, Booper leaves when Teddy directs her to take their father his camera. As she exits, Teddy

provides her with detailed instructions about when and where their swimming lessons are, just as a parent would.

Teddy then sits and journals, revealing that he will die either on this day or when he is sixteen, foreshadowing his death at the end of the text (276-77). While he writes, a man named Bob Nicholson approaches Teddy and questions him about his Vedantic beliefs. Eliot Deutsch explains the Vedantic tradition as “a practical guide to spiritual experience” that teaches one to acquire “knowledge only in an act of conscious being” (4). The Vedanta helps one gain spiritual enlightenment and become one with God after death. Teddy, following these beliefs, as he later reveals in conversation with Nicholson, focuses on spiritual knowledge, not logic. In order to reach fulfillment in death, Teddy explains that one must reject logic. Teddy argues that the apple eaten in the Garden of Eden was full of logic: “what you have to do is vomit it up if you want to see things as they really are. I mean if you really vomit it up…You won’t see everything stopping off all the time” (291). The sin committed by Adam and Eve from the Tree of Knowledge, then, is logic—what Teddy believes prevents humans from spiritual advancement. Bryan explains, “Words and logic, according to Teddy, chop and break perception; they come between man and his world and preclude the direct vision which sees the whole as well as the parts” (364). In order to see beyond the finite, physical world, Teddy rejects logic by vomiting up knowledge in exchange for spiritual fulfillment and, in turn, one is opposing the effects of conspicuous consumption. Teddy is not encouraging the rejection of all logic, only the logic that blinds and encourages judgmental behaviors and assumptions. Teddy then reveals that in his past life, he was making very nice spiritual advancement” until he “met a lady” and “sort of stopped meditating” (287). His distraction due to this lady reinforces his idea of sentimentality being “too unreliable” (285). His affections prevented him from being so “spiritually advanced that [he]

could've died" (287). Teddy's Vedantic belief of advancing to enlightenment is hinged on dying; from abandoning his physical body, Teddy is free to "stop and stay with God, where it's really nice" (292). However, one cannot advance without vomiting up all of logic that is tied to materialism.

Post-war America has created a society so enthralled by consumerism that humans lack the essential genuine connections between one another. Teddy recognizes this issue and tries to teach those around him to reject the material and see beyond the physical world. In America specifically, Teddy explains that it is more difficult to align with the spiritual sphere: "It's very hard to meditate and live a spiritual life in America. People think you're a freak if you try to. My father thinks I'm a freak, in a way. And my mother—well, she doesn't think it's good for me to think about God all the time. She thinks it's bad for my health" (287). Teddy explicitly discusses America's judgement of spirituality, suggesting that consumerism led to vacuousness in society. Without human connection and by focusing primarily on the material, humans are unable to connect with each other or seek God—leaving people in need of emotional and spiritual healing, like most characters in *Nine Stories*. The same way that Teddy's father views him, American society views spirituality. His mother's opinion of thinking about God damaging one's health mirrors post-war society's dependence on medicine and psychiatry when, as Teddy suggests, meditation and connecting with others in a deep, spiritual way offers healing as well. Just as Seymour is misunderstood and Sergeant X is wrongly diagnosed, Teddy's family, or the professors questioning him, do not understand his heightened perspective. Each misunderstood character throughout *Nine Stories* has one central need—to *see more*, into the spiritual world, for healing.

Teddy's ultimate ascension into the spiritual occurs with his death at the end of the text. After his discussion with Nicholson, he goes down to the pool for his and Booper's swimming lesson, and it is suggested that he is pushed into the empty swimming pool by his sister. Teddy predicts his own death earlier in the text, noting that he will die on this day or when he is sixteen, but he also tells Nicholson that "I could go downstairs to the pool, and there might not be any water in it…I might walk up to the edge of it, just to have a look at the bottom, for instance, and my sister might come up and sort of push me in. I could fracture my skull and die instantaneously" (294-95). Teddy's example here is so specific that when Nicholson, outside the door to the pool, hears a little girl's "all-piercing, sustained scream," it seems that Teddy's prediction comes true (302). Bryan explains that "Salinger has apparently drawn on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zen to portray a child with a soul perfected through thousands of incarnations and ready for release from the cycle of becoming" (362). Teddy's understanding of life and death combine these religious ideas to establish spiritual fulfillment and push Teddy into peace with God.

Teddy offers answers to the cycle's debate over how to survive post-war America's plague of materialism and find healing. For most characters, mothers and surrogates have provided this nurturing and care; however, "Teddy" suggests that ultimate healing comes from aligning one's spirit with God, which ideal mothers lead their children toward to help them overcome spiritual devastation from the war. Paul Kirschner also argues that Teddy is completely independent from needing maternal guidance: "spiritual faculties, serving time in an American body, need no comfort from anything in this world; they are ultimately assured of the society of Brahma…What counts is communion with oneself, leading, paradoxically, to self-negation and tolerance toward those blinded" by things like logic and emotion (76). Teddy

himself has outgrown the need for a maternal guide and becomes his own. By rejecting logic and the material in order to embrace the continuity of life and death, Teddy finds ultimate peace. He tells Nicholson, “All you do is get the heck out of your body when you die. My gosh, everybody’s done it thousands and thousands of times. Just because they don’t remember it doesn’t mean they haven’t done it” (294). Teddy’s belief that dying only reincarnates one’s soul or transitions one into living with God defeats the westernized idea of death. McDuffie argues that in the same way that Christ defeats death, Teddy’s role is to defeat death and “help others to understand that death is an illusion (or a porthole) so others might see through the illusion of death and follow God” (192). Teddy literally disassembles the fear of death by suggesting that one can relive thousands of times until finding spiritual fulfillment. By overcoming death, Teddy proves that suffering and brokenness is also not definite as healing can always be found. As De Daumier-Smith declares, “everyone is a nun,” Teddy takes this possibility of spiritual healing one step further to embrace the idea that “everything was God” (251, 288). “Teddy” suggests that everything, everyone, no matter the extent of their brokenness and selfishness, can be God. As death is exposed as a cycle of rebirth and spiritual growth, the cyclical genre of *Nine Stories* suggests that each story feeds into the themes and realizations of the others. Instead of ending with Teddy’s death, one is pushed back into the hellish landscape of “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” with a new perspective on Seymour’s suicide, in which rejecting the body is the ultimate material rejection.

Nine Stories offers a path to spiritual healing through the motif of mothers, both the ineffectual and effectual. On the surface, Salinger seemingly organizes the narratives by their original publication date. The first six stories are ordered from earliest to latest, dating from 1948-1950 while “Pretty Mouth” is published the same week as *Catcher in the Rye* and the final

two stories are dated after the novel's publication in 1952 and 1953. However, each piece sets the tone or implements similar themes for the following or preceeding story, suggesting that there is more craftsmanship to *Nine Stories'* arrangement. Prigozy argues that the stories "delineate the path from spiritual death to spiritual enlightenment" (116). The cycle's order is woven together in a way that suggests spiritual exploration within post-war America, frequently guided by mothers and maternal or spiritual guides, to overcome death. Prigozy agrees: "The overriding subject of each story, directly or indirectly, is death—physical, emotional, or spiritual" (117). Approaching *Nine Stories* to understand the mysteries of death in each story uncovers the overarching importance of spiritual healing. Just as Teddy urges Nicholson not to think of everything as finite and stopping, the cycle offers the motif of mothers as one puzzle piece to the layered and spiritually broken landscape of post-war America.

The bookends of *Nine Stories*, "Perfect Day" and "Teddy," offer a new interpretation of death, a theme that is present throughout the entire cycle. Beginning with "A Perfect Day," Salinger creates a scene saturated with materialism through Muriel, her mother, and Mrs. Carpenter. These women present the issues of the cycle: the world is spiritually broken, Mother America has abandoned her children for war and neglected them upon their return, and healing is desperately needed. Sybil, then, like Teddy, acts as an extraordinary child who isn't defined by the material. Teddy certainly succeeds while Sybil's spiritual future is uncertain, although Cotter argues that Seymour succeeds in saving Sybil from this consumeristic disease: "When Sybil sees the bananafish with six bananas in its mouth, the young man kisses her foot in gratitude because her vision no longer comes from earth but from within" (89). Even if Sybil does not fully recognize the spiritual world as Cotter suggests, Seymour's ability to *see more* introduces her to the risks of following her mother's path of consumerism and ingenuine human connection

through the tale of the bananafish. Furthermore, Seymour echoes Teddy's beliefs within this story; as the bananas are too fat to escape their holes, Teddy provides the answer—one must vomit it all up—both logic and the material. Both Seymour and Teddy's deaths can be viewed as spiritual fulfillment when approaching the book as a complete cycle with distinguishable patterns. Kirschner explains that "the suicide in the first story is transmuted in the last, for death has been stripped of its conventional meanings…a completed pattern emerges from the sequence of stories" (76). Kirschner outlines major issues within the cycle and determines that the pattern of *Nine Stories* centers around the deaths seen in the first and last stories. Death, however, operates as a bridge to new life and suggests that the hopeless, broken characters within the pages can reach spiritual fulfillment—often through the guidance of mothers and surrogate mothers.

The second section of stories can be viewed through the ineffectual mothers and acts as another reminder of post-World War II society's spiritual devastation. "Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut" mirrors Teddy's parents through Eloise's inability to see Ramona. Teddy explains to Nicholson that his parents cannot truly love him: "They don't love me and Booper…I mean they don't seem able to love us just the way we are. They don't seem able to love us unless they can keep changing us a little bit" (285). Eloise acts the same way toward Ramona; she cannot see past her daughter's resemblance to Lew and rejects her because of her own unhappiness. She cannot change Ramona's looks and resents her daughter's ability to move on from her beau when she cannot move past Walt's death. Elosie's inability to see and fully accept her daughter echoes the same inability to see presented in "Perfect Day" and is represented again in Teddy's parents' inability to love Teddy as he is. "Uncle Wiggly" establishes the distance between parent and child demonstrated in the next two stories.

“The Laughing Man” and “Just Before the War with the Eskimos” both establish scenes without effectual mothers. The narrator and the other boys in “Laughing Man” are neglected by their parents despite their traumatic experience while the parents in “Eskimos” are by and large absent from the story. However, both texts introduce surrogate mothers to fulfill the roles as spiritual guides. While the Chief fails to follow through with his duties due to Mary’s abortion, Franklin stands in as the perfect servant for Ginnie. The progression between these two surrogate figures suggests that Teddy is correct; sentimentality can distract from spiritual progress as the Chief slaughters the Laughing Man due to his inability to build a future with Mary, killing the boys’ hero. Conversely, Franklin centers his perspective on the spiritual, guiding Ginnie to do the same. Both stories, as Prigozy explains, portray “a revelation of adult pain” that “intrudes piercingly upon adolescent confusion” (122). Ginnie and the narrator of “The Laughing Man” are introduced to the fear of pain and death, and each must seek spiritual guidance to equip themselves for this reality or to continue, terrified, into the material world. “The Laughing Man” establishes a fear of and sensitivity toward death that reflect the need for spiritual guides, preparing the cycle for an ideal mother.

“Down at the Dinghy” lies at the heart of the cycle as the fifth story, metaphorically suggesting that the heart of the issue within post-World War II society relies on the need for maternal healing. Lionel, directly following the trauma of the narrator in “Laughing Man,” also has an intense fear of loss. Lionel focuses on the possibility of losing his father, like a child loses a kite, and needs compassion and agency. Boo Boo operates as the ideal mother because she offers her son healing while also equipping him to navigate the world. Prigozy compares the Chief and Boo Boo, further connecting the stories’ order: “Like the Chief, Boo Boo creates a fantasy world for Lionel wherein she is the admiral calling her crew with a bugle” (123). In

making this fantasy, Boo Boo does not shelter Lionel from death and loss but prepares him to overcome his fears with the tools of human connection and maternal healing. She teaches Lionel to reject the negative aspects of materialism and to embrace restorative human relationships found in his love for her and his father. Through Boo Boo's service, the mention of Walt and Seymour, Sandra's antisemitic remarks, and Lionel's fear of loss, "Down at the Dinghy" prepares the cycle for a story devastated by war.

"For Esmé—With Love and Squalor" portrays the desperate need for healing in the post-war area through the lens of a veteran and his connection with another extraordinary child; however, Esmé, unlike the other children in the cycle, acts as the ideal surrogate mother. She encourages human connection and ultimately saves the narrator from further devastation. Like Boo Boo, Esmé recognizes that some material objects have value because of the connection to significant people in one's life. She gifts her father's watch as a symbol of love for the narrator and, although the watch is broken, the action guides Sergeant X toward healing. Esmé mirrors Teddy's role as a caregiver in her relationship with Charles and Sergeant X. As Teddy provides spiritual wisdom, Esmé offers nurturing through building genuine relationships. She loves both Charles and the narrator despite their flaws, unlike Teddy's parents. This type of unconditional, unjudgmental love is what sets Esmé's and Boo Boo's spiritual healing apart from the others in the cycle.

Following two of the most healing and hopeful stories in *Nine Stories*, "Pretty My Mouth and Green My Eyes," seems out of place within the progression of spiritual advancement. This narrative unfolds a false relationship between two friends and a marriage that has become a "wasteland," as Joseph A. Thompson argues in connecting the cycle to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Lee is the friend of Arthur but sleeps with Joanie, Arthur's wife. This story is

unique in its lack of maternal figures and spiritual guides. No character is hopeful; Lee does not tell Arthur the truth, and Joanie shows no compassion toward her husband. McDuffie establishes a connection between this story and “For Esmé,” stating that “Salinger inverts the conditions of love and squalor. While in ‘For Esmé’ the condition of squalor comes through tragedy that in turn leads to love, in ‘Pretty Mouth,’ the condition of squalor comes through the characters’ inability to understand love” (151). Unlike Esmé’s ability to love despite squalor, these characters only have squalor. The story, like “A Perfect Day” and “Teddy,” also has images of hell, as Kenneth Hamilton argues: “Hell is absolute for those who deal in appearances and have forgotten what children understand—that hope is born of truth viewed through the eyes of the imagination” (398). The only story that does not have children, “Pretty Mouth” seems hopeless in part because there are no redeeming figures or enlightened children. In terms of spiritual and maternal healing, this story only fits this theme in its complete absence and neglect of healing. Prigozy concludes that in most cases, “the reader is repelled by this brutal revelation of spiritual waste” (125). One could evaluate this story as Salinger’s final scene of a complete wasteland—a horrifying image of what life would be like without restoration—prior to the final two stories of spiritual fulfillment.

“De Daumier-Smith’s Blue Period,” on the other hand, presents an emotional type of wasteland through the narrator’s inability or refusal to face his grief over losing his mother. However, this story aligns with the motif of healing mothers as his mother is what guides him to his spiritual epiphany. Her absence is so significant that even without her physical presence, she still leads him to healing. This power of memory mirror’s Teddy’s argument with the orange peels; the material world exists solely in one’s mind, so death does not have to be devastating or definite. Instead, the narrator of “Blue Period” draws on the memories of his mother and learns

how to live with his grief. Furthermore, Wiegand argues that both "Teddy" and "Blue Period" "explore a solution for the bananafish, first, in terms of union with God and, finally, in terms of re-union with society. The stories demonstrate that although the bananafish is incapacitated by the weight of his experience, he is also afflicted with a psychological conflict between the desire to participate in and the need to withdraw from society" (12-13). Jean struggles to find this balance with the world until his Experience; on the other hand, Teddy naturally recognizes that each person exists in one's life as "part of each other's harmony and everything" (285). Teddy's death does not reject human connection but encourages it through spiritual advancement.

Lastly, "Teddy" establishes the idealized, fully healed embodiment of spiritual mothers through Teddy's own enlightened mind. By rejecting the material and "the logical," Teddy can overcome the consumeristic and spiritually desolate American society, and his death can be seen as a steppingstone into a new life. The ocean liner setting of "Teddy" also works to symbolize the different stages of spiritual healing throughout the cycle as, Bryan explains, the ship transports "all the people at various incarnate stages of spiritual development" (361). Just as the ship is filled with hundreds of souls, the cycle carries a multitude of characters in separate stages of spirituality. Some—Muriel, Eloise, and everyone in "Pretty Mouth"—seem hopeless with no intention of seeking spirituality. Others such as Sergeant X, the narrator of "Laughing Man," Jean, and Lionel are only beginners in their pilgrimages. Boo Boo, Esmé, Seymour, and Teddy, however, are strides ahead. Warren French points out there is a clear "progression based upon the slow and painful achievement of spiritual enlightenment" (63). This emphasis on spiritual advancement suggests that re-reading the cycle after experiencing Teddy's lessons provides a scale of enlightenment in which each character falls. By tracking the employment of spiritual guides, like mothers, the essential antidote for American materialism is found in human

connection and seeing beyond the physical world. Viewing *Nine Stories* as a spiritual cycle filled with maternal guides highlights the interconnectedness of the stories with mothers acting as the necessary healers for a spiritually desolated post-war America.

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