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## Structural and Symbolic Parallels Within the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and the Catcher in the Rye

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STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC PARALLELS WITHIN *THE ADVENTURES*  
*OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE*

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Bachelor of Arts in English  
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May 1989

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH  
at the  
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December 2014

**We hereby approve this thesis**

**For**

**David G. Polster**

**Candidate for the Master of Arts degree**

**for the Department of**

**English**

**And**

**CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S  
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**November 18, 2014**

Dedicated to my wife, Kristi, for all her patience,  
my sons Jaden and Noah, for all the fun,

and to my parents, for all the support throughout  
the years -- I love you all.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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STRUCTURAL AND SYMBOLIC PARALLELS WITHIN *THE ADVENTURES  
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DAVID G. POLSTER

**ABSTRACT**

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye* are both quest narratives in which the youthful protagonist begins his story trapped within a paradigm that oppresses him and – in order to escape – dies a symbolic death, descending to the underworld to learn a sacred truth that will be revealed at novel’s end.

The structure and symbolism are quite similar and follow the archetypal hero’s journey, which I closely examine. In my thesis, I seek to prove that by descending to the “hell” of the Antebellum South and the conformist/materialistic world of post-war America, both Huck and Holden ultimately help to exorcise the demons of their respective war-torn societies.

In my research, I discovered that most critics had not taken this comprehensive “spiritual” approach in analyzing Huck and Holden’s quest, and I concluded that their journey through the underworld, and the sacred knowledge that they discovered there, helped in a small way change America herself.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Of the fact that there are similarities between JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* there can be little doubt. Critics have certainly discovered this obvious link in the sixty-three years since *Catcher's* debut. However, while most scholars have written amply about the two youthful protagonists' language and rebellion, the main similarity that I would like to focus on is more of a spiritual similarity, namely that both protagonists symbolically die within the paradigms that ensnare them and, like so many questing literary heroes before them, are reborn and travel through the Hades-like inner rings of their war-damaged societies only to emerge, on the other side of their journey, with some type of sacred knowledge. To read these texts, then, within the lens of the archetypal quest narrative is to realize the value that both Huck and Holden's hell-wrought vision brings, and the ultimate reward of analyzing the novels within this specific critical lens is to grant agency to the powerfully subversive knowledge that is presented within both texts' resolution – a sacred knowledge indeed that helps transform the country from its old constructs into a New America altogether.



This type of shamanistic criticism is not so overt in all of the discourse pertaining to these two novels, as most primarily focuses on the obvious, such as language. Charles Kaplan writes, in his *Huck and Holden: The Odysseys of Youth*, that “in each the story is narrated by the central figure, an adolescent whose remarkable language is both a reflection and a criticism of his education, his environment, and his times” and that “the slangy, idiomatic, frequently vulgar language ... is remarkable for the clarity of the self-portraits that emerge” ( 77 ). Indeed, many-a-critic dissects the similarities in vulgarity which keep the “(s)ivilized” reader at an aesthetic distance and, by the same token, firmly positions the “appropriate first person vernacular” ( Branch 146 ) of Huck and Holden as outcast in its stance. Moreover, the “primacy of speech” ( Locke 3 ) is analyzed as well, where many scholars rightfully notice the opening similarities between the two texts, where Holden’s narrative stance “consciously echoes” ( Pinsker 28 ) the opening of Huck’s: “You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain’t no matter. The book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing” ( 1 ). And: “If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth” ( 1 ).

Indeed, from the very opening of each, the youthful protagonists’ “vulgar” language ( “ain’t”, “crap” ) establishes a primal intimacy where the first-person

narration seeks to only know the *truth* ( interesting, then, how both novels' openings concern themselves with this concept ). It is this truth-seeking, of course, that has propelled both Huck and Holden to the literary Mt. Olympus, as each character famously rebels against the norms of their society with "a common hatred of hypocrisy and a search for integrity" making them "brothers under the skin" ( Carpenter 316 ). Functioning within the terrors of the Antebellum South and, too, the post-war consumer/conformist era of mid-century America, "both Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield are ... outsiders, uncertain about the necessity and desirability of becoming insiders; moreover, their pariah status suits them for the role of social critic which each more or less unconsciously assumes and to which brings a fine moral instinct" ( Wells 50 ). Ergo, this "fine moral instinct" with which each protagonist rebels makes "them realize that these crises are not merely private but conspicuously social and encompass large questions of freedom, authenticity and civilization and its discontents" ( Locke 2 ), thereby making the two characters not merely iconic but national literary heroes- as both plunge to the dark heart of America only to emerge at the other end of their story with a bit of enlightenment.

Moreso than this similarity between voice and rebellion that so many critics have observed, then, it is this questing nature of the protagonists that most thematically links the two texts. Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller write in their seminal *J.D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff* that:

*The Catcher in the Rye* belongs to an ancient and honorable narrative tradition perhaps the most profound in western fiction. The tradition is the central pattern of the epic and has been enriched by every tongue; for not only is it itself exciting but also it provides that artist a framework upon which he may hang almost any fabric of events and characters. It is, of course, the tradition of the Quest .... American literature seems fascinated with the outcast, the

person who defies traditions in order to arrive at some pristine knowledge, some personal integrity. ( 129 )

Jack Solomon, too, in his excellent *Huckleberry Finn and the Tradition of The Odyssey* notes that “the tradition and essential pattern of *The Odyssey* is reflected in *Huckleberry Finn*” and that “Twain appears to recognize certain parallels between the two stories as echoes of an archetypal motif in literature” ( 12 ) and Kaplan notes that:

each is fundamentally a story of a quest – an adventure story in the age-old pattern of a young lad making his way in a not particularly friendly adult world. An outcast, to all intents without family and friends, the protagonist flees the restraints of the civilization which would make him its victim, and journeys through the world in search of what he thinks is freedom. ( 77 )

It is the singularity of this quest vision and its accompanying structure that, to me, links *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with *The Catcher in the Rye* so greatly; however, far more than most of the pre-existing literary criticism that has been written since *Catcher's* publication, I will prove that the structural symbolism is far more pronounced than previously examined, as each character's “death”, descent to the figurative underworld, and gaining of sacred knowledge mimics through archetypal repetition a hero's journey specifically designed to enlighten the community that receives it.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HEART OF DARKNESS

A good starting point would be to keep in mind what Arvin Wells, in his *Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield: The Situation of the Hero*, has written: “in both, the narrator-protagonist goes upon a semi-comic odyssey through the heart of darkness as this is manifested in his time and place” ( 50 ). To this end, then, we must first pay attention to the particular “time and place” where the “heart of darkness” occurs, and that is specifically within the defining wars of each of the preceding centuries. Twain’s “heart of darkness” was, of course, the institutionalized slave state of the Antebellum South. Writing *Huck Finn* some twenty years after the Civil War, Twain was disgusted with the various methodologies that the white Southerners used to limit the hard-earned freedoms of the newly emancipated blacks. As if the bloodshed of Shiloh, Antietam and Gettysburg had all been spilt in vain, the South’s nefarious implementation of Jim Crow and the rise of the Klu Klux Klan negated the lives taken on the battlefield and so, to reflect this horror, Twain crafted a youthful innocent to be placed some fifty-some years before his novel’s publication ( and, of course, some thirty years before the Civil War had even begun ) and, in so doing,

propels his thirteen year old protagonist on an epic voyage through the metaphoric blood of Gettysburg and the Cape Coast Castle of Ghana, at odds so badly with the (s)ivilized paradigm that he famously “lights out” in search of something else.

Holden, too, is ritualistically bathed in the blood of the innocents. Unlike Twain, who served with the Confederacy for a short while before deserting to go out West, Salinger was a part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Counter Intelligence Corps and witnessed some of the most horrific events of World War II, where “the war, its horrors and lessons, would brand itself upon every aspect of [ his ] personality” ( Slawenski ). Deployed on D-Day, Salinger fought for twenty-six days in combat and, later, would be sent to liberate the concentration camps of Dachau, where Salinger later wrote that “you could live a lifetime and never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose”. All the time he was stationed in the war, he carried versions of *The Catcher in the Rye* on his person, and Salinger and his inchoate story’s pages “had stormed the beach at Normandy... paraded down the streets of Paris... been present at the deaths of countless soldiers in countless places, and been carried through the concentration camps of Nazi Germany” ( Slawenski ). So traumatized by the events that he experienced that on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, on the day of the German surrender, Salinger sat on a bed alone, wondering what it would feel like to shoot the .45 caliber pistol he held in his hand through his left palm ( Slawenski ). After being hospitalized for war trauma despondency, Salinger returned home to the states in May of 1946 and completed a ninety-page novella of *Catcher* with which he wasn’t satisfied. Continuing to work, he finally finished it to his liking in the summer of 1950, crafting anew within its pages a sixteen year old protagonist who is so at odds

and traumatized within the spiritually vacuous post-war world in which he functions that, like Huck before him, he simply must “light out” from its odious paradigm and soul crushing constructs to discover, instead, a new truth.

Hence, it is within this entire trauma, blood and horror that both characters are spiritually vested *before* their respective story even begins; the domain of the head and heart already manifested by the psychic negativity of their “time and place”. Is it any wonder that on the very first page of *Huckleberry Finn* that Huck’s first person narration tells us that “the Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn’t stand it any longer I lit out” ( 1 ). Here, of course, Huck’s famous line – “*I lit out*” – signifies his oppositional values to the paradigm within which he is forced to function; like two oppositely charged batteries, the values of the Widow and the values of Huck cannot be brought together – they are repellent to one another. Furthermore, it is not only the “regular and decent” ways that repel Huck ( having to wear clothes that make him feel “cramped up” and smothered; having to separate the food on his plate when it’s so much better to eat it all mixed up together ), it is also the larger societal constructs that he cannot accept as well. For example, when the widow wants to teach Huck about Moses, once he finds out that he “had been dead a considerable long time” he no longer finds any value or merit to any of the widow’s religious teachings and says that he “don’t take no stock in dead people” ( 2 ). It is this singular ability to whittle down the world to what only makes sense to him and negotiate the morals of the Antebellum South as they apply to himself alone

that makes Huck such a heroic character; he “takes no stock in dead people” and therefore doesn’t believe that the lessons of Moses and the Bible make any sense for him to believe. The South, because of the so-called “Curse of Ham” and of Biblical verses like Ephesians 6:4-6 -- “slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ” and 1 Peter 2:18 -- “slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh” – believed ( with some exceptions, most notably the Baptists, who were split over the issue ) that God wanted them to have slaves. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, even said in a speech before the US Senate in 1850 that “slavery was established by decree of Almighty God ... it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation ... it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts”. But as signified by the widow and her insistence in prayer, Huck’s iconoclasm does not accept the twisted religiosity of his societal paradigm.

It only gets worse with the widow’s sister, Miss Watson, “a tolerable slim old maid” ( 2 ). After pestering him to sit up straight in his chair, she begins talking to Huck about heaven and hell, telling him that in heaven “all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and forever” ( 3 ). Huck, though, in his intense dislike for Miss Watson, again selfishly whittles down the world to what makes sense to him and doesn’t want to go anywhere – even heaven -- that Miss Watson will be and tells her, instead, that he wants to go to “the bad place”, thus aligning himself against the agency of Miss Watson’s (s)ivilization in

the most pronounced of fashions. Then, without missing a satiric beat, Twain has Miss Watson call in her slaves to say their prayers.

Twain grew up in the Antebellum South where he had “no aversion to slavery” and “was not aware that there was anything wrong with it. The local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind – and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure” ( Duncan, Ward 11). He spent his summers, though, at his rich uncle’s, where he would play in the fields with his uncle’s slaves’ kids and “with those of our own age we were in effect comrades.” Most importantly, he befriended Uncle Dan’l, “who taught him to sing the spirituals and jubilees he would love throughout his life”. Many years later, Twain would write that “it was on the farm that I got a strong liking for Uncle Dan’l’s race ... and my appreciation of certain of its fine qualities. This feeling and this estimate have stood the test of sixty years and more and have suffered no impairment. The black face is as welcome to me now as it was then” ( Duncan, Ward 10-11 ). However, to the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson – and to all of the paradigm in which Huck Finn operates, the black face was not the face of a human being – it was the face of 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a man, it was property.

This psychic negativity of “time and place” is even more amplified with Huck’s father, Pap, who, because of the demented racial hierarchy of the Antebellum South, has more power and prestige than the Widow’s slave Jim; however, this notion of “white privilege” and its accompanying color signification is gloriously subverted by Twain with the introduction of Pap, where his face is “not like another man’s white,



but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl – a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white" ( 19 ). Here, the author inverts the color signification of the South's "white is right" mentality and makes it, instead, something evil (which is, of course, how any black face would perceive a white face peering into their quarters). Moreover, Pap's character is so ridiculously over the top as he lambasts his son for learning how to read and write and go to school yet, again, the satiric intent is that even as a low-class white, he has power within the social structure of the Antebellum South, a fact that is even made all the more ridiculously apparent within his famous diatribe against "a free nigger there from Ohio ... [who] had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat...a p'fessor in a college [who] could talk all kinds of languages" ( 27 ). Pap is incensed not only that this man is well dressed and could vote up North, but also that he can't auction him off and sell him as a slave until he's been "in the state six months". "Thinks I", asks Pap, "what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I wasn't too drunk to get there" ( 27 ) and here, of course, the skewering of Pap's ridiculous notion of privilege is so comically overt that it practically jolts Twain's white readers out of their comfort.

Just as repugnant is the manner in which Pap treats his son, whom he kidnaps from the Widow and transports into a desolate old cabin in the woods, where he "got too handy with his hick'ry", beating Huck, who "was all over welts". Moreover, when he goes off to town to trade fish and game for alcohol, he locks Huck in the cabin for three whole days, leaving Huck "dreadful lonesome" ( 24 ). Terrified and abused, Huck is torn between two worlds; on the one hand, living with Pap was

“kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books nor study” and, on the other hand, was life back in (s) ivilization with the widow and Miss Watson, “where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book” ( 24 ). Like a phantom soul caught in the nether region of a purgatory state, Huck finds the white paradigm of the Antebellum South physically and spiritually suspect and so, the only possible way for him to survive this brutal soul crushing regime of “time and place” is to leave it in the most extreme way imaginable: to die.

To this end, he kills a pig and lets it bleed all over the floor of the cabin; then he “pulled out some of my hair” and “blooded the ax” ( 33 ) with it and drags the butchered corpse through the woods ( leaving a trail ) and throws its carcass into the river, making it look like he was murdered. This crass imitation of the Levitical sacrifice system, where an animal – a bull, goat or lamb, but not a pig – is carefully slaughtered and every body part carefully taken into account is possibly another way of establishing Huck’s irreligious persona or, perhaps, the slaughter is more consistent with ancient Hittite ritual sacrifices, where a pig was used to absorb impurities. Whatever the religious intent, after the animal sacrifice is complete and Huck bathes in its ceremonial blood, his metamorphosis begins and he is cleansed, no longer ever fully vested in the societal branding of who or what “Huckleberry Finn” was. With Huck Finn “dead”, he travels at night like a phantom to Jackson’s Island.

There, he watches “amongst the leaves” as the ferryboat carrying all of the members of the societal paradigm from which he just fled – Pap, Judge Thatcher,

even his middle-class playmate Tom Sawyer – scour the river looking for his body. After they finally give up the search and go home – leaving him officially dead – Huck is at long last “all right now” ( 38 ): he is free. On the island, he “listened to the current swashing along, and counted the stars” and “found plenty strawberries, ripe and prime; and green summer grapes, and green razberries”, and was “boss” ( 39 ) of its whole terrain. Like Jesus who has to die in order to live again, Huck, too, is spiritually reborn on Jackson’s Island, cleansed from the stench of the paradigm from which he just escaped. Hence, it is this “reborn” Huck who again meets Jim, Miss Watson’s runaway slave, and when the latter confides that he “run off” ( 42 ), Huck refuses to abide by the law of St. Petersburg any longer, promising Jim “I ain’t a-going to tell, and I ain’t a-going back there, anyways” ( 43 ), the there in question being, of course, the (s)ivilized world of the Antebellum South and all of its accompanying mores and learned social constructs. Not only is Huck now free, he is *existentially free*.

Holden, too, begins his odyssey oppressed as well. While not nearly as specifically evil as Huck and Jim’s sojourn within the nefarious hierarchy of that “peculiar institution”, Holden’s “time and place” is within the shadows of a time every bit as evil: the atom bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and death camps of Auschwitz. However, rather than being located singularly within this particular heart of darkness, Holden’s physical and spiritual domain exists within the post-war world that suppresses the war trauma of a nation, instead devoting itself, like Eliot’s *Hollow Men*, to various superficialities that don’t have “any roots that clutch” in the least. Like Huck, Holden begins his narrative distancing himself from the operating

regularity of day to day functions within the dominant culture: on page one of Twain's text, Huck "lit out"; on page two of Salinger's, the youthful protagonist-narrator is at his prep school, Pencey Prep, where "it was Saturday of the football game with Saxton Hall [ and ] around three o'clock that afternoon I was standing way the hell up on top of Thomsen Hill" [ and ] you could see the whole field from there, and you could see the two teams bashing each other all over the place. You couldn't see the grandstand too hot, but you could hear them all yelling, deep and terrific on the Pencey side, because practically the whole school except me was there" ( 2 ).

This disconnect from the societal norm is further illustrated when the reader discovers that Holden is "flunking four subjects and not applying [himself] at all" ( 4 ), thereby illustrating that the learning required does not contain value to his fragile sense of self. Nevertheless, either a rebel against the pedagogical teachings of 1940's America or just plain lazy, Holden has clearly signaled his oppositional values to the dominant paradigm, just like Huck, and rejects success as defined by Pencey Prep. Indeed, life at Pencey is signaled by an assortment of characters both major and minor: "the big phony Ossenburger" who made a lot of money after he graduated from Pencey for starting funeral parlors, where Holden imagines him "asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs" ( 17 ), the basketball coach Ed Banky who, even though "it wasn't allowed for students to borrow faculty guys' cars" did anyways because "in every school I've gone to, all the athletic bastards stick together" ( 43 ) and Ernest Morrow, who was "the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey" and "was always going down the corridor, after he 'd have a shower,

snapping his soggy old wet towel at people's asses" ( 54 ). These three minor characters cue to the reader the inherent social values exemplified by life within the microcosm of Pencey Prep and, too, the macrocosm of life within post-war America. Is it any wonder that Holden wants to sit a-top Thomsen Hill, far from the reaches of the crowds?

The major characters, too, exemplify traits of the dominant culture that Holden finds repugnant. There's Robert Ackely, "this guy who roomed right next to me" ( 19 ), whose disgusting grooming habits nauseate Holden ( "the whole time he roomed next to me, I never once saw him brush his teeth" ) and his roommate, Ward Stradlater, whose profane socio-sexual agency serves as the trigger which begins Holden's flight. Symbolically, Stradlater is the foil to Holden's values: he does not appreciate the innocence of Holden's old friend Jane Gallagher or, most significantly, the sacredness of Holden's younger brother, Allie, who died when Holden was thirteen. Allie was the "nicest" member of the Caulfield family and so intelligent that when he played baseball, he used to write poems on his mitt "so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field" ( 38 ). When he died of leukemia in 1946, Holden "broke all the windows in the garage ... with [ his ] fist" and his parents "were going to have [ him ] psychoanalyzed and all" ( 39 ). Gish Jen writes in *A New Literary History of America* that "Salinger fought in some of the bloodiest and most senseless campaigns of World War II ... [and ] it is hardly surprising that Holden's reactions should evoke not only adolescent turmoil but also the awful seesaw of a vet's return to civilian life..... [ where ] it is easy to read the death of his brother as a stand-in for unspeakable trauma". This trauma—his knowledge of

death – is at the heart of Holden’s disdain for the phony world, which seems to repress the horrors of World War II in its march to post-war “normalcy”. Moreover, the virginal Jane Gallagher, like Allie, also signifies innocence, and Holden narrates that when she “used to play checkers...she wouldn’t move any of her kings. What she’d do, when she got a king, she wouldn’t move it. She’d just leave it in the back row” ( 32 ), thus preserving her sexual capital. However Stradlater, in his socio-sexual myopia, doesn’t value any of what Holden finds sacred and, combined with Ossenburger, Banky, Morrow and Ackley, synthesizes into one singular societal unit that is Pencey Prep, which signifies the “bleak moral climate which destroys the soul [ and is ] representative of the general tone of American cultural commentary in the aftermath of World War Two” ( Rowe 129 ). Whereas Huck’s rebellion was against the oppression of (s)ivilization, “Holden’s society holds far more possibilities for horror and depravity, and on a massive scale” ( Branch 155 ), and so he, like Huck, rejects the values inherent in the dominant paradigm and, quite simply, flunks out -- but not before he gets to say “some kind of good-by” ( 4 ) to his History teacher Mr. Spencer, who symbolizes, like Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas, all that Holden rebels against.

At Mr. Spencer’s house, the line is very clearly drawn in the sand between what the dominant paradigm values and what Holden, in his distinct *otherness*, values. Mr. Spencer illustrates the values of the Western world that just brought civilization, yet again, to the brink of the apocalypse and, within his domestic space, as ancient as the Crusader culture that he represents, there “were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops”, signifying its moribund

nature. However, Mr. Spencer is at this time – 1940s America – still very much alive and every bit the embodiment of its law and order. Questioning why Holden has flunked out, he tells Holden that “life *is* a game, boy, life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules” ( 8 ); however, to Salinger, who witnessed first hand what following the rules of the Western paradigm brings – the citizens on the ground at Hiroshima, the Jews in the ovens at Dachau, the traumatized soldier who dreams of shooting a bullet through his hand -what happens when you’re “on the *other* side ... then what’s a game about it?” ( 8 ). With Spencer’s rules operating against what Holden can no longer find value, the sixteen year old simply realizes that “we were too much on opposite sides of the pole, that’s all” ( 15 ) and bids his old teacher farewell, and goes back to the dorm.

All this culture conflict comes to a head when Holden gets back to his room and Stradlater is there. Prior to going to Spencer’s house, Stradlater asked Holden to write an essay for him about something “descriptive. A room. Or a house . Or something you once lived in or something – *you* know. Just as long as it’s descriptive as hell” ( 28 ). What Holden decided to write about was Allie’s glove, something that, to Holden, had a sacred value and affirmed Life in the presence of Death. Stradlater, though, doesn’t recognize the holiness of Holden’s composition and angrily says “for Chrissake, Holden. This is about a goddam *baseball* glove .... You always do everything backasswards.... No wonder you’re flunking the hell out of here,” ( 41 ). Here, destroying the societal contract once and for all between himself and (s)ivilization, Holden defiantly rips up the paper and, by extension, the rules of Mr. Spencer and the entire Western paradigm, lighting a cigarette in the dorm room

as if sending out smoke signals of a forthcoming battle, annoying Stradlater because “you weren’t allowed to smoke in the dorm [ and ] it drove him crazy when you broke any rules” ( 41 ). Angrily questioning his roommate about his date with the sacred/virginal Jane Gallagher, Holden asks “did you ask her if she still keeps all her kings in the back row?” – is she still pure, like Allie? or like Salinger before he went mad with knowledge? Stradlater responds that he took her out in Ed Banky’s car ( the vehicle of choice for Pencey’s athletes – the ones who follow all the rules and are favored by all the rules ) and proceeds to arrogantly take “these shadow punches down” at Holden’s “shoulder”, beating around the bush as to whether or not he gave “her the time in Ed Banky’s goddam car”. When Stradlater finally responds “that’s a professional secret, buddy” ( 43 ), Holden realizes that he must act against the sacrilege of Stradlater’s transgressions -- and so, with the English paper torn on the ground and the smoke from the cigarette hovering in the air, he declares war on the phoniness/profanity of post-war America, trying “to sock him with all my might, right smack in the toothbrush, so it would split his goddam throat open”. Of course, Holden is “not too tough ... a pacifist, if you want to know the truth” ( 46 ) and soon Stradlater is on top of him, pummeling Holden.

Just as Huck had to die in order to live again and bathe within the blood of the ceremonial slaughtered pig, Holden, too, is purified with blood – his own. He narrates “you never saw such gore in your life. I had blood all over my mouth and chin and even on my pajamas and bathrobe. It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me” ( 45 ). Beaten by the profane social agency of Stradlater’s America, he goes back to his room and obsesses, again, about what he may have done with



Jane in Ed Banky's car until he can stand it no longer. At this point, he "decided what I'd really do, I'd get the hell out of Pencey – right that same night and all" ( 51 ) and so he, too, lights out – calling out to his peers "*Sleep tight, ya morons!*", turning his back once and for all on the paradigm in which he initially functions, stepping out, like Huck, into the Great Unknown, *existentially free*.

## CHAPTER III

### A SEASON IN HELL

Hence, the opening third of both texts positions the protagonists as youthful innocents oppressed within the societies in which they function; indeed, their oppression is so great, and their spirit so diminished, that the only way out is to symbolically die. Indeed, one of the more striking similarities between the two texts is the utterance of this exact sentiment. Huck, voicing his discontent living within the laws of the Widow's Hannibal, says "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead" ( 3 ); Holden, too, similarly trapped, also says "I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead" ( 48 ). Whether or not the exact sameness of these lines is intentional or is just merely co-incidence nobody can say except Salinger; however, if the repetition of this line is indeed co-incidence, it is precisely because of the archetypal nature of each text's youthful narrator.

Nonetheless, "Huck and Holden share the mutual condition of being protagonists in death-haunted novels" ( Pinsker 29 ), and the symbolic death of the two protagonists initiates the archetypal quest narrative, as both Huck and Holden "die" and wander to the dark heart of the "time and place" in which they function.

Solomon writes that “the journey to Hades, common to all epic literature, in *The Odyssey* is found in the chapter called “the Book of the Dead [ yet in *Huck Finn* ], Huck cannot descend to Hades as epic heroes do, but he descends as is permitted in the world of realism – he descends to the dead by association on two levels. He pretends to be dead ....” ( 12 ). Thus, shedding ego as defined by the Antebellum South and becoming reborn, like Christ, with Jim on Jackson’s Island, Huck Finn is “Huck Finn” no longer, and the very first time he returns to (s)ivilization after his ego-death, he assumes the persona of “Sarah Williams” ( 55 ), a girl. Holden, too, after fleeing Pencey Prep is “Holden Caulfield” no longer and, while travelling by train to New York City, is reborn as “Rudolph Schmidt” ( 54 ). Their respective paradigms – the Antebellum South and post-war America – are Dantesque wastelands; is it any wonder, then, that both Huck and Holden, like the characters in Eliot’s magnum opus of twentieth century life, also wear “such deliberate disguises/rat’s coat, crowskin, cross staves”? Kaplan writes that “Huck’s voyage down the Mississippi is a series of constant rebirths, a search for identity [ where he ] assumes a series of varied roles” ( 77 ). He also writes that “like Huck, Holden assumes a series of guises during his lone wanderings” ( 78 ). And Solomon, in defending some of *Huck’s* more ludicrous episodes where the “young heroes resort to play-acting [and ] disguises” writes that “one should remember that in one great epic, *The Odyssey* ... the hero, Ulysses, lands in Ithica, [ and ] wears disguises himself” ( 11 ).

As Sarah Williams, Huck returns to the shore life and begins to inquire of Mrs. Judith Loftus about the town gossip. Not surprisingly, she tells “Sarah” about Huck’s

own murder, and informs him that most people think “it was done by a runaway nigger named Jim” ( 56 ). Dressed in a “calico gown”, Huck absorbs all the information from the seemingly affable Mrs. Loftus, who tells Huck “some folks think the nigger ain’t far from here. I’m one of them .... I was pretty certain I’d seen smoke over [ Jackson’s Island ]” ( 57 ). She tells Huck that her husband is going to get a gun and ride a boat to the island to hunt down Jim like an animal, and secure his three hundred dollar reward. This, of course, is one of the many dark beating hearts of Twain’s novel, and indicative of the text’s descent to its hellish “time and place”: that a nice, matriarchal figure like Mrs. Loftus can also be an active participant in the institutionalized slave state of the Antebellum South. Indeed, the evil of this “peculiar institution” is so unquestioned by the general “masses of men” that it doesn’t even seem evil at all, it seems “normal”. Why should Mrs. Loftus see the humanity in Jim when she has been indoctrinated by the Curse of Ham and Ephesians 6:4 to think otherwise? The inherent racism of the South was as natural to her as breathing, but to Huck, dead to the dominant paradigm and existentially/spiritually reborn, her willingness to capture Jim like an animal made him “so uneasy I couldn’t set still” ( 57 ). Fleeing Mrs. Loftus’s rat-infested home, he rides back to Jim and tells him “git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain’t a minute to lose. They’re after us!” ( 62 ).

Only able to inhabit his own body and his own identity with the pariah escaped slave, Huck returns back *as Huck* to heroically inform his friend of his fate should he sleep a minute more. Without question, this plural “us” – “they’re after us!” -- is one of the most important moments in the text – indeed in all of literature – as here

Huck truly aligns himself with that which should be anathema to him: helping a runaway slave escape bondage. At this moment, he embarks upon his heroic quest with Jim, which, in the eyes of the South, is a demonic quest that runs counter to its Biblical teachings.

Farther down the Mississippi, the episode where Huck is separated from Jim and goes ashore as “George Jackson” is a particularly noteworthy descent into the violence of the fallen world that surrounds him. Again wearing disguises consistent with the pattern of quest narratives, “George’s” eyes are opened to the evil of the cultural norms and values of the Grangerfords. Not only does the family engage in a family feud with the Shepherdsons for a reason that nobody can recall, they do so with a particularly blood-thirsty vengeance, hunting each other down in the woods, just as Mr. Loftus would do to Jim. The satiric intent here, though, is for “George” to bare witness to the truism that he sees with his own two eyes: that it is the white people who are the ones who are acting savagely, *not* the black people. In fact, as the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords lay in the woods and take pot shots at each other with their rifles, the black folk – their slaves – have built an alternate community where they are taking care of one another, hiding Jim out in the swamps and feeding him and housing him while he rebuilds the raft and waits for a chance to re-unite with Huckleberry. Moreover, as “George”, Huck goes to Church with the Grangerfords and narrates with a cool deadpan nonchalance that the Sheperdsons were there too -- and all “the men took their guns along” ( 108 ). It is not until the feud escalates between the two families and culminates in his young friend’s death that “George” wished to “get out of that awful country” ( 114 ) – explicitly away

from its senseless violence and back to Jim and the raft, narrating “we said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” ( 115 ).

Similarly, “like Huck, [ Holden ] enters a jungle world, New York City” ( Branch 145 ). Though not as demonically pronounced as Huck and Jim’s Antebellum South, Holden, too, wears disguises and, fleeing Pencey, rides the midnight train to New York as “Rudolph Schmidt”, the school janitor’s identity. It is curious that the affluent Holden chooses the name of the more blue-collar Schmidt as the first of his disguises that he wears; perhaps in his truth seeking the entity that he is most uncomfortable with is his own: “Holden Caulfield”, and therefore initiates his own ego-death to rid himself of his socio-economic privilege. Nevertheless, as he rides the train as Schmidt ( the name being, now, a Pencey Prep student ), he runs into a classmate’s mother – Mrs. Murrow – and realizing that he has to lie to invent a reason why he has left Pencey early, tells Mrs. Murrow that he has “this tiny little tumor on the brain” ( 58 ), a manifestation, perhaps, of Holden’s death-wish.

With the blood from his encounter with Stradlater still on his face, Holden/Rudolph journeys to New York City, and there his quest to the underworld begins masked with a more symbolic nefariousness. As opposed to Twain’s novel being placed before the war, Salinger’s novel is placed after the war and, indeed, it is this seemingly profane universe in which the novel functions that signals its post-war hellishness: in the wake of the horror of World War II, that life, “phonily” enough, goes on in the ashes of its collective Hell. This spiritual freakshow is

therefore introduced as Holden arrives in New York and checks in at the Edmont Hotel. Gazing from his hotel window, he sees a man take “out all these women’s clothes, and put them on. Real women clothes -- silk stockings, high heeled shoes, brassier, and one of those corsets with the strap hanging down and all” ( 61 ). If Huck’s cross-dressing was done for comic effect, the cross dressing that Holden sees is not. It, along with the man and the woman he sees spitting water on each other, is perverse: Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* right outside his hotel window. Huck’s odyssey begins as his youthful eyes are opened as he witnesses the murdered body on the houseboat, the two robbers on the sunken ferry threatening to kill the third man, and seeing his friend, Buck, get killed; Holden’s eyes bear testament to the Fall more as an active participant. To that end, after witnessing the transvestite and water spitters, he calls up Faith Cavendish, a former “burlesque stripper” who “didn’t mind doing it once in a while” ( 63 ). Once she rejects him, he goes down to the hotel bar, again not as “Holden Caulfield” but as a wearer of disguises -- this time as “Jim Steele” ( 73 ) – and tries to get drunk dancing with the three girls from Seattle who just spend their night looking for movie stars, which annoys Holden greatly.

Whereas Huck has Jim to tether him to a morality that transcends the evil of the (s)ivilization from which they flee, Holden has no such talisman to physically guide him as he traverses through the land of the profane, and he is alone – emotionally and physically. Still functioning under the disguise of “Jim Steele” ( 94 ), Holden enters one of Dante’s most lascivious levels of Hell and contracts with Maurice, a pimp, to deal perversely enough, in human flesh. However, when the prostitute

arrives and is the same age as himself, "Jim Steele" loses interest, unable to commit the act with this fellow lost wanderer any more readily than Holden would endorse Stradlater's "giving the time to Jane Gallaher in the backseat of Ed Banky's goddam car" ( 49 ) – he opts out. Of course, Maurice returns and demands more money than Holden originally agreed to pay and, curiously enough, here Caulfield asserts his morality, refusing to pay. Maurice then promptly beats him up for the second time that day as the profane agency of the universe, yet again, is seemingly conspiring to destroy him and, after Maurice and Sunny leave, Holden again dreams his death –wish, narrating that "what I really felt like, though, was committing suicide" ( 104 ).

Indeed, it is this contrast between the sacred and the profane around which the novel – and Holden himself, as its spiritual avatar – wildly oscillates. While Pap is the phantom spirit that hovers over Twain's text, the spirit that looms large over Salinger's is Holden's dead brother Allie. Throughout the course of the novel, Holden talks to Allie, prays to Allie and has Allie help him when he feels he is disappearing, and Allie's premature death is the entity that most troubles Holden's fragile mind. Frequently, his family would go to his grave and put flowers on the tombstone, but when it rained "all the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and then go someplace nice for dinner – everyone except Allie" ( 156 ). This *phoniness*, this sense of life going on as if the horrors of World War II hadn't happened, is the dark heart of Salinger's "time and place". If Salinger himself saw the corpses of Dachau,



isn't it profane/perverse to return to the grey flannel world of post-war America and wait in a bar getting drunk and looking for Peter Lorre, or uttering inane niceties such as "glad to've met you" ( 86 ) in the face of Death? Isn't it obscene not to appreciate an essay written about Allie's baseball glove? And yet, this spiritual perversion is all around – it's the "fuck you" written on the walls in the elementary schools and in the mummy's tomb; it is inescapable, unavoidable and is what drives Holden Caulfield the most mad as he journeys throughout the Hades-like freakshow of post-war America.

Interestingly enough, mention of the war is repressed within the text except for the day after Holden is beat up by Maurice and starts thinking of his brother D.B. who – like Salinger – "landed on D-Day" ( 140 ). D.B. once told Allie "that if he'd had to shoot anybody, he wouldn't've known which direction to shoot in, [ saying ] that the Army was practically as full of bastards as the Nazis were" ( 140 ) and then, codifying the agency of the various characters with whom he has battled, Holden narrates "it'd drive me crazy if I had to be in the Army and be with a bunch of guys like Ackley and Stradlater and old Maurice all the time" ( 140 ), therefore subverting the entire paradigm of Spencer's America in one truth-seeking utterance. However, the narration that I find the most telling is the one Holden ends his anti-Army riff with: "anyways, I'm sort of glad they've got the atom bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will" ( 141 ). Indeed, for a novel that was written throughout and even during some of the most horrific fighting of the war, and for a novel to be written by an author whose entire frame-of-reference was shaped by his experience

in the war, this lone, Major Kong-like line ( the bomb-riding cowboy major from Stanley Kubrick's anti-war black comedy *Dr. Strangelove* ) is, without question, paramount to understanding the text. It's an absurd thing to say – you'll sit on top of the atom bomb; it's an insensitive thing to say -- you're glad they invented it—but it's the most revealing, honest and raw sentence in the book as its absurdity and “insensitivity” reveal, to me, the war trauma of Salinger as manifested by his alter-ego, Holden Caulfield: indeed, this sentence is the seed from which Holden's entire insanity has bloomed; it is the germ from which the illness has spread – (all other sentences in the book are fiction, this sentence is reality ) . This sentence is as close to the *insanity* as the reader is permitted. Here, the repression of the horror is momentarily freed.

Therefore, as Holden journeys throughout the Land of the Dead, he, like Salinger himself, becomes a part and parcel of it: damaged, demented, unclean. Possessed, then, by the trauma of the war dead and possessed, too, by the trauma of his dead brother, both Salinger and his literary doppelganger absorb the negative energy and psychic death of the world that they inhabit. Importantly, Holden narrates that:

The guys I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was the lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times as much as the Disciples, that poor bastard. ( 99 )

Holden is referencing the demon known as Legion, whose story is told in Peter 7:34 and Mark 4:5. In the Biblical text, there is a possessed man who lives in a cave who refuses to wear clothes, and who howls and yells, speaking only in tongues. When Jesus comes to the cave and asks the man's name, he replies “My name is Legion for I am many”. This, too, like Salinger's *Dr. Strangelove-esque* riff on the madness of

war, is an important passage in deconstructing the novel's dark spirituality as realized by Holden's possession. Simply put, like Legion, Holden, too, is manifested by many demons. During his quest throughout the nether regions of the underworld, he meets pimps and prostitutes and spiritual phonies of all types, drinking and smoking the entire time like a madman as he, the spiritual avatar of its perversion, manifests the unclean spirits of his "time and place" just as the authorial voice of the text, too, manifests the demons of Dachau and the beaches of Normandy, both ultimately succumbing and capitulating to the horror of it all.

On the edge of a nihilistic self-destruction in his affinity for the demon Legion, Holden calls up an old friend by the name of Carl Luce and feels "like getting stinking drunk" ( 145 ) with him. At the bar, Holden peppers the more mature Luce with a barrage of questions about sex. When he finds out that Luce's girlfriend is Chinese, Holden asks:

"Do you like that? Her being Chinese?"

"Obviously."

"Why? I'd be interested to know - I really would."

"I simply happen to find Eastern philosophy more satisfactory than Western, since you *ask*."

"You do? Wuddaya mean 'philosophy'? Ya mean sex and all? You mean it's better in China? That's what you mean?"

"Not necessarily in *China*, for God's sake. The *East* I said. Must we go on with this inane conversation?"

"Listen, I'm serious," I said. "No kidding. Why's it better in the East?"

"It's too involved to go into, for God's sake," old Luce said. "They simply happen to regard sex as both a physical and a spiritual exercise." ( 146 )

And then Holden proceeds to get really drunk, dunks his head in a wash basin of cold water and wanders around in the cold December night looking for the ducks in Central Park, again thinking of "dying" ( 156 ). The important part of this Legion-

inspired episode, though, is that for the first time in the text, there is a way out of Holden's spiritual sufferings: the East.

Huck, too, is travelling a demonic path as well, as his quest with Jim throughout the nether regions of the Antebellum South certainly runs counter to its teachings of the Bible; however, when Jim is sold back into slavery for forty dollars by the treacherous Duke and Dauphin ( the same amount of gold coins in which Judas sold out Jesus ), Huck sympathetically believes that he should return Jim back as the property of Miss Watson because "it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he'd *got* to be one" ( 208 ). At this point, though, in a move that is repeated when Holden ripped up the paper he had written for Stradlater, this imagined letter to Miss Watson reconnects the social contract Huck has with the socio/religious mores of the (s)ivilization from which he has fled and induces a moment of panic. Far from being autonomous from the rules of the South, Huck capitulates to the psychic hegemony (not for the first time, but for the most spiritually pronounced) and knows that what he is doing goes against God, realizing that "here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven" and "that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire" ( 209 ). Here, the epic hero faces a spiritual crucible as his descent into the perverse, inverted Hades of his "time and place" becomes a reality: do I do the right thing and turn Jim in, or do I do the wrong thing and help him escape and, more importantly, whom do I believe in saying what the "right thing" is anyways?

At the crossroads, Huck looks at the letter he has written Miss Watson, narrating: “it was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it” ( 210 ). At this moment, of course, the stakes have never been so high in either the text or the country itself, and this is the exact “time and place” of that “peculiar institution” that Huck’s epic quest through the dark heart of the Antebellum South has taken him: the perverse construct of its Biblical justification of slavery. “Threatened with an eternity in Hell if he violates the code of Hannibal” ( Olan 24 ), Huck satanically/heroically utters perhaps the most “blasphemous” words in all of American Literature: “all right, then, I’ll *go* to hell” ( 210 ), and rips up the letter, thus initiating the deicide against Jefferson Davis’s God and choosing, instead “the fiery nether world” ( Olan 24 ) of its antithesis to do what is “wrong”. Hence, like Holden’s Legion, Huck too is absorbing the psychic dark space of his paradigm and taking into his head and heart the “horror “ of it all, fulfilling the modus operandi of the archetypal epic hero who must descend to Hades to learn a truth that will ultimately enlighten the society in which he functions.

Returning to (s)ivilization to liberate Jim once and for all from the chains of oppression, our epic hero again returns to the wearing of disguises consistent with the archetypal nature of the quest narrative, this time inhabiting the body and identity of “Tom Sawyer”. As “Tom”, Huck again bears witness to the malevolent “soft” racism of another matriarchal figure, this time Aunt Sally Phelps. When questioned why he was so late coming to their farm, “Tom” said the boat that he was on “blowed out a cylinder head”. Aunt Sally asked “Tom” if anybody was hurt, and

he replies “no’m. Killed a niggger”, to which Aunt Sally utters perhaps one of the most devastating lines in the whole book: “well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt” ( 218 ). In this line, though, Twain destroys the entire construct of the South’s lie that African-Americans aren’t fully human because by the time Huck lands at the Phelps’, Twain has demonstrated to his audience again and again how it is the white Southerners who are savage and barbaric, and not the black slaves. Of course, this knowledge subverts the Antebellum South as signified by Aunt Sally’s egregious utterance and positions, instead, Huck’s “satanic” truth-seeking at the forefront of the nation’s discourse, making him not just an epic hero, but truly a national hero set out to free his friend – and Twain’s readers -- from the Southern heart of darkness.

Nonetheless, as “Tom”, Huck frustratingly enough works with the real Tom Sawyer, now “Sid”, to free Jim from the Phelps, making Jim capitulate to “Sid’s” ridiculous machinations at liberation. Once the boys’ plans work and Jim is free, “Sid” has been shot and here, importantly, Jim stands up yet again to do the right thing, telling the boys “I doan’ budge a step out’n dis place ‘dout a doctor; not if it’s forty year” ( 271 ). When the white doctor comes and needs help with a bleeding “Sid”, Jim majestically emerges from the obscurity of shadows to help nurse his friend, which has the exact same symbolic function as Huck’s decision to go to hell to liberate Jim. In this episode, Jim’s willingness to step from the freedom of his fugitive state back into the very literal hell of the Antebellum South’s subjugation is the same as Huck’s willingness to go to a spiritual hell. Importantly, this mutual sacrifice establishes Huck and Jim as national heroes who teach their post-Civil War

audience that the love they share for one another despite the paradigm in which they function is more powerful than the hate which, again, is the subversive truth that Twain wishes to present to his readers.

As the novel reaches its resolution, Huck's epic voyaging throughout the nether regions has reached its end. Learning that the dead body that Jim shielded him from seeing at the beginning of their journey was indeed the butchered remains of Pap, Huck is released from the patriarchal/cultural terror and is finally free to float like a phantom back into the body and mind of "Huck Finn" once more, putting to an end the ego-death which he perpetuated upon himself. Here, at last, the epic hero has returned home to the shores of (s)ivilization like the brave Odysseus and no longer has to wear the disguises of "Sarah Williams" or "George Jackson" or "Tom Sawyer" any longer but, instead, can finally just be *himself*. No longer the innocent whom he was when he started his quest, Huck's *Song of Experience* has given him the knowledge to put him, like Nietzsche, beyond the generally perceived constructs of good and evil and he is thus free in a manner that radically distinguishes him as truly one of the great literary iconoclasts of all time. Emboldened with this forbidden knowledge, he is again placed in the novel's last paragraph within an existential crucible of sorts: faced with returning back to the corrupt (s)ivilization of Aunt Sally or, instead, to flee the constraints of society yet again, Huck non-surprisingly narrates that "I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before" ( 288 ).

Like Huck's willingness to go to Hell to free his friend Jim, Holden's affinity for the demon Legion has led him, towards the novel's resolution, to the brink of spiritual destruction. Consistent with the novel's motif of sexual perversion as a manifestation of the twentieth century's debasement, Holden leaves his beloved English teacher Mr. Antolini's house because he got "pervery" with him, "patting [ Holden ] on the goddam head" ( 192 ) as he slept on the couch in his home. Awaking to this derangement, Holden quickly gathers his clothes and scampers out the door, where he begins walking down Fifth Avenue and:

Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street, I'd thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, it scared me. You can't imagine. ( 198 )

Collapsing from the psychic weight of the symbolic knowledge that he carries as a witness to the unspeakable horrors of Death ( and its accompanying flannel-suited veneer ), Holden frantically begins praying to his deity of innocence, Allie, begging his brother to please "don't let me disappear" ( 198 ) as his very being oscillates between being here and disappearing entirely from this time/space continuum. Looking for last minute salvation, Holden realizes that he must "light out" from the Inferno in which he functions once and for all, and decides 'I'd start hitchhiking my way out West" ( 198 ) where he'd live as a "deaf-mute", radically and subversively negating once and for all the entirety of operative signifiers of symbolic thought – language -- under which the paradigm of the West and its constructs have been built. Like Huck, Holden is existentially free, but first, like Frost's traveler in the



woods, he still has “some promises to keep” and must say good-bye to his beloved kid sister Phoebe to “give her back her Christmas dough” (199 ).

Returning to the elementary school that he himself attended, Holden has a note to give Phoebe, telling her where to meet him before he heads out West. Within the school, a place that he reveres as a place that housed him before his fall, where you could go on field trips to the Natural History Museum and pass “one of those puddles in the street with gasoline rainbows in them” ( 122 ) , Holden nonetheless is awakened from his sweet nostalgia by the obscenity that he sees on the wall: “fuck you” ( 201 ). Here, Salinger’s weaving of the binary between the forces of innocence and the forces of corruption amplify in Holden’s fragile state and he has dark visions of saving the world from Desecration as he thinks of “wanting to kill whoever’d written it [ and ]how I’d smash his head on the stone steps till he was good and goddam dead and bloody” (201 ). He then goes to the Museum and, there, too, within the Pharaoh’s Tomb, deep within thousands’ of years of human history, Holden finds another “fuck you” (204 ) just as he was feeling “nice and peaceful” within the cool, womblike space. He narrates, “that’s the whole trouble. You can’t ever find a place that’s nice and peaceful, because there isn’t any. You may *think* there is, but once you get there, when you’re not looking, somebody’ll sneak up and write ‘Fuck You’ right under your nose” ( 204 ); the worm in the cosmic apple.

As the novel’s spiritual themes reach their grand crescendo, Phoebe comes rushing down the street holding a suitcase and wearing Holden’s beloved red hunting hat upon her head, his mark of individuality in a conformist world ( and a symbolic reminder of Allie’s red hair ). When Holden asks her what the suitcase was

for, Phoebe tells him "I'm going with you" ( 206 ), indicating that she, too, plans to run away with her older brother out West. However, this infuriates Holden, who can no more stand the thought than he can bear the image of Jane being in the backseat of Ed Banky's car: he will not aid and abet Phoebe's loss of innocence, and that is what "lighting out" with Holden would be. Phoebe, in her *Song of Innocence*, still has some vested interest within the good aspects of society – doesn't she want to act in the school play? - and still, therefore, is holding some metaphoric cards in her hand while her brother has long since thrown in the chips and been spiritually destroyed by his *Song of Experience*. When it is apparent that Holden will not allow her to share in his Great Escape, she "chucked" ( 209 ) his red hunting hat right in her brother's face, rejecting him.

They walk silently through the zoo in Central Park, watching the sea lions and the bears and, gradually, Phoebe softens toward her brother, still not speaking to him, but now walking closer than before. As Salinger weaves the cosmic binary between Innocence and Corruption within the resolution of his text, the two are drawn to the carrousel in the park, where its eternal "nutty music" forever plays the same songs over and over and, here, Phoebe speaks to Holden for the first time, asking him: "I thought the carrousel was *closed* in the wintertime" ( 210 ). He assures her that perhaps it's opened because it was Christmastime, and then he asks her "do you want to go for a ride on it?" After much cajoling ( she initially doesn't want to go on because she's "too big" ), Phoebe reluctantly obliges and Holden watches Phoebe ride on it. She then gets off, tells Holden that she's not mad at him anymore, and gives him a kiss. Then it starts to rain. Holden watches Phoebe ride

the carrousel one more time, getting drenched in the downpour, watching, again, Phoebe “going around and around” where, at long last, he “felt so damn happy” because Phoebe “looked so damn *nice*, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all” ( 213 ) and, as the story concludes, Holden is cleansed.

But what, exactly, causes this cleansing, and how is this the culmination of our hero’s quest? Perhaps, as he is oscillating between the time/space continuum, soaked in the lunacy of Legion and the eternal “fuck-you”, the shifting planes of existence have been deliberately manipulated at the carrousel by Salinger and the reader has been taken out of the Western paradigm altogether and been transported, instead, into a literary/spiritual wormhole. Here, the same Eastern paradigm that Carl Luce had been talking with Holden about earlier in the text has now transfigured the carrousel into a cosmic mandaala of sorts, where the progression of human existence is not linear in the Western sense from birth to death but instead is cyclical in a very Buddhist sense from birth to death to birth – around and around. Thus, as he watches his beloved sister, he is overcome with the beauty of the moment and Holden, who has fought with the Western perception of Time throughout the entirety of the text, has his “destructive unclean spirits exorcized by Phoebe’s love and need for him” ( Locke 9 ) and achieves a type of *satori*. This *satori*/exorcism frees Holden from Legion and enables him to surrender to Time and realize that all of his anger at it will never bring Allie back or, in Salinger’s case, bring back those killed in the war. The utilization of Luce’s East, which is more paramount in the author’s post-*Catcher* work, ultimately helps Holden *and* Salinger’s with their specific knowledge of Death and, in its own small

way, helped open the door to the Eastern-styled spirituality of the 1950s/1960s as the nation, too, sought to heal itself from the ashes of war.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Hence, as epic heroes who were positioned by their respective authors to sojourn through the dark lands of their specific “time and place”, only to emerge upon the other side of their journey with some kernel of enlightenment to present to their reader and his/her society, both Twain and Salinger’s text presciently transformed the American society that received them. In Twain’s case, the love between the white Huck and the black Jim helped paved the way for a New South and, in Salinger’s case, Holden’s total cultural rebellion positioned him as an avatar to the counter-cultural revolution of the mid twentieth century, who recognized in its protagonist’s distinct *otherness* a paradigm shift so radical that it established an alternative value system posited far outside of Spencer’s America -- and the Western tradition itself.

Moreso, then, than just the stylistic similarities in voice and rebellion that most critics analyze, both texts’ protagonists conform to the archetypal role of the questing Homeric hero and structurally and symbolically mirror one another along those patterns: each rebels against the norms and constructs of the (s)ivilization in

which they initially function and, to free themselves, symbolically die and go on a journey in various disguises through the Hades-like underbelly of their respective “time and place” to discover, at the end, sacred knowledge that ultimately enlightens their respective society. Thus, no matter how you look at it, America was transformed as a result of both *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, as both Huck and Holden’s jeremiad helped cleanse the soul of a nation.

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