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## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

### **Images of Childhood in Books of J.D.Salinger and W.Saroyan**

Obraz dětství v díle J. D. Salinger a W. Saroyana

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Veronika Jeřábková

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### **Anotace**

Cílem práce je srovnání povídkové tvorby W. Saroyana s románem J. D. Salingera *Kdo chytá v žitě* a také s několika Salingerovými povídkami. Práce se zaměří především na tematiku dětství v Saroyanových povídkách a v Salingerově románu a porovná nejen motivy dětství zobrazujících se v daných dílech, ale také styl psaní obou autorů, jejich zázemí a v neposlední řadě také vliv autobiografických prvků na celkový prozaický útvar.

### **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is comparison of Saroyan's literary output which concerns mostly stories with Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* as well as several Salinger's stories. The thesis is mainly focused on the motives of childhood which can be found in both Saroyan's and Salinger's books. The thesis further compares the style of writing of both authors, their different background and also occurrence of autobiographical features in their books.

## Contents

1.	Introduction .....	6
2.	Background .....	8
3.	J. D. Salinger .....	9
3.1	Childhood .....	10
3.2	Work in Europe .....	11
3.3	Start of Salinger's Career as a Writer .....	11
3.4	World War II .....	13
3.5	Escaping from Fame .....	13
4.	Salinger's Main Work .....	15
4.1.	The Catcher in the Rye .....	15
4.1.1.	Critics .....	17
4.2	Franny and Zooey .....	18
4.2.1	Franny .....	19
4.2.2	Zooey .....	20
4.3	A Perfect Day for Bananafish .....	21
5.	Salinger's Style of Writing – Language of The Catcher .....	22
6.	William Saroyan .....	24
6.1	Childhood .....	24
6.2	Start of His Career as a Writer .....	25
6.3	Marriage and Family .....	26
6.4	Saroyan Dragged Down .....	26
6.5	In His Declining Years .....	27
7.	Saroyan's Main Works .....	29
7.1	Tracy's Tiger .....	29
7.2	Papa You're Crazy .....	30
8.	Saroyan's Language .....	31
9.	Childhood in Books .....	32
9.1	Main Characters .....	32
9.1.1	Salinger .....	33
9.1.2	Saroyan .....	35
9.2	Religion .....	36
9.2.1	Salinger .....	36
9.2.2	Saroyan .....	38

9.3	Philosophical Thoughts .....	38
9.3.1	Salinger .....	38
9.3.2	Saroyan .....	39
9.4	Family.....	42
9.4.1	Salinger .....	42
9.4.2	Saroyan .....	44
9.5	School.....	47
9.5.1	Salinger .....	47
9.5.2	Saroyan .....	48
10.	Conclusion.....	50
11.	Sources .....	52

## 1. Introduction

I have based my thesis upon symbols of childhood in books of two famous American authors who lived approximately during the same time frame. The first one is William Saroyan who initially impressed himself on my mind by his book *Tracy's Tiger* and later also by several other stories. The second one is Jerome David Salinger who is probably best known for his novel *The Catcher in The Rye*, even though he is more of a story writer.

The work should aim at the subject of childhood in the books of Saroyan and Salinger in order to depict the contrast between adulthood and childhood.

Firstly, I will describe the historical background of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America to indicate the era in which both authors lived. Subsequently, biographies of both authors will follow. The purpose of these biographies is not just to describe the author's life year by year, but most of all, to point out the character as a whole to understand their personality better so that we can highlight the significant or interesting moments in their lives in parallel with their own childhood.

Both Saroyan's and Salinger's biographies will be provided with the name of their main book titles as well as brief plot summaries. As Saroyan wrote great deal of stories in his life, I have decided not to include their plot into this section but add it individually as part of the text wherever mentioned.

Having used many quotations from their books, an individual chapter will deal with the particular language analysing the style of writing. As for Salinger, I will focus on his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, whereas Saroyan's style is considered as a whole piece of work.

The main part of my thesis will further deal with the issue of childhood in context of the main characters themselves, family, school, philosophy and religion. According to this, the thesis will be divided into separate chapters which will describe the features of childhood both in Salinger's and Saroyan's stories.

Concerning sources, I have used mainly the writings of the authors as such for the analysis of childhood. Also encyclopaedias, biographies or newspaper articles have been studied in order to analyse the childhood parallels.



## 2. Background

Both Salinger and Saroyan lived in approximately the same period of time, the twentieth century. Saroyan was born a little bit earlier, in 1908 whereas Salinger was born right after the end of the First World War in 1919. The period of the Great Depression starts in 1930s as a consequence of the World War I.

Soon after, the World War II unleashes and it has an immediate impact on the life of all people.

Salinger's book *The Catcher in the Rye* was not regarded as convenient to publish and it had to be postponed.

The influence of the war on both Salinger and Saroyan is obvious. Both authors reflect their feelings in some of their writings. Probably Salinger's most famous story that had captured his feelings of the war is called *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, Saroyan reflects the war in the novel *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*.

The atmosphere after war is not good and in *Lectures on American Literature* Procházka describes it as follows:

*Since there is nowhere to go, one has to learn to live with chaos. In the age of commercialism, consumer society, and the Cold War, everything is different from everything else, and a unifying reality is gradually disappearing.*<sup>1</sup>

The *Catcher* has often been criticized for the usage of offensive language but Graham claims that the novel includes a strong critique of modern America and that „*It is not Holden who should be examined for a sickness of the mind, but the world in which he sojourned and found himself an alien.*”<sup>2</sup>

Actually Holden's discontentment with the current society shows his morality.

It is not only Salinger's character Holden who feels the alienation but also Franny and Zooey, two siblings of a Glass family. “*Throughout the*

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<sup>1</sup> PROCHÁZKA et al. 2002, p. 295

<sup>2</sup> GRAHAM 2007, p. 33

*Glass stories – as well as in Catcher – Salinger presents his abnormal heroes in the context of the normal world’s dislike and fear of them.”*<sup>3</sup>

Many novels in the time of sixties and seventies established reputations as significant through what Richard Ohmann described as the “illness story”. The main characters of the illness stories felt deep anxieties and often even despair, because they were ill at ease with their increasingly affluent economic circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Then Procházka also adds that “the only solution can be found in individual psychotherapy, or perhaps religion-as J.D.Salinger’s enormously popular early 1960s book, *Franny and Zooey*, seems to propose.”<sup>5</sup>

Saroyan was one of many writers who made a great impression on Salinger. Salinger was somehow fascinated by the enchantment of his hearty lyricism and according to Hamilton Saroyan became a role model in writing for Salinger.

### **3. J. D. Salinger**

Jerome David Salinger, an American writer famous mostly for his book called *The Catcher in the Rye*, was born on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 in New York City. Called Sonny as a child and later Jerry when he was older, J. D. Salinger is mostly described as an extremely tall and slim man with black hair and dark eyes. He wore black clothes that reflected his mysterious character.

Probably the most curious feature about Salinger is the fact that he did not need to gain any fame by publishing books as many other writers do. The fact he does not rush into the publishing gains him a lot more fame than he ever even wanted.

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<sup>3</sup> MALCOLM 2001

<sup>4</sup> PROCHÁZKA et al. 2002, p. 294

<sup>5</sup> PROCHÁZKA et al. 2002, p. 294-5

### 3.1 Childhood

As for Jerome's parents, his father Solomon, Sol for short, was Jewish and his mother Marie, who was Christian decided to change her name to Miriam to cover her religion and propitiate Solomon's family.

In order to emphasize his high social standard of living, Sol buys a very expensive car, which he used to drive his family around the city. He is also very ambitious for his son Sonny so he insists on taking thirteen years old Sonny out of public school to study in very expensive private school.

His childhood is not exactly the happy one. He is expelled out of many schools and he had not very close relationship with his father either. When his father Sol Salinger set up an interview for him at very exclusive private McBurney School, Jerry does not leave a very good impression.

*"[Sonny] had no idea of what he wanted to do with his life. When the interviewer asked him what subject he was interested in, Sonny offered two: drama and tropical fish."*<sup>6</sup>

Despite this poor interview, Sonny is accepted. He may be helped by his father lobbying for him or the interviewer must have found something special in Sonny. So Jerome can start his studies from the fall of 1932. However, he does not stay there for a long time and two years later he is registered to military school in Valley Forge by his father. This school was known for "*whipping aimless young men into shape*"<sup>7</sup>. The idea of a tough discipline apparently interests Sonny's father and he hopes Sonny will change his attitude towards school. It is partly true as Jerome has decided his name Sonny sounds too childish and decides to use Jerry instead.

Even though Jerry is not an excellent student, he is not too bad either. He has much more knowledge of literature than anyone else in his class and he has a potential as an actor too. According to his classmates, Salinger is usually very sarcastic and he has a great sense of humour. But in general, there are two groups of schoolmates. Those who loves Jerry and those who hates him. Girls mostly fall in love with him and boys are getting envious.

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<sup>6</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 37

<sup>7</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 38

Anyway, most of them agree that Jerry is a loner and because of that, it is really hard to start up a conversation with him.

### 3.2 Work in Europe

In spite of signing up to school, it seems that Jerry is not very interested in studying and does not exert any effort to graduate from school. It is only Sol's effort to have his son educated and he tries to arrange interviews at school for him. Sol is clearly unhappy with Jerry's school results and he disapproves Jerry's wish to become a writer. He wants his son to work in a family company of cheese making. Jerry is not excited about it at all as he is mostly interested in writing and in the theatre. Anyway in 1937 he goes to Europe to learn some useful knowledge of trade but the main experience he has got from his trip to Europe does not relate to business but to a girl he meets in Vienna. He also manages to write some stories in Europe.

### 3.3 Start of Salinger's Career as a Writer

When he comes back home in 1938 he decides to enrol at a university once again so he applies to Ursinus College in Pennsylvania in the fall of 1939. He is successful although not for long.

Jerry is very good at telling stories, and many of Jerry's schoolmates are excited when he tells them stories about his experience in Europe. Anyway, his studies are short-lived again and he comes back home to New York. *"He didn't flunk out. I have no information on why he left the college."* B. Boris, the schools' registrar said.<sup>8</sup> Jerry leaves the Ursinus out of a sudden without even saying goodbye. He has a clear picture of what he wants to do in life and he feels he is just losing his time at school like this. *"I'm not satisfied. This is not what I want. I've got to be a writer. Going here is not going to help me."*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 52

<sup>9</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 52

This is to be his very last attempt to accomplish a school.

He desperately needs to find some writing course so as to learn to write in order to become a writer. Finally, in 1939, he enrolls on *Burnett's short-story creative-writing class at Columbia University*.<sup>10</sup> Salinger is fascinated by Burnett's reading of Faulkner's story as he reads the story in the natural way, without any affected gestures, without forcefully changing his voice so as the connection between reader and the writer remains undamaged. "*It was as if he had turned his voice into paper and print.*"<sup>11</sup> Salinger comments.

Despite all that, Salinger does not seem to appreciate the class. He just sits in the back of the room looking out of the window and he looks like he is not even interested in the reading and he totally ignores what Burnett says. At the end of the second semester he comes with his first own novel. Burnett is astonished by that.

The very first money he earns as a writer comes from publishing his story called *The Young Folks* in 1940. It is a story about teenagers drinking and smoking cigarettes. After publishing his first story Salinger has got his own agent, Dorothy Olding.

Salinger writes a story called *Slight Rebellion of Madison* on its basis he later writes the whole novel with the same main character Holden Caulfield, *The Catcher in the Rye*. In December 1941 the story is accepted by the *New Yorker*, but at the time it is ready to be published the Japanese attacks Pearl Harbour therefore publishing of the story has to be postponed as the publishers does not feel comfortable to publish a story about a teenage boy whose problems are nothing with comparison to the war.

The story is finally published after the World War II., in December 1946. The cover of this book was originally in red with a picture of a carrousel horse and Salinger's portray but Salinger insisted on removing his piece for the next edition.

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<sup>10</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 55

<sup>11</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 57

### 3.4 World War II

When Salinger tries to join the Army in 1941 he is denied due to some minor heart condition but as the United States enters the WWII, he is accepted and his army service is to begin.

During the war, Salinger keeps in touch by corresponding with Oona, a woman he met earlier and is madly in love with. Anyway she must have lost interest in him as she marries another man.

In correspondence with Burnett, Salinger admits the big impact of the war on himself. He simply cannot put those horrible things that he witnessed into words. The trauma of his dreadful experience is hidden in some of his stories, especially in the story named *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, where all the stress and emotional tension lead the hero to commit suicide.

### 3.5 Escaping from Fame

When Salinger arrives home from Europe to New York in 1946, he brings with him a French woman named Sylvia, who later becomes his wife. There are not many details about her left as the relationship between them does not last long and she has soon realized she is feeling homesick and returns back home to Europe.

After all these events, Salinger, still being shaken by war, tries to start a brand new life. He decides to exercise, study Zen Buddhism and he also starts to go to clubs more often to enjoy nightlife with several young women.

The *Catcher* is planned to be published on 16th July in 1951, and as Salinger wants to avoid all the fame, he moves to England. Then again, in the midst of July, he was on run again for having the book published in Britain by Hamish Hamilton. Back in America, he refuses to read any reviews of his book. He decides to escape publicity and moves from New York to Cornish, New Hampshire where he stays till the end of his life.

He actually hopes his popularity will disappear quickly but it lasts much longer than he has expected. He hardly deals with all the fame and does not know how to avoid being celebrity. Anyway, when the groundswell

of the reviews and all the publicity diminishes, Salinger asserts: *“I enjoyed a small part of it, but most of it I found hectic and professionally demoralising”*<sup>12</sup>

He promptly makes friends among teenagers living in the new area, he begins to spend a lot of time with them inviting them to his house.

*“He was just one of the gang. He always knew who was going with whom, and if anybody was having trouble in school, and we all looked up to him, especially the renegades.”*<sup>13</sup>

His fondness towards teenagers was obvious. Above all he finds attraction to young teenage girls. First it is a Viennese girl, then he meets Oona and in 1955 he marries Claire Douglas which is nineteen years old and with whom he has two kids later on. But it does not take long and the marriage breaks up in 1967.

Anyway, one of the teenagers he meets in Cornish, Shirlie Blaney, asks Salinger for an interview in order to write an article about his work for some school newspaper. He gladly accepts telling her that the character of Holden may be autobiographical and the boy Holden is in fact his portrait originating from his youth.

*“My boyhood was very much the same as that of the boy in the book, and it was a great relief telling people about it.”*<sup>14</sup>

Anyway, Blaney does not publish her article in school newspaper as she promised, but it is published in the *Claremont Daily Eagle*, New Hampshire's daily newspaper. This obviously makes Salinger very angry. He does not meet up with the kids anymore and as an excuse he pretends not to be at home. It is 1953 and this is his last interview he is going to give to press.

This is also his last interview he is willing to make and he refuses to meet up with any journalists or reporters. No wonder then, he is not too excited when he finds out that Ian Hamilton wants to write a biography about him. Hamilton plans to use several Salinger's letters which Salinger obviously does not approve of and the disagreement between them leads to

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<sup>12</sup> GRAHAM 2007, p. 8

<sup>13</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 175-6

<sup>14</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 177-178

the court. Anyway, the biography is finally published but Hamilton has to reduce the amount of published letters. Salinger expresses his feelings to Hamilton:

*"I hate you. You are a snoop and a thief."*<sup>15</sup> Salinger added *"It is really hard for me. I wish you had to read your own letters written 46 years ago. It is pretty embarrassing for me to read it."*<sup>16</sup>

Generally, it is pretty hard to get some information about Salinger's life as most of his friends and relatives respect Salinger's privacy. One of Salinger's friend Peter de Vries denies talking about Salinger by saying

*Even if you asked me how to spell his name, I would not feel eligible to tell you this. If your story has some gaps then that is because Salinger wants this story to have those gaps.*<sup>17</sup>

According to Hamilton's book *In Search of J. D. Salinger*, Salinger is very hardworking, constantly rewriting and improving his texts. Hamilton also finds out that Salinger gets up early at 5 or 6 in the morning to spend about 15 or 16 hours in front of his typewriter in his workroom.

Paul Alexander remarks that *"consequently Salinger's reputation, at least in the latest part of his life, is based not on the books he has written but on the books he allowed to be published"*<sup>18</sup> Salinger just loves to write for himself and his own pleasure.

## **4. Salinger's Main Work**

### **4.1. The Catcher in the Rye**

This book that made Salinger famous was published in 1951 and it became so popular that it was translated into more than 30 languages.

The fascinating story is written so engagingly that it enables readers to identify themselves with the main protagonist, a 17 year old Holden Caulfield and the narrator who are both in fact the same person.

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<sup>15</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 192, my translation

<sup>16</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 198, my translation

<sup>17</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 170, my translation

<sup>18</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 25



The attractiveness of the book is best to describe by quoting Holden's own words:

*What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it.<sup>19</sup>*

The plot of the novel is rather simple. Holden tells the story retrospectively in the course of just a few days, although it may seem much longer as several incidents, that Holden usually describes very colourfully, come about.

The whole book contains myriads of short but important and interesting stories and each of them is like a little fragment that all together makes a picture. Each chapter describes the character of Holden more and more deeply.

Despite the whole novel is composed of 26 chapters, S. Graham defines 4 main sections of the story that are specified by a certain place and time.

1. at Pencey Prep on a Saturday afternoon and evening (covers chapter 1-7)
2. at the Edmund Hotel on a Saturday night (covers chapter 8-14)
3. public places in Manhattan on Sunday daytime and evening (covers chapters 8-14)
4. apartments in Manhattan from Sunday night to Monday morning (covers chapters 21-24)<sup>20</sup>

The last two chapters are not included into this division. Chapter 25 is set into a moment when Holden meets Phoebe on Monday and, in the very last chapter of 26, we see Holden just at the time from which he actually starts telling the story retrospectively. Therefore the story is in fact ending at its start.

Holden has an older brother D.B. and a little sister Phoebe. He has also another brother named Allie who dies of leukaemia. Holden really loves

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<sup>19</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 22

<sup>20</sup> GRAHAM 2007, p. 19

him and he is so devastated by his sudden death that he breaks all the windows in the garage with his bare fist. He thinks about life and how unfair it is.

Holden is a very smart boy but it seems he does not have any respect for authorities. That is why he was kicked out of many schools so far. In fact, he fights against everything as his mood swings all the time.

Although Holden is 17 years old he admits self-critically acting really strange from time to time. He also describes himself like “crazy” or a “madman”. The conflict between acting like a child and being serious is critical to Holden creating the most important theme of this novel. This so ubiquitous growing up issue runs throughout the whole novel but it is largely reflected in a quotation of psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel. Mr. Antolini, one of Holden’s former professor wrote this quotation about Holden. “*The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.*”<sup>21</sup>

The second main idea of this novel after the problem of immaturity is Holden’s relationship with his little sister Phoebe. Holden really loves her, he thinks of her most of his time and as he is getting older he is also aware of responsibility for her. He wants to keep Phoebe off any danger.

#### 4.1.1. Critics

In the introduction of her review book on the Salinger’s greatest novel Sarah Graham states that *The Catcher in the Rye* is “*one of the most frequently banned books in America.*”<sup>22</sup>

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, which was the day of publishing of the novel in New York, there is an already published review of this book by *New Yorker* on that day acclaiming how “*an extraordinarily great first novel*”<sup>23</sup> it is. Generally the American reviews are much more positive than those in Britain.

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<sup>21</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 195

<sup>22</sup> GRAHAM 2007

<sup>23</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 113, my translation

*Philadelphia Enquirer* was sure that “*there will be no such eccentric book published this year anymore*”<sup>24</sup>

Some reviews also appreciate the strong connection between childhood and adulthood Salinger has depicted. According to the *Time* magazine “*the best you can catch in the rye is the writer Salinger himself. He is able to understand the feelings and mind of adolescent without even being obviously an adult himself.*”<sup>25</sup>

However, there are naturally a lot of negative reviews of this book. It is mainly criticised for the use of offensive language and immorality. *Christian Science Monitor* even “*expressed a worry of spreading this book as there is a risk of widening these types of boys as Holden is.*”<sup>26</sup>

Trying to imitate Salinger’s colloquial and indecent language, James Stern writes a very unusual review of this book in the same way Salinger wrote *The Catcher*:

*This Salinger, he's a short story guy. And he knows how to write about kids. This book, though, it's too long. Gets kinds of monotonous. And he should have cut out a lot about these jerks and all at that crumby school. They depress me. They really do.*<sup>27</sup>

## 4.2 Franny and Zooey

Janet Malcolm says about *Franny and Zooey*, that *when the story was coming out in the magazine, Salinger was no longer the universally beloved author of The Catcher in the Rye; he was now the seriously annoying creator of the Glass family.*<sup>28</sup>

*Franny and Zooey* is a title of a book consisting of two parts which are named accordingly *Franny* and *Zooey*.

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<sup>24</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 113, my translation

<sup>25</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 113, my translation

<sup>26</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 114, my translation

<sup>27</sup> LOMAZOFF 1996

<sup>28</sup> MALCOLM 2001

These stories take us to the Glass family Salinger has made up and they are becoming more and more popular as they appear not only in this book.

*Salinger loves the Glasses more than God loves them. He loves them too exclusively.*<sup>29</sup>

Franny and Zooey are the youngest siblings in the Glass family. They also have a brother Seymour who kills himself in a story called *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*. It is very interesting how Salinger manages to mingle the family line throughout several different stories.

#### 4.2.1 Franny

The first story tells about Franny dating her boyfriend Lane. From the very beginning it is obvious that the couple is having some problems. They are having lunch in a restaurant. Franny does not feel like eating she is very quiet and taciturn. Once she comes back from a restroom she starts telling Lane about a book she finds really interesting.

It is a religious book called *The Way of a Pilgrim* in which the main character is a peasant travelling around the world. He has no break praying to the lord Jesus Christ incessantly spreading his teaching to all the people he meets along the way.

When Franny is passionately telling the story Lane does not either seem to be interested in the book or in its main character as he interrupts her telling claiming *“I hate to mention it, but I’m going to reek of garlic.”*<sup>30</sup> Lane does not share the enthusiasm with Franny considering the book to be rather fanatic.

At the end of the story, Franny faints. As she becomes conscious, Lane has left to bring her some water as well as to get a taxi. Franny lies on the floor alone *“her lips began to move, forming soundless words, and they continued to move.”*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> UPDIKE 1961

<sup>30</sup> SALINGER 1955

<sup>31</sup> SALINGER 1955

#### 4.2.2 Zooey

The second part of the novel begins with Zooey taking a bath and reading a letter from his older brother Buddy. Suddenly his mother Bessie enters the room. She wants to talk to him in person as she is worried about his little sister Franny. Zooey is naturally annoyed when his mother disturbs his privacy.

During the whole conversation, Zooey is constantly asking his mother crossly to leave the bathroom. Zooey eventually discloses to Bessie that Franny has been reading that mysterious book and that it has been influencing her a lot. Franny has taken this book from a bookshelf of her older brothers Buddy and Seymour.

Both Buddy and Seymour are very religious. They try to help their younger siblings to find the right way in their lives. Zooey's attempts to cheer Franny up are unsuccessful initially so he gets an idea to phone her pretending to be Buddy. Very soon she finds out the truth but she is not angry with him. Zooey manages to give Franny consolation and she overcomes her crisis.

Janet Malcolm points out two interesting elements present in the stories of *Franny and Zooey*. They are the food and the cigarettes. The first concerns Franny's diet. Franny eats almost nothing and, as a result, she faints in the end. Then there is an issue of obsessive smoking in *Zooey*. Janet Malcolm says that these two issues, food and cigarettes "*enact a kind of a parallel plot. Cigarettes offer the writer a great range of metaphoric possibilities. They have lives and deaths. They glow and they turn to ashes. They need attention. They create smoke.*"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> MALCOLM 2001

### 4.3 A Perfect Day for Bananafish

It is a story from Salinger's collection of stories named *Nine stories*.

*All of the pieces in Nine Stories are concerned with the loss of innocence and the force of corruption. The adult world becomes the site of corruption in these stories, and childhood becomes a temporary stay against corruption.*<sup>33</sup>

This story tells about a young married couple, Seymour and Muriel Glass. The story has two parts.

In the first, Seymour's wife Muriel has a phone call with her mother. By this conversation, one can already sense that something goes wrong. They talk about Seymour as Muriel's mother is increasingly worried about her husband Seymour, so she warns Muriel that "*Seymour may completely lose control of himself.*"<sup>34</sup>

The second part of the story depicts Muriel with Seymour together on the beach where Seymour meets a little girl named Sybil Carpenter. They talk spontaneously and Seymour gets a strong feeling Sybil is the only one he can make himself understood with. He starts finding some kind of comfort in the childish world. He does not find such an understanding from his wife as she is mostly busy with things like as manicure or hairdressing.

Seymour and Sybil are looking for Bananafish in the water together. He explains to Sybil that Bananafish swim into a hole where they eat bananas and they get so voracious that they cannot finally get out of the hole. When Sybil asks Seymour the reason why they cannot help eating, Seymour says they will get "banana fever" and they will die. The reader is being shown a clear connection with Seymour war experience that still frightens him. He seems to be overeaten by memories as the Bananafish are by bananas that they cannot live any longer.

At the end of the story, Seymour commits suicide by shooting himself in his temple.

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<sup>33</sup> PARINI 2004, p. 518

<sup>34</sup> SALINGER 1962, p. 9

## 5. Salinger's Style of Writing – Language of *The Catcher*

When writing *The Catcher*, Salinger did not even know for sure whether he was going to finish his novel about Holden. He found himself rather “*a dash man not a miler - a short story writer rather than a novelist.*”<sup>35</sup>

The language used in the novel suggests that it is not just an ordinary piece of writing. Thanks to the intimacy and informality hidden in the story, it creates a vivid presence of the main character and the reader can feel like a part of the whole story.

As for the most of Salinger's books, *The Catcher* is written mostly by dialogues which make the book even more readable. Salinger might have followed advice by Jack Woodford. At the time for every newcomer Woodford's textbook of storytelling played a key role in the style of writing. Woodford's advice is that the dialogue should be a great part of every story. “*A story that is 75% of dialogue is 10 times popular than the one with only 50% of dialogues. NEVER go under 25%!.*”<sup>36</sup>

The way Holden tells his story strongly reinforces the intimate connection between the narrator and the reader. The key aspect of this power is that Holden addresses his story to “you” so that the reader gets closely related to the narrator. The whole book even starts with the sentence “*If you really want to hear about it.*”<sup>37</sup> As this is being addressed so personally, it really makes the reader want to hear more about it. Another example could be when Holden says: “*God, I wish you could've been there.*”<sup>38</sup> And thus the effect of getting into direct contact with the narrator has been established.

*The Catcher* abounds with such an informal language that made the novel very famous but criticised either.

Holden often uses some phrases and expressions with a very strong exaggerated meaning but he actually does not mean it literally. For example

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<sup>35</sup> GRAHAM 2007, p. 7

<sup>36</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 62, my translation

<sup>37</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 5

<sup>38</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 219

when he talks about his little sister “she kills me” he just wants to emphasize how amazing she is.

The reader can easily notice a very frequent occurrence of some phrases like:

*and all*

*I really did*

*it really was*

*or something / or anything*

*if you really want to know the truth*

There is also common repetition of expletives like:

*goddam*

*hell*

*ass*

*bastard*

*sonuvabith*

But these expressions are not always as strong as it seems and they never mean just that. It can stand completely opposite to the meaning the reader would have expected.

In order to criticise the world and people around him, Holden uses a word “phony” quite often. The purpose is to deride the character of snobby people using it as an adjective to words like “party”, “smile” or “handshake”. When Holden calls Sally to ask her out, she answers “*I’d love to. Grand.*” Holden as a narrator claims: “*Grand. If there’s one word I hate, it’s grand. It’s so phoney.*”<sup>39</sup>

Holden himself admits he has ‘lousy vocabulary’ and when he speaks he sometimes makes a few mistakes. “*I think I probably woke he and his wife up.*”<sup>40</sup>

Due to the fact that there are some mistakes in Holden’s speech and the book itself is written rather informally, it makes an impression of a vivid spoken story rather than a novel. We are all fallible and that may be actually

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<sup>39</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 112

<sup>40</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 181



the reason why the story is so popular. This book has been generally written for ordinary people regardless of their education. *“Everybody can write. You do not need any specific abilities for that. Professors who write flawless English are the worst writers in the world. The most important thing is the idea, not syntax.”*<sup>41</sup>

## 6. William Saroyan

William Saroyan was born on 31st August of 1908 in Fresno, California.

He was a very famous Armenian American writer, mostly known for his collections of short stories such as *My name is Aram*, novel *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson* or even a play *The Time of Your Life* and many others.

### 6.1 Childhood

When he is only 3 years old his father Armenak dies. This is a very painful loss for little William and he is going to focus on the relationship of father and son later in his works.

After his father’s death, he spends some time in Fred Finch Orphanage in Oakland with his siblings while his mother works hard to make some money. They all reunite later in Fresno.

William’s father was a story writer but he had never published any of his work. When William comes to see his father’s writings he gets immediately inspired. He does not have any intention to accomplish his studies so he drops Technical College soon after. He becomes a self-educated learner in writing and reading. Since he comes from a poor family, he has to earn some money by selling newspapers.

Theme of poverty is often seen in Saroyan’s stories. For example in a story called *Oranges*, which is a part of the collection *Five Ripe Pears*,

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<sup>41</sup> HAMILTON 1999, p. 61, my translation

Saroyan depicts a young boy who thinks of the meaning of life. In order to scrape out a living this young boy decides to sell oranges alongside the road. He soon finds out the harsh reality of the street job. Nobody stops by, nobody smiles at him. He is totally ignored by other people no matter how hard he tries to do his job best. Despite all this he never fails to keep smiling at people and carries on with his job as best as he can regardless of the state of his mind.

The theme of poverty is also depicted in the book of *Papa, You're Crazy*. However the poverty is not described as strong as in the previously mentioned story and it gives a great opportunity to the story to show the true values of life as the father does not care as much of money as of the moral aspect of life.

At the age of eighteen, Saroyan leaves Fresno and moves to Los Angeles where he stays just for a while moving to San Francisco short after. A few years later, at the age of 19, he moves to New York. He is not as successful there as he hopes for. He soon becomes homesick and returns back to his family to San Francisco. He takes up several menial jobs just to keep himself.

## **6.2 Start of His Career as a Writer**

In 1933 he succeeds in serializing some of his works in Armenian journal *Hairenik*. Later the same year Saroyan's tale *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* is published in the journal *Story*.

Soon after other magazines buy his pieces of work and, very quickly, his star is rising even though he comes from a poor family. For Saroyan this means a huge change in everything.

Before long he travels around Europe and abroad. His success continues and in 1940, he is awarded by the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for his play *The Time of Your Life*. Later on, he returns the Pulitzer Prize as it seems too commercial to him.

At the end of the same year, his collection of stories called *My Name is Aram*, is published. The stories include fragments of biographies of his own childhood.

Very often similar autobiographical features can be also tracked in Saroyan's books and Howard Floan *points out that in his early tales the young people of Saroyan's stories had been essentially undiluted projections of himself.*<sup>42</sup> This is also something Saroyan has in common with Salinger who has left much of his childhood experience in his stories.

### **6.3 Marriage and Family**

In February 1942, Saroyan meets Carol Marcus who becomes his wife just a year later. Few months after their marriage, their son Aram is born.

Saroyan joins the US army during the World War II and in the beginning of 1944 he travels to Europe. During the war, he writes *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*, into which his war experience is being projected.

Soon after he returns back home from Europe, in 1946 his daughter Lucy is born. In spite of a promising happy family life, Saroyan's following years are not going to be so. Neither his marriage nor his writing career goes well.

### **6.4 Saroyan Dragged Down**

After the World War II, Saroyan is still deeply affected by the war experience and so are all the people living at the time. The atmosphere is not favourable for anyone. Saroyan probably reflects his situation in a story *Boys and Girls Together* where he talks about a family in which the father, probably a projection of himself, works as a writer.

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<sup>42</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 475

He talks about his profession as a writer and describes how he struggles to earn some money and what more he just left Army therefore his view of the world has completely changed.

*“His stories and plays had earned him a name and more money than he had had in mind [...] but now after three years in the Army he was broke, in debt, bored with his name, with writing, and with art in general, because to the real people, the people in the real trouble, what good did art do?”<sup>43</sup>*

Saroyan starts having problems with drinking and gambling. In 1949 his marriage fails completely and William and Carol break up. Anyway, they are not going to live apart for long as in 1951 they get back together and get married again. But as soon as the next year, Carol files for divorce. William finds a new home in Malibu.

Even though he keeps publishing some stories, his financial situation does not improve and he stays in debt. He hopes to pull himself together in a beach house in Malibu.

A few years later, in 1958, he leaves Malibu and travels to Europe. In Paris he writes a film scenario to earn some money.

*“I certainly didn’t gamble away every penny,” he wrote in a memoir, in a flippant mood. ‘I drank some of it away, and I bought a raincoat.’<sup>44</sup>*

His plays are quite successful in Europe. John Mason Brown, an American drama critic, acclaims: *“Saroyan has managed to widen the theatre’s horizons by escaping from facts and reasons...”<sup>45</sup>*

## **6.5 In His Declining Years**

Finally after some time his problems with gambling and drinking get more or less under control.

Similarly to Salinger, Saroyan also declines interviews. A writer Bella Stumbo writing for Los Angeles Times comments on that:

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<sup>43</sup> SAROYAN 1963

<sup>44</sup> <<http://williamsaroyansociety.org/biographical-sketch/>>

<sup>45</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 476

*"He refused all interviews with the press (on the grounds that the 'knotheads' asked him stupid questions), and even turned down invitations to the White House in later years."*<sup>46</sup>

Saroyan also comments on his age in one interview. *"I'm growing old! I'm falling apart! And it's VERY INTERESTING!"*<sup>47</sup>

This comment gets also supported by the statement of eleven year old neighbour who remembers him as a very vital person. *"I saw him ridin' with no hands and everything, lots of times." He was a great favorite of neighborhood children, and they were favorites of his.*<sup>48</sup>

In 1981, few days before he dies of cancer in hospital, he makes a phone call to the Associated Press saying: *"Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?"*<sup>49</sup>

Throughout his professional life, Saroyan had published more than sixty books translated in about twenty languages.

His interpretation of the meaning of life is greatly expressed in his last published book *Obituaries*, where he says: *"My work is writing, but my real work is being."*<sup>50</sup>

The last sentence of this book says: *"I did my best, and let me urge you to do your best, too. Isn't it the least we can do for one another?"*<sup>51</sup>

According to his last wish his ashes are scattered both in Fresno and in Armenia.

After Saroyan's death, a novelist Herbert Gold writes on Saroyan: *"He didn't want to be the greatest Armenian-American writer in the world. He wanted, very boyishly, just to knock everyone's eyes out with beauty and fun and delight."*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 478-9

<sup>47</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 478

<sup>48</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 478

<sup>49</sup> <<http://williamsaroyansociety.org/biographical-sketch/>>

<sup>50</sup> <[http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public\\_html/overview.html](http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public_html/overview.html)>

<sup>51</sup> <[http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public\\_html/overview.html](http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public_html/overview.html)>

<sup>52</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 474

## 7. Saroyan's Main Works

### 7.1 Tracy's Tiger

The very incentive of this story lies in the poem of *The Tiger* written by William Blake. The poem is also quoted by Tracy in the story.

Tracy has been inspired by the word "tiger" since the first time he heard the word at the age of three. When he is fifteen he goes to the ZOO and the very moment he beholds a black panther it is capturing his attention. He suddenly realizes the tiger is a projection of himself. From this moment on, he has been having his own tiger that follows him throughout his life helping him to deal with his own problems.

As many other Saroyan's writings, *Tracy's Tiger* is a very metaphorical story and it is obvious that the tiger which Tracy owns is not real. The tiger is both peaceful and frisky as well as little kitty and predatory inclining to eccentricity which sometimes makes him uncontrollable. At the end of the whole story, Saroyan reveals that the tiger means love, but the reader can spot there is more to comment. For every single reader of this book the tiger means something different.

Hilský says that:

*Tracy's tiger is a black panther, which escapes the ZOO. Tracy's tiger is love. Tracy's tiger is a dream, desire and joy. Tracy's tiger is Laura Luthy. Tracy's tiger is a five-cent alcoholic beverage. Tracy's tiger is an inflatable for children. Tracy's tiger is a media sensation, puma coloured in black and a big black cat. Tracy's tiger is simply everything, but most of it all, it is something deep inside Tracy.*<sup>53</sup>

Having a "tiger of their own" means also to have a great deal of wisdom that is too much too often seen as a craziness mainly by those who do not have their own tiger.

The very important moment is when Tracy meets Laura and is falling in love with her immediately. But when Tracy visits Laura at home and

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<sup>53</sup> HILSKÝ: epilogue of Saroyan's book *Tracy's Tiger* 1996, my translation

meets her mother, he cannot help kissing her mother when Laura has left the room. This incident hurts Laura a lot and thus he is losing her love at the same time. Soon after, he also loses his tiger when it escapes from him and becomes real. Tracy is sent to Bellevue, an institute for mad people.

When Tracy restores his life back to normal, he starts working for the coffee factory where he reunites with Laura and now he can say goodbye to his tiger as he finally finds his love in Laura. Hilský thinks about the mysterious disappearance of the tiger at end of the story insisting that the tiger has not died. He suggests that “*the tiger does not vanish completely. He has transformed into the picture on the wall or he became the poem which he came from.*”<sup>54</sup>

There can be many tigers found also in more Saroyan’s stories than just in the most familiar one, Tracy’s Tiger. Actually, every Saroyan’s hero has its own tiger.

We can find for instance a reference to tiger in the story *The Barber Whose Uncle Had His Head Bitten Off By A Circus Tiger* or in a book *Papa You’re Crazy*, when a boy takes a roundabout ride with his father and he wants to sit on the tiger, whilst his dad takes the lion.

## 7.2 Papa You’re Crazy

This is a book consisting of very short stories about a father and his 10-year-old son.

Typically for Saroyan, there is no specific plot throughout this work. Every single story is more about how to make the reader look for something extraordinary present in common things rather than giving them a fixed scenario. One can get a very positive and powerful perspective of life and the outlook to the future.

The father for example teaches the son that there should be a table in every household where everyone would put some objects on it and then look at these things carefully. He would put there for example a piece of newspaper, leaf, a button, an apple, a flower. All these things represent his

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<sup>54</sup> HILSKÝ: epilogue of Saroyan’s book *Tracy’s Tiger* 1996, my translation

character and it is clear to see which one is the most precious for him. As for the leaf or a flower, it is obvious he loves the nature and newspaper may represent some kind of wisdom.

## 8. Saroyan's Language

Saroyan's style of writing is very specific. In general, the main focus of every book is the plot. But this does not apply to Saroyan. He usually does not base his stories on any plot and sometimes he also refuses to follow a chronological order of the story, but what is crucial for him is an idea. That is what makes him so special.

*Everything I write, everything I have ever written, is allegorical. This came to pass inevitably. One does not choose to write allegorically any more than one chooses to grow black hair on his head. [...] In fact all reality to me is allegorical.*<sup>55</sup>

Anyway, Saroyan's books are written by quite a simple language which makes the book more accessible to everyone and it makes it also more readable.

*To fully enjoy Saroyan, either in prose or on the stage, you have to be "with" him. This may require effort, but once you are with him, he can take you places you have never been before.*<sup>56</sup>

The Armenian culture that he comes from is a significant feature in his writing inspiration and a key topic in his stories.

Saroyan describes the Armenians in one of his story called *The biggest watermelon anybody ever saw* "... the Armenians are also funny, they know how to have fun, how to make comedy, how to tell funny stories, how to say funny things"<sup>57</sup>

But not only he writes about the Armenian people but about all the people in this world.

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<sup>55</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 475

<sup>56</sup> <[http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public\\_html/overview.html](http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public_html/overview.html)>

<sup>57</sup> SAROYAN 1965



Saroyan has a great ability to describe human mind and soul. *He was powerfully pro-human. He talked and wrote about the human spirit.*<sup>58</sup>

Saroyan seems not to struggle in writing of his books as he says

*“. . . I do not know a great deal about what words come to, but the presence says, Now don't get funny; just sit down and say something; it'll be all right anyway. Half the time I do say it wrong, but somehow or other, just as the presence says, it's right anyhow. I am always pleased about this.”*<sup>59</sup>

It is also noticeable in Saroyan's book *Papa You're Crazy*, how much the boy's father wants him to write his own book, teaching him how to use words, calming him down whenever necessary telling him that it does not matter so much if he makes some grammatical mistakes, but the usage of the right words is very important. Another piece of good advice his father gives to his son is about how to write a good play. He also says that in order to become a good author, the play should pontificate people before entertaining them first.

## **9. Childhood in Books**

### **9.1 Main Characters**

The main characters in both authors' books are usually males. Female characters play but supporting roles in the stories.

Another common feature between Saroyan and Salinger is that their stories are mostly narrated by the main character so it gives the reader a much closer insight into the main character's, usually boys, feelings and thoughts.

Whereas childhood is mostly a symbol of happiness and innocence in Saroyan's work, Salinger describes the age of growing up as a very complicated process and his hero often deals with many problems as it can

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<sup>58</sup> <[http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public\\_html/overview.html](http://home.uchicago.edu/~coleman/public_html/overview.html)>

<sup>59</sup> TAYLOR 1987, p. 476

be seen at Salinger's most popular character, the very rebellious Holden Caulfield.

### 9.1.1 Salinger

One of Salinger's character Holden is described to be a rather rude and unmannered boy in contrast to Saroyan's calm and obedient one. That was also the main reason why there were a lot of critical reviews.

*Salinger's portrayal of Holden includes incidents of depression, nervous breakdown, impulsive spending, sexual exploration, vulgarity and other erratic behaviour.*<sup>60</sup>

Opposing to the negative critics of Holden's behaviour, Virginia Peterson wrote about the hero's innocence.

*Peterson wrote that Holden was on the side of the angels, despite his contamination by vulgarity, lust, lies, temptations, recklessness, and cynicism. "But these are merely the devils that try him externally," she wrote, "inside, his spirit is intact."*<sup>61</sup>

Anyway, there is a slight development of Holden's behaviour going on in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden is mainly torn apart by acting like a child and adulthood. He concedes that:

*I'm 17 now and sometimes I act like I'm about 13.[...]Sometimes I act a lot older than I am - I really do. But people never notice it.*<sup>62</sup>

Even though he sometimes acts really irrationally there are also several signs showing that Holden has grown up.

One of the main features of his maturity is the need to protect his little sister and not only her, but also the other kids. In comparison with his schoolmates, Holden thinks of himself as an adult. For instance, when he sees "Fuck you" written on the school wall and also at the museum, he gets really angry as he thinks of the consequences! What if his little sister Phoebe reads it? He does not want her even to know these words. Phoebe is actually the reason for Holden to grow up.

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<sup>60</sup> LOMAZOFF 1996

<sup>61</sup> LOMAZOFF 1996

<sup>62</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 13

Another one is when he sees Phoebe with a big suitcase packed up insisting to go away with him as she likes him so much that she does not want to stay without him. Holden realizes how silly his behaviour has been and that he does not want Phoebe to feel like this. Finally, when Holden is watching his sister riding a carousel, he says to her that he is not going anywhere and that he will stay and he really means it.

Phoebe is now the only reason for Holden to be serious so much that he wants to become a role model for her.

At the same time Holden is being torn apart by childhood and adulthood. He feels he is just in that stage where he does not belong to either of the group.

*Children are the only people with whom Holden feels a connection, but because he is on the cusp of adulthood, he cannot move freely in the world of children.*<sup>63</sup>

Holden is metaphorically trying to protect the children's innocence. It can be further seen as he explains his dream of being a catcher in the rye. He would be standing at the edge of a cliff protecting all the children playing around from falling down.

Janet Malcolm also points out the fact that

*Salinger is himself a kind of catcher of the children and young adults who appear in his stories and are in danger of falling – threatened by the adults who are supposed to be protecting them, but who cannot keep their hands of them.*<sup>64</sup>

We can see his “protector feelings” not only in the original story *The Catcher in the Rye*, where Holden has a dream of catching children thus saving them from falling down the cliff, but also when Mr Antolini gently strokes Holden's head when he was asleep, or in the story *Zooey* where Bessie enters the bathroom when Zooey is in wanting to talk to him. And just one more example Seymour kissing the girl's feet in the story of *Bananafish*.

Holden's childhood is very similar to Salinger's. Salinger used to play on the stairways of public buildings, he used to ride a bike along Central park and he also fell into a small lake like Holden.

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<sup>63</sup> PARINI 2004, p. 517

<sup>64</sup> MALCOLM 2001

Holden is mostly described as a loner just as Salinger was. Emptiness, loneliness and silence take turns in Holden's dreams. Holden claims that he would like to live on some secluded place where he would just cut the wood and cook all by himself. He would be pretending to be deaf-mute and, one day, he would find some deaf-mute girl partner to live with. However, we cannot substitute the life of the main character for the life of the author.

### 9.1.2 Saroyan

The link between adulthood and childhood is mostly described in the book context of family especially in the father and son relationship. The son is generally described as a young boy discovering the world whereas the father goes for the representation of adulthood which should be sharing its wisdom. The boys are usually very self-reflective as they are able to recognize the difference between the two worlds of youth and adulthood. An excerpt from *Papa You're Crazy* tells it for all: "*When I was five, I wished to be ten. But I am ten now and I would like to be twenty.*"<sup>65</sup>

Another example can be seen in a story *The Beautiful White Horse* coming from the well-known Saroyan's story collection *My Name is Aram* where Aram's cousin Mourad says to Aram who is nine years old: "*You're still a small boy, he said. When you get to be thirteen you'll know how to do it.*"<sup>66</sup>

A great feature of childhood can be found in the book *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson* where Wesley, even though he is a little older than most other Saroyan's heroes, is trying to ease the pain of the military service by various childish games conditioning himself like if he sees a shooting star in the night he will not be killed in the war or if the journey is as long as the number of steps he guesses, his dad will be all right.

In the story called *The Three Swimmers and the Grocer from Yale*, three boys, Aram and his friends Mourad and Joe want to swim across the flooded ditch from one bank to another when it is very cold. When Joe is

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<sup>65</sup> SAROYAN 1964, p. 51

<sup>66</sup> SAROYAN 2009, p. 22

asking Aram “*Can you really swim?*” he replies casually “*Aw, shut up*”<sup>67</sup> Aram is just boasting in front of his friends but he is actually no good at swimming at all.

*“The youth are unlucky because the words do not come easy when their hearts need to talk the most and the grown-ups just talk too much and keep forgetting where to begin and what language they speak”*<sup>68</sup>

But not all of Saroyan heroes enjoy their childhood. In a story called *Fire* from a story collection *Five Ripe Pears*, there is a young boy whose mother dies suddenly. His father together with his new girlfriend is taking care of him but still he feels very sad. He loses every interest in life and he gets depressed so much that it ends up with him setting his house on fire trying to burn all the memories to ashes. It is a very depressing story on helplessness, bad dreams as well as no will to live.

What binds all of Saroyan’s characters together apart from youth is that they all have a vivid fantasy. And each of them also has their own “tiger” as Tracy has.

## **9.2 Religion**

### **9.2.1 Salinger**

In *The Catcher in The Rye*, both Holden and his author J. D. Salinger show some religious aspects in a way. On the other hand, both are being also torn apart by their philosophical minds.

There is an obvious similarity between Salinger and Holden to track in the story. Holden’s parents are of two different religions. His father was Catholic before he married Holden’s mother. The family background of Salinger is almost the same with a slight difference: Salinger’s mother Marie, who is a Christian, gives up her religion for Sol who is Jewish.

Hamilton finds Jerry’s school application form that is filled-in by his father and he is answering the questions about Jerry’s religion by angry

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<sup>67</sup> SAROYAN 1940, p. 100

<sup>68</sup> SAROYAN 1965, p. 58

crossing them out a gesture that probably means no religion at all. It may represent another autobiographical feature that is reflected in the book as Holden mostly acts as if he would not have any religion but deeply inside he feels there is something above us all and he thinks about religion and asks philosophical questions. He definitely believes in something but he cannot name it.

Holden considers himself to be an atheist but he sometimes feels like praying. His last name is Irish and most Irish people are Catholic therefore a lot of people think Holden is Catholic and that drives him crazy.

Probably, it is not religion Holden does not like or accept he just does not want to be a part of anything where most people are included, because he does not want to be like other people. Anyway, Holden is quite sensitive and reflective and somewhere deep inside he feels there is nothing wrong with praying and believing in something.

A very specific reflection of the religion to the story represents Salinger's story called *Teddy*. Salinger later inclined to oriental religion and this story was affected by these religious ideas. The story is probably one of the most controversial stories Salinger ever wrote, as it ends up when Teddy, ten years old genius kills his little sister. Before this incident, Teddy has a philosophical talk with a man called Bob Nicholson in which Teddy revealed he has no feelings, then he mentioned he has a swimming class in a few minutes and outlined a hypothetical situation what could happen if there was no water in the pool and he would be standing on the edge and his sister might push him. Then he leaves to the swimming pool, Nicholson decides to follow him and he suddenly heard "*an all-piercing, sustained scream-clearly coming from a small, female child.*"<sup>69</sup> The most shocking is the fact that Teddy is just a child. Alexander adds:

*"Nothing is more disturbing than the destruction of innocence, and that was what Salinger was writing about in this story. Teddy, the picture of innocence, is capable of cold-blooded murder."*<sup>70</sup>

Religion is an evident topic in *Franny and Zooey* as well and Salinger's concern with Eastern religion is reflected in this story. The main

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<sup>69</sup> SALINGER 1962, p. 144

<sup>70</sup> ALEXANDER 1999, p. 170

heroes are trying to find the moral principles of life, trying to find themselves, their own personalities through religion.

### 9.2.2 Saroyan

Religion and searching for God are very important topics in Saroyan's work too. Saroyan's heroes, even though they are usually younger than Holden, have their own experience with religion as their parents want them to go to church. This is the main theme in the story of *The Presbyterian Choir Singers* and also another one called *The Sunday Zeppelin*, where there are two brothers having moral dilemma over religion and money. They have to choose between spending a nickel for Sunday school and saving it for later in order to buy their dream Zeppelin. Here we can clearly see how well-behaved, shy and humble Saroyan's heroes are. Even though they finally decide not to spend their money for Sunday school, these two brothers feel so bad about what they have done that they confess all to their parents trying to explain the true reason for their savings.

The main character of *Papa, You're Crazy* is also curious about religion and he asks his father several questions.

*"What is a church, papa?"*

*"One of the best rooms in the human household."*

*"What is God?"*

*"The head of that household."*<sup>71</sup>

The boy character in *Papa You're Crazy* also thinks of the church as a theatre. He says that there is a stage like in the theatre where a play takes place.

## 9.3 Philosophical Thoughts

### 9.3.1 Salinger

Holden's view of the life seems to be rather pessimistic and negative. He feels desperate as he is not satisfied with the society he is part of and he

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<sup>71</sup> SAROYAN 1964, p. 48

is convinced he can change the world. Later in the story he finds out how naive and childish he was and that he can do nothing about the society much less about the world.

*Holden views the world as an evil and corrupt place where there is no peace. This perception of the world does not change significantly through the novel. However as the novel progresses, Holden gradually comes to the realization that he is powerless to change this.*<sup>72</sup>

But his character is not as one-sided as it may seem at first glance. Holden is also very self-reflective and thinking about the life deeply.

Holden is down with the loss of his brother Allie who has died from leukaemia. He is just writing an essay for his schoolmate Stradlater about Allie's baseball glove. Holden gets furious when he finds out that Stradlater does not appreciate his essay because he has tried really hard to put all his painful feelings for Allie into the story. The glove symbolizes painful memories of his brother. This is a very rare scene where Salinger shows Holden's sensitive side of his character.

Anyway, the core of the whole story is Holden struggling to decide whether he belongs to the world of adulthood or childhood.

### **9.3.2 Saroyan**

Saroyan often includes philosophical questions in his stories. No matter how simple they are, they mostly represent a great deal of the character and the story.

So is the main protagonist of the story *Corduroy Pants* who likes reading Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Spinoza. There are so many philosophical thoughts going through his mind and, at the very same time he constantly ponders about God. The whole story is composed mainly of inner dialogues of a boy who thinks about quite simple and ordinary things wondering what would happen if there was a man without pants.

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<sup>72</sup><[http://www.studyworld.com/newsite/reportessay/Literature/Novel%5CHolden\\_Caulfields\\_View\\_Of\\_The\\_World-401050.htm](http://www.studyworld.com/newsite/reportessay/Literature/Novel%5CHolden_Caulfields_View_Of_The_World-401050.htm)>



*What if a man wears no pants? It's not just because of good fun nor that he would like to either [...] but simply because he has no pants at all! He has no money to afford buying some! [...] How can we sort him out? Shall we send him to jail? And if so, for how long? And for what?*<sup>73</sup>

Saroyan's hero Wesley, in a very depressed mood, is thinking about the meaning of life and its purpose.

*To oppose the war when it has already started is like to stand against a windstorm after it has swept a house off the ground together with you [...] But as for the windstorm it is sent by God, maybe the war too, I am not sure about this yet, still I think the war is made by humans as well.*<sup>74</sup>

When Wesley is searching for his father's phone number in a telephone directory he finds the list of all names fascinating. Even though he has not found the number he was looking for he is still impressed. "*Names are like poems [...] I like the poetry of names*"<sup>75</sup>

In the same book, *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*, so-called "letters to the people of the world" are thrown away by someone straight from the window into the most populous street. These letters are full of various philosophical thoughts and ideas. Wesley is fascinated by this random action reading those letters greedily.

The last story of the book *My Name is Aram* is called *A Word to Scoffers*. It is a deeply philosophical and also religious story. This story makes a magnificent ending of the whole book as it brings a great message to the reader. In this story, Aram meets an old travelling preacher who says to him that he can save his life with simple advice:

*Well, said the religious man, you stop trying to figure things out and you believe.*

*Believe, I said. Believe what?*

*Why, everything, he said. Everything you can think of, left, right, north, east, south, west, upstairs, downstairs and all*

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<sup>73</sup> SAROYAN 1998, p. 43

<sup>74</sup> SAROYAN 1993, p. 33

<sup>75</sup> SAROYAN 1993, p. 72

*around, inside, out, visible, invisible, good and bad and neither and both.*

*That's the little secret. Took me fifty years to find out.*<sup>76</sup>

Saroyan's heroes are very characteristic for their ability of deep thinking about every little thing, even the most ordinary ones. Be it pears in the story *Five Ripe Pears* or seashells in the book *Papa, You're Crazy*.

For example the boy hero of *Papa You're Crazy* loves his father's poor household, where they have a tablecloth made from newspaper and he even loves it more than any tablecloth. Because they are poor they often talk about money. When the boy asks his father how much money a person needs to live on, his dad answers him: "*Three – Three hundred?– No. Just three.*"<sup>77</sup> The father knows they do not have much money but he explains to his son there are people who have much worse conditions for living.

As for the money, there is a great contrast between modesty and possessiveness in Saroyan's story *The biggest watermelon anybody ever saw*. A young boy named Hap Bashmanian has more money than his friends. He has a dime while other boys had only a penny or two, or even nothing at all. They all argue whether it is better to earn the money or spend it. "*Earn and the world likes you; steal and the world hates you*"<sup>78</sup> says Hap, but another boy named Ara adds: "*But earn and you get tired. Steal and you get more, and don't get tired.*"<sup>79</sup>

In the *Boys and Girls Together* dialogue in which a woman tells her husband she hates being poor, the man answers in a similar way as every other Saroyan's character can possibly react:

*It's not so bad. It makes people more alive. Even when I used to get money, I never stopped being poor [...] What happens is that if you let yourself get rich in money you get poor in living.*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> SAROYAN 2009, p. 138

<sup>77</sup> SAROYAN 1964, p. 75

<sup>78</sup> SAROYAN 1965

<sup>79</sup> SAROYAN 1965

<sup>80</sup> SAROYAN 1963

## 9.4 Family

The main difference between Salinger's and Saroyan's stories is the conception of family life. In general, there are only the basic members of the family described in Salinger's stories. There are not many other relatives than just parents and siblings that the main character meets or thinks about. On the other, hand Saroyan depicts the whole large Armenian family with several uncles, cousins and so on. These distinct conceptions may be deeply autobiographical. The projection of the authors' own lives, family and social background are reflected into their stories. As for Salinger he lives a life of a loner and his relationship with his father is full of conflicts.

### 9.4.1 Salinger

Whereas Saroyan generally emphasises the relationship between the children and parents, especially father, in Salinger's novel *The Catcher*, there is practically no direct link to Holden's parents. The only hint of his parents is when Holden secretly visits Phoebe at the moment their parents are coming home unexpectedly. Holden hides away.

Anyway, what matters the most in Salinger's *Catcher* is a sibling relationship between Holden and his sister.

Phoebe is only 10 years old and she is very smart of her age. "*If you take her to a lousy movie for instance, she knows it's a lousy movie. If you take her to a pretty good movie, she knows it's a pretty good movie.*"<sup>81</sup>

The only negative comment Holden has ever said about his little sister is that she is a little too emotional. But he does not blame her for that at all because she is a girl and, after all, she is still a child.

Phoebe is worrying about Holden when she finds out he just got kicked out of school again. She gets mad at him telling him "*You don't like anything that's happening.*"<sup>82</sup> Holden is really sad about what his little sister said to him because he knows she is right and that makes it even worse.

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<sup>81</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 72

<sup>82</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 176

Despite this little fight Phoebe still loves her brother and she lends him all the money she has been saving for buying Christmas presents, although it meant a lot to her.

Another example of sibling love is seen after an incident in which the mother unexpectedly enters the room that is full of cigarette smoke. Phoebe is protecting Holden by telling mum that it was her who has been smoking in the room.

Actually, the name of the book *The Catcher in the Rye* comes from a part of a conversation between Holden and Phoebe which concerns the future. Phoebe gets angry with Holden because it seems that Holden does not like anything at all, so she finally asks Holden what he would like to become some day in the future and after a while of thinking he answers he wants to be a catcher in the rye. Holden is picturing a lot of kids playing and running around in a big field of rye and he is standing on the edge of a cliff catching all the kids who get dangerously close to the edge.

*That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing. I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.*<sup>83</sup>

Holden writes Phoebe a note that he wants to meet her to say goodbye before he leaves. Phoebe immediately packs all her stuff without hesitation just to meet Holden with a big suitcase telling him she wants to go with him. At that very moment we can see Holden being shocked but there is no way he could take her along with him. They start arguing with each other and, at one moment Phoebe shouts at Holden to “shut up” which was really hard for Holden to accept. But he soon understands Phoebe acts like a child, as he does sometimes, but now he can clearly see how irrational this is. And what more, he is realizing she has done all this because she loves him. He cannot be really angry with her because he suddenly knows he has not been right in this case. When he assures her he will stay and that he really means it, both are very happy. Holden feels he has done finally the right thing and all he cares about is to take care of Phoebe.

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<sup>83</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 180

### 9.4.2 Saroyan

Besides the point of describing a large family as it has been already mentioned above, Saroyan also highly focuses on the relationship of father and son. The best example could be primarily seen in a book called *Papa, You're Crazy*.

A very similar to *Papa You're Crazy* is story called *Conversation with Father*<sup>84</sup>. The relationship between father and son in this story reminds the reader the same relationship as it is in *Papa You're Crazy*. The parents are divorced and the son is living with his mother but every time he can see his dad he is very glad. The father is the one who can really understand him. The boy also thinks of leaving home but in comparison to Salinger's hero Holden, this little boy keeps this idea in his mind only as a result of growing up but he does not realize it as Holden does.

In a story *Ball* from *Papa You're Crazy* we can see the other extreme. A little boy does not want to go to school and he is constantly thinking about going to the mountains with his best schoolmate instead. Finally they are both too scared to make it. That is the pivotal difference between Salinger's and Saroyan's heroes. Saroyan's heroes are more decent and mild-mannered.

The boy in *Papa You're Crazy* asks his father a lot of questions very often which are about life, religion, art. The boy feels this is much better education for him than he can get at school. His dad teaches him how to live a good life and when they play games together, he teaches him lessons on losing and that it is a part of life to accept rather than being angry with.

There is also a strong connection between the hero Wesley and his father in a book called *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*. The reader can find several references to Wesley's father during the whole story. When they talk to each other and after Wesley has been told that his father killed a young boy about the same age as him in the war, he is quite shocked. But then his father is trying to explain that he unfortunately had no choice but either to kill him or to be killed himself and thus not to see Wesley again. He just wanted to stay alive to see his son again.

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<sup>84</sup> my translation of a story title from Saroyan's book *Five Ripe Pears*, 1965

The motive of father and son relationship repeats itself not only in the book but also in the lives of the characters themselves. Wesley's father is really happy to have a son and Wesley wishes to become a father someday too. He confides in a letter to his dad "*You have me, but I don't have a son and I miss him a lot.*"<sup>85</sup>

Another feature of father and son relationship is well portrayed in a story *Picnic Time*. This story is all about teenage inner fights and dialogues of an adolescent boy. His father understands well his son's mixed feelings that take him back to his own teenage days. Therefore the reader can find a very close relationship between father and son. The mother though does not seem to tolerate all the mood swings of her coming-of-age son. She is asking her husband for an explanation.

*What do you mean, what's the matter with him? Nothing's the matter with him, everything's the matter with him, the same as it is with everybody else. He's just fine. He gets overwhelmed now and then, and he doesn't know how to say what he feels or means, so he cries and runs off a little, trying to find out where to go, for God's sake. Where can you go?*

*You're almost as bad as he is.*<sup>86</sup>

She does not understand a word he said. This issue is far too complicated for her as all it seems it is as a brand new world to her, the world of men.

Father and son relationship in the story *Lord Chugger of Cheer* gives us a picture of the spiritual values of life and morality. There is a boy longing for a bicycle so his father drives him to a shop to buy one. Before buying the father takes a while in order to explain to his very excited son that he had not got his own bike till he was 12 sharing one with his brother. The father tells his son the true values of life teaching him the importance of being humble and thankful for everything.

A relationship between father and son is not only described by the father and the boy, but also by memories of father's father mentoring him when he was young. For example in a story *Papa You're Crazy* the father

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<sup>85</sup> SAROYAN 1993, p. 137

<sup>86</sup> SAROYAN 1988, p. 49

says that he can see his own father, who died a long time ago, every time he looks at his son.

There are usually large families depicted in Saroyan's stories though orphans can be also found there. For example Jim who has no family in a story called *The First Day of School*. He goes through quite an ordinary childhood in which we can see some similarities to other Saroyan's stories as Jim is also quite shy but getting into mischief as well.

In the story *The Sunday Zeppelin* Mark and Luke are brothers. There is a typical sibling rivalry going on in the story. Luke wants to fly in the zeppelin with his friend Ernest but he does not want to take his brother with him. Luke with Ernest have invented their own secret language so that no one can understand, which drives Mark crazy.

Not happy families exclusively are depicted in Saroyan's stories. A story called *Gaston* tells us about the parents that split some time ago. Each of them has different personalities, moral and values, all of which has some impact on their little daughter. During a visit of her father who she has not seen for a long time they sit and eat peaches together. After the father ate one, he finds a bug inside one of the peaches but he does not squash it which surprises his daughter because she finds it natural to squash a bug. To explain why he is telling a story about Gaston the homeless bug that has nowhere to go now and the girl starts feeling sorry for Gaston. She also wants a one with some other Gaston living inside. But the other peaches are healthy so he goes to the shop to buy some bad ones. When he comes back bringing some rotten peaches, he sees his daughter dressed up just about to leave. She tells him about a phone call by her mother and a party she has to go to because her mom wants her to be there. The girl squashed the bug her usual way and left. Even though her father tries to teach her the true values, she is still very under control of her mother whom she models herself upon.

## 9.5 School

### 9.5.1 Salinger

As for the matter of school, Salinger's hero Holden is very autobiographical. They both break school rules and discipline, Salinger gets expelled from school many times and so does Holden. Even though neither Holden nor Salinger is having difficulty in learning, they just do not like school.

There's a moment during one of Holden's conversations with Sally when Holden asks her about her attitude to school.

*"[...] I mean do you like school, and all that stuff?"*

*"It's a terrific bore."*

*"I mean do you hate it? I know it's a terrific bore, but do you hate it, is what I mean."*

*"Well, I don't exactly hate it. You always have to—"*

*"Well, I hate it. Boy, do I hate it," I said.<sup>87</sup>*

Holden as well as his creator Salinger himself are expelled out of school many times.

As Salinger was sent to a private school by his father, Salinger reflects his attitude towards these types of schools via his character Holden when he says: *"The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has—I'm not kidding."*<sup>88</sup>

Hamilton describes a situation when Salinger's mother comes to visit Jerry at school and she notices that some boys have red pins on their caps. These actually represent an award of merit, but Jerry makes his mom believe the boys wear the pins as a punishment for using nasty words thus she cannot talk to those boys. This is a kind of a prank Holden does as well.

Salinger says *"A lesson starting at 8 o'clock in the morning is a continuation of sleeping, just without those formalities as pyjamas."*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 136

<sup>88</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 8

<sup>89</sup> HAMILTON 1988, p. 45



Even though Holden has problems accepting the school system of education, he has some kind of respect towards teachers even though he does not display these feelings too much. Holden, for example, thinks of a teacher Miss Aigletinger who takes them to the museum which he enjoys a lot.

*Sometimes we looked at the animals and sometimes we looked at the stuff the Indians had made in ancient times. Pottery and straw baskets and all stuff like that. I get very happy when I think about it.*<sup>90</sup>

### 9.5.2 Saroyan

Generally, Saroyan's heroes are rather shy and not such scamps compared to Salinger's Holden but they do not avoid making schoolboy pranks as any other little boy. A very nice example can be seen in a story called *The First day of School*. It is a simple, heartfelt story about some mixed feelings of a little boy named Jim, it takes place during his first day at school. Jim is terrified by the new atmosphere and unknown people - but finally he finds out there is something he can look forward to and this is a little childish game. He finds it very funny when his schoolmates Ernest and Hannah chew a gum and the teacher asks them question like what they are chewing and their answer is that it is a gum. They are asked to throw the gum into the bin. Some other day, Jim buys a chewing gum just because of the fun as he knows pretty well he will have to throw it away. He is looking forward to that precise moment when the teacher will tell him to get rid of the chewing gum and he will have to go all the way across the classroom to the bin. So, finally, Jim finds something to make him looking forward to school and he also make friends this way.

There is another evidence that school is not a good place for kids to be found in Saroyan's work. It is the presence of physical punishment in stories like *The Circus* (from the collection *My Name is Aram*) or *Five Ripe Pears* (from the collection of the same name *Five Ripe Pears*)

Although Saroyan's characters do not like school in most cases, they do not generally act not as rebelliously as Holden does. Anyway, they mostly

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<sup>90</sup> SALINGER 1958, p. 126

admit that there is no school, they can learn from as much as the real life can teach them, especially told by their fathers. Fathers in Saroyan's books generally live in poverty yet they are very wise and intelligent. They teach their sons how to look at the world carefully. They emphasize reading books and playing with words is also very important. Especially in the book *Papa You're Crazy*, where the boy wants to be a writer after his father. He does his best to learn how to use the language in a proper way. His father tells him that the most important thing is the word and the way of using it in a sentence rather than focusing on grammar. He also shows him how to guess a new word from a word game, taking letters out of an already existing word trying to create another one.

Even though Saroyan's heroes are not as rebellious as Holden, they do sometimes fight against school as every other young boy does. For example in the story *Five Ripe Pears* where a boy steals pears from a tree but he does not think it is a theft. All the boys are generally very self-reflective and think about the world deeply. Another of Saroyan's story titled *When Friends Fail*<sup>91</sup> is a great example. Here the most interesting thing is that the hero is William Saroyan himself. There is a history class at school one day. The teacher starts talking about Stonehenge. William asks the teacher how she can be so sure about the age of the stones Stonehenge consists of claiming they are 20 thousand years old. The teacher gets angry with him as she thinks he has been trying to discredit her. But that is not his aim at all. He is just not happy with the brief explanation given to him as he needs to take into account all we know so far about the relic site to fully understand all possible connection it may have.

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<sup>91</sup> my translation of story title from Saroyan's book *Five Ripe Pears*, 1965

## 10. Conclusion

In my thesis I have tried to focus on and describe various images of childhood in Saroyan's and Salinger's work.

As I have already indicated in the introduction, the biographies of both Salinger and Saroyan are pivotal to understand how their life stories go hand in hand with their writings. During the whole thesis, I have pointed out several autobiographical features reflected in Salinger's and Saroyan's stories.

I have also tried to give a complex view of the literary output of both writers, focusing on each of the authors individually.

The course of the writing my thesis itself has been rather extended and time-consuming as firstly I had to read up on plenty of both Salinger's and Saroyan's stories and novels. This is the first and the most fundamental step for the whole thesis. I have had to focus mainly on those stories including some features of childhood as it is the main concern of mine. I have been listing continuously notes carrying important information off the stories including the name of the book and the page reference to be able to get back to it quickly.

The second part of my effort is to summarize and categorize these notes into some sections, from which I finally chose the five main ones as it goes like main characters, religion, philosophical thought, family and school and I further describe how Salinger and Saroyan reflect the aspect of childhood in context of these 5 categories in their books.

Comparing both these authors, I have to say that even though they have several things in common, such as autobiographical features or the motif of childhood in their writings, each of the categories mentioned above is seen differently by each author.

While Saroyan generally describes his characters like boys, approximately between six and eight years old, who are just discovering the world and enjoying the sweet innocence of childhood, Salinger builds up his most famous character of Holden on a teenage boy somewhere between childhood and adulthood, rebelling against society.

Religion and philosophical thoughts are also seen from different points of view. Saroyan shows them up in his stories searching for God which are rather peaceful and natural part of everyday life whereas Holden in Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* rises up against everything, including religion even though he feels deep inside that he believes in something or someone. Religion as a strong manipulation tool to manage people's mind is then described in Salinger's story *Teddy* or in stories *Franny and Zooey*.

The motif of family is portrayed more extensively in Saroyan's writings than Salinger's as Saroyan focuses mainly on the father and son relation and this theme is repeatedly used in several of his stories whereas Salinger's heroes have generally difficult relationships with their parents and they rather interact with their siblings as it can be seen at an example of Holden and Phoebe or *Franny and Zooey*.

As for the last category described, school is common and often repeated background of the stories. Holden's attitude towards schools is obvious as he has been expelled of many ones and he also confides he hates school even though his words are not so strong in fact as it may seem, because he actually says that he hates everything all the time but it is mostly just a sign of his desperate react on the corrupted world he is discontented with. Saroyan's heroes on the other hand are more disciplined and even though they do not love school entirely, they do not reject the school as Holden does. On top of all, they also learn a great deal from their father's wisdom.

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