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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

THE FUNCTION OF SEYMOUR GLASS IN THE CONCEPTUAL AND  
TEXTUAL PERSONA AND FICTIONAL OUTPUT OF J.D. SALINGER

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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(I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.)

V Praze dne

## Abstrakt

Účelom tejto práce je ponúknuť nový uhol pohľadu na amerického spisovateľa J.D. Salingera, známeho predovšetkým vďaka úspešnému románu *Kto chytá v žite*. Keďže zvyšok jeho publikovaného diela leží v tieni Holdena Caulfielda, považovala som za dôležité vyzdvihnúť pozitíva a zvláštnosti jeho menej známej no nemej kvalitnej poviedkovej tvorby. Z troch súborov knižne vydaných poviedok som si vybrala Seymoura Glassa, aby som na ňom ukázala komplexnosť, ktorú Salinger dokázal uplatniť na postave krátkej fikcie.

Prvá poviedka, v ktorej Seymour Glass vystupuje, končí jeho samovraždou. Touto samovraždou sa však Seymourov príbeh nekončí, ale paradoxne začína to, čo Salinger priamo či nepriamo rozvíjal v ďalších siedmich publikovaných poviedkach. Keďže táto, tak často zmieňovaná postava, nikdy neodhalí svoju podstatu úplne, pokúsila som sa o to ja, a to prostredníctvom komplexnej analýzy založenej na údajoch z mnou vytvoreného Seymourovho životopisu. Prostredníctvom všetkých získaných údajov o postave Seymoura Glass som pripravila životopis, ktorý neobsahuje iba konkrétne faktické údaje, ale aj scény z jeho života, ktoré pri následnej analýze považujem za kľúčové.

Pri tvorbe životopisu som nepostupovala podľa obdobia, kedy boli poviedky vydávané. V úvode kapitoly som sa naopak snažila vytvoriť krátky chronologický prehľad Seymourovho života, začínajúci dátumom jeho narodenia a končiaci dátumom jeho samovraždy. Po tomto krátkom priereze nasleduje niekoľko strán popisujúcich povahové črty postavy, ktoré často vyplývajú z určitej konkrétnej situácie, a preto sú vo väčšine prípadov dokladané množstvom citátov.

V kapitole s názvom „analýza“ bola prevedená dôkladná a podrobná analýza psychického stavu postavy Seymoura Glass, pomocou ktorej som sa dopracovala k cieľu svojej práce, teda k zisteniu, prečo táto postava spáchala samovraždu. Na základe analýzy som sa dopracovala k trom záverom. Seymour Glass, postava, ktorá bojovala v druhej svetovej vojne, preukazuje príznaky psychickej poruchy zvanej „shell shock“, istý typ šoku, na ktorý trpia vojaci počas alebo po skončení vojny a ktorý spôsobuje medzi iným psychickú labilitu často ústiacu do psychického zrútenia alebo samovraždy. Druhým záverom, ku ktorému som počas analýzy dospela je skutočnosť, že Seymour preukazoval isté psychické zhody s príslušníkmi Stratenej generácie, ktorí sa po vojne, rovnako ako Seymour, nachádzali v stave silnej depresie, sklamaní a beznádeje. Tretím, posledným, dôvodom samovraždy bola

nezvyčajne vysoká psychická citlivosť analyzovanej postavy, ktorá miestami hraničila s precitlivenosťou. Fakt, že sa Seymour Glass od útleho detstva zaoberal štúdiom literatúry s morálnou, etickou a náboženskou tematikou, a že sa získané vedomosti snažil uplatniť vo svojom živote, prispelo k nezvyčajne vycibrenému svedomiu, ktoré odmietalo akýkoľvek náznak násilia, nespravodlivosti či nezmyselnosti. Vojna mala na takto vypracované a citlivosťou budované svedomie katastrofálne dôsledky ústiace spolu ďalšími dvomi vyššie uvedenými dôvodmi do samovraždy.

V závere práce som sa venovala autobiografickým črtám, ktoré som po prečítaní životopisu J.D. Salingeru spozorovala na postave Seymoura Glass. V kapitole je tiež načrtnuté porovnanie autorovej poviedkovej tvorby s jeho jediným publikovaným románom *Kto chytá v žite*. Na základe tohto porovnania som sa snažila dokázať, že poviedky J.D. Salingeru sú často neoprávnene odsúvané na druhé miesto.

## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to offer a new view of an American writer J.D. Salinger's work who is well-known mainly because of his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Since the rest of his published work usually lies in the shadow of Holden Caulfield I considered it important to describe the positives and the uniqueness of his short stories. I chose the character of Seymour Glass from three Salinger books of short stories to show his ability of creating such a complex character as Seymour Glass within a short story fiction.

The first short story in which Seymour Glass appears ends with his suicide. However, Seymour Glass's story itself does not end at all with this act. On the contrary, Salinger incorporates this character in another six of his short stories where we get to know much more about him. Since Seymour Glass, a character so often mentioned within the work of Salinger, never reveals his inner essence completely, I tried to do it myself. I began with a biography of Seymour Glass. All the information that I included comes from Salinger's short stories.

The biography consists of two parts. The first section includes a short chronological overview of Seymour Glass's life. The second part consists of several pages with many scenes through which Seymour's character is described. They often arise from a specific situation; therefore many quotations are used to support them.

A detailed analysis of the mental condition of Seymour Glass is made in the third chapter thanks to which I fulfilled the aim of this work, ergo, to find out why Seymour Glass committed suicide. I came to three conclusions. Seymour Glass, the character who fought in World War II suffers from so called 'shell shock', a mental disorder that often affects soldiers during or after the war. The second reason of Seymour's suicide has to do with the Lost Generation. As well as members of this unfortunate generation, Seymour Glass feels depressed, disappointed and hopeless. The last reason of his suicide is his unusually developed sensibility. Since his early childhood, Seymour Glass devoted himself to the study of literature concerning ethics, morality and religions and consequently he endeavoured to apply what he learnt, to his own life. However, his polished conscience could not bear the meaninglessness, violence and cruelty of the war what led - together with the two above mentioned reasons - to his suicide.

I dedicated the last section of the work to the autobiographical elements, which I found in the character of Seymour Glass after reading J.D. Salinger's biography. A general comparison between his only novel *The Catcher in the Rye* and his short fiction is also made in this chapter. Based on this comparison I tried to prove that Salinger's short stories are unjustifiably insufficiently appreciated.

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## I. Introduction

When mentioning the name of Jerome David Salinger the very first association made by anybody with average knowledge of literature is Holden Caulfield or *The Catcher in the Rye* generally. Despite the fact, that the book about a problematic teenage boy was in its publication year of 1951 not altogether well received, the novel became within a decade a must in the bookshelf of any American devotee to literature. The writer J.D. Salinger had been in that time already known mainly by the *New Yorker* readers. The popularity of Holden Caulfield was in the 1950s growing more and more even though Salinger was producing new pieces. Caulfield became part of the high school and university literature lessons and he was bringing to Salinger still more unwanted fame. Thousands of essays about Holden have been written and now it seems that J.D. Salinger cannot be spoken about without mentioning Holden Caulfield. Unfortunately, Holden Caulfield is also the reason because of which insufficient attention is paid to Salinger's short stories being at the time of their publication, often more eagerly received than *The Catcher in the Rye*. Though they are not many, Salinger worked on almost each of them night and day for many weeks. The result of his long work was often such a long short story, that critics were and are often using the word 'novella' instead of 'short story'. Because of their length, Salinger had enough space to offer polished pieces of literature full of complex characters, which are worth not less attention than Holden Caulfield.

In 1948 one of the best-known of Salinger's short stories, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" was published. The story introduced the character of Seymour Glass, and opened the door to the house of the Glass's, an unusual family, which from then on became the protagonist of the considerable number among Salinger's short stories. The last published piece by Salinger, "Hapworth 16, 1924", was as well dedicated to the Glass family, especially to the peculiar Seymour Glass, the eldest of the Glass siblings. Since this character appears directly or indirectly in seven of Salinger's relatively small collection of published short stories, I consider him and his family deserving more attention than he has received so far.

'Things happen, in most good fiction, at least partly because the people have certain personalities or characters (moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities) [...]. What their names are and what they look like may help you to understand them, but probably the best guide to characters is what they do. As we get to know more about their drives and goals [...] we enjoy seeing the writer complete the portraits, finally presenting us with a coherent and

credible picture of people in action. In this view, plot and characters are inseparable. Plot is not simply a series of happenings, but happenings that come out of character, that reveal character, and that influence character.’<sup>1</sup>

The importance of characters in fiction is, as the quotation suggests, immense. In most of his short stories, especially those important for this work, Salinger does not concentrate so much on the plot depiction but mainly on the character portrayal and on the writing technique. His complex sentence structures and selection of vocabulary may cause difficulties when reading often sixty-page long stories, but when overcoming this obstruction, readers have the possibility of enjoying an unusually complex net of stories, populated by characters that cross from one story to another. This gave Salinger an unusual possibility to develop his characters within short fiction. When we abandon the sphere of plot-centred reading, we become aware of the fact that Salinger’s short stories offer pictures of moral, intellectual and emotional qualities of various characters but mainly of Seymour Glass.

I intend to find any mention of Seymour Glass in Salinger’s work and use all information available in his short fiction to build a complex picture of this character and through analysis of his personality come to a conclusion, which would explain the reasons of his suicide. As I agree with the quotation, I will not separate character from plot and will therefore offer apart from physical and psychological description also all the qualities of Seymour Glass derived from his behaviour in specific situations. Many quotations will be used to draw the picture of Seymour Glass and though sometimes they can seem unnecessary, their importance will be proved in the final analysis.

The work itself consists of five chapters. The second chapter contains all information about the life of Seymour Glass that is used in the third and most important chapter, in which the principal aim of this thesis is accomplished. The fourth chapter deals with the importance of Seymour Glass within the literary work of J.D. Salinger and offers also some insight on Salinger’s autobiographical features which Seymour Glass bears.

Since I do not have any evidence of a similarly extensive work about the character of Seymour Glass, the sources of the secondary literature were quite limited. Because of that I worked mainly with the primary sources that contain seven short stories. During the analysis, I relied mainly on the knowledge gained during the three years of my university studies and

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1986)112 -113.

with the help of the publications *Literary Theory, An Introduction*, which contains also a chapter on psychoanalysis, with a *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*, with some internet resources and finally with the help of Paul Alexander's *Salinger, A Biography*, I tried to do my best to make a contributing analysis of the character of Seymour Glass.

## II. Character Sketch

### II.I. Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to prepare Seymour Glass's character sketch, which will be essential for my further analysis. The description of the character sketch will follow the suggested structure of character sketching from *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*. The next five aspects of Seymour Glass will be considered: what he says (taking into consideration also the fact that he may be hypocritical, self-deceived or biased), what he does, what others say about him, what others do (their actions may help to indicate what the person could do but does not do) and finally what Seymour Glass looks like – with respect to his face, body, clothes.<sup>2</sup>

Before starting the very sketch of Seymour Glass a few facts must be explained. First of all, why is there a need to make a character delineation of Seymour Glass and even dedicate to this portrayal a whole chapter? Though I am aware that students should avoid biographical studies in their BA thesis, I think a detailed biography of Seymour Glass is indispensable in this case since according to my knowledge, it has been never done before and without it, it would not be possible to do the analysis of this character. It is essential also because the information that we have about Seymour Glass in Salinger's short stories is very fragmentary. There is not a single complex passage in any of Salinger's short stories, where Seymour would be described in more than a few words. However, there are dozens of short passages dedicated to the character of Seymour Glass in seven of Salinger's short stories. To analyse the character, all information must be looked up and put into one complete text.

Another reason of my sketching-method is that Seymour Glass is an unusual character who is very difficult to understand. However, a complex sketch of his personality could help us to analyse him and to offer some explanations for his suicide. When reading about Seymour Glass it often seems that the character could not really exist, that Salinger simply let his imagination fly away from the restricted reality, and that Seymour could never be anything but a literary character. Since all the rest of Salinger's characters, unusual as they are, are depicted within the truly humanly possible capabilities, Seymour Glass requires even more attention. All data, even at first glance unimportant information, can be essential; therefore the following biography will be thorough.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*, 113.

All the information about Seymour proceeds from seven short stories ("Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters", "Seymour, an Introduction", "Franny", "Zooey", "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish", "Hapworth 16, 1924"). It will be directly copied or paraphrased. Sometimes, I will use deduction and write down also information which is not directly mentioned in the text but which emerges from the plot or from some other aspects of the text.

There are two kinds of information used in the following sketch. The first type is second-handed information. It is delivered mostly by Seymour's brother Buddy and it forms more than seventy percent of all information available. The other kind of information proceeds from Seymour himself. There are only four sources of this kind of information. Two short stories where Seymour appears alive ("A Perfect Day for Banana Fish", "Hapworth 16, 1924"), the first being a reproduction of the last moments of Seymour Glass's life and the latter being a very long letter written by seven-year old Seymour. Other two sources are much shorter: an excerpt of Seymour's diary and a letter dedicated to Buddy. As the biography consists exclusively of the information from Salinger's short stories, it will include a great number of quotations.

## **II.II. Biography of Seymour Glass based on Buddy's notes**

Seymour Glass was born in 1917 to Less and Bessie Glass, a half-Jew family. He was the first of the seven Glass children, followed by a brother Buddy, a sister Boo Boo, twins Walter and Waker, and the youngest siblings, a brother Zooey and a sister Franny. Seymour was a very respectable part of the Glass family and influenced the raising of each of his siblings. Buddy however stresses that Seymour did not surpassed his siblings only in age but also in rhetoric which was an inseparable part of the Glass family:

Still, we were a family of seven children, originally. And, as it happened, none of us was in the least tongue-tied. It's an exceedingly weighty matter when six naturally profuse verbalizers and expounders have an undefeatable champion talker in the house. True, he never sought the title. And he passionately yearned to see one or another of us outpoint or simply outlast him in a conversation or an argument. The fact remains that the title was his, and though I think he would have given almost

anything on earth to retire it [...] he never did find a completely graceful way of doing it.<sup>3</sup>

His physical appearance was not very exceptional. He had wiry black hair. He was a very hairy man, as his brother Buddy points out, but his hair started to come out at handfuls at nineteen. He was relatively tall; his ears had extremely long, fleshy lobes. He had extra dark eyes. He was almost without chin, had fine, beautiful hands, great, fleshy, drooping trompe-like nose with bend to the right. He had dark skin. Buddy sums up, that 'he was quite funny-looking boy when he was growing up, but gained more attractiveness with age'.<sup>4</sup>

When he finished his university studies (which was extremely soon since 'he had been a freshman at Columbia when he had just turned fifteen'<sup>5</sup>), he worked as a teacher of English until 1940 when in his twenty-third year he registered for the draft<sup>6</sup> ('Our eldest brother, Seymour... was a corporal in what, in 1942, was still called the Air Corps. He was stationed at a B-17 base in California, where, I believe, he was an acting company clerk...'<sup>7</sup>). In that time he already spoke five languages: English, German, Italian, Japanese and Chinese.

He married Muriel Fedder in 1942. Seymour's sister Boo Boo wrote about the girl to her brother Buddy: 'Seymour is getting married – yes, married, so please pay attention. I've met the girl. She's a zero in my opinion but terrific-looking. I don't actually *know* that she is a zero. I mean she hardly said two words the night I met her. Just sat and smiled and smoked, so it isn't fair to say. [...] They apparently met when Seymour was stationed at Monmouth last winter.'<sup>8</sup>

The wedding itself was however more complicated than it usually is. Very shortly before the wedding, Seymour met Muriel saying, as an angry Muriel's bridesmaid remarked, 'how he is too happy to get married and that she'll have to postpone the wedding till he feels steadier or he won't be able to come to it... he is terribly sorry but he can't get married till he feels less happy or some crazy thing...' Fortunately, we have the possibility of comparing this statement with the one of Seymour himself which comes from his diary: 'I really called to ask her, to beg her for the last time to just go off alone with me and get married. I'm too keyed up

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<sup>3</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction* (USA: Little, Brown and Company, 1991) 110.

<sup>4</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 176 – 177.

<sup>5</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction* 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction* 9.

to be with people.’<sup>9</sup> In the end Muriel and Seymour got married (without the wedding guests as Seymour had wished) and they spent six years of their lives in marriage about which there is practically no mention at all in any of Salinger’s short stories.

Seymour Glass died in 1948 while vacationing in Florida with his wife Muriel. He was then thirty-one years old. He committed suicide when he came back to a hotel room after spending some nice time with a little girl Sybil on the beach. ‘He glanced at the girl (Muriel) lying asleep on one of the twin beds. Then he went over to one of the pieces of luggage, opened it and [...] took out an Ortgies calibre 7,65 automatic.[...] Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple.’<sup>10</sup>

The influence Seymour had on his family and mainly on his siblings was immense. It was not only because he was the eldest brother but mainly because of his knowledge, which he gladly shared with his brothers and sisters. As the following quotation suggests, they appreciated it very much.

He was a great many things to a great many people while he lived, and virtually all things to his brothers and sisters in our somewhat outsized family. Surely he was all real things to us: our blue-striped unicorn, our double - lensed burning glass, our consultant genius, or portable conscience, our supercargo, and our one full poet, [...] and he was also our rather notorious ‘mystic’ and ‘unbalances type.’<sup>11</sup>

However, though he meant very much to all his siblings, he was even more special for the second eldest brother of the Glass children, Buddy. He says that ‘with or without a suicide plot in his head, he (Seymour) was the only person I’ve ever habitually consorted with, banged around with, who more frequently than not rallied with the classical conception, as I saw it, of a *mukta*, a ringding enlightened man, a God-knower.’<sup>12</sup> For Buddy, a writer, Seymour also embodied inspiration: ‘I’ve written about my brother before. ... There’s seldom been a time when I haven’t written about him...’<sup>13</sup> The information he offers to us comes from ‘his’ short stories, which are in reality written by J.D. Salinger. Though Buddy loved Seymour deeply, he is also speculating about Seymour’s nature. He is accepting the

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<sup>9</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 90.

<sup>10</sup> J.D. Salinger, *For Esme with Love and Squalor* (London: Penguin Group, 2010) 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 111.

possibility or maybe sending this possibility into our minds, that Seymour had not only positive qualities: ‘Had Seymour no grievous faults, no vices, and no meannesses that can be listed, at least in a hurry? What was he anyway? A saint?’<sup>14</sup> He says that one of his distracting habits was e.g. the one of ‘investigating loaded ashtrays with his index finger, clearing all the cigarette ends to the sides – smiling from ear to ear as he did it – as if he expected to see Christ himself curled up cherubically in the middle, and he never looked disappointed’<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, despite his deep love for Seymour and vice versa, they ‘very rarely wrote personal letters to each other, even during the war’<sup>16</sup>. It also must be pointed out that though Seymour took great care of his siblings, ‘he was by far the least prolific letter writer in the family’<sup>17</sup>.

He was an extremely intelligent creature from his early childhood. ‘He spend nearly seven years of his childhood as star turn on a children’s coast-to-coast radio quiz program’<sup>18</sup>, where he was showing wide knowledge from various spheres. Moreover, ‘by the time Seymour was in mid-adolescence-sixteen, -seventeen he not only had learned to control his native vernacular, his many, many less than élite New York speech mannerisms, but had by then already come into his own true, bull’s-eye, poet’s vocabulary.’ More of his astounding wisdom and unbelievable general knowledge at the age of seven will be proved towards the end of this chapter.

Seymour liked poetry very much. He not only read it but also wrote it. He was especially attracted by Chinese and Japanese poetry, which he could both read and write. Buddy says, that his brother wrote 184 poems during his last three years of life<sup>19</sup>. Among the 184 are mostly poems written in the army.<sup>20</sup> Hence the love for classical Japanese, three-line, seventeen-syllable haiku that ‘he himself wrote (almost always in English, but sometimes in Japanese, German, or Italian)’<sup>21</sup>. Buddy offers some specific information about Seymour’s poems:

By far the majority of the 184 poems are immeasurably not light- but high-hearted, and can be read by anyone, anywhere, even aloud in rather progressive orphanages on stormy nights, but I wouldn’t unreservedly recommend the last thirty or thirty-five

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<sup>14</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 108.

<sup>15</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*,8.

<sup>18</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 106.

<sup>19</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*,117.

<sup>20</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 127.

poems to any living soul who hasn't died at least twice in his lifetime, preferably slowly'<sup>22</sup> and he also adds that 'all Seymour's verses are bare and ungarnished.'<sup>23</sup>

He also wrote a short poem on the afternoon of his suicide. It was a 'straight, classical-style haiku. He wrote it in Japanese – in it he briefly tells of a little girl on an airplane that has a doll in the seat with her and turns its head around to look at the poet.'<sup>24</sup> Buddy was not sure whether the poem was autobiographical or not.

Seymour Glass was also a very sensible, mentally delicate person. There are various notes on his sensible personality in Salinger's short stories but the one that most strikes me is a story about Buddy and Seymour going together to a barbershop:

I (Buddy) said something, in a distinctly ratty tone of voice, about his 'damn hair' always jumping all over me. The instant I said it I was sorry, but it was out. He didn't say anything, but immediately started to worry about it. It grew worse as we walked home, crossing streets in silence; he was obviously trying to divine a way of forbidding his hair to jump on his brother in the barbershop.<sup>25</sup>

He was also sensitive to the opinions of others: 'he stopped dead short in the middle of Amsterdam Avenue and asked me [...] if I'd mind very much getting a haircut without him. I pulled him over to the curb and said I certainly would mind. He had a notion his neck wasn't clean. He was planning to spare Victor, the barber, the offense of looking at his dirty neck.'<sup>26</sup>

What kind of clothes did Seymour wear? According to his brother's description, he might look strange: 'The main hitch there was that nothing he bought suits, overcoats particularly ever fitted him properly... His clothes, in short, often wore the whole family to something akin to despair.'<sup>27</sup> It sounds a little bit contradictory, that on the one hand, he is so afraid of a barber seeing his dirty neck and on the other hand he does not care about his clothes and what people think about them.

His persistence verged on obsession: 'When Seymour was hot on something, investigating something, he could and frequently did, from the age of about twelve, go two and three nights in a row without going to bed at all, and without distinctly looking or

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<sup>22</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 129.

<sup>24</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 134 – 135.

<sup>25</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 184.

<sup>27</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 187 – 188.

sounding the worse for it.'<sup>28</sup> This quality is probably responsible for his great academic knowledge at a very early age, to which some space will be dedicated later.

Seymour Glass liked sports. As we see in the next excerpt, his pacifist personality surfaces in sport: 'At soccer or hockey, Seymour had a way, singularly unendearing to his teammates, of charging downfield-often brilliantly-and then stalling to give the opposing goalie time to set himself in an impregnable position. Football he very seldom played, and almost never unless one team or the other was short a man. I played it constantly. I didn't dislike violence.'<sup>29</sup>

From this excerpt arises the fact, that Seymour Glass disliked violence even in sports and games. He disliked even pretended violence in which no life of man was really endangered. How does a personality like this feel in war and what consequences must it have on such a sensitive person?

Seymour was a believer. However, he was not a traditional one. His faith was based on various religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism...), on philosophies from different continents and on literature of all kinds. In all of these, he was trying to find the rightness of human being or anything that could enrich the spirit of a man:

Once, when we were boys, Seymour waked me from a sound sleep, much excited, yellow pajamas flashing in the dark. He had what my brother Walt used to call his Eureka Look, and he wanted to tell me that he thought he finally knew why Christ said to call no man Fool. (It was a problem that had been baffling him all week, because it sounded to him like a piece of advice... Christ had said it, because there are no fools.)<sup>30</sup>

What could people who did not know Seymour Glass personally think about him? There are not many comments on this subject in Salinger's short stories, but there is one mention in a short story (or a novella) "Seymour, an Introduction", which could have some importance. The note is made by a character who was rather angry with Seymour, therefore we must take into consideration also her mental countenance and possible bias:

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<sup>28</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 191.

<sup>29</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 197.

<sup>30</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 135 – 136.

‘Seymour, in her opinion, was a latent homosexual and that he was basically afraid of marriage. About the only other thing she said was that this Seymour was a really schizoid personality and that, if you really looked at it the right way, it was really better for Muriel that things turned out the way they did.’<sup>31</sup>

The very same character also touches the subject of the young Seymour’s ‘attack’ on his female friend Charlotte: ‘This normal Seymour apparently hit her and she had nine stitches in her face.’<sup>32</sup> Buddy, being at that moment with the irritable bridesmaid in the same car reacted:

Would you like to know how Charlotte got those 9 stitches? We were up at the Lake. Seymour had written to Charlotte, inviting her to come up and visit us, and her mother finally let her. What happened was, she sat down in the middle of our driveway one morning to pet Boo Boo’s cat, and Seymour threw a stone at her. He was twelve. That’s all there was to it. He threw it at her because she looked so beautiful sitting there in the middle of the driveway with Boo Boo’s cat. Everybody knew that, for God’s sake – me, Charlotte, Boo Boo, Waker, Walt, the whole family [...] I’m a liar, of course. Charlotte never did understand why Seymour threw that stone at her.<sup>33</sup>

Seymour was also a very caring person. He took care mainly of the education of his siblings introducing the kids to the worlds of literature, religions and philosophy even before they got to primary school. However, he did not take care only of their education; he wanted to partake in many other spheres of their upbringing: ‘For years, among the seven children in our one-bathroom family, it was our perhaps cloying custom to leave messages, using a moist of soap to write with. ‘Boo Boo, pick up your washcloth when you are done with it. Don’t leave it on the floor. Love, Seymour’’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 37 – 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 89.

<sup>34</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 64.

### II.III. Biography of Seymour Glass based on his own notes

In this section I shall use information from four sources: Seymour's diary, his letters, and two short stories in which he appears alive. As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, we have to take into consideration also the fact that the character may be hypocritical, self-deceived or biased. We have to bear this in mind especially in the following passage, since we do not know in what mental condition Seymour Glass was when composing it. Another possibility that we should bear in mind while reading his notes is that he may be an unreliable narrator.

The extract from Seymour's diary proceeds from the short story "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters". Buddy uses an exact reproduction of a passage from Seymour's diary, which he found in Seymour's and his own common flat in New York on the day of Seymour's wedding. The passage he copied to 'his' short story concerns mainly Seymour's relationship to Muriel and with Seymour's understanding of the institution of marriage. Buddy also mentions that Seymour was writing his diary when 'stationed at Fort Monmouth, in late 1941 and early 1942',<sup>35</sup>.

As Boo Boo wrote in her letter to Buddy, Muriel was not an unusually intelligent person. On the contrary, to Boo Boo she seemed rather simple. So what attracted Seymour to this woman, with whom he could obviously discuss little of all the knowledge he had gained throughout his life? According to what he wrote in his diary, it was precisely her simplicity that captivated him. We know nothing about the profession, studies, or age of Muriel Fedder. The only thing we know about her is that she had a very close relationship with her mother: 'The familiarity between Muriel and her mother struck me as being so beautiful when we were all sitting in the living room.'<sup>36</sup> Muriel is however very much influenced by the opinions of her mother, which are often narrow-minded: 'Her mother thinks I'm a schizoid personality. Apparently she has spoken to her psychoanalyst about me, and he agrees with her.'<sup>37</sup> Moreover she said that 'I (Seymour) withdraw from and fail to relate to people [...] apparently there is something 'wrong' with me because I haven't seduced Muriel [...]'<sup>38</sup> Consequently, Seymour decided to follow the advice of Muriel's mother and visited a psychoanalyst: 'I can't

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<sup>35</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 69.

<sup>37</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 70.

see that I have anything to lose by seeing an analyst. If I do it in the Army, it'll be free.'<sup>39</sup> However, later in the short story Zooye, the main character Zooye Glass just incidentally points out, that he does not want his sister Franny to go to a psychoanalyst, because of what psychoanalysis did to Seymour. Unfortunately we do not know anything more about this subject. Not even whether psychoanalysis produced Seymour's overall mental health or whether it could have been even the reason for his suicide...

There are various mentions about Seymour's inclination to Muriel. They are usually stressing the simplicity and the innocence of his fiancée: 'How I worship her simplicity, her terrible honesty. How I rely on it.'<sup>40</sup> He also says about her that

her marital goals are so absurd and touching. She wants to get a very dark sun tan and go up to the desk clerk [...] and ask if her Husband has picked up the mail yet. She wants to shop for curtains. She wants to shop for materninty clothes [...]. Buddy would despise her for her marriage motives [...] yet they seem to me so human - size and beautiful that I can't think of them even now as I write this without feeling deeply, deeply moved.<sup>41</sup>

Elsewhere he writes: 'She was trying to teach me to smile, spreading the muscles around my mouth with her fingers. How beautiful it is to see her laugh. Oh, God, I'm so happy with her. If only she could be happier with me.' For some unknown reason, Seymour thinks that Muriel is not completely happy with him:

But on the whole I don't make her really happy. Oh, God, help me. My one terrible consolation is that my beloved has an undying, basically undeviating love for the institution of marriage itself.' It also seems that he has a guilty conscience because of this fact: 'Oh, God, I'm so happy with her. If only she could be happier with me [...] Muriel loves me but she will never feel really close to me, familiar with me, frivolous with me...'<sup>42</sup>

My last comment on Seymour's opinion on relationships includes a quotation from miscellany of Vendanta (Hindustani texts), which Seymour himself used in his diary:

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<sup>39</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introducion*, 71.

Marriage partners are to serve each other. Elevate, help, teach, strengthen each other, but above all, *serve*. Raise their children honourably, lovingly, and with detachment. A child is a guest in the house, to be loved and respected-never possessed, since he belongs to God.<sup>43</sup>

He comments on this excerpt with the following words: ‘The joy of responsibility for the first time in my life.’<sup>44</sup> From the last two quotations it is clear that Seymour was not running away from marriage, when he decided not to marry Muriel as they planned it. He worshiped the institution of marriage very much and was looking forward to it. He just did not need witnesses of this important step of his.

Finally, there is one mysterious element that Seymour mentions in his diary. It may be proof for his uncommon mental condition, or it may be that Salinger did not give us enough information, but I am more inclined to the first option. He writes:

I have scars on my hands from touching certain people. Once, in the park, when Franny was still in the carriage, I put my hand on the downy part of her head and left it there too long... Certain heads, certain colours and textures of human hair leave permanent marks on me. Other things, too. Charlotte once ran away from me, outside the studio, and I grabbed her dress to stop her, to keep her near me. A yellow cotton dress I loved because it was too long for her. I still have a lemon-yellow mark on the palm of my right hand.<sup>45</sup>

Seymour’s letter to Buddy is a written response to one of the stories that Buddy wrote. Buddy is a writer. When he was beginning with writing and later on probably too, he was expecting Seymour’s response to his texts, to what Seymour responds saying

What bliss it is to be your first reader. It would be straight bliss if I didn’t think you valued my opinion more than your own. It really doesn’t seem right to me that you should rely so heavily on my opinion of your stories.<sup>46</sup>

From the quotation, as well as from many others which I have already quoted it arises that Seymour wanted to be less important than he really was. He was probably not pleased with all the attention he received during the coast-to-coast radio programme neither with the family

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<sup>43</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 91.

<sup>45</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 158.

focus pointed to himself. In my opinion he would love to be invisible though everywhere present.

Generally, we cannot say that Seymour was really responding to Buddy's story in his letter. As usual in his texts (a diary entry and letters) he is contemplating various philosophical and religious issues. He is also speaking about the unimportance of individuality, since he says that it is not so terrible when he (Seymour) and Buddy sound like each other (Buddy often got irritated when one of his siblings remarked that he sounds like Seymour<sup>47</sup>). He is also imposing the following question: 'Is it so important for us to keep in mind which is whose?'<sup>48</sup> Seymour does really not offer criticism on Buddy's story though in the end of the letter he advises him to write 'a something, an anything, a story, a poem, a tree, that was really and truly after your own heart'<sup>49</sup>. He is expecting from his brother what he valued so much in his fiancée – honesty.

A short story or rather a novella "Hapworth 16, 1924" is supposed to be written by Buddy. In the beginning of the short story Buddy says that he is going to write 'some comment in advance, as plain and bare as I can make it'<sup>50</sup>. There are only five paragraphs in his introduction among which there is one where Buddy says:

I intend, right now, probably on this same sheet of paper, to make a start at typing up an exact copy of a letter of Seymour's that, until four hours ago, I had never read before in my life. My mother, Bessie Glass, sent it up by registered mail.<sup>51</sup>

The letter that he mentions is the letter written by seven-year old Seymour, which I have already mentioned above in this section. It is written during his and Buddy's stay in summer camp in Hapworth, Maine. He wrote the thirty-page long letter one day during which he had to stay in bed because of a wound that he sustained the day before. He wrote a sixty-A4-page long letter, which is, obviously, a very unlikely length of letter written by a seven-year old child. However, the length of the letter is not as unbelievable as the content itself. It presents us a young Seymour as a seven-year old linguistic genius using such sentence constructions of which the majority of adult English-speaking people are never capable. The vocabulary he

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<sup>47</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 158.

<sup>48</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 158.

<sup>49</sup> *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, 161.

<sup>50</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

<sup>51</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

manages to use is also very surprising. Examples of the above mentioned characteristics of the letter can be found many times at any page of the letter but to show at least one example I will use the sentence in which Seymour himself speaks about his ability of written constructions:

While bearing in mind that my loss of you is very acute today, hardly bearable in the last analysis, I am also snatching this stunning opportunity to use my new and entirely trivial mastery of written construction and decent sentence formation as explained and slightly enriched upon in that small book, alternately priceless and sheer crap, which you saw me poring over to excess during the difficult days prior to our departure for this place.<sup>52</sup>

As you can see, the probability that the last sentence could be written by such a small child is very low. Salinger however goes on and endues Seymour with even more astounding qualities. Seymour has the enviable virtue of constant knowledge-gaining and personal improvement. This may be observed for example here:

It is in danger of destroying my possible future as a young poet, private scholar, and unaffected person. I beg you both and perhaps Miss Overman, should you drop by at the library or run into her at your leisure, to please run a cold eye over all that follows and then notify me immediately if you uncover any glaring or merely sloppy errors in fundamental construction, grammar, punctuation, or excellent taste. Should you indeed run into Miss Overman quite by accident or design, please ask her to be merciless and deadly toward me in this little matter, assuring her amiably that I am sick to death of the wide gap of embarrassing differences, among other things, between my writing and speaking voices!<sup>53</sup>

According to what he says in the last quotation he is embarrassed about his writing abilities, which means that his oral capabilities are even better...

Salinger goes on with his exaggerating and adds to young Seymour a huge amount of knowledge, which a man gains only rarely. The seven-year old kid is quoting in his letter various religious representatives, poets, philosophers and a great number of literature writers.

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<sup>52</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

<sup>53</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

To continue and mercifully conclude this list, I would be thankful to read anything in English written by the tolerable Cheng brothers or anybody else passably gifted and heartrendingly ambitious who had the disagreeable luck to do any religious writing in China after the two, towering, incomparable geniuses of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse, not to mention Gautama Buddha!<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere he writes:

Continuing at leisure, as for my own writing, I have completed about 25 reasonable poems for which I have a low regard, followed by 16 poems that have some merit but no enduring generosity, as well as about 10 others that have turned out to be in unconscious, disastrous imitation of William Blake, William Wordsworth, and one or two other dead geniuses whose sudden passing never ceases to cut me like a knife.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the letter, we find out that Seymour is familiar with most (if not all) of the world's classic literature writers, with religions, with spiritual subjects generally, and with many historical events. From what he writes, Buddy is following him in learning and they both together share their knowledge and learn from each other. The list of the books that he kindly asked his parents to send him is of such a length that a good adult reader would have enough to read for a year. Buddy and Seymour planned to read them all in the camp saying that they can read unusually quickly.

Though the letter is mainly imposing illustration of young Seymour's knowledge, we can also find there some of his qualities, which will develop more and more towards his adulthood. One of these is for instance his caring personality: 'Boo Boo, practice your writing of complete words! [...] Do not take any more crafty refuge in your tender age\*, I beg you! [...] Also, my dear, darling, unforgettable Miss Beatrice Glass, please work harder on your manners and etiquette in private as well as in public.'<sup>56</sup> He gives at least one advice to each member of his family except for Buddy, since he was in the camp with him. He not only advises about the education or the upbringing of his siblings but he also gives some pieces of advice to his parents. This all confirms that he cared very much about his family, he missed

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<sup>54</sup> J.D Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

<sup>55</sup> J.D Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

<sup>56</sup> J.D Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

them and he wanted to do as much good for them as possible. His suicide is therefore even more surprising and harder to interpret.

The last passage of this chapter will be dedicated to the short story "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish". Despite its often - coded message, it contains much key information to Seymour's suicide and it reconstructs the last moments of Seymour's life. It is set in Florida where Seymour and his wife Muriel went for a holiday. They lived in a busy hotel very close to the beach. The story can be divided in three parts. It starts with a phone call, which is followed by a beach scene where Seymour spends some time with a little girl Sybil after which he goes to his hotel room and committed suicide.

In the first part Muriel's mother calls her daughter because she fears for her. The phone call is very long and though it does not explain anything in particular nor offer a complete explanation of Seymour's mental condition, it gives us various hints to his current behaviour. All of the following quotations are extracted from the text where Salinger brilliantly describes the dialogue between a mother and her daughter:

- Who drove?
- [...] He did.
- [...] Did he try any of that funny business with the trees? [...] Did he keep calling you that awful - ?
- He calls me Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948[...]
- Your father talked to Dr. Sivetski. He told him everything. [...] The trees. That business with the window. Those horrible things he said to granny about passing away. What he did with all those lovely pictures from Bermuda – everything. [...] He (the doctor) said it was a perfect crime the Army released him from the hospital. [...] He very *definitely* told your father there's a chance [...] that Seymour may *completely* lose control of himself.<sup>57</sup>

There are many more hints of the kind, all pointing to Seymour's recent mental instability. Unfortunately, Salinger does not develop further any of the above mentioned Seymour's actions so we cannot know what exactly happened with the trees neither what Seymour said to granny about her passing away.

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<sup>57</sup> For *Esme with Love and Squalor*, 2.

In the second part the plot moves to the beach. Little Sybil finds Seymour Glass on the beach and they start to chat. Seymour completely adapts a childlike talk and what is more he looks very comfortable in this chatting. Until Sybil came there, he was alone. He was obviously searching for seclusion throughout the whole story. The only company he did not mind was that of the children. The climax of this part of the story takes place in the sea where Seymour says to Sybil how tragic the life of a bananafish is. The analogy found in the following quotation will be further explained in the next chapter.

- Well, they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as much as seventy-eight bananas. [...] Naturally, after that they're so fat they can't get out of the hole again. Can't fit through the door.
- [...] 'What happens to them?' [...]
- Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die.'<sup>58</sup>

The closing of the short story has two settings. The first one is the elevator where Seymour shows an unexpected outburst of irritation when he has the feeling that a lady who was in the elevator with him was looking at his feet. Here comes what Salinger does not offer in the first part of the short story – a complete reconstruction of a scene, where Seymour's mental condition shows some symptoms.

- I see you're looking at my feet.' [...]
- I beg your pardon. I happened to be looking at the floor.'
- If you want to look at my feet say so, but don't be a god-damned sneak about it.'<sup>59</sup>

A part of the last scene of the "Perfect Day for Banana Fish" was already quoted in the beginning of this chapter. After what could seem like an agreeable afternoon on the beach, Seymour Glass walks to his room where he finds his wife asleep, takes a gun and surprisingly

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<sup>58</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 12.

fires 'a bullet through his right temple'<sup>60</sup>. What was the reason for this act is not clear but I intend to interpret it on the basis of all the information from this chapter.

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<sup>60</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 12.

### **III. Analysis**

#### **III.I. Introduction**

The main role of this chapter is to use all information available from the first chapter, ergo, from Seymour Glass's biography, and through the analysis explain why Seymour Glass committed suicide. It will be done in three subchapters each of which will explain one of the three most important motives of Seymour's suicide: shell shock, resemblance of The Lost Generation and sensibility. Even though the three motives are interconnected, they will be analysed independently until the conclusion of this chapter where a general judgement of his suicide will be made.

#### **III.II. Shell shock**

An Argentinean writer José Narosky once said that in war, there are no unwounded soldiers. Though we usually think that the wounded ones are those without an extreme physical wound, with deformed faces or with scars on their bodies, it does not have to be necessarily like this. We have to bear in mind also the fact that wounds can be invisible psychic ones to our eyes. As people from the twenty-first century, people aware of what wars caused to humanity throughout history, we know that any war leaves scars not only on bodies but also on psychic systems. One of the most recently specified mental disorders, which is directly caused by war, specifically in war combat, is *shell shock*. This concept started to be used towards the end of the World War I when military doctors observed similar symptoms of an until then unspecified mental disorder. Despite the fact that soldiers suffered such similar symptoms also before World War I, the mental disorder caused directly by war was never given a precise name. Surprisingly, it was not even considered an illness, but only a demonstration of cowardice and slackness. However, the number of soldiers with this kind of mental disorder was increasing from one war to another, and therefore military doctors had to admit that the cause was somewhere else than in the cowardliness of soldiers. 'During the early years of World War II, psychiatric casualties had increased some three-hundred percent when compared with World War I, even though the pre-induction psychiatric rejection rate was three to four times higher than World War I.'<sup>61</sup> Consequently, military doctors started to

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<sup>61</sup>The Evolution of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", *PTSD Support Service*, 14, June 2012, 13 July 2012 <[http://www.ptsdsupport.net/evolutionof\\_ptsd.html](http://www.ptsdsupport.net/evolutionof_ptsd.html)>.

treat soldiers who suffered from *shell shock* with a specific care, dedicated more effort to the study of this 'new illness' and military services all over the world dedicated more time to prevent it.

After a detailed study of Seymour Glass's biography I came to the conclusion that Seymour suffered from shell shock. I believe that he was shell-shocked when he committed suicide and that he was suffering from latent shell shock also a long time before he killed himself despite the fact that several years had passed since World War II, in which he participated, had ended. Why I think so and what evidence I have to support my theory with will be explained in the following passage in which a more detailed explanation of what exactly shell shock is will be offered.

'Shell shock was a term used during the First World War to describe the psychological trauma suffered by men serving on the war's key battlefronts - France, Flanders, along the Isonzo and in Gallipoli.'<sup>62</sup> From these battlefronts shell shock spread like a virus not only through space but also through time. Men all over the world in the majority of war conflicts were experiencing shell shock and taking the disordered state of mind also to their homes after the war ended. How the disease manifests itself? 'Early symptoms included tiredness, irritability, giddiness, lack of concentration and headaches. Eventually the men suffered mental breakdowns'<sup>63</sup>. The cure of so affected a soldier was not always successful. 'Sent home to recover many shell shock victims recovered over time, whereas many others continued to feel its effects for years afterwards.'<sup>64</sup> 'Some of them committed suicide.'<sup>65</sup> The last two quotations are vital for my 'diagnosis' of Seymour Glass's mental condition in 1948 when he was on holiday with his wife.

The short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" suggests that the mental condition of Seymour was unstable. From what we know of the text, Seymour was for some reason located in a hospital. Since the plot of the short story is set to the year 1948, and since Muriel's mother seems to be speaking about the recent past, we suppose that Seymour had to spend some time in a hospital two or three years after World War II ended. We can be sure that he was located in a military hospital because Muriel's mother told Muriel that her father spoke to

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Duffy, "Encyclopedia – Shell-shock", *A Multimedia History of World War One*, 22 August 2009, 13 July 2012 <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/shellshock.htm>>

<sup>63</sup> Spartacus Educational, 14 July 2012 <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWshellshock.htm>>

<sup>64</sup> Michael Duffy, "Encyclopedia – Shell-shock", *A Multimedia History of World War One*, 22 August 2009, 13 July 2012 <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/shellshock.htm>>

<sup>65</sup> Peter McMillan, "Shellshock", *Spartacus Educational*, 14 July 2012 <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWshellshock.htm>>

some Dr. Sivetski who 'said it was a perfect crime the Army released him (Seymour) from the hospital.'<sup>66</sup> As the physical condition of Seymour does not seem to be anyhow damaged in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", we have to suppose that Seymour was in the hospital because of his mental condition. Besides, Dr. Sivetski said that 'there's a very great chance [...] that Seymour may *completely* lose control of himself.'<sup>67</sup> It may be that Seymour suffered from one or various mental breakdowns and that is why he had to spend some time in the hospital. This is only speculation. However, I think we can rely on the opinion of Dr. Sivetski, and admit that Seymour was in such a mental condition that he could anytime 'lose control of himself'. One of the above - mentioned symptoms of shell shock is a danger of mental breakdowns.

Another of the shell shock symptoms is a lack of concentration. Though we do not have any direct mention of it, there is a passage according to which we can suppose that Seymour could have had impaired powers of concentration. In the introductory dialogue of the short story Mrs. Fedder, Muriel's mother, is obviously disturbed when Muriel tells her that Seymour was driving when they were going to Florida. She immediately asked: 'Did he try any of that funny business with the trees?'<sup>68</sup> Muriel answered:

I said he drove very nicely, Mother. Now, please. I asked him to stay close to the white line, and all, and he knew what I meant, and he did. He was even trying not to look at the trees-you could tell. Did Daddy get the car fixed, incidentally?<sup>69</sup>

For some reason, unknown not only to us but also to Seymour's family, he was attracted by trees that were distracting him from driving. He could not keep his eye on the road, but had to look at the trees and try some 'business with them'. Though we do not know what exactly this funny business was, we know it provoked a car accident, since to answer Muriel's last question Mrs. Fedder said: 'Not yet. They want four hundred dollars.'<sup>70</sup> As Muriel said that 'Seymour told Daddy that he'll pay for it'; it looks as if Seymour realized it was his fault that the car was broken. Mentally healthy people do not get constantly disturbed by trees when they are driving. They concentrate on the road and on the wheel. Those mentally tired, however, can switch their attention to trees without realizing how dangerous it can be.

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<sup>66</sup> A Perfect Day for Bananafish, 3.

<sup>67</sup> A Perfect Day for Bananafish, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 2.

That Seymour was not mentally stable and that he got easily irritated without any reasonable cause is obvious from what I wrote in the first chapter. When Seymour was in the elevator with the woman whom he suspected of looking at his feet, he got clearly upset. From her reaction we know, that his irritation was caused more by his imagination than by reality. Moreover, his mood suddenly changed. He changed from a peaceful and playful person to an excitable and an offensive one.

Though we do not find any evidence of Seymour being tired or giddy, we obviously find in his case the gravest consequence of shell shock - suicide. Three years after the war ended, after resting X weeks, maybe months in the military hospital, after having holidays, after lying on the beach, Seymour Glass committed an unexpected suicide. As one of the above used quotations says, some of the ex-soldiers felt the effect of shell shock many years after the war ended. This reader considers that this act of Seymour's could have been the culmination of his inability to get rid of the war memories and of the latent mental suffering he had been experiencing since he left the terror of war.

### III.III. New wave of The Lost Generation

'Every man becomes civilized between the ages of 18 and 23. If he does not go through a civilizing experience at that time of his life, he will not become a civilized man. The men who went to war at 18 missed the civilizing [...]'<sup>71</sup> Gertrude Stein said this about the young American intellectuals who fought in World War I and stayed in Paris after it ended. Though in fiction Seymour Glass went to the draft when he was exactly twenty-three years old, that is, when his civilizing process should have been completed, he was a witness of a great number of young men who, as Gertrude Stein said, 'missed the civilizing'. Despite the fact that he fought in World War II, he experienced similar feelings as The Lost Generation. We already know how hard he was on himself since his early childhood. He was gathering knowledge from hundreds or thousands of books, which included a great number of religious books, and books on the moral and ethical behaviour of people.<sup>72</sup> Despite his finished civilization (the quotation of Gertrude Stein however cannot be accurately applied to Seymour Glass since he was greatly civilized already at the ripe age of seven) he had to spend some

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Ryan, "The Lost Generation", *CBC American Studies*, July 14 2012, <<http://www.umsl.edu/~ryanga/amer.studies/amst.lost.html>>

<sup>72</sup> J.D Salinger, *Hapworth 19, 1924*, *New Yorker*, 19 June, 1965, 16 April 2012 <<http://freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/hapworth.html>>.

time looking at young men who denied him all he had learned so far, all the religious, moral and ethical traditions that he respected and that he believed in; he thus started to be confused and consequently lost.

Although I realize that the concept of the 'Lost Generation' is generally used for the generation born in the end of the nineteenth century and for the generation who fought in World War I, I believe that its essence can express the feelings of any other young, frustrated generation who fought in the war and who feels lost after the war ended. As we know from Seymour's biography, he was a very religious man who based his beliefs in the best aspects of various world religions. We also know that he detested violence; therefore his activity in war caused him a lot of psychological strain. The way he was raising his siblings was completely opposed to what he saw in the war; and the fact that the world was absolutely different from what he was trying to build during his whole life certainly must have disturbed him. Moreover, we cannot forget that Salinger himself fought in World War II when he was in his early twenties and after the war ended his reaction to post-war times was similar to the one of The Lost Generation since his 'unit – was directly involved in a significant part of some of the most savagely contested fighting in World War II.'<sup>73</sup> Though Salinger was able to deal with his life after the war we know that 'for some time he had been feeling sullen and depressed'<sup>74</sup> and he could not continue with writing. Besides, Salinger and Hemingway were both in Paris on Liberation day and 'Salinger was intrigued by the prospect of meeting a writer as renowned as Hemingway.'<sup>75</sup> They indeed did meet and therefore we can suppose that Salinger could have been to some extent influenced by The Lost Generation first because of his meeting with Hemingway and secondly because he deeply admired another Lost Generation writer – F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'the author who had become one of Salinger's favourites and an influence on his own work'.<sup>76</sup>

Concrete evidence of the influence of The Lost Generation on Seymour Glass comes again from the short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish". It is the passage in which Seymour explains to Sybil how the life of a bananafish looks like:

They lead a very tragic life. [...] they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in. But once they get

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Alexander, *Salinger, A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999) 100.

<sup>74</sup> *Salinger, A Biography*, 103.

<sup>75</sup> *Salinger, A Biography*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> *Salinger, A Biography*, 87.

in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas. [...] Naturally, after that they're so fat they can't get out of the hole again. Can't fit through the door. - What happens to them? - Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die.<sup>77</sup>

I think the last passage could be a manifesto of The Lost Generation. When a reader reads the passage for the first time, it can seem that it is only a hastily invented fairy-tale. However, when we think about it more, we find out that Seymour talks to Sybil about his feelings. He tells to little, innocent Sybil, not to his wife or to his psychoanalyst, what is bothering him and though Sybil does not understand the concealed message, with the knowledge of Seymour's background, we can decipher it. The story of a bananafish is an analogy of the life of Seymour Glass and of many others with similar experiences, feelings and troubles. Seymour is a common man, a common bananafish, who went to the hole, that is, to the war. He saw other men, other bananafish, who acted like pigs when they were in the hole with him. I suppose the absurd number of bananas that Seymour mentions in his analogy represents the number of men from the enemy troops, which a bananafish can kill. Men behaved like pigs, they were killing each other. They could kill 'as many as seventy-eight' men. Seymour says it is a very tragic life and it indeed is, because once a man gets into the war, he cannot get out. He is so fat, so overeaten with the bad impressions, emotions and depression, that he 'cannot fit through the door' and enter to a normal life again. He has to die. Is this not an analogy of The Lost Generation?

The title of the short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" itself carries certain message. If we consider that Seymour Glass himself is a bananafish and that the story is an analogy of his own life, we can assume that the title refers to Seymour being a bananafish. The day described in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is a perfect day for putting an end to Seymour's tragic life. After coming back from the war, Seymour cannot take the same social position that he left before the draft. He is not interested in the corrupted world of adults and either seeks solitude or spends time with children. Nevertheless, he cannot find relief for his soul. He is lost and he decided to end his tragic life by committing suicide. It was a perfect day for bananafish to kill himself.

Given what I have said above, it arises that Seymour Glass could be considered a member of the 'new wave' of The Lost Generation. Although I am aware that nothing like a

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<sup>77</sup> *For Esme with Love and Squalor*, 11.

second generation of The Lost Generation officially exists, my intention is not to invent a new group of writers or of fiction characters but to show that the character of Seymour Glass shares some attitudes towards life with The Lost Generation. Since the writers E. Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald belonged to The Lost Generation and since J.D. Salinger was influenced by them, I am convinced that Seymour's resemblance to The Lost Generation is not accidental, and that it is indeed one of the three main reasons for which Seymour decided to committed suicide – the feeling of being lost.

### III.IV. Seymour's cultivated sensibility

In the short story "Raise Hight the Roof Beam, Carpenters" Buddy wrote that for his siblings Seymour represented something like a portable conscience. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* says that conscience 'is the part of you that judges how moral your own actions are and makes you feel guilty about bad things that you have done or things you feel responsible for.'<sup>78</sup> Seymour read probably all books that could help him to cultivate not only his own conscience but also to help his siblings with this task. Though he was not their father, he wanted to form the best possible people. A cultivated conscience makes people perceive their faults in detail and helps them prevent future mistakes. I believe that Seymour Glass was cultivating his conscience with the help of all available sources, which included books from various religions, philosophies, significant persons and literary characters. At the age of thirty Seymour came to that state of soul, which Buddy called saintship. I think that a man who took so much care about his soul and about the souls of his siblings and who was doing his best to prevent any harm he could possibly do, could hardly bear all the fighting and killing.

William Wordsworth said that a poet is a man 'endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind.'<sup>79</sup> We know from the first chapter, that Seymour Glass was 'one full poet'. Anytime Buddy tries to give a true picture of his older brother, he says that Seymour is a poet. Based on Wordsworth's opinion about the nature of the poet, we can confirm that Seymour was indeed more sensitive and tender than the majority of common people. Buddy writes that during his last three years of

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<sup>78</sup> *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 295.

<sup>79</sup> "William Wordsworth", *Wisdom on Demand*, 20 July 2012, <<http://www.iwise.com/6zWK5>>.

his life, Seymour wrote 184 poems. However, he 'wouldn't unreservedly recommend the last thirty or thirty-five poems to any living soul who hasn't died at least twice in his lifetime, preferably slowly.'<sup>80</sup> Therefore the poems must be of such a nature that they would not make its readers happy compared with the rest of Seymour's poems. According to this information, Seymour's poetry was probably cheerless, gloomy, depressed ... If we suppose that his poetry resembled his state of mind or/and the state of his soul, we can see that towards the end of his life he was losing his cheerfulness. It may be that it was because of the cruel human nature that he got to know during the war. The majority of the soldiers coped with it but since Seymour was more 'endued with sensibility and tenderness', he was not able to do it. It was his poetic nature that impeded him from doing so.

Seymour was also very fond of innocence especially the child's innocence. His youngest siblings were born when he was already in his late teens; therefore he spent much of his life-time in the company of children. As we see in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" the thirty-two-year old Seymour was still comfortable around children. He is seen in the company of an adult only once, and that is exactly when his irritability displays itself. It is so presumably because he detested the corrupted materialistic world of the adults. We also know that what he most admired and worshipped in his fiancée was her simplicity and her honesty. All these human qualities are very much opposed to the soldierlike environment. The innocence he was seeking all his life was far away from him and that surely made him innerly very uneasy.

In Seymour's biography I mentioned that there is one mysterious element of Seymour, the meaning of which can be gained only by speculation.

I have scars on my hands from touching certain people. [...] Certain heads, certain colours and textures of human hair leave permanent marks on me. Other things, too. Charlotte once ran away from me, outside the studio, and I grabbed her dress to stop her, to keep her near me. A yellow cotton dress I loved because it was too long for her. I still have a lemon-yellow mark on the palm of my right hand.<sup>81</sup>

Though Seymour says he has 'permanent marks' on himself we have to bear in mind also his unreliability since we cannot know how reliable his notes are. In my opinion what he might have in mind when writing about the 'permanent marks' was that some moments, e.g., the

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<sup>80</sup> Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters, 128.

<sup>81</sup> Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters, 75.

moment when he caressed the hair of his little sister, or when he touched the yellow dress of his friend Charlotte he felt such a joy that it left something like a 'positive' invisible scar on him. It made scars on his memory. I would use J. Joyce's word 'epiphany' - an experience of sudden and striking realization<sup>82</sup> - to describe what Seymour might have felt when speaking about the scenes from which he has the 'permanent marks'. Things like this are not perceived by all people only by those 'endued with more sensitivity and tenderness'. This human trait, usually very valued, meant for Seymour after the war a complication with which he was not able to cope. The sensibility that he was cultivating since his early childhood cost him his life. His tender nature was simply not able to reconcile with the nature of the twentieth-century world.

### **III.V. Conclusion of the third chapter**

Each of the three subchapters was written with the intention of offering a complex explanation of Seymour Glass's suicide. Though I found also indications of other possible reasons for Seymour's suicide, the evidence to support these indications was low. Consequently I based my explanation on the three most evident grounds: shell shock, attitudes of The Lost Generation, and over sensibility. When the three elements interconnect in the mind of one man, it is understandable that he is not able to deal with all of them. As a result, he surrenders because he sees no future for him in the post-war world where nothing of what he had learnt during his life is valid and so he decides to take his own life. Seymour Glass, the leading figure of the Glass family, was shaken by the war so much that nothing he saw after it could reduce his disquiet. Nothing of what he had read helped him. Not one of his relatives could appease him. He felt lost and saw no more hope in his life. He was too sensitive to go on and watch the corrupted, materialistic life which was arising around him and which was suffocating his poetic, sensitive, and tender soul. That is why he committed suicide.

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<sup>82</sup> *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2008) 472.

## **IV. See more Salinger through Seymour Glass**

### **IV.I. Introduction**

Though the aim of the present thesis was to explain and to elucidate the reasons for Seymour Glass's suicide I would also like to clarify why I chose this topic and to interpret the function of my thesis within a literary context, more specifically within the literary production of J.D. Salinger. As I briefly outlined in the introduction, J.D. Salinger is worldwide known mainly because of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Though I understand that the importance of *The Catcher in the Rye* is raised also with the fact that it is the only novel that Salinger published, I still think that the rest of his work lies unjustifiably in the 'Catcher's' shadow. I think so because Salinger had written many of his short stories after he finished *The Catcher in the Rye* therefore his craft became even more developed. Since I am not happy with this general 'Catcher tendency' when one is choosing a book by Salinger, I decided to prove that within Salinger's work there are many other complex and interesting characters such as Seymour Glass who are worth reading and studying. I hope I managed that in the last two chapters. In this last chapter, I will outline what Seymour Glass reveals about J.D. Salinger and why I think that the majority of Salinger's work can successfully compete with Holden Caulfield if not go through him.

### **IV.II. Autobiographical elements in the fictional character of Seymour Glass**

At the time when Salinger had started to write about Holden Caulfield his relationship with publishers and literary agents were not yet damaged. Thanks to the correspondence maintained with his friend and publisher Mr. Burnett we know that Salinger 'had decided to try an autobiographical novel'.<sup>83</sup> It was apparently the novel about Holden Caulfield on which he started to work. I will not argue about why the book is good or bad, but what I want to stress in this passage is that – as the quotation says - it was partly an autobiographical novel. Since Salinger soon after he had become famous left the life of a publicly known author, and since he refused to give almost any information about himself, the novel which Salinger himself proclaimed to be autobiographical is one of the few reliable sources that offers some information about Salinger's life. It is of course only one of the many reasons why the book is so favoured. However, I also found autobiographical elements in the character of Seymour

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<sup>83</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 64.

Glass, which are for some unclarified reason far less discussed than those of Holden Caulfield.

To show an example I will dedicate some space to the most striking similarity between Seymour Glass and J.D. Salinger. Both of these “characters” fought in World War II and the war left both of them in a bad mental condition. Paul Alexander, the author of Salinger’s biography writes that ‘at twenty-two, he (Salinger) was prime material for military service.’<sup>84</sup> As we know, Seymour entered the army soon after his twenty-third birthday. The two men were therefore almost at the same age when they entered the Army, but what is more important and what associates them even more is their mental condition in which they left the Army.

Thanks to the correspondence that Salinger maintained with Burnett we know what effects the war had on him.

His (Salinger’s) June 28 letter to Burnett was written in a new – and unmistakably sombre – tone. For the better part of the month, Salinger had been in the war zone where, as he witnessed mass death and destruction, he knew he, too, could be killed at any moment. As a result, the light-hearted, jovial tone he had affected in many of his past letters was gone, replaced by a solemnity usually foreign to Salinger.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know what exactly Seymour did in the war and where he fought, if he indeed did fight. However, since we know in what mental condition he was some years after the war ended, we can assume that Salinger imagined Seymour fighting in a similar condition as he himself did. From another Salinger letter written in 1944 we know that ‘for some time he had been feeling sullen and depressed’<sup>86</sup>. To sum up, he found himself in a state of mind, which once again resembles very much the one of his fictional creation if not his alter ego, Seymour Glass.

In the end, after the war ended, Salinger could not bear his mental state and sought help.

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<sup>84</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 77.

<sup>85</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 96.

<sup>86</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 103.

Salinger, like so many others who had fought in the war, was exhausted, disenchanted, and confused by what he had been through [...] Exhaustion turned into despondency, disenchantment into despair. Salinger had more and more trouble coping with living life on a day-to-day basis [...] Finally, in early July he checked himself into an Army general hospital in Nuremberg where he was evaluated by doctors as being in good physical condition but suffering from what amounted to a nervous breakdown [...] Exposure to live combat over a prolonged period of time had left Salinger depressed, angry, and unable to cope with the routine of ordinary life.<sup>87</sup>

Although Salinger wrote "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" three years after he checked into the Army hospital, we can certainly say that Seymour Glass is a fictional embodiment of Salinger's mental state after the war. We do not know how exactly Salinger felt when he was writing the story, whether he was already feeling well or whether he was writing about something that was still a fresh wound. Regardless of this there is obviously an evident resemblance between Seymour's and Salinger's mental condition. For this reason, I came to a conclusion that the short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is partly an autobiographical story as well as *The Catcher in the Rye*. The main difference between them is that while the main character of the latter, Holden Caulfield, offers some information about the life of Salinger when he was a teenager, the short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" reveals details about the older, already adult Salinger whose personality was suddenly changed by the war. Therefore, the character of Seymour Glass can enrich any reader with some new information about Salinger's private life, which he always protected so carefully.

#### **IV.III. Novel vs. short stories**

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" brought Salinger an immense success. He gained an attention of his most respectable magazine – the *New Yorker*<sup>88</sup>.

In 1947 [...] Salinger wrote a story that would prove to be one of his best [...] because of the singular quality of the story and because Salinger had published so much in such a short time [...] the *New Yorker* gave him [...] a first-rejection

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<sup>87</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 107 – 108.

<sup>88</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 140.

contract [...] The story that got Salinger his first-rejection contract, the story that would permanently change his standing in the literary community, was a peculiar, upsetting piece called [...] "A Perfect Day for Bananafish". And it had as its narrator a complex, unusual, and unquestionably disturbed young man by the name of Seymour Glass.<sup>89</sup>

As the quotation says this short story changed Salinger's status within an American and later on also within a European literary world. Ostensibly, it was Seymour Glass who changed this not Holden Caulfield. Though Holden confirms Salinger's talent, Seymour Glass is the one who aids the meteoric rise of Salinger from an unknown young author to a widely read and appreciated American writer.

After publishing *The Catcher in the Rye* Salinger never again published another novel. He went on writing short stories. The reviews for his novel were generally very good, but the reviews for his short stories were often better. The review, which strikes me most, was written by Eudora Welty and appeared in the *New York Times*. Among other things she says that 'His novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, was good and extremely moving, although - for this reader - all its virtues can be had in a short story by the same author, where they are more at home.'<sup>90</sup> I very much agree with this opinion of hers. While *The Catcher in the Rye* is a very well written absorbing novel, Salinger seems 'more at home' in his short stories. The fact that Salinger promised his readers 'several new Glass stories'<sup>91</sup> also suggests that he had more plans with short stories than with novels. Moreover, Salinger was gradually losing interest in writing stories with plot therefore we cannot consider *The Catcher in the Rye* – a plot based novel – to be Salinger's representative literary piece. The artistic fact that he wanted to write more about the Glass family also confirms that he considered the Glass family worth more attention and that he probably saw potential for more interesting short stories in them. Unfortunately 'By 1970, even though he continued to write, sometimes on a daily basis, Salinger had made up his mind that he was not going to publish again, at least not for the foreseeable future.'<sup>92</sup> Because of this decision of his we cannot know whether he continued to write about Seymour Glass and whether by any chance he explained why his character committed suicide. However, thanks to many allusions and hints pointing to Seymour, we can be sure that J.D. Salinger knew about Seymour Glass more than he exposed to his readers and that this

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<sup>89</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 123 – 124.

<sup>90</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 229.

<sup>91</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 229.

<sup>92</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 239.

character played one of the key roles in his fiction. Since Seymour Glass acts - alive or posthumously – in seven short stories, I think that readers should pay more attention to him and because of his contribution to Salinger’s fiction, he should be at least equalized with Holden Caulfield.

#### **IV.IV "Death of the Author" and the work of J.D. Salinger**

’The image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions.’<sup>93</sup> Roland Barthes’s essay the "Death of the author" negates part of the traditional approach to literature. He disagrees with the study of an author’s life, what critics often used to explain certain meanings of the texts. Consequently, Barthes says that the author and text are two independent - and what is more – two unrelated elements of any work of art.

’The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the “human person” ’.<sup>94</sup> J.D. Salinger would probably agree with the quote. He himself was an individual who became a ’modern figure’ of our contemporary literature but he disliked this fact and, as we know, he decided to withdraw from publicity. Nevertheless, Salinger’s reclusion did not provoke ’the death’ of his fame. On the contrary, it attracted even more interest in his personality and in his work. Because of the unusual kind of life that Salinger led, we have to ask ourselves the following questions: Was it really the quality of Salinger’s work that attracted the attention of his readers or was it rather their curiosity and eagerness to learn more about the mysterious author? How much would be people interested in the work of the reclusive J.D. Salinger if he was a common writer giving many interviews a year, publishing his short stories in a great number of magazines, acting in radio or TV shows etc? I am convinced that he would be widely read in that case too but because of the specific context of his life, we can never declare its contents objectively.

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<sup>93</sup> R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Tbook*, 4 August, 2012. <[http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death\\_authorbarthes.pdf](http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf)>, 2.

<sup>94</sup> R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Tbook*, 4 August, 2012. <[http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death\\_authorbarthes.pdf](http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf)>, 2.

'The explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence."<sup>95</sup> Barthes blames conservative literary critics who seek after the voice of the author in any piece of literature. I partly agree with Barthes. The study of literature should not be overly based on the name printed on the cover of the book. The name itself should not evoke respect or disdain. It should be the work of art itself independently from its author. However, when we concentrate on a specific part of a work of art and the biographical context of the author can help us to understand it better, why should we not use it? For instance, the analysis of a literary character such as Seymour Glass. Though Salinger's work offers much information about him in his work, there is still another great source of information. It is the life narrative of J.D. Salinger. Through studying it, I found out where the inspiration for Seymour Glass originated. Moreover, it filled the empty spaces in my puzzle and finally it helped me to find out what I intended – to discover why Seymour Glass committed suicide. Without the help of Paul Alexander's biography of J.D. Salinger, I could easily come to a mistaken conclusion. I believe that in such cases, neglecting biographical information would be unreasonable.

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<sup>95</sup> R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Tbook*, 4 August, 2012. <[http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death\\_authorbarthes.pdf](http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf)>, 2.

## V. Conclusion

The aim of this work was to uncover and to explain the reasons of Seymour Glass's suicide. I believe that I achieved this goal by suggesting three possible reasons: shell shock, over sensibility and resemblance with The Lost Generation. I also wished to slightly divert the attention from Holden Caulfield and direct it towards Seymour Glass and generally towards Salinger's short stories. Regrettably I could not use Salinger's opinions to support or disprove my theory since he was reluctant to give almost any interview after he stopped publishing whereupon his views of his own work are unknown to his readers. Salinger decided to withdraw from publicity and we should respect it. On the one hand I believe that he made a right decision since in one of the very few interviews he gave he said: 'There is a marvellous peace in not publishing. It's peaceful. Still. Publishing is a terrible invasion of my privacy. I like to write. I live to write. But I write just for myself and my own pleasure.'<sup>96</sup> According to this statement, Salinger felt satisfied with writing without the intention of publishing. It was making him content and he avoided all the disillusion and anger which publishing often caused him. On the other hand, there is the possibility that some brilliantly written short stories or even novels with such complex and refined characters such as Seymour Glass is, will be never taken out of his drawer... Precisely because of such a limited number of Salinger's published works (four books), we should enjoy all of them, not only the most famous one. A wider knowledge of the range of his work offers also the possibility of observing how his talent developed throughout the period when he was publishing. After publishing the majority of his work, Salinger himself realized that what he was writing was at least unusual and could not attract attention of many people. Probably because of that he wrote ('reincarnated' into the character of Buddy Glass): 'There are, however, readers who seriously require only the most restrained, most classical and possibly deftest methods of having their attention drawn, and I suggest – as honestly as a writer can suggest this sort of thing – that they leave now [...]'<sup>97</sup> In this short story, Salinger was still only suggesting and giving his readers the possibility of taking a decision. His readers themselves could decide whether they would read his work or not. However, later on, when he stopped publishing his work, Salinger decided for them. He knew very well what consequences it had: 'I pay for this kind of attitude. I'm known as a strange, aloof kind of man. But all I'm doing is trying to

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<sup>96</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 239.

<sup>97</sup> Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymou, an Introduction, 100.

protect myself and my work.’<sup>98</sup> Fortunately there are those four books, which we have still at our disposal and through which we can ’see more Salinger’.

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<sup>98</sup> Salinger, a Biography, 250.

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