## 23 CRITICS DISCUSS

### J. D. Salinger

(1919-2010)

"New York-born writer, resident in New Hampshire, began to publish stories in the early 1940s; and after service as an infantry sergeant in Europe during World War II he wrote more stories, but has not chosen to collect them from Collier's, The Saturday Evening Post, Story, and other journals. His first book was Catcher in the Rye (1951), about an unhappy teenage boy. Holden Caulfield, who runs away from boarding school as part of his disgust with 'phoniness,' and who because of his feelings and the idiom in which he communicated them became, particularly for a generation of high-school and college students, a symbol of purity and sensitivity.

In Nine Stories (1953), printing stories written beginning in 1948, including 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish,' Salinger introduced his chronicle of an eccentric, warm-hearted family named Glass, continued in his next books of stories. Franny and Zooey (1961) presents two members of the Glass family, sister and brother, in two long stories. Franny, a college senior, visits her boyfriend on a football weekend which is made desperately unhappy because she is dissatisfied with him, herself, and life. Zooey, her older brother, a television actor, tries to ease her feelings after this weekend, and his sensitive aid is first described by their still older brother, Buddy, whom the author calls his 'alter ego.'

Raise High the Roof-Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction (1963), a single volume, reprints stories from The New Yorker (1955,1959), in which Buddy Glass tells, first, of his return to New York during the war to attend his brother Seymour's wedding and of Seymour's jilting of the bride and then of their later elopement; and, second, after Seymour's suicide, of Buddy's own brooding, to the point of breakdown, upon Semour's virtues, human and literary. In the early 1960s Salinger retired to his rural home, withdrew from the literary scene, and has not published since 'Hapworth 16, 1924,' a story about Seymour aged seven, in The New Yorker (June 19, 1965)."

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1941-83) 663

"J. D. Salinger's writing is original, first rate, serious and beautiful….He has the equipment for a born writer to begin with—his sensitive eye, his incredibly good ear, and something I can think of no word for but grace. There is not a trace of sentimentality about his work, although it is full of children that are bound to be adored. He pronounces no judgments, he is simply gifted with having them passionately….What this reader loves about Mr. Salinger's stories is that they honor what is unique and precious in each person on earth."

Eudora Welty
*New York Times*
(5 April 1953) 4

"Salinger is an extreme individualist with a pleasing disregard for conventional narrative form and style….Above all Salinger appears to be ravenously interested in human beings, whom he depicts with an understanding, without either sentimentality or condescension, something unusual in so young a writer. Even his weaker stories are peopled with memorable minor characters, people who appear on stage for a few moments only, but who are endowed with lives of their own."

William Peden
*Saturday Review*
(11 April 1953) 43-44

"The special quality of Mr. Salinger's stories is humaneness. He engages the reader's civilized sympathies for the puzzled and troubled individuals whose sensibilities civilization has injured. There is little perception of the tragedy of life or, as Faulkner has put it, of the human heart in conflict with itself. Mr. Salinger's is the tradition of Chekhov applied to middle-class niceties and influenced by the standards

of *The New Yorker*….What he does do, he does well, but the scope of these stories is strictly limited. They are more concerned with a slice of life, an impression of it, than with life itself. For the most part, one discovers the problem of sensibility isolated, misdirected, misunderstood, and at last interpreted in a flash of insight."

Gene Baro
*New York Herald Tribune*
(12 April 1953) 6

"J. D. Salinger's closest resemblance is to F. Scott Fitzgerald—that is, close in one sense. Salinger is at home with the details of upper middle-class life, and, like Fitzgerald, there is much grace, lightness of touch, and bitter-sweet emotion in his stories. But since Salinger is his own man, and hardly an imitation, the analogy with Fitzgerald ends at a certain point; there is a bitterness and intensity in the young writer's work which is subtly wedded to the charm, and the combination makes Fitzgerald seem romantically old-fashioned by comparison. But both writers have that particular poignancy which results from a lyrical identification with subject matter set off by a critical intelligence; they are both lovers, so to speak, who are forced to acknowledge that they have been 'had,' and this gives their work the emotion of subtle heartbreak."

Seymour Krim
*Commentary*
(24 April 1953) 78

"Salinger's fiction convicts us, as readers, of being deeply aware of a haunting inconclusiveness in our own, and in contemporary, emotional relationships—members all of the lonely crowd. His characters exist outside the charmed circle of the well-adjusted, and their thin cries for love and understanding go unheard. They are men, women, and adolescents, not trapped by outside fate, but by their own frightened, and sometimes tragi-comic awareness of the uncrossable gulf between their need for love and the futility of trying to achieve it on any foreseeable terms. Salinger's short stories are all variants on the theme of emotional estrangement."

David L. Stevenson
*Nation*
(9 March 1957) 216

"The satiric author of American adolescence in revolt already commands the authority of a prophet, the sanctity of a guru, and the teasing charm of a Zen Master. And yet it was only in 1951 that the apotheosis of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a Book-of-the-Month selection took place. Since then American youth has learned to speak of Salinger and Dostoyevsky in the same breath, and to read them in the same measure, as a recent survey in *The Nation* claimed. That is all very well. James Dean and Elvis Presley have also had their moments. But we do Salinger ill-service to base his reputation on anything less enduring than his art….Salinger, of course, has written some of the best fiction of our time. His voice is genuine, new, and startlingly uneven. In his work we find no showy or covert gesture in the direction of Symbolism or Naturalism….Social realities are no doubt repressed in the work of Salinger—note how gingerly he handles his Jews—and this puts a limit on the total significance we can accord to it. Yet it is by what an author manages to *dramatize* that we must finally judge him.

The dramatic conflict which so many of Salinger's stories present obviously does not lend itself to sociological classification….The conflict…suggests a certain polarity between what might be called, with all due exaggeration, the Assertive Vulgarian and the Responsive Outsider. Both types recur with sufficient frequency to warrant the distinction, and their interplay defines much that is most central to Salinger's fiction. The Vulgarian, who carries the burden of squalor, stands out for all that is crude, venal, self-absorbed, and sequacious in our culture. He has no access to knowledge or feeling or beauty, which makes him all the more invulnerable…These, in a sense, are Spiritual Tramps, as Seymour called his wife in 'A Perfect Day for Banana Fish,' though he might have better said it of her mother. The Outsider, on the other hand, carries the burden of love. The burden makes of him sometimes a victim, and sometimes a scapegoat saint….

The risks Salinger has taken with his art are contained in the risks he must take with his religious view of things….[His] fair-sized body of work—fair-sized by contemporary standards but slim in comparison with the output of many earlier writers—may be classified into four 'periods': the early tentative efforts, up to 'The Inverted Forest,' 1947; the fine stories which appeared in the *New Yorker* and were later included in the collection *Nine Stories*, 1953; *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951; and finally the more recent narratives, beginning with 'De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period,' 1953, which express a new religious bent….*The Catcher in the Rye* was in fact developed from six earlier stories in which the two Caulfield brothers, Vincent and Holden, appear, and the central sibling relationship between Holden and Phoebe is prefigured by the relation of Babe Gladwaller to his sister, Mattie….

On the surface, Holden Caulfield is Salinger's typical quixotic hero in search, once again, of the simple truth. Actually, Holden is in flight from mendacity rather than in search of truth, and his sensitivity to the failures of the world is compounded with his self-disgust…The action of the book is recollected by Holden who is out West recuperating from his illness, and Holden only chooses to tell us 'about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas'—nothing more….The partial blindness of Holden, which has been correctly attributed to Holden's juvenile impatience with the reality of compromise, is made more serious by Salinger's failure to modify Holden's point of view by any other….Holden does succeed in making us perceive that the world is crazy, but his vision is also a function of his own adolescent instability, and the vision, we must admit, is more narrow and biased than that of Huck Finn, Parson Adams, or Don Quixote. It is this narrowness that limits the comic effects of the work. Funny it is without any doubt, and in a fashion that has been long absent from American fiction. But we must recall that true comedy is informed by the spirit of compromise, not intransigence….

The novel's sly insistence on suffering makes it a more subjective work than the two novels which relate the adventures of Huck Finn and Augie March [by Saul Bellow]. Adventure is precisely what Holden does not endure; his sallies into the world are feigned; his sacrificial burden, carried with whimsey and sardonic defiance, determines his fate. The fate is that of the American rebel-victim….Despite his striking gifts for dialogue—Salinger had once expressed the hope of becoming a playwright—the broad sense of dramatic participation is lacking in his fiction….Then, too, the cult they make of vulnerability, of amateurism in life, which is the very opposite of Hemingway's cult of professionalism, diffuses the pressure of Salinger's insight onto a rather thin surface. The quixotic gesture—Seymour searching for God by poking his finger into ashtrays—is made to carry a heavier burden of meaning than it can sustain."

Ihab Hassan
"J. D. Salinger: Rare Quixotic Gesture"
*Western Review* XXI (Summer 1957) 262-80
reprinted in *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*
(Princeton 1961)

"In January, 1953, after a year and a half of literary fame and literary silence, Salinger published in the *New Yorker* a story called 'Teddy,' which began his latest phase. It reads *methodically*; as if the impulse had first been to write something that was not a story. It has dialogue of a kind then new to his work but now his standard: no longer seducing our belief and lighting up characters with things we had heard but not listened to, but expounding an ordered set of ideas as plainly as can be done without actually destroying the characters into whose mouths they are put. The ideas are mostly Zen. In the stories Salinger has published since then…poignant, beautifully managed philosophic dialogues, really—the doctrine is developed, sometimes in the language of Christian mysticism (after Meister Eckhart) and sometimes as a rather high-flying syncretism."

Donald Barr
*Commentary*
(25 October 1957) 90

"Salinger made an excellent reputation for himself as a writer of polished and subtle short stories before he published his first novel in 1951. *The Catcher in the Rye* confirmed and sustained this reputation and gained him a position as one of the more important American writers of the younger generation. The novel owed part of its popular success to its alleged shocking passages and to its selection by the Book-of-the-

Month Club, but it is nevertheless a first-rate novel and one of the most convincing studies of adolescence ever to be written by an American.

Salinger is widely thought of, with justice, as a keen student of children. 'All of my best friends are children,' he himself has said. His extraordinary achievement in this area rests on two principles: first, he views children not from the adult point of view but from their own, from the inside, in a way few writers have succeeded in doing; and second, he concerns himself almost exclusively with extraordinary children. Many adult writers tend to make children seem younger than they actually are, to accentuate their babyish qualities, but Salinger does the opposite: he portrays children who are unusually mature for their age, who speak, or attempt to speak, like adults, and who wish to be accepted by adults on an adult basis. Models of this type are the little girl in 'For Esme—With Love and Squalor' and Phoebe, the sister of the hero in *The Catcher in the Rye.* His adolescents speak in a curiously gauche dialect which belongs to their age, yet they too are seeking for acceptance in an adult world—in fact this is the whole plot of *The Catcher in the Rye.*

Stylistically Salinger is competent, painstaking, and precise, in the tradition of the *New Yorker* type of fiction which is his specialty. Like many other young American writers, he has an unerring ear for dialogue. His fiction is not strong on plot, and is sometimes virtually plotless; his stories are essentially character studies revealed through accurate, highly vernacular, and often clever dialogue. Yet for all his magazine-writer competence he is not stylized; there is a quality about his style that instantly identifies it as his own. Part of this is due to his characterizations, i.e., to the fact that he usually writes about the same kind of people who talk in the same way. In addition to this, however, his style is individual and original, bearing that unmistakable personal mark which is one of the characteristics of a quality writer."

Donald Heiney
*Recent American Literature* 4
(Barron's Educational Series 1958) 281-82

"Salinger is probably the most avidly read author of any serious pretensions in his generation. There are good reasons why he should be, for though his work has certain limitations—both of subject matter and of technique—it is, within these limitations, the most interesting fiction that has come along for some time…. One of the sharpest implications of his work…is that perceptive people have difficulty remaining operative, or even surviving, in our world; a great deal of his most brilliant wit, like so much of James Thurber's, is close to desperation….

His immediate appeal is that he speaks our language, or, to be exact, makes a kind of poetry out of the raw materials of our speech. His ear picks up with stunning exactness the speech of many kinds of people…His people are wholly present, in devastating dramatic immediacy, in everything they say….Like Twain and Lardner, Salinger depends more than most prose writers on the fine shading of his style to convey his meaning. That is why he is at his best when one of his characters is speaking….

*The Catcher in the Rye*, despite its brilliance of observation and the virtuosity with which Salinger keeps Holden Caulfield's monologue going for the length of a novel, is primarily concerned neither with the working out of a plot nor the development of a character. It is a lyric monologue in which the complex feelings of an essentially static character are gradually revealed. For all Salinger's skill, *The Catcher in the Rye* has a claustrophobic and, at the same time, random quality….

The essential reality for him subsists in personal relations, when people, however agonizingly, love one another….This is true of all Salinger's mature stories. Their subject is the power to love, pure and—in children and the childlike—simple, but in aware people, pure and complicated. Salinger's constant allusions to the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri Ramakrishna, Chuang-Tzu, and the rest are only efforts to find alternate ways of expressing what his stories are about. This power to love can be realized—and represented—most fully in complicated personal relations like those of the Glasses….

What Salinger has seen in American life is the extraordinary tension it sets up between our passion to understand and evaluate our experience for ourselves and our need to belong to a community that is unusually energetic in imposing its understanding and values on its individual members. Whatever one may

think of Salinger's answer to the problem, this view of American life is important; it has a long and distinguished history. But Salinger's achievement is not that he has grasped an abstract idea of American experience, important as that idea may be in itself; it is that he has seen this idea working in the actual life of our time, in our habitual activities, in the very turns of our speech, and he has found a way to make us see it there, too."

Arthur Mizener
*Harper's Magazine* CCXVIII
(February 1959) 83-90

"For the college generation of the Fifties, Salinger has the kind of importance that Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway had for the young people of the Twenties. He is not a public figure as they were; on the contrary, his zeal for privacy is phenomenal; but he is felt nevertheless as a presence, a significant and congenial presence. There are, I am convinced, millions of young Americans who feel closer to Salinger than to any other writer. In the first place, he speaks their language. He not only speaks it, he shapes it, just as Hemingway influenced the speech of countless Americans in the Twenties….In the second place, he expresses their rebellion."

Granville Hicks
*Saturday Review*
(25 July 1959) 13

"There are many writers, like J. D. Salinger, who lack strength, but who are competent and interesting. Her identifies himself too fussily with the spiritual aches and pains of his characters; in some of his recent stories, notably 'Zooey' and 'Seymour: An Introduction,' he has overextended his line, thinned it out, in an effort to get the fullest possible significance out of his material. Salinger's work is a perfect example of the lean reserves of the American writer who is reduced to 'personality,' instead of the drama of our social existence….The delicate balances in Salinger's work, the anxious striving, inevitably result in beautiful work that is rather too obviously touching."

Alfred Kazin
*Harper's Magazine*
(October 1959) 130

"Salinger, the Greta Garbo of American letters."

Harvey Swados
"Must Writers Be Characters?"
*Saturday Review* XLIII
(1 October 1960) 12-14

"Many an observer of the manners and mores of American youth contends that a first novel published ten years ago occupies much the same place in the affection of today's college generation as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* did for their parents in the Nineteen Twenties. The novel is *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger, which since its publication on July 26, 1951, has sold a total of 1,500,000 copies in the United States alone….Of the 250,000 paperback copes sold this year, a goodly number went to students of Yale, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and 275 other colleges and universities across the country who have adopted the book for required or supplementary reading in English, psychology or other courses….Critically, ten years after publication, Salinger, his novel, and his previous and subsequent work are not only the subjects of numerous articles in *Time, Newsweek, Harper's Magazine, Saturday Review, The Nation, New Republic* and *Commonweal,* but also are soberly and not so soberly evaluated in master theses, 'little' magazines and literary quarterlies such as the *Chicago Review, Western Humanities Review, College English* and *American Quarterly.*

Currently, a mild critical reversal is in progress. Mr. Salinger, we are told, is a minor writer, a brilliant minor writer, to be sure, but still one who has published just one short (277-page) novel and a dozen or so serious short stories. But Salinger and Caulfield continue to move and amuse the current school and college generation, and the quarterly critics, most of whom are college teachers, know it. One of them wrote recently in some exasperation: 'Mr. Jerome David Salinger is neither Moliere nor Chekhov. He is not yet Mark Twain (and by a long shot)'….Looking back over the contemporary reviews of *The Catcher in the*

*Rye* one is struck immediately by two things: how many of them there were and how poor they were, too. Almost two hundred newspapers and magazines reviewed or commented upon the book; no more than twenty (if that many) were perceptive, let alone intelligent….Most of the reviews were wildly or mildly favorable. *Time, Newsweek, Saturday Review* liked it very much. Charles Poore wrote in *Harper's*: 'Probably the most distinguished first novel, the most truly new novel in style and accent of the year'….

*The Catcher in the Rye* was favorably compared to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*...and Salinger also reminded people of Ring Lardner. But not everyone was so taken. Some reviewers, like *The New York Herald Tribune*'s, simply did not like the novel: 'an irritated and irritating bore…The book just about killed me, it really did.' Some felt the novel, which originally had been a ninety-page novelette, was attenuated, thin and merely a character sketch. Finally, a small but vocal minority felt *The Catcher in the Rye* was a dirty book 'not fit for children…Many adults as well will not wish to condition themselves to Holden's language. Indeed, one finds it hard to believe that a true lover of children could father this tale,' said *The Christian Science Monitor.* What was it about the novel that struck Americans so squarely ten years ago and continues to hit the mark still? Primarily it was, I think, the shock and thrill of recognition. Many of my friends and this writer himself identified completely with Holden. I went to a school much like Pency Prep. One of my friends had a younger brother like Allie….

*The Catcher in the Rye* has become a crucial American novel without the help or hindrance of television, movies, or dramatization, for Salinger has always refused to permit any kind of adaptation of the book, possible as the result of a film, *My Foolish Heart*, starring Susan Hayward and Dana Andrews, based, as the saying goes, on 'Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut'….I believe that, despite its flaws, it will continue to be read. As others have noted, toward the end of the book Holden fulfills his ambition to become a catcher in the rye when he refuses to let Phoebe run away with him. 'What I have to do,' Holden says, 'I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff'."

Robert Gutwillig
"Everybody's Caught *The Catcher in the Rye*"
*The New York Times Book Review Paperback Section*
(15 January 1961)

"Since 1953, when The Catcher in the Rye was reprinted as a paperback, it has become the favorite American novel on required or suggested reading lists of American colleges and secondary schools…A fundamental reason for Salinger's appeal (like that of Hemingway in the short stories that made him famous) is that he has exciting professional mastery of a peculiarly charged and dramatic medium, the American short story. At a time when so much American fiction has been discursive in tone, careless in language, lacking in edge and force—when else would it have been possible for crudities like the Beat novelists to be taken seriously?—Salinger…projects emotion like a cry from the stage and in form can be as intense as a lyric poem….

Someday there will be learned theses on The Use of the Ash Tray in J. D. Salinger's Stories; no other writer has made so much of Americans lighting up, reaching for the ash tray, setting up the ash tray with one hand while with the other they reach for a ringing telephone….Just as married people get to look alike by reproducing each other's facial expressions, so a story by Salinger and a passage of commentary in the New Yorker now tend to resemble each other….In each story, the climax bears a burden of meaning that it would not have to bear in a novel; besides being stagy, the stories are related in a way that connects both of them [Franny and Zooey] into a single chronicle. This, to quote the title of a little religious pamphlet often mentioned in it, might be called 'The Way of the Pilgrim.' Both Franny and Zooey Glass are, indeed, pilgrims seeking their way in society typified by the Fat Lady...The eldest and most brilliant of the children, Seymour, shot himself in 1948 while on his honeymoon in Florida; this was the climax of Salinger's perhaps most famous story, 'A Perfect Day for Banana Fish'…

I am sorry to have to use the word 'cute' in respect to Salinger, but there is absolutely no other word that for me so accurately typifies the self-conscious charm and prankishness of his own writing and his extraordinary cherishing of his favorite Glass characters. Holden Caulfield is also cute in The Catcher in the Rye, cute in his little-boy suffering for his dead brother, Allie, and cute in his tenderness for his sister, 'Old Phoebe.' But we expect that boys of that age may be cute—that is, consciously appealing and

consciously clever. To be these things is almost their only resource in a world where parents and schoolmasters have all the power and the experience. Cuteness, for an adolescent, is to turn the normal self-pity of children, which arises from their relative weakness, into a relative advantage vis-à-vis the adult world. It becomes a role boys can play in the absence of other advantages, and The Catcher in the Rye is so full of Holden's cute speech and cute innocence and cut lovingness for his own family that one must be an absolute monster not to like it….

The love that Salinger's horribly precocious Glass characters speak of is love for certain people only—forgiveness is for the rest; finally, through Seymour Glass's indoctrination of his brothers and sister in so many different (and pretentiously assembled) religious teachings, it is love of certain ideas. So what is ultimate in their love is the love of their own moral and intellectual excellence, of their chastity and purity in a world full of banana fish swollen with too much food. It is the love that they have for themselves as an idea. The worst they can say about our society is that they are too sensitive to live in it. They are the special case in whose name society is condemned. And what makes them so is that they are young, precocious, sensitive, different. In Salinger's work, the two estates—the world and the cutely sensitive young—never really touch at all. Holden Caulfield condemns parents and schools because he knows that they are incapable of understanding him; Zooey and Franny and Buddy (like Seymour before them) know that the great mass of prosperous spiritual savages in our society will never understand them….

But Holden and, even more, the Glass children are beaten before they start; beaten in order not to start. They do not trust anything or anyone but themselves and their great idea. And what troubles me about this is not what it reflects of their theology but what it does to Salinger's art….when Fitzgerald describes a character's voice, it is because he really loves---in the creative sense, is full interested in—this character. When Salinger describes a character's voice, it is to tell us that the man is a phony. He has, to borrow a phrase from his own work, a 'categorical aversion' to whole classes and types of our society. The 'sympathetic bond' that Lawrence spoke of has been broken….As a friend of mine once said about the novels of Mary McCarthy…'The heroine is always right and everyone else is wrong'….Salinger is a far more accomplished and objective writer of fiction than Mary McCarthy, but I would say that in his work the Glass children alone are right and everyone else is wrong….

Salinger's vast public, I am convinced, is based not merely on the vast number of young people who recognize their emotional problems in his fiction and their frustrated rebellions in the sophisticated language he manipulates so skillfully. It is based perhaps even more on the vast numbers who have been released by our society to think of themselves as endlessly sensitive, spiritually alone, gifted, and whose suffering lies in the narrowing of their consciousness to themselves, in the withdrawal of their curiosity from a society which they think they understand all too well, in the drying up of their hope, their trust, and their wonder at the great world itself."

Alfred Kazin
"J. D. Salinger: 'Everybody's Favorite'"
The Atlantic Monthly CCVIII
(August 1961)

"Few writers since Joyce would risk such a wealth of words upon events that are purely internal and deeds that are purely talk….Salinger's intense attention to gesture and intonation help make him, among his contemporaries, a uniquely relevant literary artist. As Hemingway sought the words for things in motion, Salinger seeks the words for things transmuted into human subjectivity. His fiction, in its rather grim bravado, its humor, its morbidity, its wry but persistent hopefulness, matches the shape and tint of present American life. It pays the price, however, of becoming dangerously convoluted and static. A sense of composition is not among Salinger's strengths, and even these two stories, so apparently complementary, distinctly jangle as compositions of one book. The Franny of 'Franny" and the Franny of 'Zooey' are not the same person….

The more Salinger writes about them, the more the seven Glass children melt indistinguishably together in an impossible radiance of personal beauty and intelligence….Of Zooey, we are assured he has a 'somewhat preposterous ability to quote, instantaneously and, usually, verbatim, almost anything he had ever read, or even listened to, with genuine interest.' The purpose of such sentences is surely not to

particularize imaginary people but to instill in the reader a mood of blind worship, tinged with an understandable envy. In 'Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters' (the best of the Glass pieces: a magic and hilarious prose-poem with an enchanting end effect of mysterious clarity), Seymour defines sentimental as giving 'to a thing more tenderness than God gives to it.' This seems to me the nub of the trouble: Salinger loves the Glasses more than God loves them. He loves them too exclusively. Their invention has become a hermitage for him. He loves them to the detriment of artistic moderation. 'Zooey' is just too long; there are too many cigarettes, too many goddamns, too much verbal ado about not quite enough. The author never rests from circling his creations, patting them fondly, slyly applauding….

'Franny,' nevertheless, takes place in what is recognizably our world; in 'Zooey' we move into a dreamworld whose zealously animated details only emphasize an essential unreality….Not the least dismaying development of the Glass stories is the vehement editorializing on the obvious—television scripts are not generally good, not all section men are geniuses. Of course, the Glasses condemn the world only to condescend to it, to forgive it, in the end. Yet the pettishness of the condemnation diminishes the gallantry of the condescension. Perhaps these are hard words; they are made hard to write by the extravagant self-consciousness of Salinger's later prose."

John Updike
"*Franny and Zooey*"
*The New York Times Book Review*
(17 September 1961) 1, 52

"*Franny* is a beautifully balanced short story. Franny, at twenty, is on the edge of 'a tenth-rate nervous breakdown.' There is a certain resemblance to the emotional crisis faced by Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye.* But Franny is not to be saved by a contact with innocence. Instead, she begins a weekend with her pseudo-intellectual lover, Lane Coutell. In a brilliant scene between the two at lunch, Franny speaks of the writings of a holy man. She tries to explain the Jesus Prayer…Lane's preoccupation with the mechanics of eating afford a subtle contrast of spirit versus flesh….

*Zooey* continues the story of Franny's emotional crisis three days later. This 'prose home movie' is unwieldy as a short story….Great demands are made on the reader's credulity by Buddy's insistence that he was able to reconstruct the action of *Zooey* second hand….The frequent inclusion of diaries and letters in the Glass saga indicate that Salinger is having additional mechanical difficulties with his embarrassing wealth of Glassiana. He has become so enmeshed in his material that his artistic judgment is clouded. Sections of *Zooey* are bearable only if one has a prior affection for the Glass family….

There is evident, throughout Salinger's writing, a consistent preoccupation with innocence, a preference for the chaste, complemented by the inability of his adult characters to reconcile physical and spiritual love. It is obvious on a re-examination of Salinger's work that his characters are extremely limited in their choice of sexual expression….Holden places women on a comfortably distant pedestal, divorced from sex. Although he loved Jane, he never puts the purity of his love to any test of physical expression. He avoids contacting her. What is suggested or hinted at in Salinger's earlier work is full grown in his novel—the idealization of the celibate, the chaste, and the innocent.

Salinger's adult characters cannot integrate physical and spiritual love. Even the reconciliation of both in marriage is denied them. Married couples are invariably mismated and miserable—marriage itself a badly bungled affair. The insensitive girl friend runs a close second to the shallow wife. In the Salinger world, woman plays her ancient role of Eve, Pandora, or Lorelei. She can exist beloved or uncriticized only as an asexual saint or mother. When she expresses herself as a sexual creature, Salinger sees her as a witch or vampire."

Anne Marple
"Salinger's Oasis of Innocence"
*New Republic* CXLV
(18 September 1961) 22-23

"The idea that J. D. Salinger is a kind of middle-class American guru…has somehow resisted those gently abrasive sands. Among the reasonably literate young and young in heart, he is surely the most read

and reread writer in America today, exerting a power over his readers which is in some ways extra-literary. Those readers expect him to teach them something, something that has nothing at all to do with fiction. Not only have his vague metaphysical hints been committed to rote by *New Yorker* readers from here to Dubuque, but his imaginary playmates, the Glass family, have achieved a kind of independent existence; I rather imagine that Salinger readers wish secretly that they could write letters to Franny and Zooey and their brother Buddy, and maybe even to Waker (who is a Jesuit and apparently less disturbed than his kin), much as people of less invincible urbanity write letters to the characters in *As The World Turns*….[soap opera] What actually happens in *Franny and Zooey*, the two Glass family novelettes published this fall, is really nothing much….

In 'Fanny,' Fanny Glass arrives at Princeton for a football weekend and is met by her date…He has frogs' legs for lunch and talks about Flaubert, all of which gets on Fanny's nerves, especially because all she wants to do at the moment is say something called 'The Jesus Prayer'….When her date somehow fails to get the point about the Jesus Prayer, Franny faints. In 'Zooey,' which picks up the action the next morning, we find Franny laid up at home on East 79th Street with what her brother, a television actor named Zooey, calls 'a tenth-rate nervous breakdown.' She is tired of everybody's ego, not excepting her own….

However brilliantly rendered (and it is), however hauntingly right in the rhythm of its dialogue (and it is), *Franny and Zooey* is finally spurious, and what makes it spurious is Salinger's tendency to flatter the essential triviality within each of his readers, his predilection for giving instructions for living. What gives the book its extremely potent appeal is precisely that it is self-help copy: it emerges finally as *Positive Thinking* for the upper middle classes, as *Double Your Energy and Live Without Fatigue* for Sarah Lawrence girls."

Joan Didion
"Finally (Fashionably) Spurious"
*National Review* XI
(18 November 1961) 341-42

"Salinger was raised in and around New York City, attended three colleges but did not graduate, and served in France during World War II. His first story was published when he was twenty-one, and he has since published in a number of magazines, but most frequently in *The New Yorker*. *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel dealing with two days in the life of Holden Caulfield, an adolescent boy on the verge of a nervous breakdown, was highly praised when it appeared and has come to be considered a work of high literary quality….Stylistically, the book is clean, concise, and particularly notable for Salinger's skillful use of colloquial speech.

*Nine Stories* (1953), a collection of stories which originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, was equally well received by the critics. Most of the stories deal with precocious, sometimes troubled, children, whose sensitivity is in strong contrast to the materialistic and emotionally empty adult world of their parents. The first story, 'A Fine Day for Bananafish,' ends with the suicide of Seymour Glass. Salinger returned to the Glass family in *Franny and Zooey* (1961), two long stories originally published in *The New Yorker*. Franny Glass, a pretty twenty-year-old college student, and her brother Zooey, a television actor, are the youngest of the original seven Glass children, two of whom are now dead and all of whom were child prodigies. Franny's intelligence and sensitivity leave her unable to cope with the pseudo-sophisticated and meaningless society in which she lives, and, in desperation at the spiritual barrenness of a world she cannot love, she has a nervous breakdown.

In the long conversation which takes up almost half of the 'Zooey' story, her brother reminds her of the 'Fat Lady,' a symbol of all the ugliness and pettiness of the world which she has categorically rejected but which she must nevertheless love, in order, as it were, to be saved. Although much of the story is centered on a discussion of religious mysticism Salinger claims that 'Zooey' is not religious or mystical but a love story. Salinger has also written *Seymour: An Introduction*, another long story on the Glass family which appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1959 but has not yet been published in book form….Perhaps no other author of so few works has been the subject of so many analyses in the scholarly journals."

Max J. Herzberg & staff

*The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*
(Crowell 1962) 989

"Salinger's ironic compassion is replaced by a self-regarding, and slightly self-pitying whimsicality which recalls Truman Capote rather than any writer of importance. His nihilism has a pattern as precise as an equation: conventional society is a nightmare too horrifying to contemplate—the expensive boarding school, the mockery of family-life, the executive's career, and the call-girl system in The Catcher; a respectable marriage in 'Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut'; a businessman's adultery in 'Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes.' His despairing analysis does not permit even the stoical resistance of Camus, let alone the positive hope of Faulkner. The alternatives he presents—life-in-death conformity and mental collapse—eliminate all possibility of creative living."

Brian Way
"A Tight Three-Movement Structure"
New Left Review
(May-June 1962) 72-82

"Who is to inherit the mantle of Papa Hemingway? Who if not J. D. Salinger? Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* has a brother in Hollywood who thinks *A Farewell to Arms* is terrific. Holden does not see how his brother, who is *his* favorite writer, can like a phoney book like that. But the very image of the hero as pitiless phony-detector comes from Hemingway….

Like Hemingway, Salinger sees the world in terms of allies and enemies. He has a good deal of natural style, a cruel ear, a dislike of ideas (the enemy's intelligence system), a toilsome simplicity, and a ventriloquist's knack of disguising his voice. The artless dialect written by Holden is an artful ventriloquial trick of Salinger's…And now, ten years after *The Catcher in the Rye* we have *Franny and Zooey*. The event was commemorated by a cover story in *Time*; the book has been a best-seller since *before* publication. And again the theme is the good people against the stupid phonies, and the good is still all in the family, like a family-owned 'closed' corporation.

The heroes are or were seven children (two are dead), the wonderful Glass kids of a radio quiz show called 'It's a Wise Child,' half-Jewish, half-Irish, the progeny of a team of vaudevillians. These prodigies, nationally known and the subjects of many psychological studies, are now grown up: one is a writer-in-residence in a girls' junior college; one is a Jesuit priest; one is a housewife; one is a television actor (Zooey); and one is a student (Franny). They are all geniuses, but the greatest genius of them all was Seymour, who committed suicide on vacation in an early story of Salinger's called 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish.' Unlike the average genius, the Glass kids are good guys; they love each other and their parents and their cat and their goldfish, and they are expert phony-detectors. The dead sage Seymour has initiated them into Zen and other mystical cults.

During the course of the story, Franny has a little nervous breakdown, brought on by reading a small green religious book titled *The Way of a Pilgrim*, relating the quest for prayer of a simple Russian peasant. She is cured by her brother Zooey in two short seances between his professional television appointments; he recognizes the book (it was in Seymour's liberary, of course) and, on his own inspiration, without help from their older brother Buddy or from the Jesuit, teaches her that Jesus, whom she has been swearing to find via the Jesus Prayer, is not some fishy guru but just the Fat Lady in the audience, the average ordinary humanity with varicose veins, the you and me the performer had to reach if the show is going to click.

This democratic commercial is 'sincere' in the style of an advertising man's necktie. The Jesus Zooey sells his sister is the old Bruce Barton Jesus—the word made flesh, Madison Avenue's motto. The Fat Lady is not quite everybody, despite Zooey's fast sales patter. She is the kind of everybody the wonderful Glass kids tolerantly approve of. Jesus may be a television sponsor or a housewife or a television playwright or your Mother and Dad, but He (he?) cannot be an intellectual like Franny's horrible boyfriend, Lane, who has written a paper on Flaubert and talks about Flaubert's 'testicularity,' or like his friend Wally, who, as Franny says plaintively, 'looks like somebody who spent the summer in Italy or soomeplace'….

These fakes and phonies are not the outsiders who ruin everything. Zooey feels the same way. 'I hate any so-called creative type who gets on any kind of ship. I don't give a goddam what his reasons are.' Zooey likes it here. He likes people, as he says, who wear horrible neckties and funny, padded suits, but he does not mind a man who dresses well and owns a two-cabin cruiser so long as he belongs to the real, native, video-viewing America. The wonderful Glass family have three radios, four portable phonographs, and a TV in their wonderful living-room, and their wonderful, awesome medicine cabinet in the bathroom is full of sponsored products all of which have been loved by someone in the family. The world of insiders, it would appear, has grown infinitely larger and more accommodating as Salinger has 'matured.' Where Holden Caulfield's club excluded just about everybody but his kid sister, Zooey's and Franny's secret society includes just about everybody but creative types and students and professors. Here exception is made, obviously, for the Glass family: Seymour, the poet and thinker, Buddy, the writer, and so on. They all have college degrees; the family bookshelves indicate a wide, democratic culture.

The Glass family librarian does not discriminate, in keeping with the times, and books are encouraged to 'mix.' In Seymour's old bedroom, however, which is kept as a sort of temple to his memory, quotations, hand-lettered, from a select group of authors are displayed on the door: Marcus Aurelius, Issa, Tolstoy, Ring Lardner, Kafka, St. Francis de Sales, Mu Mon Kwan, etc. This honor roll is extremely institutional. The broadening of the admissions policy—which is the text of Zooey's sermon—is more a propaganda aim, though, than an accomplishment. No doubt the author and his mouthpiece (who is smoking a panatela) would like to spread a message of charity. 'Indiscrimination,' as Seymour says in another Salinger story, 'leads to health and a kind of very real, enviable happiness.' But this remark itself exhales an ineffable breath of gentle superiority. The club, for all its pep talks, remains a closed corporation, since the function of the Fat Lady, when you come down to it, is to be what?—an audience for the Glass kids, while the function of the Great Teachers is to act as their coaches and prompters. And who else are these wonder kids but Salinger himself, splitting and multiplying like the original amoeba?

To be confronted with the seven faces of Salinger, all wise and lovable and simple, is to gaze into a terrifying narcissus pool. Salinger's world contains nothing but Salinger, his teachers, and his tolerantly cherished audience—humanity; outside are the phonies, vainly signaling to be let in, like the kids' Irish mother, Bessie, a home version of the Fat Lady, who keeps invading the bathroom while her handsome son Zooey is in the tub or shaving. The use of the bathroom as stage set—sixty-eight pages of *Zooey* are laid there—is all too revealing as a metaphor. The bathroom is the holy-of-holies of family life, the seat of privacy, the center of the cult of self-worship. What methodical attention Salinger pays to Zooey's routines of shaving and bathing and nail cleaning, as though these were rituals performed by a god on himself, priest and deity at the same time!

The scene in the bathroom, with the mother seated on the toilet, smoking and talking, while her son behind the figured shower curtain reads, smokes, bathes, answers, is of a peculiar snickering indecency; it is worth noting too, that this scene matches a shorter one in a public toilet in the story *Franny,* a scene that by its strange suggestiveness misled many *New Yorker* readers into thinking that Franny was pregnant—that was why, they presumed, such significance was attached to her shutting herself up in a toilet in the ladies' room, hanging her head and feeling sick. These readers were not 'in' on the fact that Franny was having a mystical experience. Sex is unimportant for Salinger; not the bed but the bathroom is the erotic center of the narcissus ego, and Zooey behind the shower curtain is taboo, even to the mother who bore him—behind the veil. The reader, however, is allowed an extended look.

A great deal of attention is paid, too, to the rituals of cigarette lighting and to the rites of drinking from a glass, as though these oral acts were sacred—epiphanies. In the same way, the family writings are treated by Salinger as sacred scriptures or the droppings of holy birds, to be studied with care by the augurs: letters from Seymour, citations from his diary, a letter from Buddy, a letter from Fanny, a letter from Boo Boo, a note written by Boo Boo in soap on a bathroom mirror (the last two are from another story, 'Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters'). These imprints of the Glass collective personality are preserved as though they were Veronica's veil in a relic case of well-wrought prose. And the eerie thing is, speaking of Veronica's veil, a popular subject for those paintings in which Christ's eyes are supposed to follow the spectator with a doubtless reproachful gaze, the reader has the sensation in this latest work of Salinger that the author is

sadly watching him or listening to him read. That is, the ordinary relation is reversed, and instead of the reader reading Salinger, Salinger, that Man of Sorrows, is reading the reader.

At the same time, this quasi-religious volume is full of a kind of Broadway humor. The Glass family is like a Jewish family in a radio serial. Everyone is a 'character.' Mr. Glass with his tangerine is a character; Mrs. Glass in her hair-net and commodious wrapper with her cups of chicken broth is a character. The shower curtain, scarlet nylon with a design of canary-yellow sharps, clefs, and flats, is a character; the teeming medicine cabinet is a character. Every phonograph, every chair is a character. The family relationship, rough, genial, insulting, is a character. In short, every single object possessed by the Glass communal ego is bent on lovably expressing the Glass personality—eccentric, homey, good-hearted. Not unlike 'Abie's Irish Rose.' And the family is its own best audience…They have the disturbing faculty of laughing delightedly or smiling discreetly at each other's jokes. Again a closed circuit: the Glass family is the Fat Lady, who is Jesus. The Glass medicine cabinet is Jesus, and Seymour is his prophet.

Yet below this self-loving barbershop harmony a chord of terror is struck from time to time, like a judgment. Seymour's suicide suggests that Salinger guesses intermittently or fears intermittently that there may be something wrong somewhere. Why did he kill himself? Because he had married a phony, whom he worshiped for her 'simplicity, her terrible honesty'? Or because he was so happy and the Fat Lady's world was so wonderful? Or because he had been lying, his author had been lying, and it was all terrible, and he was a fake?"

Mary McCarthy
"J. D. Salinger's Closed Circuit"
*Harper's Magazine* CCXXV
(October 1962) 46-48

"Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) remains, of course, the testament of the postwar generation. The novel was both mature and adolescent in the classic manner of the American novel. A virtuoso of the short story too, Salinger penetrated in his unique prose to the point where love and squalor silently meet. His later series of novelettes, *Franny and Zooey* (1961), *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* (1963), and *Semour* (1963), made an attempt to break down the form, re-creating it in the shape of a parody or mock biography. A legend himself, Salinger also created the myth of the Glass family by which the actualities of American life may be gauged, criticized and upheld. The essential quality of his work was sentiment and irony united in a quixotic gesture of the spirit which reaches to mystical love but falls back again to redeem with humor the vulgarity of life below."

Ihab Hassan
*Literary History of the United States*, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1425

"Though he has published only a single short novel land thirteen short stories (not counting collections of previously published work and some early uncollected stories which the author himself seems willing to forget), Salinger has been subjected to a range and intensity of critical analysis which, before our century, was reserved only for the acknowledged masters of literature….Salinger criticism has become an 'industry'….Observers of the American scene know that Salinger is by far the most popular author, living or dead, among college students. So intense is public interest in Salinger's affairs that *Life* felt obliged to publish a long article, the substance of which was an account of their reporter's inability to achieve an interview with the inaccessible author….

He has been hailed as a superb artist and dismissed as merely a gifted entertainer. It has been said that Salinger has succeeded in creating a contemporary saint: conversely, Franny and Zooey have been described as 'one and a half religious maniacs.' If one critic acclaims Salinger for his power to reach a vast youthful audience, another charges that he 'flatters the very ignorance and moral shallowness of his younger readers.' On the one hand he is celebrated as one of the few genuinely religious writers of our time; on the other he is a provider of 'self-help' copy and 'positive thinking' for girls' schools and the upper middle-class….From the beginning Salinger has been used by some critics merely as a springboard for discussion of American youth, Zen, politics, madness, suicide, or alienation. This has been particularly true since the publication in book form of *Franny and Zooey*."

Marvin Laser and Norman Fruman
Introduction
*Studies in J. D. Salinger:*
*Reviews, Essays, and Critiques of* The Catcher in the Rye *and Other Fiction*
(Odyssey 1963) v-vii

Michael Hollister (2015)