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"Everyone's always going through something, aren't they?": J.D. Salinger, Sally Rooney, and the Desire to Connect in the Face of Distress

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Introduction

Attempts between humans to connect, both failed and successful, are at the heart of literature. Protagonists' conflicts often center around desires to feel understood and failures to understand others. Readers, too, participate in these conflicts; the act of reading is an interaction between author, character, and reader. Stories appeal to audiences because they are relatable, and there is perhaps nothing more relatable than the fundamental need to connect with others. Audiences often consume texts in which characters' arcs are centered around finding interpersonal understanding. Further, audiences themselves choose to read these texts because they want to relate to characters—to connect with them.

The transitory period between adolescence and adulthood is rich with experiences that can contribute to narratives about human connection. Young adults are plagued by the pressure to individuate and solidify their identities. Since they do not yet know for certain who they are, the people around them cannot fully know them either; as a result, having an identity in flux is especially isolating. An older adult reader more secure in their identity—such as gender, class, and sexuality—may no longer connect with these texts, but for young adult readers experiencing similar conflicts, characters struggling to connect remind them that they are not alone.

One of the most prolific authors of stories about young adults who feel isolated is J.D. Salinger. *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) is the confessional narrative of Holden Caulfield detailing his emotionally charged days in New York City before having a breakdown and going to a sanitarium to recover. After being kicked out of yet another preparatory school, Holden is unable to stay at his dorm and unwilling to return home. He fills his time in the city with superficial, unsatisfying social interactions: a sex worker named Sunny, her violent pimp Maurice, three women at a nightclub, two nuns, ex-date Sally Hayes, former classmate Carl

Luce, Holden's sister Phoebe, and his (possibly predatory) former teacher Mr. Antolini. Between interactions, Holden fantasizes about but never succeeds at calling Jane Gallagher, a girl his age whom he idealizes as innocent. Over the course of the novel, readers learn more about Holden's isolation and distress. His brother Allie died of cancer, which destabilized his mother, and he witnessed a former classmate, James Castle, commit suicide. Holden's distinct narrative voice—one of cynical disillusionment, immature unreliability, and slang turns of phrase—is part of why this novel resonates with audiences; high school students across the country still read *Catcher* today.

Less widely popular but thematically similar is *Franny and Zooey* (1961), a combination of the short story "Franny" (1955) and the novella "Zooey" (1957)—both originally published in *The New Yorker*. At a lunch date with her Ivy League boyfriend Lane Coutell, Franny Glass faints. Just before, she tries to explain *The Way of a Pilgrim* to him, a book about learning to pray incessantly that used to belong to her oldest brother, Seymour. Franny, who has just quit the Theatre Department and believes academia is full of pretentious men, has a breakdown and returns to her family apartment. "Zooey" is a story told in conversations set immediately after the events of "Franny," primarily between Franny and her twenty-five-year-old brother Zooey, a television actor. Franny's distress is revealed in layers: she is afraid that her desire to act makes her egotistical, she has not processed Seymour's suicide, and she is uncertain about entering adulthood. Zooey, who has dealt with similar struggles, must overcome his brashness and cynicism if he is going to effectively help Franny.

Salinger's postwar fiction is a product of both "a decade of postwar prosperity, McCarthyism[,] and free market capitalism" and "mounting concerns about mental health, due in part to the large number of American military recruits rejected on psychiatric grounds and

American soldiers granted psychiatric discharge" (Smith 1). Society came to realize that "far more Americans were mentally ill than previously thought" (3). Even so, "many [psychoanalysts and psychiatrists] resisted the call of community mental health and saw it as a threat to their earning potential," preferring instead to work with "clients wealthy enough to pay for their services" (7, 6). Salinger's characters fall into that category; many of them, such as Holden, are able to afford psychoanalysis and sanitarium stays.

Characters like Holden and Franny are detached from the postwar understanding of mental illness, so their distress is primarily literary in nature, meant to portray a thematic concern with the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Additionally, their mental states were considered an intrinsic part of why their narratives were worth reading: "[W]ell established by 1951 was the link between neurosis, self-destructive behavior, and social maladaptation on the one hand, and artistic sensibility and special insight on the other" (Shaw 97). Their distress was seen not as a cause for concern but as an intellectual and artistic necessity.

The detachment of Salinger's work from a psychoanalytical critical lens is necessary to understand its literary legacy. Regarding the impact on his audiences, "illness representations may also influence personal recovery by determining whether people in recovery can reclaim a positive sense of identity and purpose in life" (Chan and Mak 17). For individuals in high school and college, "[t]he move into adulthood is inevitable and their happiness—and sanity—depends on a successful transition" (Bickmore and Youngblood 252). Young adult readers benefit from stories that relate to their experiences. Attempts to pathologize Holden's and Franny's narratives undermine the appeal of non-specific mental illness representations like theirs: capturing the intensity and complexity of growing older in a way with which readers connect.

Salinger's work—particularly *Catcher*—has staying power in both scholarly criticism and the classroom; however, limiting discussion of Salinger's impact to direct engagement with his work fails to capture his broader legacy. Looking at popular fiction that may not be taught in classrooms but is widely read, it becomes clear that "the influence of *Catcher* repeatedly manifests itself in contemporary realistic young adult literature" (Bickmore and Youngblood 251). Just as Holden and Franny seek human connection to help them with their crises, thematically similar books are proof that young adults continue to experience the isolation inherent in the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood. These narratives resonate with readers: "While they are fictional characters, their experiences could not be more real, identifiable, or connected to the adolescents who encounter them" (261-2). Some of the value reinventing of the "Holdenesque narrators of these novels" across decades is the authorial ability to culturally update the young adult's journey (252). Topics to which Salinger paid little attention—gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status—that are more openly discussed today add new dimensions to such narratives. In a world increasingly concerned with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is important to explore the complexities of growing older for individuals at the intersection of marginalized identities.

Some thematically similar writers more closely interact with Salinger's novels than others; one such author is Sally Rooney, a contemporary Irish novelist. Rooney has openly shared her connection with Salinger's work: "I often describe *Franny and Zooey* as my favourite book. For me, this combined short story and novella has it all—miserable, brainy protagonists, lots of great dialogue, spiritual ennui. The critic Ernst Fischer described it as a 'new and extraordinarily subtle form of social criticism'. I agree" ("Sally Rooney"). Some links between the two writers are superficial; for example, the name of the protagonist of Rooney's first novel,

Frances, may itself be an allusion to Franny Glass. However, the connections between Rooney's work and Salinger's go beyond names and "miserable, brainy protagonists."

Her aforementioned first novel, *Conversations with Friends* (2017), is written in the same first-person confessional style as *Catcher*. The protagonist is a university student named Frances, a bisexual woman who self-identifies as a communist. Frances is a writer and spoken-word poet; she collaborates with her best friend and ex-lover, Bobbi, who performs but does not write. The two are invited over to the house of Melissa, a writer and photographer, and her husband Nick, an actor. The four grow increasingly entangled when Frances begins an affair with Nick, though she resents his upper-middle-class lifestyle. She has to balance her sexual attraction to Nick, her feelings for Bobbi, and her jealousy of Melissa, which she does by maintaining a veneer of cold, sarcastic detachment. Frances's happiness and adjustment to impending adulthood after college depends on her ability, like Holden, to overcome self-imposed isolation and connect with the people whom she loves.

Rooney's follow-up to *Conversations*, 2018's *Normal People*, also follows a Salinger model—this time her favorite text, *Franny*. The novel spans approximately four years, beginning in the final year of secondary school and progressing through university. There are dual protagonists: Connell is a shy, sensitive English major who was popular as a secondary school athlete but unable to recreate that in university; Marianne is a bright, sarcastic Politics student who was considered odd in secondary school but fits in perfectly among the elite population at Trinity. Their evolving social dynamics are further complicated by the fact that Connell's mother cleans Marianne's family home. Connell and Marianne secretly have sex in secondary school, but after Connell snubs her by inviting a popular girl to the school dance, they do not speak again until university. From there, the pair has an on-again, off-again romance, remaining friends even

when they date other people. Like Franny, Connell struggles to find a comfortable positioning for himself in university and, as the years pass, has frequent crises. He, too, experiences loss by suicide, anxiety about his desires, and uncertainty about what will happen to him in the future. Marianne plays the Zooey role, trying to support Connell while going through her own struggles with an abusive family, masochistic boyfriends, and an eating disorder.

Unlike Salinger's era of postwar prosperity, Rooney's novels are partially a product of Ireland's 2008 financial crisis and ensuing recession. Her characters are thus concerned with issues like employability after university and affording housing while attending school. Rooney has been branded a millennial writer because "the author herself seems representatively *representational*: A painstaking awareness of class and gender dynamics guides her characters' inner lives as well as how they interact" (Oyler). Unlike Salinger's upper-middle-class, sexless characters, Rooney's characters come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and have sexual relationships complicated by gendered power dynamics. A review of *Normal*, for example, says the book is "a conventional heterosexual romance on one level and a long meditation on submission, desire, gender and self-hatred on another" (Nolen). While *Conversations* is less conventionally heterosexual—Frances is bisexual, Bobbi is a lesbian, and the novel ends with the four core characters engaged in non-monogamous relationships with one another—the same issues of self-loathing and gendered submissiveness permeate the novel. Women like Marianne and Frances gain relational power by being sexually available, yet their passive male partners, Connell and Nick, enjoy that power only when detached from their masculine physicality. In each book, the female lead asks to be hit during sex; in each, the male lead refuses. So, while Rooney "weaves a whole story out of a collection of moments of

intimacy," that intimacy is charged with internalized misogyny, class disparity, and constant exchanges of power (Nolen).

By injecting social issues in her work, Rooney takes on the added labor of dissecting those issues and how they affect the way people interact with one another. Rooney has an "uncanny manner of parsing social dynamics, whether it be popular vs. unpopular or rich vs. poor" (Leininger). Unlike the individualistic attitudes of Holden and Franny, who believe themselves to be particularly special—Holden as a social critic, Franny as a gifted actress—Rooney's characters, even when they are not able to connect, are aware of their need for collectivistic security. Salinger scholars attribute this to differences in cultural ideologies: "In the work of English and European writers generally, society is the ground of human experience. […] One grows, develops, changes through interactions with others in a web of social and personal forces which is simply life itself" (Rowe 86). For American protagonists like Holden, Franny, and Zooey, "[t]heir identities are shaped, not by interaction with others but in resistance to whatever *is*, in the name of a higher social, ethical, or aesthetic ideal" (86-7). This, too, can be understood in the differing economic contexts of the authors: "large-scale economic growth is associated with greater independence from others" (Bianchi 567). Salinger is situated in post-war economic prosperity, so his characters are more naturally individualistic, especially since they are young adults and "rising individualism following periods of substantial economic growth is often propelled by younger cohorts rather than broader shifts within the population" (568). Rooney's recession-era work, meanwhile, better understands "the self [as] defined in terms of one's relationships with others and role within the larger group" (567-8). Rooney's characters exist in a cultural moment that emphasizes social interdependence and collectivistic attitudes.

Understanding the broader historical and cultural contexts of Salinger's and Rooney's works is important, and just as significant is a foundational understanding of their critical contexts—how are these four novels situated in the realms of academia and criticism? Of the four core texts this thesis discusses, none has been critically canonized more than *Catcher*. There is so much scholarship on the book that much of it is irrelevant to this thesis. Some common topics for *Catcher* criticism include pedagogical debates on whether to teach the novel, Holden's use of slang, and his opinions on popular culture. Other areas of scholarship are more relevant, especially those which interpret Holden's social isolation, anxiety surrounding adulthood, and perception of identity. Scholarship on *Catcher*, as well as on *Franny*, will guide the interpretation of how Rooney responds to, builds on, and complicates Salinger's work.

Holden suffers from feelings of isolation. His frequent phone calls are attempts to connect with others, and he has a "tendency to judge other characters based on their (lack of) responsiveness to his calls" (Kinane 120). Holden uses conversations with other people to refract his self-image, communicating through what he believes is their perception of him (119, 121). It is a feedback loop of social isolation; the accumulative effect is his distress and sanitarium stay. That recuperative time provides him with his audience: "Although *Catcher* is of course a written document, Holden's narrative is represented as a spoken narrative" (Cowan 37). Holden is speaking to someone at the institution in which he is located at the time of the narration. The form his narrative takes is thus another indicator that the core of Holden's distress is a feeling of isolation and a desire to communicate with others.

Just as Holden's iconic slang term "phony" indicates that he considers distance a producer of artifice and superficiality (Kinane 118), one of his other favorite terms—madman—suggests that he thinks society is unwell, not himself (Dashti and Bahar 457). A Foucauldian

interpretation of madness in *Catcher* posits that what society deems madness is simply a deviation from the norm (458). Individualism is a fundamental attitude in American society (Smith 2) and increased in the post-World War II period (Bianchi 568). Therefore, it makes sense that popular culture creates the "cult status of Holden as a generalized champion of American individualism and indicator of the psychic disturbances caused by the stresses of postindustrial society" (Brookeman 58). This contributes to the novel's identification "with the antiestablishmentarian attitude of fifties intellectuals" (Seelye 25).

These loftier intellectual associations fail to meet Holden on his own terms—a grieving, traumatized adolescent unable to mature. He refuses to mourn Allie's death, James Castle's suicide, and his own childhood (Shaw 101). His survivor's guilt contributes to his frequent failures at school and his anxiety around rites of passage like being in love (104). By refusing to grow up, Holden restricts his ability to individuate and solidify his identity. His distress is at odds with "a society in which the mess and pain of a real struggle with ideas and feelings is considered an unwelcome deviation from the approved norm of 'personality'" (Rowe 90). Holden cannot "conceive of society as a source of growth, or self-knowledge" (90). As a result, his identity is obfuscated in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Identity is not limited to Holden's self-perception. He also contends with the very notion of identity and what, if anything, separates him from the phonies he disdains (Svogun 703, 705).

Franny, like Holden, copes with an uncertain identity. While Holden ends up in a sanitarium, *Franny* features an explicit case against psychoanalysis and psychiatry in a conversation between Zooey and his mother, Bessie (Bufithis 69). Perhaps because of the direct resistance to psychiatry in considering how best to help Franny, scholarship on the book often considers Salinger's perception of psychoanalysis. However, much of that criticism is filtered

through the lens of religion, which is not relevant to this thesis. In spite of, or perhaps because of, their theological obsessions with the mind, the Glass children—like psychiatrists—are aware of their own mental states. The psychiatrist, though, has acclimated to adulthood while Franny and Zooey struggle; this becomes the difference between the "Responsive Insider" and the "Responsive Outsider," respectively (68). Both responders combat the "Assertive Vulgarian" (Hassan, qtd. in Bufithis 68), which suggests that, like Holden's frustration with phonies, both the Glass children and the psychoanalysts they detest view the world around them as mad. While Holden ends up in a sanitarium, the Glass family identifies art as a way to displace neurosis (76). Much like Holden's love of writing, the act of creation becomes a force to resist madness and access truth.

Other criticism on *Franny* regards the representation of Franny, who was originally seen as a flat cultural cliché in her sheared raccoon coat and chic haircut (Rodrigues 121). Given *Catcher*'s singular focus on the male identity, Franny becomes an access point for a feminist reading of Salinger's work. The establishment of American cultural cliché in the depiction of Franny may serve to reveal the social understanding of postwar womanhood (120). To dismiss Franny's breakdown as female hysteria plays into the exact social constructs that Salinger loathes, including psychiatric treatment for women's mental health. The narration dismisses her social concerns and focuses on the philosophical issue of her idealism (122). A larger question is posed in contemporary criticism about the ending of *Franny*—does Franny find relief in Zooey's final counsel about the Fat Lady, or is she "disappointed, having received no relevant counsel from any of the 'leading men' in her life" (144)?

That question is more easily answered in Rooney's fiction, which openly engages with gender. Given Rooney's feminist literary lens, the limited available scholarship centers around

Rooney's representations of womanhood. However, Rooney's novels have only been published within the past five years; as a result, there is little scholarly writing on Rooney's work and none that places it in conversation with Salinger's. Indeed, though Rooney herself studied American literature for her Master's at Trinity (Ingle), academic criticism on her writing typically places it within the legacy of Irish women's writers (Cameron; Gray).

Frances, the protagonist of *Conversations*, is unable to attain the neoliberal notion of a good life—marriage, home ownership, a family, a stable career. This is unsurprising, as Foucault's theorization of individuals in contemporary society posits that "young, queer women from non-wealthy families" would be the least likely to attain the aforementioned good life (Gray 68). As the world moves rapidly around her, Frances must negotiate new space for herself in neoliberal time. Her discontent with late-stage capitalism, and with herself because she desires a man with everything she claims to despise, may drive her mental and emotional spiral (76). Frances's power comes from conversation, which she views as sparring; this worsens her social isolation because it turns opportunities for connection into conflicts (77). She perceives judgment and stigma from others and struggles to view herself objectively. That objectivity is generated when she creates distance—communicating via technology and rereading old communications to find new insights (78).

Both of Rooney's novels have been placed in conversation with mid-twentieth century Irish women writers to explore how Rooney offers "new and different versions of earlier fictional narrative arcs" (Cameron 411). Using that same framework of interpretation but detaching it from Irish womanhood enables the placement of Rooney and Salinger together. When Rooney is read against other women writers, the feminist critical lens is an obvious choice. For example, the counterpart to man's heroic myth is woman's fantasy of being saved,

which runs dangerously close to masochism (413). *Conversations* and *Normal* play with this idea: “Both are love stories, both are more or less predicated on the erotics of passivity, and both veer fearlessly into the complex continuum stretching along passivity and surrender into the dark mazes of the masochistic drive” (420). However, Rooney’s contemporary writing forges new ground in exploring this dynamic of intimacy between men and women, “not just because of how Rooney writes women but also, and perhaps even more strikingly, how she writes men” (421). In *Normal*, for example, the connection between Connell and Marianne is “the heart of the story,” but the “excluded part of that story is his power over her, inextricably intricated in their love and utterly essential to him” (423, 425). True intimacy in Rooney’s novels is only possible when the erotics of passivity are set aside and characters focus on being not saved but understood.

Otherwise, the published writing on Rooney is primarily reviews and interviews. From one perspective, this is because Rooney’s fiction is not worthy of real scholarly attention. Her work has been dismissed as “chic lit,” books “written by elite females” like Rooney “for elite females,” coded language for Rooney’s own privilege as a white, college-educated woman (Hill). It is “now aspirational to be the kind of person who has read Sally Rooney” because she “is a signifier of a certain kind of literary chic” (Grady). However, her popularity should not occlude academic attention to her writing; Rooney was a scholar before pivoting to fiction and is aware of her literary predecessors and the potential to locate her work as a response to them. This, coupled with her professed attachment to Salinger’s work, invites a critical interpretation of their novels in conversation with each other. Rooney subverts the gender identities of Salinger’s focal characters in her corresponding texts. Then, she places her protagonists on the same emotional and narrative journeys as Salinger’s, forging new ground in gendered representations of the tension between isolation and connection.

All four texts are read in this thesis not only within their respective historical and cultural contexts but also within the contexts of feminist theory and Marxist literary theory. These theories are especially useful because of their emphasis on power dynamics. Neither lens is perfect, in part because they both often employ reductive binary thinking: men versus women, individualist versus collectivist. Binary constructs are limiting and this thesis strives to complicate notions of femininity, masculinity, and power. Still, feminist and Marxist perspectives are important to these texts. Rooney invites these critical lenses through her own representations of gender and class, as well as through her characters' discussions about their identities. The parallel journeys of Salinger's characters and Rooney's retrospectively invite contemporary criticism on gender and class in Salinger's work.

The chapters are organized according to the scale they discuss. Chapter One focuses on the narrative construction of the four texts as whole books. They are paired off according to their similar functions and techniques. The first section looks at *Catcher* and *Conversations*, the predecessors to *Franny* and *Normal*, respectively. The two debut novels have similar narrative voices: unreliable first-person narrators constructing self-portraits for their audiences. They also follow the same plot pattern: the protagonists isolate and spiral out of control while desperately seeking connection; they realize that isolation is unsustainable but continue to fall apart; another character suggests that they need serious medical help; and then they have a moment of decision regarding how they will approach the future. Similarly, *Franny* and *Normal* follow the same narrative pattern. Told in the third-person voice, each has a pair of protagonists who are constantly in dialogue. Despite being in constant conversation, there is verbal sparring and the characters resist being fully honest. By the end of the books, however, the focalized characters realize that they must stop fighting against the conversation in which they are participants and

instead must listen to each other. Regardless of the narrative similarities are established, there are significant differences due to Rooney's engagement with gender and socioeconomic status.

Chapter Two moves from the narrative as a whole to a specific convention within all four narratives: the use of distanced communication methods. This entails phone calls and letters in Salinger's work, and phone calls, emails, and instant messages in Rooney's novels, though not all forms are discussed in detail. The conversations that exist within these distanced modes have elements of performativity—individuals can pretend to be someone else or take time to plan out and script what they want to say. However, these performances are opportunities for the speaker to prepare whatever truth they feel the need to share in a way that is clear and accessible. This chapter balances the way that distanced communication is conducted by personas with the way those personas are used to convey the emotional truths at the heart of these texts.

Chapter Three further narrows the scope from form and convention to more specific literary devices. The chapter focuses on how a particular thread in each pair of novels explores on a micro scale the distress—and possible solutions—characters experience on the novels' macro scales. Rather than being inextricably tied to the rest of the books' plots, these are additional subplots layered into the texts to further complicate their narratives. Once again, the *Catcher/Conversations* and *Franny/Normal* pairs are employed. The first section pays close attention to the abdominal "wounds" in *Catcher* and *Conversations*: Holden's imaginary bullet in the guts and Frances's endometriosis diagnosis. These are synecdoche, the abdomens standing in for the characters' mental states. How Holden and Frances invent and reinvent themselves around their abdominal pain invite commentary on how they cope with their mental distress. The second section, meanwhile, focuses on Franny and Connell's frustrations with academia. The two characters try and fail to find a sense of community in the academic world. They take issue

with arrogant faculty, egotistical classmates, and systems that misplace value. How they conceptualize academia is a model for their broader sociocultural critiques and their generalized sense of disconnection. In both pairings, these literary devices are strategies that the characters use to externalize their distress and either displace or process it.

Finally, the conclusion ties together the common through-line of the three chapters: isolation. Holden, Franny, Zooey, Frances, Connell, and Marianne are young people who struggle to forge connections with other people. The issue goes beyond the cynicism, precociousness, and grief that Salinger suggests are the root causes of social isolation. Rather, as Rooney introduces to Salinger's familiar narratives through her reinterpretation, individuals have to overcome the unique challenges created by the intersection of their identities if they are going to understand and be understood.

Chapter One: Same Structures, Different Outcomes

Salinger's work has clear influences on Rooney's content and themes, positioning her as yet another writer interested in the psyche of mentally distressed young people. Beyond thematic influence, however, Rooney's first two novels, *Conversations* and *Normal*, follow the structure and plot patterns of two Salinger works: *Catcher* and *Franny*, respectively. They are not, of course, perfect analogues. Salinger's writing places a stronger emphasis on setting with respect to place, perhaps because Rooney's characters exist and operate in more nebulous spaces—cosmopolitan cultures and digital worlds (explored in greater detail in Chapter Two). Salinger's settings also constrain time more closely (a few days in *Catcher* and a weekend in *Franny*), while Rooney's plots sprawl across time (months in *Conversations* and years in *Normal*). Rooney, meanwhile, inverts the gender of the protagonists from Salinger's work to her own and introduces socioeconomic disparity that is noticeably absent from Salinger's consideration of his characters. Pairing the texts by their structural and plot similarities as a way of reading Rooney's work as a clear subversion of Salinger's reveals a broader thesis of Rooney's writing as a whole. Through a careful consideration of how identities like gender and class impact an individual's actions and mental wellbeing, characters can move from isolationist tendencies to an interdependent mode of living that enables community care.

The first pair to consider is the first novel from each author: *Catcher* and *Conversations*. Both are written in a first-person singular, past-tense voice. The effect is confessional; the narrators—Holden and Frances, respectively—recount specific sets of past experiences for unnamed audiences. However, the confessional mood does not mean that the narratives are truthful accounts of their experiences. Rather, implementing the past tense allows Holden and Frances to reconstruct previous events and reveal what they were actually thinking and feeling

versus what they said and did. Frances's rhetorical goals are the same as Holden's: "to control both the past of [their] memories and the present of [their] narrating by gaining at least partial control over [their] past and present audiences" (Cowan 37). Neither narrator obscures this facet of their story presentation.

In fact, Holden and Frances openly admit their fallibility. Holden explains, "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful. If I'm on my way to the store to buy a magazine, even, and somebody asks me where I'm going, I'm liable to say I'm going to the opera. It's terrible" (Salinger, *Catcher* 16). Frances similarly declares, "I felt my heart beating hard in the knowledge that I was being deceitful, but outwardly I was a capable liar, even a competitive one" (Rooney, *Conversations* 60). Both of them express some distaste for the behavior even as they engage in it. However, those feelings are not quite the same. Holden dislikes the act—"*it*'s awful," "*it*'s terrible" (emphasis mine)—but does not explicitly extend that sentiment to himself. Frances, meanwhile, praises her skill as a liar—"capable," "competitive"—but feels physical symptoms of guilt that she admits to the reader. Holden is careful to separate his judgment from himself, while Frances's judgment is inextricably linked to her self-image. This difference predicts the trajectory of each character; Holden's compartmentalization suggests that his alienation will be persistent, while Frances's guilt implies that some part of her cares how people perceive her.

Their penchant for lying is just one aspect of Holden and Frances's isolation. Even when they are not actively trying to alienate others, Holden and Frances have difficulty connecting with the people around them; this difficulty is established in the early pages of each text. Holden, for example, decides that he wants to begin his story not with the "David Copperfield kind of crap" but with "the day [he] left Pencey Prep" (Salinger, *Catcher* 1, 2). There is a major football

game, but Holden is "standing way up on Thomsen Hill, instead of down at the game" (3). He explains that, as the manager of the fencing team, he had gone that morning to New York for a meet, but the meet did not take place: "I left all the foils and equipment and stuff on the goddamn subway. It wasn't all my fault. I had to keep getting up to look at the map, so we'd know where to get off. […] The whole team ostracized me the whole way back on the train" (3). This is a key indicator of Holden's inability to operate within the capitalistic adult world around him: "The management of people is a key skill in postindustrial America, and Holden signally fails in this area" (Brookeman 62). Holden makes excuses for his actions to avoid any real culpability; he suggests, for example, that it was his effort to be responsible regarding travel plans which resulted in him leaving the fencing equipment on the subway. There is no way to know whether the team would have been kinder to Holden had he taken responsibility; regardless, they "ostracized" him, isolating him from his peers. If "[t]he domain which the Salinger hero opposes can be identified generally as the *social* world and specifically as middle-class culture," then Holden's separation from his peers is indicative of his inability to functionally participate in their social stratification (Bufithis 69). By beginning the story this way, Holden establishes that feeling disconnected is fundamental to understanding his identity. In missing the football game, Holden distinguishes himself both from the "deep and terrific" yelling "on the Pencey side" and the "scrawny and faggy" visiting team's cheering (Salinger, *Catcher* 3). While Holden resists alignment with stereotypes of queer effeminacy, he also cannot align himself with the traditional masculinity of his peers, which limits his capacity to form real connections with them.

Frances, too, struggles to form and maintain intimate connections—with both individuals her age, like her friend Bobbi, and with older adults, like photographer/writer Melissa and her husband, Nick. These three significant individuals in Frances's life are separated from her by

class difference: “Frances’[s] understanding of the world and her place in it is inflected by her self-image as an economic outsider compared with her wealthy friend and ex-girlfriend” and the upper-middle-class couple (Gray 76). Like Holden, Frances’s narrative explores “the messy mistakes inherent to becoming an adult,” but with the added “themes of taboo attraction” as she initiates an affair with Nick while having feelings for Bobbi (Apostolides). At the dinner during which Melissa interviews Frances and Bobbi to write a profile piece, Frances admits, “I was starting to feel adrift from the whole setup, like the dynamic that had eventually revealed itself didn’t interest me, or even involve me” (Rooney, *Conversations* 13). This early encounter with Bobbi, Melissa, and Nick establishes how Frances views herself in relation to the other three—separate, “adrift,” and uninvolved.

However, just like Holden’s admission that losing the fencing equipment is partly but “not all [his] fault” (Salinger, *Catcher* 3), Frances also recognizes her own part in creating this perception of the dynamic: “I could have tried harder to engage myself, but I probably resented having to make an effort to be noticed” (Rooney, *Conversations* 13). The question of being “noticed” is supplemented by Melissa’s gaze; she photographs Frances and Bobbi for the profile as well, and Frances feels that Melissa is attentive to Bobbi—which results in Frances having private moments to talk to Nick, though she does not yet appreciate Nick’s attention. After the dinner party, Melissa sends Bobbi and Frances the photographs she took, and Frances notes, “for every picture of Bobbi, I appeared too, always lit perfectly, always beautifully framed” (18). Despite the realization that she, too, was noticed during the party, Frances does not apply the information to an admission of having been mistaken. A critical reading of *Catcher* argues that “there are obvious discrepancies between what [Holden] says about himself and the truth of his situation and feelings,” and Frances is similarly unreliable not only in her reconstruction of

events but in her desire to obscure her insecurities from her audience (Rowe 83). Frances's unreliability contributes directly to her spirals; she misreads situations to upset herself and, when faced with evidence that contradicts her reading, refuses to reevaluate her interpretation and its accompanying emotional response.

After noting the social separation that triggers their spirals, the protagonists eventually realize that their isolation is unsustainable. However, that does not mean that they stop isolating or attempt to slow down the spiraling—in fact, the recognition that they are lonely appears to have no bearing on whether they perpetuate their loneliness. Holden, for example, wakes up after a physical encounter with a pimp, Maurice, that left him feeling suicidal and decides to give "old Sally Hayes a buzz" despite the fact that he "wasn't too crazy about her" (Salinger, *Catcher* 105). Instead of reaching out to someone with whom he wants to spend time, Holden chooses to call someone he does not particularly like. He intentionally facilitates a negative confrontation that will result in him feeling even more isolated.

Holden takes Sally to a theater performance for which he expresses disdain; then, they go ice-skating. Over some Cokes while watching the rink, Holden attempts to have an erratic conversation with Sally, during which she often says that he needs to lower his voice and stop jumping from subject to subject (Salinger, *Catcher* 130-1). The conversation crescendos when Holden makes a proposal to Sally: "'Look,' [he] said. 'Here's my idea. How would you like to get the hell out of here? …What we could do is, tomorrow morning, we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont, and all around there, see. It's beautiful as hell up there. It really is'" (132). Sally responds with multiple logical reasons why this is impossible: their ages, financial situations, and prospects of college and marriage. Holden is fed up with her practicality and her inability to understand his apprehension for the adult life he has seen modeled in New York City;

he declares that she "give[s] [him] a royal pain in the ass" (133). This, of course, is a mistake, and Sally is immediately outraged.

As the altercation with Sally draws to a close, Holden chooses isolation over repairing the severed connection. He half-heartedly attempts to apologize for being rude, but Sally does not want to hear it: "She kept telling me to go away and leave her alone. So finally I did it" (Salinger, *Catcher* 134). In leaving Sally alone, Holden is himself alone again. He recognizes that he "shouldn't've" left but concedes that he was "pretty goddam fed up" (134). Holden is intolerant of anyone who sides with the phonies instead of his fantasy of social interaction. Readers see the irony in a self-proclaimed liar who disdains phonies, but "Holden distinguishes phoniness from lying; he views the latter as a means of self-preservation, as opposed to an adopted practice" (Kinane 119). Even so, he acts the phony part until her ultimate dismissal and his departure: "I stuck around for a while, apologizing and trying to get her to excuse me, but she wouldn't" (Salinger, *Catcher* 134). He places the emphasis not on his trying to behave better, but on her needing to excuse him. When she does not forgive him for insulting her, he leaves. Holden has the capacity to remember and perform socially acceptable behavior but chooses not to instead.

In reflecting on the encounter, Holden does not express regret for the way he treated Sally. Instead, he regrets proposing his idea to her in the first place: "If you want to know the truth, I don't even know why I started all that stuff with [Sally]. I mean about going away somewhere, to Massachusetts and Vermont and all. I probably wouldn't've taken her even if she'd wanted to go with me. She wouldn't have been anybody to go with" (Salinger, *Catcher* 134). He implies that he would still go on the trip but asserts that he would not have wanted to spend that time with Sally. Since she is the only person to whom he made the proposal—though

perhaps the reader supposes he would rather invite Jane Gallagher—Holden would instead make the trip, find the job, and start a life there on his own. However, Holden also recognizes his loneliness: "The terrible part, though, is that I *meant* it when I asked her. That's the terrible part" (134). He may not have wanted to go to "Massachusetts and Vermont and all" with Sally, but he certainly did not want to go alone, either. He repeats that this recognition is "the terrible part" of what took place—not, of course, upsetting Sally, whom he considers a phony. Ultimately, Holden dismisses his behavior with his hollow refrain: "I swear to God I'm a madman" (134). With Sally left behind and Holden's desire for companionship self-rejected, he finds himself once again alone.

While Holden tends to physically extricate himself from social interactions, Frances's isolation is not always physical but often emotional; when she is surrounded by other people—including people she loves—she often feels detached from them. This tendency is clearest when Frances and Bobbi visit Nick, Melissa, and some of their friends during a summer trip to France. A party game gone awry due to Bobbi's mischief leaves Nick and Frances feeling vulnerable; Frances reacts to this by "provok[ing] Nick into fighting with [her]" about his continued feelings for his wife (Rooney, *Conversations* 129). She leaves Nick and goes to her own room, where she is "lying on [her] own in the silent house" (129). She manufactures physical isolation to mirror how she feels emotionally. Frances has a tendency to externalize her feelings and imagine they are a result of others' actions subjected on her; this night is no different: "I felt like someone had gripped my shoulders and shaken me firmly back and forth, even while I pleaded with them to stop. I knew it was my own fault" (129). Despite recognizing her own contribution to her distress, Frances processes that distress through the external "someone."

Frances isolates herself in a house full of people in part because she does not feel like she can talk to anyone there. This, too, she recognizes as a product of her decision-making: "I'd lied to everyone, to Melissa, even to Bobbi, just so I could be with Nick. I had left myself no one to confide in, no one who would feel any sympathy for what I'd done" (Rooney, *Conversations* 129). Again, Frances externalizes her feelings. She wants someone to be both an audience to her feelings and a confidant who will offer "sympathy," as opposed internal emotional processing. She is so far removed from introspective coping that she attempts to absolve herself of any emotional responsibility: "All I could decide was whether or not to have sex with Nick; I couldn't decide how to feel about it, or what it meant" (129). Nick has the ability to construct his own emotional response to actions, but Frances's desire to define actions within a sole definition of truth drives her to dismiss her own feelings any time she comes into contact with someone else's feelings that oppose hers.

The dismissal is a product of Frances's desire for control; when she cannot maintain complete control over a situation, she feels completely helpless instead. Frances thus attributes all the power to Nick: "And although I could decide to fight with him, and what we would fight about, I couldn't decide what he would say, or how much it would hurt me. Curled up in bed with my arms folded I thought bitterly: he has all the power and I have none" (Rooney, *Conversations* 129). Frances recognizes her ability to take action by picking fights. However, she does not acknowledge that while she cannot decide the immediate emotional response to what Nick says ("how much it would hurt"), she can decide how to respond to and process it. Frances curls into a defensive posture as a physical manifestation of her desire to emotionally protect herself.

Her defensiveness is not necessarily a justified response to the situations in which Frances finds herself. She follows up her thought regarding the power dynamic between Nick and herself with, "[t]his wasn't exactly true, but it was clear to me for the first time how badly I'd underestimated my vulnerability" (Rooney, *Conversations* 129). Frances is resistant to being vulnerable. In this case, her "vulnerability" is that she actually has feelings for Nick. Her frustration with her emotions leads her to displace it; she imagines that Nick has all the power in her relationship with him so that she can be upset at his masculine privilege instead of her complicated feelings. Finally, however, Frances tries to convince herself to accept her vulnerability and emotions: "Just admit it, I thought. He doesn't love you. That's what hurts" (129). Her attempt at acceptance, however, is flawed; Frances makes an assumption about Nick's feelings without determining whether it accurately represents the situation or is distorted by her emotional response. This enables her to feel justified in her assumption and engage in less productive behavior, instead of being open with Nick about her feelings. Frances's impulse to externalize her feelings and internalize her projections of others' feelings only serves to amplify her feelings of isolation and distress.

In each novel, the spiraling becomes so visible that the characters trying and struggling to connect with the protagonists realize something is wrong. Eventually, Holden and Frances reach points of intervention—someone tells them that they should consider seeking psychological help. For Holden, this advice comes from a former classmate, Carl Luce. For Frances, it comes from Bobbi. Despite these parallel conversations, there are clear differences between how the male/male and female/female conversational pairings work out—differences that may be attributed to both gender and time period. A close reading of the two passages against each other highlights those differences. Holden and Luce have their conversation after a couple of drinks:

> "I told you the last time what you need."
>
> "You mean to go to a psychoanalyst and all?" I said. That's what he'd told me I ought to do. His father was a psychoanalyst and all.
>
> "It's up to you, for God's sake. It's none of my goddam business what you do with your life."
>
> I didn't say anything for a while. I was thinking.
>
> "Supposing I went to your father and had him psychoanalyze me and all," I said. "What would he do to me? I mean what would he do to me?"
>
> "He wouldn't do a goddam thing to you. He'd simply talk to you, and you'd talk to him, for God's sake. For one thing, he'd help you to recognize the patterns of your mind."
>
> "The what?" (Salinger, *Catcher* 148)

Frances and Bobbi, meanwhile, discuss counseling as one facet of a much larger conversation about their relationship:

> You could go to counseling, [Bobbi] said.
>
> Do you think I should?
>
> You're not above it. It might be good for you. It's not necessarily normal to go around collapsing in churches.
>
> I didn't try to explain that the fainting wasn't psychological. Anyway, what did I know? If you think so, I said.
>
> I think it would kill you, said Bobbi. To admit that you needed help from some touchy-feely psychology graduate. Probably a Labor voter. But maybe it would kill you in a good way.

Truly I say to you, unless one is born again.

Yeah. I came not to send peace, but a sword. (Rooney, *Conversations* 288)

The women are able to access an honest vulnerability between each other, while the men require alcohol to facilitate the ability to be vulnerable. Even so, Bobbi's suggestion to "go to counseling" is delivered frankly, while Luce offers the more obtuse "I told you the last time what you need." Alcohol is not enough to pierce the performance of masculinity.

Bobbi and Luce also both create a requisite separation from the suggestion, refusing to present a command—even when their advisees request one. Holden asks if Luce indeed means psychoanalysis, to which Luce replies, "It's up to you, for God's sake." Frances often wants to be told what to do, and this conversation is no different: "Do you think I should?" Bobbi does not directly answer the question; instead, she says, "You're not above it. It might be good for you." Both Luce and Bobbi want to encourage their friends to make active choices rather than passively obey instructions. Still, they are unable to refrain from hints of hostility. Luce does so through further separation between himself and Holden: "It's none of my goddam business what you do with your life." Bobbi is more passive-aggressive, instead referencing the event that compelled Frances to reach back out to Bobbi (explored more in Chapter Two): "It's not necessarily normal to go around collapsing in churches." Neither Bobbi's nor Luce's reaction is uncalled for, but they do pose the risk of weakening the established vulnerability within the conversation. Perhaps this is Luce's intent—he expresses earlier his desire to avoid "a typical Caulfield conversation" (Salinger, *Catcher* 145). Bobbi and Frances, as individuals with romantic and sexual involvement, have more investment in maintaining proximity than Luce and Holden, who are loose acquaintances at best. Further, Bobbi and Frances's deeper bond, as well

as the fact that Frances recently upset Bobbi and this is their first reunion since, means Bobbi has freedom to express frustration or poke fun at Frances, depending on how one reads her tone.

Frances and Holden react with a similar silence before continuing the conversation. However, Holden asserts a vague independence, while Frances leans into the potential limit to her knowledge. Holden explains to his audience, "I was thinking." About what? The choice to omit that information stands out in a first-person narrative that spends great lengths of time within the narrator's thoughts; when it comes to Holden's mental state, he is intentionally avoidant. Frances, meanwhile, admits what she is thinking—that the collapse in church was due to her endometriosis—and that she may not be the best judge of whether counseling is a good idea: "Anyway, what did I know?"

Then, the conversations continue with some speculative discussion about what the sessions may be like. The protagonists are characterized in each scene by a hesitancy or skepticism toward psychological help. Holden evidently harbors concerns regarding psychoanalysis, a common trope in Salinger's work because "[t]he psychiatrist is society's plan of action systematized and institutionalized" and "the gatekeeper to the charmed house of adjustment" (Bufithis 69). Holden worries that a psychoanalyst would "do" something to him. What exactly would be done is unclear; Holden himself does not know. Luce explains with some hostility: "He wouldn't do a goddam thing to you. He'd simply talk to you, and you'd talk to him, for God's sake." Bobbi also suggests that a counseling session would be conversational with her reference to "some touchy-feely psychology graduate." Neither Luce nor Bobbi is entirely serious with their response; Bobbi merely takes on a more light-hearted tone. Bobbi is also willing to recognize Frances's apprehension or unwillingness to seek out therapy, saying "it would kill" Frances to "admit that [she] needed help." Luce does not reach the same level of

vulnerability or honesty with Holden, which could be attributed to their performance of masculinity, their level of closeness, or the cultural expectations of the time period.

Finally, both Luce and Bobbi reiterate that psychological help could be beneficial. Luce, like "the psychoanalytic critics in particular," takes "a too purely clinical approach to Holden" by "[f]ailing to take into account the normality of abnormality in adolescence" (Shaw 100). Luce says that a psychoanalyst would "help [Holden] to recognize the patterns of [his] mind." Holden, rather than being resistant, claims cluelessness—he asks what the patterns of one's mind even are. This shifts the conversation away from the personal to a more general discussion of psychoanalysis and Luce's engagement with it; finally, Luce leaves the bar. Bobbi offers, on the other hand, that Frances may hate having to admit she needs help, but "maybe it would kill [her] in a good way." Bobbi's more generous reading of therapy's potential to help Frances is thus able to avoid the pitfalls of Luce and the psychoanalytical school of thinking. Still, Frances, like Holden, wants to shift the conversation from personal to impersonal. She quotes a Bible verse that says one must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (*English Standard Version*, John 3.3). Bobbi adjusts to the conversation's new tone, quoting a verse as well in which Jesus says he has come not to bring peace to Earth but a sword (Matt. 10.34). The two women, who are not particularly religious, use the verses to communicate certain feelings with each other: Frances is prodding at the idea of self-improvement to earn some level of social acceptability, while Bobbi acknowledges that her approach to the conversation with Frances is slightly combative out of necessity. Their use of allusions is also a way to intellectualize the conversation and disarm its emotional intensity. So, like Luce leaving, the conversation effectively ends.

Whether or not the protagonists seek psychological help, the two novels conclude with the understanding that for the characters, life will keep going. Holden mentions going back to

school in September, while Frances is about to reinitiate her relationship with Nick. Each character ends their narrative with self-reflection. In these reflections, Frances and Holden express two similar sentiments: the inability to understand the personal before it is experienced and the feeling of detachment from others. In each case, they openly admit wanting human connection. However, their expressions come with different tones that color how the reader digests their desires.

Holden's concluding thoughts reveal that he will proceed through the world relatively unchanged. He is irritated by concern regarding his improvement: "A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I'm going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. It's such a stupid question, in my opinion" (Salinger, *Catcher* 213). There are multiple reasons for his irritation to be justified. The concern is expressed by "[a] lot of people" and the question of whether he will apply himself is repeated, which becomes naturally annoying. The emphasis is not on improving enough to return to school—they say "when" Holden returns to school in September, not "if." Instead, the concern is whether he will "apply [him]self;" the "psychoanalyst guy" and other sanitarium staff are interested in how productive Holden will become, not in his wellness, though "it is not at all clear that his several months in whatever sort of southern California facility he inhabits have altered his beliefs and feelings significantly" (Cowan 45). The probing into his productivity motivates Holden to question back, "I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you *do* it? The answer is, you don't" (Salinger, *Catcher* 213). He asserts his own certainty by stating the answer as well; Holden maintains confidence and masculine bravado even as he acknowledges that some things can only be known after they have taken place.

Frances, meanwhile, expresses ideas that suggest she is moving toward interdependence. She learns over the course of the novel the "way into a more affectively oriented worldview through accepting her mutual interdependence with" Bobbi and Nick (Gray 67). Her reflection, though similar to Holden's, lacks his performed confidence. Still, her verb tense reveals that she, too, feels self-assured: "You live through certain things before you understand them" (Rooney, *Conversations* 307). Unlike Holden's response, which is about one's own actions—and is thus centered around individualism and autonomy—Frances considers events that are "live[d] through," which suggests a more communal experience because the events exist outside of the individual. So, too, does her feeling of detachment: "Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know about and never would" (307). Frances recognizes a fundamental separation between herself and the "[t]hings and people" around her—a product of a fundamental lack of intimacy because it is impossible for her to know everyone and everything.

Holden feels a similar lack of intimacy, especially as he considers the impact of sharing "this madman stuff that happened to [him] around last Christmas just before [he] got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy" (Salinger, *Catcher* 1). His story contains several individuals with whom he tried and failed to develop a meaningful relationship. Sharing his narrative requires remembering each and every one of those missed connections. Holden makes the impact of that clear: "About all I know is, I sort of *miss* everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (214). By admitting that he was unable to connect or stay connected with different people—and specifically with other men—Holden realizes that he did and still does want those connections. The effect of his

confessional storytelling is “missing everybody;” Holden’s response to his own narrative is emotional. Frances, too, admits to an emotional response: “You can’t always take the analytical position” (Rooney, *Conversations* 307). The difference in their reactions is that Frances embraces the need to engage with one’s emotions, while Holden is adamantly opposed. Holden’s advice to his audience is, “[d]on’t ever tell anybody anything” because the effect is feeling lonely and wanting a connection with other people. Frances, meanwhile, is determined to not always take the analytical position and, in response to her ex-lover Nick saying he still has feelings for her, says, “Come and get me” (Rooney, *Conversations* 307).

At the end of their narratives, then, their arcs diverge. Frances reaches out, while Holden advises against even desiring connection. It is impossible to dissect with certainty why each character behaves the way they do; by constructing narratives that are told by unreliable protagonists, Salinger and Rooney ensure there is something unknowable about their thoughts and actions. However, their contexts reveal the factors which may contribute to who Frances and Holden are and who they may become. The shift in time period establishes a more evolved understanding of mental illness and its treatment in Rooney’s work than was ever possible for Salinger and his contemporaries. Salinger’s characters distrust psychoanalysis, a distrust that is not unfounded. Rooney’s work could thus be read as a natural answer to Salinger’s, an exploration of how their protagonists’ fates differ with developments in concepts of care.

Similarly, Frances has the emotional privilege of femininity which would not be afforded to someone like Holden—who, if considered effeminate, would have been speculated to be queer. Therefore, the range of emotions available for Holden to access is limited compared to Frances. The intersection of social environment and gender identity informs attitudes toward independence; while Holden has the “cult status” of “a generalized champion of American

individualism," Frances is able to move toward an understanding of individuals as part of a community within her communist political framework (Brookeman 58). Further, Frances's narrative, as the title itself suggests, is situated around deep interpersonal conflicts, while "Holden is never allowed to imagine or experience himself in any significant struggle with others […] [so] neither he (nor his creator) can conceive of society as a source of growth, or self-knowledge" (Rowe 90). As a result, the two characters can go through the same arc, with only Frances applying what she learns to escape the spiral while Holden remains isolated.

Like *Catcher* and *Conversations*, *Franny* is paralleled by *Normal*. And, again, the tension between an impulse to isolate and a desire to connect is at the heart of this pairing. Both books are written in the third-person, with a distance that allows for a view of dual protagonists. While the focalization is able to move between the perspectives of either protagonist and a more objective narrative of events, it is limited in that the thoughts of secondary characters are largely inaccessible. As a result, each novel is an insulated portrait of a pair of individuals and their relationship with each other.

The specific dynamic of each relationship differs: Franny and Zooey Glass are the youngest two of seven siblings, while Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron are in an on-and-off relationship since secondary school. Regardless, each pair has a deep intimacy established as a product of their relationship forming and/or developing during their formative years. The majority of each novel takes place during college years, but Connell and Marianne begin their relationship immediately post-pubescence, while Franny and Zooey spent their childhoods together. The pairs feel an intense, important bond as a result of that intimacy, even when sometimes separated. The dynamics of these pairings form the emotional cores of each story.

Before delving into those stories, each book begins with a section that is shorter and relatively separate from the rest of the plot, but is necessary to establish the stakes, both tangible and intangible. The first part of *Franny and Zooey* is the short story, "Franny," which details a date Franny Glass has with her boyfriend, Lane Coutell, before the fainting spell that leads to her homebound mental breakdown. Franny and Lane are meant to go to the Yale game together, but their pre-game lunch quickly goes awry. After listening to Lane describe his Flaubert essay, Franny calls him a section man, which she defines as "a person that takes over a class when the professor isn't there […] He's usually a graduate student or something. […] Where I go, the English Department has about ten little section men running around ruining things for people, and they're all so brilliant they can hardly open their mouths" (Salinger, *Franny* 14-5). She goes on to detail her frustrations with acting, the world of academia, and with the competitive atmosphere of adult life more generally. Then, they have a "conversation" in which Franny tries to describe *The Way of a Pilgrim*, which details how to pray incessantly and Lane intersperses comments about the food. The "disconnection from Lane[,] suggests that her relationship with her partner must be managed according to specific, if strenuous, rules of engagement" (Rodrigues 130). Perhaps this results in the story's conclusion—Franny gets up to go in the direction of the bathroom and instead faints by the bar (Salinger, *Franny* 41). The story ends with Franny beginning the prayer as detailed in the book: "Alone, Franny lay quite still, looking at the ceiling. Her lips began to move, forming soundless words, and they continued to move" (43). The opening short story establishes the context of Franny's crisis, which is both intellectual and spiritual in nature, and prompts her the transition from the initial setting—the date with Lane—to the main setting—the Glass family apartment.

The limited focus of "Franny" to Franny and Lane's date means Salinger cannot establish Zooey in the short story, so he instead does so in the early pages of the novella "Zooey." The titular character's first action is to be "seated in a very full bath, reading a four-year-old letter" (Salinger, *Franny* 50). Zooey is described as "the complex, the overlapping, the cloven," "surpassingly handsome, even spectacularly so," and "an actor, a leading man" (51-2). The narration goes on to detail Zooey's childhood history with psychoanalysis: "Zooey had been, of all the Glasses, hands down, the most voraciously examined, interviewed, and poked at" (54). While Franny's mental breakdown is established in her story, Zooey's own history with mental illness and the industry of psychoanalysis is established in the early pages of his. Finally, the opening pages of *Zooey* reveal the content of the "four-year-old letter." It is a letter from Zooey's second-oldest (and oldest living) brother, Buddy, which is intended to offer advice for what Zooey should do with his adult life, accompanied by some thoughts on the suicide of Seymour, the oldest Glass brother. Additionally, Buddy's letter provides further context for Franny and Zooey's childhood, in which the eldest brothers applied their Eastern philosophies to creating an informal education: "I know how bitterly you resent the years when S. and I were regularly conducting home seminars, and the metaphysical sittings in particular. I just hope that one day—preferably when we're both blind drunk—we can talk about it" (66). Here, too, is further context that will inform how Franny and Zooey interact in the novel. First, there is the frustration Zooey has with "the metaphysical," which certainly includes Franny's obsessive prayer. Second, Buddy's hope for a "blind drunk" conversation about Zooey's feelings reveals the family tendency toward a lack of communication and the masculine need for alcohol to enable vulnerability, a common detail in Salinger's work. With the two protagonists and the key

elements of their particular crises established, the story is able to progress from its introductory section to the main plot.

Rooney does similar work with the first six chapters of the novel, which take place when Connell and Marianne are in the end of secondary school. Their relationship is first defined by economics: "Marianne answers the door when Connell rings the bell. […] She turns and walks down the hall. He follows her, closing the door behind him. Down a few steps in the kitchen, his mother Lorraine is peeling off a pair of rubber gloves" (Rooney, *Normal* 1). Connell's mother cleans Marianne's house; the financial disparity between the pair is a persistent point of tension for the entire novel. This dynamic is not widely known in their community: "In school he and Marianne affect not to know each other. People know that Marianne lives in the white mansion with the driveway and that Connell's mother is a cleaner, but no one knows of the special relationship between these facts" (2). Rooney's carefully chosen words emphasize both the dual performance at school—"affect"—and the unacknowledged but ever-present link between them—"special relationship." Their public performativity and private bond inform how they interact, almost cleaving them into two selves. For instance, Connell tells Marianne, "You act different in class, you're not really like that" (13). Marianne in turn reflects, "If she was different with Connell, the difference was not happening inside herself, in her personhood, but in between them, in the dynamic" (14). The sense of some fundamental specialness and difference in their "dynamic" is a core element of the narrative.

If the way they interact with each other is "different," then they must also have public-facing identities. Connell is "so desperately trying to figure out how to be in the world, and so hyperconscious of the external gaze," which makes him more focused on performing masculinity in accordance to social standards (Nolen). For example, knowing that Marianne is an outcast, he

tells her, “I think it would be awkward in school if anything happened between us” (Rooney, *Normal* 15). Social acceptability is the driving motivation to keep their relationship a secret in secondary school. That motivation is especially prominent as Connell copes with the traumas and social concerns inherent to the lower class: “[T]heir class disparity, and different social statuses create external pressures that render their desires unwelcome and impractical” (Leininger). Connell overcompensates in his performance of norms and standards because he fears that otherwise, he will be excluded because of his socioeconomic status. This extends beyond just social situations; Marianne encourages Connell to apply to study English at Trinity because “[i]t’s the only subject [he] really enjoy[s],” while Connell is hesitant because he is “not sure about the job prospects” (Rooney, *Normal* 21). Without Marianne’s insistence, Connell would not have applied to Trinity at this point in the novel, and if he had not applied, then the pair would not have been geographically together for the rest of the novel. Her easy disregard of financial concerns coupled with his attraction to her is fundamental to the narrative.

Marianne’s wealth privilege affords her the ability to disregard others’ opinions. Though “she is considered an object of disgust” (Rooney, *Normal* 3), when she chooses to perform the socially standard femininity, she is immediately reacted to with comments like, “Don’t you scrub up well?” and, “You look gorgeous” (31). Rooney’s entry into Marianne’s mind further emphasizes her detachment from the social system:

> [E]veryone has to pretend not to notice that their social lives are arranged hierarchically […]. Marianne sometimes sees herself at the very bottom of the ladder, but at other times she pictures herself off the ladder completely, not affected by its mechanics, since she does not actually desire popularity or do

> anything to make it belong to her. From her vantage point it is not obvious what rewards the ladder provides, even to those who are really at the top. (31)

Marianne alternates between seeing herself at the bottom of and on the outside of the social hierarchy, with no interest in "popularity or do[ing] anything to make it belong to her," which is the complete opposite of Connell's perspective. Her belief that the social ladder either provides nothing or nothing "obvious" primes her to take a collectivist approach to forming community, which will contribute to how their public selves will both shift in college. Marianne becomes well-liked and popular, while Connell finds himself sinking further into isolation as his obsession with social norms turns into a consuming anxiety. The social and economic stakes are thus established for the novel.

Whether or not the individuals are driven toward isolation or community, they nevertheless remain deeply committed to their pairings. While Frances and Holden "can't resist having a long conversation—albeit a one-way one […]—with the nominal audience of [their] narrative[s]," the characters in *Normal* and *Franny* cannot resist having a long conversation with each other (Cowan 37-8). The "Zooey" section of *Franny* is essentially three conversations in a row: Zooey and his mother, Zooey and Franny in person, and Zooey and Franny on the phone. *Normal*, meanwhile, jumps through time to focus only on moments when Marianne and Connell spend significant time together, whether in a relationship or in conflict. As a result, "most of the effort to balance power takes place […] within the novel[s'] structure[s]" (Oyler). The pairs of characters are less dedicated to balancing power, instead "under the strain of ready alert, often evasive and forever preparing for combat" (Cowan 40). For Franny and Zooey, this is a product of their sibling rivalry—one built on intellectual competition and their participation in the same career field, acting. All seven of the Glass children, "at rather conveniently spaced intervals

during childhood, had been heard regularly on a network radio program, a children's quiz show called 'It's a Wise Child'" (Salinger, *Franny* 53). From a young age, Franny and Zooey were trained to approach intellectual discussions as a competition that can be won or lost based on quickness and charisma. Further, the comfort provided by their intimacy enables them to be frank and often harsh with each other. Almost immediately after waking Franny from her sleep on the living room couch, Zooey manages to upset her:

> Zooey […] said dispassionately, "You look like hell. You know that?"
>
> Franny stared at him. "You could have sat there all morning without saying that," she said. She added, with meaning, "Just don't start in on me again, bright and early in the morning, Zooey, please. I mean it, now."
>
> "Nobody's starting in on you, buddy," Zooey said, in the same dispassionate tone. "You just happen to look like hell, that's all. Why don't you eat something? Bessie says she's got some chicken soup out there she's—"
>
> "If anybody mentions chicken soup to me just once more—" (127-8)

The narrative makes clear that both Franny and Zooey are attractive young people, so Zooey's remark seems both hostile and inauthentic. When Franny first wakes up, for example, her looks are described: "There were half circles under her eyes, and other, subtler signs that mark an acutely troubled young girl, but nonetheless no one could have missed seeing that she was a first-class beauty" (125). Most likely, then, Zooey is commenting on the signs of Franny's distress, not on her appearance as a whole. However, Franny takes offense and immediately shifts to the defensive, telling Zooey not to "start in on" her. He remains "dispassionate," stating his comments with a dry, sardonic tone that suggests a performed confidence or intellectuality. This early conversation "sets the tone for the remainder of the siblings' dialogue, constructing a

discursive pattern in which Franny's problems and desires are dialogically reframed and redirected by Zooey" (Rodrigues 138). Zooey tries, for example, to encourage Franny to allow herself to be cared for—to eat Bessie's chicken soup—but she is hostile toward both the idea and Zooey for suggesting it. His attempt to redirect her distress over her future into a matter of familial care is an early example of an oft-repeated pattern.

Marianne and Connell have similarly combative conversations, especially when one feels wronged by the other; the defensive tone in their conversations is most likely a self-protective instinct. One of their early and intense conflicts comes when Connell asks Rachel Moran to go to a school dance, the debs, with him instead of Marianne, with whom he is still having sex:

> He told her it wasn't 'romantic,' and that he and Rachel were just friends.
>
> You mean like we're just friends, said Marianne.
>
> Well, no, he said. Different.
>
> But are you sleeping with her?
>
> No. When would I even have the time?
>
> Do you want to? said Marianne.
>
> I'm not hugely gone on the idea. I don't feel that insatiable really, I do already have you.
>
> Marianne stared down at her fingernails.
>
> That was a joke, Connell said.
>
> I don't get what the joke part was.
>
> I know you're pissed off with me.
>
> I don't really care, she said. I just think if you want to sleep with her you should tell me.

> Yeah, and I will tell you, if I ever want to do that. You're saying that's what the issue is, but I honestly don't think that's what it is. (Rooney, *Normal* 64)

Marianne's anger is justified, but she does not express it with the volume or tone that is typical of such an emotional display. Instead, Marianne—like Zooey—is dispassionate. She asks clarifying questions to which she already knows or suspects the answer, which in turn puts Connell on the defensive. Adding a word like "even" to asking about when he would have the time to sleep with Rachel implies that Connell sees Marianne's question as absurd or pointless. He doubles down on his defensiveness when he tries to make a joke: "I don't feel that insatiable really, I do already have you." When Marianne does not laugh, he insists that he was joking; she refuses to acknowledge any humor in the moment. His joke is predicated on a level of masculine entitlement: that sex is a matter of his insatiability and that he already possesses Marianne for sexual gratification. Instead of trying to explain "the joke part" to Marianne, Connell pivots to point out the Marianne is "pissed off with" him," shifting the attention from his behavior to her action.

Marianne, for her part, refuses to actually admit that she is upset. Connell probes further, saying she claims her issue is whether Connell and Rachel are sleeping together "but [he] honestly [doesn't] think that's what it is" (Rooney, *Normal* 64). However, when Marianne gives him the opportunity to state what he thinks she is really upset about, he chooses not to say anything, refusing to take any responsibility. This is what makes Marianne finally laugh—"just how savagely he had humiliated her, and his inability to apologize or even admit he had done it"—and then he leaves (64). Like Franny, Marianne falls into a long, deep sleep instead of expressing or processing emotions. After she wakes up, she chooses not to go back to school for the rest of the term, completely isolating herself in the same way that Franny is trying to do.

Even when they are not actively fighting each other, the pairs have a tendency to miscommunicate. In *Franny and Zooey*, these miscommunications are often centered around discussions of art—as they are both actors trying to navigate participating in the industry of performance without their true selves. For example, they each struggle to find work they consider worthy of their talent, with actors who are equally talented:

> "… [W]hat about Dick's thing?" she asked. "Have you read it yet?"
>
> "In Dick's thing, I can be Bernie, a sensitive young subway guard, in the most courageous goddam offbeat television opus you ever read."
>
> "You mean it? Is it really good?"
>
> "I didn't say *good*, I said *courageous*. Let's keep on our toes here, buddy." (Salinger, *Franny* 134)

Zooey, as prompted by the reread four-year-old letter from Buddy, has already considered the potential difficulties of working in his industry and accepted that he will likely not act in television programs that are "good." Franny, however, deeply desires to perform in—to be—something good, so her excitement is palpable when she asks, "You mean it?" She hopes that there is finally a role in a production that is good, which would signal that there is hope for her career, too. Zooey has no tolerance for Franny's fantasy of goodness and immediately corrects her, accompanied by a patronizing comment: "Let's keep on our toes here, buddy." His tone could have invited more combativeness, but Zooey immediately carries on with a rant about the television script. He is interrupted only when he finally looks at Franny and "apparently looking for trouble" asks if she has begun the Jesus Prayer again as a way of "[t]aking refuge from [his] un-Christian attitude to the popular arts" (135). If Franny misunderstood Zooey's opinion of the script, then this is Zooey's turn to misunderstand her. Without ceasing her murmurs, "Franny

looked up then, and shook her head, blinking. She smiled at him. Her lips had, in fact, been moving, and were moving now" (135). She is self-soothing with the prayer, but not necessarily as a direct response to Zooey's attitude, at least according to her. He seems unsure how to react to her, and so says only, "Just don't smile at me, please […] Seymour was always doing that to me. This goddam house is lousy with smilers" (135). Zooey distinguishes himself from the rest of his siblings—the "goddam house"—and in particular aligns Franny with Seymour. At least with respect to art and acting, Zooey has thus far been following Buddy's advice; it seems, then, that he is creating a dichotomy separating the oldest two and youngest two siblings in the family. That means placing himself in opposition to Franny (and to Seymour—the smilers). In establishing this division, Zooey increases the possibility of miscommunication.

Marianne and Connell, too, often fail to understand each other, and their miscommunications also frequently relate to the economic world. While Franny and Zooey are young adults first starting to navigate the working world, Connell in particular has been aware of socioeconomic status from a young age. Marianne, with her wealth privilege, has a mindset more in line with the Glass children's financial unawareness. One of the most intense moments of economically-related miscommunication drives Marianne and Connell to stop sleeping with each other after their first year of college. Rooney introduces the scenario first in a focalization of Marianne's perspective: "Marianne hasn't seen him since May. He moved home after the exams and she stayed in Dublin. He said he wanted to see other people and she said: Okay. Now, because she was never really his girlfriend, she's not even his ex-girlfriend. She's nothing" (Rooney, *Normal* 114). Marianne's perspective views the events as cause and effect driven by Connell; he had to go home "and she stayed," he expressed an interest in sleeping with other people "and she said" that was okay, though clearly it upset her. Her framing of her choices as

reactionary shifts any blame in their breakup onto Connell. Marianne further exemplifies this in her belief that because they were never really dating, "[s]he's nothing" now. Her identity is so caught up in her relationship with Connell that his absence from her life leaves her socially undefined.

Rooney revisits the separation again when she focalizes Connell's perspective, depicting his remembrance of what happened between himself and Marianne. As opposed to the five-sentence explanation Marianne's perspective offers, Connell replays the entire conversation in his memory, recontextualizing it: "Their power over one another is reflected through alternating perspectives, Connell's take on a situation reworked and retold by Marianne and vice versa" (Apostolides). After agonizing for weeks about how to ask Marianne if he can move in with her over the summer, he finally tells her, "It looks like I won't be able to pay rent up here this summer. […] I'm going to have to move out of Niall's place. […] Pretty soon. Next week maybe" (Rooney, *Normal* 128). He hopes that Marianne will offer to let him stay because his socioeconomic situation makes it far more difficult for him to ask for financial support from others. However, she instead reacts coldly: "Her face hardened, without displaying any particular emotion. Oh, she said. You'll be going home, then" (129). The combination of being unable to read Marianne's facial expression and her verbalized assumption that he will return home triggers an anxiety attack in Connell: "He rubbed at his breastbone then, feeling short of breath" (129). It is emotionally impossible for him to ask for support, especially financial support. This is one of several instances in the novel when "he believes she may have ended their relationship because of his inferior social standing; she, with the comfort of the privileged, doesn't think about it at all" (Nolen). Connell views his own socioeconomic status as distressing in the context

of his relationship with Marianne, especially after going to university and losing the social capital with which he compensated.

Rooney presents Connell's turmoil through self-questioning: "He couldn't understand how this had happened, how he had let the discussion slip away like this. It was too late to say he wanted to stay with her, that was clear, but when had it become too late? It seemed to have happened immediately" (Rooney, *Normal* 129). Despite the third-person focus, the insertion of "that was clear" and the passage's placement after Marianne's reading of events reveals the fallibility of both Connell's and Marianne's perspectives. So, while Marianne thinks that Connell "said he wanted to see other people," the dialogue Rooney offers readers from Connell is actually, "I guess you'll want to see other people, then, will you?" (114, 129). He believes that Marianne assuming he will go back home means that she is no longer interested in him. She, however, thinks that that is what he wants. They cannot clear up this miscommunication in the moment, especially because Connell, in line with socialized masculinity, restricts his emotional responses. When he has the conversation with Marianne, "[h]e contemplated putting his face down on the table and just crying like a child. Instead he opened his eyes again" (129). Connell does not allow himself emotional release until exiting the conversation altogether: "When he left her building he did cry, as much for his pathetic fantasy of living in her apartment as for their failed relationship, whatever that was" (129). Both Connell and Marianne are uncertain of how to define "whatever" their "failed relationship" was, but the geographical separation feels like an ending for both of them.

Sometimes, however, the four characters recognize that they need to stop fighting against their conversations, transitioning from being combative to being honest; often, this happens during a period of retrospect. For example, when Franny begins to talk about how she

treated Lane on their date, Zooey tells her that he does not want "any unfresh reminiscences this morning, buddy," before beginning to actively deconstruct both his and his sister's behavior (Salinger, *Franny* 138). Instead of lingering on the same cyclical thinking, Zooey recognizes that he and Franny need to move forward and try to develop something productive out of their conversation. After dividing them into smilers and non-smilers, Zooey reunites himself with Franny: "In the first place, you're way off when you start railing at *things* and people instead of at yourself. We both are. I do the same goddam thing about television—I'm aware of that. But it's *wrong*. It's *us*. I keep telling you that" (138). Zooey acknowledges a common problem they both have, complaining about external issues instead of personal shortcomings. He invites Franny to align herself with him once again, which enables him to progress the conversation by interrogating the reason for their common problem: "We're freaks, that's all. Those two bastards got us nice and early and made us into freaks with freakish standards, that's all. We're the Tattooed Lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, till everybody else is tattooed, too" (138-9). Zooey blames Seymour and Buddy, the "two bastards," for giving them an informal education as children; Buddy himself apologizes for that very act in his four-year-old letter to Zooey from earlier in the text. Their intellectual worldview is indeed a barrier to their ability to connect with other people, which Zooey would cite as the cause for Franny's conflict with Lane, whose paper she described as "harmless[,] test-tubey[,] […] so strictly English Department and *pa*tronizing and campusy" (138). The paper serves as synecdoche for Franny's perception of Lane as a whole. Franny, then, wants Lane to be "tattooed" in the same way that Zooey wants the writers and producers in his industry to have his drive toward creating truly good media. He attempts to ascribe all of their shortcomings to what Buddy and Seymour taught them, as amplified by the repeated "that's all." Here, then, is a

limitation on Zooey's ability to think through the ways in which he and Franny are harmful—to each other and to their social spheres.

Zooey also addresses the inherent conversational combativeness that he and Franny have generally. He tells her, "[W]e've got 'Wise Child' complexes. We've never really got off the goddam air. Not one of us. We don't talk, we hold forth. We don't converse, we expound. At least *I* do" (Salinger, *Franny* 139). Zooey seems to give Franny an out by adding that qualifier that "[a]t least" he behaves that way, but actually the addendum serves to soften his more hostile tone. He recognizes that the performative, competitive discourses in which the Glass siblings participated as children fostered those same mannerisms in their adult conversations; admitting that problem is the first step toward remedying it. This is why Zooey wishes one of the screenwriters he works with, Hess, would refrain from describing scripts face-to-face rather than giving them to Zooey to read privately: "He's not stupid. He *knows* it's impossible for me to keep my mouth shut" (139). Zooey knows that the way he behaves upsets people but cannot translate that to better navigating conversation. Instead, he hopes dialogue does not take place at all. After making some broad claims about the mindset of people in Hollywood, Franny asks if he actually shared his thoughts with Hess, to which Zooey replies, "Certainly I told him that! I just got through telling you I can't keep my mouth shut. Certainly I told him that! I left him sitting there wishing he was dead. Or *one* of us was dead—I hope to hell it was me" (140). Zooey again employs repetition, insisting that he told Hess his thoughts; it reads as almost desperate, an attempt to accept culpability. He also hopes that Hess was able to externalize his anger and wish Zooey "was dead" instead of himself. This conversation, then, serves as an opportunity for Franny and Zooey to actively dissect the underlying reasons for their behavior. Learning to accurately place blame is a skill that would serve both Franny and Zooey well.

Connell and Marianne similarly return to older conversations in attempt to understand what went wrong and how they can ease their combativeness to better communicate in the future. One such retrospective interpretation revolves around, as previously discussed, Connell's move home and their separation. The conversation comes after Connell is mugged and, because he has Marianne's number memorized, he calls to ask if she can help pay a taxi so he can get home (Rooney, *Normal* 144-5). She tells him to take a taxi to her apartment so that she can pay the driver for him and then give him enough to afford another ride back to his own place. When he finally gets there, being given the money is emotionally difficult: "She knows that he feels bad; she wants to be a grown-up about things. She finds her purse and hands him the money, which he puts in his pocket. He looks down, blinking and clearing his throat, like he's going to cry too. I'm sorry, he says" (156). The urge to cry is the same as his reaction when he tried and failed to stay with Marianne, which is perhaps why he feels comfortable bringing up that conversation up again:

> You know, I didn't really know what was going on with us last summer, he says. Like, when I had to move home and that. I kind of thought maybe you would let me stay here or something. I don't really know what happened with us in the end.
>
> She feels a sharp pain in her chest and her hand flies to her throat […].
>
> You told me you wanted us to see other people, she says. I had no idea you wanted to stay here. I thought you were breaking up with me.
>
> He rubs his palm flat against his mouth for a second, and then breathes out.
>
> You didn't say anything about wanting to stay here, she adds. You would have been welcome, obviously. You always were. (156)

Connell admits that he did not "know what happened with" them, finally confessing the confusion he felt when the conversation first took place. He softens his expression of his own feelings to spare Marianne, sandwiching the verb "thought" with the phrases "kind of" and "maybe." Marianne's physical reaction is one of pain as she realizes that their relationship ended over a miscommunication. She is able to be assertive, saying what she thought occurred without any accommodating language. They invert gender norms in this conversation; Connell is hesitant while Marianne is forward. When he hears Marianne's version of events, Connell is unable to speak further. This gives Marianne the freedom to continue, "You would have been welcome, obviously. You always were." She reveals her wealth privilege—the freedom to assume standing invitations and to disregard financial anxiety. The miscommunication is finally exposed to them both. However, Marianne is in a relationship now, so there is nothing that can actually be done to remedy the situation except for Connell taking the taxi fare. So, he does—and then he leaves. The encounter ends with each more distressed; like a critical interpretation of Holden in *Catcher*, the "mere remembering and recounting of things that exacerbated [their problems] reopen the emotional wounds" (Cowan 45). They are therefore unable to process the potential lesson for their communication styles.

The emotional turmoil and difficulty to communicate that all four characters experience is further informed by the impact that suicide has on their lives. Each text features a secondary character who commits suicide either before or over the course of the novel, and the effects of those deaths are "stalking in and out of the plot with considerable frequency, like so many Banquo's ghosts" (Salinger, *Franny* 52). Given that *Franny and Zooey* takes place over the course of a weekend, it makes sense for the specter of suicide to come from outside the bounds of the novel: "The reader, then, may care to know at the outset that in 1955 [when the story takes

place] the eldest of the Glass children, Seymour, had been dead almost seven years. He committed suicide while vacationing in Florida with his wife" (52-3). How Seymour's suicide affects Franny and Zooey informs how they engage with the topics he introduced to their lives, like the importance of learning, the act of performance, and their entry into adulthood. Buddy's letter introduces the potential difference between Zooey and Franny: "[Waker, one of their older brothers,] said you were the only one who was bitter about S.'s suicide and the only one who really forgave him for it. The rest of us, he said, were outwardly unbitter and inwardly unforgiving" (68). The implication is Zooey has processed Seymour's suicide and is better able to move forward; Franny, if truly "inwardly unforgiving," has not done that work, and by being "outwardly unbitter," it makes sense that she and Zooey are combative in conversations about Seymour. Since their childhood was so heavily influenced by Seymour, Zooey can understand where Franny is at in her life but still not approve of it. Since their style of conversation is informed by being on the same quiz show as their older siblings and by spending so much of their time insulated in the family dynamics, Seymour's identity and presence is thus infused throughout the narrative.

Zooey's opinion that he and Franny are "Tattooed Lad[ies]" with "'Wise Child' complexes" is thus a product of Seymour's influence and how Zooey has processed his death (Salinger, *Franny* 139). He is an individual who favors action, conviction, and evolution; he complains about other members of his family who lack those values. In a conversation with his mother, Bessie, Zooey says of Buddy, "This whole goddam house stinks of ghosts. I don't mind so much being haunted by a dead ghost, but I resent like *hell* being haunted by a half-dead one. I wish to *God* Buddy'd make up his mind. He does everything else Seymour ever did—or tries to. Why the hell doesn't he kill himself and be done with it?" (102-3). Zooey uses "haunted" and

"ghosts" as a way of conceptualizing the outsized influence his oldest brothers had on his life, and by extension on Franny's. However, by manifesting their influence as a malleable but contained entity, he positions it as an obstacle that can be overcome. He is able to cope with his brothers' physical absence more directly, taking action, for example, after leaving Franny on the couch: "This was the first time in almost seven years that Zooey had, in the ready-made dramatic idiom, 'set foot' in Seymour's and Buddy's old room" (174). Franny, meanwhile, is only able to express—in response to Zooey's offer to get Buddy on the phone—that she misses her older brother: "'I want to talk to Seymour,' she said" (150). Zooey is able to cross a physical and emotional threshold because, unlike Franny, he has forgiven Seymour for committing suicide. The ability to forgive releases some burden for him, which makes Zooey better equipped to understand and support Franny. As the story moves to its conclusion, then, Zooey is the one who attempts to de-intensify the combative relationship and evolve as a listener and conversationalist.

Given the broader timescale of *Normal People*, it makes sense that, unlike Seymour's death, Rob's suicide takes place within the frame of the novel, though like *Catcher* and *Franny*, the frequent jumps in time act as "an encased […] frozen narrative fragment […] that rhetorically attempt[s] to frame and freeze realities that at the same time we are asked to experience as dynamic and uncontrollable" (Cowan 35-6). Rob was one of Connell's secondary school friends, who stayed in Carricklea while Connell and Marianne went to Trinity in Dublin. Connell, in his attempts to maintain his new, upper-class friends and his relationship with Marianne while struggling to makes ends meet, loses touch with Rob. When Connell receives a text message from his former schoolmate Rachel Moran asking if anyone has seen Rob, he thinks little of it; then, "[t]he next day Rob's body was recovered from the River Corrib. […] Since then Connell's mental state has steadily, week after week, continued to deteriorate. His anxiety, which

was previously chronic and low-level, serving as a kind of all-purpose inhibiting impulse, has become severe" (Rooney, *Normal* 212-3). Niall—Connell's closest friend at university while Marianne is studying abroad in Sweden—encourages him to seek professional counseling from his school's clinic, both for his "severe" anxiety and his depression. While "conformity to traditional masculine norms can both increase men's likelihood of experiencing distress and decrease their willingness to seek help," Rooney's introduction of a common, free resource on college campuses is a reminder that "men will seek help if it accessible, appropriate[,] and engaging" (Seidler et al. 115). Even so, Rob's suicide leaves Connell, like Franny at home after her date with Lane, wanting to sleep all day and avoid eating as often as possible. In an inversion of Salinger's reinforced gender binary categorization that has Zooey as tough and Franny as fragile, Rooney reveals Connell's vulnerability and has him lean into care from others.

Marianne, meanwhile, is the solid, stable one in the face of Rob's suicide, in spite of appearances: "Then, through the opened church doors, [Connell] saw Marianne. He'd known she was coming back from Sweden for the funeral. […] He hadn't seen her since Italy. She looked, he thought, almost frail" (Rooney, *Normal* 216). Given her developing eating disorder and abusive relationship in Sweden, it is natural for Marianne to look frail. However, she is able to project comfort for Connell and his friends. At the reception, Connell struggles, but "he felt in awe of [Marianne's] naturalness, her easy way of moving through the world. It hadn't been like that in school, quite the opposite. Back then Connell had been the one who understood how to behave, while Marianne had just aggravated everyone" (218-9). Connell takes the opportunity to reflect on how he and Marianne have changed since school; acknowledging that openly suggests Connell has the potential to grow within their dialogue and adapt to their changing dynamic. Marianne, too, begins to reflect and evolve after Rob's suicide. One night the following summer,

one of their former schoolmates—Connell's friend and Marianne's bully—finds Marianne while out drinking and apologizes for bullying her: "[Eric] was talking about Rob a bit, she says. He was saying Rob would have wanted to apologize" (231). When Connell says that Rob would have wanted to apologize, Marianne replies, "Oh, I hate to think that. I hate to think he had that on his conscience in some way. I never held it against him, really. You know, it was nothing, we were kids" (231). Like Zooey's acceptance of Seymour's death, Marianne is able to forgive and unburden herself of the past. These are thoughts made explicit in Rooney's text, unlike the assessment of Zooey made one degree removed in Buddy's letter: "She wishes that she could have forgiven Rob, even if it meant nothing to him" (232). When Marianne articulates this to Connell—when she says she does not hold grudges, he responds, "Luckily for me" (233). And it is lucky for Connell, both because she forgave him for how he treated her in high school and because her ability to forgive and move forward better equips her to care for him. Again, like Zooey, Marianne is positioned as the more capable conversationalist as the novel builds toward its ending.

After combative attempts at dialogue are broken down by grieving processes, the natural conclusion for each text is an effective level of communication in which the characters finally understand each other. For Zooey and Franny, their final conversation comes on the phone, after Zooey has pretended to be Buddy in a last-ditch effort to help his sister. After realizing she is talking to Zooey, Franny tells him, "[I]f there's anything special you have to say to me, please hurry up and say it and leave me *alone*" (Salinger, *Franny* 192). In response to Franny's expression of hurt, Zooey responds with something close to an apology: "There's one thing I *do* know for sure, though. I have no goddam authority to be speaking up like a *seer* the way I have been. We've had enough goddam seers in this family" (193). This disarms Franny, which

enables the rest of the conversation—a conversation that Zooey makes clear will be brief: "I have just one or two very small things more, and then I'll quit, I promise you that" (195). Their conversation, spanning nearly half the text, is soon to draw to a close. Zooey tells Franny that if she wants to act and to be good at it, she has to fully commit instead of complaining that the rest of the industry and the audience are beneath her. Zooey and Franny are then able to find a point of unity—Seymour told them both to perform for "the Fat Lady" (199). Finally, Zooey has come to his point: "There isn't anyone *any*where that isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. Don't you know that? Don't you know that goddam secret yet? And don't you know—*listen* to me, now—*don't you know who that Fat Lady really is?* ...Ah, buddy. Ah, buddy. It's Christ Himself. Christ Himself, buddy" (200). Franny's urge to pray, Zooey suggests, was a product of her anxiety over whether her desires to compete and to perform were pointless. Zooey is "only giving here a religious connotation to what is denotatively aesthetic" as a means of "play[ing] a very special kind of psychiatrist to Franny" (Bufithis 76). He wants to help her, so he recontextualizes her desires through Seymour's lens of spirituality: "Zooey's appeal endeavors to redirect Franny's focus toward the socially-acceptable, productive work of acting […] in the interest of her achieving self-fulfillment via responsible means" (Rodrigues 142). Rather than pursuing religion, Zooey suggests she should simply commit herself to being the best she can be as an actress, because "Seymour's Fat Lady" is both every audience member and Jesus, to whom she is praying. The text suggests in its emphasis on the audience that the moral and spiritual success Franny desires is not in fact antithetical to capitalistic individualism but can be achieved by working hard within that system—by aspiring to individual greatness. He tells her, "I can't talk any more, buddy," and the dialogue is finally complete (Salinger, *Franny* 200).

Connell and Marianne's final conversation is also about the future's academic and career possibilities but is framed outside of the context of labor productivity. Connell tells Marianne that he has been accepted to an MFA program in New York, but that he cannot go because "[he]'d miss [her] too much" (Rooney, *Normal* 272). Marianne, for her part, demonstrates that she has a better understanding of Connell's circumstances, assuming that his initial resistance to the idea of the program is because of financial concerns. When she considers that he wants to stay for her, Marianne is steadfast in her insistence that he go. She reflects on the years they have spent so close to each other, and to the emotional support she provided him after Rob's suicide: "All these years they've been like two little plants sharing the same plot of soil, growing around one another, contorting to make room, taking certain unlikely positions. But in the end she has done something for him, she's made a new life possible, and she can always feel good about that" (272). Unlike Seymour's consumer-focused Fat Lady metaphor, the "two little plants" simile is focused on personal growth and their particular relationship, rather than a larger sociocultural positioning. Connell, like Franny, places the conversational power in Marianne's hands: "Say you want me to stay and I will" (273). She thinks carefully before speaking, about how her relationship with Connell has "brought her goodness like a gift" and "done a lot of good for each other" (273). Due to the eventual peace after their earlier combative dialogue, Marianne is comfortable letting Connell leave: "You should go, she says. I'll always be here. You know that" (273). Their conclusion is thus about personal growth and improvement as individuals and as a pair, rather than a focus on what they will produce for the rest of the world.

Carefully reading *Franny* and *Normal* reveals that the two major distinguishing factors between them are their treatments of gender and class. The traditional gender roles performed in Salinger's text heavily contribute to Franny's "breakdown[, which] reflects an inability to face

her limited options as a first-generation, woman student in the arts, circa 1955: that is, marrying her boyfriend, Lane Coutell, or refusing marriage to become a professional actress (neither option she claims to desire)" (Rodrigues 122). Rooney's novel has more freedom to explore gender, complicating Marianne's sexual submissiveness and inviting a more careful consideration of the gentle masculinity Connell exudes. Connell is the male counterpart to Franny's nervous breakdown, but the conclusions the pairs reach are somewhat different. Salinger's work is culturally situated in post-war capitalism and anxiety about communism, yet it is "bereft of the usual social consciousness that characterizes so much fiction of the previous period [the 1930s/World War II era]" (Seelye 28). His characters simultaneously do not consider their socioeconomic status and struggle because they want to find a way to succeed within the workforce despite clinging to adolescence. This applies to both *Franny and Zooey* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, in which Holden wishes he could just perform the titular role for the rest of his life, saving other children.

Rooney, on the other hand, has the benefit of a twenty-first century cosmopolitan culture that is more open to consideration of socioeconomic class and Marxist critique. She is able, then, to inject class dynamics into narratives modeled on Salinger's class-blind writing. Again, this applies to both *Normal People* and *Conversations with Friends*, in which Frances struggles with her feelings for Nick and Bobbi, two distinctly upper-middle-class individuals who are not concerned about money. Scholarship more distant from Salinger's time period notes that "[i]t is difficult to be sympathetic toward the frustrations of a youth who is privileged to ride in cabs and go to the theater," which Rooney addresses in her fiction through a careful dissection of her characters' social strata and relative privileges (Shaw 108). Because Rooney is able to blur the rigid binary of gender and reveal the complicated effects class has on interpersonal relationships,

her work updates Salinger's arguably for the better. Her readings of how individuals interact with one another and strive to escape isolation are more inclusive. Rooney's characters "want to be 'better,' to be good people—a desire so quaint as to be novel, and for a reader, a deeply satisfying thing to root for" (Nolen). Salinger's characters, meanwhile, have "dominating consciousness[es], setting [themselves] and the reader in a world apart, that insures [their] isolation" (Rowe 85). Rooney's characters have a community-oriented approach to life that allows them to at least partially overcome their distress. Salinger's writing has been taught in classrooms for decades with Holden as "the original representation of alienated youth" (Bickmore and Youngblood 252). However, it is evident that Rooney's writing is perhaps a more applicable remix of Salinger's anxiety-laden coming-of-age struggles for connection—and a more hopeful approach to adulthood.

Chapter Two: Communication at a Distance

Salinger's work and Rooney's are both recognized for a particular hallmark convention: the use of distanced communication methods by the characters. For Salinger, these are letters and phone calls. Rooney, whose critic-given title "Salinger for the Snapchat generation" is ubiquitous in reviews of her work, adapts those methods for the advanced technological age (Clark). Instead of letters, characters send each other emails; rather than placing phone calls, they send instant messages and texts. These are not brief references to off-scene events—significant portions of all four books are scenes of conversation one degree removed, disembodied from the speakers by technology or the page. All four texts present "social isolation as a problem of communication—and as a problem of language" (Kinane 118). For characters who are struggling to connect with others, distanced communication methods can be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, with the pressure of face-to-face immediacy, which is conducive to emotional outbursts and miscommunications, distanced communication is a way to have more thoughtful, careful dialogues. On the other, distance can enable taking on some sort of persona to influence their conversational partner in some way, especially for characters who place a "moral premium" on "dialogical 'success'" (Gray 77). Careful readings of excerpted distanced communication passages across all four books—connecting letters to emails and phone calls to instant messages, respectively—with a consideration of both performativity and opportunity reveals tension that all of the protagonists feel: the desire to construct a persona but also to use that persona to convey some emotional truth.

The distanced communication methods used in all four texts have varying degrees of artifice: a phone call is difficult—but, as Zooey proves, not impossible—to fake, while letters and emails may come from a specific sender but are able to be constructed to form a particular

narrative. Unlike a face-to-face conversation in which subconscious facial expressions, vocal tone, and body language can be examined and interpreted, distanced methods allow the communicators to exercise some control over their presentation. That control can, at times, result in artificiality or clear implementations of rhetorical devices for strategic effect. Distance essentially provides the opportunity for the manipulation or obfuscation of mood, intention, or even identity. What people say, how they say it, and why they say it are rarely clear-cut in these texts.

One of the most intense examples of rhetorical construction and performativity across all four texts is Melissa's email to Frances after finding out about Frances and Nick's affair. Melissa's email, which is written in a single, four-page long block of text, begins, "Hi Frances. I'm not angry at you, I want you to know that. I'm just getting in touch with you because I think it's important that we're on the same page with this" (Rooney, *Conversations* 224). Maybe Melissa is not angry, but her cited reason for emailing is almost certainly false. Rather than trying to get "on the same page" as Frances, Melissa's message seems written solely to convince Frances to leave Nick. She says that Frances will never marry Nick and, in a dig at Frances framed as self-deprecation, that "Nick is not primarily attracted to good-looking or morally worthy people" (224). Melissa goes on to state her emotions as facts: "I've cried copiously, not only in fits & starts but also for sustained periods of over an hour each" (225). In the next two sentences, Melissa says her own affairs mean that her "feelings don't count," and then, "I know I'm a monster & he probably tells you bad things about me" (225). Melissa exaggerates her guilt and self-punishment in an attempt to receive some pity. For Melissa, at least in this email, emotions are something to manipulate—both as a rhetorical device and as an intended effect on the reader.

Melissa's email both self-deprecates and cruelly insults Nick, in an effort to cast him in an undesirable light. She writes, for example, "I've become so used to seeing him as pathetic & even contemptible that I forgot anybody else could love him" (Rooney, *Conversations* 225). Her perception of Nick, she suggests, was something she had to grow accustomed to over time, allowing her disdain for her husband to settle into her subconscious. She says she considers Nick not only pitiful ("pathetic") but, worse, worthless ("even contemptible"), yet her own desire to stay in a marriage with him undercuts her point. Melissa's emotional truth—that Melissa still loves Nick—is poorly disguised in her construction of Nick as pathetic and contemptible. She also undercuts her attempt to make Nick undesirable when she comments on his improvement since knowing Frances: "[H]e only met you during the summer, he still wasn't really himself then he's been so much better since. And now I realize that you're actually a function of the betterness, or it's a function of you" (225). In Melissa's conceptualization, Nick is unlovable until someone loves him enough to make him lovable through "a function of the betterness" or the lover. She traps Nick in an emotional paradox in which love is not about the act of loving but of being loved—thus placing the burden of her marriage's complications on Nick. Other digs at Nick only reveal her own insecurity, such as her concern about Frances's "extreme youth": "21 is young, right? But what if you were 19, would he still have done it then? Is he the kind of morbid guy in his 30s who secretly finds 15-year-old girls attractive?" (226). She recasts Nick from a man sleeping with a younger woman to a potential pedophile in an attempt to make the relationship seem more perverted to Frances—who, of course, already has her own perceptions of Nick and his morality.

Frances also already has her own self-perception, but Melissa's email partially serves as an attempt to undermine that as well. For example, between calling Nick contemptible and

commenting on his improvement since starting his affair with Frances, Melissa writes, “He tells me your father is an alcoholic, so was mine. I wonder if we gravitate toward Nick because he gives us a sense of control that was lacking in childhood” (Rooney, *Conversations* 225). Mentioning that Nick told her a personal detail about Frances asserts some intimacy between herself and her husband, intimacy that might include betraying Frances. Melissa’s rudimentary psychoanalysis—of both herself and Frances, just like the comment about Nick not being attracted to good-looking or morally worthy people—is a strategy to make Frances uncomfortable by attributing her affair to her traumatic relationship with her father. Further, Melissa compares Frances to herself knowing that Frances does not like her; by suggesting they are similar, Frances’s sense of self is breached, leaving her vulnerable to the same loathing she feels for Melissa.

Where Melissa falls short, then, is in not realizing that Frances has already come to view herself with disdain and to critically question what about Nick attracts her to him. Frances is not concerned with Melissa’s view that she is “cold & unkind” or that she experiences “jealousy & fear” because Frances already thinks these things about herself (Rooney, *Conversations* 226). For Frances, the takeaway from the email is that Nick was not lying when he told her he loved her the day before (223); Melissa says the same thing: “For Nick you’re probably indistinguishable from happiness. I don’t doubt that he considers you the great love of his adult life” (227). Any attempts at stoking self-loathing in Frances fail because the only new information being provided—other than that Nick was in a psychiatric hospital—is about how Frances has improved Nick and made him happy. Melissa expresses that she wishes Frances and Nick were not seeing each other, but that she wants Nick to be happy: “Even when it looks like

this I still want it" (227). Melissa's email, for all its calculated cruelty, ultimately gives Frances permission to keep seeing Nick.

Frances performs the same sort of close reading on the email, a meta-reading by Rooney to demonstrate the skepticism and care with which readers should approach an unreliable writer with an ulterior motive—a writer like Frances. After "read[ing] the email several times," Frances begins to pick it apart (Rooney, *Conversations* 228). First, she notes the formatting: "It seemed like an affectation on Melissa's part not to include paragraph breaks, as if she was saying: look at the tide of emotion that has swept over me" (228). Then, she comments on her sense of Melissa's care and control over the content of the email: "I also believed she had edited the email carefully for effect, the effect being: always remember who is the writer, Frances. It is me, and not you" (228). Frances recognizes the performativity in the email's construction as a piece of rhetorical writing. Rooney offers Frances's application of close reading skills in part so that non-English major readers are forced to read the email through an intellectualized lens rather than as a mere "tide of emotion." The email is a performance within a book narrated by an unreliable perspective, which is thus itself a performance. Frances's analysis of Melissa's email serves as a model for how Rooney's audience should be reading the text as a whole, inviting the reader to consider subjectivity's function in the novel. It should come as no surprise to the audience that Frances took "an hour" to write this in response to Melissa's email: "Lots to think about. Dinner sounds good" (229). After witnessing Frances's close reading, the audience should consider how Frances is actually feeling versus what her message is intended to convey—confidence and a removal of Frances and Melissa as either subjects or objects, the exact opposite of Melissa's email. The novel asks readers to move beyond a singular focus on the narrator, instead exploring

how every individual works to construct narratives around their lives, identities, and relationships.

For Holden in *Catcher*, on the other hand, the narrative emphasizes a singular focus on himself; his narrative is more compressed, his interactions with other people are shorter, and every conversation he shares is heavily interspersed with his opinions. Much of his communication is an attempt to evade solitude by reaching out to people who can keep him company; even if he does not like a person, he is willing to perform interest in them so that he does not have to be alone. Unfortunately, it often backfires as soon as he is actually with the person because it is the distance of a phone call that enables him to disguise his true feelings. Sally Hayes is a perfect example of one such person in the novel. Holden calls Sally in part because she had written to him confirming when she would be home for the holidays, so he knows she is available. However, he is clear that he does not particularly enjoy her company: "I wasn't too crazy about her, but I'd known her for years" (Salinger, *Catcher* 105). Sally is someone Holden can reach out to because the two have an extensive personal history, which could make her more tolerant of his erratic behavior as he spirals.

What Holden actually says during the phone call contradicts the information he reveals to his audience as he retells his conversation with Sally. When Sally answers the phone—after her maid and father have both spoken to Holden—she asks, "who is this?" (Salinger, *Catcher* 106). Holden complains, "She was quite a little phony. I'd already told her father who it was" (106). However, he does not express any ire toward Sally's phoniness and instead answers her politely. Twice in their conversation, he uses the filler word "swell," including to tell her how he is doing (106). Holden chooses manners over honesty with Sally, though he ironically considers Sally and her language "so phony," not himself and his own (106). Sally's language about which Holden

complains is her use of the word "grand" to accept his invitation to see a matinee show (106). Holden looks down on Sally for her expression of excitement at the idea of spending the afternoon with him. Maybe he disdains the performativity of her language; on the other hand, perhaps he dislikes the word "grand" because he is aware of his own performed interest in spending time together and cannot tell whether or not Sally is also performing.

Whether he actually dislikes Sally or feels contempt for his own performativity, Holden continues to pretend to want to spend time with her. However, he considers redacting his invitation: "For a second [after Sally said 'grand'], I was tempted to tell her to forget about the matinee. But we chewed the fat for a while. That is, she chewed it. You couldn't get a word in edgewise" (Salinger, *Catcher* 106). Holden's desperation for companionship outweighs his negative feelings toward Sally. The phone call continues, with Holden immediately reframing it from the two talking together to Sally rambling alone, casting her in a less flattering light. Then Holden shifts to summary so that he can present both the content and his reaction from his own perspective. He says Sally tells him about "some Harvard guy" and "some West Point cadet," both of whom are interested in her (106). In reference to each man, Holden adds his own commentary. About the Harvard student, for example, he says, "it probably was a freshman, but she didn't say, naturally" (106). Holden suggests that the man interested in Sally is closer to her age than she wants to imply, as if being pursued by an older man would be more compelling of a story. The adverb "naturally" indicates that Holden expects Sally to lie about or obscure a detail like the student being a freshman. In regard to the West Point cadet, Holden uses two words to express his disdain: "Big deal" (106). Though he discloses to his audience that he and Sally used to be seeing each other—"I think I'd have found [whether or not she was intelligent] out a lot

sooner if we hadn't necked so damn much" (105)—he purports not to care about any men who are interested in her.

Evidently, though, Holden feigns enough interest in what Sally tells him because she does not change her mind about agreeing to go to a matinee with him. Holden's retelling of the conversation frames the end of the phone call as curt on his part: "I told her to meet me under the clock at the Biltmore at two o'clock, and not to be late, because the show probably started at two-thirty. She was always late. Then I hung up" (Salinger, *Catcher* 106). Holden's use of "swell" and his polite questions earlier indicate that he knows how to perform niceties and manners for people to get what he wants, so it is unlikely—though possible—that he was aggressive with Sally over the phone, or that he "hung up" without a proper goodbye. Holden, in casting the people around him as "phonies," suggests that he is the authentic alternative; if he were to demonstrate his own performativity to the reader in this phone call, he would undermine both the narrative and the self he tries to construct. Even so, Holden dismisses his desire to spend time with her as superficial: "She gave me a pain in the ass, but she was very good-looking" (106). To him, then, the performance in the conversation is transactional—Holden feigns attentiveness so that he can be seen with a "very good-looking" young woman in public doing a socially acceptable activity. Perhaps Holden has less capitalistically motivated desires and simply wants companionship, but his choice of Sally over someone he actually likes suggests that Holden on some level wants to perform social expectations. The phone obscures Holden's body language and creates a degree of distance that allows him to secure the company of an attractive peer in a courteous way.

In *Normal*, Connell's preferred method of distanced communication is email; instead of using it to get something he wants, though, the fundamental performativity of email for him is its

ability to be (re)constructed. "[W]riting is a way for the lower-class characters" in Rooney's novels, like Connell, "to establish agency and selfhood; if [they] can't control the world, or other people's impressions of [them], [they] can approach control over [their] work" (Oyler). Connell turns email into an extension of his writerly aims, using it as a creatively expressive tool to influence how Marianne perceives him. During the summer after receiving the scholarship, Connell has the financial freedom to travel throughout Europe, eventually arriving at Marianne's holiday home to stay for a few days. As he travels, Connell writes emails to Marianne. His emails "have become lengthy" since "they've been apart" (Rooney, *Normal* 162). Without the necessity of face-to-face communication, Connell becomes more expressive and articulate. He increasingly turns to writing emails during mundane moments during his travels: "He's started drafting them on his phone in idle moments, while waiting for his clothes in a launderette, or lying in the hostel at night when he can't sleep for the heat" (162). Moments of time typically spent alone—doing chores or trying to sleep—are now instances when Connell can construct a narrative about his life for Marianne. His emails are not simply snippets about his travels stitched together during spare moments. Rather, Connell carefully revises his messages to her: "He reads over these drafts repeatedly, reviewing all the elements of prose, moving clauses around to make the sentences fit together correctly" (162). Connell revises his emails with the precision one expects him to apply to his English essays or his fiction; he views his correspondence with Marianne as something of intellectual and expressive value. He believes there is a way to write his emails "correctly," as if they are a piece "of prose" rather than a more informal communicative structure. Unlike in dialogue, when Connell and Marianne frequently misunderstand each other, email allows Connell to "repeatedly" review what he is going to share with Marianne and ensure that it is the clearest, best-performed version of himself.

Connell's emails to Marianne have an almost therapeutic effect on him. He is able to completely lose himself in their construction: "Time softens out while he types, feeling slow and dilated while actually passing very rapidly, and more than once he's looked up to find that hours have gone by" (Rooney, *Normal* 162). Unlike quick-moving conversations, which overwhelm Connell, writing an email is a "slow," calm process for him. Without the pressures of reading social cues and interpreting tones, Connell can lose himself in crafting a version of himself whom he wants to present to Marianne. Though he is not certain exactly how, Connell is able to sense that his email-writing is significant: "He couldn't explain aloud what he finds so absorbing about his emails to Marianne, but he doesn't feel that it's trivial. The experience of writing them feels like an expression of a broader and more fundamental principle, something in his identity, or something even more abstract, to do with life itself" (162). The specificity of Connell being unable to explain "aloud" reveals the importance of alternative, distanced communication methods for him; he can communicate more clearly in writing than out loud. Also specific is that he feels this way about "his emails *to Marianne*," (emphasis mine) not email as a whole. Their relationship and its intimacy are core elements of his desire to send not mere emails but carefully crafted ones. The scope of the "experience of writing" the emails continues to widen: from a specific communication between two people to an ineffable quality of one person's personality to some aspect of existence. By transcending the particular conversation, the emails become a performance of how Connell views himself ("something in his identity") and how he interacts with the world around him ("something […] to do with life itself"). The act of constructing an email becomes, for Connell, a means of self-presentation and self-interpretation.

Rather than being his actual, in-person self—anxious, depressed, overwhelmed—Connell's emails portray a better, articulate self who is engaged with the world around him.

Unlike Marianne, who describes "how she feels, [and] how she surmises the others are feeling," Connell writes "about the cities they visit, sometimes including a paragraph describing a particular sight or scene" (Rooney, *Normal* 163). For someone who feels detached from the social environment at Trinity, his emails to Marianne are a way to demonstrate how much he pays attention to the world. This, too, is a performance for his own benefit: "It feels powerful to him to put an experience down in words, like he's trapping it in a jar and it can never fully leave him" (163). Connell writes to archive "experience[s]" in his life to feel connected to them. He reconstructs events as a method of "trapping" them in his mind; writing them down feels more "powerful" for him when he has an audience. Marianne is a willing, complimentary reader: "If [your stories are] as good as your emails they must be superb, she wrote" (163). Marianne is able to sense the craft and construction that goes into the emails she receives, comparing them to the artistic manifestation of his discipline. Though Connell is flattered, Rooney writes, "[H]e responded honestly: They're not as good as my emails" (163). To note that he was honest in this response suggests the level of artifice that goes into his prose-adjacent emails most of the time. Further, the fact that his emails are "honestly" better than his stories indicates that Connell puts more time and energy into constructing his messages to Marianne. However, his choice to describe places rather than his feelings indicates that the construction is well-written but less personally revealing. A side effect of his performativity is emotional distance, even though what Connell wants with Marianne is intimacy.

Like Connell, Zooey in *Franny* is overwhelmed by face-to-face interaction, and he uses a phone call to perform a different persona as a buffer between his real feelings and the people with whom he wants to connect. After a long, hostile conversation with Franny ends in her crying, Zooey "looked away from her, and then, not unbravely, back at her. […] 'I'm sorry,

Franny. I'm very sorry'" (Salinger, *Franny* 172). Zooey at first avoids Franny's vulnerability, then "not unbravely" turns to face it again. Knowing he has hurt her, he plainly apologizes before leaving the room. Instead of sitting in the discomfort of their conversation, Zooey pulls away so that he can construct a different conversational partner for Franny. The performed partner, in this case, is their oldest living brother, Buddy. Zooey's phone call to Franny demands a level of physicality: "[H]e picked up his handkerchief from the desk and put it over the mouthpiece, quite loosely and mounted rather high. […] He might have lighted his cigar, which had gone out, but he didn't" (182). To adequately pretend to be Buddy, Zooey has to manipulate the mouthpiece to obfuscate his voice and leave his cigar unlit so that Franny does not hear the sound of his smoking. There are these physical elements to Zooey's performativity, yet the physicality is only possible through the phone. Despite the talents expressed in his career as an actor, Franny would immediately know which brother she was speaking to if she were able to see him in person. Distanced communication technology is necessary to facilitate Zooey's performance.

Even so, Zooey's performed Buddy is imperfect. His mother, when telling Franny that Buddy is on the phone to talk to her, adds, "He sounds as though he has a horrible cold" (Salinger, *Franny* 184). Zooey is incapable of recreating Buddy, which means that his performance depends on Franny's self-concern and his ability to maintain a conversation in which she does the bulk of the talking. One method for this is to indulge Franny and keep the focus on her, which Zooey does with questions in the style of their older brother like, "Are you all right, sweetheart?" and invocations like, "Just talk to me" (187). He drops his personal affect of calling people "buddy" in favor of Buddy's terms of endearment like "sweetheart" and "Flopsy" (187). When Franny asks him a direct question, he is able to deflect by implementing "a most characteristically Buddylike pause at the other end. It was exactly the kind of pause—

just a trifle rich with seniority of years—that had often tried the patience of both Franny *and* the virtuoso at the other end of the phone when they were small children" (187-8). Behaviors and mannerisms that "tried the patience" of Zooey himself are now useful tools for performing Buddy's attentive, caring, slightly condescending demeanor.

The Buddy persona is a tool for Zooey to hear Franny speak candidly about himself because he repositions himself from a talker (Zooey) to an active listener (Buddy). When Franny introduces Zooey to the conversation by saying he has "been at [her] all morning," Zooey-as-Buddy focuses his follow-up questions on Zooey to hear what she thinks of him (Salinger, *Franny* 188). Franny begins vaguely, first saying that "[h]e's *fine*. He's just tip*top*. I could just murder him, that's all" (188). Salinger's italics make it clear that Franny is being sarcastic when she describes Zooey, though the anger expressed in the sentiment that she "could just murder him" is straightforward. Through his implementation of another mannerism of Buddy's—repeating what the other person has said to prompt them to keep talking—he is able to probe Franny for the reason why she is angry. Franny complains to Zooey-as-Buddy that Zooey is "com*plete*ly destructive," going "around and around in such horrible *cir*cles," and "so *bit*ter about things" (189). By performing the Buddy persona, Zooey is able to learn exactly why Franny is upset with him: his aggressive attitude toward the Jesus Prayer, the roundabout construction of his argument, and his cynicism regarding life in general.

As Zooey-as-Buddy processes the information Franny reveals about her frustration with him, it becomes more difficult for him to keep up his persona. He is slower, for example, in his use of Buddy's signature phrases and mannerisms. After Franny rants about Zooey's irritation over meeting people for drinks, she asks if he is listening, and he answers, "I'm listening, I'm listening…sweetheart" (Salinger, *Franny* 191). Salinger implements the ellipsis to make it clear

that Zooey's Buddy mask is slipping. There is more that Zooey wants to say to Franny, and as he debates whether to try to phrase it as Buddy would, he is less focused on how to pretend to be Buddy. The next time he tries to make a comment, he fails at his performance: "There were several experienced verbal stunt pilots in the Glass family, but this last little remark perhaps Zooey alone was coördinated well enough to bring in safely over a telephone. […] [S]he suddenly knew that it was Zooey at the other end of the phone" (191). Zooey's own cleverness—which contributes to his ability to initially perform as Buddy—ultimately exposes him. Zooey is silent when Franny discovers him, allowing her to express her feelings of irritation and exhaustion. He only begins speaking again after Franny says he is acting as if she is made of iron when he launches his arguments with her, to which he replies, "I don't think everybody's made of iron, buddy" (193). Rather than engaging with any of her emotional outbursts, Zooey only responds to her comment about what *he* thinks; he listens to her perspective and asserts his own sense of reality.

Here, the interaction between performativity and opportunity is made clear. Zooey has been caught in his performance, but he continues the active listening borrowed from Buddy. He was able to use the phone call to pretend to be someone he was not, but then he implemented what he learned into his more authentic attempt at communication, which maximizes the call's opportunity for him to improve in his dialogue with Franny. For example, he takes her feedback delivered to Zooey-as-Buddy about his argumentative tone and hostility toward the Jesus Prayer: "I suppose I more or less called to tell you to go on with your Jesus Prayer if you want to. […] I have no goddam authority to be speaking up like a *seer* the way I have been" (Salinger, *Franny* 193). He drops his earlier aggression and offers an almost-apology, marking a turn away from his earlier behavior as a result of Franny's complaints about him. By taking advantage of her

valid criticisms, he is better able to say what he actually *wants* to say to her without it becoming a conflict.

Ultimately, Zooey encourages Franny to take advantage of opportunities of her own. In his conversation with Franny before the phone call, Zooey criticizes the performativity of Franny's breakdown: "[W]hether you know it or not, you're having a tenth-rate nervous breakdown. I've seen a couple of real breakdowns, and the people who had them didn't bother to pick and choose the place they—" (Salinger, *Franny* 165). During their call, however, he repackages her performativity as opportunity, just like the reader interprets the two phases of the phone call. He points out that when Franny "first felt the urge, the *call*, to say the prayer, […] [she] *came home*" (194). Franny made a choice to reach out to her family, with whom she wanted to experience community, rather than to isolate; Zooey sees this as significant, even if earlier he complained that this meant her breakdown was "tenth-rate." By reframing her performative breakdown as an opportunity to reconnect with her family, Zooey is able to refine and more clearly present his frustration with her behavior that weekend: "How in *hell* are you going to recognize a legitimate holy man when you see one if you don't even know a cup of consecrated chicken soup when it's right in front of your nose?" (195). Instead of resisting their mother's repeated offers of chicken soup, Franny should accept it, Zooey argues. If she is going to perform distress, then she should indulge in the responding care. In the same way, Zooey performs as Buddy so that he can indulge in the clearer guidelines for how to interact with Franny. Salinger demonstrates how performativity and opportunity are not oppositional forces but two sides of the same coin, both working for the benefit of the conversationalist who implements them.

Regardless of the performativity inherent in distanced communication methods, they also offer their users opportunities to present some truth in a clear, accessible manner. Without the pressure of immediacy in a face-to-face conversation, communicators are able to take time and care to express themselves accurately. Rather than using emails and phone calls to construct false selves, characters like Zooey are also able to use them as alternative modes of connection. For individuals with a tendency to isolate, the ability to communicate at a distance is an opportunity to be vulnerable and clearer in their expression of complicated feelings and ideas.

Like Zooey over the course of his phone call with Franny, Frances in *Conversations* shifts from performativity to honesty, first when talking on the phone to Melissa and then rippling outward to connections with other characters. She "searches for new modes of human connection in the temporal and affective expansions and retractions of various new media" like phone calls and emails (Gray 68). Frances calls Melissa to confront her for sending to Bobbi a copy of a story Frances wrote about Bobbi without permission. However, Frances changes course and apologizes to Melissa for having been unkind, which prompts Melissa to say, "Jesus, […] [w]hat's wrong, are you okay?" (Rooney, *Conversations* 284). Frances allowing her façade to collapse is so unexpected that Melissa assumes something must be seriously wrong; instead, though, Frances has had an epiphany and decided to yield to her vulnerability. After hanging up on Melissa, Frances almost immediately writes an email to Bobbi. She begins with a single sentence about fainting in a church, then immediately undertakes the difficult work of apologizing and trying to understand what exactly she is apologizing for: "I'm sorry my story hurt your feelings. I think the reason it hurt is because it showed I could be honest with someone else even when I wasn't honest with you. I hope that's the reason" (285). The apology comes first because Frances is sorry regardless of the reason, even if she wants to understand it. She

suspects the reason is a desire, conscious or unconscious, on Bobbi's part to monopolize Frances's vulnerability, or at least to be its primary witness. Frances "hope[s] that's the reason" because she can begin to make up for having been inaccessible to Bobbi by being vulnerable with her now.

Frances's new vulnerability includes a confession of love: "The truth is that I love you and I always have. Do I mean that Platonically? […] When you broke up with me I felt you beat me at a game we were playing together, and I wanted to come back and beat you. Now I think I just want to sleep with you, without metaphors" (Rooney, *Conversations* 285). Frances interrogates whether her love for Bobbi transcends sex and romance, but ultimately decides that she wants to "sleep with" Bobbi. While that in itself is a confession of feelings, Frances reaches that conclusion by working through how she felt when Bobbi first broke up with her. Frances wants to give up another level of performativity in her life when she says she wants to go from "a game [they] were playing together" to "just want[ing] to sleep with [Bobbi], without metaphors." She is no longer interested in constructing a relationship out of rhetorical devices and intellectualization; instead, she wants to have real, simple intimacy. Frances is able to reach for that closeness without physical proximity, which "highlights the potential for new communicative media to enable young women to relate to others—regardless of socioeconomic disparity—and to acquire greater agency" (Gray 78). While Bobbi has the financial freedom to avoid the apartment that she and Frances share, Frances can still reach Bobbi through more universally accessible Internet communication. She has the agency to share her thoughts openly, just as Bobbi, as the recipient of the email, will have the agency to determine if and how to respond. Email becomes a facilitator of intimacy on both individuals' terms.

To establish that intimacy, Frances feels like she needs to probe deeper into their conflict over the story she wrote: “I can’t say sorry for writing that story or for taking the money. I can say sorry that it shocked you, when I should have told you before. You’re not just an idea to me. If I’ve ever treated you like that I’m sorry” (Rooney, *Conversations* 285). Frances begins by admitting two limitations—she will not apologize for writing something that expresses herself or for needing money to survive. However, Frances recognizes that intent does not make up for impact, so she apologizes for how her necessary actions unnecessarily harmed Bobbi—harm that could have been reduced if Frances had approached things differently. She is sorry for not telling Bobbi about the story before publishing it. She is also sorry that the story, which was framed with Bobbi as the subject but not an active character in the plot, presented Bobbi as an idea instead of as a complete person. Like how Melissa’s email is used to model close reading, Rooney engages in an intellectual discourse with how fiction functions. Frances’s story about Bobbi is unable to fully capture her humanity, just like the narrative as a whole, since it is limited to Frances’s perspective, is unable to portray all of the characters as evenly human.

Frances’s email further engages with the concept of the other characters’ humanity when she considers how “all the possible couples that didn’t involve [her] seemed so much more interesting than the ones that did” (Rooney, *Conversations* 286). Frances has been feeling pressure thus far in the narrative to insert herself into relational dynamics that do not explicitly include her because she wants to know and understand the others. However, the distance she has from everyone right now—she and Nick are no longer together, Melissa is reachable only by phone call, Bobbi has not been coming home to the apartment—has given her the opportunity to interrogate that desire. Having space allows her to articulate her realization in the email to Bobbi: “But now I see that nothing consists of two people, or even three. My relationship with you is

also produced by your relationship with Melissa, and with Nick, and with your childhood self, etc., etc." (286). Frances recognizes the inherent unknowability of other people because of how each person constructs and reconstructs themselves depending on with whom they are interacting. The novel's inability to fully capture other characters is not just a product of Frances's limited perspective but of the limited perspective all individuals have when they interact with one another.

Frances ends with a question and three simple statements that embody the fully realized opportunity that distanced communication presents to her: "Is it possible we could develop an alternative model of loving each other? I'm not drunk. Please write back. I love you" (Rooney, *Conversations* 286). The question articulates her most pressing desire—the ultimate reason for writing the email. Then, the first of the three statements communicates her sincerity, clarifying that she is not writing under the influence of any substances that would alter her state of mind. The vulnerability comes from her actual self. The second statement expresses her desire to really communicate with Bobbi, rather than posturing and putting up performative walls. Finally, Frances reiterates her most vulnerable statement—her expression of love for Bobbi; instead of backing down, Frances doubles down. When Frances chooses to drop the performativity of a constructed piece of writing like an email, she is able to access the opportunity to ask for what she wants and confess how she feels.

Though less intensely vulnerable, Connell in *Normal* also chooses to drop some of the performativity of his email-writing to communicate more honestly with Marianne. When Marianne moves to Sweden for a year, she and Connell continue to exchange email correspondence. One of his emails is included in its entirety, which is the first time that occurs in the text; Rooney grants the reader new, deeper access to Connell's thoughts—or to his

presentation of his thoughts for Marianne. The email is in one of the chapters focalized through Marianne's perspective, so the reader does not know whether or not the email was constructed over a span of hours. However, unlike the emails describing scenes from his trip, Connell writes to Marianne primarily about her. There is a degree of inaccessibility at first for the reader because Connell begins by responding directly to Marianne: "I don't know what you mean by your last sentence there exactly. Do you mean just because we're far away from each other or because we've actually changed as people? I do feel like a pretty different person now than I was then but maybe I don't seem that different, I don't know" (Rooney, *Normal* 192). The reader does not know the "last sentence" Marianne wrote, but they are able to get a sense of Connell's feelings about himself and his relationship with Marianne. His use of "we" suggests Marianne commented on how their relationship has evolved, and Connell's willingness to engage with that reveals email's transition for him from a performative tool to an opportunity for honest communication. The reader also does not know what Connell means by "then," or how far into the past Marianne is referencing, but they do get to see that he views himself as a changing person. This is a new level of openness from Connell.

Further, Connell is willing to talk about Marianne directly, as opposed to focusing on external events or scenes from his life. He tells her, "By the way I looked your friend Lukas up on Facebook" (Rooney, *Normal* 192). Admitting to looking up Lukas suggests his curiosity about Marianne's life in Sweden. Connell goes on to talk about Marianne's potential relationship with Lukas:

> Sadly Sweden did not qualify for the World Cup this time so if you end up with a Swedish boyfriend I'll have to think of another way to bond with him. Not that I'm saying this guy Lukas is going to be your boyfriend or would want to talk to

> me about football if he was, although it's something I am putting out as a possibility. (192)

Connell recognizes the limitations of his own interests, like "football," while simultaneously expressing his willingness to learn more about something else "to bond with" any of Marianne's potential partners. Rather than shying away from the awkwardness of his ex-lover being with someone else, Connell leans into the "possibility." In exchange, he mentions his current girlfriend, Helen, to Marianne—though notably only in a parenthetical about Helen having seen a photo of Lukas. Connell and Marianne are able to communicate honestly with each other about romantic prospects, which indicates the staying power of their friendship. However, Connell goes on to express a level of concern for Marianne's potential relationship with Lukas: "I'm not pushing the boyfriend thing, I just hope you have confirmed he's not a psychopath. You don't always have a good radar on that" (192). Connell feels comfortable over email warning Marianne to be cautious about any men she might be seeing. Her previous relationship with Jamie was abusive, which contextualizes Connell's concern. Instead of using email as a performance of one's best self, Connell and Marianne use it to explore, albeit to a minor extent, serious problems in their lives.

Connell also uses this email as an opportunity to try to articulate both his creative self and its intersection with his complex feelings about Marianne. Instead of describing a party he went to, which he says "was honestly boring," he tells her about a herd of deer he saw while getting a taxi afterward (Rooney, *Normal* 193). He describes the "strange looking creatures," which in particular interest him because "[t]hey paused to observe our taxi before moving on. To me it's weird when animals pause because they seem so intelligent, but maybe that's because I associate pausing with thought" (193). Beyond illustrating the deer for Marianne, Connell relates his

reaction to them as a means of inviting her into his mind. Then, he goes further by comparing Marianne to deer: “They have those thoughtful faces and nice sleek bodies. But they also kind of startle off in unpredictable ways. They didn’t remind me of you at the time but in retrospect I see a similarity there. I hope you’re not offended by the comparison” (193). Connell wants to convey to Marianne not just how he feels about deer, but how he feels about her: “[T]he literariness of his email couches an unexplored talent […] [b]ut the comparison of Marianne to a sleek, thoughtful deer also provides an emotional outlet—one safe and distanced, the perfect vessel for the things they’re unable to express to each other while together” (Leininger). In writing the story about the deer after the fact, Connell is able to make new connections to Marianne “in retrospect.” He is naturally concerned that by sharing his thoughts, she might react negatively; instead of avoiding that anxiety, he openly acknowledges it when he says he hopes she is not offended. The narrative later communicates Marianne’s reaction to Connell’s email: “She liked the line about thoughtful faces and sleek bodies” (Rooney, *Normal* 201). Connell and Marianne use email to communicate with each other, but also to engage in self-reflection by thinking back on what has been said and processing their thoughts. It is an opportunity to slow down and consider what is being said, rather than the rapid reactivity of face-to-face conversation.

However, not every individual is able to yield to vulnerability when using distanced communication methods. Holden is a character whose opportunity never comes to fruition because he never admits what he actually desires. He longs “for something beyond superficial social inclusion, for an authentic and intimate communication with another,” but he is unable to articulate that and instead has several unsatisfying encounters with individuals like Sally Hayes and Carl Luce (Kinane 118). Unlike Rooney’s characters and Franny and Zooey, “Holden is someone cracking up and breaking down under the pressure of a society in which social leisure

and communication have become full-time occupations" that do not consider an individual's personal needs (Brookeman 69). Holden's inability to adequately express his desperation to escape isolation is made manifest in the failed attempts to get in touch with Jane Gallagher. Jane first enters the narrative as the date of Holden's school dormmate, Stradlater; Holden tries to tell Stradlater about his childhood friendship with Jane and especially about her refusal to move her kings out of the back row in checkers, but "[t]hat didn't interest Stradlater, though. Only very sexy stuff interested him" (Salinger, *Catcher* 32). The metaphor of Jane's checkers strategy (or lack thereof) appeals to Holden: "By not moving her kings out of the back row, Jane solves the problem presented by this unavoidable process of maturation. She has made it one of *arrested development*" (Shaw 103). Further, she is the embodiment of innocence to Holden, who "mostly hates adulthood, from which he seeks to rescue all children, much as he wants all the girls he knows to remain virgins" (Seelye 29). He is so audibly upset by the idea of her and Stradlater engaging in intimacy that Stradlater eventually beats him up (Salinger, *Catcher* 45). It is possible that the physical altercation is exactly what Holden wants: "Having participated in Stradlater's splitting off of tender love from his sexual intentions toward Jane, Holden has maneuvered Stradlater into hitting him in order to be punished for this violation of Jane" (Shaw 105). Though she is physically present outside the dorm that night, Holden's shame around sex prevents him from going downstairs to talk to her; instead, he gets "spurious comfort from […] the image of Jane" as an eternally sexless youth (Svogun 700). The idealized image of her becomes a key factor in his failed attempts to call her.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Holden is torn between a desire to talk to Jane, to whom he wants to feel close, and a failure to actually take advantage of the opportunity posed by distanced communication methods to reach out. He is caught in the liminal space between

adolescence and adulthood; actually talking to Jane would shatter the illusion that she exists in a nostalgic past and instead reveal that she, too, is transitioning into adulthood. Given that he uses the phone to set up dates, distanced communication is associated with sexual maturation for him. One attempt at contacting Jane, after buying a record for his sister Phoebe, is framed as incidental: "When I came out of the record store, I passed this drugstore, and I went in. I figured maybe I'd give old Jane a buzz and see if she was home for vacation yet" (Salinger, *Catcher* 116). Holden's choice to frame the drugstore as a place he "passed" before a place he "went in," as well as the addition of "maybe" regarding his decision to call Jane, suggests that he made the decision to call casually and in the moment. Readers, however, know that he has been considering getting in touch with Jane since before he left school. His aversion to adulthood means the phone call fails: "The only trouble was, her mother answered the phone, so I had to hang up. I didn't feel like getting involved in a long conversation and all with her" (116). Holden is uninterested in talking to an adult figure like Jane's mother. Further, he is apprehensive about a "long" phone conversation, perhaps because he struggles to sustain his performed social acceptability. However, the contact with an adult also reminds him of his looming anxiety, which results in him "hang[ing] up" instead of trying to talk to Jane: "I should've at *least* asked her if Jane was home yet, though. It wouldn't have killed me. But I didn't feel like it. You really have to be in the mood for that stuff" (116). Holden's refrain of the figurative "killed" adds a sense of drama to the matter of talking to an adult. The real obscurity is to what Holden refers when he says "that stuff." He could be talking about a conversation with Jane's mother, the potential disappointment if Jane is not home, the potential shattering of his illusion of Jane if she is home, or some combination of the three. In any case, Holden's desire to connect with Jane is overshadowed by his self-isolating anxiety.

Holden tries again to call Jane after his date with Sally falls apart. Here, though, distanced communication methods work against him: “I gave old Jane a buzz again, but her phone didn’t answer, so I had to hang up” (Salinger, *Catcher* 136). Holden repeats the clause, “so I had to hang up,” in this part of the narration as well, suggesting that he lacks any agency. Jane’s mother picking up the phone is just as undesirable as nobody answering the phone at all. Notable is Holden’s phrasing; instead of invoking a particular person as the subject—or the fact that there was no person on the other end of the line—Holden says that the “*phone* didn’t answer” (emphasis mine). He blames the communication method for this failure to connect with Jane. While Holden is uncomfortable with the risk of talking to adults, he is equally uncomfortable with the use of a phone call to facilitate interactions when he actually wants to establish intimacy with the other speaker. For Holden, “the difficulty of determining who someone really is, when the disconnection between public persona or reputation and deeper nature manifests itself,” is only made more complicated when he is not physically present with another person (Svogun 705). Performativity is inextricable from distanced communication, so much so that Holden cannot consider taking advantage of the opportunity it provides. The consequences of this are presented in the narrative as inevitable: “Holden’s desire for meaningful, intimate communication with others is presented in the text, firstly, as unrealistic, and secondly, as something that is undermined by his own troubled mental state and his relationship to the means of communication” (Kinane 125). By the end of the novel, he still has not reached out to Jane; rather, he further isolates himself, staying in the sanitorium and only seeing limited visitors. The opportunity for honesty inherent in distanced communication methods is only possible when an individual is first honest with themselves about what they want.

Salinger and Rooney, then, both use the technologies of their time periods—letters, phone calls, and emails—to explore how physical distance informs an individual's sense of isolation or community. As technology develops, characters can be farther apart and still connected; Holden, for example, calls other people in New York, while Connell in Ireland can email Marianne in Sweden. Even so, the struggle to feel intimately connected to another person transcends technology and time period. All four texts reveal the complexities of desiring a sense of community. Characters construct personas to perform better versions of themselves or to protect themselves from conflict. However, the realization that what they want can only be achieved through vulnerability requires them to lessen their defenses and present carefully considered emotional truths. Distance always demands some level of performance; individuals filter and prioritize their thoughts and feelings to maximize their time and the benefits of those communication methods. Balancing performativity with opportunity means that rather than being artificial, a communicator can be as concise and articulate as possible in conveying something important to them. They can construct a false self, or they can construct a careful, accurate expression of themselves, free from miscommunication. Holden's "inability to move forward and assert a positive goal would seem to be precisely the point of his character" (Rowe 78). He lacks the ability to move freely between forms of communication, stuck with distanced methods, which makes it impossible for him to see past their performative aspects. Characters like Connell, Frances, and Zooey, however, who have the ability to switch from distanced to face-to-face communication with relative ease, are able to overcome that barrier and find meaningful intimacy and connection even when physically apart from others. Salinger establishes a problem in *Catcher* and begins to move toward a solution in *Franny*; Rooney, though she imitates

Catcher's formal conventions, is careful not to regress from the progress made in *Franny* and instead continues to develop on the complexities of distanced communication.

Chapter Three: Separating Distress from Self

Returning to the textual pairings presented in Chapter One, Salinger and Rooney uses particular figurative devices and sub-plot points to further articulate the distress and isolation of their characters. They are able to expand their discussions from the specific relationships between characters in the texts to larger cultural thematic and cultural concerns, elevating the stories from personal and relationship dramas to resonant narratives of the tension between self-isolation and the need for social connection. Salinger's work has a clear situation: the capitalistic heteropatriarchy of the 1950s United States. Rooney's work, however, engages as both the inheritor and the resistor of that capitalist, heteropatriarchal system, infusing her work with Marxist and feminist critiques that complicate her fictional world—a world that is similar to Salinger's in its settings, characters, plots, and themes. The textual choices Rooney makes are therefore a way to engage in an intellectual dialogue with Salinger, pushing back against the assumptions within his writing to resituate the neurotic bildungsroman in a contemporary, feminist, anti-capitalist context.

Central to the narrative of *Conversations with Friends* is Frances's progress toward an endometriosis diagnosis. What begins as a mysterious set of symptoms and pains is, over the course of the novel, realized as a chronic illness in which the tissue of the uterine lining grows places other than the uterus, such as the fallopian tubes. It can be lifelong and, in most cases, the pain is simply something to manage. In a novel already loaded with drama and plot—relationships, affairs, friendships beginning and ending and beginning again—Rooney makes the choice to include endometriosis as yet another element of the story. Salinger, too, layers an additional detail into the plot of *The Catcher in the Rye*: Holden's fixation on an imagined bullet in his guts. He has not actually been shot; instead, Holden adds drama to his experiences when in

distress. In each novel, the abdominal wounds serve as synecdoche, representing the mental and psychological distress of the protagonists. However, Frances and Holden's manifestations of synecdoche differ on three key points: permanence, specialness, and independence; those differences are constructed because of the expectations forged within the gender binary.

The discussion of *The Catcher in the Rye* and Holden's bullet in the guts is essentially bound to two scenes: the first is after Holden is attacked by a pimp, Maurice, and the second is after Holden gets drunk with Carl Luce. These are the two scenarios which prompt Holden to enact his fantasy. Meanwhile, the discussion of *Conversations with Friends* covers a broader selection of scenes because Frances's endometriosis is not a performance but a part of her daily life, and as such frequently impacts her throughout the novel. To begin, then, it is important to recognize these two important distinctions between Frances and Holden: their gender identities and their actual afflictions. Permanence matters both because Frances is the one who experiences real physical pain and because her physical pain is a product of a chronic illness that can only affect people with uteruses. While not all people with uteruses are women, Rooney's implementation of endometriosis is a means of constructing gender difference—both in the novel and between her and Salinger's works.

Holden's fantasy is exactly that—a fantasy. There is no actual bullet in his guts, and there likely never will be. His mental distress is real, but he has a level of control over it—he recognizes action he could be taking and chooses not to take it. He could call Jane, but he does not. In fact, that is an impulse he denies again and again. Alone at the bar, Holden says, "Finally what I felt like, I felt like giving old Jane a buzz and see if she was home yet" (Salinger, *Catcher* 150). His desire to connect with someone he really likes is averted by the time he makes it to a phone, as discussed in Chapter Two: "But when I got inside this phone booth, I wasn't much in

the mood any more to give old Jane a buzz. I was too drunk, I guess" (150). Holden instead indulges in his desire to feel unique by imagining physical suffering as a distraction from his unraveling mental state. The bullet in his guts is a proxy of that suffering that Holden designs for himself specifically *because* it is not permanent. He knows that he can end the performed bullet wound whenever he wants, usually when a different distraction arrives to keep him from thinking about the actual sources of distress to his mental state.

Frances's physical pain, meanwhile, is very real, and she has no control over it. Even so, she attributes to it symbolic significance: "I was sick at the time, I had cystitis. For a while the persistent discomfort and mild fever felt psychologically appropriate and I did nothing about them […] I knew that Nick was suffering no similar aftereffects" (Rooney, *Conversations* 82-3). Unlike Holden, who imagines a bullet as a manifestation of his mental state, Frances extrapolates her mental anguish from an actual abdominal wound. Frances also separates herself from Nick, who is not similarly suffering; because he lacks physical pain and the corresponding metaphorical significance, Frances concludes, "There was nothing equivalent about us. He had screwed me up in his hand like paper and tossed me away" (83). She thus attributes Nick's *lack* of pain to his own mental state—one of, she assumes, brashness and male bravado. Rooney chose to include endometriosis as the illness from which Frances suffers because it can only affect individuals who are assigned female at birth, meaning that it is impossible for Nick to suffer, at least in the same way Frances does. Given that Holden is also a young man, Frances would assert that he, too, cannot suffer with the same intensity that she does.

Regardless of its permanence, the mental performance of Holden's bullet in the guts is intended to make himself feel special. He creates an entire fantasy around the bullet, which he blames on "[t]he goddam movies" (Salinger, *Catcher* 104). When he first imagines the bullet in

his guts, Holden "cannot resist segueing into a fantasy sequence" (Svogun 698). In it, he gets revenge on the pimp who mugged, punched, and "shot" him by "plug[ging] him anyway. Six shots right through his fat hairy belly" (Salinger, *Catcher* 104). Holden has just been assaulted, but he immediately reconstructs the event to recenter himself as the hero, affording himself a sort of implied specialness: "This lack of self-awareness characteristic of American heroes, this refusal to probe the tangled underbrush where psychological and social claims intertwine, leads to a familiar pattern: a sense of self-versus-world" (Rowe 80). It is a form of escapism that allows him to disregard the very real trauma he endured in favor of focusing on the sort of man he wishes he was.

The second bullet in the guts fantasy is no less performative than Holden's first. It begins after Holden meets Luce for a drink; when Luce leaves, Holden stays behind and continues drinking. Holden blames the alcohol for him starting "that stupid business with the bullet in my guts again" (Salinger, *Catcher* 150). The performance takes on a physicality that his first fantasy lacks; rather than a mental exercise, this time, "I kept putting my hand under my jacket, on my stomach and all, to keep the blood from dripping all over the place" (150). Again, he establishes a sense of specialness that sets him apart from everyone else who is at the bar: "I was the only guy at the bar with a bullet in their guts" (150). Even when in distress, Holden insists on a performed singularity. He has an ideal of the exceptional American man that depends on being able to bear pain. Since Holden avoids getting in touch with his mental and emotional pain, he manifests a fake bullet—a physical pain—to imagine his masculine refusal to receive help.

Frances's first experience of symptoms is similar to Holden's fantasies because she, too, thinks what she is feeling may mark her with a sort of specialness: "I was exhilarated by the seriousness of my pain, like it might change my life in an unforeseen way" (Rooney,

Conversations 21). Frances shares Holden's self-versus-world mindset, at least privately. Even so, Frances's performance of her pain in front of Bobbi is the opposite—she insists that she is not special at all: "You suffer, she [Bobbi] said. / Everybody suffers. / Ah, Bobbi said. Profound" (22). Bobbi's response reads as sarcastic; she often reacts to Frances's broad claims with some cynicism, realizing that Frances is performing. If Bobbi recognizes Frances's performance, then she understands that Frances at this point does view her suffering as special and wants it to be observed, even as she pretends otherwise.

When Frances finally receives her official endometriosis diagnosis, however, she feels wholly un-special, the exact opposite of Holden's feelings about his bullet in the guts: "I realized my life would be full of mundane physical suffering, and that there was nothing special about it. Suffering wouldn't make me special, and pretending not to suffer wouldn't make me special. Talking about it, or even writing about it, would not transform the suffering into something useful" (Rooney, *Conversations* 263). Unlike Holden, whose second fantasy specifically involves "con*ceal*ing" his wound and pretending not to suffer so that he feels more special (Salinger, *Catcher* 150), Frances recognizes that suffering, whether one engages with or represses it, is wholly un-special, allowing her to reunite with the world against which she earlier constructed an internal conflict. Frances's realization regarding her suffering comes one a chapter after her conversation with Nick in which he finally explains his own mental illness and time in a psychiatric unit "in a sincere, self-effacing way, not trying either to make [Frances] laugh or to make [her] feel bad" (Rooney, *Conversations* 248). Whereas before, Frances thought she and Nick were totally disparate and that her pain made her unique, she develops a deeper understanding of Nick—and then of the unfortunate ordinariness of her own suffering. Her

earlier claim that "[e]verybody suffers" holds true, though it is still fair to say that the way Frances suffers is different from Nick and Holden.

How Frances and Holden perceive their pain also dictates their response to it; particularly, it determines whether they will be independent or interdependent in their efforts to manage their suffering. Again, Frances's response is distinguished from Holden's by the very real nature of her abdominal affliction. She allows her endometriosis to represent her pain, but she does not lean into it as a means of compartmentalizing her suffering. Holden, meanwhile, has mental distress much like Frances does, but rather than admitting that, he displaces his suffering onto the fake bullet. That displacement is isolating and in turn informs Holden's refusal to communicate his need for support and connection.

The first bullet in the guts fantasy ends with Holden's imagined reunion with Jane Gallagher, on whom he is fixated throughout the novel, so that she can care for him: "Then I'd crawl back to my room and call up Jane and have her come over and bandage up my guts. I pictured her holding a cigarette for me to smoke while I was bleeding and all" (Salinger, *Catcher* 104). This part of the fantasy is a representation of Holden's longing for connection—he does not just want to imagine being shot, but to imagine being shot, getting [a masculinized version of] revenge, and then being tended to and nursed back to help by the girl for whom he cares. This, too, Holden blames on the movies; his construction of care is based on the movie-plot expectation that the hero gets the girl: "the mass media in the shape of Hollywood movies are also crucial to Holden's worldview" and his mental state (Brookeman 72). Despite Holden's imagination, however, he is "aware of how derivative his fantasy is […] and in fact he finally gains no comfort from it" (Svogun 698). Holden says, "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide" (Salinger, *Catcher* 104). The adverb "really" suggests that the fantasy of the

bullet and Jane was not his actual desire, and that what he wants instead is a final isolation: death. Holden resists his need for connection in favor of independence to the highest degree.

The second bullet in the guts fantasy enables Holden to more overtly articulate a resistance to aid: "I didn't want anybody to know I was even wounded. I was con*ceal*ing the fact that I was a wounded sonuvabitch" (Salinger, *Catcher* 150). The imagined bullet is a synecdoche for the real mental and emotional wounds that Holden conceals; the bullet is a way for Holden to explain his pain to his audience without admitting it. He views himself and his pain with some derision, calling himself a "sonuvabitch." Here, again, his gender identity informs his self-perception of distress; the language he uses to insult himself is derogatory toward women in particular, and his desire to perform masculinity—like the action-hero scenario with the first bullet in the guts—prevents him from seeking help.

The fantasy ends with Holden longing once again to call Jane but choosing instead to call Sally, for whom he has expressed disdain. His call reads as a cry for help, a desire to connect with someone. He tells Sally, "I'll come over and trimma tree for ya, okay?" (Salinger, *Catcher* 151). His desire to be with another person overrides even his contempt for Sally and her home life. When Sally expresses concern for his drunken state, however, Holden reverts to fantasy:

> "Where are you? Who's with you?"
>
> "Nobody. Me, myself and I." Boy was I drunk! I was even still holding onto my guts. "They got me. Rocky's mob got me. You know that? Sally, you know that?"
>
> "I can't hear you. Go to bed now. I have to go. Call me tomorrow." (151)

Holden admits that he was drunk to his audience, but resists Sally's concern about that very real problem and instead returns to the fake bullet in his guts. Like his narrative's audience, Sally is an observer of his distress, and he relates the bullet-in-the-guts scenario to her in the hopes that

she will understand that he is suffering without actually articulating why he is unraveling. He tells her the mob has gotten him and repeats his question, "You know that?" He seems to want Sally to understand him, but she does not; instead, she tells him to go to bed and hangs up. With the phone call over, Holden's assertion that he is alone—"[m]e, myself and I"—is truer than ever.

Holden engages in another fantasy to justify his feeling of disconnection from Sally. He "pictured her out with the Lunts and all somewhere, and that Andover jerk. All of them swimming around in a goddam pot of tea and saying sophisticated stuff to each other and being charming and phony" (Salinger, *Catcher* 151). He constructs a scenario in which Sally is engaging with her own class; he expresses his resentment with phrases like "a goddam pot of tea," "sophisticated stuff," and "being charming and phony." To Holden, being "charming" and appealing to other people is equivalent with being "phony" and performative. This explains his own feelings of isolation: Holden is afraid of being phony and so refuses to be charming, which makes it difficult for him to get along with other people. However, Holden insists that his isolation is independence and that his attempts to connect are mistakes: "I wished to God I hadn't even phoned her. When I'm drunk, I'm a madman" (151). He expresses regret for calling Sally immediately after the phone call ends by blaming it on being "drunk" and "a madman," a catchall term Holden uses at least fifteen times in his narrative. Alcohol is an excuse and Holden uses "madman" so frequently it feels like a hollow term, which makes it clear that though he may regret calling Sally specifically, he does not regret attempting to reach out to someone.

Frances, on the other hand, starts by trying to manage her suffering alone, but eventually realizes this is unsustainable and instead begins leaning on her loved ones: her mother, Bobbi, and Nick. The process is gradual; Frances slowly develops trust and allows herself to drop her

guard and be vulnerable. Her first attempt at such vulnerability is with her mother at home after her trip to France with Bobbi, Nick, and Melissa. Frances realizes, "I was bleeding again. This time the blood had soaked through my clothes" (Rooney, *Conversations* 159). The amount of blood and the intensity of the pain scares Frances, so much so that she finally understands that her abdominal affliction, unlike Holden's, is real and unmanageable: "I realized that it wasn't just a feeling, something I could dismiss to myself. It was an outside reality that I couldn't change" (159). Frances calls her mother and gets help going to the hospital; the pelvic exam she has introduces the language of wounds to the novel: "It felt like some extremely sensitive wound inside me was being twisted around" (164). By connecting pain and wounds specifically to the pelvic exam, Rooney again asserts a link between Frances's suffering and her femininity. This suggests that elements of the lived experience of womanhood contribute to Frances's distress.

Eventually, it is not just Frances's mother who bears witness to Frances's suffering and takes the opportunity to support her. When Bobbi sees Frances collapse on campus, she quickly shifts into a caretaker role. Frances allows that shift: "Bobbi gave our address [to the taxi driver] and I let my head loll back and gazed out the window while they talked" (Rooney, *Conversations* 214). Bobbi takes Frances home, runs a bath, and undresses Frances. Further, despite Frances's recent fight with Nick—he was upset that she was lashing out at him, and she was upset that (she believed) he did not love her—Bobbi calls Nick, knowing he is important to Frances. The phone call provides Nick with an opportunity to provide care: "He told me he would like to come and see me. I said he was welcome to" (218). Thus, Frances is able to be surrounded by a small community that cares for her, despite her efforts to minimize and obscure her illness. It is almost an intervention, with the aid Nick and Bobbi offer reading as inevitable because Frances's chronic illness would eventually and necessarily be exposed publicly, given its overwhelming

impact on her health. Still, her refusal to tell anyone until absolutely necessary—or until they bear witness to her symptoms without her telling—parallels the privacy of Holden's bullet, which nobody can possibly know about unless he chooses to tell them. The difference, of course, is that Holden's bullet is imaginary, while Frances's pain is real enough that eventually her suffering is revealed without her consent.

However, despite the questionable nature of the reveal—and what it says about a woman's ability to maintain her privacy and independence when situated as a member of a larger society—Nick's arrival proves revelatory for Frances. Bobbi answers the door for Frances, leaving Frances alone in the bathroom momentarily:

> I lay there in the bath not thinking, not doing anything. After a few seconds, I heard her open the front door, and then her voice saying: she's had a really rough day, so just be nice to her. And Nick said: I know, I will. I loved them both so much in this moment that I wanted to appear in front of them like a benevolent ghost and sprinkle blessings into their lives. Thank you, I wanted to say. Thank you both. You are my family now. (Rooney, *Conversations* 220)

Frances is often over-introspective, obsessing over situations with such intensity that she, like Holden, tends to mislead herself and misread them. In this moment, finally, she is "not thinking" at all. The absence of thoughts of her own makes her receptive to the actual words and tones which she overhears in Bobbi and Nick's brief exchange. Bobbi is defensive of Frances—her "rough day" and the need to "just be nice" instead of lingering on the fight Nick had with her—while Nick, for his part, is immediately willing to set aside any frustration or hurt feelings he has harbored. Frances hears and understands the tenderness the two feel for her, and she wants to respond in kind: "I loved them both so much in this moment […] Thank you, I wanted to say."

With both Nick and Bobbi, Frances is navigating a complicated relationship; Bobbi is her best friend and sometime-lover, while Nick is married and trying to balance his affair with his feelings for his wife. These complexities seem to make it difficult for Frances to convey the depth of her own feelings to either of them directly—which may be why she only *thinks* these things and does not say them. Nevertheless, she moves both Bobbi and Nick from friends/lovers to "family," a recontextualization of her love for them. As she reflects on that love, she determines that she wants "to appear in front of them like a benevolent ghost and sprinkle blessings into their lives." In response to the physicality of her illness and the way that physicality exposes her vulnerability and need for care, Frances wants to be able to return affection while disembodied from any corporeal form. There is a tension, then, between the limits imposed upon her by having a female body and the ways by which she actually wants to communicate.

In exchange for Frances's vulnerability, naked in a bathtub and suffering, Nick, too, is vulnerable. His emotional reaction to seeing Frances communicates his distress at the idea of her being in pain: "I'm happy to see you, he said. His voice sounded thick. […] He looked up at the ceiling, like he was laughing at himself, and his eyes were wet" (Rooney, *Conversations* 221). Frances here learns a lesson that Holden, by keeping his bullet in the guts a secret and failing to reach out to the people with whom he could actually build a community, never does: being vulnerable with a loved one results in reciprocity. This is how a community of care is formed, and this sets Frances apart from Holden—he is independent, while she is interdependent. Nick and Frances are able to establish a new intimacy once he is allowed to see her suffering: "I watched him standing there, not blinking, his expression calm and fathomless like an ocean. We didn't have to speak then. He wrapped the cloth around me and I got out of the bath" (221). In

response to Frances's physical pain, Nick offers physical comforts—a towel, a kind expression. These acts provide an opportunity for Nick to care for her physically, and in doing so, they also assuage her mental distress. Knowing about Frances's physical pain is thus a way for the people in her life to go beyond practical aid and express support in a way that translates to affection, modeling the support she could access by admitting her mental pain.

Rooney's endometriosis response to Salinger's bullet-in-the-guts device is rooted partially in the distinction between Frances's reality and Holden's fantasy. On a surface level, there is the suggestion that Holden, within the white heteropatriarchal framework, is able to delude himself with self-victimization, while Frances is a woman suffering from real physical pain. However, when these abdominal wounds are read as synecdoche for the mental distress of the characters, Frances is revealed to have a special sort of privilege rooted in her femininity: the privilege of being taken seriously. There is an expectation of pain and suffering for women in a patriarchal world that so often exploits and abuses the female body. By manifesting Frances's abdominal wound as a real affliction, Rooney enables her to engage with systems of care. Those systems have their limitations—the medical industry is costly and inefficient, while Frances's loved ones can only help her when she communicates her needs—but they are in place for her. Holden, meanwhile, projects his distress into a fantasy that nobody can see, understand, or help. Unlike Frances, the range of emotions that are acceptable for a young man like Holden is limited. Rooney is also cognizant of how the change in time period affects care for mentally ill individuals; Frances's lover, Nick, has major depressive episodes and divulges toward the end of the novel that he was hospitalized before the events of the story (Rooney, *Conversations* 248). Salinger, of course, never discloses what exactly resulted in Holden's institutionalization. Further, the frequent attempts characters like Bobbi and Nick make to reach out to Frances

versus Nick's struggle to tell Frances about his own illness reveals Rooney's awareness of different gender expectations for mental health—differences that are only heightened between Rooney and Salinger, with Holden living in a society that reinforces the gender binary more strictly. Rather than a condemnation of Holden and his bullet, then, Rooney adapts Salinger's device as a means of critiquing the heteropatriarchal systems and expectations for masculinity that help to manufacture his psyche and result in his isolation and relatively unsupported breakdown.

Franny and *Normal* also have a common added element in their plots that contributes to the two major protagonist breakdowns. Franny and Connell, of the course of their mental collapses and attempts to recover, engage their counterparts, Zooey and Marianne, in conversations about academia. Franny and Connell each try—and fail—to find a sense of community in the larger academic world, instead finding themselves face-to-face with artificiality, facades, and egos. They are intellectuals who nevertheless feel excluded from academia, even as they participate in it; part of the urgency in their breakdowns is their desire to find a place in the academic world where they fit despite anxious opposition to different elements of academia. Zooey and Marianne, meanwhile, share the same criticisms of the collegiate world as their paired conversationalists: entitled faculty, egotistical classmates, and systems that misplace value. Regardless, Zooey and Marianne ultimately encourage Franny and Connell to continue in academia. Just like *Conversations*'s critique of *Catcher*, Rooney layers feminist ideology into *Normal*'s response to *Franny*; further, the conversations around academic conflicts are supplemented in *Normal* by a Marxist theoretical approach that results in the ultimate difference between how Connell and Franny respond to their crises.

As instructors, advisors, and role models, professors are some of the most important figures in an early academic's life. For Franny and Connell, however, professors are not always—or even often—sources of encouragement. To Franny, some professors are discouraging by virtue of their distance from the creation of real art. Lane points out that Franny has "two of the best men in the country" in her English Department—two poets (Salinger, *Franny* 18). Franny, however, does not like either of them: "That's partly what's so awful. I mean they're not *real* poets" (18). Franny struggles to articulate what she considers a real poet, though she does express her belief that a poet has to leave something beautiful in the world (19). She has particular issues with the idea of ego, and suggests that commercial success is not the same as artistry. Lane points out that Franny told him she liked one of the poets, Manlius, "about a month ago," to which Franny retorts, "I do like him. I'm sick of just liking people. I wish to God I could meet somebody I could respect" (20). There is no place in Franny's conceptualization of artistry for the mere likable person; she wants someone whose career is worthy of respect, which for her is intrinsically tied to creating something beautiful. The tension between art and academia is at the heart of Franny's personal crisis; she wants to be an artist, which she cannot reconcile with her work in both the English department and the acting industry. She tells Lane that she is "sick of everybody that wants to *get* somewhere, do something distinguished and all, be somebody interesting" (29). Beyond a mere critique of ego, Franny's comments on "get[ting] somewhere" and "do[ing] something distinguished" are a direct critique of aspiration. Traditional markers of success are, to Franny, disdainful. Her Ivy League faculty, for having already achieved this success and for feeling entitled to further career success, are thus targets of her disdain.

Franny goes on to express disdain for another professor—and particularly his aesthetic performance of academia—in a conversation with Zooey after she returns home for her breakdown. She tells him about an anxious dream she had that mostly featured women living in her dorm: "The only person that made any *sense* in the dream was Professor Tupper. I mean he was the only person that was there that I *know* really detests me" (Salinger, *Franny* 126). She positions Professor Tupper and herself as mutual enemies in her certainty that he "really detests" her. When Zooey asks her why, she answers, "He detests me because I'm in this crazy Religion seminar he conducts, and I can never bring myself to smile back at him when he's being charming and Oxfordish" (127). Franny, who studies English and theatre, made the intentional choice to take a "Religion seminar" outside of her disciplines. Given that her early exposure to different religions and philosophies came from Seymour and Buddy, her emotions around the class are certainly heightened; therefore, her frustration in the class is colored even more intensely by personal bias. Perhaps this is why she does not comment on the content of the course itself. Instead, Franny focuses on her Tupper's attitude and artifice, suggesting he is intentionally "being charming and Oxfordish," rather than naturally so. She goes on to detail what she thinks of his personality and appearance: "[H]e's just a terribly sad old self-satisfied phony with wild and woolly white hair. I think he goes into the men's room and musses it up before he comes to class" (127). Franny looks down on Tupper, who she characterizes as worthy of her pity ("terribly sad") and her derision ("self-satisfied phony") simultaneously. She doubles down on the derision when she claims that he "musses" his hair up "before he comes to class," establishing an artificial aesthetic. Finally, Franny brings her criticism to the subject of ego: "He has no enthusiasm whatever for his subject. Ego, yes. Enthusiasm, no. Which would be all right—I mean it wouldn't be anything exactly *strange*—but he keeps dropping idiotic hints that

he's a *Realized Man* himself and we should be pretty happy kids to have him in this country" (127). Franny has to edit herself when she says ego without enthusiasm "would be all right" because she evidently does not consider ego alright. Instead, she says it "wouldn't be anything exactly *strange*," generalizing about the ego of professors as a class of workers. Further, she believes that Tupper considers himself entitled to praise from the "kids" who are in his classes, which simultaneously flatters his ego and undermines his students' adulthood. She thus positions Tupper as a personal nemesis within the scope of the authority he represents.

Connell's particular struggle with authority figures in his academic career is defined by sexual exploitation, a subversion of the common image of the female student taken advantage of by the male professor. The first conversation Connell and Marianne have is centered in part around whether their secondary school Economics teacher, Miss Neary, is interested in Connell (Rooney, *Normal* 3). When Connell asks why Marianne would suggest that, she asks, "God, you're not having an affair with her, are you?" (4). He is upset by the question, for which Marianne quickly apologizes, which leads to his reflection on the matter:

> His supposed feelings for her are widely discussed in school. Some people are even saying that he tried to add her on Facebook, which he didn't and would never do. Actually he doesn't do or say anything to her, he just sits there quietly while she does and says things to him. She keeps him back after class sometimes to talk about his life direction, and once she actually touched the knot of his school tie. He can't tell people about the way she acts because they'll think he's trying to brag about it. In class he feels too embarrassed and annoyed to concentrate on the lesson, he just sits there staring at the textbook until the bar graphs start to blur. (4)

This passage intersects with Connell's struggles with his classmates, who also exploit him—if not physically then mentally and emotionally—by "widely discuss[ing] in school" his "supposed feelings" for Neary. Rooney emphasizes Connell's passivity when he interacts with Neary through the frequent use of negations, like "didn't," "would never," "doesn't," and "can't." There is a sense of his helplessness in the face of her professorial authority, especially with the repetition of "he just sits there." The phrase is used first to refer to their private conversations and then to refer to class settings; Neary's attentions disrupt Connell's education. When she talks to Connell "about his life direction," she feels entitled to his body, as communicated by the shock of, "once she *actually* touched the knot of his school tie" (emphasis mine). Neary is associated with language of possession, not just touching him but also "*keep*[ing] him back after class" (emphasis mine). Connell is aware of the gender dynamics at play in their interactions: "He can't tell people about the way she acts because they'll think he's trying to brag about it." He knows that his understanding of events is not conducive to his performance of masculinity; if he is not the sexual pursuer, then he should be the boastful pursued. Rooney highlights systems of power that override the privilege and power of masculinity—in this case, the academic with intellectual superiority.

Miss Neary is a character who returns later in the novel—after Connell starts university, he visits home and the two have a drunken sexual encounter, during which she again exploits him. When the two come across each other, "Connell was so drunk that his vision was misaligned, and beside every solid object he could see another version of the object," so he is clearly too drunk to be able to give consent (Rooney, *Normal* 133). Neary buys Connell and his friends more drinks, then he somehow ends up at her house, where she gives him more to drink and then makes an advance on him. Connell is aware that if he and Neary had slept together

when he was in secondary school, "[his classmates] would have thought his shyness masked something steely and frightening," implying that he would naturally be the aggressor (134). However, Rooney inverts that gendered assumption when she assaults him. Connell at first tries to assert some autonomy: "Back in school Miss Neary had made him feel so uncomfortable. But was he mastering that discomfort now by letting her kiss him on the sofa in her living room, or just succumbing to it?" (135). By framing his discomfort as a question, there is the suggestion of possibility, and Connell takes on some of the responsibility when he thinks that he is "letting her kiss him." However, Rooney follows that with the prepositional phrases "on the sofa in her living room" to remind readers that Neary is the one in control. Connell tries twice to stop her, once physically and once verbally; it is only the threat of him vomiting on her that makes her stop. Though Connell has new professors at university, Neary—always defined by her role as an Economics teacher—maintains power over Connell. His desire to conform makes it difficult to navigate social encounters, in which he often "succumb[s]" to stronger personalities, such as an authority figure like a teacher.

Criticism of the way faculty behave in the two texts is easily extended to other students and their egos. As detailed in Chapter One, Franny has a particular distaste for the classmates she calls "section men" (Salinger, *Franny* 15). She knows that her rant against section men will upset Lane, but "with equal parts of self-disapproval and malice, she felt like speaking her mind" (14). Section men are, essentially, egotistical (usually graduate-level) students who dominate the classroom. She tries to capture for Lane why these men frustrate her: "Anyway, if it's a course in Russian Literature, say, he […] starts knocking Turgenev for about a half hour. Then, when he's finished, when he's completely *ruined* Turgenev for you, he started talking about Stendhal or somebody he wrote his thesis for his M.A. on" (14-5). The dual conversational elements of a

section man are "ruin[ing]" a writer for his classmates and then talking about "somebody he wrote his thesis" on—section men minimize other students' interests in favor of expounding on their own. The fact that Franny specifically comments on men is a clear indication of the role of the male ego in academia; as a young woman trying to establish herself in English, Franny is in largely male environments that dismiss her interests.

For Connell, the classroom is also a difficult space to navigate due to his classmates' egos and aesthetic performances. However, the primary space of competition for Connell is not intelligence but socioeconomic status. To an extent, Connell recognizes that his "shyness" is "an obstacle to his social life" (Rooney, *Normal* 73). However, he goes beyond the idea of mere shyness: "[H]is personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions of others, rather than anything he individually did or produced" (73). Connell envisions himself as simultaneously distanced from and immersed in his peers' artificial, constructed personalities. By maintaining that his personality is "external to himself," Connell admits to a performance of his own. However, he places the onus of that performance on his peers, claiming that his personality is based on "the opinions of others." Some fundamental part of himself—not his personality—is kept separate from the way he presents himself to the world, which is generated by a pressing desire to conform. Unlike Franny, however, who has the means to fit in with her female peers (but not the right to be considered equal to her male counterparts), Connell's socioeconomic status prevents him from a sense of belonging. Connell feels "self-conscious" and "objectively worse-looking than he used to be" in part because "[a]ll the guys in his class wear the same waxed hunting jackets and plum-colored chinos," while "[h]is only shoes are an ancient pair of Adidas trainers" (73). Like Franny's section men, there is a uniformity to Connell's peers. While Franny has a "sheared raccoon coat" that Lane considers "a perfectly desirable, organic

extension of the person herself," Connell lacks the wealth necessary to perform social conformity in a university setting (Salinger, *Franny* 7). In response to the tension between Franny's femininity and the section men's masculinity, then, Rooney posits that class—with which Salinger disengages—is a major component of relational conflicts, especially in competitive spaces like higher education.

Rather than focusing solely on the individuals with whom Franny and Connell have conflicts, Salinger and Rooney explore broader aspects of the spaces in which their protagonists exist. One of Franny's biggest complaints about the academic world, for example, is publishing. Her rant against section men, for example, is prompted in part by Lane's discussion of his writing. Lane's professor encourages him to "publish the goddam paper [on Flaubert] somewhere" as a means of participating in industrialized academia (Salinger, *Franny* 14). Lane's mannerisms, the narrative suggests, convey a performance of exhaustion due to "the demands made on him by a world greedy for the fruit of his intellect," as if the commodification of his work into the "fruit" of his labor is expected of him. He further comments on the industrialized processes of publishing: "I mean critical essays on Flaubert and those boys are a goddam dime a dozen" (14). Lane's professor wants him to publish a paper on a frequently discussed subject, which Lane purports to disdain according to his use of "goddam." However, it clearly interests him, or else he would not have "abruptly" brought it up to Franny (14). Here, then, professor and student alike are willing to participate in a system Franny dislikes. That complaint is not limited to academics engaged in critical discourse. In the realm of creative writing, part of Franny's complaint about the two poets in her department is that "[t]hey're just people that write poems that get published and anthologized all over the place, but they're not *poets*" (18). She understands them as part of industrialized academia that produces content to be "published and

anthologized." Like the "dime a dozen" Flaubert essays, poetry is part of the commercialized processes within academic and publishing industries. Instead of trying to create art—trying to be real poets—the faculty are dedicated to producing quantity over quality.

Connell also positions a systematic aspect of academia as unpleasant: the establishment of scholarship cohorts that set some students apart. Like publishing, the scholarships are a matter of economic and intellectual success, which is especially significant for someone of Connell's socioeconomic status: "Everything is possible now because of the scholarship. His rent is paid, his tuition is covered, he has a free meal every day in college" (Rooney, *Normal* 165). For someone wealthy, like Marianne, "the scholarship was a self-esteem boost, a happy confirmation of what she has always believed about herself anyway: that she's special" (165). Marianne is like Lane in her willingness to participate in the system. On the other hand, Connell economically benefits from the system but still feels some detachment and discomfort: "That night all the new scholars had to go to a formal black-tie meal together in the Dining Hall. Connell borrowed a tux from someone in his class, it didn't fit very well, and at dinner he felt awkward trying to make conversation with the English professor seated next to him" (165). The black-tie dress code, required on the same night that the scholarships were announced, prioritizes aesthetics over the socioeconomic conditions of the various scholars. Connell's ill-fitting tux symbolizes his discomfort and inability to fit into the performances of his peers, his professors, and his environment. The distinguishing scholarship cohort is not a "self-esteem boost" for Connell, who cannot dress appropriately for the occasion and feels "awkward trying to make conversation with the English professor seated next to him," the representative of his own discipline. Connell sees the classism in the scholarships even as they make continuing his education a financial reality, and he is careful in his critique of the program.

Franny and Connell also look down on other performative aspects of their fields. For Franny, this drives her to quit theatre, which Lane says he thought was her "passion" (Salinger, *Franny* 27). Her complaints about the acting industry are similar to her frustration with the men who are her professors and peers: "It seemed like such poor taste, sort of, to want to act in the first place. I mean all the *ego*. […] I'm just sick of ego, ego, ego. My own and everybody else's" (28-9). Franny uses the star of a show she was in as a specific example of the ego she identifies in academia. After explaining that he was "so lyrical" and "spoiled any fun it might have been," Lane pointed out that "[h]e got terrific reviews[.] […] You sent me the reviews, if you recall" (28). Talent and commercial success are once again unimportant—maybe even unwanted—indicators of a person's quality to Franny. She tries to articulate this point: "He was terrific for somebody that just has talent. If you're going to play the Playboy right, you have to be a genius. You *do*, that's all—I can't help it" (29). Franny is looking for some ineffable quality beyond "talent," a quality she calls "genius" but does not define. This, too, is a major component of Franny's breakdown: she is trying to define what success and genius mean to *her*. Acting, as an inherently performative industry, is fraught with artifice, and what Franny seems to want is authenticity. As a result, she feels unsatisfied by the very nature of her labor.

As Connell comes into his own as not only a scholar but a creative writer, he begins to feel skepticism toward the artifice in his field as well, especially as it is made manifest in literary readings. Connell attends a reading by a visiting writer and immediately regrets it: "Everything about the event was staid and formulaic, sapped of energy" (Rooney, *Normal* 225). The word choice indicates his boredom ("formulaic," "sapped of energy"), but also a sense of artifice ("staid"). Connell's criticism is not necessarily of the writing itself: "He had read the writer's collection and found it uneven, but sensitive in places, perceptive" (225). He makes an intelligent

critique of the collection's pacing while recognizing ways in which it excelled emotionally. Then, he makes the argument that the literary reading undermines the collection's high points: "The stiffness of this performance made the observations in the book seem false, separating the writer from the people he wrote about, as if he'd observed them only for the benefit of talking about them to Trinity students" (225). Like the event itself, the reading is lacking in energy and making up for it in "stiffness." Connell feels as if the writer himself constructed his collection for the sake of performing it, adding a layer of artifice to what Connell first thought was a genuine, observational text. Connell mentally redefines the audience from a general reading public to "Trinity students," his aspirational peers. Those peers, such as literary magazine editor Sadie Darcy-O'Shea, "who'd called [Connell] 'a genius' to his face back in first year," were thrilled by the reading: "You read so wonderfully, said Sadie [to the writer]" (226). She also exposes Connell's critique to the writer, who casually agrees: "Yeah, same as that, [the writer] said. They're boring, aren't they?" (226). Connell's criticism of readings is not so much that they are "boring" but that they are performative and cater to a classist audience. The writer, then, is someone willing to criticize readings but still participate in that system for his own benefit. As Connell tries and fails to fit in within contexts outside his socioeconomic status, like the scholarship dinner, he is both unable to and increasingly unwilling to fully participate in the system.

One personal byproduct of these larger criticisms of the academic world is Connell and Franny's insecurity. In a letter to Lane before her visit to him, she writes, "[T]he noise in the dorm is absolutely incredible tonight and I can hardly hear myself think. So if I spell anything wrong kindly have the kindness to overlook it" (Salinger, *Franny* 4). Her repetition of "kind" is a plea for empathy and understanding from Lane, a young man full of arrogance. In the same

letter, she expects derision from Lane when she explains an idea for a writing project: “I think I’m beginning to look down on all poets except Sappho. I’ve been reading her like mad, and no vulgar remarks, please. I may even do my term thing on her if I decide to go out for honors and if I can get the moron they assigned me as an advisor to let me” (5). Franny’s letter criticizes masculinized ego regarding Lane specifically and the academic world more generally, but “the discourse applied in it does not explicitly register this frustration. Rather, a pattern of intentional, semantic errors and calculated omissions appear in Franny’s letter, softening its focus on her aversion to Lane’s ‘super-male[ness]’” (Rodrigues 129). This passage intersects with Franny’s frustration about her professors. It also demonstrates her expectations for how Lane will treat her. She has to request that he refrain from any “vulgar remarks” in response to her interest in Sappho, whose work engages with femininity and queerness. Franny does not write with confidence—she “may” write about Sappho, and she is not writing a thesis or dissertation but a “term thing.” Unlike Lane, who monologues about his work with a section man attitude that assumes his own brilliance, Franny occupies a space in the academic world that is fraught with uncertainty and a lack of confidence.

Interestingly, the insecure academic in *Normal People* is a man, which is another example of Rooney’s active dismantling of gendered expectations for her characters. Even after being selected for one of only four university scholarships in English, Connell “has never really known whether to believe that [he is special] about himself, and he still doesn’t know” (Rooney, *Normal* 165). Someone like Sadie might call Connell a “genius,” but he lacks the security and self-esteem to make such judgments of and for himself. For example, when Connell sends one of his short stories to Sadie, who asks to publish it, he has a minor anxiety attack and then replies, “I’m glad you liked it but I don’t think it’s good enough to be published yet, thanks though”

(252). She pleads for his permission—clearly indicating that *she* thinks it is good enough to publish—and he finally yields, but only "under a pseudonym" and if she promises she "won't tell anyone who wrote it, even the other people who edit the magazine" (253). Connell has no desire to be recognized for his work, preferring instead to detach himself from it. He does not consider himself talented, even when other people suggest otherwise. Like Franny, who does not talk about her own writing ambitions with confidence, Connell thinks about his own work with disdain. When he reads the published piece, he looks for typos and ultimately begins "to believe it had only been published in the first place because Sadie was lacking material for an upcoming deadline" (253). He struggles with a private ego, keeping two copies of the magazine for himself, but refuses to consider the work any good or to tell his loved ones that he has been published (254).

Another byproduct of Connell's and Franny's attempts to carve out space for themselves in academia is a sense of self-loathing. Franny feels this with respect to herself and to her interactions with others. Lane accuses Franny of being afraid of competition and only pretending to dislike the other people in theatre, but she insists the opposite is true: "I'm afraid I *will* compete—that's what scares me" (Salinger, *Franny* 30). Her fear is participating in a system she views as problematic. She suggests that being aware of an issue is not enough; some sort of action needs to be taken: "Just because I'm so horribly conditioned to accept everybody else's values, and just because I like applause and people to rave about me, doesn't make it right" (30). For Franny, the action is withdrawal from theatre—and, once she begins reciting the Jesus Prayer, withdrawal from the world around her. She cites both other people ("everybody else's values") and herself ("I like applause and people to rave about me") and problems, both of which are issues of ego. However, like Connell's conception of his personality, Franny puts herself at a

remove by suggesting that her desire for attention and praise is because she has been "so horribly conditioned to accept" others' values. The blame, then, is the social conditioning of her heteropatriarchal, capitalist world. Franny's choice to limit her own culpability is furthered by the level of hypocrisy in how she talks about Lane to Zooey. First, she expresses some loathing for how she handled her date: "Almost from the very second he met me at the station, I started picking and picking and picking at all his opinions and values and—just everything. But *ev*erything" (138). Then, she pivots and lists her complaints about the paper Lane wanted her to read: "He'd written some perfectly harmless test-tubey paper on Flaubert that he was *so* proud of and wanted me to read, and it just sounded to me so strictly English Department and *pa*tronizing and campusy" (138). Her self-loathing reads as a sort of performance, a way to preemptively pardon her criticism through the guise of self-awareness. The terms Franny uses to criticize Lane are primarily generalizations of academia: "test-tubey," "English Department," "patronizing," "campusy." She merges her complaints about publication, section men, and the industry of academia. All the while, she knows she is "picking and picking and picking," being an ungenerous critic, which only further frustrates her and contributes to her self-loathing.

Connell, too, considers himself with some derision, especially as his mental health spirals and he tries to recover. At the campus clinic, for example, he articulates that "he feels his future is hopeless and will only get worse" (Rooney, *Normal* 207-8). Connell devalues himself to the point that he does not have hope for his future, even as he is externally valued and supported—by Marianne, his mother Lorraine, his friend Niall, and his peers like Sadie. The site of Connell's mental collapse is "his scholarship accommodation," suggesting that he is feeling worse about himself as a product of his academic success and the isolation from most of his peers through the scholarship cohort (208). He has the same distaste for himself when he attends the free dinners

with the other scholars: “Eating alone like this, overhearing the conversations of others but unable to join in, Connell feels profoundly and almost unendurably alienated from his own body” (211). The act of trying to be with his intellectual peers only makes Connell more uncomfortable and he feels not just separate from them but separate from his body, which is attending those dinners even as he consciously feels “almost unendurably alienated from” it. The distance from his physical self allows him to view himself with scorn and displeasure, enabling fantasies like dying of dehydration on his accommodation’s floor (210). Without Marianne’s physical proximity to make him feel supported, Connell is unable to moderate his self-loathing.

Connell’s alienation is “almost” unendurable, but not; Franny’s “picking and picking and picking” is irritating, but can be stopped. How Connell and Franny understand, articulate, and process the academic world is not an indication of some permanent, unalterable distress. Instead, Salinger and Rooney use these scenes of interaction with academia to explore how Franny and Connell externalize their own issues of ego and self-esteem. Left unchecked—without conversational partners—the two would spiral further into Jesus Prayers and dehydration fantasies. However, through conversation, they are able to refine their ideas about acting and academia, determining how exactly they fit into it. Zooey encourages Franny to pursue acting in spite of her concerns about ego. Meanwhile, Rooney’s “writer protagonists—Frances and Connell—enjoy success only after they learn to be vulnerable in their relationships,” which explains why Connell needs Marianne to encourage him to pursue an MFA in New York (Oyler). The growth Franny and Connell model over the course of their texts as they more willingly engage in conversation with Zooey and Marianne is modeled by but not limited to discussions of academia, which serve as intellectualized placeholders for their feelings about themselves. Even

as Connell and Franny are in distress, they demonstrate their intellect and potential for healing through defining a role within the heteropatriarchal, capitalist systems on their own terms.

Bullets in guts, endometriosis, acting without ego, and publishing under pseudonyms—Salinger and Rooney externalize their characters' problems through a figurative or thematic device in all four books. In each case, relief is also externalized: Holden talks to Luce and later his sister, Phoebe, though he ultimately insists on isolation; Frances leans into community care from Nick and Bobbi; Franny has abrasive but ultimately helpful conversations with Zooey; and Connell depends on the love and support of Marianne. Ultimately, only Holden chooses isolation, perhaps an indication of the masculinized individualism by which he was socialized. Different, too, are Rooney's characters, who value alternative systems, like non-monogamy and Marxist ideology. The consensus across the texts, however, is that societal norms are—at least to an extent—harmful. The pressures of a capitalistic definition of adulthood and the working world, as well as the damaging effects of a rigidly enforced gender binary, are clear across the texts as mentally distressed young people try to work through their problems. At one point or another, dehydration, starvation, and/or death are considered options for the characters to escape their problems. However, all four texts suggest that systems of care—whether fully embraced or partially resisted—provide the opportunity to survive undesirable economic and sociocultural conditions. Perhaps, even, these characters can see the future opportunity to thrive.

Conclusion

High school and college students continue to read J.D. Salinger's fiction, and not just because *The Catcher in the Rye* is assigned in the classroom. The protagonists of *Catcher* and *Franny and Zooey* have unique voices and personalities, but the larger narrative concerns—insecurity and isolation—are universal. Salinger's work resonates with young people about to enter the uncertain world of adulthood. His work evidently resonated with Sally Rooney, given her love for *Franny* and his demonstrable influence on her first two novels, *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*. While the two writers share universalized plots, Rooney's work interrogates heteropatriarchal and capitalist systems by engaging with the gender and socioeconomic status of her protagonists and the characters with whom they try to connect. Her careful attention to power dynamics as individuals with different identities interact complicates Salinger's singular focus on youth. How someone enters adulthood varies based on the privilege they have; heteropatriarchal, capitalist society is easier to exist within when one has masculine or wealth privilege. Salinger's stories may have timeless appeal, but Rooney's reinterpretation of his work highlights his inability to write outside of his own privileged perspective.

Chapter One demonstrates the clear appropriation of Salinger's plot progressions in Rooney's novels. *Conversations* is modeled on *Catcher*, while *Normal* is modeled on *Franny*. The first pair of books is centered around trying to establish intimacy. Although Holden and Frances have similar narrative arcs, they come to different conclusions. Holden's reaction to his own story is to lean into isolation. Meanwhile, Frances embraces vulnerability for the sake of establishing a community to support survival under oppressive systems. Masculinity often affords privileges, but Rooney recognizes that Frances's outcome diverges from Holden's in part because femininity allows Frances to access a wider range of emotions. Holden represses his

emotions to cling to his male privilege; when coupled with his distress, though, that repression only serves to deepen his spiral and solitude.

The second pair of books follows characters who already have intimate relationships but risk fracturing them because of their miscommunications. Salinger's focus on two siblings occludes the potential for readings of class—Franny and Zooey come from the same background and therefore share the same socioeconomic status. Additionally, the stakes are lower; given that they use conversational patterns developed in childhood, Zooey's brash hostility is unlikely to permanently alter his relationship with his sister. For Rooney's Connell and Marianne, the stakes are much higher: their relationship fluctuates over the years between romantic, platonic, and virtually nonexistent. It is far more likely that, without the built-in bonds of family, Marianne and Connell will fall out with or grow apart from each other. The nature of their relationship also means that Rooney is able to explore how disparity in socioeconomic status affects how they interact. Connell, like Salinger's male characters, struggles to access all of his emotions—although for him, this manifests as anxiety rather than aggression. His anxiety also corresponds with his lifelong financial insecurity. Rooney carefully weaves together how Connell's class and gender intersect. Even so, with Marianne's affection and attention, Connell is able to grow more emotionally vulnerable.

Chapter Two builds on the established importance of communication between characters by examining distanced communication methods. Again, Rooney's novels indicate how these narratives evolve in the contemporary period. While Salinger's characters are limited to letters and phone calls, Rooney's also have access to emails and instant messages. Regardless of technological improvements, performativity is inherent in any communication method that includes a degree of separation between communicators. Even so, distance can sometimes enable

individuals to express themselves with less anxiety. The close readings in Chapter Two reveal that Zooey, Frances, and Connell are able to strengthen their relationships in spite of distance by utilizing distanced communication methods. Holden, however, cannot reap the benefits of distanced communication to develop deeper intimacy. This demonstrates that intimate connections are only possible when an individual is first honest with themselves about what they want. Characters who refuse to admit they feel isolated fail to overcome it.

Chapter Three examines a strategy that characters employ to confront their distress: externalizing and displacing it onto a smaller problem to deal with it on a more manageable scale. In *Catcher* and *Conversations*, this takes the form of abdominal wounds as synecdoche of their overall distress. Holden fantasizes about a bullet in his guts, while Frances is diagnosed with endometriosis. They both conceptualize their abdominal wounds as signals of their own specialness and an individual experience. However, Frances eventually outgrows those notions because her wound, unlike Holden's, is real and requires care from her personal community. Rooney subverts the bullet in the guts, removing it from the realm of fantasy and asserting that Frances's gender is an inextricable element of her distress.

In *Franny* and *Normal*, Franny and Connell have broad anxieties about functioning in the adult world but displace those anxieties by predominantly discussing the academic world. School becomes a microcosm for society at large. They both struggle with teachers, who are meant to act as guiding forces for the transition to the adult world but serve themselves instead. Rather than finding allies in classmates, Connell and Franny meet peers who are arrogant and self-important; not wanting to be like their peers, the two begin to think that having ambitions is the same as being egotistical. They also identify systems in their fields that place value on performativity and artifice, which they find antithetical to their efforts to be more vulnerable. By

externalizing these concerns and displacing them onto academia, Franny and Connell are able to communicate their anxieties to their conversational partners without feeling the intensity of talking about themselves. Those partners are able to assuage their fears and encourage them to pursue what they want.

At the end of all four books, only one character is left definitively unconnected: Holden Caulfield. His only audience is unable to answer him. Franny and Zooey have each other, even if it is unclear whether Zooey was adequately able to help Franny. Connell and Marianne may not stay together but have a permanent presence in each other's lives; meanwhile, Frances has a relationship with both Nick and Bobbi. Rooney's work, in responding to Salinger's, reveals the importance of experiencing the full spectrum of emotions. Intimacy with another person is only possible when individuals are vulnerable with themselves about their desires and fears. Salinger and Rooney link emotional repression to masculinity. For Holden, who only positively encounters femininity with sexless nuns and his pre-pubescent sister, there is no freedom to explore his own relationship with his gender as he approaches sexual maturity. He similarly lacks the ability to function within broader societal systems like the capitalist economy. Franny, unlike Holden, excels in her field and is encouraged to work within those systems. Though Rooney's characters resist heteropatriarchal, capitalist systems, they are ultimately more successful at transitioning to adulthood. Instead of sacrificing parts of themselves to better function in the adult world, they embrace their complex identities. They recognize that the connection they desire is only possible on a person-to-person level and accept some discomfort for the sake of intimacy.

Rooney does more than rehash Salinger's plots and devices. Rather, she provides a contemporary answer to his distressed young people's concerns about conformity and

connection. Instead of turning a blind eye to gender and class like Salinger does, Rooney reveals the necessity of engaging openly with one's identity to overcome isolation. Even when caught in oppressive systems, Rooney posits that a level of contentment is attainable at the individual level—so long as one is honest with themselves about who they want to be and how they want to be loved. Despite the possibility of their particular intimate relationships falling apart, Rooney's characters conclude their narratives with a degree of hopefulness because they have learned to confront not only their identities but how their identities inform their interpersonal power dynamics. That hopefulness, Rooney suggests, is possible for any close reader, so long as they are willing to closely read themselves.

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