

PRIVILEGE AND IDEALISM IN SALINGER AND KNOWLES'S
MODERN AMERICAN PREP SCHOOL STORIES

By

ANGELA D. SCHLEIN

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2007

© 2007 Angela D. Schlein

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. R. Brandon Kershner and Dr. Julie Kim for their direction and instruction throughout this project. I would also like to thank Mr. Ed Desrochers, Assistant Librarian and Academy Archivist at the Class of 1945 Library of Phillips Exeter Academy, for answering my questions about Exeter and kindly sharing copies of the school's recruiting materials from the 1940s and 1950s. Finally, I thank my family and friends for their encouragement, support, and faith throughout my graduate school career.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	6
ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	9
2 THE SCHOOL STORY CAST.....	11
3 THE CAMPUS BOUNDARY	17
4 BEYOND THE PLAYING FIELDS.....	32
5 CONCLUSION.....	39
LIST OF REFERENCES	41
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	42

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Catcher:* *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger. Published in 1951.
- Peace:* *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. Published in 1959.
- TBSD:* *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Thomas Hughes. Published in 1857.

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

PRIVILEGE AND IDEALISM IN SALINGER AND KNOWLES'S
MODERN AMERICAN PREP SCHOOL STORIES

By

Angela D. Schlein

August 2007

Chair: R. Brandon Kershner
Major: English

Although the critical histories of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (1959) are especially well-developed, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid to the formal function of the novels' unique settings. Both Salinger and Knowles, working simultaneously but independently in the 1950s, chose to situate their novels in the privileged world of New England preparatory schools during World War II and the prosperous yet anxious fifties. This paper seeks to explore the function of the elite boarding school in these novels and to compare these modern American school stories to their British literary precursor, Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857).

By situating their postwar work within the elite school, Salinger and Knowles utilize a preexisting cast of school story characters long established by the British tradition. This familiar cast makes possible the development of the psychologically complicated characters of Holden Caulfield and Gene Forrester. More significantly, however, the space of the elite boarding school provides a way for Salinger and Knowles to contain or disguise an exploration of larger postwar social issues. By focusing on "micro-divisions" within the upper classes and remaining strangely silent on the positions and experiences of less privileged Americans—the "out" grouping necessary to define the "in" grouping of the school—Salinger and Knowles manage to

subtly critique the shortcomings of postwar society while maintaining a tenor that is more acceptable to audiences than perhaps more transparent social commentary would be. To further emphasize the safe, apt space of the school for the work of social critique, Salinger and Knowles detail the catastrophic fate of those boys who choose to stray too far—physically and philosophically—from the campus grounds and the school’s accepted, expected social norms.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Literary critics have long recognized the existence of the British “school story” genre, which is generally considered to have begun in the mid-nineteenth century with Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) and ended prior to World War II. The energetic, spirited tales of young boys away at British public schools—tales pointedly tempered with disciplinary consequences and grave patriotic, moral, or religious messages—were not as relevant or popular by the early decades of the twentieth century, when swiftly changing economic, social, moral, and technological forms made the lessons and experiences of the elite British school quaint and obsolete. However, J. D. Salinger and John Knowles, working in the years immediately following World War II, produced, respectively, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *A Separate Peace* (1959), two of the most popular and heavily assigned novels in the United States. Both novels take place in the prosperous, privileged worlds of New England preparatory schools in the 1940s and 1950s but, in spite of the well-developed critical histories attached to both books, surprisingly little attention has been paid to their unique settings, which indicate at least the possibility of an American school story genre.

It cannot, of course, be convincingly argued that an American school story genre developed as fully as it did in Britain, given the relatively few American adolescent novels set in elite schools. Such a project, too, would encounter many of the inherent problems of trying to identify and define any genre: the selection of some texts at the exclusion of others, the rather arbitrary determination of some works’ literary quality as compared to others, and the insistence on finite genre lifetimes, when the reality of literary development is more gradual and multi-directional than a linear timeline could suggest. Nevertheless, it still might be worthwhile to ask why both of these novels take place in the elite male boarding school. What is the formal

function of such a school as seen by Salinger and Knowles, and what does such a space perhaps reveal about the reality of postwar existence in America?

Most obviously, by locating their protagonists in the worlds of the fictional Devon and Pencey Prep schools, Salinger and Knowles manage to solve the technical problem of populating a literary landscape. The school comes complete with a cast of characters familiar to students and readers long before Hughes published his novel, and against and within this recognizable backdrop the more unique and complicated characters of Holden Caulfield and Gene Forrester can be developed. More significantly, however, I will argue that Salinger and Knowles use the space of the elite boarding school as a way to contain or disguise an exploration of larger social issues in the postwar period. The central conflicts of *Catcher* and *Peace* result from differences and incompatibilities between the members of the elite school community, but the privileged boys have much more in common with each other than they do with the population at large. By focusing on “micro-divisions” within the upper classes and remaining strangely silent on the positions and experiences of less privileged Americans—the “out” grouping necessary to define the “in” grouping of the school—Salinger and Knowles manage to create fiction that subtly critiques the shortcomings of postwar society while maintaining a tenor that is perhaps more palatable to the tastes of audiences in the 1950s than more transparent social commentary would be. As if to further emphasize the safe space of the school for the work of social critique, Salinger and Knowles pointedly detail the catastrophic fate of those boys who choose to stray too far—physically and philosophically—from the campus grounds and its accepted, expected social norms.

CHAPTER 2 THE SCHOOL STORY CAST

Salinger and Knowles may use the boarding school as a device to explore abstract themes of postwar existence, but the school serves, first and foremost, to satisfy the need to people their literary landscapes. As explored by David Galef, Alex Woloch and others, the successful execution of the modern novel, with its hallmark protagonist(s) of comprehensive psychological development, depends on a supporting cast of characters who are quickly recognizable or identifiable to the reader. This “built-in” company affords, of course, the attention and energy necessary to develop or understand a unique and individualistic protagonist within the confines of the text. Perhaps, though, no other modern literary setting carries quite the troupe and kit of the school. Cultural folklore surrounding the experiences of student life is well-developed and familiar, and long before students reach school, or before readers encounter a “school story,” they have been fully debriefed by parents, peers, teachers, counselors, and/or personal experience as to the world they are entering. They expect to find, of course, requisite teachers and students of a variety of ages, talents, and dispositions, and they use their pre-existing knowledge to immediately begin processing and navigating the environment or story.

In much the same way, Salinger and Knowles are building on the cast of characters long established by the British school story tradition. The Rugby School of *TBSD*, the Devon School of *Peace*, and the Pencey Prep, Whooton, and Elkton Hills schools of *Catcher* are all populated with characters that are quickly and easily recognizable to the audience. Many of the archetypes transmit across temporal, geographical, and cultural divides as well: the star athlete, the lofty headmaster, the perfectionist student, the cruel bully, the tormented wimp, the stiff master, the hopeless outcast, and, of course, the frowsy female nurse or housekeeper. Clear parallels among characters can be seen across the books, even if some individual characteristics are shuffled to

suit different narrative needs. “Old Brooke,” for example, the talented and charismatic head of Tom’s house football team and the respected leader of the Rugby boys, finds his modern American equivalents in Holden’s handsome, athletic roommate Stradlater in *Catcher* and in Brinker Hadley of *Peace*, Devon’s “big man on campus” who holds myriad leadership roles among the student body despite a lack of athletic skill.

Stereotypical or archetypal roles like this are recognized, commented upon, and reinforced by other characters in the novels as well. For example, Hughes interrupts the play-by-play narration of the first football scene in *TBSD* for an authorial aside on Brooke: “Absolute as he of Russia, but wisely and bravely ruling over willing and worshipping subjects, a true football king. His face is earnest and careful as he glances a last time over his array, but full of pluck and hope, the sort of look I hope to see in my general when I go out to fight” (Hughes 101). In this comment, one example of his many narrative interruptions, Hughes as the authoritative narrator affirms Brooke’s favored role among the Rugby boys and reinforces the appropriateness of Brooke’s elevated place in the school society, while also suggesting that the espousal of Brooke is also patriotic support of imperial England. Holden of *Catcher* admits, too, that his roommate Stradlater is handsome and charming despite some of his more deplorable characteristics, and Holden comments that even his parents would recognize and comment upon Stradlater’s place in the social world of the school:

He *was* pretty handsome, too—I’ll admit it. But he was mostly the kind of a handsome guy that if your parents saw his picture in your Year Book, they’d right away say, ‘Who’s *this* boy?’ I mean he was mostly a Year Book kind of handsome guy. I knew a lot of guys at Pencey I thought were a lot handsomer than Stradlater, but they wouldn’t look handsome if you saw their pictures in the Year Book. . . . (Salinger 27)

Stradlater thus draws the notice and admiration of authoritative parents, and his role in the school world is certified for fictional characters and youthful readers alike.

Other character parallels exist across *Catcher*, *Peace* and British precursors like *TBSD*, too. Consider the standard, if small, female presence at the boys' boarding school as depicted in English literature. The matron and housekeeper of Tom Brown's Rugby house are overworked women who surface only briefly to manage linen, nurse the injured or ill, and oversee other administrative and housekeeping duties. The matron is first introduced by Hughes as "that dignitary," perhaps a bit of a jab considering that she is of a lower social class than her charges. She is asked (or expected) to unpack Tom's trunk upon his arrival and the young boys also call her by her first name. The housekeeper perhaps fares no better when it comes to garnering respect, since she cannot elicit any information from the boys when Tom is badly burned by older bullies. Women in the modern American novels suffer similar treatment. In *Catcher*, in an attempt to save face after losing a fight with Stradlater, Holden tells him to "stop off on the way to the can and give Mrs. Schmidt the time"—the boys' slang for having sexual intercourse—going on to tell the reader that "Mrs. Schmidt was the janitor's wife. She was around sixty-five" (Salinger 45). In *Peace*, too, the boys rarely mention or interact with women. They suffer through a summer tea with the interim headmaster's nervous, formal wife, and Gene later refers to the night nurse as "Miss Windbag, R.N." and imagines telling her that she is "rotten to the core" (183).

While the requisite lonely, belabored female of the boys' school is relegated to the fringes of the prep school world, a Christ-like figure often features prominently in the school story. When Headmaster Arnold of *TBSD* observes young Tom's gradual but steady decline into moral ruin, he places him in charge of the delicate, effeminate Arthur, a new boy who is repeatedly described as fair, blond, and cherubic. Arthur is holy beyond his angelic appearance, for he convinces Tom to defend and resume public bedside prayer and to abandon the use of "cribs" in

his studies. An illness brings Arthur to the brink of death and spurs Tom to make the last of his reforms. In much the same way, the Christ-like Phineas of *Peace* is too good to be true, a characterization that has earned criticism given the realism of the rest of the novel. Phineas is repeatedly described as glowing and radiant, and he even walks on water. It is “one of his favorite tricks, Phineas in exaltation, balancing on one foot on the prow of a canoe like a river god, his raised arms invoking the air to support him, face transfigured . . . skin glowing from immersions, his whole body hanging between river and sky as though he had transcended gravity . . .” (Knowles 75). Phineas’s eventual fall and death is tied to a tree, too, as the site of the fateful double jump with Gene. Finny firmly believes in the goodness of others even when confessions to the contrary are made to him, and his death brings realization and eventual peace to Gene. In *Catcher*, of course, Holden sees himself as a Christ-like defender of innocence and virtue, the last bastion against “phoniness” and exploitation, the one rubbing out all the “Fuck you” graffiti in the world, and he imagines himself keeping happy, distracted children from falling over a cliff’s edge as they play. And, as will be discussed in more detail later, the school stories of Victorian Britain and modern America often feature an outcast who does not fit in with his peers and often cannot thrive in the highly artificial and restrictive prep school environment. When this boy seeks solace in nature or tries to be truthful to himself, however, he often faces a fate worse than ostracism.

With these and other characters, Salinger and Knowles tap into the pre-existing school world as held in the cultural consciousness of the audience. By taking advantage of this, Salinger and Knowles have only to modify slightly the standard character stock long established by the British school system and literary tradition to suit their own artistic purposes. This permits the devoted, careful development of two of the most memorable and popular characters

in American literature. Gene and Holden are unique, psychologically complicated characters who react realistically—that is, often surprisingly or unpredictably—when they encounter various moral or social challenges. Unlike their relatively flat classmates, Gene and Holden are able to embody contradictory characteristics or exhibit inconsistent behaviors. Holden rails against “phoniness” in the world, for example, but he constantly lies about his age, name, social status, activities, and friends. Gene, of course, wrestles with mixed feelings resulting from love, admiration, and pride for Phineas blurred with jealousy, disbelief, and suspicion. The school story work of Salinger and Knowles surely grapples with grave moral questions, as do the traditional British works, but the modern American novels do so in a way that is much darker and more ambiguous than the work of Hughes and his contemporaries, leaving the reader to forge his own conclusions about right and wrong.

Although the moral answers of *Catcher* and *Peace* are more ambiguous than those of the early British school stories, Salinger and Knowles’s work clearly perpetuates the stock school characterizations that have been a hallmark of the school story genre from the very beginning. Interestingly, one of the key precursors to the British school story as standardized and popularized by Hughes, Dean F. W. Farrar, Talbot Baines Reed, and Rudyard Kipling was an early attempt to classify the students at the elite Eton school. Maria Edgeworth’s *Parents’ Assistant or Stories for Children* was first published in 1796 and was one of the early “nursery” collections of short stories popular in England at the end of the eighteenth century for their entertaining and improving tales for children. Most of the stories were highly didactic, and the authors felt a solemn responsibility for the moral development of English children. It is no surprise, then, that the short “Eton Montem” piece of *Parents’ Assistant* presents a dramatic sketch of the “two types believed to be common at Eton, the first an extreme snob and the second

an honest independent” (Musgrave 26). Beyond the obvious moral lesson here, the privileged English child was also learning the archetypes he would encounter at school as a youth. Edgeworth’s collection was very popular and republished several times (even as late as 1897), attesting to the continued relevance and resonance of “Eton” and other stories with British audiences. Even in this embryonic stage, the school story presented a limited range of acceptable roles for privileged youth, and the school was seen as a place where such young men could be easily fitted—or molded—into discrete types.

The preoccupation with character in the British tradition makes sense, of course, given the responsibility of the school story to instruct its readers in matters of morality, religion, and patriotism, for Hughes and his social peers did not primarily send their sons to public schools for educational purposes but for social ones. Recall Squire Brown’s thoughts as he prepares to say goodbye to young Tom, Rugby-bound:

I won’t tell him to read his Bible and love and serve God; if he don’t do that for his mother’s sake and teaching, he won’t for mine. . . . Shall I tell him to mind his work, and say he’s sent to school to make himself a good scholar? Well, but he isn’t sent to school for that—at any rate, not for that mainly. I don’t care a straw for Greek particles, or the digamma, no more does his mother. What is he sent to school for? Well, partly because he wanted so to go. If he’ll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that’s all I want . . . (Hughes 71)

This emphasis on the moral development of individuals also kept students or readers from questioning or critiquing the school’s structure or ideology. In the modern American tradition, however, a close focus on the experience of individuals, or an exaggeration of differences in a small, homogeneous social group, might function to model the outside world and subtly critique it.

CHAPTER 3 THE CAMPUS BOUNDARY

Although an emphasis on the development of unique protagonists and many supporting characters would seem to produce an especially dynamic cast, the choice to situate *Catcher* and *Peace* in the space of the elite boys' school essentially precludes the possibility for any real social diversity resulting from differences in cultural upbringing, economic class, race, or gender. The students at Devon and Pencey certainly differ from each other, but the in-grouping of the exclusive prep school in the novels does more to homogenize its privileged characters than diversify them, especially since admission to such schools depends on the demonstration and maintenance of various social qualifications. This uniformity is particularly apparent when one considers the "real world" beyond the boundary of the school campus. Many of the distinctions between the boys appear insignificant when they are compared to the true composition of postwar society in America. By focusing on individual characters or a small group of similar characters, Salinger and Knowles manage to neatly contain or largely avoid more candid or grim social commentary that might be distasteful to 1950s audiences. Salinger and Knowles do manage to address some of the more distressing realities of postwar society in their work, but they do so cautiously and within the narrow, more manageable space of the elite school.

As expensive, prestigious, and single-sex educational institutions, the Devon and Pencey schools are unique places where one can witness great equality and great inequality, depending on the location of the observer. To an outsider, all of the students in such a specialized school appear quite homogeneous. All are white males who have qualified academically and financially to enter the space, and care is taken to ensure the maintenance of their qualifications. For example, quite a bit of consideration is given to the studies and grades of Gene and Holden in the modern American texts when the traditional British school story is famous for its pronounced,

almost absurd, lack of attention to the characters' academic endeavors. In fact, Holden is consecutively expelled from the elite Whooton, Elkton Hills, and Pencey schools because he does not adequately apply himself to his studies and fails too many courses. As mentioned earlier, too, there are very few women at such schools, and no minority or international students are mentioned in either text.

Beyond a cursory consideration of demographic factors, however, some inequalities are observable among the privileged boys. The boys differ from each other in individual talents and strengths, and various students excel or struggle athletically, academically, socially, and romantically. Relative differences between the boys' financial backgrounds are apparent, too. For example, Holden recalls the time he tried to protect the feelings of an old roommate with cheap suitcases by hiding his own more expensive bags under the bed. Shortly thereafter, Holden finds his bags returned to the rack by the roommate, who hoped that others would think Holden's bags were his. This same roommate also repeatedly derides Holden's other belongings, describing various articles as "bourgeois" in an attempt to find a kind of superior social footing among his wealthier classmates (Salinger 108–109).

The boys recognize and maintain other differences, perhaps as an adolescent attempt to find identity in an otherwise homogeneous environment, but their masters and coaches recognize and perpetuate inequalities as well (similar to the way authoritative adults reinforce the stereotypical roles of the students as mentioned earlier). Holden remembers with disgust the headmaster at the Elkton Hills school and the way he treated some boys' parents based on their physical appearances:

Mr. Haas . . . was the phoniest bastard I ever met in my life. . . . On Sundays, for instance, old Haas went around shaking hands with everybody's parents when they drove up to school. He'd be charming as hell and all. Except if some boy had little old funny-looking parents. . . . I mean if a boy's mother was sort of fat or corny-looking or something, and if

somebody's father was one of those guys that wear those suits with very big shoulders and corny black-and-white shoes, then old Haas would just shake hands with them and give them a phony smile and then he'd go talk, for maybe a half an *hour*, with somebody else's parents. . . . (Salinger 13–14)

Holden recognizes the same social cues that Haas does—the physical appearances or details of clothing that signal financial inferiority and/or a lack of interest in social climbing—but the observation spurs Holden to internal depression rather than Haas's outward behaviors of exclusion and ostracism. Holden also explains the privileges of athletes at the prep school, as his roommate Stradlater has the use of a car for an evening date: “Ed Banky was the basketball coach at Pencey. Old Stradlater was one of his pets, because he was the center on the team, and Ed Banky always let him borrow his car when he wanted it. It wasn't allowed for students to borrow faculty guys' cars, but all the athletic bastards stuck together. In every school I've gone to, all the athletic bastards stick together” (Salinger 43). In *Peace*, too, Brinker as campus leader is trusted with access to the “Headmaster's Discretionary Benevolent Fund,” from which he removes (pirates?) \$4.13 to serve as a prize for Phineas's Winter Carnival games. And, as seen again and again, Phineas manages to wriggle his way out of punishment at the hands of elders on the basis of his charm alone.

Such inequalities among the boys exist, of course, because of their own behaviors or the influence of authoritative adults, but those differences are perhaps insignificant when compared to the opportunities and privileges they boys enjoy when compared to the American population at large. Gene and Holden are enrolled at prestigious, expensive, and selective college preparatory schools. They and their peers are being primed for and shepherded into distinguished, lucrative careers in law, medicine, business, and politics. Whatever their differences, all of the boys at Devon and Pencey are certainly advantaged in their access to a superlative education, and other social and financial benefits most likely accompany that access.

Consider, for example, that when Holden runs away from Pencey on a Saturday night, a few days before he is expected home on the following Wednesday, he passes time by spending a long weekend in New York City. His impromptu vacation, however, does not consist of cramped nights in bus stations or cold nights in Central Park, a fate one might expect for any other spontaneous teenage runaway. By gathering money saved from duplicate birthday gifts from a forgetful grandmother who is “quite lavish with her dough” and selling his expensive typewriter to other peers with ready cash, Holden considers himself “pretty loaded” when he leaves Pencey (Salinger 52). He must be, for he has the resources to rent hotel rooms, take cabs, meet friends out for cocktails, donate money to nuns, take girls on ice skating and Broadway dates, and even hire a prostitute during the weekend. Holden may not manage his “wad” very well once he reaches the city, but he certainly begins with one that reveals his privilege as the son of a corporate lawyer.

The boys at the Devon School are privileged in another important way as well. In addition to their financial and educational advantages, Gene and his friends are protected and isolated from the war. This is especially true in the summer of 1942, when the boys are too young to be “draft bait” and have the license to live as they wish. The boys enjoy a “streak of tolerance” from the masters during the summer, and although Gene cites Phineas’s winning personality as one reason for this change, he also knows there is a primary and more solemn reason for this leniency:

I think we reminded them of what peace was like, we boys of sixteen. We were registered with no draft board, we had taken no physical examinations. No one had ever tested us for hernia or color blindness. Trick knees and punctured eardrums were minor complaints and not yet disabilities which would separate a few from the fate of the rest. We were careless and wild, and I suppose we could be thought of as a sign of life the war was being fought to preserve. Anyway, they were more indulgent toward us than at any other time; they snapped at the heels of the seniors, driving and molding and arming them for the war.

They noticed our games tolerantly. We reminded them of what peace was like, of lives which were not bound up with destruction. (Knowles 23, 24)

While “the class above, seniors, draft-bait, practically soldiers, rushed ahead” to the war, “caught up in accelerated courses and first-aid programs and a physical hardening regimen,” Gene and his peers are still “calmly, numbly reading Virgil and playing tag in the river” (Knowles 15).

It seems, though, that Gene and Holden do not necessarily wish to take full advantage of the privileges they have, perhaps out of guilt or embarrassment. Holden is repeatedly depressed and uncomfortable when faced with the lower financial or social status of others, like the breakfast counter nuns with shoddy suitcases, his old roommate and his cheap suitcases, the young prostitute and her careful consideration of her dress, and outcast Ackley and his loneliness and estrangement. Holden does not apply himself at Whooton, Elkton Hills, or Pencey, much to the chagrin of his teachers, parents and little sister, and he blatantly despises the “Joe Yale-looking” guys of his social circle and announces his intention to forego an elite college, unlike his peers: “All those Ivy League bastards look alike. My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn’t go to one of those Ivy League colleges, if I was *dying*, for God’s sake” (Salinger 85). Holden, of course, sees himself as the arbiter of all things “phony” or tainted, and he believes that his schools and the surrounding social circles are full of “crooks,” bullies, and potential sexual predators.

Gene and many of his classmates, too, become increasingly unsatisfied with their place in the American social order. *Peace* may begin in the calm, studious summer of 1942, but the students at Devon grow restless as the war continues. The war creeps into the everyday lives of the boys in small ways at first, but the boys become more impatient with their prep school existence as they encounter greater realities of the conflict. Gene even complains at one point, “Who ever heard of studying dead languages at a time like this[?]” (Knowles 98). Probably for

the first time in many of their lives, the boys perform manual labor and earn a wage. They are paid to harvest the local apple crop in the absence of other laborers, and they also agree to clear a nearby railroad yard after a heavy snow. They enjoy the novelty of the work, but after they shovel out the railway lines and step back to allow a crowded troop train to pass, Gene describes the feelings of inferiority and isolation the boys experience when encountering the young soldiers:

The coach windows were open and the passengers surprisingly were hanging out; they were all men, I could discern, all young, all alike. . . . They were not much older than we were and although probably just recruits, they gave the impression of being an elite as they were carried past our drab ranks. They seemed to be having a wonderful time, their uniforms looked new and good; they were clean and energetic and going places. After they had gone we laborers looked rather emptily across the newly cleared rails at each other, at ourselves, and not even Brinker thought of a timely remark. . . . Stranded in this mill town railroad yard while the whole world was converging elsewhere, we seemed to be nothing but children playing among heroic men. (Knowles 97)

The Devon boys envy the recruits for their freedom and the promise of adventure and true utility in wartime, even though their lives at school are certainly more comfortable, safe, and predictable than the soldiers' lives. When the Devon boys do approach graduation and begin to consider enlistment, even the opportunities for wartime involvement are carefully edited, for only the safest and most privileged posts are offered to the boys:

Every day in chapel there was some announcement about qualifying for "V-12," an officer-training program the Navy had set up in many colleges and universities. It sounded very safe, almost like peacetime, almost like just going normally on to college. . . . There were also a special few [boys] with energetic fathers who were expecting appointments to Annapolis or West Point or the Coast Guard Academy or even . . . the Merchant Marine Academy. (Knowles 158–159)

Gene eventually enlists in the Navy, rather than waiting to be drafted into the infantry, which is "not only the dirtiest but also the most dangerous branch of all," Brinker enlists in the Coast Guard, their classmate Leper joins a specialty ski troop division, and one particularly well-connected boy, Cliff Quackenbush, has "two possible appointments to the Military Academy,

with carefully prepared positions in V-12 and dentistry school to fall back on if necessary” (Knowles 199, 159).

Quackenbush’s myriad options may seem superior to Gene’s plans and the others’, but all of the Devon boys are clearly being shepherded into choice military positions that minimize risk and discomfort when compared to their peers in the general population outside of the elite school. It is ironic that the Devon boys envy the young recruits they see on the railway, because as they fantasize about enlisting and leaving the prep school world, others clamor to enter their social sphere and jump at the chance to do so later. The G.I. Bill passed after World War II provided the opportunity for thousands of veterans to attend the kind of colleges Gene and Holden would have gone to, and the returning soldiers took full advantage of the new opportunities for higher education. In fact, the new students proved more mature, industrious, appreciative, adaptable, and self-disciplined than their classmates:

The veterans who took advantage of the G.I. Bill during the later half of the 1940s distinguished themselves by their numbers, their maturity, and their achievement. They overshadowed their nonveteran classmates, dominated American campuses, and surprised prognosticators. Faculty and administrators, overcoming caution and even fear, hailed them collectively as the best college students ever. (Olson 43)

The new students “flocked to the Ivy League schools, the state universities, and the better liberal arts colleges and technical schools” and, “by failing less and earning higher grades, raised the level of work at most schools” (Olson 45, 51). Other students complained that the veterans “study so hard . . . we have to slave to keep up with them,” and one reporter wrote that that the GIs were admirably “hogging the honor rolls and Dean’s lists” (Olson 51). Whereas Gene and Holden fail out or fantasize about leaving the boundaries of elite schools, others are eager to enter and try for the social and financial privileges conferred by such an education and social association.

Although returning GIs were jumping at the chance to enroll in college in the postwar period, it is important to remember that women were actually leaving institutions of higher education in startling numbers. Just as women are virtually excluded from the single-sex institutions of Pencey Prep and the Devon School in these novels, women were removed from the vital economic work of a booming America after World War II. Whereas veterans were taking advantage of the opportunity to get an education and participate in the business and professional, rather than military, sectors of the economy after the war, women were being encouraged to return to the home after serving (or watching their mothers serve) adroitly in the manufacturing and business roles of the country in the wartime absence of men. In an increasingly globalized world, women found themselves again in the narrow, isolated orbit of the home. Re-relegation back to the home and a lack of mental stimulation were significant factors in the epidemic “problem that has no name” as explored by Betty Friedan. Friedan begins her seminal *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by reporting that the “proportion of women attending college in comparison with men dropped from 47 per cent in 1920 to 35 per cent in 1958,” and that by “the mid-fifties, 60 per cent [of women] dropped out of college to marry, or because they were afraid too much education would be a marriage bar” (16). Although many women were leaving college and “returning to the home,” they were also entering the workforce in greater numbers than ever before but not earning wages comparable to men’s. Women constituted 32 percent of the total American workforce by the 1960s, a jump from 27 percent at the start of the 1950s (Dunar 196). Most of their jobs were “women’s jobs,” like bank telling, social work, and teaching, and the bulk of women who worked were either young and unmarried (and presumably looking for a husband at the office) or over 45 years old and working to augment family income

after raising children or helping sons pay for college. On average, women earned “36 percent less than men; by 1960, they earned 39 percent less” (Dunar 197).

It makes sense that women do not feature prominently at the single-sex Pencey and Devon schools, but Salinger and Knowles are also strangely silent regarding the presence of any other social diversity within the school body. It is easy to examine Knowles on this erasure in particular, since much of *Peace* is loosely autobiographical. Knowles attended Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire from September 1942 through August 1944, and many of his experiences found their way into his novel. He remembers that there really was “a club whose members jumped from the branch of a very high tree into the river as initiation,” and he recalls that “the masters were relaxed” during the wartime summers, yet “virtually all the younger masters disappeared one by one, and old men became our only teachers” as the war marched on (*Phillips Exeter Bulletin*, Summer 1995). Knowles does not mention any minority or foreign students in *Peace*, though, even though a special issue of the *Phillips Exeter Bulletin* from March of 1948 proudly reports that the “718 students enrolled in 1947–48 came from 47 of the 48 states of the Union, two territories, the District of Columbia, the Canal Zone, and eight foreign countries. About one-third were from New England.” Exeter was, and is, also committed to providing educational opportunities for all kinds of students. In the 1940s, the school was “consciously going after boys of as diverse backgrounds and income levels as possible,” and its constant “search is for boys of high character and intelligence, wherever they may be found,” from “wealthy families,” “suburban homes,” or “the dwellings of oil field and textile workers, steel puddlers, dirt farmers, small town clergymen and merchants,” as stated in a 1947 special issue of the *Bulletin*. The same issue also gives detailed information on the financial aid available to students at Exeter, and they emphasize that “Every Boy Is on a Scholarship” since

the school absorbed at least some percentage of the real cost of each student's attendance on a sliding scale that depended on the year's budget and a deserving boy's individual need.

Despite this evidence of significant geographical, cultural, and financial diversity at Exeter in the 1940s, Knowles neglects to reflect the true social composition of the school in *Peace*, even though he faithfully reproduces many other details of his experiences there. In fact, Gene with his southern heritage is as exotic a classmate as his peers have. This is a bit of relative celebrity he cultivates by posting romantic images of antebellum plantation life on his dorm room walls, but his background is seldom referenced. As mentioned earlier, too, Holden admits some financial differences between his classmates, as evinced by clothing and suitcases, but *Catcher* also seems to erase the possibility of any meaningful social diversity or inequality. Why would Salinger and Knowles choose to position their work within the boarding school, only to exclude several defining characteristics of those schools?

By situating their work in the space of the elite male boarding school, and by further manipulating the social composition of the space, which is exceptionally homogeneous to begin with, Salinger and Knowles manage to find a kind of "safe space" for their postwar projects. The elite school and its relatively privileged student body provides boundaries for a kind of tentative or contained social commentary on the larger social issues of the period, or perhaps even an escape from the responsibility of fairly representing those issues. The school is recognized by audiences as a safe, nostalgic space, and would seem to function as a quiet node between the end of the war and the onslaught of newer postwar anxieties. Fears stemming from the Cold War, atomic technology, and the burgeoning civil rights movement, among other developments, encroached upon Americans at a time when audiences must have felt they deserved a respite after the wants and sacrifices of the Depression and war. General audiences

could easily lose themselves in the stories of privileged young Americans at a time when they, too, were enjoying the first fruits of a renewed—and improved—age of consumption and youth culture not seen since the 1920s. Salinger and Knowles’s recognition of the population’s need to celebrate or escape, then, assures an audience and some measure of professional “bestseller” success.

The celebration or escape provided by *Peace* and *Catcher* is only a partial one, however. It is important to realize that the boundary of the prep school does not completely restrict or relieve Salinger and Knowles when it comes to significant social commentary since the school space is not completely insulated from the troubles of society at large. Rather, the school space is useful in that it provides a way for the authors to disguise or contain their criticisms so they are attractive and acceptable to a wide audience in an age marked by racially segregated public schools, backsliding women’s rights, and Communist witch-hunts. In other words, perhaps weary postwar Americans were not quite ready for the sweeping social critiques and reforms of the 1960s and 70s, but the issues of inequality were certainly present and in need of initial exploration and examination. By definition, the exclusive school depends on a conceptualization of an “outside” group, the many who are deemed unfit and denied access to the space in order for it to have meaning and value for the privileged few “inside.” Gene and Holden encounter this outside group—blue collar workers, women, and others—at various points in the novels, like when the Devon boys encounter the troop train and Holden embarks on his weekend spree in New York, but the most significant interpersonal conflicts in the novels occur between the “in” members of the school community or their comparable outside counterparts (like the similarly privileged friends from home Holden primarily associates with even after he leaves Pencey). The characters are dealing with micro-inequalities and micro-divisions of class in the school

space, which can perhaps allude to or gesture towards larger social issues in the postwar “real world,” but all this is happening in a relatively safe, manageable, and reader-friendly package.

It is ironic that Salinger and Knowles find the school a “safe” space in which to explore social inequalities and other societal shortcomings since the school’s inherently contradictory nature often reveals the glaring chasms between cultural ideals and cultural realities. The school is responsible for simultaneously providing two completely antithetical, and thus impossible, services. The school is called upon to embody and project the paramount social ideals of a community in order to properly educate, socialize, and otherwise prepare children for their eventual participation in, and perpetuation of, the culture at large. The school must present and uphold the ideals as faithfully as possible in order to teach the young, a task that is presumably possible because the school space is smaller and more closely controlled than the space of the greater community. At the same time, however, the school is also called upon to faithfully reproduce the vocational realities of the outside world in order to best train and prepare future workers. This responsibility to pragmatic training opens or exposes the school space to the realities of the outside world, which usually falls short of the social ideals it consciously purports or encourages.

Even though the school setting of *Catcher* and *Peace* might explore social inequalities in a kind of approximate or symbolic way with the treatment of micro-inequalities among students, the schools are the perfect place to exhibit another characteristic of postwar American life in a much more a precise way. Scholarly commentary that considers the prep school setting of *Catcher* or *Peace* by any sustained or rigorous means is scarce, but Christopher Brookeman (1991) and Robert Miltner (2002) have recently explored the importance of—and the problems with—the peer group’s role in socialization in postindustrial America and the importance of the

prep school as the main organizing principle in the *Catcher* novel. It is this peer sociability that Brookeman sees as one of Salinger's central commentaries. Brookeman details the work of the sociologist David Riesman, who suggests that the peer group in postindustrial societies is the primary socializing force for members, taking the place of the "tradition-directed" forms of socialization in feudal societies (like ritual, routine, and religion) and the "inner-directed" efforts of parents towards new members (or entrepreneurial selves) in industrial or capitalistic societies. Working with Riesman's models, Brookeman believes that *Catcher* aptly depicts the current peer-based model "of how the individual and a specific social character interact" (66). This third "other-directed" model consists of the "dominance of the peer group, the pervasive influence of the mass media, and the decline of parental authority" in an effort to groom individuals for a "postindustrial economy where the service sector is more important than the manufacturing sector" and the world is characterized by "leisure industries, financial services, and consumption rather than production" (67). To prepare for service careers in law, business, sales, and the like, Holden and his peers must hone their social skills and perfect their abilities to "read" people and lubricate social interactions. The ultimate goal is to be such a part of an "in" grouping that one becomes "invisible beyond comment within a group, and therefore to have . . . membership in the group confirmed" (70).

Miltner builds upon the peer-centric ideas of Brookeman and recognizes that Holden is navigating most of the "universal" challenges of adolescence but notes that he has the additional socialization handicap of a lack of suitable adult mentors. Holden, like most other adolescents, feels a keen sense of loneliness, isolation and confusion, but he has no one to turn to for guidance or support. Miltner uses the term "sibling society" as coined by Robert Bly to describe one of the pervasive conflicts in the *Catcher* text and one of the most prominent problems in American

society since the 1950s. A sibling society is a community in which “adults, due to single-parenting and divorce, [and] fueled by the media-driven emphasis on the youth culture, are less mature and responsible than their parent’s generation. Conversely, and more importantly, adolescents, due to growing up in working, single-parent homes, assume more adult responsibilities” (34). Miltner quotes Bly: “Parents regress to become more like children, and the children, through abandonment, are forced to become adults too soon” (34). Distinctions between adults and adolescents fade away, and a muddled extension of adolescence persists long after the normal period.

According to Miltner, Bly identifies the biggest issue of sibling societies as the problem of “socialization of young males in the absence of fathers and mentors” (Bly qtd. in Miltner 35). Without responsible social models, adolescent males never learn the behaviors necessary for stable, successful, and productive adult lives and the sibling society cycle begins again. Miltner catalogs the potential older male mentors Holden seeks in *Catcher* and details the distance, disinterest, inability, or inappropriateness of each to serve as a guide and model for the boy: Holden’s absentee father, a workaholic corporate lawyer who never directly encounters his son in the novel; Holden’s beloved older brother D.B., who has moved cross-country to California to write Hollywood scripts; Holden’s favorite English teacher, Mr. Antolini, who fondles Holden’s head, a gesture Holden reads as an unwanted sexual advance; and Holden’s friend Carl Luce, an older classmate from the Whooton School who refuses to become too personally invested with a lonely, confused Holden and his persistent questions. Holden’s mother is also emotionally unavailable, for she is still grieving the death of Holden’s younger brother.

As recognized by Brookeman and Miltner, the elite school is the perfect place to model Riesman’s “other-directed” model of modern socialization and Bly’s observation of “sibling

society” cycles. By focusing on individual characters or a small group of similar characters, Salinger and Knowles manage to neatly contain or largely avoid more candid or grim social commentary that might be distasteful to postwar audiences, too. Salinger and Knowles do manage to address some of the more distressing realities of postwar society in their work, but they do so cautiously and within the narrow, more manageable space of the elite school. But how safe and attractive is the school space—or the greater society—that drives boys to mental illness and even death?

CHAPTER 4 BEYOND THE PLAYING FIELDS

As we have seen, the elite school in *Catcher* and *Peace* functions to define the parameters of social commentary in the novels, and any consideration of more significant social inequalities beyond the boys and their peers is largely missing from the texts. By keeping their work within the bounds of the elite school, Salinger and Knowles manage to produce fiction that, at best, perhaps simply alludes to greater social inequalities while maintaining the familiar and inoffensive “novel of character” mode that is attractive to general audiences. Attention is diverted from the world outside of the school, even though the school is an inextricable part of the greater society and the place entrusted with the dissemination of its highest social ideals. The distracted audience loses itself in conflicts among the members of the privileged classes, conflicts that result only from relatively minor differences in power and opportunity, and the space of the school thus contains or largely avoids any more meaningful, but perhaps offensive, consideration of the greater world.

As if to highlight the emphasis on the orderly, safe space of the school (and to perhaps reveal pressures they may feel as artists), Salinger and Knowles comment on the dangers awaiting the student who dares to break away from the standard social mold of the elite prep student or the physical boundaries of its campus. One of the archetypal school story characters seen as early as *TBSD* is the introverted, romantic boy who chooses to spend his days exploring the fields and woods beyond the manicured, controlled spaces of the school campus. The boy who pursues such scientific or romantic pursuits over athletics in the competitive, masculine world of the boarding school is ostracized, of course, and he suffers greatly at the hands of the other boys in the absence of any adult supervision. Martin is this amateur scientist and nature lover in *TBSD*, and he becomes gentle Arthur’s first friend besides his mentor Tom. Martin

spends his days hiking, bird watching, and caring for his pet birds, rats, and reptiles. He also practices chemistry in his study, even though he often loses his books and appears recalcitrant and unprepared during exams. Martin's peers gleefully torment him and interfere with his belongings and work, and they even kill at least one pet bird during their assaults. In various asides, a sympathetic Hughes calls Martin an "Ishmaelite in the house," and identifies him as "one of those unfortunates who were at that time of day (and are, I fear, still) quite out of their places at a public school. If we knew how to use our boys, Martin would have been seized upon and educated as a natural philosopher" (Hughes 247). Instead, Martin is called "Madman" by his classmates, and he suffers their ridicule with quiet patience until Arthur takes an interest in him and brings him into the more acceptable social circles of the house.

It is interesting that the boys of Rugby jokingly refer to their "natural philosopher" as a madman, for the romantic nature-lover of Knowles's *Peace* eventually suffers a true mental breakdown. If Martin is named after a bird that may be easily tamed and domesticated, then Elwin Lepellier's nickname "Leper" does not suggest a similar fate. Leper is shy, quiet, and timid, and he is afraid to jump from the tree into the river as Phineas and Gene do. Instead, Leper prefers to collect and catalog snail shells, snowshoe among the New Hampshire woods and rivers surrounding Devon, and photograph beaver dams. Brinker Hadley's frustration with his cloistered prep school life spills over onto Leper, and when he angrily roars that Leper is "a *nat-u-ral-ist!*," Gene comments that "the scornful force of his tone turned the word into a curse" (Knowles 100). Leper is the first student from Devon to enlist in the military, perhaps to escape his classmates, and he chooses to join the United States "ski troops" after seeing a recruiting film that featured clean, crisp images of the specialized soldiers whizzing down snow-covered slopes.

The war proves too much for gentle Leper, though, and he eventually deserts during basic training. He has trouble eating, sleeping, and adjusting to military life, and he begins to suffer from bizarre, frightening hallucinations. He deserts in an attempt to avoid a “Section Eight discharge,” the classification for “the nuts in the service, the psychos, the Funny Farm candidates. . . . Like a dishonorable discharge only worse. You can’t get a job after that. . . . You’re screwed for life . . .” (Knowles 144). Like Martin, though, perhaps Leper’s “madness” is wisdom. He recognizes that Gene was always “a savage underneath,” and he knows not to reveal too many details about Phineas’s accident when he is pressed for information during Gene’s impromptu trial, saying that he will not “have it used against me later” (Knowles 145, 176). When Leper testifies and recalls the day when Gene and Phineas chose to take the fateful “double jump” from the tree, he describes the summer light and the two boys on the branch in the terms of artillery and machinery:

The rays of the sun were shooting past them, millions of rays shooting past them like—like golden machine-gun fire. . . . They moved like an engine. . . . First one piston sinks, and then the next one sinks. The [boy] holding on to the trunk sank for a second, up and down like a piston, and then the other one sank and fell. (Knowles 174–176)

Nature no longer holds any solace for Leper, and the spaces both within and outside of the school prove hazardous to him.

Holden himself might be this amateur naturalist character in *Catcher*. He leaves Pencey Prep early in the novel and escapes to the urban jungle of New York City, yet he is narrating the story from a California mental hospital because he “got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy” (Salinger 1). As he navigates the city, Holden is constantly plagued by worries for the ducks that live in a Central Park pond: Where do they go when the water freezes? Holden also finds respite in the city museum, especially in the peaceful tableaux featuring scenes from the ancient fishing villages of New York State’s Native Americans.

Whenever Holden publicly expresses any of these sensitive thoughts, though, he is unable to connect with the cab drivers, school acquaintances, or other people who happen to be in his company, and these failed attempts to connect with others are among many that contribute to Holden's eventual nervous breakdown.

Holden remembers another student whose sensitivity and natural honesty also proved to be his downfall. James Castle was a very quiet, honest, and shy boy from the Elkton Hills school who paid the ultimate price for refusing to conform to the prep school social strictures. Holden remembers James as "a skinny little weak-looking guy, with wrists about as big as pencils," "one of these very quiet guys . . . who hardly ever got up to recite or go to the blackboard or anything" (Salinger 170–171). When James calls a particular student "a very conceited guy," an estimation Holden agrees with, he refuses to withdraw the statement and is cornered by a group of boys (Salinger 170). It is unclear what the boys do to James, since Holden only reports that it is "too repulsive" to repeat, but it forces him to jump out of his dorm room window to escape (Salinger 170). James dies from the fall, paying a hefty price for his honesty and integrity. Robert Ackley is yet another of Holden's classmates who chooses not to comply with the social principles of the school and so lives as a pariah at the dorm. Ackley is physically unattractive and careless in his personal habits (he has "mossy" teeth, acne, and dirty ears that "damn near made you sick") but he also misses, or ignores, crucial social hints and cues that further seal his fate as a prep school outcast (Salinger 19). He is clear and vocal about his dislike of Stradlater, Mal Brossard, and other students, and he seems willing to suffer the social consequences.

The fate of the amateur naturalist or social outcast in the modern American prep school story is clear, and those who stray from the safe spaces of the school campus or reject the group must be prepared to account for it. By including the stories of Leper, Holden, Castle, and

Ackley, Salinger and Knowles seem to comment on their own boundaries as authors working in the postwar period. Straying too far from the privileged set in the heady postwar days of patriotism, wealth, and consumption is perhaps a risky gamble. After the lean years of the Depression and war, American audiences must have felt entitled to reward and enjoy themselves. Alternatively, they might have felt the need to escape from the newer anxieties of postwar life. The tensions surrounding the boys' doomed involvement with nature or natural social urges allude to some of these anxieties in a time when Americans moved into standardized suburbs (continuing the migration from a more traditional and productive agricultural existence to a more urban and consumptive existence), grappled with mounting social inequalities, and feared the technological threat of ever more advanced and annihilating atomic weapons. The school space might seem a nostalgic, safe, and even egalitarian place in comparison to some of the more grim realities of the postwar world. It, too, however, is subject to many of the same problems, as Salinger and Knowles quietly acknowledge and carefully explore. Holden, Gene, and Phineas, and their quieter, braver classmates like Leper, Castle, and Ackley, all blatantly and bluntly critique various aspects of the schools where they live and study—the snobbish, pretentious, and condemnable behavior of peers and masters—while Salinger and Knowles use the stage of the elite school to quietly reflect and critique various aspects of the post-war world in which they live and write as well.

Salinger and Knowles clearly find the natural boy first popularized by Martin in *TBSD* useful in a postwar American context, and considering Martin's fate against the destiny of the American boys reveals the differences between the ideological climates of imperial Britain and modern America. Martin begins as eccentric, lonely student at Rugby, but once Arthur notices a kindred gentle spirit he asks Tom to facilitate a friendship. Tom is surprised and pleased that his

shy charge Arthur is settling in and branching out, and Martin, too, is pleased with the attention and kindness. The three boys begin talking and studying together, and Martin leads his new friends on expeditions to the farms, woods, and fields around Rugby. The boys seek out rare birds' nests, scale trees with the help of climbing-irons, and take eggs back to campus to add to their impressive collections. The boys have other adventures away from campus as well, like the time they are caught by a neighboring farmer and wrongfully accused of stealing poultry (a crime Tom had committed before the improving influence of Arthur and Martin but had ceased to participate in at the time of the accusation). Arthur blossoms in the company of Martin, and "before the end of the half-year he had trained into a [bold] climber and good runner" and "knew twice as much about trees, birds, flowers, and many other things" as did other boys who merely dabbled under Martin's tutelage (Hughes 275). Martin eventually graduates from Rugby and leaves his new friends to go "on a cruise in the South Pacific, in one of his uncle's ships," leaving his pet magpie in Arthur's capable hands (Hughes 298).

It is immediately after this kind of informal apprenticeship with Martin and the bequest of his nature-knowledge that Arthur is ready to complete his role as the Christ-like figure of the novel. Arthur falls ill with fever only one short chapter later, hurrying a fearful Tom to make the last of his moral reforms as a kind of successful penance for Arthur's life. For Hughes, a love of nature and a familiarity with the natural world signifies closeness to God, as well as a patriotic celebration of Britain's imperialist reign, for the boys explore and lord over the lands surrounding Rugby, rejoicing in the beauty of the countryside and enjoying (or exploiting) its rich, rare bounty. The "natural philosopher" of *TBSD* may begin as an ostracized, bullied boy, but he soon comes to represent a kind of holy and patriotic British philosophy. Leper, Holden, Castle, and Ackley do not fare as well, however, perhaps as a reflection of America's

increasingly conflicted relationship with nature in the post-war era. The modern American tensions surrounding the natural world—Preserve natural resources or utilize them for profit? Embrace earthly existence or prepare for eventual atomic annihilation? Maintain an increasingly unrealistic but traditional rural or agricultural American lifestyle in an increasingly urban, global, and service-centered economy?—are acted out in miniature in the conflicted lives of Leper and his company. It is in this way that Salinger and Knowles find expression for the more significant movements beyond the bounds of the prep school while also acknowledging the social and professional dangers of straying too far from the acceptable.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The boy of *Catcher* or *Peace* who dares to venture beyond the comfortable, predictable boundaries of the elite school campus—a kind of refusal of his privilege—or who dares to naturally heed his own conscience thus falls victim to ostracism, mental illness, or even death. Although the traditional cast of school story characters would seem to create a diverse, vibrant community with space for all kinds of boys, the socially acceptable “options” for existence actually prove more restrictive and stifling than some can bear. The need for escape, expression, or release is understandable, but the price is dear.

Salinger and Knowles may feel similar restrictions writing in postwar America, and the choice to situate their work within the space of the school perhaps reflects this. The decision to locate an adolescent work of fiction in a school is not novel, of course, but the fact that these two authors, working independently but simultaneously in the 1950s, chose to make that school a single-sex and exclusive New England preparatory institution is significant. Rather than following Gene to war, or pitting Holden against a more inhospitable urban experience, Salinger and Knowles prefer to keep them within the bounds of the elite school, or, as in *Catcher*, among the school’s associated social circles. The school is a safe space for social critique, and the exaggeration or emphasis of the relatively slight ideological or social differences between the privileged students must stand in place of more transparent, offensive, or unmanageable social commentary on the “real world” outside. Victory, consumption, happiness, and enjoyment for all were the prevailing and unquestioned social myths of the time, even though many Americans, like returning blue-collar veterans and languishing women, must have felt they were alone on the fringes of the celebration. A close examination of the school reveals the chasms between

appearances and reality, between social ideals and social truths, but the school continues to stand as a symbol for the promise of a better life and the hope for a stronger nation.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Brookeman, Christopher. "Pencey Preppy: Cultural Codes in The Catcher in the Rye." *New Essays on The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Jack Salzman. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Dunar, Andrew J. *America in the Fifties*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2006.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton, 1963.
- Hughes, Thomas. *Tom Brown's School Days*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911.
- Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Scribner, 1959.
- Miltner, Robert. "Mentor Mori; or, Sibling Society and the Catcher in the Rye." *The Catcher in the Rye: New Essays*. Ed. J. P. Steed. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Musgrave, P. W. *From Brown to Bunter: The Life and Death of the School Story*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Olson, Keith W. *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1974.
- The Phillips Exeter Bulletin*, Special Issue 43.3A (1947).
- The Phillips Exeter Bulletin*, Special Issue 44.4 (March 1948).
- The Phillips Exeter Bulletin* (Summer 1995).
- Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1951.

WORKS CONSULTED BUT NOT CITED

- Galef, David. *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993.
- Quigly, Isabel. *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1982.
- Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Angela Schlein earned her bachelor's degree in English from Emory University in 2002. Before beginning graduate school at the University of Florida, Angela worked as a junior paralegal and marketer for two large Atlanta law firms. She earned her master's degree in English with an emphasis in American literature in 2007 and plans to return to Atlanta to work in the publishing, communications, or marketing fields.