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THE INFLUENCE OF ZEN BUDDHISM  
ON THE WORKS OF J. D. SALINGER

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The later works of J. D. Salinger have been influenced by Zen Buddhism. There are earlier traces of some of the philosophical concepts which are mentioned in this thesis, but the works discussed here are primarily the following Glass family stories: "Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters," "Seymour: an Introduction," "Franny," and "Zooey." Another story, "Teddy," is also replete with Oriental religion, and has therefore, been included.

The effect of Zen Buddhism on the works listed above has been examined in two ways. The first, and most obvious method used, was to note all direct references to Zen Buddhism. In fact, it seemed pertinent to include most of the references to any Oriental religion or philosophy. The second approach was to look for interpretations of the stories, or elements of the stories, which seemed to relate to concepts encountered in Zen Buddhism. For example, the empty pool at the end of "Teddy" is discussed in terms of its relationship to the Zen concept of sunyata (emptiness).

Once these two approaches had been applied to the stories under consideration, it was possible to note a recurrence of both symbolic and philosophic content present in them. It appears that the major characters, Teddy, Seymour, Buddy, Franny, and Zooey, seem to be seeking a state which

transcends ordinary intellectual or religious levels, a condition which may be described as satori. (An appendix contains a short summary of Zen Buddhism, as directly relevant to the stories of Salinger that are analyzed in the thesis.) Each of the major characters, in one way or another, is faced with obstacles to this goal which he or she discusses at length. The reader is led to believe that Seymour, Buddy, and Zooey have passed the obstacles and have attained their goal. Also the reader witnesses the breakthrough of Teddy and of Franny.

Salinger's concept of transcending, rather than repudiating, intellectual and religious authority, may present a conservative outlet for the youth of today. Exotic Eastern philosophy, combined with the possibility of adapting it to youthful anti-establishmentarianism, may be the reason for Salinger's great popularity.