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**“I’d rather push a guy out a window”: Trauma, Abject Bodies, and the Unhomely
in *The Catcher in the Rye***

Abstract:

This article examines connections between embodied manifestations of trauma and the ability to bear witness to what Judith Butler has called the “abject.” The “abject” are those bodies that fail to adhere to heteronormativizing cultural scripts. Building upon Butler’s provocative delineation between “bodies that matter” and bodies that *are* matter, this analysis turns to J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, arguing that it is Holden’s status as a trauma survivor that has pushed him into an ‘unhomely’ position from which he is able to expose the violence with which those who reject the power imperative are pushed to the edges of cultural viability.

Keywords: embodied trauma, witness, abject, *Catcher in the Rye*

There is a horror in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* that goes relatively unremarked. About ¾ of the way through the novel, Holden tells of a boy named James Castle who, having dared to stand up to a bully named Phil Stabile, is beaten and raped by Stabile's clique, and escapes from this torture by jumping out a window to his death. This horror has shaped Holden Caulfield quirky personality: he demonstrates an exacting demand for honesty, but is himself a glib liar; he shows a callous disregard for some people's feelings, but is achingly eager to defend others; he pines for human connection, but insults and runs from those who offer him care. If exposure to the event of James Castle's bullying and death is not enough to confirm that Holden subsequently suffers from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the back-and-forth, contradictory oscillation of Holden's behaviors confirms it.

However, more important than Holden's experience of psychological trauma and its embodied symptoms is what it enables. Because he is no longer squarely situated in the camp of "the hotshots" – those whose bodies matter – Holden is now able to see a range of people that would normally be invisible to people like him. These people are the inhabitants of the "unlivable zone" called by Judith Butler "the abject." Judith Butler's argument in *Bodies that Matter* that subjectivity is secured by means of the production and expulsion of abject bodies is relevant here: Phil Stabile and boys like him secure their place in their world as bodies that matter by turning others into mere bodies – into bodies that ARE matter and matter alone. The trick, of course, is that for Stabile's group to continue to matter, their status must be reasserted over and against the very bodies that they relegate to the margins of society.

Salinger's novel encourages us to ponder what kind of man a boy like Holden would have become if his life had gone along like those of most boys of his age, era and social class. If he had emerged from a teenage of rituals of education and continual reassertion of his meritorious masculinity via ritual performances of heteronormativity, he might never have noticed the people whose bodies prop up his subjectivity. This paper argues that Holden's experience of trauma is presented as a good thing: it is trauma that allows him to step out of the expected modes and rituals and to recognize their clockwork. For a time, however temporary, Holden is able to see and show readers the abject bodies that male subjectivity like his is built upon due to trauma that pushes Holden out of his comfort zone and into an unhomey position.

"I couldn't stop thinking about" it: Trauma and Embodied Memory [1]

Psychiatrist Judith Herman suggests that traumatic events destroy victims' subjectivity because, at their root, such events treat those individuals as body-objects. Actions like battle, rape, kidnapping, and systematic violence like racism have the power to traumatize because they strip victims of their sense of their own value as subjects and insist that they are nothing but bodies. [2] Derailing the systems of meaning and logic that subjectivity is built upon, trauma is quite literally

beyond words, indescribable, unnarratable, and resistant to analysis. Thus, trauma victims relive their experience physically – through unwilling re-enactments of the trauma, obsessive thinking that they cannot escape from, and autonomic responses that replicate the adrenalin-infusion of the original response, long after the danger has passed. Until the victim makes sense of what has happened to him or her, places that once gave solace become danger zones and people that once offered protection are to be avoided because they failed to protect.

In the real world, health and social service providers seek to help trauma victims secure safety and meaning – to bring understanding and some measure of closure – as quickly as possible. However, fictional works like *The Catcher in the Rye* enable readers to linger with the victim in his or her traumatized state, to piece together the events that caused the trauma, and to ponder whether traumatic cognition may enable a person to see fault-lines and injurious patterns in a culture that others see as ‘normal’. Through Holden’s eyes readers are able to witness those injury-causing fault-lines in culture that have been normalized and to entertain the possibility that the world of privilege that boys like him inhabit is built on the bodies of others.

The premise of *The Catcher in the Rye* is that Holden is telling an interlocutor, probably a therapist, about a three-day sojourn in New York that culminated in mental and physical collapse. The sojourn is propelled by Holden’s third expulsion from boarding school. As he moves at the edges of the adult world of the city, memories of the previous three years surface including his brother Allie’s death from leukemia, the apparent suicide of James Castle at Elkton Hills, the first boarding school Holden attended, and an almost-relationship with a girl named Jane Gallagher. His sojourn is a desperate attempt to evade these memories.

Trauma affects both cognition and the human body’s reactions. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is suffering from recurring traumatic memories that evoke strong physical responses. Holden remembers things suddenly, thinks about things without wanting to, and can’t stop those thoughts even when he wants to move on. These thoughts leave his body almost literally frozen in place. One example is his memory of his summer with Jane Gallagher, which is so strong that it stops him short in the unpleasant lobby of the Edmont Hotel. Sitting on a “vomity” looking chair he reminisces for three pages about how he never quite necked with Jane. The repetitive, traumatic pattern relates to Holden’s fear that roommate Ward Stradlater may have done what Holden was unable to do with Jane: “Every time I got to the part about her out with Stradlater in that damn Ed Banky’s car, it almost drove me crazy. I knew she wouldn’t let him get to first base with her, but it drove me crazy anyway” (104). Recurring memories like this one recur so often and so effectively derail the forward movement of the novel’s plot that it soon becomes clear that deep memory rather than the current event is the point and deep memory has a deep hold over his body. Indeed, as compelling as the story of the “madman stuff” that happened to Holden during his three days in the city is (3), it is clear that his memories are what he needs to deal with – and

what we are meant to understand.

Judith Herman would call these intrusive memories. She explains that the traumatic moment “becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness” (37). Traumatic memories do not occur as “a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story” (37). Instead they are experienced somatically because they are “encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images” (37, 38). Those who have witnessed trauma often physically “relive the event as if it were continually recurring in the present” sometimes with a will to change the outcome of the event (37).

The Catcher in the Rye is rife with intrusive memories physically enacted. For instance, alone in his hotel room after failing to have sex with a prostitute, Holden talks out loud to his deceased brother Allie. Holden comments, “I do that sometimes when I get very depressed. I keep telling him to go home and get his bike and meet me in front of Bobby Fallon’s house” (130). Later, walking in the city, “Every time I’d get to the end of a block, I’d make believe I was talking to my brother, Allie. I’d say to him, ‘Allie, don’t let me disappear. Please don’t let me disappear. Please, Allie.’” And then he would thank him and do it all again (257).

Holden’s pattern of intrusive memories is especially significant in relation to James Castle’s suicide and shows a sinister link between memories and Holden’s attitude toward his own body. Holden’s sarcastic observation that some people would “commit suicide or something” over things like a football game or to glimpse a celebrity (5, 96), gives way to an apparently genuine reflection on whether Jesus would have sent Judas to hell for committing suicide (131). After getting beaten for the second time in one evening, Holden admits that “What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide” (136) and that “I probably would’ve done it, too, if I’d been sure somebody’d cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn’t want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory” (136). In other words, it is only his concern for how his dead body will be perceived that stops Holden from ending his life.

Reeling from his suicidal thoughts, Holden enters a state of constriction (Herman 43). In constriction the loss of control over one’s body is more pronounced. Herman reports that in this “numbed” state, “time sense may be altered,” or the individual “may feel as [if he] is observing from outside [his] body,” resulting in “indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle” (43). Holden’s awareness of himself and his surroundings is distorted – for instance, when repeatedly told to keep his voice down he claims he did not know he was shouting. He loses track of time. On several occasions he passively accepts beatings. Like those “traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate” Holden engages in a manic round of drinking, nightclubs, walking, and smoking.

Yet, as Herman observes, “Trauma impels people both to withdraw from close relationships and to seek them desperately” (57). Similarly, Holden admits he is lonely, but he avoids going

home, instead seeking contact with strangers (he asks everyone he meets to have a drink with him – his cabdriver, performers at night-clubs, three tourists, two nuns and even a little kid) in public places like bars and nightclubs. Holden hesitates to call Jane Gallagher, but reunites with unappealing figures like Carl Luce and Sally Hayes. Yet, whenever he gets the companionship he longs for he soon lashes out – for instance telling Sally she is a pain the ass when she does not agree to get married and run away.

This push-pull behavior is linked to the “contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction [which] establish an oscillating rhythm [that is] the most characteristic feature of post-traumatic syndromes” (Herman 47). The traumatized individual is “caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma” and “the instability produced by these periodic alternations further exacerbates the traumatized person’s sense of unpredictability and helplessness” (47). Since unpredictability and helplessness were part of the original conditions of trauma, the pendulum-swing of trauma’s symptoms replicates the original trauma. Because this “dialectic” is “potentially self-perpetuating” (47), Holden could well be trapped in a mental prison that manifests itself in his body’s actions.

Another physical reaction is Holden’s fight or flight response to stimuli, called “hyperarousal” by Herman. Perhaps the most embodied of the responses to trauma, hyperarousal results when the autonomic response system tells the body that danger is constantly present. Holden’s hyper-vigilance, irritability, quick anger, disturbed sleep – all physical manifestations of his psychic injury – might appear to be obvious signs of trauma to current readers. Yet in the story world, Holden’s been responding this way for so long that no one around him thinks this is unusual behavior. Rather, this is what is expected of Holden these days: Luce calls it “typical Caulfield” behavior (189).

His body takes action that his mind is unaware of. For instance, Holden reveals that on the night his brother Allie died, he punched out windows in the garage until his own fist broke, recalling “It was a very stupid thing to do, I’ll admit, but I hardly didn’t even know I was doing it, and you didn’t know Allie” (Salinger 50). Holden taunts Stradlater and later Maurice until they punch him; even when warned to stop, he persists in calling them morons. Having riled Maurice, “I didn’t even try to get out of the way or duck or anything. All I felt was this terrific punch in the stomach” (135). Having similarly baited Stradlater, Holden shows constrictive amnesia when he claims that he hardly can remember what he was doing (for instance, “Some things are hard to remember”) (52). [3] When punched by Stradlater Holden blacks out. After Maurice’s punch, “I wasn’t knocked out or anything...I stayed on the floor a fairly long time, sort of the way I did with Stradlater, only, this time I thought I was dying” (135). When Holden is not fighting, he is poised to flee. He proposes to enter a monastery (65), plots to run away to Vermont with Sally (171), mentions going to Colorado to work on a ranch (214) and finally determines to go west and live

as a deaf mute (257). Far more tangible is the incident with Mr. Antolini. When Holden wakes to find him “petting or patting” his head, he quite literally flies from the scene (249), running from the apartment almost without willing to do so. This scene clearly fits Herman’s description of “an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event” (36).

In summary, Holden displays each of the cardinal symptoms of PTSD. One trouble that remains, however, is determining the source of that trauma. The novel’s attention to settings that are neither public nor private, and to Holden’s futile efforts to cultivate selfhood in this topsy-turvy world is helpfully illuminated by Bhabha’s concept of unhomeliness – of bodies displaced and thereby enabled to see that which others cannot see.

“[The phonies] were coming in the goddam window”: Unhomely Vision and Bodies out of Place [4]

The heading above, borrowed from Holden’s commentary about life at Pencey Prep, captures his sense that he is wholly unable to control his world. Places that should be safe have become threatening. Phonies and obscene language are ubiquitous. Good people die, and adults who were to keep them safe abnegate responsibility and may actually add to the injury. In corollary, private places are invaded by hostile forces, things that should be kept private can only happen in public, and the past keeps popping up in the present.

These trauma-inducing conditions evoke more than the personal, psychological response of an individual to injury. Rather, Holden’s experiences can be understood as unhomely: as Homi Bhabha explains, “The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic, history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (11). [5] Unhomely moments occur when the elision of the “familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” becomes noticed (Bhabha 9). If, as Hannah Arendt suggests, the private realm is imagined to belong to “things that should be hidden,” while the public is the realm of “things that should be shown” (10), Bhabha argues that in our modern world this division no longer exists. Yet this lack of division is hidden and distinction between the realms is reasserted and normalized by way of forgetting and “disavowal” (11). The unhomely moment arises when the elision is exposed; it is frightening because one is seeing what is not to be seen – that the distinction drawn is false and in the service of power; it is empowering because it reveals

the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on to the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them. (11)

Bhabha would have us understand that it is not seeing what is private that alarms us; rather when we see the unhomely, we are seeing that our convictions about what we keep private and what we can show in public works in the service of power.

The Catcher in the Rye is an extended unhomely moment, saturated with evidence of the collapse of private and public, and a corollary questioning of gender. One scene especially captures these collapsed realms. Hotel rooms challenge the public/private divide, offering, at best, serial privacy. Hotels work diligently to remove all traces of previous guests and, to minimize their guests' awareness of other guests around them. But Holden is able to see into what is thought to be a private world where he sees

A gray-haired guy, very distinguished-looking with only his shorts on [who] took out all these women's clothes, and put them on. Real women's clothes – silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, brassière, and one of those corsets with the straps hanging down and all. Then he put on this very tight black evening dress. I swear to God. Then he started walking up and down the room, taking these very small steps, the way a woman does, and smoking a cigarette and looking at himself in the mirror. (80)

Holden's gaze, limited only by the window's frame, in breaching the man's privacy is met with the man's unabashed performance of femininity. As a 'distinguished' man, he has successfully negotiated the heterosexualizing imperative and been rewarded for it. But he uses that public cachet to secure a private place in which to become a not-man who performs his not-manness for himself as audience.

The illusion of the privacy of hotel rooms and blurring of gender is further challenged when Holden's room is invaded by Sunny, a young prostitute. A prostitute is of course a person who publicly trades her sex – deemed in Western culture to be the private property of a man (father, husband). Signaling the start of the expected sexual exchange by asking Holden for the time (she asks "Ya got a watch on ya?" -- three times), she "stood up and pulled her dress over her head" (123). Holden recoils from Sunny's blatant and business-like approach: "I certainly felt peculiar when she did that. I mean she did it so *sudden* and all" (123). In this unhomely moment, the disavowed elision between public and private become momentarily clear. When Sunny asks for the time and then strips off her dress and urges Holden "Let's go, hey," she strips away the normalizing practices that mask the power underlying sexual exchanges. But it is when Holden fails to do in private what he has paid for (have sex) and asks to do privately what could have been done in public (talk), that Sunny becomes upset. Her upset marks the disavowal and the return of normalizing scripts.

She takes her pay but returns later with Maurice, full-time elevator boy and part-time pimp, insisting that Holden owes more money. "They acted like they owned the place," pushing Holden over, and then taking seats, threatening to make public what Holden had attempted and failed

to do. Maurice asserts his place within Holden's 'private' room by removing his clothes: under his uniform coat he's wearing only a phony collar. As Maurice sits with bare chest and belly, and Sunny perches on the windowsill, Holden's reaction seems odd: "It wouldn't have been so bad, I don't think, if I hadn't had just my goddam *pajamas* on" (133). As Sunny dips into Holden's wallet, and Maurice snaps his finger on Holden's pajama front ("I won't tell you where he snapped it" (135)), and Holden bursts into tears, Holden's concern about his clothing seems a sadly inadequate disavowal of this unhomey moment.

Holden's life in the dorm challenges the division between what bodies do in public and what they do in private. Each room in his dorm houses two boys and, while sinks and toilets ("the can") are down the hallway, every two rooms is connected by a shared shower. [6] This means that any of the boys can cross into the others' room at any time. Holden will eventually take refuge in Ackley's room by way of the shower; under normal circumstances, Ackley enters Holden's room by way of the shower "about eighty-five times a day" and makes himself at home by "always" touching "your" personal belongings—a photo and even a jockstrap (27). What's more, Holden indicates that he can hear Ackley snoring in the other room, so private goings-on become public through sound bleed. [7]

More generally, actions commonly thought to demand privacy occur publicly. Carl Luce, holds conversations while using the toilet, stall door open, while educating the younger boys about matters of sexuality with a special focus on "flits." Public performances mimic private intimacies: boys flick towels at each other, and goose each other in the hallways. In contrast to these public homosocial actions, heterosexual exchanges are pushed into public spaces like the back seats of cars. Supposedly private places (the dorm rooms) thus become queer spaces that operate as single sex economies avowedly devoted to producing "splendid, clear-thinking young men" (4) to fulfill roles within the heterosexual matrix. Yet, such practices as goosing and towel-snapping in the all-male dorms, and necking and even having sex in the heterosexual terrain of the backseats of cars have become normalized as rites of passage. But *The Catcher in the Rye* demonstrates that this disavowed elision between public and private creates conditions for intense violation.

Indeed, Holden witnesses just such in intense violation. Salinger carefully delineates the permeable boundaries of the dorms to ready readers for the most disturbing unhomey moment in the novel – a moment that Holden presents as simultaneously hidden and shown.

There was this one boy at Elkton Hills, named James Castle, that wouldn't take back something he said about this very conceited boy, Phil Stabile. James Castle called him a very conceited guy, and one of Stabile's lousy friends went and squealed on him to Stabile. So Stabile, with about six other dirty bastards, went down to James Castle's room and went in and locked the goddam door and tried to make him take back what he said, but he wouldn't do it. So they started in on him. I won't even tell you what they did to him – it's too repulsive – but he *still* wouldn't take it back,

old James Castle. And you should've seen him. He was a skinny, weak-looking guy, with wrists about as big as pencils. Finally, what he did, instead of taking back what he said, he jumped out the window. (221)

The elision of the public/private boundaries in dorm rooms is reprised here when six boys make Castle's room both a public place where groups congregate and their own private place where they are able to act at will. And, like the repurposing of the back seat of Ed Banky's car as a private space where boys like Stradlater euphemistically "give the time" to girls who are not working on the clock (like Sunny who doles out intimacy at a price per unit of time), this public/private place is repurposed by those in power (the "dirty bastards") as a disciplinary space that uses violent sexuality to enforce their interests (silencing Castle). The thing that Holden deems too repulsive to tell – the thing that was violating enough to send a boy out a window – can't be blood or gore from a beating, sights which Holden readily relates. The only other time Holden refuses to tell something is when Maurice flicks him "I won't tell you *where*". As he felt this attack on his penis should remain hidden, so he feels that what was done to Castle is supposed to be hidden – so hidden that it should not even be shown through words. As Maurice's action conflated power, gender and sexuality to show the limits of Holden's power, so does this action for Castle, but in a far more resounding and definitive way. This unnameable action repudiates Castle, remanding him to the zone of the weak, the silent, those to whom things are done, the abject: Castle was raped. When Castle was "given the time," time, for him and for Holden, stopped.

In the first seven chapters of his novel, Salinger carefully established the geography of dorm rooms in boys' boarding schools. A lockable, public door for the use of the roommates, along with the weird private entrance via the most private of places – the shower – was established with no fewer than six crossings of that threshold and multiple references to sound bleed that creates a constant violation of privacy. Thus Holden's presence in a shower during James Castle's punishment is not the airtight alibi he might wish it to be.

I was in the *shower* and all, and even *I* could hear him land outside. But I just thought something fell out the window, a radio or a desk or something, not a *boy* or anything. Then I heard everybody running through the corridor and down the stairs, so I put on my bathrobe and I ran downstairs too, and there was old James Castle laying right on the stone steps and all. He was dead, and his teeth, and blood, were all over the place, and nobody would even go near him. He had on this turtleneck sweater I'd lent him. All they did with the guys that were in the room with him was expel them. They didn't even go to jail. (221)

But as the hidden contents of Castle's body become shown on "the stone steps and all" outside the dorm and the "teeth, and blood" go "all over the place," the unhomely truth about the disavowal of power through the normalizing myth of regulation of space and gender becomes

manifest. Seeing the abject body of James Castle transformed into nothing but matter, Holden can't unsee the unhomely evidence of abject bodies excluded to shore up the subjectivity of those in the livable and visible world.

“If a body meet a body”: Witnessing Excluded Abject Bodies [8]

Holden dreams up his ideal job through a misprision: as his sister Phoebe points out, whereas Holden wants to “*catch* a body” before it runs over “some crazy cliff”, Robert Burns’s poem meditated on what happens “If a body *meet* a body” coming through the rye. [9] In Burns’s poem, the speaker observes the wet and bedraggled “Jenny,” wondering if she would object to being kissed. Whereas Burns writes about entering a heterosexual economy, Holden wants to catch children’s bodies before sexuality is even an issue. The notion that Holden is trying to protect children from a fall from innocence into sexual knowledge is almost a critical commonplace. [10] What has not been examined however, is the possibility that, rather than forestalling their entry into sexual knowledge *per se*, Holden wants to ward off the necessary abjection and repudiation of some that will enable the entry into the heterosexual matrix of others.

This conundrum is the novel’s heart. If James Castle had assented to his spot in the excluded abject, he would have been alive, but his body still would have been no more than matter to those whose subjectivity was formed by repudiating him. In that case, Holden would never have seen the traumatizing scenes that in turn enable him to see that structures of power are normalized through regulations on gender and space, and enforced through violence. Because Holden’s vision was enabled by trauma, it registers as a bad thing. But this awareness is productive -- it is what Judith Butler calls an “enabling disruption:” unlike many around him, Holden can see “what has been foreclosed or banished from the proper domain of ‘sex’ – where that domain is secured through a heterosexualizing imperative” (Butler 23). In his extended unhomely moment, he is able to see the disavowed, repudiated and forgotten evidence of the foundational exclusion that secures subjectivity within the structures of power. He is able to see the abject.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that the “naturally occurring category of ‘sex’ was no less discursive than gender” (2). But, if one fails to realize that “sex” is itself produced through discourse, one might then suppose that it is the natural ground of identity and fail to understand the foundational role “sex” plays in considering whether one will even be considered as fully human. As she argues, “‘Sex’ is ... not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body of life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (2). Those who fail to conform to the heterosexualizing imperative are beyond what can be understood in the culture.

Yet, such an outside is needed to constitute the cultural subject, and if there is not an outside, one will be produced. That which is excluded is the abject that makes the heterosexual

matrix, and the social structures for which it provides a foundation, possible. She explains,

The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. [...] The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation (3).

Putting this another way, Butler states, “The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of ‘sex’, and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge” (3). For one to be a subject, one must articulate, and then exclude and repudiate an abject.

At first glance, this formulation appears to grant all agency and power to the subject. Yet, Butler claims that one can *choose* the abject; in fact, the ground for social change lies in the choice to opt out of the heterosexualizing imperative. She states, “it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. Such collective disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern” (4). [11] Thus Butler argues what is at stake in recognizing the existence and operation of abjection is humanness itself. If bodies that conform to regulatory ideals of heterosexuality register as humans – as bodies that matter – and bodies that do not conform are understood as nonhuman – as bodies that do *not* matter because they *are* matter – then recognition of those bodies that are matter is a revolutionary act.

Those bodies that *are* matter – the abject inhabitants of the unlivable zone – both disgust and fascinate Holden. Throughout the novel, as his own body progressively betrays him, he reflects upon correlations between appearance and inner character and upon the terrible costs that betrayals can exact from other bodies. Holden’s deteriorating health coheres with his “unlivable” surroundings. Holden is increasingly surprised by bodily functions that he believes he should be able to control. His memory fails him. He cannot laugh without feeling the need to vomit (255, 260, 262). He cries (134, 198, 233). He has diarrhea and feels he is going to pass out (265). Similarly, Holden’s world is resoundingly “unlivable:” he is surrounded by the offal, the rejected and the gross. The word “puke” is nearly as endemic in this novel as the word “phony.” In various nightclubs, the phoniness he sees makes him want to puke. He rides in “vomity” smelling cabs (106), and sits in “vomity-looking” chairs in hotel lobbies (99). His hotel lobby smells like “fifty million dead cigars” (118). Walking through Central Park, “the sun wasn’t out, and there didn’t look like there was anything in the park except dog crap and globs of spit and cigar butts from old men, and the benches all looked like they’d be wet if you sat on them” (153). Walls in schools and

museums all bear scrawled instructions to “fuck you.” [12]

When he visits Mr. Spencer, Holden recounts the embodied details of illness: “there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops.” While he is “not too crazy about sick people, anyway,” he observes that “what made it even more depressing, old Spencer had on this very sad, ratty old bathrobe.” This is upsetting because: “I don’t much like to see old guys in their pajamas and bathrobes anyways. Their bumpy old chests are always showing. And their legs. Old guys’ legs, at beaches and places, always look so white and unhairly” (11). What’s more, as Holden watches, Mr. Spencer picks his nose because “I guess he thought it was all right to do because it was only me in the room” (14). Mr. Spencer’s non-normative embodiment means that he is supposed to be excluded from sight. Instead he is acting as if it is alright to flaunt his abjection in Holden’s presence.

Holden evaluates Robert Ackley, his suitemate, similarly. Per Holden’s description, Ackley seems to be an unpopular boy because of his non-normative body. He is a “very, very tall, round-shouldered” guy “with lousy teeth ...They always looked mossy and awful, and he damn near made you sick if you saw him in the dining room with his mouth full of mashed potatoes and peas.” He also has “a lot of pimples. Not just on his forehead or chin, like most guys, but all over his whole face” (26). In Holden’s room, Ackley trims his nails and lets the trimmings fall where they will, flouting norms. Ackley is a body, and one that is excluded and repudiated by most of the boys at the school. In an almost literal realization of the way that the abject body’s exclusion is required for the subject’s intelligibility, Ackley lurks, appearing through the shower when popular boy Stradlater leaves, disappearing when he returns.

Mr. Spencer and Ackley apparently accept their place in the unlivable zone of the abject and stay out of sight. Not so Selma Thurmer, the headmaster’s daughter, who takes buses to town and goes to every Pencey football game, unabashedly moving through the public sphere. Selma, with her “big nose and her nails [that] were all bitten down and bleedy-looking and [wearing] those damn falsies that point all over the place,” isn’t “exactly the type that drove you mad with desire” (5). Neither is Mr. Spencer: Mrs. Spencer calls her husband “a perfect – I don’t know what” (9). This expression of long-married frustration casts Spencer as unintelligible even to the wife that legitimates his heterosexuality. Holden ventures that if Ackley “ever gets married his own wife will probably call him Ackley” (26) and so will exclude him from the intimacy of a nickname—or even a first name. All three evoke revulsion rather than attraction and are not only excluded from the heterosexualizing imperative; because they are also part of an array of non-normative bodies -- the ugly, the ill, the fat, and the corny-looking – they are not fully recognized in Holden’s world as human.

In contrast are the bodies that matter, those that thrive on recognition and public status. For Holden, the conceited and the phony are those who celebrate their own bodies’ beauty. While

there are plenty such folks in Holden's world, his roommate Ward Stradlater is an especially powerful realization of the body that matters. Stradlater is "conceited." "He thought he was the handsomest guy in the Western Hemisphere," Holden says, but "he was mostly a Year Book kind of handsome guy" (36) -- the kind who looks handsome on paper or in public, who parents point to and remark upon. There are tons of better-looking boys, he argues, who just don't look good in pictures. Stradlater, however, is "in love with himself" and will stand contentedly stroking his own chest and belly. He doesn't really listen except when something sexy is being said (42). He's hard to anger because he is "too conceited" (44). And he is a careful rule follower (54).

However, according to Holden, Stradlater's appealing public appearance disavows a darker inner self: Stradlater's "crumby razor" proves him to be a "secret slob. He always looked all right, Stradlater, but for instance, you should've seen the razor he shaved himself with. It was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap" (35). As he leaves the razor uncared for as long as it makes him look good, so Stradlater treats the people around him as tools. When Stradlater determines that Holden has no date, he borrows his jacket, asks him to write an essay for him, and then tells him how to write it. Such guys are "crazy about themselves, [so] they think *you're* crazy about them, too, and that you're just dying to do them a favor" (36). Stradlater is used to being taken care of, and getting what he wants.

What's more, Stradlater is a "very sexy bastard" who only considers what he wants from a girl. Whereas "Most guys at Pencey just *talked* about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time....old Stradlater really did it. I was personally acquainted with at least two girls he gave the time to" (63). Holden explains his technique: "he'd start snowing his date in this very quiet, *sincere* voice." When his date said no, he "kept snowing her in this Abraham Lincoln, sincere voice, and finally there'd be this terrific silence in the back of the car" (64) as Stradlater secured his place in the heterosexual matrix. Like Holden and the razor, girls are there for Stradlater's use. Although such exclusions are never final and must be reiterated again and again, it is clear that Stradlater is confidently taking his place in a world built on the exclusion and abjection of others. He matters. Others are matter. Holden observes, simply, "He was a very strong guy. I'm a very weak guy" (39).

Holden is especially alarmed that Stradlater is no anomaly. Having been to "about four" schools like Pencey, Holden reports that every school has conceited boys and weaklings and rites of hostile, even violent, struggle to determine who matters and who will be relegated to the unlivable zone of the abject, destined to do others' will whether they accede to their place or not. Boys brag about sexual escapades. Boys hide their own bad luggage and pretend their roommate's good luggage is theirs. Most important the weak boys keep their mouths shut about how they feel about the strong boys.

Holden reports Ackley's avowed dislike of Stradlater, and, given how much Holden seems to dislike Ackley, he works very hard to keep peace between the two boys. He even spins wholly unrealistic hypothetical situations to excuse Stradlater's behavior. For instance, Holden argues that, despite a brutal comment about Ackley's teeth, Stradlater is "generous", and "at least a pretty friendly guy" (32, 34) -- the kind of guy who will give another boy his tie just because that other boy said he liked it. Extrapolating on previous experience, Holden tries to keep Ackley from striking out at Stradlater because Ackley is bound to lose. And losing, as seen in the case of James Castle, means death.

Holden has learned that unspoken rules of behavior accepted as normal are unilateral and exclusionary and, while they may protect some, they definitely injure others. Mr. Spencer cautions Holden, "Life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules," upon which Holden skeptically reflects, "Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right -- I'll admit that. But if you get on the *other* side, where there aren't any hotshots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game" (12). Despite objections, Holden demonstrates that he knows these rules -- and can play the game if he wants to. The game has as its prize recognition of the player's heterosexuality. At Ernie's, a nightclub, he is introduced to a girl's Navy officer date. "His name was Commander Blop or something. He was one of those guys that think they're being a pansy if they don't break around forty of your fingers when they shake hands with you. God I hate that stuff" (113). The handshake is part of a system of behaviors through which masculinity is cited and reiterated and that performance can never be final. One can never be manly enough or finally manly. What is especially noteworthy though is Holden's suggestion that this performance is injurious to others -- one proves one is a man by excluding homosexuality, and one can only do that by causing harm to others' bodies.

Holden does not like this behavior, but his dissidence is ambivalent. Commenting that Ackley "brought out the old sadist" in him, he admits to being "pretty sadistic with him quite often," although he stops (29). Similarly, claiming that he is "probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw," Holden admits he can "see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each others' face" (120). Yet even as he admits the appeal of treating another's body as an object, Holden's use of the words "both" and "each other's face" reveals that he is imagining an exchange rather than a unilateral action. But still, "I don't *like* the idea. It stinks if you analyze it. I think if you really like a girl ... then you're supposed to like her face, and ... you ought to be careful about doing crumby stuff to it, like squirting water all over it" (120). In other words, he believes that one's pleasure should not come from debasing or disrespecting another. Instead, albeit fumblingly, he attempts to respect and even protect girls: "The trouble is, I get to feeling sorry for them. I mean most girls are so dumb and all. After you neck them for a while, you can really *watch* them losing

their brains. You take a girl when she really gets passionate, she just hasn't any brains. I don't know. They tell me to stop, so I stop. I always wish I *hadn't*, after I take them home, but I keep doing it anyway" (121). Phrasing it apologetically, as if it were a failing, Holden reports that he continues to listen to girls' wishes, even though he knows he could get away with ignoring them.

The code within which Holden's cohort operates suggests that these girls are always already bodies. Holden shares a fantasy derived from a "corny" book that says "that a woman's body is like a violin and all, and that it takes a terrific musician to play it right" (121). The man is the agent, and the woman is object. Holden observes that becoming "Caulfield and his Magic Violin, boy" is "corny, but it isn't *too* corny" (121). Yet, when the opportunity arises, Holden ends up feeling he must stop. Either he has "a helluva lot of trouble just *finding* what I'm looking for, for God's sake, if you know what I mean" (122), or, as when Sunny the prostitute unceremoniously pulls her dress over her head, "Sexy was about the *last* thing" he feels (123). Out of synch with social expectations for masculinity, Holden finds himself unable take the expected action. [14]

Similarly, he claims he is unable to fight the way that men are supposed to. As he comments, "I am one of these very yellow guys" (115). There are times when "I'd feel I ought to sock a guy in the jaw or something – break his goddam jaw. Only I wouldn't have the guts to do it" (116). Instead "I might say something very cutting and snotty, to rile him up" or, he comments, "I'd rather push a guy out the window" (117). Holden is clearly aware of a code he is supposed to follow if he is truly to be a man among men. Yet, in sexuality as in fighting he fails to fit the norm.

Holden understands, however, that it is imperative to keep up the front. Thus, when taking leave of Commander Blop and Lillian at Ernie's, "The Navy guy and I told each other we were glad t've met each other" as one must do even when "I'm not at *all* glad" (114). This, too, is part of what is expected, or even more: "If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though" (114). Following the norms that govern the heterosexualizing imperative is a matter of life and death.

"Maybe they're all secretly terrific whistlers": Cherishing Bodies

Holden has figured out a way to stay alive, a phrase that takes on added weight when James Castle's fate is considered. But whereas others – the hot-shots, the phonies and the conceited boys – consider such demonstrations of their masculinity to be just part of "the game" and don't even notice the people whose fingers are broken along the way, Holden is torn by his awareness that the bodies of others are more than matter. Rather, Holden's gaze detects many bodies that fail to fit prescribed roles – including his own – and wants to make a space for those bodies to be valued.

On the one hand, he has himself been that person who excludes and injures others. While he rails against "dirty little goddam cliques" (170), he is eager enough to join one, even at his third school: at Pencey, "they had this goddam secret fraternity that I was too yellow not to

join” (217). Ackley really wanted to join “but they wouldn’t let him. Just because he was boring and pimply” (217-18). Similarly, he may have been one of the group that clustered around Phil Stabile, perhaps telling Stabile what James Castle said, or helping to identify Castle by means of a sweater (equivalent of a Judas kiss?), or guarding the shower to keep the boy in, or, as he expresses somewhat randomly about his cowardice, pushing a guy that he couldn’t look in the face out a window.

On the other hand, he is eager to avoid binary thinking that would force him to wholly like or wholly hate an individual. Thus he reasons that conceited boys like Stradlater may end up giving you their tie. Boys like Carl Luce may be “flits” but may also be “pretty intelligent” guys (186). Holden is similarly tolerant of the bores because “They don’t hurt anybody, and maybe they’re secretly terrific whistlers or something” (161). Holden hopes that something hidden will redeem objectionable people – something that could be wasted or lost without others even knowing it was there.

There are, after all, all sorts of good things that Holden believes should not be public. Really good music should be played “in the goddam closet” (110). To enjoy plays, he indicates that he has “to read that stuff by myself” (153). His brother D.B.’s movie work may be prostitution, but his stories were not, and he lauds as the best a story about a boy who won’t show anyone his goldfish. The ducks that have disappeared from Central Park lagoon mean more to Holden than the fish that stay. And Allie, hidden under the dirt in the cemetery is more valuable than anyone that he knows. In Holden’s experience, the things one cannot see are to be treasured.

These secretly great whistlers are certainly better than traitors for whom Holden desperately wants redemption. Holden declares those who cause others’ deaths to be the worst of the worst (145), yet the text is peppered with references to traitors who end up forgiven. There is Judas, who despite betrayal and suicide, Holden argues, will end up forgiven by Jesus. Phoebe is thrilled by the chance to play Benedict Arnold in her school’s Christmas play (210). There is the mercy killing Doctor, the subject of the film Phoebe saw earlier that day. In Holden’s view none of these figures deserve to be excluded; all deserve redemption.

But most treasured for Holden are those who fail to fit into a ready-made category – those who are resistant or queer. For instance, there is the boy whose speech is full of digressions, and Mr. Antolini, the only person who would go near James Castle’s body, who both resist the pressure to adhere to a norm. Where gorgeous Sally is a pain in the ass, Jane is beloved not for her standard beauty but because she is “muckle-mouthed. I mean when she was talking and she got excited about something, her mouth sort of went in about fifty directions, her lips and all... and she never really closed it all the way, her mouth” (100). Most often, of course, those who are celebrated are children. Children “kill me” he says, like the little girl with the skate key and the little boy who unselfconsciously buttons up his pants in the museum (262). And then there’s Phoebe

who has all the intelligence of an adult but who is still a child.

Perhaps the most pointed model of the failure to fit, though, is the little boy who gives the book its title and Holden his dream. This unnamed boy makes Holden feel better when he sees him because he “was walking in the street, instead of on the sidewalk, but right next to the curb. He was making out like he was walking a very straight line the way kids do, and the whole time he kept singing and humming” (150). As “cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place,” and his parents paid no attention, he keeps walking next to the curb, singing ““If a body catch a body coming through the rye”” (150). He conforms to no model, yet is never injured and he sings the anthem of care for others that Holden grabs onto. In plaintive fulfillment of the question he had posed to Sally, “I mean did you ever get scared everything was going to go lousy unless you did something?” (169), Holden decides that he wants to be that person who catches the bodies of children, unaware of the cliff beyond and sets them back to their games. Of course, he has gotten the words wrong. But perhaps even the desire to help others – to rescue them from the exclusion of the abject – has merit.

He realizes even before he gets into therapy that this ability to see and protect those in the abject is untenable. Society says you have to let those people go. They will either succeed when they “grab for the gold ring” (273), and matter, or they will fall and become matter. But for a brief time, Holden is able to see them and to resist repudiating them. It is unlikely that Holden will ultimately resist the demands of normalization; but he has nonetheless shown readers a glimpse of the array of individuals who are heterosexuality’s abject and the terrible cost of their exclusion.

Thus, ultimately, while *The Catcher in the Rye* may be commonly understood an indictment of a world that damages the innocent and pure, just as it has injured Holden, the novel also shows that injury has afforded Holden a privileged view of his world. This view enables an unhomey moment in which Holden allows readers to see the matrix of normative control that promises those who are willing to enact vicious repudiation of the abject that they *will* matter. They will become hot-shots who drive Cadillacs. All they have to do is push a guy out a window.

Endnotes

[1] The quoted phrase is a commonplace for Holden, who, for example, can't "get [Jane Gallagher] off my brain (99), and "can't stop thinking about" nuns he had met (148), or about Mr. Antolini (254) among others.

[2] Several studies explore Salinger's war experience with US Military counterintelligence, suggesting that trauma influences Salinger's post-war work. Slawenski especially focuses on this connection, noting for instance that Salinger was stationed in a zone packed with concentration camps including Dachau, and, as a counterintelligence officer, he would have been the first to enter when they were liberated. Margaret Salinger's memoir reports that Salinger helped to liberate more than one camp, as does Thomas Beller's study, *J.D. Salinger: The Escape Artist*.

[3] In this scene, he insists on his fuzzy memory multiple times: "I don't even remember where I was sitting when he came in...I swear I can't remember" (52); "This next part I don't remember so hot" (56); "I can't hardly even remember" (57).

[4] Salinger 19.

[5] In applying this term to Holden I may be pushing the limit of what Bhabha would allow. He explains in *The Location of Culture* that this concept is "paradigmatic" for "colonial and post-colonial condition" but that it is possible to "hear" the unhomely in other fictions – those that "negotiate power of cultural difference in a range of trans-historical sites" (9).

[6] Thomas Beller makes the case not only that Pencey is modeled after the Valley Forge Military Academy, where J.D. Salinger was a student, but also "in the novel and in real life, the dorm rooms were separated by showers, and privacy in the rooms was minimal" (33).

[7] Holden makes reference to both visible light (60) and audible noise through the curtains (47, 51, 59, 65). The frequency of these references underscores how very public the privacy of these dorm rooms is.

[8] Salinger 224.

[9] Burns's poem actually reads "Gin a body meet a body...". "Gin" can be translated as "if." However it is interesting to consider its alternate translation as "should" which ambiguously allows that such a meeting may be improper; 'if' carries only the sense of conditional or happenstance rather than the possibility that such a meeting may be wrong.

[10] While the critical terrain on *Catcher in the Rye* is complex and rich, a focus on the novel as a study of loss of innocence is eminently teachable and has dominated high school classroom interpretations of the novel for several generations. The 200 or more college freshman with whom I have studied this novel all come to me pre-packaged with the conviction that Holden's red hat is the symbol of his fall, and the cliff is adult sexuality. See the dozens of internet results that promise free or cheap essays on this topic as some measure of how commonplace this notion is.

[11] While I do not believe that Salinger's argument is especially feminist or queer, I do believe that Salinger is inviting readers to imagine that one may *choose* to be excluded – to disidentify.

[12] Here I am thinking more of Kristeva's sense of the abject than Butler's. For Kristeva, the concept of the abject signifies things that are disgusting or horrifying – bodily excretions, scrofula, corpses, maggots, etc. My understanding of this concept also relies upon Elizabeth Grosz's explication of Kristeva's theory in "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. Of course, Butler's re-thinking of the abject and the unliveable zone they are relegated to is based upon Kristeva's theory.

[13] Privitera asserts that "Holden is embraced by readers not as a disturbed young man who does not fit into the world but as a tragic hero who dares to flout society's rules" (204). Yet, the pattern of the novel suggests that Holden does not so dare; he is instead pretty fearful of his failure to fit.

[14] In fact, he has constructed a set of “sex rules” for himself even though he admits “I always break them right away” (82).

[15] “The Secret Goldfish” is mentioned in Holden’s description of his family (2).

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