

The *Bildungsroman* and the Theme of Authenticity in Jane Austen's *Emma* and J.D. Salinger's  
*The Catcher in the Rye*

Jaclyn M. Sanford

A Thesis in the Field of English  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

March 2019

Copyright 2019 Jaclyn M. Sanford

## Abstract

This analysis of the *bildungsroman* as a literary form explores the theme of authenticity and the ways in which it engages with coming-of-age narratives in Jane Austen's 1815 novel *Emma* and J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. In these works, Austen's titular heroine and Salinger's Holden Caulfield explore what it means to live authentically as they approach the transition from youth into young adulthood. In their respective temporal and social settings, Emma and Holden precariously navigate the trials of learning to truly know oneself amidst the challenges of convention. Ultimately, the unique relationship of these complex protagonists and the theme of authenticity in Austen's and Salinger's coming-of-age narratives reveal that the *bildungsroman* is fundamentally a portrait of a search to discover what it means to live authentically.

Though their works are temporally divided by nearly a century, Austen and Salinger demonstrate how the coming of age novel is essentially a discovery of one's own authenticity amid the challenges of adapting to the conventions of society as an adult. The complexities of Emma's and Holden's unique characters reveal how issues of gender, class, and privilege affect the evolution towards adulthood. These texts demonstrate that it is society's perception of and traditional approaches to gender roles that complicate the maturation process. In addition, Austen's and Salinger's narratives illustrate how issues of class and privilege complicate the ways in which a protagonist engages with society as he or she approaches adulthood. Furthermore, Austen and

Salinger demonstrate their nuanced utilizations of subtle symbolism and irony in their respective manipulations of text.

## Author's Biographical Sketch

Jaclyn M. Sanford graduated *cum laude* from Harvard University in May 2014 with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree in English, Extension Studies; minor in psychology. She was a recipient of the Dean's List award in 2012 and 2014. In 2012, she also achieved an Associate in Arts degree with a concentration in humanities from Harvard University, Extension Studies. She looks forward to receiving her Master of Liberal Arts degree in English in May 2019.

From 2008 to 2018, while pursuing her ALB and ALM degrees from Harvard University, Ms. Sanford performed as a member of Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre's professional ballet company in Cambridge, MA. During her tenure as Company Member, she performed featured soloist roles of original neoclassical choreography by Jose Mateo at such Greater Boston performance venues as The Sanctuary Theatre in Harvard Square, The Cutler Majestic Theatre in Downtown Boston's Theatre District, and the historic Strand Theatre in Dorchester, MA. In 2018, she appeared in Columbia Pictures and Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* as a Principal Dancer, scheduled for theatrical release in December 2019.

Ms. Sanford is a faculty member of several Greater Boston and South Shore dance studios where she instructs diverse populations of recreational and pre-professional students in classical ballet

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to those who have supported me throughout my academic endeavors at Harvard University and especially during the composition of this thesis. Enormous thanks are due to my research advisor, Talaya Delaney, for her guidance. I sincerely thank William Sanford Jr. and Holly Sanford Rojas for their caring encouragement. I would also like to thank Charlotte Guglielmi for her reliable and faithful support. I extend familial gratitude to Stephen James Behan for his unconditional friendship and unwavering sense of humor.

I also must acknowledge those who have made my artistic endeavors during my academic career possible, chiefly among them Jose Mateo and Scott Fraser. I am grateful to them and the dancers of Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre for their community and creativity.

I am immensely grateful to Dean Michael Shinagel for his direction in this research endeavor, his generous guidance, and for sharing his luminous understanding of the written word throughout my graduate education. Dean Shinagel's professional endeavors in continuing education at Harvard have made the design of my academic career possible. I am immeasurably grateful for his instruction in life and letters.

Lastly, deepest gratitude is given to my parents, William and Eleanor Sanford, for whom I credit the possibility of my success in all endeavors, academic and artistic.

## Table of Contents

Author's Biographical Sketch.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Chapter I.....	1
Chapter II.....	16
Chapter III.....	30
Chapter IV.....	40
Chapter V.....	50
Chapter VI.....	65
Bibliography.....	76



## Chapter I

“To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart was the first endeavor”

In the preface to his poetic text *Endymion*, John Keats highlights the development of imagination as a fundamental element of maturation, as noted by Jerome Buckley in his work, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Keats refers to the introspective, emotional states of an individual’s life rather than physicality, in order to define the period of life known as coming-of-age. He commences his approach to coming-of-age by stating that “the imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy” (Keats 1). Yet, in this excerpt, Keats does not provide a definition for what he deems to be ‘healthy’ with regards to an imagination. Emma Woodhouse and Holden Caulfield are certainly appropriate case studies for readers to study through the lens of Keats’s view of development. Holden’s first-person narrative provides insight into his emotionally problematic adolescence. Furthermore, while readers receive Emma’s narrative from the voice of an unnamed narrator, the narrative content primarily focuses on Emma’s psychological experience. Thus, Keats’s labeling of coming-of-age as a period of life defined by the scope of one’s imagination is apt.

This brief excerpt by Keats also accurately describes the sense of transition, ambiguity, and personal uncertainty seen in the narrative paths of both Emma and Holden. After making note of the two imaginative periods of one’s life, Keats refers to “a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted” (Keats 1). Keats’s choice of descriptive phrases here is remarkably insightful. ‘Ferment’ indicates a sense of gradual, potent

growth by organic processes. Furthermore, both Emma and Holden demonstrate the qualities of ‘undecided’ and ‘uncertain,’ in that their final outcomes are unclear and undetermined until their respective narratives’ conclusions. Lastly, his description of ambition as ‘thick-sighted’ conjures a strong, yet somewhat blinded desire. Emma’s wishes to manufacture the social standing of her peers—and eventually herself—are mirrored in her own fledgling views. Holden’s ambitions rapidly reproduce and increase in urgency, his vision increasingly blurred by his psychological distress.

Thus, Keats accurately describes this formative stage of life as a period wherein one’s desires are marked with intensity, the fundamental nature of one’s character is undergoing gradual development, and the resolution of one’s conflicts is uncertain. Having articulated a vivid description of the precarious nature of this phase of being, readers may be compelled to question how definition and focus is gained in the transition to adulthood. In a coming-of-age narrative, the protagonist in development endeavors to achieve a sense of resolution in order to bridge the dubious, increasingly problematic gap between youth and maturity. Hence, it is critical to identify what is needed in order to reach this resolution, what is lacking in the protagonist’s lives, and what barriers to happiness and clarity of mind impede development.

Emma and Holden both exist in varying narrative environments, marked by differences in time, gender, environment, as well as societal conditions. Yet, they share more qualities and characteristic concerns than readers may anticipate. While literary criticism may appropriately examine these cultural conditions, ultimately close reading reveals that coming-of-age is a fundamentally internal progression of the individual. Such external conditions as environmental, societal, and temporal characteristics of one’s

narrative will strongly influence the protagonist's journey. Yet, Emma and Holden, respectively, demonstrate a critical, introspective, defining determinant to coming-of-age that is the theme of authenticity.

Ultimately and uniquely, both Emma and Holden—in their respective ways—demonstrate that literary coming-of-age is best understood as a young individual's search for a way to live authentically. The Oxford English Dictionary defines authenticity as “the quality of being authentic” (OED.com 1); authentic is defined as “of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine” (OED.com 2). The OED definition for the authentic is most aptly understood by its secondary description of ‘genuine,’ which implies a definitive nature of truthfulness and sincerity. The element of origin included in the OED's terminology suggests a lack of guile or contrivance in the impulses for one's behavior—a condition that is undoubtedly demonstrated in both Emma and Holden's respective narratives. Furthermore, the OED's inclusion of originality in its definition indicates that evident originality and uniqueness is needed in order for an individual to qualitatively achieve authenticity.

The effort to understand and apply authenticity in one's developmental stage of life can be succinctly defined by the quality of truthfulness—a character achieves a narrative coming-of-age when he or she adopts truthfulness in their actions, decisions, impulses, and overall presentation of the self. William Shakespeare gives voice to this fundamental element of coming-of-age in Act I of his drama *Hamlet*. In this scene, the somewhat foolish yet well-intentioned Polonius instructs his son Laertes as he prepares to depart his homeland: “this above all: to thine own self be true/And it must follow, as the night the day/Thou canst not then be false to any man” (Act I scene iii). By stating that

truthfulness to one's self should be prioritized 'above all' demonstrates its importance and therefore its necessity to the genuine formation of the self. Polonius expands this sentiment to prohibit the prospect of being 'false' to another individual. He does not explicitly provide a definition for the action of being, yet one may assume that falsehood is effectively disapproved of in thought as well as action.

In order to apply Polonius' direction to Emma and Holden, one may thus summarize the central challenge of their narrative endeavors as an effort to transition and evolve into adulthood with not only maturity but also truthfulness and, thus, authenticity. While any individual may be faced with the inevitability of physical development, the concept of coming-of-age is differentiated by an effort to adopt authentic approaches to living that will allow an individual to embark into adulthood with truthful, sincere behavior. With regards to Emma and Holden, while they may simply transition into physical, societal adulthood, their narratives adopt urgency, importance, and challenge with the incorporation of authenticity. Hence, the theme of authenticity allows a narrative to not simply exist as a communication of events, but rather as a text that instructs its protagonist, informs its readers, and expresses its importance in literature.

As a literary form of fiction, the *bildungsroman* provides readers with accounts of the ways in which protagonists navigate the period of maturation wherein they transition from youth to adulthood. A challenge has arisen among literary critics to provide specifically and efficiently a definition for the *bildungsroman* as a genre of fiction. In acknowledgement of the definition's difficulty, Buckley offers a list of "several possible synonyms: the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life novel" (Buckley viii). These synonymic labels aid in readers'

comprehension of the concept of development as it pertains to coming-of-age. For instance, the terms ‘education’ and ‘apprenticeship’ infer a progression of knowledge and skill. ‘Initiation’ conjures a sense of commencement and entrance into a new phase, suggesting the newness of a stage of life.

Buckley goes on to further analyze this list of terms in an effort to gain precision in defining the *bildungsroman*. He claims, “the first two of these [the novel of youth and the novel of education] are perhaps the least unsatisfactory alternatives, if ‘youth’ can imply not so much a state of being as a process of movement and adjustment from childhood to early maturity” (Buckley viii). Particular emphasis should be applied to his use of the phrase ‘process of movement,’ as it communicates the notion of change itself as the fundamental element of one’s youth. In attempting to comprehend youth, one should therefore focus on the process of change, thus making the theme an active evolution rather than a static timeframe. Buckley continues, asserting, “‘education’ can be understood as a growing up and gradual self-discovery in the school-without-walls that is experience” (Buckley viii). Similarly to his analysis of the concept of youth, Buckley’s attention to the notion of movement is evident in his inclusion of the phrases ‘growing up’ and ‘gradual,’ indicating a sense of progression.

Buckley’s intricate analysis of these terms also critically includes the importance of one’s experiences in fully experiencing and understanding one’s formative period of life as it is portrayed in the *bildungsroman*. He refers to ‘experience’ as a ‘school-without-walls,’ implying that actions, decisions, and life events can provide a variety of learning opportunities outside of the confines of a traditional education experience. A lack of ‘walls’ or boundaries also suggests the absence of temporal barriers, marking

development as an ongoing process. Also notable is his inclusion of the phrase ‘self-discovery,’ suggesting the coming-of-age text will narrate the crucial process of exploring oneself. The word ‘discovery’ further indicates an effort and sense of activity from the individual, again emphasizing such concepts as movement and progression in this consequently active period of life.

Additionally, in his annotations, Buckley delves further into a nuanced understanding of the *bildungsroman*. He references a quotation from author G.B. Tennyson wherein the *bildungsroman* is differentiated from simply a novel of development to a more specific definition, identifying the literary form as “the novel of harmonious cultivation of the whole personality” (Buckley 287). This understanding of the novel of development accurately indicates that one’s formative experiences and moments of development work in tandem to evolve the individual’s character as a whole. Yet, Tennyson’s definition curiously describes the experience as ‘harmonious,’ which would imply a lack of friction or discord in the process. Rather, the coming-of-age process is often fraught with conflict, as evidenced by Austen’s and Salinger’s texts.

Certainly, the concept of the harmonious in coming-of-age narratives serves as a point of contention in analyzing the *bildungsroman*. Buckley commences the Preface of his text with a quotation from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, wherein he states, “and ‘Happy season of youth’ exclaimed Goethe, with enthusiasm and a little irony, ‘happy times of the first wish of love!’” (Buckley vi). Buckley subtly questions the romantic joy to which Goethe refers in his description of the nature of youth with his mention of ‘a little irony.’ The ironic nature of this view of adolescence is exposed in Buckley’s responding sentiment from another literary voice, stating “more than a century later

Somerset Maugham countered the opinion with a sober cynicism: ‘It is an illusion that youth is happy, an illusion of those who have lost it’” (Buckley vii). Thus, Maugham asserts that the happiness that one observes in youth is merely nostalgia. He classifies Maugham’s interpretation as cynical, arguably indicating that perhaps neither description of one’s youth is fully accurate. Both extremities of emotion are necessary to the comprehensive evolution of the self as it is portrayed in literature.

Buckley’s text continues to delve into the genesis of the *bildungsroman* as a literary genre by examining its origins in form and style. He identifies the previously quoted Goethe as having produced the text that “has established itself in literary history as the prototype of the *bildungsroman*” (Buckley 12) with his novel, *Wilhelm Meister*. He then goes on to describe the resulting variations on the Germanic genesis of the form, including, “the *Entwicklungsroman*, a chronicle of a young man’s general growth rather than his specific quest for self-culture; the *Erziehungsroman*, with an emphasis on the youth’s training and formal education; and the *Kunstlerroman*, a tale of the orientation of an artist” (Buckley 13). Thus, readers are able to differentiate among *bildungsromanen* that focus on the development of an individual’s personal character, professional or academic progress, or artistic pursuits.

Buckley also articulates the ways in which the genre diversified as the *bildungsroman* expanded from German literature into English narratives. He mainly differentiates between the German origin and its English derivative by noting a broader literary form, less defined by categorization. He states, “in England these categories have been far less rigid; the pursuit of the self-culture has hardly ever been so deliberate or programmatic, and the process of education, though schooling may play a major role in

it, has seldom begun or ended with prescribed courses of study” (Buckley 13). Whereas the German foundation of the *bildungsroman* may be clearly assigned to sub-genres, English authors expanded the form to include narratives that may most closely be identified as novels of development or youth. Arguably, the expansion of the narrative form to its English derivative echoes the process of coming-of-age itself. As demonstrated in the coming-of-age novel, the maturation process is more often diversely colored with experience and tension than a clear organization of progress.

Buckley does identify common patterns that appear in the English *bildungsroman*. As a result, a sense of structure remains in the more broadly defined English form of the genre. Buckley describes how the protagonist of an English *bildungsroman* is often depicted as growing up “in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination” (Buckley 17). Here, an initial conflict is established, in that the protagonist must learn to balance his or her instinctual thoughts and feelings with the constraints of society. The inclusion of the descriptor ‘provincial’ further indicates that the individual’s place of origin may typically be depicted as insular or narrow-minded in its culture, thus highlighting the contrast between a freely thinking self in development. Additional sources of conflict or tension are identified, including the protagonist’s family, early education, as well as the repression or innocence of one’s original environment.

In the traditional English *bildungsroman*, as described by Buckley, the catalyst for active development occurs when the protagonist leaves his or her home environment for an urban setting. Buckley notes that “there his real ‘education’ begins, not only his preparation for a career but also—and often more importantly—his direct experience of

urban life” (Buckley 17). An urban setting will serve a source of opportunities for growth based on the diversity of experience and characters, particularly in contrast with the provincial setting from which the protagonist may originate. The geographical or physical change will prove necessary to the narrative in that one cannot achieve the radical growth needed for the transition to adulthood while remaining in a stagnant setting. The striking novelty of the urban setting thus signifies the theme of change as a fundamental factor to the coming-of-age narrative.

Buckley identifies an additional element essential to the protagonist’s growth—the influence of a romantic relationship so as to demonstrate emotional, physical, and sexual maturation. He assigns this component of the coming-of-age narrative to the category of urban experiences, indicating that the change in setting will also provide a change in characters. Buckley specifically refers to “as least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values” (Buckley 17). The theme of change is further evidenced by his inclusion of the term ‘reappraise,’ in that such external changes as setting and peers will result in an internal transformation, as well. The development and solidification of one’s personal value system is therefore identified as a central component coming-of-age, as illustrated through narrative events.

These formative experiences will thus cumulatively result in a breaking down of youthful impressions and values in order to recompose the character as an adult—a process that may not be entirely self-determined. The protagonist cannot fully move into a new phase of life without rejecting what he or she had previously accepted about him or herself. Buckley describes this vital aspect of maturation, noting that “by the time he has

decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity” (Buckley 18). The ‘debasement’ nature of a character’s initial sexual encounters is reflected in the ‘painful’ quality of one’s self-reflection, demonstrating that discomfort is needed in order to grow. This observation certainly counters Goethe’s impression of youth as a ‘happy season.’

Furthermore, Buckley makes a notable word choice in his description with ‘accommodation,’ which suggests an element of submission inherent in the protagonist’s journey. Thus far, close reading of critical impressions of the traditional coming-of-age narrative has emphasized the formation of a personal, internal value system as a result of external influences and conditions. Yet, one now wonders whether the development process as it is illustrated in narrative fiction is more so a matter of adjusting oneself to established society? Further notable is Buckley’s inclusion of the adverb ‘honestly’ in describing the degree to which the protagonist is able to make said accommodations. Arguably, this sense of honesty refers to the degree to which a protagonist feels he or she can conform to society yet while maintaining the personal value system that has been solidified through the trials of adolescent development. Ultimately, it is a matter of being sincere—or, rather, authentic—with oneself. Thus, we return to the theme of authenticity and find evidence of its significance as the fundamental basis on which the coming-of-age narrative is best understood.

As the theme of authenticity is further established as the foundation of the coming-of-age journey, it becomes necessary to identify a definition of the theme itself. In his published collection of Norton lectures entitled *Sincerity and Authenticity*, literary

critic Lionel Trilling engages with the titular themes and their presence in literature. Prior to specifically delving into the theme of authenticity, Trilling introduces the related theme of sincerity as a critical element of human nature, as well as the relationship between morality and the self. In considering the moral self, Trilling refers to “the state or quality of the self which we call sincerity” (Trilling 2). He goes on to consider the meaning of sincerity, stating, “the word as we now use it refers primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (Trilling 2), adding “the word cannot be applied to a person without regards to his cultural circumstances” (Trilling 2). Trilling therefore understands sincerity as a state of being wherein internal feelings match his or her external presentation—that is, to the extent that one’s society will allow. Notably, the addition of this specification suggests that Trilling does not view the individual as existing solely unto itself. Rather, even as sincere beings, humans exist within a cultural and societal context.

Trilling contextualizes the theme of sincerity through literature by examining the lenses of Western canonical authors, including scripture, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Shakespeare, and Jane Austen among others, in order to analyze the ways in which literary authorities engage with themes of sincerity and authenticity. Trilling considers an excerpt from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* wherein Polonius instructs his son Laertes that, “this above all: to thine own self be true/And it doth follow, as the night the day/Thou canst not then be false to any man” (Trilling 3). Essentially, Polonius urges his son to act earnestly and relate to others with honesty. Furthermore, the phrase ‘this above all’ demonstrates that he assigns this dictum with superior importance over other perspectives on living. As Trilling observes, “he has

conceived of sincerity as an essential condition of virtue and has discovered how it is to be attained” (Trilling 3). By labeling sincerity as an ‘essential condition of virtue,’ he ultimately asserts its necessity to a virtuous or benevolent navigation of the human condition.

Shakespeare’s articulation of the significance of sincerity provides a common understanding of the concept—an understanding that will evolve into the related theme of authenticity. Trilling uses Polonius’ proverbial recommendation to summarize the theme as, “sincerity is the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one’s own self” (Trilling 5). Yet, by including the necessity of an individual’s cultural context, Trilling reveals the essential challenge of sincerity. He observes:

This enterprise of presenting the self, of putting ourselves on the social stage, sincerity itself plays a curiously compromised part. Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short, we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgment may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic (Trilling 11).

Trilling articulates the central challenge of living sincerely, which is to reconcile one’s desire to act in accordance with one’s honest feelings with the conventions of society. One often must temper the impulse to act sincerely with the expectations of others, thus impeding the genuine nature of an individual’s state of being. These expectations of society and interactions with others will necessarily result in an element of evaluation regarding the degree to which one’s character is genuine or, as Trilling states, authentic.

Thus, the theme of authenticity is revealed as a fundamental element of human nature and the formation of an individual’s true character. Trilling differentiates

authenticity from sincerity by claiming that the former carries a greater characteristic weight and moral gravitas than the latter. He initiates his analysis of authenticity itself by claiming that he “can rely on its suggesting a more strenuous moral experience than ‘sincerity’ does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man’s place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life” (Trilling 11). While both themes engage with the concept of being truthful to oneself, based on Trilling’s perspective, sincerity may primarily refer to the direct relation of the individual and the need to act in accordance with one’s own true feelings—with the understanding that this impulse may require an adjustment to the conventions of society. Authenticity includes the challenge of acting with sincerity, yet expands to incorporate a more penetrating examination of such universal concepts as the self, human nature, and the constraints of society.

Trilling therefore claims that authenticity exhibits a greater value in relevant discussions of human nature than the theme of sincerity. His analysis suggests that sincerity may be viewed as a predecessor of the concept of authenticity, as though the latter “had come along to suggest the deficiencies of sincerity and to usurp its place in our esteem” (Trilling 12). Hence, Trilling finds sincerity inadequate as a means of fully evaluating the self and human nature. Based on his proposed understandings of these themes, the scope of sincerity is generally limited to the self, whereas authenticity encapsulates a more expansive understanding. He observes a “marvelous generative force that our modern judgment assigns to authenticity, which implies the downward movement through all the cultural superstructures to some place where all movement ends, and begins” (Trilling 12). Authenticity’s significance is further demonstrated by

modernity, in that relevant interpretations of the relationship between culture and the human condition may be better understood through the all-encompassing lens of authenticity. Trilling goes on to use literature as a basis for his analysis of authenticity and human nature, therefore illustrating the unique capacity of narrative fiction to serve as a platform for examination of these themes.

The basis of societal influence on which Trilling's comparison of sincerity and authenticity rests may reveal a degree of inconsistency. According to Trilling's observations, the weight of authenticity is evidenced by its significance in formulating an individual's character and its impact on the ways in which said person engages with the human condition. Sincerity, while still important, is denied this sense of gravitas as it mainly refers to the relationship between how one feels internally and how one behaves socially. Trilling contradicts himself somewhat, though, in referencing Rousseau's interpretation of authenticity. He states, "from Rousseau we learned that what destroys our authenticity is society—our sentiment of being depends upon the opinion of other people" (Trilling 93). To claim that one's authenticity can so easily be negated contradicts the weighted significance that Trilling earlier applies to it. Furthermore, he also assigns 'a less than genial' or resistant view of society to his definition of authenticity. One then questions how authenticity can be so easily swayed by society if one has already established a sense of rejection towards it?

Is authenticity then somewhat more similar to the theme of sincerity inasmuch as it is not necessarily immune to the constraints of society? The relevant literary criticism may tempt readers to assign an impenetrable, universal value to the theme of authenticity, making it effectively exempt from the constraints of society. The search for an authentic

manner of living is in fact not immune to societal hindrances. Arguably, influences from society may be seen as an integral part of authenticity. Thus, in order to live authentically, one must discover how to interact with society genuinely and in accordance with personal values. While Rousseau (via Trilling) may have posited that society destroys authenticity, perhaps society is rather a necessary challenge of establishing an authentic character. Such as coming-of-age narratives as Austen's and Salinger's demonstrate the urgent necessity of mediating one's grasp on an authentic means of living with the influences of society in order to establish adulthood.

## Chapter II

### “All that David Copperfield crap”

Jane Austen’s Emma Woodhouse and J.D. Salinger’s Holden Caulfield experience conditions of wealth and privilege in their ongoing searches for authentic means of existence. The material prosperity with which both protagonists have lived offers a degree of inoculation from consequence as they attempt to navigate the relative social peril in which they mature. As a result, both narratives demonstrate the impact of privilege and class on the coming-of-age narrative. While Emma’s and Holden’s material privilege may endow them with a sense of safety from repercussions as they venture into adulthood, their departures from the comforts of youth and into a world of consequence result in jarring revaluations of their own characters. Yet, as evidenced by analyses of the *bildungsroman* as a literary form, this revaluation of character is necessary for a protagonist’s coming-of-age narrative. In order for an individual to actualize his or her adult persona, a deconstruction of one’s youthful persona is imperative.

The specific pairing of Austen’s *Emma* and Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* demonstrates the diverse range of the *bildungsroman* as a literary genre. Both novels may share the distinction of coming-of-age texts and explore similar tensions and thematic elements. The parallels that can be observed between the two narratives become increasingly remarkable when considering the temporal and cultural differences between the literary worlds of Austen and Salinger. The adolescent angst of Holden Caulfield’s post-WWII New York City offers a stark contrast from Emma Woodhouse’s privileged comfort in bucolic Victorian England. The protagonists themselves present undoubtedly

divergent characters: the acerbic, pubescent discontent of Holden versus the egotistical confidence of Emma.

Undoubtedly Salinger's and Austen's *bildungsromanen* strongly differ from one another. In Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield's first-person narration recounts his brief, yet dangerously eventful journey from getting expelled from the esteemed Pencey Prep to cavorting around New York City unsupervised and in search of a source of relief from his increasingly life-threatening depression. Holden repeatedly tells his audience of his gravely depressed internal state—largely due to his unaddressed grief over the death of his brother, Allie—as he seeks refuge such unsuccessful external remedies as cigarettes, alcohol, prostitution, and ill-fated companionship with former peers and instructors. As he narrates his precarious adventures, he muses over the human condition and struggles to comprehend the transition into adulthood. Ultimately, he survives his descent into emotional chaos due to the intervention of his younger sister, Phoebe.

Austen's *Emma* also offers a coming-of-age narrative, yet with distinctly less dangerous circumstances than Salinger's text. Like Holden, Emma Woodhouse also embarks on a transition to adulthood, but in the comfortable safety provided by her father's wealth and estate. She maintains her status as an unmarried young lady of society in her early-twenties and occupies her keen mind with social manipulations. Throughout her narrative, Emma becomes distracted by social schemes involving the inevitably maudlin Jane Fairfax, the confusingly flirtatious Frank Churchill, the assuming Mr. Elton, and the naïve Harriet Smith, among others. Ultimately, these social episodes involving her peers prompt Emma to re-evaluate her values and priorities. As Phoebe

guides Holden through his period of distress, Emma's companion, Mr. Knightley, serves as a moral compass intended to guide her into a genuine manner of living as an adult. Austen rewards Emma for happily completing her challenge of a re-examined coming-of-age by uniting her and Mr. Knightley in marriage.

Despite their differences, Austen's and Salinger's *bildungsromanen* present readers with challenging protagonists who seek authentic ways of living by actively challenging convention. In Salinger's narrative, Holden Caulfield embarks on a self-destructive, depressive journey through societal convention and adolescence. Due to his extraordinary, unfettered grief, Holden cannot submit to the conventions of society and his path is problematically paved and, in fact, life threatening. Emma Woodhouse does not share Holden's psychological constraints, and her acts in pursuit of independence are more shrewdly nuanced and subtly destructive in her social sphere. Yet, she does share Holden's urgent desire to reject the ways in which society's conventions are thrust upon the individual during coming of age, particularly with regards to gender roles, marriage, and domesticity. While Emma and Holden may differ in their capacity to express what they believe to be an authentic way of living, they share the ardent desire to manifest authenticity in adulthood.

Austen introduces Emma Woodhouse to readers by emphasizing the egoism that will color Emma's experiences. The novel's opening line describes Emma as, "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition" (Austen 5), illustrating the beauty and comfort that has cultivated her life thus far. Additionally, this observation's placement in the narrative's initial line indicates its importance to the Emma's characterization. The narrator goes on to state that she "seemed to unite some of

the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (Austen 5). The contentment of circumstance described in the novel’s opening phrases is further solidified with the claim that the protagonist has experienced limited, if any, emotional as well as material inconvenience thus far in her young life. A critical lens may lead readers to question whether or not Austen intends ‘blessings’ to be read ironically. Is Emma’s immunity from discomfort throughout her youth an actual ‘blessing’ or will it result in further difficulty as she ventures into the coming-of-age journey?

By including the word ‘seemed’ in this characterization, Austen’s narrator suggests that readers should indeed question the degree of joy that said ‘blessings’ have secured for Emma. The information about Emma’s physical, social, and material status would presumably ensure a sense of superiority and fixed comfort. Yet by including the word ‘seemed,’ Austen’s narrator undermines the assumption of Emma’s satisfied security. This theme will serve a fundamental purpose throughout Emma’s narrative, in that she will be continually challenged to reconcile her external social environment with the formation of an internal system of genuine values and empathic judgment. Her narrative thus illustrates Emma’s process of learning that appearances and social manipulations do not necessarily constitute ‘the best blessings of existence.’ Rather, she must explore the tension between what seems to be and what truly is in order to formulate an authentic approach to adulthood.

Austen uses the novel’s opening passages to further establish the conflict that arises from Emma’s security when she must come to terms with her governess’ marriage and consequent separation. The narrator describes how “on the wedding-day of this

beloved friend that Emma first sat in mournful thought of any continuance” (Austen, 5). This statement again reveals the skilled subtlety of Austen’s word choice. By stating that it was the ‘first’ time that Emma was faced with sustained unhappiness, the narrator not only speaks to the comfort with which she has lived throughout her life, it also initiates the theme of change as a fundamental element of the coming-of-age narrative. Furthermore, the fact that her ‘beloved’ companion’s marriage results not in joy but sorrow indicates the fragile self-serving nature of Emma’s developing ego. Thus, as she faces the prospect of adulthood, Emma must reckon with not only changes in her environment and peers, but also in the constancy of her self-comfort.

This observation leads Austen’s narrator to pose an essential question of Emma’s coming-of-age narrative, when she then asks, “How was she to bear the change?” (Austen 6). The true meaning of Austen’s statement is undoubtedly twofold. The narrator may specifically be referring to Emma’s difficulty in adjusting to her governess’ departure. But ultimately, she establishes the primary tension of Emma’s coming-of-age trajectory, which is learning to manage change. This inquiry will serve as a foundation for the *bildungsroman* narrative as a whole. Change will prove to be an essential element of a protagonist’s transition into adulthood, and one’s ability to ‘bear it’ or embrace the evolution inherent in the maturation process will serve as the primary challenge of a character’s coming-of-age trajectory.

The first-person narration of Salinger’s Holden Caulfield provides a sharp contrast to the subtle suggestion and artful inference of Austen’s narrator. Speaking in his characteristically caustic tone, Holden candidly introduces himself to readers by stating, “if you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where

I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap” (Salinger 1). He rejects the sentimentality of nostalgic reminiscences of childhood, dismissively referring to such descriptions as Dickensian ‘crap.’ By including the indelicate term ‘crap’ in Holden’s first moment of narration, Salinger effectively initiates the theme of authenticity. Referring to something as ‘crap’ indicates rejection and disbelief in value, thus hinting at Holden’s forthcoming emphases on ‘phoniness.’ Salinger’s memorable opening statement also establishes his skillful application of irony. With his introduction, Holden mocks the epitome of *bildungsroman* protagonists, Dickens’ David Copperfield—made ironic by the fact that Holden will take his place in the canon as another quintessential coming-of-age hero in critical literary company with Copperfield himself. Ironically, Holden mocks the very thing that he is to become.

Holden inadvertently undermines the sincerity of his rebellious rejection of autobiography and sentimentality by essentially disproving it. He follows his brash statement by stating, “but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth...I’m not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography” (Salinger 1). Yet, he will shortly thereafter spend his narrative doing precisely what he claims he will not, which is to divulge details about his personal life. The unreliability of his perception will become evident to readers as his emotionally troubled voice provides a detailed account of his life thus far as a young man teetering on the brink of young adulthood and psychological collapse. Arguably, Holden is attempting to conceal the precariousness of his psychological state under the tenuous guise of adolescent apathy. He claims not to want to expose himself emotionally to others when, in fact, he is desperate for someone

to save him from his inability to cope with his changing life. Holden thus demonstrates the emotional confusion inherent in young adulthood, in that when faced with the challenge of becoming who you truly intend to be, one often falters in understanding exactly who that person is and what he or she wants.

Holden vocalizes the frantic desperation caused by change when he repeatedly questions what will come of the ducks that he observes in New York City's Central Park. The train of thought surrounding the Central Park ducks reoccurs when he is struggling to cope with the uncertainty of his future. The motif first appears in the novel's second chapter when his former teacher, Mr. Spencer, attempts to confront Holden about his academic downfall at Pencey. While Spencer questions Holden in order to ascertain his grasp on the gravity of his circumstances, Holden confesses that he can only think of the lagoon in Central Park and "if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go. I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over" (Salinger 13). Holden relates to the ducks that he witnesses because, like himself, their future is unclear. Just as he cannot see where they will go or how they will survive the winter. Likewise, he is frightened by the fact that he cannot envision his own future. The prospect of winter's cold and unlivable conditions for wildlife mimics his own views of the future. His desire to know exactly what the ducks will do to survive echoes his own anxiety about what the future entails. He realizes that the ducks cannot remain just as they are and also survive. Rather, they must adapt in order to thrive. Holden is reluctant to acknowledge that he, too, must find ways to adapt to the inevitable, unknown changes and challenges as he departs from youth.

The wintry environment and, importantly, absence of a visual resolution serve as a symbol for Holden's approach to his present period of life. He goes on to question "if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away" (Salinger 13). What specifically disturbs Holden is the fact that he does not have visual evidence for the ducks survival amidst their changing environment. Likewise, his own fate is unsettled and the further he descends into his directionless, depressed state of being, the more uncertain his ability to survive becomes. Notably, his image of a man coming to remove the ducks to safer circumstances mirrors his forthcoming desire to be caught and saved from the uncertainty of change. The potential scenario of the simply flying away furthermore can be coupled with Holden's repeated suicidal statements. Rather than confront his own issues, Holden instead fixates on the ducks in hopes of evading his own problems.

Notably, the first instance of Holden's musing about the fate of the ducks takes place during his visit with Mr. Spencer wherein he seeks and fails to find validation from an academic authority figure. Thus, Salinger establishes a dynamic that will continue throughout the narrative wherein Holden searches for presentations of authenticity—and therefore relief from his desperation—from adults in life who hold traditional places of authority. Yet, he is never successful in attaining the sense of clarity that he hopes they will offer and, as a result, remains resolute in his fixation on phoniness. In his visit with Spencer prior to leaving Pencey, for instance, Holden observes Spencer's habit of nodding while in conversation and claims, "You never saw anybody nod as much in your life as old Spencer did. You never knew if he was nodding a lot because he was thinking and all, or just because he was a nice guy that didn't know his ass from his elbow"

(Salinger 8). Holden has not wholly rejected Spencer, as evidenced by un-ironically labeling his former teacher as ‘a nice guy.’ His accusation of not knowing ‘his ass from his elbow’ essentially challenges the authenticity of the gesture, as though the nodding is no more than a posturing of knowledge.

Holden further excavates Spencer’s posturing of intellectual wisdom, thus augmenting his rejection of Pencey and authority. As Spencer resumes the aforementioned nodding habit, Holden observes, “he also started picking his nose. He made out like he was only pinching it...I didn’t *care*, except that it’s pretty disgusting to watch somebody pick their nose” (Salinger 9). The repulsive act, paired with minimal effort to conceal it, symbolizes the fundamental lack of authentic behavior that Holden seeks. Spencer approaches him with kindness and concern, yet undermines his authority by engaging in an obvious social error. Furthermore, Salinger’s italicization of ‘*care*’ subtly signals to readers that Holden does in fact ‘care’ to an extent. While his disapproval of Spencer as a role model may not stem wholly from the act of nose-picking, the moment serves as evidence for the lack of credibility that Holden recognizes in academic authority. The overwhelming lack of authenticity in authority therefore serves as the catalyst for Holden’s decision to fully reject his surroundings. Yet, this rejection consequently catalyzes his desperation as a result of his inability to accept and adapt to change.

Thus, Holden’s concern for the ducks’ survival, as it is introduced during his exit from Pencey, mirrors the critical theme in both narratives of development that is the aversion to change. Both Holden and Emma struggle with the impulse to reject change in favor of avoiding any resulting discomfort or unanticipated hardship. The prospect of

change, as illustrated by Holden's preoccupation with the Central Park ducks in wintertime, fails in his attempt to distract himself and instead he becomes increasingly frightened by his lack of direction and obscured vision of his future. In the case of Austen's *Emma*, her titular heroine expresses satisfaction with her current circumstances and dismisses any potential opportunities for change, as evidenced by her denial of marriage. Her own characteristic growth is stymied for much of her narrative as she fails to recognize her own need to evolve with age. Thus, Holden and Emma both exhibit a critical challenge of *bildungsroman* protagonists, which is to accept change as a fundamental component of one's coming-of-age process.

Austen's narrator presents Emma's aversion to change early in her narrative, establishing its influence on her character's developmental trajectory. Emma's hypochondriacal father demonstrates the Woodhouses' shared reluctance as he reacts to the departure of Emma's beloved governess upon her marriage. The narrator describes Mr. Woodhouse's tendency to be "fond of every body that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable" (Austen 7). Mr. Woodhouse's antipathy towards change—especially changes in proximity with peers or loved ones—provides a sense of origin for Emma's own aversion. The loss of attachment and the prospect of disconnect from loved ones largely contributes to Mr. Woodhouse's dislike of change. His fear of separation indicates an overwhelming dependence on others for comfort and security. Thus, the familial lack of emotional independence presents itself as another challenge that Emma must confront in order to mature successfully.

Emma assumes her father's disapproval of marriage, yet she provides material reasoning beyond the emotional desire to maintain attachment with loved ones. When questioned on the topic by her companion, Harriet, Emma confidently replies, "I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry...and, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield" (Austen 62). Emma's statement demonstrates that she is aware of the privilege with which she lives and the opportunity it offers her. In a striking moment of honesty, she expresses the fact that marriage would actually diminish her financial and social status, in contrast to most of her female peers in society. She differs from the endlessly naïve Harriet Smith in that attraction, connection, and potential partnership are not daily concerns that will affect her ability to thrive as an adult.

While Emma's assertion is admirable through a feminist lens, in that her self-worth does not depend on the affections of a romantic partner, her perspective may not be as enlightened as it seems upon a first reading. Her approach to mature companionship and its effects on her coming-of-age are further illuminated through her prioritization of familial love over romantic love. She goes on to state that, "never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's" (Austen 62). While her economic and social reasons to remain unmarried demonstrate Emma's capacity to think pragmatically, her added rationale is evidence of egoism. In truth, she ultimately wishes to continue as mistress of her home so that she can maintain not only her economic status but even more so her father's affection

and its augmentation to her ego. Thus, while Emma may have the capacity to live as a financially independent woman—without needing a husband to support her materially—she lacks the emotional independence needed for successful maturation.

Emotional dependence and aversion to change will furthermore result in an overall rejection of adult relationships for both Holden and Emma, as they view romantic experience in a decidedly negative lens. For instance, when Emma discusses the topic of marriage with Harriet, she claims, “Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall” (Austen 62). Emma rejects even the prospect of romantic connection, declaring that it is not in her ‘nature’ or character. This claim illustrates her lack of comprehension of her own identity. According to Austen’s narrator, Emma has enjoyed a relatively brief existence—twenty-one years—characterized by material comfort and little if any emotional distress. Thus, such self-imposed claims about her ‘nature’ are unfounded and lacking in adequate life experience needed to serve as supporting evidence. Emma ironically assumes that she understands her character and as a result will be faced with endeavors that will challenge her to actually do so.

Salinger’s Holden also makes assertions about his identity, while his tenuous state of being demonstrates that he does not truly comprehend his own character yet. Throughout the novel, he makes direct claims about what he believes are genuine aspects of his character, yet his choices often illustrate either an opposing reality or that his actions are simply performative. Particularly during the novel’s introductory chapters, Holden offers a variety of contradictory statements about his character, including, “I’m quite a heavy smoker...I’m pretty healthy though” (Salinger 5), illustrating the physical

evidence of his posturing of adulthood. He speaks about his smoking habits as though he has the extensive experience of an adult consumer, conspicuously followed by his unprompted assertion that he is physically healthy. Holden's statements ultimately demonstrate confusion and assumptions about the human body, characteristic of someone struggling to navigate the physical changes of adolescence. He does not fully comprehend his physicality yet and is further bewildered by the prospect of corporeal adulthood.

Holden makes similarly unfounded statements about adulthood and maturity—both physical and psychological. As a coping mechanism for his threatening view of coming-of-age, Holden strives to present himself as a fully formed adult when he is in fact struggling to adapt to progression. For instance, he attempts to demonstrate self-awareness about his presumed maturity when he states, “I act quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen. It's really ironical, because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair...And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve” (Salinger 9). Holden's postulating about what age best corresponds with this behavior varies to such an extent that it becomes evident that he in fact does not understand how he should behave. In a sign of true obtuseness, he speaks as though he has already accomplished enough maturation in order to evaluate the human condition. Yet, his actions, as well as his emotional distress, will illustrate that he does not comprehend how far he has yet to go in coming-of-age.

Also notable is Holden's mention of the 'ironical' nature of his physical appearance. He accurately grasps the irony inherent in the fact that he has the height and

hair color of a man much older than his physical and behavioral age. Yet, he then follows this observation with the contradictory claim that “sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice yet. People never notice anything” (Salinger 9). His conflicting assertions about how young or old he acts demonstrate his inability to evaluate his own behavior and its relationship to his physical age. His self-perception is so unclear that he cannot establish a consistent view of whether or not his is operating in accordance with his age.

The ironic presence of gray hair and tall height serve as symbols of the performative nature of Holden’s behavior. His immaturity and failures to adapt to change are highlighted by such physical symptoms of age as graying hair and height beyond that of a typical adolescent. In addition to his ironic appearance and his claims regarding how mature or immature he feels he is, throughout his narrative he attempts to posture male adulthood and manufacture coming-of-age through actions and decisions with which he is in fact too young and psychologically unstable to cope. By posturing male adulthood, Holden participates in what literary critic Lee Overman describes as “gender as performance: behavior intended to garner societal applause rather than an indication of innate realities” (Overman 231). Without grasping the implications for authentic living, Holden behaves and speaks to his audience in his characteristically performative manner in order to present what he feels will be an acceptable persona, rather than who his is authentically intended to be. Thus, Holden and Emma both make statements regarding authentic qualities of their characters when, in fact, they lack the experience and maturation necessary to comprehend authenticity and their forthcoming journeys into adulthood.

### Chapter III

“If a body catch a body comin’ through the rye”

Ultimately, Holden’s censorious opinions of his peers demonstrate a fundamental flaw in his approach to authenticity, in that he stubbornly forms opinions but has not yet grasped what it means to live authentically. His lack of progress in developing an authentic adult identity is furthermore obscured by his inability to regulate his extreme emotions and appropriately relate his internal world to the external. Similarly, Emma Woodhouse shares Holden’s need to develop a grounded emotional relationship with the world. She may not share the extremity or intensity of Holden’s sentimentality and succeeds in aligning her emotions with the social conventions of her environment. Yet, Emma’s feelings manifest themselves in an attempt to manufacture an external world based on her internal desires, regardless of the consequences for her peers. Holden similarly attempts to control his interactions with others based on his erratic emotions. Thus, both protagonists are faced with the challenge to align their internal desires with the external world in an authentic, emotionally responsible manner. This critical aspect of Austen’s and Salinger’s narratives demonstrates the degree of submission inherent in the *bildungsroman*, as observed by Jerome Buckley.

As Emma and Holden attempt to navigate the transition into young adulthood and learn to mediate their internal emotions with external circumstances, Phoebe Caulfield and Mr. Knightley sustain their influence and positions as voices of reason within the emotional disarray of coming-of-age. Knightley and Phoebe succeed in facilitating

Emma's and Holden's transitions out of the emotional disarray of youthful confusion and into clearer conceptions of what it means to live authentically. Thus, they both serve as agents of change and arbiters of authenticity in development for their companions.

Throughout their interactions with their counterparts, they maintain their relative understanding of the theme of authenticity as an essential component to the human condition and are not hesitant to communicate their concerns with candid urgency. As a result, they not only serve as the voices of authenticity in their respective novels, but also as the moral centers of their narratives.

Mr. Knightley—Emma's frequent companion and arguably the moral center of her narrative—instructs her to behave rationally and reasonably in an effort to advance her maturation. Austen's narrator often speaks to the strong-willed decisiveness with which Emma thinks and behaves. When describing her relationship with the simple-minded Harriet Smith, Emma is characterized as “quick and decided in her ways” as well as “obliged to fancy what she liked” (Austen 20). Readers receive an impression of Emma as headstrong and not contemplative in her decision-making. She is presented as a protagonist who acts quickly on her impulses and personal desires without reasonable consideration. In fact, her ‘fancy’ is so potent that throughout her narrative Emma acts so as to manufacture the circumstances that she envisions in her relationships in order to create the circumstances that she desires. Arguably, Emma's material and social status has endowed her with a privilege that has transferred into a sense of power. The comfort with which she lives enables her to seek and construct similar satisfaction directed by her own self-interests in her relationships

Emma's relationship with Harriet Smith, for instance, serves as a means through which she can materialize her aspirations. While describing Emma's view of her companion, the narrator labels Harriet as "a valuable addition to her privileges" (Austen 20), as though she is a physical augmentation to Emma's comfortable status. Austen's narrator goes on to state that "as she saw more of her she approved her, and was confirmed in all her kind designs," with regards to Emma's opinion of her friend. Notably, the narrator's reference to Emma's 'designs' speaks to her desire to manufacture her relationship with Harriet—the problematic nature of which is ironically referred to in the inclusion of the word 'kind.' Also, the reader is led to understand that Emma selects Harriet as a companion not out of a sense that they are kindred spirits, but rather for perceived potential for Emma's social schemes. When one considers the impact of the loss of immediate contact with her beloved governess, readers may believe that Emma's actions are perhaps a result of loneliness and loss of companionship. Like Holden, rather than reflect on the painful aspects of development and changes of circumstance, Emma fixates elsewhere in her social sphere.

Emma's avoidance of the realities of development is further evidenced in her continued approach to her relationship with Harriet. Austen's narrator concludes that Emma "was quite convinced of Harriet Smith's being exactly the young friend she wanted—exactly the something which her home required" (Austen 20). Austen's application of irony skillfully reveals the problematic nature of Emma's approach to friendship—and demonstrates the significance of irony in the *bildungsroman*. Notably, she refers to Emma's being 'convinced' of her opinion yet does not state that any actual contemplation or introspection has taken place. Furthermore, Harriet is referred to as

‘something’ rather than ‘someone,’ indicating that her value to Emma lies in her utility rather than her character. While Emma may not consider any ill will inherent in her perspective, her intentions are more problematic than she intends. By viewing her companion—simple-minded as she may be—as an asset, it not only dehumanizes and devalues Harriet, but also ultimately precludes Emma’s development of the capacity for authenticity in relationships.

Furthermore, the narrator’s usage of the word ‘privileges’ in describing Emma’s relationships subtly reveals a lesson that will aid Emma’s personal development towards authentic living. The description of Harriet as a ‘valuable addition to her privileges’ echoes the narrator’s introductory sentiment in the novel’s first line, wherein she refers to Emma’s apparent ownership of the ‘best blessings of existence.’ Readers are reminded that the comfortable affluence with which Emma lives is not limited to material possessions, but rather expands to social privilege. Additionally, the fact that Emma can so easily acquire a cooperative companion who is conveniently complementary to her desires certainly demonstrates the privilege of someone with social power; had someone with Harriet’s social currency attempted to initiate their relationship, it may not have been met with such ease. In consideration of Austen’s use of irony, the blessing of Harriet’s friendship likely lies not in the comfortable augmentation that she provides for Emma’s egoism. Rather, the significance of their relationship will be illustrated in the lessons on adulthood companionship and authenticity that Emma will gain.

Austen’s narrator will continue to make use of irony as a signal for a learning moment in Emma’s progression towards an authentic way to live. Mr. Knightley provides much of the guidance Emma receives in social respectability and, ultimately, authenticity.

At times, Knightley instructs Emma through direct address, but his lessons regarding authenticity are often delivered through Austen's subtle, skillful manipulation of language. For instance, when Emma produces a portrait of Harriet intended for her ill-conceived scheme to unite her companion with Mr. Elton, Mr. Knightley responds with a veiled criticism of the friendship. Emma receives a wealth of praise for her artistic prowess in sketching Harriet—a typical moment of encouragement for Emma's substantial ego. In response, Knightley cannily remarks, "You have made her too tall, Emma" (Austen 35). His critique is cleverly twofold. On the surface, his comments refer to the disproportionate height of Harriet's drawn likeness. Rather, Austen's narrator uses this moment to artfully communicate that Knightley has observed Emma's social error in attempting to elevate Harriet's social goals. He can recognize that Emma's encouragement of her friend and manipulation of Harriet's expectations in pursuing marriage are problematic and, notably, he is not hesitant to verbally correct Emma. While Emma's intentions are not malevolent, they are intended to manufacture a social status and egotism that is neither aligned with reality nor from a genuine origin. Knightley's awareness of this issue and his subsequent communication of his concerns to Emma essentially defend the status of authenticity in their narrative and thus indicates his status as the novel's moral center.

Thus, Knightley's critiques of Emma's social maneuvers are essentially rooted in his allegiance to the theme of authenticity. Knightley has observed and thus alerts Emma to her interference with authentic social interactions, as well as their peers' organic perceptions of Harriet. In this sense, Mr. Knightley acts as a moderator of authenticity in Emma's narrative. He concerns himself with not only authenticity in their societal

interactions, but also with the task of aiding Emma's development of an authentic worldview for her own sake. While discussing his concerns about her relationship with Harriet, Knightley criticizes Emma, asserting, "Emma your infatuation about that girl blinds you" (Austen 45). He recognizes that Emma has become so preoccupied with her affection for Harriet as a comfortable companion, that her perception and judgment are obscured. Furthermore, his acknowledgement of 'infatuation' as a driving factor in Emma's decision-making illustrates the influence of unchecked emotion—a quality that she shares with Salinger's Holden. Knightley's concern again stems from the issue of authenticity, in that he is alarmed by Emma's impaired judgment and the resulting disconnect from an authentic engagement with society.

Comparable to Knightley's narrative position as the prevailing voice of authenticity in Emma's narrative world, Holden's younger sister Phoebe holds a similar role in his own life. Phoebe's influence on Holden and her concerns with authenticity are communicated similarly to Knightley's, in that Salinger also employs both direct address and skillful irony in their interactions. Also notable is Phoebe's ability to serve as a voice of reason for Holden—perhaps the sole voice to whom he is actually receptive. As he describes his beloved sister to his audience, Holden often refers to Phoebe as 'old Phoebe,' as a term of endearment. Certainly, the irony is not lost on readers in that 'old Phoebe' is in fact the youngest principal character in the novel and is referred to as 'old.' But, Holden's application of the term suggests a sense of familiarity evocative of an antiquated, older voice. Again, readers find evidence of Holden's posturing adulthood in an effort to conceal his anxiety and discomfort in his developmental state. He manipulates language in order to feign a maturity that is beyond his actual capacity as a

precarious adolescent succumbing to psychological distress. By manipulating language for the sake of contrived maturity, Holden arguably attempts to bypass the strain of coming-of-age and instead bypasses authenticity.

Towards the novel's concluding chapters, Holden's stability becomes increasingly tenuous and the urgency of Phoebe's influence intensifies. As Holden's moments of distress begin to suggest threats to his personal safety, his reminders of Phoebe subdue any immediate danger he potentially poses to himself, thus illustrating the notable extent of her influence on Holden. After cavorting around Manhattan and repeatedly exposing himself to questionable scenarios, Holden reminisces on Allie's passing and as a result his self-reflection becomes plainly suicidal. He considers "how old Phoebe would feel if I got pneumonia and died. It was a childish way to think, but I couldn't stop myself...I figured I'd better sneak home and see her, in case I died and all" (Salinger 156). Not only does this excerpt demonstrate the weight of this relationship with Phoebe, it also illustrates the recurrent usage of irony. Holden remarks that his envisioning Phoebe's feelings in the event of his death are 'childish.' Rather, Holden fails to recognize that he is in fact employing empathy—a fundamental function of human nature. The ability to consider another person's feelings, rather than remain fixated on one's own regardless of consequences, indicates growth in the direction of adulthood.

Phoebe's contributions to Holden's survival are demonstrated in the gravity with which she reacts to her brother's downward spiral. Unlike Holden, she is able to grasp the tenuousness of his personal safety and attempts to alert him to the reality of behavior. When she discovers that he has been expelled from yet another school, Phoebe becomes visibly upset, to which Holden responds, "She gets very emotional, I swear to

God...She's a true madman sometimes" (Salinger 165). Holden's ironically labels Phoebe as 'emotional' and 'a madman,' whereas his own mental health is clearly in crisis. Phoebe's emotional reaction is certainly warranted, as she recognizes the fact that her brother's adolescence has become a chaotic exercise in dysfunction, made increasingly problematic by his inability to remain enrolled in multiple schools. Salinger's use of irony is evident in Holden's unfazed reaction to his scenario. He does not express concern over his own disarray, therefore proving that Phoebe is in fact far more engaged with reality and consequence than her brother.

Even in his dysfunctional state, Phoebe is able to make an impression on Holden, thus demonstrating her significance in Salinger's narrative and position as the novel's moral center. As she begins to comprehend the gravity of Holden's situation, she does not simply communicate her concern. Rather, she urgently attempts to impress a sense of accountability on Holden—a pivotal aspect of the coming-of-age journey. Holden recalls how, "all of a sudden, she said, 'Oh, why did you *do* it?' She meant why did I get the ax again. It made me sort of sad, the way she said it" (Salinger 167). The emphasis placed on the word 'do' refers to the control over his circumstances that Holden does not acknowledge. Phoebe does not allow him to submit to his dysfunction. Instead, she acknowledges the agency that he has relinquished in his state of distress. Additionally, her ability to make an impression on Holden is demonstrated in his admission that she felt 'sort of sad,' upon hearing her criticism. While he may not possess the clarity of mind to fully process his feelings, his moment of sadness illustrates that Phoebe is able to impress a sense of consequence upon Holden even in moments of crisis.

Thus, Phoebe undoubtedly serves as a principal source of influence—similar to Knightley’s influence on Emma Woodhouse—in Holden’s wayward journey towards adulthood, even in his instability. Phoebe’s likeness to Austen’s Mr. Knightley is further illustrated in her willingness to openly and directly address Holden’s errors. During their late-night exchange at the Caulfield residence, Holden declares that he “just didn’t like anything that was *happening* at Pencey,” (Salinger 169), to which Phoebe defiantly responds, “You don’t like *anything* that’s happening” (Salinger 169). She does not shy away from candidly asserting her impression of Holden and alerting him to the degree to which his depressive state has obscured his judgment and grasp on reality. Phoebe and Knightley thus share a boldness and verbal bravery, as evidenced by the fact that they prioritize honesty—and, thus, the theme of authenticity—above coddling their troublesome companions.

Phoebe’s commentary, in contrast with Holden’s dysfunctional perspective, maintains the presence of authenticity in the narrative. Phoebe actively rejects Holden’s submission to his current state and urges him to consider how far his depression has strayed him from a reality. While Holden defends his behavior on the basis of dislike specifically for Pencey, she astutely observes the inaccuracy in his statement and, as a result, his disingenuous engagement with his surroundings. By alerting Holden to the fact that he doesn’t ‘like *anything* that’s happening’ and therefore his disdain is not a symptom of his attending Pencey, she shows that his depressive instability has become so far reaching that it has permeated his entire worldview. Therefore, he prevents himself from accurately and genuinely engaging with reality. As a result, his defense that his

dislike is directed towards Pencey is merely an excuse and, thus, an inauthentic statement.

## Chapter IV

“The blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart”

Undoubtedly, in accordance with their relative societal standards of propriety, Salinger’s narrative engages with issues of sexuality far more directly than the realm of possibility for Austen and her contemporaries would have allowed. Yet, the condition of societal constraints does not exclude Emma Woodhouse from the physical aspects of her maturation process. Therefore, it is critical to consider the ways in which Austen engages with issues of sexuality, physicality, and intimacy, as they are necessary to the *bildungsroman*. As stated in Buckley’s synopsis of the coming-of-age narrative arc, sexual experiences are a meaningful rite of passage for the protagonist as such experiences contribute to his or her formation of personal values.

Overall, Austen’s works adhere to the societal conditions and constraints of her temporal environment. Yet she artfully inserts challenges to the patriarchal status quo through the narrative voices of her protagonists. As noted in the contextual appendices of the Norton Critical Edition of Austen’s *Emma*, “the society of the eighteenth century was rigid and hierarchical, maintained by deference from below and paternalism from above. There was a greater degree of social mobility in Britain than in other European countries, but by and large it was influence, rather than merit that enabled a man to advance” (ed. Justice 349). Austen’s societal world was thus controlled by status and with limited opportunity for advancement outside the dictations of paternity. Notably, when social mobility occurred it was a result of ‘influence, rather than merit,’ meaning the

benevolence or work ethic of an individual had little if anything to do with prosperity. Rather, the structure and organization of daily life depended purely on social consequence.

With her release of *Emma*, a shift occurred in Austen's work from characters faced with the challenge of navigating upward social mobility to a heroine endowed with status and material prosperity from the narrative's start. In such earlier works as *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Austen presents such themes "a heroine who proves her merit to a skeptical world...[and] heroines the reader could cheer to victory on the basis of merit" (Justice viii). The referenced novels thus illustrated the challenge of coming-of-age based on protagonists' efforts to prove themselves worthy of upward mobility based on the benevolence of their characters and actions, wherein the narrative stakes are raised by social and economic interests.

With Emma Woodhouse, Austen departs from her previous form by presenting a protagonist who does not face the material or societal challenges of her previous heroines. Austen herself is quoted to have described Emma as a heroine whom "no one but myself will much like" (Justice viii). Admittedly, Austen acknowledges that the lack of a need for upward mobility, paired with a characteristic confidence unlike that of her literary peers may result in a diminished likability on the part of readers. Readers' potential rejection of Emma's strong character may be due to society's preference for palatable feminine submission and deference. Notably, Austen does not universally exclude Emma from readers' sympathy—just readers aside from herself. This nuanced assertion arguably indicates that Austen recognized the patriarchal aversion to an assertive female character and yet remained steadfast in her instincts.

Emma Woodhouse's audacious character provides an avenue through which Austen can challenge gender bias and inequality of her era—inequalities that have survived into contemporary history. Despite the material comfort with which she lives, Emma is still faced with a challenge of mobility. Her test is one of personal value and internal development so that she may learn more authentically to encounter the external and social world as she enters adulthood. Due to her status and familial wealth, Emma is granted the privilege of approaching adulthood with the comfort of being provided for. Arguably, this material and lack of financial consequence in decision-making affords Emma the ability to be far more forthcoming and independent in her opinions as she comes of age than her female literary peers. For instance, early in the novel, Emma is described as “doing just what she liked” (Austen 5) and “quick and decided in her ways” (Austen 20). These descriptive phrases may imply that she is largely self-directed, impulsive, and stubborn, presumably contributing to the unlikable impression readers receive. Yet, one questions whether these qualities would be received similarly in male contemporaries of the literary realm in which Emma Woodhouse exists.

In an essay entitled “Darcy and Emma: Austen's Ironic Meditation on Gender,” Lee Overman similarly questions the nature of gender bias in readers' perceptions of Emma's character. By analyzing Austen's *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Overman accurately observes that gender bias creates a notable contrast in readers' reception of Emma Woodhouse's and Mr. Darcy's strong personalities. He observes “the very different expectations Austen's society held for men and women. An action performed by a woman is perceived differently than when performed by a man” (Overman 224).

Essentially, the society in which Austen produced her works held different standards of acceptable behavior on the basis of gender. He goes on to state that:

Temperaments are also perceived differently. Darcy, for example, is ‘haughty’ (PP 16), but his responsibilities and position as a ‘great m [an]’ entitle him to be so (PP 258). Society may disapprove but suffers his behavior, dismissing it as mere ‘whimsical[ity] in his civilities’ (PP 258). The same flaw in Emma, however, makes her endearingly obtuse one moment and unselfconsciously self-absorbed and manipulative the next. Her behavior is not excused ‘without a remonstrance’ (E 374)...Emma’s greater potential to cause damage is ironic, given that her sphere of influence as a woman is so much smaller than Darcy’s as a man (Lee Overman 224).

The potency of gender bias is such that Emma’s actions and overall personality are condemned for similar traits that inspire attraction and reverence in Mr. Darcy.

Furthermore, Overman is keenly aware of the irony inherent in this gender-based partiality. Emma is limited in the actual influence she may wield on her environment simply due to the fact that she is a woman, yet she is castigated far more than her male literary peers were they to behave similarly.

Emma employs the characteristic confidence she has comfortably developed in youth to boldly challenge gender-based assumptions—an impulse that she must learn to wield effectively but not at the expense of authenticity as she enters adulthood. Emma’s rejection of patriarchal standards is often illustrated in her heated interactions with Mr. Knightley. For example, as they quarrel over her influence on Harriet’s decision to reject Robert Martin’s proposal, Emma disputes her future spouse’s defense of female submission in the interest of marriage. She declares that, “it is always incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse an offer of marriage. A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her” (Austen 44). She takes issue with the

presumptive readiness that men expect in women's acceptance of marriage proposals. Her description of a female response to a male request other than immediate acceptance as 'incomprehensible' effectively critiques the male assumption that women can and should cater to their patriarchal standards.

Emma's statement essentially refers to inequality inherent in female submission, as demonstrated by a woman's readiness to respond to male requests. Granted, the material privilege with which she lives may blind her to the fact that her female peers may readily accept such proposals under the premise of economic dependence, perhaps contributing to a degree of disapproval from readers. Yet, the limited nature of women's options and lack of female economic independence account for the cultural female submission to which Emma refers. Emma's observation refers more to a woman's genuine desire to marry a proposed suitor, rather than the reality of whether or not she may feel forced to accept. Ultimately, her claim highlights a cultural disconnect that exists between authenticity and adult relationships of the environment in which she lives, largely due to the rigidity of Victorian socialization and the inequality of options for livelihood based on gender.

Whereas Emma's initial statements on relationships and Victorian romantic culture reveal Austen's enlightened insight into gender politics of the time, Holden Caulfield's perspective exposes adolescent unease regarding adult relationships and sexuality. Overall, Holden's approach to sexuality demonstrates his naïveté and attempts to manufacture coming-of-age at a pace with which he is unable to adapt. Throughout the novel, Holden views peers who demonstrate physical growth and sexual maturity with disdain and contempt. For instance, he speaks of his roommate at Pencey Prep, Robert

Ackley, with candid repulsion for his body. Holden describes his teeth as “mossy and awful” (Salinger 19) and his skin as having “a lot of pimples...all over his whole face” (Salinger 19). The visceral nature of his word choice—‘mossy’ teeth—accentuates Holden’s dislike and makes it palpable for his audience. He summarizes his severe appraisal of Ackley by declaring that “not only that, he had a terrible personality. He was also sort of a nasty guy. I wasn’t too crazy about him, to tell you the truth” (Salinger 19). The ‘nasty’ or repugnant way in which Holden views his roommate is illustrated in his criticism of Ackley’s physicality, shown in his dubious hygiene and acne. Distasteful appearance is representative of an unlikeable persona for Holden. The tension between discomfort about the body and internal anxiety will continue to reveal itself throughout Salinger’s narrative.

Holden extends his pointed criticism of his peer’s physicality to his other roommate, Ward Stradlater. As he observes Stradlater’s shaving habits, Holden critiques the maintenance of his roommate’s shaving equipment, claiming that “he always *looked* good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway, if you knew him the way I did. The reason he fixed himself up to look good was because he was madly in love with himself” (Salinger 27). Here, Holden indicts Stradlater on an error of authenticity, in that he fashions a favorable appearance for the sake of vanity. The phrases ‘*looked* good’ and ‘secret slob’ serve as a means of questioning Stradlater’s authenticity and infer Holden’s view in that vanity taints the sincerity of his peer’s character. Furthermore, the specific physical qualities that Holden critiques illustrate his apprehension regarding the maturation process. He finds such of evidence of physical development and pubescence as acne, shaving, and fledgling attempts to adopt adult

hygiene repellent. Holden is so intimidated by maturation and coming-of-age itself that even simple physical symptoms intimidate and alarm Holden.

Holden's subsequent altercation with Stradlater illustrates that his anxiety surrounding physical representations of adulthood is heightened and agitated by expressions of sexuality. When he discovers that Stradlater is preparing to go on a date with his childhood friend, Jane Gallagher, he obsesses over the prospect of them engaging in sexual activity. Holden admits that following the conversation he "kept thinking about Jane, and about Stradlater having a date with her and all. It made me so nervous I nearly went crazy. I already told you what a sexy bastard Stradlater was" (Salinger 34). He connects Jane with their childhood acquaintance and, thus, the innocence of his youth. As a result, he becomes greatly disturbed when he realizes that this representative of his childhood innocence is not only sexually active, but also engaging in such activities with someone who embodies the very vanity that Holden disdains. Holden's inability to grasp the notion of sexual maturity—especially when it challenges his concepts of childhood innocence and authenticity—demonstrates his deep rejection of development.

Holden's past relationship with Jane Gallagher reveals further insight into his aversion to adult sexuality and its implications for his problematic coming-of-age journey. Throughout his narrative, he repeatedly returns to his memories of Jane as an attempt to remedy his loneliness. Following his departure from Pencey, Holden remains fixated on the possibility of Stradlater engaging in sexual activity with Jane, concluding that "I was pretty damn sure old Stradlater hadn't given her the time—I know old Jane like a book—I still couldn't get her off my brain" (Salinger 76). Even the way in which

Holden refers to sexual activity ('the time') indicates his juvenile nature, in that simply the prospect of the act itself is too daunting to refer to by name. Additionally, Holden's usage of the phrase 'old' prior to both of his peers' names feigns familiarity and a characteristic cadence of an antiquated voice. As a coping mechanism for the painful anxiety inspired by adult issues, Holden postures adulthood, as though it will conceal his discomfort both to his readers and himself. He attempts to mask this discomfort with physical maturity by rejecting the prospect of sexual maturity, thinly veiled by labored diction.

As the text will continue to demonstrate, Holden's troubled approach to relationships—both erotic and platonic—reveal his inability to engage with genuine human connection. He continues to convince himself that Jane has not reached sexual maturity and, thus, remains under the guise of youthful innocence on which Holden fixates. He claims that he "really got to know her quite intimately. I don't mean it was anything *physical* or anything—it wasn't...you don't have to get too sexy to get to know a girl" (Salinger 76). The use of the word 'intimately' calls into question the reliability of Holden's point of view. He exists in a tension between loneliness and rejection of social relationships and, as a result, one questions whether or not Holden can understand what intimacy truly is. His statement furthermore demonstrates an overall rejection of sexual connection. Holden does not limit his claim to his own rejection of physical intimacy or the need to 'get sexy' in order to become close with another human, but expands his words to dismiss the need for sexual activity as a whole.

The ways in which Holden relates to his developing peers—particularly those who have matured physically and sexually—reveals how critically and severely he rejects

the prospect of developing beyond the innocence of childhood. Holden precedes his interaction with another one of his female peers from his past, Sally Hayes, with further judgment of the physically mature. He observes young women in New York, suggestively describing his visual observations as “really nice sightseeing, if you know what I mean” (Salinger 123). Holden’s comments demonstrate his emotional ineptitude with regards to sexuality. He disapproves of his peers’ physical expressions of sexuality, yet participates in the male gaze’s devaluation of the female body. By referring to women as ‘sightseeing,’ he unknowingly suggests that these female individuals purely exist for visual recreation. Holden fails to recognize that he subscribes to the toxic masculinity that he claims to reject. Thus, Holden continues to exemplify the primary challenge of coming-of-age that is to truly know oneself.

Holden’s wayward attempts to navigate adolescent sexuality become increasingly fraught with his lack of emotional awareness. He continues to muse on said ‘sightseeing,’ admitting, “it was sort of depressing, too, because you kept wondering what the hell would *happen* to all of them. When they got out of school and college, I mean. You figured most of them would probably marry dopey guys” (Salinger 123). Holden then goes on to describe his definitions of said conventional ‘dopey guys’ as “guys that are very mean. Guys that never read books. Guys that are very boring” (Salinger 123). Despite his conscious efforts to express his disdain of young adult men, his words also serve as a sexist critique of women, again reminiscent of the toxic masculinity to which he unconsciously succumbs. He refers to women’s pursuit of married life as something that ‘*happens* to them,’ as though they are victimized, when they are likely simply seeking human connection. He fails to envision sympathetically a positive outcome of

development and assumes that any departure from youthful innocence will result in sorrow, made furthermore painful due to his all-consuming depressive state.

Presumably, Holden's comments are partly a result of his chronic loneliness, yet he fails to recognize that his bitter rejection of maturing relationships in fact acts as a barrier to his own development. As evidence of his youthful ignorance, Holden prefers to remain stagnant so as to avoid the threat of change inherent in coming-of-age, illustrated by his failure to grasp the sexual component of development. Furthermore, Holden remains fixed in his own images of authentic living, based mainly on his own observations and assumptions. In his mind, young women will undoubtedly succumb to partnerships with young men who will submit to 'dopey' means of interacting with the world, and fail his undefined tests of literacy and liveliness. Holden is quick to assign such dismissive labels as 'phony' or 'dopey,' yet he lacks the evidence and life experience needed to validate his opinions. He is stubborn in his ideal version of the self but fails to recognize that the precarious formation of his own self more urgently requires honest introspection.

## Chapter V

“So unlike what a man should be”

In Chapter III of the novel's third volume, Austen disrupts the aura of pastoral gentility in which Emma and her literary peers exist. As Emma continues to muse endlessly about the social intentions of her peers, she unexpectedly observes Harriet fainting. Austen's narrator describes the event with an ironic detachment, stating, “a young lady who faints, must be recovered; questions must be answered, and surprises be explained. Such events are very interesting, but the suspense of them cannot last long” (Austen 229). By referring to the subject of the event ambiguously and simply as ‘a young lady,’ followed by the routine order of events, Austen indicates the far-reaching scope of social convention. The uniformity of response to which she refers suggests that the focus is less about the wellbeing of the woman who faints and moreover about the social implications and opportunity for occupation among her peers. Austen's narrator refers to this lack of concern and excitement for social opportunity when she ironically describes the situation as ‘very interesting,’ rather than concerning or troubling.

Emma's participation in the related intrigue and stimulation exemplifies the degree of boredom and resulting social scheming produced by social culture in the Victorian world of gentry. When a mind as active and clever as Emma's is limited in activity to superficial social occupation, it must seek stimulation in the most base of circumstances. Furthermore, the individual at the center of the scenario—Harriet, in this instance—is essentially reduced to the role of entertainer for her social circle when she is

in fact in a moment of crisis. The narrator indicates that the priority for Harriet is not ensuring her safety and health, but rather satisfaction of the ‘questions’ and ‘surprises.’ Thus, Emma and Harriet become play-actors in the social melodrama in which they live.

Austen’s narrator goes on to describe Harriet’s faint-inducing altercation, resulting in a jarring break from the otherwise comically peaceful narrative world of Highbury. She describes an episode in which Harriet is accosted by “a party of gypsies” (Austen 229) and is rendered helpless until Frank Churchill comes to her defense. While describing the altercation, Austen’s narrator emphasizes Harriet’s utter inability to defend herself. Her physical helplessness is demonstrated when her companion, Miss Bickerton, is able to escape whereas, “poor Harriet could not follow. She had suffered very much from cramp after dancing, and her first attempt to mount the bank brought on such a return of it as made her absolutely powerless—and in this state, and exceedingly terrified, she had been obliged to remain” (Austen 229). The narrator’s patronizing characterization of ‘poor Harriet’ as ‘powerless’ is fitting in that she is woefully crippled by a simple act of social dancing coupled with fear. Furthermore, the fact that she must rely on Frank Churchill to save her augments her weakened condition. Evocative of the world of gentry in which she lives, Harriet must depend on a man in order to survive.

Harriet’s brief altercation with the dubious pack of gypsies purposefully—albeit temporarily—disrupts the placid façade of gentility, thus reminding readers of the realities that exist outside Austen’s world of manners. As a result, Austen subtly suggests communicates her awareness that the comfortable privilege that provides Emma with a comfort environment for coming-of-age is not necessarily available for others. For instance, Emma’s privilege is furthered solidified by Austen’s choice to subject the

inferior Harriet to this dangerous experience. In doing so, Austen momentarily reminds her readers of the dangers that exist outside the confines of her heroine's relatively placid life, while maintaining Emma's elevated state of comfort. Readers may presume that perhaps in a more precarious narrative—such as Salinger's—Harriet may have been exposed to far more dangerous consequences than a lost shilling. Furthermore, one may question the origins and background of the mysterious gypsies that are evidently driven to theft as a means of survival. Rather, Austen's narrator ironically refers to this potentially dangerous incident as “an adventure” (Austen 230), as though it were a fanciful voyage, thus concluding her brief venture outside of Victorian gentility and into reality. Her characters may see this as a titillating episode during which they can advance their social motivations. In actuality, though, their ironic reactions further demonstrate the contrast between their lives of leisure and the reality that exists outside their immediate narrative.

Thus, readers can consider an additional element of the *bildungsroman*, which is the necessity of reckoning with the realities of one's world. In order for an individual to engage with the world in an enlightened manner, he or she should be endowed with character-building experiences that would enable one to view environment through a rational lens. Emma falters in achieving this aspect of coming-of-age, evidenced by the fact that she passes through Harriet's incident unchanged. She is momentarily exposed to the threat of danger, evidence of poverty, and individuals highly unlike herself. Yet after observing Harriet's harrowing experience, she primarily draws a conclusion that, “circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other” (Austen 230), referring to Harriet and Frank Churchill. Thus, Emma's development is

stifled by her continued belief that the overall circumstances of the world are actively conspiring in support of her theories regarding flirtation and courtship. Essentially, Emma continues to suffer from a chronic case of self-centeredness. She therefore fails to recognize that the environment in which she lives encompasses a greater series of circumstances than those that are directly related to her own social motivations.

In this regard, Salinger's narrative sharply contrasts with his counterpart in that Holden's environment is saturated with realism and cynical depictions of it. His coming-of-age journey is not colored with the romantic pastoral serenity of Emma Woodhouse's. Rather, Holden wholly exists in the jarring discomfort and anxiety illustrated in Harriet's altercation. His unsupervised cavorting through New York reveals his naïveté, as well as the realistic dangers inherent in the urban landscape with which he attempts to contend. Holden initially plans to "take a room in a hotel in New York—some very inexpensive hotel and all—and just take it easy till Wednesday. Then, on Wednesday, I'd go home all rested up and feeling swell" (Salinger 51). His claim may alert readers to the disconnect that exists between Holden's perception of himself and the reality of circumstances. Holden's primary reason for deciding to go to New York is because he feels "too sad and lonesome" (Salinger 51) at Pencey Prep, thus establishing the impetus for his actions throughout his narrative. His choices are aimed at remedying his inability to cope with his environment and his development into young adulthood, as well as the loneliness that accompanies his desperate internal worlds.

As soon as Holden arrives in New York, he continues to search for an external antidote for his loneliness. He becomes disillusioned with his image of a soothing, comforting retreat at his New York hotel. Holden repeatedly refers to his fragile

psychological state, sharing that he “was too depressed to care whether I had a good view or not” (Salinger 61). He is so consumed by his depression that the remedies he seeks are unsuccessful and only augment his desperate state. He then observes, “one guy, a gray-haired, very distinguished-looking guy with only his shorts on, do something you wouldn’t believe me if I told you...he took out all these women’s clothes, and put them on” (Salinger 61). Yet rather than respond with revulsion, he views this figure sympathetically. Holden watches as the man “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. He was all alone, too” (Salinger 62). Given Holden’s typically nervous response to sexual scenarios, readers may have anticipated a more judgmental response. Yet, he relates to the cross-dressing man’s loneliness, illustrating how his depression has saturated his perspective.

In analyzing these narrative episodes, it is helpful to return to the works of Goethe and his influence on narratives of development. In Goethe’s dramatic masterpiece, *Faust*, the titular character embarks on a journey with the devil, Mephistopheles. In the work, devil wagers with God that he can succeed in luring his favorite human, Dr. Faust, away from his virtuous efforts and into the forces of evil. Dr. Faust essentially sells his soul to Mephistopheles, agreeing to serve the devil in exchange for his assistance in Faust’s efforts on earth. During their journey, they celebrate *Walpurgis* Night, or *Walpurgisnacht*, wherein Faust shares in the consumption of celebratory bacchanalia, thus distracting him from his earthly pursuits. In “The Function of the ‘*Walpurgis* Night Dream’ in the Faust Drama,” Harold Jantz analyzes the *Walpurgisnacht*, describing it as a night wherein "every concept of rational order is necessarily broken down, the laws of

space, time, and gravity defied...the whole scene is; so to speak, a transition from the limitations of space and time” (Janz 401). Likewise, Holden’s unsupervised evening in New York serves a similar purpose to his narrative development. He witnesses individuals and partakes in experiences that signal a suspension of his understanding of reality.

By pausing to revisit the works of Goethe, readers may better understand the influences that have contributed to the *bildungsroman* genre, as evidenced by Holden’s narrative. In the *Walpurignacht* episode of *Faust*, the titular character is plunged into an environment that is wholly saturated by mystical and phenomenal forces as he continues to interact with the forces of good and evil. Faust is submerged into bacchanalian pleasure, which ultimately serves to further complicate the choices with which he is faced. This narrative dynamic mirrors the challenges faced by both Holden in his unfettered exploration of urban freedom and adult sexuality. Holden essentially experiences a *Walpurgisnacht* episode of his own as he ventures through the precarious nightlife of New York. He observes and interacts with individuals with whom he differs characteristically, socially, and sexually. These interactions and Holden’s narration thereof reveal how far he has yet to go in his journey to discover a way to live authentically as a young adult.

Holden’s disillusioned interactions during his excursion in New York will continue to reveal both his loneliness and his discomfort when dealing with issues of sexuality and the body. His interaction with a prostitute at his hotel exemplifies his emotional desperation and sexual ineptitude. Holden explains his decision to welcome a prostitute into his room, stating that “it was against my principles and all, but I was

feeling so depressed I didn't even think. That's the whole trouble. When you're feeling very depressed, you can't even think" (Salinger 91). Notably, his inexperience is subtly summarized in his brief mention of his 'principles,' in that Holden does not actually know what his principles are. His character is clearly still in a tenuous formative process and he does not realize how far he has yet to go in his journey towards adulthood. What further complicates his perspective is the fact that his depression has spiraled to such an extreme level that, as he acknowledges, his decision-making capacity is highly limited.

Holden inadvertently demonstrates his own inexperience by critiquing the same qualities in the prostitute, Sunny, evocative of his own anxiety. He ironically comments on Sunny's assumed inexperience when he in fact exhibits the same issues. For instance, he claims that, "she was very nervous, for a prostitute" (Salinger 94). One wonders how Holden can make such a statement when he undoubtedly does not have any other interactions with a prostitute with whom he can compare. He continues to critique her presumed inexperience, stating that, "she had a tiny little wheeny-whiny voice. You could hardly hear her. She never said thank you, either, when you offered her something. She just didn't know any better" (Salinger 94). When Holden criticizes her juvenile voice, he fails to remain conscious of the fact that he himself is young and still pubescent. Thus, he is hardly in a position to adequately judge whether or not someone presents his or herself as mature. The irony of this interaction is best exemplified in his concluding statement that 'she just didn't know any better,' in that Holden is the one that does not 'know any better.' Arguably, when Holden critiques his peers on their characterization or socialization, he is unconsciously critiquing his own self. His social commentary

establishes the capacity for self-awareness as an essential component of one's coming-of-age journey.

Holden's strained interaction with Sunny also reveals an often-overlooked aspect of his character—his empathy. As with the cross-dressing man, Holden considers what her feelings and origin may be and, as a result, responds sympathetically. For instance, when he hangs up the woman's dress, he admits that, "It made me feel sort of sad when I hung it up" (Salinger 96). He then describes how he, "thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought that she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell—I don't know why exactly" (Salinger 96). Undoubtedly, his interaction with the woman makes him unbearably uncomfortable, as evidenced by the fact that he shortly thereafter asks her to leave without performing any sexual acts. Yet, he does not judge her circumstances or admit any sense of disgust for her profession. Instead, he pities the thought of the woman trying to function as an average, respectable individual when, in truth, her professional life is rather pathetic. Holden therefore demonstrates a remarkable capacity for empathy, often obscured by the cynicism that saturates his first-person narration.

While Holden's introspective response to his interaction with the prostitute reveals a commendable degree of empathy, it also further demonstrates how he remains fixed in an anxious state of juvenilia. The more that he attempts to fabricate an adult persona, the more he reverts to a childlike emotional state. This is illustrated when Sunny returns to Holden's room with her pimp, Maurice, to intimidate Holden into giving them an additional payment. He admits that he "had just my goddamn *pajamas* on" (Salinger

102) and his “voice was cracking all over the place” (Salinger 101), reminding Holden and his readers that he is, physically, a pubescent boy—made visually more effective by the image of him wearing pajamas. He attempts to fashion an adult persona by embarking on such activities as drinking, smoking, renting a hotel room, and hiring a prostitute, yet these actions only further overwhelm him.

Holden then augments the juvenile image of him wearing pajamas and speaking with a cracking voice by crying and succumbing to physical intimidation. As the confrontation between him and Maurice intensifies, Holden falters in his ability to present himself as an adult and essentially reverts to childhood. As Maurice continues to badger him for an additional five dollars, Holden admits, “all of a sudden I started to cry. I’d give anything if I hadn’t, but I did... Then what he did, he snapped his finger very hard on my pajamas. I won’t tell you *where* he snapped it, but it hurt like hell” (Salinger 103). By crying, he physically demonstrates the desperation, fear, and loneliness to which he has alluded in a helplessly childlike manner. Furthermore, Maurice’s finger snap can presumably be interpreted as a moment of sexual assault, inasmuch as Holden cannot bring himself to vocalize where he was touched on his body. The image of Holden weeping, physically assaulted, and verbally intimidates strikingly illustrates his woeful, troubled attempt to present himself as an adult when, in truth, he is a frightened and depressed child, overwhelmed by the adult dangers of urban nightlife.

The theme of sexuality continues to present itself as a central element of these episodes wherein Holden challenges and falters to his perceptions of salvation. He seeks a remedy to his desperation in such sources as urban life and sexual activity, yet each refuge ultimately adds to Holden’s depressed disillusionment. When he reaches another

point of desperation, he seeks relief from “about the best teacher I ever had, Mr. Antolini” (Salinger 174). Holden describes how Mr. Antolini earned his admiration by caring for the body of James Castle, a Pencey student who commits suicide to whom Holden repeatedly refers. He recalls how Mr. Antolini “finally picked up that boy that jumped out the window I told you about, James Castle. Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put it over James Castle and carried him all the way over to the infirmary” (Salinger 174). Given Holden’s continual references to his depression and a lack of willingness to live, his admiration for an adult who cares for a victim of suicide is undoubtedly clear. Yet, the specific gesture that earns Holden’s admiration appears to be Antolini’s willingness to carry the body and conceal it with his own coat. Holden adds that, “he didn’t even give a damn if his coat got all bloody” (Salinger 174). Antolini’s lack of concern for appearances aligns with Holden’s apparent concept of authenticity. He is willing to care for another even in grotesque, graphic, and deeply tragic circumstances. Most notably, his lack of concern over whether or not he gets bloody on his coat signals to Holden disinterest in others’ perception of himself—an ultimate representation of the authentic in extraordinary circumstances.

Yet, Holden’s ill-fated visit to Antolini’s apartment ultimately continues his pattern of seeking and, consequently, failing to find validation from an academic authority figure. His sense of comfort is jarringly disturbed when he suddenly awakens to discover “something on my head, some guy’s hand. Boy, it really scared hell out of me. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini’s hand...he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head” (Salinger 192). Holden’s vulnerability, depression, and general anxiety surrounding personal connection result in an understandable degree of alarm. The

unexpected physical contact—particularly from a presumed place of sanctuary—causes Holden to panic and flee the apartment in order to return to his late-night troubled wanderings through New York. Following the incident, he claims that, “I know more damn perverts, at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they’re always being pervery when *I’m* around” (Salinger 192). One questions what criteria Holden uses to label someone’s behavior as ‘pervery.’ Presumably, the term refers to one who engages in errant or problematic sexual behavior. Yet, as his narration dictates, Holden has a highly limited frame of reference for adult sexuality, further exemplifying how juvenile he truly is.

Arguably, the term may be more of a reflection on Holden’s discomfort and anxiety regarding sexuality than a genuine judgment on another individual’s sexuality. Certainly, Mr. Antolini’s decision to caress Holden in the middle of the night is misguided and presumably influenced by the fact that he is inebriated or, as Holden states, “a little oiled up” (Salinger 182). Whether or not Antolini’s physical contact is a product of pedophilia or inebriation, the incident triggers Holden’s demonstrates his age-appropriate inexperience in handling precarious situations. In a characteristically consistent fashion, his discomfort instantly transforms into panic and he descends further into desperation. Evocative of his pubescent inexperience and self-consciousness, Holden’s intense responses to sexually charged situations expose his true vulnerability.

Holden’s self-reflection on the episode further reveals his anxiety and adolescent immaturity regarding sexuality. In addition to his general sexual ineptitude, his thoughts demonstrate a juvenile approach to homosexuality in particular—evocative of what one would expect of an insecure adolescent boy. For instance, following his sudden exit from

Antolini's house, he muses that "maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe he just liked to pat guys on the head when they're asleep" (Salinger 195). Presumably, Holden does not use the term 'flitty' in an ill-intentioned derogatory way. The term itself is inappropriate and culturally harmful, but his comments do not indicate a sense of malice towards homosexuality. Rather, Holden has adopted a juvenile approach to adult sexuality coupled with cultural ignorance typical of the society in which he lives. His questionable vocabulary choices demonstrate his immaturity regarding adult sexuality. Try as he might to appear as a grown man in control of his circumstances, scenarios involving sexuality reveal how far he has to go in his coming-of-age journey.

Furthermore, the innocently hilarious notion of a grown man who likes to asexually caress other men while they are sleeping illustrates Salinger's infusion of genuine humor into Holden's prose. In Salinger's skillful application of humor in text, readers may find that Holden is far more humorous when he does not intend to be. Thus, Holden's audience may become conscious of an application of the theme of authenticity in humor. When Holden's humor is forced, it generally serves as a coping mechanism for his insecurity or anxiety surrounding a social situation. Yet, when he speaks to his audience guilelessly and without a conscious attempt to manufacture a façade of adulthood, then his natural capacity for humor becomes apparent. As a result, Salinger illustrates the importance of authenticity not only in one's actions and social interactions, but also in one's perspective. The genuine nature of Holden's humor demonstrates an actualization of authentic narrative voice, in addition to the search for authenticity in his actions as he approaches adulthood.

The protagonist's response to shame serves as an effective device for revealing the character's progressive status in their coming-of-age journey, consequently advancing the *bildungsroman* narrative. Holden's narrative includes numerous moments of shame and anxiety, whereas Emma's moments of internal reckoning are communicated more subtly and in far less threatening circumstances. Emma's most palpable moment of shame and resulting introspection occurs as a result of a pivotal social faux pas. As the guests are gathered for socializing at Box Hill, Emma offends the foolish yet well-intentioned Miss Bates in a slightly cruel attempt at humor. As Frank Churchill invites each person in their group to share "one thing very clever...or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull" (Austen 255) so that Emma may respond, Miss Bates self-effacingly comments that she herself often makes dull remarks. In response, "Emma could not resist. 'Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once'" (Austen 256). The narrator then notes that "a slight blush showed that it could pain her," (Austen 256) referring to Miss Bates. While Emma's remark was intended to be a witty quip, Austen's narrator quietly and empathetically alerts readers to the fact that Miss Bates demonstrates wounded feelings, thus holding Emma accountable.

Mr. Knightley then personifies this sense of accountability as he reprimands Emma for valuing snide humor above the feelings of her friend. As a result, the theme of empathy is proven to be a critical element of the *bildungsroman* narrative. In the case of Emma, empathy must be cultivated in balance with her need for validation of ego. Holden similarly requires validation, yet his needs are less egotistical and more so based

on security and emotional well-being. Mr. Knightley scolds Emma and demands that she consider “how could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? –Emma, I had not thought it possible” (Austen 258). When Emma then attempts “to laugh it off” (Austen 258) and use humor as a defense mechanism, Knightley continues to instill a sense of accountability. Knightley asserts that he “will tell you truths while I can, satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now” (Austen 259). Knightley verbalizes his position as a moral center in Emma’s life, urging her to live up to the standard to which he holds her.

As their narrative concludes, Knightley leads Emma by example in terms of authentic living in adult companionship. Throughout their relationship, he maintains his position of superiority by instructing and correcting Emma when she falters socially and philosophically. When she accepts his declaration of love and consequent proposal of marriage, he also demonstrates another fundamental component of one’s coming-of-age—fluidity and the ability to adapt. His willingness to adapt to her needs in order to craft a partnership that is mutually satisfying and productive shows that he is not only an effective tutor for Emma, but also an ideal life partner. Despite his own esteemed status he decides to move to Hartfield, rather than ask Emma to part with her father. Austen’s narrator describes how Knightley “trusted his dearest Emma would not find in any respect objectionable; it was, that he should be received at Hartfield; that so long as her father’s happiness—in other words his life—required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise” (Austen 309). Knightley prioritizes his partner’s happiness and makes a reasonable and significant concession in order to facilitate a functional family

life. In doing so, he demonstrates to Emma that manufacturing an authentic partnership and fulfilling adulthood requires a mutual balance of priorities. Even their partnership itself serves an instructive purpose to Emma's development.

Mr. Knightley and Phoebe both demonstrate the significance of a character to serve as a moral compass for the protagonist in a *bildungsroman* narrative. The two characters reflect the diversity of the *bildungsroman* genre, in that Mr. Knightley is an esteemed gentleman of Victorian gentry in his late thirties, whereas Phoebe Caulfield is a ten-year-old girl living in post-WWII Manhattan. While they both enjoy lives of comfort in their respective settings, they are able to offer honest and constructive perspective, relatively unspoiled by privilege. The significance of their perspectives is demonstrated by their consistent influence on their protagonists. Even in moments of contention, Mr. Knightley and Phoebe succeed in instructing Emma and Holden to live more empathically, rationally, and genuinely. With Mr. Knightley's continued, impassioned intervention in Emma's social schemes and self-satisfied approach to life, he is able to correct her in errors of compassion and eventually lead her to formulate an authentic approach to adulthood—made more satisfying to characters and readers alike by their marriage. Holden's narrative stakes may be more urgent than Emma's social manipulations, in that his depression becomes essentially life-threatening. Thus, Phoebe's ability to save Holden from complete self-destruction becomes even more remarkable. Overall, without Knightley and Phoebe's intervention, their companions may have been narratively damned to disingenuous or bitterly unhappy lives.

## Chapter VI

“If you want to know the truth”

While the candor of Emma Woodhouse’s thoughts on marriage and wealth is commendable, she still exists within the Victorian world of gentry and, as a result, the potential of Austen’s insight into gender bias is limited. Thus, one is compelled to uncover further limitations to realizations of the theme of authenticity in the *bildungsroman*. As Overman observes in his essay, “for all her unconventional advantages (unconventional, that is, for a woman), Emma is as stereotypically idle as any woman of the gentry class” (Overman 226). Even though she lives with considerable social status and relatively unfettered material comfort, Emma remains fixed in her role as a young woman in Victorian society. As a result, she would not have access to the opportunity of her male counterparts and, as Overman states, “Emma’s talents and energy, under the gender restrictions of idleness and a small, unvaried environment, make her bored...The solution, little as the modern reader may like to admit it, is for Emma to conform more fully to the gender norms for women of the time” (Overman 226). Overman speaks accurately to the modern impulse to assign increased consequence in breaking gender-based restrictions to such literary heroines as Emma. While her boldness of opinion and vivacity of character make Emma Woodhouse exceptional among heroines of the *bildungsroman*, Overman is correct in observing the submission that is required for Emma’s coming-of-age narrative to be completed.

Thus, one questions whether the actualization of authenticity recognized in *bildungsroman* is a perhaps less-inspiring act of submission to the confines of adult

expectations in society. Overman exposes the curious extent of submission inherent in Austen's conclusion, recognizing that "Emma's taking advice from and then marrying Mr. Knightley are emphatic confirmations of social norms" (Overman 227), in that she wholly submits to male influence and the institution of marriage that she had otherwise rejected. For instance, Emma's thoughts on her marriage to Mr. Knightley demonstrate a clear contrast to her prior declarations of independence. As the narrative reaches its harmonious conclusion, Emma internally expresses concern that "she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security.—What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, who intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in the future" (Austen 327). The joy of Emma and Knightley's long-awaited union may obscure the conspicuous departure from her prior pledges to self-sufficiency. Strangely, she shares that her sole aspiration is to remain deserving of Knightley's attention and social instruction, thereby relegating herself to female inferiority.

Yet, amidst Emma's apparently submissive entrance into adulthood, Austen does not appear to surrender fully to the patriarchy, thus demonstrating the complexity of gender in the *bildungsroman*. For instance, towards the narrative's conclusion, Emma spiritedly states to Knightley that "I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other" (Austen 326). Though she has acquiesced to gender-based conventions in her pursuit of Knightley's affection and subsequent proposal of marriage, she has retained the confident spirit of herself as a confident ingénue. As a result, readers will find that Emma has constructed her own unique interpretation of what it means to

live authentically as an adult woman living in the Victorian England world of gentry. She retains her sense of individuality and continues to assert herself to the extent she is allowed. Yet, Austen makes her aware of the realities of adulthood as dictated by society and gender-based traditions. Essentially, Emma realizes that as she has ventured towards adulthood she has developed feelings of love and a desire to join Knightley in companionship and, thus, it would be disingenuous of her to deny satisfaction of her feelings. Arguably, her narrative of development may only be completed once she recognizes the complexity and, at times, unresolved tension inherent in authentic coming-of-age.

Austen's direction of Emma's narrative indicates that a balance must be found between the strength with one asserts their own prerogative on authentic living and the navigation of social constructs in order to thrive in one's own culture. Overman speaks to this tension between authentic selfhood and the societal concessions one may feel compelled to make when he claims that "when Emma pleases others, she does not please herself, and in pleasing herself, she displeases others. Austen thus criticizes the near impossibility of reconciling the individual and social aspects of gender norms" (Overman 234). His observation verbalizes the tension that is presented by the theme of authenticity and coming-of-age. While readers may be tempted to reduce the true nature of such narratives to a rejection of or submission to standardized societal practices, Austen keenly recognizes the complexity of the *bildungsroman*. Authenticity in coming-of-age may not wholly refer to an assertion of one's own desires. Rather, Emma's narrative posits that in order to live authentically and realistically, one must in fact discover a balance the impulses of youth with the confines of society.

In depicting Emma's attempts to maneuver social constructs while remaining connected to her authentic impulses, Austen has presented a complex portrait of the ambiguity and challenges inherent in coming-of-age. Notably, the cleanliness of the conclusion of Austen's novel undoubtedly contrasts with Salinger's interpretation of the *bildungsroman*. Thus, it becomes necessary to question the ways in which Emma's harmonious entrance into adulthood differs from Holden's somber *denouement*. While Emma has achieved a satisfied balance between reasonable self-assertion and a somewhat anticlimactic submission, Holden's narrative concludes with a significant lack of resolution for his own personal trajectory. As a result, Salinger augments the impossibility of full reconciliation that Overman observes in Austen's work with an ambiguous, tenuous entry into adulthood for Holden.

Arguably, Holden is successful in that he has avoided succumbing to the disturbingly suicidal thoughts he shares with increasing frequency throughout his narration. In Salinger's brief final chapter, Holden implies that he has been speaking to his audience from what seems to be a mental health facility or sanitarium, as evidenced by his reference to "this one psychoanalyst guy they have here" (Salinger 213). Even though Holden has avoided acting on his repeated insinuations that he "really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window" (Salinger 104). The blunt candor with which Holden makes this statement serves as a jarring realization for readers of the personal danger that Holden has placed himself in, made even more striking by the frank directness and simplicity of Salinger's prose. For Holden, the developmental task of reconciling the immense grief with which he lives—and the

consequent psychological distress—with the world of adulthood induces such intense despair that the prospect of suicide offers relief.

In his final passages, Holden demonstrates continued cynicism and skepticism of others' authenticity, suggesting that he has not participated in the submission to society found in the conclusion of Emma's narrative. Austen arranges the circumstances of Emma's *denouement* with orderly resolution; it is the true nature of Emma's development as a woman in Victorian society that inspires analysis and questioning. Salinger, conversely, denies his protagonist a definitive ending and as a result readers are left to question what will become of Holden and what the implications for authenticity are in one's coming-of-age. While Holden has submitted to authority in that he relinquishes his hazardous wanderings around New York City in favor of a safe surrender to his family, the cynicism of his worldview does not appear to have changed. As his narrative comes to a close he refers to his psychoanalyst's simple inquiry about returning to school as "such a stupid question" (Salinger 213). One wonders whether the line of questioning is in fact 'stupid' or rather another eventuality that Holden would prefer to not consider. In this sense, his bitter pessimism acts as a shield against the realities of growing up.

Ultimately, Holden's problematic state of being is due to an underlying rejection of change—certainly similar to Emma Woodhouse's primary challenge of learning "to bear the change" (Austen 6). Holden's resistance to change is evident in the novel's concluding lines when he sentimentally muses about ironically missing those that he has complained about, including the same peers from Pencey Prep that he had ridiculed for lack of authenticity in their behavior. He states, "don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (Salinger 214). By verbalizing his story, it has secured

the reality of what has happened to him in his troubling coming-of-age journey and thus he is forced to reckon with the truth. According to his apparent reasoning, were Holden to heed his own advice and not reveal his feelings, and then he would not have to submit to the emotion that has thus far overwhelmed him and could rather continue to hide behind the guise of inauthentic posturing and playacting.

Furthermore, his statement demonstrates that missing people and lamenting his loss of connection serves as a basis for his emotional distress. Essentially, Holden suffers from extreme grief and, as a result, rejects any potential change that may result in loss, thus impeding his coming-of-age journey. The extraordinary grief with which he lives is evidenced by his repeated references to his late brother, Allie, who has passed away from leukemia. Allie is one of the sole figures in the text for whom Holden repeatedly expresses posthumous admiration and describes positively as “terrifically intelligent...but it wasn’t just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in a lot of ways” (Salinger 38); Phoebe also earns praise from Holden, as she reminds him of their late brother.

In moments of duress throughout his narrative, Holden eases himself by becoming immersed in thoughts of Allie. While this line of thinking may appear purely sentimental, it also acts as a hindrance to Holden’s development inasmuch as he uses grief to defer reconciling himself with the urgent need to grow and adapt to change. For instance, when Holden becomes conspicuously unsure of his personal safety and fearful that “every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I’d never get to the other side of the street” (Salinger 197). Arguably, Holden is fearfully realizing the reality of his suicidal frame of mind and rather than confronting his

depressive state, he essentially self-medicates with grief. He implores the memory of Allie for relief, pleading “Allie, don’t let me disappear” (Salinger 198). Holden has become so troubled by and disconnected with reality that he clings to Allie’s memory, illustrating his immense grief. Arguably, the fear he experiences when crossing the street indicates his consuming aversion to progress and change. As a result, he remains overwhelmed by the sense of loss, as demonstrated by the concluding thoughts of his narrative.

Holden grieves not only the loss of people, but also the loss of innocence associated with coming-of-age. He views an individual’s departure from childhood not as a positive signal of growth but rather as a sort of casualty of one’s self; the grief he feels from missing people extends to missing who the person he used to be as a child. This is illustrated when he responds to Phoebe’s inquiry about his aspirations, wherein he references a Robert Burns poem and muses, “I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all...And I’m standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff...That’s all I’d do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye” (Salinger 172). By acting as ‘the catcher in the rye’ Holden envisions the only remedy to his despair, which is preserving the innocence of childhood. He views the act of maturing into adulthood as a perilous cliff, indicating that the coming-of-age process is one of danger and damage to the authenticity he observes in the innocence of youth.

Thus, Emma Woodhouse’s and Holden Caulfield’s *bildungsroman* narratives notably converge on a thematic aversion to change as they confront the challenges of coming-of-age. Furthermore, they must not only navigate the transition into adulthood,

but they must do so in such a way that is conducive to authenticity of character. The conclusions of their narratives and, hence, the points of departure into adulthood for them as protagonists differ in decisiveness. By developing romantic feelings for Knightley and choosing to pursue them—albeit passively—Emma accepts the social convention of marriage and adapts into adulthood. She happily marries Mr. Knightley and cooperatively acquiesces to his social instruction. As a result, readers receive a decisive and conveniently composed conclusion for Austen's heroine. Conversely, Holden's mindset upon the conclusion of his narrative possesses less cooperative optimism than Emma. He does avoid succumbing to his suicidal grief by surrendering to his family and psychological intervention, thus providing a positive conclusion for Salinger's readers. Yet, this conclusion is ultimately ambiguous, in that readers do not actually know how Holden will survive after he leaves the facility in which he shares his story. The fact that he concludes his narrative while receiving help does indicate that, like Emma, he has exercised a degree of submission to authority.

Readers may interpret these conclusions as acts of submission to convention. Yet when considered in the context of the coming-of-age trajectory, these narrative endings can be more critically read as complex moments of adaptation. As their respective *bildungsromanen* commence, Emma and Holden defiantly maintain what they believe to be authentic approaches to living that will sustain them throughout the maturation process. Emma initially interprets authentic living as a rejection of patriarchal convention and a precocious assertion of social privilege. Holden similarly adopts an assertive worldview, yet it is limited in action and moreover manifests itself as a cynical rejection of the disingenuous. Their respective resistance of change stifles their capacity to develop

as young adults and thus they are faced with the choice to remain steadfast in their refusals to adapt or accept the prospect of change. In order to achieve a sense of authentic living in young adulthood, they must learn to adapt and balance their desires with social convention. Emma and Holden arrive at their respective transitions by recognizing that further rejection of change will impede their personal development and ultimate prospects for happiness. Through their narrative tribulations, they discover an essential realization of one's coming-of-age journey: that by resisting change, they will effectively deny themselves actualization of their desires as young adults—partnership with Knightley, for Emma, and survival itself, for Holden.

Thus, the theme of authenticity in coming-of-age becomes much less of a static, defiant fixation, and rather a fluid tension between internal genuine desire its external manifestation. Coming-of-age is not necessarily attained through a particular moment of achievement. Rather, close reading of these narratives reveals that it is the acceptance of and adaptation to an evolving capacity for change. In recalling Shakespeare's articulation of coming-of-age, as depicted in *Hamlet* through Polonius' instruction of 'to thine own self be true,' one reconsiders what it truly means to 'be true' to the genuine self. Truth and authenticity in identity is not a singular achievement, but rather a willingness to continually approach one's circumstances with authenticity and adaptability.

Emma and Holden thus demonstrate how in order to engage truly and genuinely with the world as a young adult, one must also learn to balance an assertion of the self with an acceptance of change and a willingness to adapt. As Emma and Holden come of age, they are forced to recognize that necessity of characteristic fluidity in order to engage with their peers and surroundings in a manner this is both authentic and realistic

in the context of established society. Therefore, readers will discover that the condition of being true to 'thine own self' is indeed fundamental, but not fixed. Rather than rigidly asserting one's preconceived conceptions of what it means to live genuinely, Emma's and Holden's adaptations of the self actually demonstrate that change in one's perspective and presentation of character is vital. Without the ability to adapt, authenticity may become obscured or even lost in an unexamined, juvenile rejection of society. One must accept that in order for oneself to survive into adulthood—and to do so authentically—the necessity of change must be accepted.

As a literary genre, the *bildungsroman* exhibits a unique capacity to illustrate a protagonist's process of learning to reconcile oneself genuinely with the world in anticipation of adulthood. Austen's *Emma* and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* illustrate the unparalleled diversity and narrative range of the novel of development—a genre that offers unceasingly relatable narratives to critical readers. Furthermore, these two narratives in particular are notable in their depiction of protagonists who are often viewed as challenging or unlikable in nature. Yet, close reading reveals that what readers may view as a lack of likability is, in fact, an assertive rejection of compromise illustrated against a background of privilege and erroneous judgment. In creating such challenging protagonists, Austen and Salinger succeed in illustrating the complex difficulty of not only coming of age within the confines of one's own society, but also the increased challenge of doing so authentically. By presenting themselves as difficult characters entrenched in the complexities of development, Emma and Holden essentially embody the ultimate challenge of a personal reconciliation of adaptation and authenticity. These elements are not fixed achievements but rather fluid states of being. Undoubtedly, Emma

Woodhouse and Holden Caulfield serve as the ideal illustrators for the depth of the theme of authenticity and the complexity of the *bildungsroman* as a literary genre. Much like the novel of development and the coming-of-age process itself, Austen's and Salinger's challenging protagonists indeed contain multitudes.

## Bibliography

### I

#### Works Cited

- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Harvard University Press, 1974.
- “English Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar Help | Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxforddictionaries.com/.
- Jantz, Harold. “The Function of the ‘Walpurgis Night's Dream’ in the Faust Drama.” *Monatshefte*, vol. 44, no. 8, 1952, pp. 397–408.
- Justice, George, editor. “Backgrounds; Reviews and Criticism.” *Emma: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, by Jane Austen, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., W.W. Norton & Co., 2012.
- Overman, Lee. “Darcy and Emma: Austen's Ironic Meditation on Gender.” *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, vol. 31, 2009, pp. 222–235.
- Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little, Brown and Company, 2014.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, Modern Library, 2008.
- Tennyson, G.B., and John M Spalek. “The *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century English Literature.” *Medieval Epic to the "Epic Theater" of Brecht: Essays in Comparative Literature*, edited by Rosario P Armato, I, University of Southern California Press, 1968, pp. 135–146.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Harvard University Press, 1972.

## II

### Works Consulted

- Austen, Jane. *Jane Austen in Context*. Edited by Janet M. Todd, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice*. Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Brookeman, Christopher. *Pencey Preppy: Cultural Codes in The Catcher in the Rye*. *New Essays on the Catcher in the Rye*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 57-75.
- Bush, Douglas. *Jane Austen*. Macmillan Pub. Co., 1975.
- Copeland, Edward, and Juliet McMaster. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Ellis, Lorna. *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850*. Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1999.
- Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. Columbia University Press, 1993. 1. Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, and Frank Claudy. *Faust: a Tragedy*. 2nd ed., [Press of T. McGill & Co.], 1899.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, and Renata Fischer-Lamburg. *Wilhelm Meister*. Akademie-Verlag, 1957.
- Hamilton, Ian. *In Search of J.D. Salinger*. Random House, 1988.
- Jantz, Harold. "The Function of the 'Walpurgis Night's Dream' in the Faust Drama." *Monatshefte*, vol. 44, no. 8, 1952, pp. 397-408. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/30165886](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30165886).
- Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen : Women, Politics, and the Novel*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kinane, Ian. "'Phonies' and Phone Calls: Social Isolation, the Problem of Language, and

- J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*" *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2017, pp. 117–132.
- Kohn, Denise. "Reading Emma As a Lesson on 'Ladyhood': A Study in the Domestic Bildungsroman." *Essays in Literature*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1995, pp. 45–58.
- Lascelles, Mary. *Jane Austen and Her Art*. Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Miller, Kathleen Ann. "Haunted Heroines: The Gothic Imagination and the Female Bildungsromane of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and L. M. Montgomery." *Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2010, pp. 125–147.
- Morefield, Kenneth R. *Jane Austen's Emma: A Close Reading Companion*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2015.
- Nokes, David. *Jane Austen: a Life*. 1st American ed., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.
- Pecchenino, Daniel. "If You Want to Know the Truth": Fair Use, Authenticity, and J. D. Salinger." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography*, vol. 83, no. 3, 2011, pp. 597–619.
- Rehder, Helmut. "The Classical Walpurgis Night in Goethe's 'Faust.'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 54, no. 4, 1955, pp. 591–611. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/27706654](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27706654).
- Roemer, Danielle M. "The Personal Narrative and Salinger's 'Catcher in the Rye.'" *Western Folklore: The Personal Narrative in Literature*, vol. 51, no. 1, Jan. 1992, pp. 5–10. *JSTOR*.
- Sasani, Samira, and Parvaneh Javidnejat. "A Discourse of the Alienated Youth in the American Culture: Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Asian Social Science*, vol. 11, no. 15, 2015, pp. 204–210.
- Speake, Jennifer, and Mark LaFlaur. "Walpurgisnacht." *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English*, 1999, pp. The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English.
- Tanner, Tony. *Jane Austen*. Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Voloshin, Beverly R. "The Limits of Domesticity: The Female Bildungsroman in American, 1820-1870." *Women's Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1984, pp. 283-302.  
 "A Discourse of the Alienated Youth in American Culture: Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*."

*“Walpurgisnacht.” Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995, pp. Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature, Edition 1, 1995.*