“What *is* a conversation?”: Power Dynamics in Modes of Communication in *Franny and Zooey* and *Conversations with Friends*

by

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To my mom. Thank you for letting me copy everything you do. You are my role model and hero.

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“I was a very autonomous and independent person with an inner life that nobody else had ever touched or perceived”

Abstract

This thesis offers an analysis on the impact and effectiveness of interactions between various modes of communication and power dynamics in *Franny and Zooey* by J.D. Salinger and *Conversations with Friends* by Sally Rooney. Written a half century apart, the modes of communication available to the characters in the two novels differ significantly, but the incorporation of new sources of technology into communications further emphasizes the complexities in the relationships between the characters in *Conversations with Friends*, the more recently published novel.

Chapter one of the thesis focuses on the ways different modes of communication change the amount of time characters have to construct their communication - ultimately allowing the exchanges to be varying levels of calculation or honesty. Methods such as email and letters allow the writer to be deliberate and concise in their delivery, whereas face-to-face conversations and phone calls do not offer the speaker the same opportunity. The Internet offers an entirely different exchange of information and warps the traditional power dynamics between characters. Chapter two of the thesis examines the stories within the stories in both novels. In *Conversations with Friends,* Frances, the protagonist, writes a story about her complicated relationship with her ex-girlfriend and current friend Bobbi. This story is the first time Frances expresses some of her feelings towards Bobbi. In *Franny and Zooey,* Buddy, Franny and Zooey's older brother, writes the novella *Zooey*, ensuring his presence is felt even though he is not actually physically present at the time. Both stories reflect on the art of fiction as a form of communication and how it can complicate power dynamics between the characters.

Chapter three of the thesis explores the ways in which communication and relationships help both Franny and Frances address their obsessions with spirituality and anti-capitalism respectively. Franny must speak with her brother to understand the unproductive, inaccurate nature of her fixation with transcendental mysticism. Frances must break free from the financial dependence she relies on from the men in her life to understand her inevitable role in the capitalist society she lives in.

Keywords: fiction, communication, diegetic, extradiegetic, narrator

CONTENT

Introduction

As Frances, the protagonist of *Conversations with Friends,* suggests in the quotation I have used in my epigraph, it is easy, especially in youth, to believe that you are completely alone in your thoughts and ideas. No one has or will ever feel, it would seem, the way you feel. However, Frances gradually learns, along with Franny, the protagonist of *Franny and Zooey,* that other people are capable of understanding their inner struggles. Not only can others empathize with their issues, but, through healthy communication, they can help.

Comprised of the short story, *Franny,* and the novella, *Zooey,* J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* follows a college-aged student, Franny Glass, as she meets her boyfriend Lane at a restaurant, and agonizes over the 'phoniness and ego' of her university's faculty. She only allows herself to find solace when she recites a prayer found in a small book called *The Way of the Pilgrim*. *Zooey* is set in the Glass family house, after Franny suffers a mental breakdown at the restaurant. Zooey, her brother, who has also read the book, tries to help Franny sort out her spiritual and moral beliefs and find a sense of peace and serenity.

Conversations with Friends follows another college-aged student and writer, Frances. She writes poetry that both she and Bobbi, her friend and ex-girlfriend, perform. After writing an article on Frances and Bobbi's performances, Melissa, a successful (and significantly older) writer, invites the pair to dinner at her house with her husband, Nick. Not long after this event Frances and Nick begin an affair.

The two novels are written over half a century apart, but share some similar themes and ideas. Sally Rooney has even been quoted saying that *Franny and Zooey* is the book that had the greatest influence on her writing (Rooney, 2020). Even the names of the protagonists are eerily

similar in a way that may or may not be a coincidence. However, no one has, at this point, connected the two novels in scholarly analysis.

In my thesis I will explore how communication techniques in Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* and J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* both enable and constrain intimacy in relationships. My study will illuminate why and how Rooney and Salinger place an emphasis on the necessity of balancing intimacy and independence in order to achieve emotional and practical maturity. In the relationships between their primary characters, communication is, somewhat surprisingly, not always beneficial in these novels. I will use the perspectives furnished by relevant examples of literary criticism and communication studies to analyze this relationship.

Communication, according to John Durham Peters in *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* "involve[s] interchange, mutuality, and some kind of reciprocity," (Peters, page 8, 1999). Most exchanges between characters in these novels have varying levels of these qualities, so it is not always clear whether or not they are successfully communicating with each other. The characters also use a variety of methods to interact with each other, including face-to-face conversation, letters, emails, phone calls, text messages, and even social media. Using Peters's conception of communication, I argue that financial exchanges and writing stories can also be forms of communication.

Monetary transfers involve an interchange between the borrower and the lender, a mutual agreement about when and if the money will be paid back and a sense of reciprocity, as both the borrower and the lender must benefit in some way. In both of the novels I analyze, characters write stories about their lives for publication. According to Peters' conception of communication,

these stories are not considered communication in the traditional sense, as the author does not "know [if] the message has arrived" directly to each reader. Once the story is published, however, the author can have some confidence that its "message has arrived" and an interchange between the reader and author has taken place. The author expresses their beliefs, and the reader reacts, forming their own opinions about the text. Of course, this form of communication works in one direction, from author to reader. No mutual agreement or reciprocal exchange (other than that of purchase) exists between the author and the reader.

In a novel, the author uses both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic to communicate a message to and interact with their readers. The intradiegetic, the events that happen in the novel can affect and be affected by the extradiegetic, the events that happen outside of the novel. I am interested in both acts of communication within the novel, intradiegetic, and in the novels themselves as acts of communication, extradiegetic. Some critics endorse the interaction between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic, but others are more wary. Joan Didion, for instance, condemns Salinger specifically in *Franny and Zooey* for his investment in the extradiegetic effects of his novel or his "predilection for giving instructions [for] living" (Gehlawat). Didion's critique implicitly draws on the modernist argument that novels should avoid the didactic in order to be appreciated as art. However, the two categories, novels that provide instruction and novels which embody the beauties and complexities of form, are not exclusive. Novels can be treated as art and also provide guidance to help us navigate experiences. As a communication device, literature can model the obstructions and complexities that condition and sometimes impede expression. Didion misses the opacities of Salinger's novel - the incompleteness and complexities of communications between its characters.

My first chapter contends that different methods of communication alter the power dynamics between characters, variously revealing or obscuring the truth. In *Franny and Zooey,* Franny sends a loving letter to her boyfriend Lane, but the letter's emotional contents are evidently disingenuous since Franny is standoffish when she sees Lane in person. Franny's letter is similarly calculated and partially sincere to an email Frances receives from Melissa in *Conversations with Friends*. Once Melissa learns Frances is having an affair with Nick*,* Melissa sends an email that contains facts about their respective relationships with Melissa's husband, Nick, but the delivery of the information conceals Melissa's true, unfiltered feelings. As modes of communication, emails and letters are mediated by their mediums, each allowing the writer to spend time crafting the communication and, potentially, making it easier to deceive the reader. Phone calls, too, are mediated by the technology of the call, permitting a degree of imposture less practicable in face-to-face conversation. *Franny and Zooey* features a phone conversation in which Zooey pretends to be their older brother, Buddy. This is a breakthrough moment for Franny's spiritual journey, and a turning point in the novel. Zooey's ability to deceive Franny, enabled by the practical realities of telephone calls, proves to be crucial to Franny's development. The deception allows her to accept that everyone should be admired for their humanity, regardless of ego or conformity. She could only hear and accept this idea from Buddy because he helped raise Franny in a way that Zooey, who is younger than Buddy, did not. In *Conversations with Friends,* before Frances meets Melissa's husband Nick, she googles him, learning about his background as a moderately famous actor. The knowledge gained from the Internet gives her an advantage in her initial communications with Nick, as she knows more about him than he knows about her. In this paper, I compare Rooney's use of modern technology

and Salinger's use of written communication and other types of communication that are not face to face, in order to discover the effects that alternate forms of communication have on the connections between the characters.

My second chapter focuses on the stories within the novels. Buddy, Franny's older brother, introduces the novella *Zooey,* and claims to be the author of the story. While Buddy is not physically present for Franny's breakdown, Buddy's presence is felt by the reader in a unique way, as he seems to know everything that happens even in a different geographic location. Since his perspective is at the forefront of the story, his biases are likely to affect the way the story is presented. In *Conversations with Friends,* Frances writes a short story about her relationship with her friend and ex-girlfriend, Bobbi. Only through writing is she honest and vulnerable about the way Bobbi makes her feel, as no one is there to interject, and she has time to think about her preferred method of expression. In writing stories, letters, and emails, characters in both novels show their preference to communicate with each other when they are not actually in the physical presence of others. Instead, they want to be able to control the narrative and be deliberate about the messages they convey. In a way, the time for deliberation serves as a hindrance, as the characters take much longer to admit genuine feelings for each other. However, this deliberation also allows the characters to communicate in a more eloquent way, analyzing the intricacies in these relationships in a solitary manner.

My final chapter addresses how communication forces both Franny and Frances to confront the obsessions they have regarding topics they deem more important than relationships: Frances is concerned with anti-capitalism, Franny with spirituality. They believe these are core

values, but the all-consuming way they approach these values causes the two protagonists to be self-destructive and narrow-minded. What ultimately allows Frances to be vulnerable and helps Franny start to find peace are the genuine, complicated relationships they have with other people. Frances is financially reliant on her inconsistent, mentally unstable father in the beginning of the novel. However, when he stops providing her money, Frances has to face the relevance money has on her life. Nick finds out about her lack of money and starts providing for her, but, eventually, she earns some money from the publication of her story and gets a job as a barista, giving her financial independence. The financial communication she has with her father and her lover forces her to come to terms with her place in the capitalist society in which she lives. Franny discovers a simple, spiritual book about a pilgrim in her eldest brother's old room. The book gives her a code of behavior and meditation to which she can strictly adhere. However, this extreme adherence makes it impossible for her to appreciate everyone's sincerity and vulnerability. Once she returns home and spends time with Zooey, he is able to help her sleep peacefully once he points out the flawed but admirable quality in every person. Zooey also uses what he has gained in his relationships to help Franny. He uses his own opinions and those of their brothers.

Franny's and Frances' connections to other people make it possible for them to focus on other aspects of life, and these connections would not be possible without the communication that the characters have with each other. All of these relationships force the protagonists to examine their values in order to mature and learn how to live in balance with what they believe and what is practical.

In my conclusion, I reflect on the ways in which various communication techniques served both as a hindrance or help in the personal growth of Franny and Frances and their relationships. I plan to look at the way technology plays a crucial role in the success of the relationships both of the characters have. Thus, I explore how these relationships help the characters grow and ultimately realize how they need to change in order to be morally sound, while still being able to function in the society they live in. Their respective realizations show that both texts serve as an instructive guide for readers, but also leaves room for ambiguity about the nature of technology and the complexities of human connection.

Chapter 1

Communication is, at some points in both novels and in life in general, more of a performance than a transparent and sincere expression. On the one hand, there is the spontaneous utterance - such as a reaction of complete shock. What a person says when they have had no time to think can be more revealing and 'honest' than a performative speech in which the person has agonized over every word choice prior to speaking. Both are necessary and inevitable in different contexts, but too much of either completely unfiltered or completely filtered communication can hinder healthy relationships from forming. If a person never censors their speech, they will say things they do not necessarily or ultimately want to endorse. If a person censors their speech too completely, they will never express themselves authentically, thereby blocking the chance for creating a certain, deeper kind of connection with others.

In *Conversations with Friends* and *Franny and Zooey*, the characters use various modes of communication - some allowing for more opportunity for performance than others. These modes (telephone, email, letter, in person discussion) alter the power dynamics between characters and variously reveal or obscure the character's true feelings. The complex combination of truth and lies perpetuated by the different methods of communication both cause conflict and allow the characters to reconcile with their true feelings.

Franny and Zooey opens with a scene of Lane, Franny's boyfriend, rereading a letter that Franny has sent him. The letter looks "as if it had been taken out of its envelope and read several times before" (Salinger 4 1961). Even before the reader knows the contents of the letter, or anything about Franny, the reader knows that Lane has read the letter numerous times and has probably analyzed its contents thoroughly. Because this method of communication is in the form

of a physical object, what has been said cannot be misreported or distorted in the same way that the memory of a conversation can. The reader of the letter could, hypothetically, have spent more time focusing on the words than the writer of the letter. Any word or syntactical choices that may have been made subconsciously - or even at random - can end up being analyzed more by the recipient than the writer, creating a further disconnect between the two.

The letter contains Franny's repeated declarations of affection for her boyfriend: "I love you I love you I love you. Do you actually know I've only danced with you *twice* in eleven months?" (Salinger 5 1961). However, some critics believe that the letter may also "foreshadow[s] her difficulties at lunch," as it "hinges on her distaste for Lane's 'super-male' tendencies; importantly however, the discourse applied in it does not explicitly register this frustration" (Rodrigues, 2020). Franny calculatedly adds "a pattern of intentional semantic errors and calculated omissions" which soften "its focus on her aversion to Lane's 'super-male[ness]." (2020). She can "first absolve herself, and then Lane from connection to her complaints" about other issues at her university by omitting the subject from certain sentences "e.g., "I" from, "but am constitutionally against strong, silent men"; and "you" from "I mean not try to analyze everything to death for once" (2020). Using a less deliberate, methodical mode of communication, such as a phone call or a face-to-face conversation could have impeded Franny's performance of affection.

However, Franny's "veiled impatience" in the letter is not so easily hidden once she sees Lane in person (Rodrigues, 2020). When they meet at the train station and go to a restaurant, she is unable to conceal her true feelings in conversation. This discrepancy between the letter and her apparent sentiment in person creates confusion and tension for both her and Lane. As Franny is

not able to think about and edit her live reactions to Lane's thoughts, she is more confrontational and honest in her feelings. When she sees "that he was irritated, and to what extent," at her inconsistency, still "with equal parts of self-disapproval and malice, she felt like speaking her mind" (Salinger 13 1961). She says:

> Where I go, the English Department has about ten little section men running around ruining things for people, and they're all so brilliant they can hardly open their mouths pardon the contradiction. I mean if you get into an argument with them, all they do is get this terribly *benign* expression

Her disclosure to Lane is not well received, as he exclaims that "your letter didn't sound so goddamn destructive" (Salinger 14). She acknowledges that she "had to strain to write it" (15). Franny tries to suppress her inner turmoil during their meetings, but it is not as easy as it is when composing a letter, so she contradicts herself. She will start to explain her desire to "drop English" as a major but then hastily denies her initial desire almost immediately and apologizes (15). Franny questions what she wants to study at university and the structure of higher education, but she hesitates to explain herself. She passionately begins her thought, but once she realizes she is disclosing her true feelings, she stops herself. Either she, Lane, or both of them become aggravated before she can fully articulate her meaning of any point she brings up. As she cannot be as deliberate and censored in person, inevitably, she has to confront her hostile feelings towards Lane and the academic pretentiousness she associates with him. She must acknowledge the physical presence of Lane. When "she felt the trickle of disloyalty and guilt, which seemed to be the order of the day, [she] reacted to it by reaching over to cover Lane's hand with her own," but "she withdrew her hand almost immediately" (15). The stark contrast between the letter's

contents and her body language makes it more difficult for both of them to interact with each other.

As Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* is set in a period decades later than that of *Franny and Zooey*, the types of communication methods have expanded significantly. Options such as email and social media manufacture more room for conflict and complexity of expression between people. After months of dinners and vacations from Melissa to Frances, Nick confesses his affair with Frances to Melissa. The day after learning of Nick's infidelity, Melissa sends Frances an email. With email, there is no time for anticipation. If this were a traditional letter, it would take days for Frances to hear Melissa's reaction to the affair. So, "when her e-mail arrived," Frances "decided that before reading it [she] would take a walk around the library desks" (Rooney 223 2017). Not only does the author of the email have more time to draft the perfectly crafted message, the recipient has more time to choose how they want to interact with the words than in person. Frances can mentally prepare herself for whatever Melissa has to say, and then respond when she wants to. Her electronic response will be sent immediately, as opposed to the delay of a physical letter. Compared to a letter, email offers the possibility of delay mixed with a degree of immediacy. This hedged or intermediate form of immediacy is important because it allows for control while maintaining the illusion of immediacy. So, Frances does not have as much time to respond appropriately as with a letter, because there is a smaller amount of time where Frances could realistically not have received and read the email. Yet, she still can take more time than in person to compose the perfect response.

Melissa begins her message by saying "I'm not angry at you," and instead proceeds to pick apart every aspect of Nick's inner psyche. While she may claim to not be angry at Frances,

she has negative emotions regarding Nick and Frances' affair (Rooney 224). She justifies "putting this in an e-mail because I don't trust Nick to be straight with you," since Nick has "a weak personality" (224). Melissa does not attack Frances quite as directly but instead strategically uses Nick's flaws to explain how Frances is flawed by association. The fact that Frances is intimate with such a broken man shows that something must be wrong with Frances as well. Melissa describes that "if you [Frances] believe his affection proves you to be a good person, or even a smart or attractive person, you should know that Nick is not primarily attracted to good-looking or morally worthy people" (224). Melissa stages a psychological attack based on an assumption that Frances looks for some kind of affirmation in her relationship with Nick. Melissa does not even need to directly criticize Frances' character, so long as Frances looks for validation from her connections and relationships.

Using email furnishes Melissa with a means to stage her feelings without interruption. She is purposeful, indirectly attacking Frances in a way that must have required time and thought. She is not in an open dialogue where someone could interrupt her train of thought. This way, she can get across every point she wants to make in the exact order she wants. So, she creates a flowing piece of writing that slowly builds in its argument. Melissa covertly adds small details that indicate Nick still cares more about Melissa - or at least as much as he does Frances. She adds that "he tells me your father is an alcoholic," and that "he says he still loves me," to establish that Nick both tells Melissa things about Frances and still loves Melissa (Rooney 225-226). She slyly inserts these passive aggressive tidbits within other information about her feelings towards the affair and Nick. Yet, they are obviously included to assert Melissa's dominance in the web of relationships. She can elegantly place these facts within the text

because it is an email. She can edit the message and carefully consider what she wants Frances to see. She does not need to act rashly, so she is able to gather her thoughts and give Frances her unprompted approval. This way, Melissa "neutralize[s] the pain of betrayal by consenting to it" (Schwartz, 2017). In fact, Frances is sure that Melissa "had edited the e-mail carefully for the effect, the effect being: always remember who is the writer" emphasizing another competitive element between the pair (Rooney 228). Not only does Melissa have Nick, but she is also a better, more successful writer than Frances. Frances realizes Melissa's apparent superiority after Frances, like Lane, read the message "several times," (Rooney 228).

Frances can also act methodically given the written means of communication. She does not have to rely on her memory to analyze what Melissa has communicated - she is able to read it over as often as she wants to, even skimming over parts that are unpleasant, like the part about Frances's father (Rooney 228). She gets to choose when and how she wants to respond, given that she is not in the room with Melissa. She responds, "after an hour," only saying "lots to think about. Dinner sounds good," (229). Frances also asserts her own power by not reacting to the more charged bits of Melissa's email. While Frances may know, at least in some form, how Melissa is feeling, Melissa does not get insight into how Frances feels about their interaction. Silence can be profoundly powerful. Frances makes a 'statement' that she will not participate in the colloquy.

Email is not the only method of communication that evokes a different set of social norms than everyday conversation. Rooney pays "attention to the intense social performance demanded by people living on the internet," in many forms (Darling). Neither Melissa nor Frances are required to be, nor are they, completely genuine and clear in their email

correspondence. However, that does not mean that these interactions are not just as crucial to the development of their relationships - both with each other and with Nick. Because the Internet has become such an integral part of their connections, "social media and messaging comes to comprise a large part of both individual identity and interpersonal relationships" (Darling). While these interactions permit a much more methodical, possibly ungenuine approach, they have just as much of an effect on the characters as in-person interactions.

Frances is also able to use the Internet to look Nick up both before and during their affair. He is a moderately famous actor. This gives him power in an obvious, overt way. He has been deemed by society as attractive and talented enough to win the admiration and desire of strangers. However, due to the nature of fame in the 21st century, there are also ways in which Frances has the advantage. Frances can easily access information about him. Technological advances have changed the power dynamics of desire. On receiving Melissa's first invitation to dinner, Frances does internet research on both Melissa and Nick, learning details about awards he has won and the type of acting he has done (Rooney 14). She looks "at his shirtless pictures of him on the Internet without him knowing, and in the moment [of meeting him] I found this knowledge very amusing and almost wanted to tell him about it" (Rooney 15). She does not have to partake in the traditional small talk to find out about Nick's career, as she already has a rather detailed understanding of his work. Even before they start their physical relationship, she knows what he looks like shirtless. While it is possible that Nick also looked up Frances at some point, Nick's public persona makes it far more accessible for Frances to learn about him than vice versa.

Later on in their affair, Frances "watched YouTube clips of his films and TV appearances." She becomes fixated on a scene on a crime show in which Nick "broke down and cried in the police station" (Rooney 82). She remarks that "he cried exactly the way I imagined he would in real life: hating himself for crying, but hating himself so much that it only made him cry harder" (Rooney 82). Even though Frances has never seen Nick genuinely cry in real life at that point in their relationship, she has a much clearer image of how he might perform this intimate act because he is an actor. She uses what she knows about him both from what she was able to find online and from what she has experienced with him in order to form a clearer picture of who he is. She extrapolates about what he must be like when actually crying. While looking him up on the Internet may not give her the most accurate picture of Nick, it is at least more vivid and can fuel her fantasies. The video has a direct positive effect on how she treats him: "if I watched this clip before we spoke at night, I tended to be more sympathetic toward him," (Rooney 82). Her decision to watch a video of him (without him knowing) increases her understanding and patience, thus favorably affecting how they both feel after their conversation. He does not know that she has looked him up, but he is affected by his own online presence in his most intimate relationships nonetheless. While he is married, wealthier, and older than Frances, she cannot be dismissed as someone with no power in their relationship. She is privy to more information about not only his career, but how he looks doing various things and feeling various emotions. This wealth of information does not mean she has all the power, but the knowledge complicates the traditional "novel of adultery, the most cliched of genres" (Schwartz 2017). While performance may seem like a form of deception, Nick's vulnerability dismisses the idea of performance as a completely inauthentic act. The very idea of performance makes it seem

inauthentic, as these are not the actor's earnest emotions and instead an act. But, the actor is still exposed to the audience in a similar way that an author exposes themselves in their writings. Both are subject to the one-sided, critical gaze of the audience or reader. The reader and the audience have the comfort of anonymity.

In *Franny and Zooey,* Zooey, like Melissa in her email in *Conversations with Friends*, also omits information as he calls Franny pretending to be Buddy. After Zooey "failed to help her himself, he tries again, as someone else" (Gehlawat 2011). When Franny hears that Buddy is on the phone for her, she feels nervous. Salinger describes that Franny "rather bravely, picked up the phone" (Salinger 159). She admires her second eldest brother and is apprehensive about how he will speak to her in this conversation. By contrast, she did not feel any nervousness when she initially talked to Zooey. He woke her up from a nap, and "it was apparent that she felt there was some kind of injustice in the air," annoyed that he interrupted her sleep (Salinger 107). She tries to explain her feelings to him, but the closeness in age between the two siblings - and perhaps her grogginess from being just woken up - do not lead to a productive conversation. She ends up crying, and he dismisses most of her concerns. Franny explains to Zooey her disturbing dream she had while napping. However, he ignores her confession and never interprets Franny's dream, "signaling that good sportsmanship is not a rule of behavior to which he must adhere" (Rodrigues 2020). They do not have the type of relationship that seems most productive for Franny to explain comfortably and come to terms with her feelings. While Zooey may not be openly nurturing to Franny, he still cares about his sister's well-being. Buddy has not been present or available for the Glass family at the time of Franny's breakdown. Zooey, though, believes that, if Buddy were to call Franny, he could help Franny work through her inner turmoil.

So, “he assumes a different role than the one he has been playing thus far—one he imagines is better suited to the occasion than his own—in order to communicate with Franny,” (Gehlawat 2011). He can play this role by using the telephone. Their voices are similar; however, Franny does notice a difference, as she comments that “you sound funny … either you have a terrible cold or this is a terrible connection,” (Salinger 159). Still, by complaining “[she] could just murder [Zooey],” she indicates that she thinks she’s talking to Buddy at the beginning of their conversation (Salinger 160). She eventually figures out that she is speaking to Zooey on the phone after one of his sophisticated remarks:

“The cigars are ballast, sweetheart. Sheer ballast. If he didn’t have a cigar to hold on to, his feet would leave the ground. We’d never see our Zooey again” (163).

Apparently, that is a “little remark perhaps Zooey alone was coordinated enough to bring in safely over a telephone” (Salinger 163). Only Zooey is witty enough over the phone to say something of that nature. Even after Franny figures out Zooey is on the phone, she still continues to open up and is more receptive to Zooey’s advice than she was when they first talked in person. Her body language changes, as she begins to sit “up abnormally straight,” (Salinger 166). As he talks more, while she “still appeared to have some considerable pain on one side of her face … her expression was markedly uncomplaining,” (Salinger 168). She can do so from the comfort of isolation since Zooey is not actually in the room with her. Perhaps if they were speaking face-to-face, she would not want to admit that he was helping her in such a visible manner, but since she is not watched, she can allow herself to physically listen to him and accept his words. After finishing the talk with Zooey, she “continued to hold the phone to her ear,” and “she appeared to find [the dial tone] extraordinarily beautiful to listen to” (Salinger 170). The dial tone appears to

soothe Franny, acting as white noise for her meditative state. Her meditative state following the call emphasizes the importance of her conversation on the phone. She even “seemed to know, too, when to stop listening to it, as if all of what little or much wisdom there is in the world were suddenly hers” (Salinger 170). The solitude she maintains while on the phone allows her to take time to absorb everything that she learned during her conversation with her brother. She does not have to share the room with anyone. This is the first moment in the novel that Franny seems to feel confident about her knowledge of anything. It could not have happened without the use of the telephone - which allowed Zooey to hide his identity initially, and allowed Franny to enjoy some privacy while having such an intimate conversation.

The use of letters, email, the Internet, and the telephone allow the characters to have different forms and measures of control over their communication with each other. In some instances, this performativity creates an imbalance in power. However, this imbalance is not always damaging, as it allows both Frances and Franny to explore their thoughts and forces them to acknowledge their own control over their emotions and relationships. Performance is not always a form of deception that conceals the truth completely. Because of Zooey’s deception, Franny feels more comfortable opening up and productively learning from Zooey. Because of Nick’s performances, Frances learns more about Nick’s career and character.

Chapter 2

On a very basic level, novels communicate the author's imagination and ideas, the intradiegetic, and allow the readers to interpret those meanings in a way that relates to their own perspective, the extradiegetic. In both novels under consideration here, the characters write about their relationships in a way that allows the reader to look at their own relationships from multiple perspectives. Writing is, in both novels, a tool that allows the author to yield power. Authors can only relay information through their perception, bringing in their own biases and perspectives. Buddy and Frances control the narratives in their respective stories within the novels in ways that not only affect them, but the people around them. Both of these stories are rooted in the realities of the narrators, so the people closest to them will be directly affected by the portrayal of them in the story. Readers can also identify with certain characters and wonder about both their own and the characters' place in society through the novel. By publishing their works, authors likely believe, in some capacity, that what they write is entertaining or edifying to other people. When readers choose to buy certain books and read certain texts, they are using their power of consumption. Their purchase communicates to the author that the book is worth a certain amount of capital. The monetary exchange in itself is an influential mode of communication that gives both the writer and reader a unique and complex power. Tahir Wood discusses this concept in *The Act of Fictional Communication in a Hermeneutic Pragmatic:*

> The author simulates in the reader's mind a knowledge of reality, a particularly esoteric form of knowledge, since the author offers to the reader nothing less than radically enhanced powers, such as the power to read another's thoughts. Perhaps it suggests an inverse relationship to actual subjectivity that may be a source of special satisfaction to a

> reader. Whereas the reader has his or her own secret subjective life that is withheld from the big Other, to borrow a Lacanian term, an 'omniscient narrator' is a linguistic device that puts the reader virtually in the place of the big Other, in the fascinating position of occupying the perspective from which the inner world of another seems to become pleasingly transparent. As this 'quasi-ominscient reader,' one is opaque to the big Other oneself, since one's own thoughts are private, but at the same time one can also be the big Other in relation to the transparent thoughts of another.

While in one sense, the narrator gets to control the story, readers can take their own opinions and experience with them to form opinions, but do not have to share anything with the author. In the sense that knowledge is power, the reader may have more. They know both their own perspectives as well as the author's perspective. The knowledge imbalance is similar to the power dynamic Nick and Frances have in the first chapter. While Nick may be the performer, his information is more accessible than Frances'. Nick is vulnerable to Frances' opinions and thoughts on his past performances. Writing a story also makes the writer vulnerable to the one-sided opinion of readers.

The entire novella *Zooey* is 'written' by Buddy. The reason I do not just use the word narrate is because Buddy discusses the editing and publishing process of the story. Salinger chooses to talk about the actual literary process, so Buddy cannot simply be known as the narrator. While an unnamed, yet knowledgeable individual narrates Franny's story, *Zooey* is told in the first person, narrated by Buddy while staying close to Zooey's perspective (Salinger 42). Some critics have argued that this choice "reads as a dismissal of [Franny's] social and personal

concerns," (Rodrigues). Zooey dismisses some of Franny's crises in a way that can seem dismissive of "gender-specific, historical and social forces bearing upon Franny" (Rodrigues). However, Buddy explains that his goal of the story is for it to be a "love story, pure and complicated" (Salinger 43). Buddy does not write solely from Franny's perspective because he wants to legitimize Zooey's efforts to help Franny deal with her spiritual and emotional questions. So, while this choice may shift the focus that *Franny* had, it allows the reader to see the dynamics of the Glass family that has shaped Franny.

Buddy obtained consent from the characters to write this story, as he reflects on the thoughts his family members have about his story that they are in. He states that Franny and Mrs. Glass (Bessie) do not take "any very shrill exception to my over-all exploitive purposes" (42). He uses exaggerated words to describe the women in the story using 'over-all exploitative purposes' in the same sentence with 'shrill' suggesting that both are hyperbolic and ironic. The word 'shrill' is inherently sexist, as even now the media uses the word to label women 2.3 times more than men (Henton). Franny appears as more of a simple cliche in this section - the young woman breaking down because she does not want to have to choose between being a wife or actress. She wants neither, and is not sure what she wants on even more pressing affairs. As discussed in chapter one, she is not even certain if she wants to continue with her college major she has, even though she has completed almost all of the requirements. One of the ways Buddy inserts a kind of control in the novel is through gendered language. In doing so, he creates a divide between Franny and Mrs. Glass and Zooey. Zooey becomes the hero of the story instead of Franny in the second story. The switch of the protagonist highlights the difference between a

'neutral' narrator and an internal or frame narrator. *Zooey* is not about Franny's struggles, but the family's dynamics.

Buddy also brings up the issue posed by creating literature based on real events. Buddy uses the emotions and thoughts of other people to create something he calls his own. He might even profit off of these varying perspectives. The fact that Franny and Mrs Glass ultimately allow Buddy to publish the story displays the family's appreciation for Buddy's craft, and their trust in his ability to portray them in a positive, but truthful manner. Buddy comically notes that Franny and Mrs. Glass "hinted they'd like to be called [lovelies]" but also emphasizes that the reason they accept the story is because they know that Buddy will "burst into tears at the first harsh or remonstrative word" (Salinger 42). Even though Buddy makes it seem like Franny and Mrs. Glass care about how they appear in the story, they ultimately want to make Buddy happy and believe in his writing and analytic ability.

However, Zooey is more hesitant. He feels Buddy's story is "a too vividly apparent transcendent element of sorts, which he says he's worried can only expedite, move up, the day and hour of my professional undoing" (Salinger 42). Meaning, Zooey believes the story may be too complex and abstract for the general public to appreciate. It is not the 'exploitive' nature of the story that bothers Zooey, but more the quality of Buddy's writing. He truly cares about his brother and does not want Buddy's writing career to suffer due to the biographical story Zooey does not believe will be well received by the public. This story within the story exemplifies the way in which the family members care about each other and share similar, but varied values. Franny and Mrs. Glass want to please Buddy (as long as they are portrayed in an accurate, faltering light respectively), and Zooey wants to make sure that the story will receive positive

critical reception. Their various desires for the story characterize them as individuals and also describes their relation to their brother.

The closeness of the narrator to the family also provides some background information on the other members of the family who do not directly appear in the story. Boo Boo, the eldest Glass sister, “modestly prefers to be identified as a Tuckahoe homemaker” and “has asked [Buddy] to describe Zooey as looking like ‘the blue-eyed Jewish-Irish Mohican scout who died in your arms at the roulette table at Monte Carlo,” (Salinger 44). While this is the one of the only moments in the book where Boo Boo is mentioned, it creates a vivid image of her witty sense of humor and her admiration for her younger brother.

Buddy is also present, indirectly, throughout the story, giving the reader insight into his character. We acquire a sense of Buddy both through what he directly says about himself and the way he conveys information about others. He opens with a scene of Zooey reading a letter Buddy wrote to him. Buddy describes the letter as “virtually endless in length, overwritten, teaching, repetitious, opinionated, remonstrative, condescending, embarrassing - and filled, to a surfeit with affection” (Salinger 48). Buddy is critical and embarrassed by his letter, but he is also the only person who can truly know the ‘affection’ he felt while writing it. He, like both Franny and Zooey, struggles with his ego. He recognizes that when he expresses his beliefs, he can come across as condescending. However, he seems to speak patronizingly because he genuinely cares about Zooey, and his lengthy description demonstrates a strong affection and desire for Zooey to be satisfied.

He mocks himself subtly throughout the novella, layering the critiques through third person and allusions. He adds a description of himself as “a writer, and consequently, as Kafka,

no less, has told us, *not a nice man,*" when evaluating his mother's "usual at-home vesture" (Salinger 64). He is certainly not the only sibling to speak harshly to the Glass matriarch, but as he is the oldest living child, this remark shows insight into perhaps why the younger siblings feel comfortable making fun of Bessie. There was a precedent set.

By writing the story, Buddy can control the narrative, deciding what is and is not left out. He controls the characterization of the family members. In a similar way, Franny achieved control in her letter, and Melissa achieved control in her email - as demonstrated in the previous chapter. However, Buddy's story is different because he is not addressing a specific person. His ultimate goal is not to communicate with one person, but instead address anonymous readers. Buddy has control of the story itself, but he does not get to ever know the reception to the same extent as he would with one-to-one communication.

He gets to explain his perspective, and even if he is self- deprecating, that deprecation shows that he is self-aware. Since he controls the narrative, he represents himself as someone who is aware of everything that is going on - even though he is not always present physically. He has the power to portray his family members the way he wants to, and shape the dialogue so the story meets his needs and opinions. He uses his narrative power in a similar way that all authors of fiction are present in their novels. Buddy is a manifestation of the author - Salinger's way of incarnating as a character in the fictional universe, adding an authorial perspective to the story. Salinger fictionalizes the act of fiction writing and suggests the way in which the storyteller encapsulates the story takes communication to a different level. Since Buddy is a part of the family, having a fictional character stand in as the author separates the story Buddy tells from the

story the whole novel tells. The novel interacts with itself in a self-reflexive manner that is ultimately a form of communication.

In *Conversations with Friends,* Frances gains power in her complex relationship with Bobbi, her best friend and ex-girlfriend, by writing a short story about their relationship. Up until this point, all of Frances's written work that she makes accessible to the public is spoken poetry that she performs with Bobbi. None of it is expressed independently. Even though she writes it all herself, she denies this:

> So you guys write everything together? Melissa said.
>
> Oh God, no, said Bobbi. Frances writes everything. I don't even help.
> That's not true, I said. That's not true, you do help. She's just saying that.
>
> Melissa cocked her head to the side and gave a kind of laugh.
>
> All right, so, which one of you is lying? she said.
>
> I was lying. Except in the sense of enriching my life, Bobbi didn't help me write the poetry. As far as I knew she had never written creatively at all. She liked to perform dramatic monologues and sing antiwar ballads. Onstage she was the superior performer and I often glanced at her anxiously to remind myself what to do. (13-14)

While Frances creates all of the content, she still feels Bobbi is better equipped to perform Frances's words. However, when Frances writes through a different medium than poetry, short stories, Frances has full control over the delivery, and finally achieves complete autonomy in her creative expression.

Frances realizes that the story was "explicitly about Bobbi," only after sending the story to Valerie, Melissa's mentor, of whom Frances knows has the connections to get the story published if it is good enough:

> "I thought of the story I had sent to Valerie that morning, a story that characterized Bobbi as a mystery so total I couldn't endure her, a force I couldn't subjugate with my will, and the love of my life. I paled at this memory. Somehow I hadn't been conscious of it, or had forced myself not to be conscious, and now I remembered. (215).

While in the story Bobbi has power over Frances, Bobbi gets the power because of the way Frances chooses to portray Bobbi. Bobbi may be a better performer than Frances, both literally in their poetry readings and figuratively in their conversations with other people, but Frances has the power of her written word - even if she does not realize or admit her agency to herself.

She does not tell Bobbi about the story, but Melissa sends Bobbi a copy in another passive aggressive, calculated move. Bobbi is angry - both that Frances wrote the story (for money) and that Frances did not tell her about it. Bobbi tears the manuscript in half (254). Bobbi's confrontation is the first time Frances sees the physical manifestation of her story. When Frances finally feels her story in paper form, she has to confront the legitimacy of the power her writing yields. Darling explores this power dynamic by remarking that this moment is "a stinging reminder to Frances that she cannot act as an unseen, unimpeachable mediator, controlling and narrativising her relationships through the internet" (Darling). While writing a story might not be a traditional mode of personal communication, Frances's ability to express herself through these

means has direct implications for her relationships, and her own development not just as a writer, but as a person as well.

The story forces her to acknowledge not only her power within her relationships, but also forces her to be honest with both herself and the people in her life. After Bobbi finds out about the story, she remarks that she "hear[s] you're getting good money for it" (254). Bobbi's family has significantly more money than Frances does, and Frances does not often explicitly admit her financial concerns to anyone - even though there are times when she literally does not have enough to buy food. However, during this confrontation, Frances remarks that "I actually need the money, I said. I realize that's an alien concept for you, Bobbi" (254). When they eventually reconcile, Bobbi has a better understanding of Frances's struggles. She also better understands an aspect of Frances's opinion of her. When Bobbi finally comes back to their shared apartment, she shares an insight about Frances:

> You underestimate your own power so you don't have to blame yourself for treating other people badly. You tell yourself stories about it. Oh well, Bobbi's rich, Nick's a man, I can't hurt these people. If anything they're out to hurt me and I'm defending myself. (288)

The story has indirect consequences as well. Since the story upsets Bobbi, she and Frances have to deal with their unresolved feelings and complaints about each other. They were in a romantic relationship, and while the physical aspect of their relationship ended, they proceeded to stay best friends. They did not, however, continue to admit how they felt about each other regularly. While they still do not define their relationship, after the confrontation they communicate more directly.

After receiving the email from Melissa discussed in chapter one, Frances has an uncomfortable dinner with Melissa, Nick, and Bobb. After the dinner Frances ignores Nick's messages for a time. She eventually rekindles her relationship with Nick but acknowledges that "there's the thing with Bobbi, which is important to me" (306). We do not get to find out what happens to their relationship after this, but at least we know that by the end of the novel Frances takes Bobbi's feelings into account. She finally recognizes how important Bobbi is to her, which she might not have done had she not written a story that works through and confesses her true feelings.

In both novels, the authors further explore the relationships between the characters through stories within the story. The layered storytelling also, though, sets up a certain kind of relationship between the author and the reader. The reader is aware that they are reading a novel within a novel, but it creates a sense of being further immersed in the novel. However, this technique also calls to attention the novel's constructiveness, and the power that each literary choice has on the portrayal of the moments that occur in the story. We can see the difference between the novel and what the character chooses to write about from a different perspective. Thus, we recognize not only the power of writing in general, but the power biases have in warping and creating a perception of their characters' lives.

Chapter 3

Both novels expand our understanding of communication by exploring it through the protagonists' struggles with their key values and belief systems. Frances' struggle with anti-capitalism and Franny's struggle with transcendental mysticism make it difficult for both characters to participate in society productively. However, Frances's financial communications with Nick and her father push her to grapple with the inevitable monetary independence she needs to function in the capitalist world she cannot avoid. Franny uses a book from her older brother to try to cope with her spiritual uncertainty, but she ultimately needs her brother's understanding both of the book and her problems in order to come to terms with her beliefs.

Frances describes herself as a Marxist, and goes so far as to decide that she does not want to make more than $16,100 a year because that is "what the average yearly income would be if the gross world product were divided evenly among everyone," according to her search on Wikipedia (22). However, when she makes this declaration, her father gives her an allowance, so she does not truly know whether she can have a sustainable, independent life on such a small salary in a developed country like Ireland. Her dad is not the most reliable monetary source, as he abruptly stops taking her calls and stops wiring her the money she needs for food and other necessities. Nick realizes that Frances does not have sufficient funds for groceries after complaining that she does not have any food in the fridge. She responds, "in a sarcastic voice" that she "was broke." Afterward, Nick "started to bring food with him when he visited" (238). Frances does not feel comfortable opening up about her financial struggles. She only acknowledges her lack of funds when asked - even then preferring to respond jokingly rather than explicitly tell Nick the extent of her problem. This lack of free and open communication

may be a comment on the value placed on the individual capitalist. The inescapable economic system in which Frances lives in affects her ability to communicate about her personal struggles.

She feels comfortable discussing the moral implications of financial inequities in the world, but she is defensive about her personal relationship with money - even with Nick who is knowingly providing for her. When she tells Nick she receives financial aid for her university tuition, he "expressed surprise and then immediately said: sorry for sounding surprised," but she immediately asserts that "we're [her family is] not poor" (239). After a bit more discussion, she admits that "at the moment I basically have no money," and Nick offers to loan her money (240). It is difficult for her to communicate her genuine need for money, even though, in the abstract, she feels that her "disinterest in wealth was ideologically healthy" (22). By disinterested, Frances may mean one of two things. Disinterest can mean uninterested or impartial. Using either meaning, though, would indicate that then she would not feel ashamed in asking for money when she cannot afford food. But, she clearly feels some embarrassment about her situation, stemming from the power imbalance in her relationship with Nick. She cannot fully escape the capitalist mindset she tries to deny nor honestly communicate with others about her financial difficulties.

Nick's loan to Frances helps her further defer financial independence. She does not actively look for a new way to make money once her dad stops supporting her. She waits until Nick finds out about her situation and offers to help. She does not directly communicate with him, instead she idly and passively waits for him to help. So, while she feels like she "finally escaped my childhood," she not only communicates in an immature, unclear way, but also, as Darling points out, she only "swap[s] dependence" (241). In doing so, "Rooney demonstrates that Frances exists in the same furrow as women before her," as Frances undergoes the

"traditional shifting of female dependency from father to husband" (Darling). But, not everything about Frances's financial situation is traditional - she is not married to the man providing for her. They are not even in a monogamous relationship. However, by accepting money and food from Nick, their power dynamics are altered. She is not only younger, poorer, and single, she also now directly relies on Nick for food, and owes him money. Before he realizes how dire her financial situation is, Nick comments on the state of their finances:

> I have money that I don't urgently need, and I would rather you had it. But the transaction of giving it to you would bother me.
>
> You don't like to feel too powerful. Or you don't like to be reminded how powerful you like to feel.
>
> He shrugged. He was still touching me underneath the coat. It was nice. I think I struggle enough with the ethics of our relationship already, he said. So giving you money would probably push it too far for me. (191)

Nick does not want to add this power dynamic between them - or at least he does not want to create another level to their already complex relationship. He lends her money because he knows she genuinely needs it. Nick does not want to feel superior to Frances and expresses concern about the nature of their relationship. He does not want another reason proving their relationship is taboo. He does not enjoy having all the power in his relationships - and adding a financial layer would give him more authority than he is comfortable with. In the standard swap of financial power, the man does not feel uncomfortable having power over the woman. Both the power dynamics and timeline of Frances' financial dependency are not traditional. She eventually is able to pay Nick back once she publishes her story, discussed in chapter two, and

gets a job as a barista. She wields her own power as a writer to ultimately gain independence. As discussed in the last chapter, after publishing her story, Frances is forced to reckon with the power she wields in her words. The story not only gives power to her perspective, but also gives her fiscal power. She no longer needs to be reliant on her father or Nick.

When Frances sells her story and gets a job, she finally takes her place in the capitalist society she lives in. She puts a monetary value on her words. Even a nonfiction book about the dangers of capitalism will, if successful, produce income through the operations of the marketplace. Thus, while Sally Rooney creates characters who endorse Marxism, Rooney herself cannot escape the marketplace she uses to publish and distribute her novels. She has sold over three million copies of her books, so she is an author benefitting from the system she critiques (Meagher). This may be unavoidable, and is not something that Rooney is proud of, as she stated in an interview that she "didn't actually take any interest in how much the book sold" because "there are a lot of people who probably enjoyed *Conversations with Friends* who are part of the system that is actively exploiting other people's labor. I am sure there are landlords who read it and thought it was a great read. Am I happy that I have given those people 10 hours of distraction? Not really!" (Secher). Becoming a successful author may be inherently antithetical to being an active communist, however, Rooney also makes capitalist critique more accessible when she comments on the critique's flaws in an entertaining, popular novel. Critics have argued that "the emotional distance of her style applies equally to the books' politics, making her more of a sociologist than a novelist" (Delistray). Rooney's style entices readers to consider the political implications on the society that her characters live in, and by extension, their own society.

Salinger also was a popular author in his time, as *Franny and Zooey* was a "bestseller even before its publication," (Gehlawat). While this is likely because "both 'Franny' and 'Zooey' has been published separately' in the *New Yorker* prior to the release of the novel, people already knew the story, and his ability to sell novels so quickly cements him as a popular author that some argue had "celebrity status," (Gehlawat). This contrasts with the book that Franny keeps so close to her throughout the novel. She obsessed over *The Way of the Pilgrim*, written by "some Russian peasant apparently" (Salinger 28). Unlike *Franny and Zooey,* this book does not have the power of name recognition to make sales:

> He never gives his name. You never know his name the whole time he's telling the story. He just tells you he's a peasant and that he's thirty-three years old and that he's got a withered arm and that his wife is dead. (28)

The simplicity of the book seems to be a reason for Franny's admiration, as the anonymous author is clearly not obsessed with ego in the same way that her professors and the authors they admire are in Franny's eyes. The pilgrim explains the way he learned to pray without stopping, and details some of the people he met along his religious journey.

Lane asks Franny about the book, and she stuffs it in her purse, pretending it does not matter to her. When he asks again, though, it is the one of the few moments that Franny actually speaks for an extended period of time on her date with Lane. She describes the entire essence of the book in detail, even when it is clear Lane shows no interest. She prefaces her explanation by explaining that "you could say it's terribly fanatical, but in a way it isn't" (28-29). It is not a traditional novel read for English class full of complex metaphors and experimental syntax, but Franny admires it nonetheless. Lane interrupts her monologue about the book a few times to

comment on the frogs' legs he is eating and a paper he has written, but Franny does not seem to mind. This simple book has animated her in a way that none of the other authors Lane has talked about can.

Salinger can be seen as an author that would be grouped in with the authors that Franny is uninterested in. He is popular and discussed among critics. But, his protagonist does not value literary or commercial success - instead choosing to focus on a simpler book that can tell her exactly how to live. In fact, at the end of *Franny*, "her lips began to move, forming soundless words, and they continued to move," insinuating that she utilizes the same prayer method that the pilgrim uses (37).

Franny's coping mechanism shows us the direct effect that words can have on people. Franny's entire coping mechanism is based on a book she read. Salinger clearly is aware of the influence books have on their readers. So, when Zooey later tells Franny how to deal with her inner turmoil, Salinger must recognize that these methods will be used by some of his readers. The communication between Franny and Zooey is not solely a conversation between a fictional brother and sister. It has become a collection of words that other people will read over and over again to make sense of their own frustrations.

The advisory nature of the novel is an aspect of the *Franny and Zooey* that many critics raised concerns about at the time of its publishing. As discussed in the introduction, Joan Didion in particular criticized the novel for attempting to tell its readers how to live. However, novels do not have one concrete purpose and can and do serve a multitude of purposes that each reader can define differently.

Zooey explicitly tells Franny what she should focus on, that his comments resemble how *The Way of the Pilgrim* indicates exactly how the pilgrim learned to repeat a specific prayer without ceasing. Zooey also tells Franny advice he received from Seymour. When Zooey complained about performing for an audience, Seymour told him to perform for the 'Fat Lady':

> I didn't know what the hell he was talking about, but he had a very Seymour look on his face and so I did it. He never did tell me who the Fat Lady was, but I shined my shoes for the Fat Lady every time I ever went on the air again - all the years you and I were on the program together, if you remember. I don't think I missed more than just a couple times. This terribly clear, clear picture of the Fat Lady formed in my mind. I had her sitting on this porch all day, swatting flies, with her radio going full-blast from morning till night. Anyway, it seemed goddam clear why Seymour wanted me to shine my shoes when I went on the air. It made *sense.* (169)

Zooey took a vague piece of advice their older brother gave him, and applied it to all his performances. He imagined that he was performing for a sympathetic woman whose sole entertainment is the radio, and so Zooey felt more comfortable being performative if he was doing so for her. He goes on to generalize this lesson to everyone, including Franny:

> *There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady.* That includes your Professor Tupper, buddy, And all his goddam cousins by the dozens. There isn't anyone *any*where that isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. Don't you know that? Don't you know that goddam secret yet? And don't you know - *listen* to me now - *don't you know who that Fat Lady really is*?... Ah, buddy. Ah, buddy. It's Christ himself.

Christ himself, buddy. (170)

His message is direct and does not just apply to Franny. It applies to anyone who struggles with performativity or spirituality. If you have gotten this far in the book, then you probably at least understand, if not empathize with the issues confronting Franny. The solution to her problems is given in a passage of straightforward dialogue. Salinger understands the power of words and provides words that can bring solace to his readers.

However, Franny does not read this solution in a book herself. She hears this in a conversation between herself and her brother, showing the importance of their relationship. She needs someone in her life who understands her problem, but also has previously experienced and successfully navigated similar difficulties. Franny needs Zooey - just like he needed Seymour who helped him think of the Fat Lady. Interestingly, Franny got *The Way of the Pilgrim* from Seymour's room.

Franny tells Lane that she "got it out of the library," because "this man that teaches this Religion Survey thing I'm taking this term mentioned it" (28). However, Zooey tells Bessie that this is not, in fact, where she got the book. Instead, Franny got the book "out of Seymour and Buddy's old room, where they've been sitting on Seymour's desk," (87). Franny obtains her first coping mechanisms, the book, from her brother, and her second, the metaphor of the Fat Lady, from another brother. This brings back the point Buddy brought up in his introduction. This book is, ultimately, a love story, and what allows Franny to work through her crisis is the love and devotion of her family members. While communication is complicated and not always beneficial, ultimately it is what allows Franny to realize that everyone is the 'Fat Lady.' They are

flawed and contradictory, but alive and interested. Ultimately, they just want to be loved and appreciated.

Both protagonists have overarching issues that they try to focus on. Frances fixates on capitalism and Franny fixates on spirituality. However, both of them do not deal with these issues in a realistic, sustainable manner. Frances wants to earn a salary that would not help her much in

Ireland, and Franny wants to reject modern society and recite a prayer over and over again. However, with the help of communication and written word, both characters are able to alter their somewhat unreasonable philosophies. Written word allows Frances to become financially independent, and it helps Franny cope with her crisis. While some critics may argue against 'self-help- literature, literature *does* help people learn, and does not need to just be looked at as art. Literature does many things and should not be limited in order to be considered serious. If Franny and Frances both benefit from the written word, then so can people that are not characters in a novel.

Conclusion

At the end of *Conversations with Friends,* after Nick and Frances have been estranged for some time following Melissa's discovery of their affair, Frances receives a phone call from Nick. He calls her inquiring about groceries - a call clearly meant for Melissa - but once they realize his misdial, they still stay on the phone and catch up. In fact, throughout the call, Frances repeatedly thinks to herself "Don't hang up," (297). Ironically, at the time of the call, Nick is buying vegetables for Melissa, and Frances is buying a book for Bobbi for Christmas. However, Nick does not end up buying anything for his wife at the grocery store.

Once they get past the awkwardness of Nick's mistake, they start to directly speak about the problems in their relationship and their relationships with Bobbi and Melissa. Frances finally tells someone about her endometriosis diagnosis - something she has not been able to tell Bobbi or her mother. She tells him that she "waited for [him] to call [her]," (300). Not until later in the conversation does Nick admit that he " can't believe you're on the phone saying you waited for me to call you, he said quietly. You really don't know how devastating it is to hear that," (305). They both desperately wanted to have contact with the other but felt that the other person had to be the first one to reach out. The last line of both the novel and their phone call is "Come and get me, I said," (307). Before she says this, she has a realization that allows her to directly ask for what she wants - a rare occurrence for Frances:

> Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know about and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you understand them. You can't always take the analytical position. (307)

This is her ‘fat lady’ moment. She realizes that she cannot always think in terms of power dynamics. She cannot use her political views, or her anti love rhetoric as an excuse to not participate in the world or in her life. Something important to note is that she would never have met up with Nick or had this final realization if it were not for an accidental call. The ultimate push comes from a technological device. While Rooney does not always paint technological communication in a positive light, it is the final push in Frances’s growth.

Franny also has her final realization on the phone with her brother - as discussed in chapter three. She also learns that while flawed, humans are beautiful, and she should cherish life and interaction. Neither of their realizations are solitary - as they need help from people they love and (if not fully) understand. While the power dynamics shift in both novels as a result of the different modes of communication, phone calls ultimately allow the protagonists to grow and mature.

Both novels end with a definitive, explicit map for how the protagonist will approach life and communication from now on. While this may seem derivative to some critics, Salinger and Rooney do not simply spoon feed instructions on how to live. They also speculate on relationships, spirituality, and politics, and how they affect young people. However, literature can serve a variety of purposes - not singularly art for the sake of art. Salinger and Rooney illustrate how young people can use communication, even with all its nuances and difficulties, to help navigate the complexities, hardships, and injustices of the world.

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