

Salinger and War

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Introduction

In his letter to *The Saturday Review of Literature* of August 4, 1945, J. D. Salinger rejects the argument of Irwin Shaw's article, "If You Write about the War" published in the same magazine, on Feb. 17, 1945. Shaw was sorry for the young writers who missed the war experience because "The writers, especially the young ones, who have not seen the war, have been deprived of an experience that is at the same time the most moving and significant and most common of their generation" (5). As a young writer who had experienced D-Day and the subsequent five campaigns, Salinger opposed this statement:

To be present in a formal war area may finally afford a writing man a grander perspective, but not necessarily a better one. Most important, it must be remembered that the object itself, truth, is an invariable and omnipresent thing. I am still too sick of the war to estimate sensibly its value to me as a writing man, but at this immature date I would guess, with the remains of my logic, that the war will have very little to do with making me a war writer — which is the only kind of writer I want to be. (21)

Actually Salinger was very conscious of the danger in dealing with war and never described any fighting scenes in his stories. He even stopped using war materials for the main subject of his stories after "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" in March 1950¹. The "war writer" which Salinger aimed to be is apparently different from a regular war writer who describes war scenes. On the other hand, even if Salinger claimed that he had not acquired "a better perspective" from his war experience, and even if it might be possible to obtain

¹ According to David Shields and Shane Salerno, Salinger wrote some works based on his wartime experiences for posthumous publication, such as "one novel, a World War II love story based on Salinger's complex relationship with his first wife, Sylvia Welter" (575) and "a novella that takes the form of a counter intelligence agent's diary entries during World War II" (575). It may mean that Salinger had no strong intention to avoid war materials. However, they have not been published yet and this paper will not include the discussion of those works.

truth without any war experience, his works definitely became more serious and were enriched in their themes through his war experience. As David Shields and Shane Salerno repeatedly note, “World War II destroyed the man [Salinger] but made him a great artist” (xv).

In this essay, therefore, I would first like to analyze how Salinger’s literary techniques and the quality of his works changed through his early stories of war². While discussing the development of Salinger’s writing, I would also like to clarify what kind of a “war writer” Salinger aimed to be and became.

Chapter 1: Just before and after Enlisting: War as the Social Background

Salinger was enlisted on April 27, 1942 and just before and after this, two similar stories of enlisting were published in *Collier’s*. In the first of them, “The Hang of It” (June 1941), the colonel of the regiment worries about his son who has just been enlisted. The colonel’s son reminds the colonel of Bobby Petit, a young inept recruit in World War I, who used to say, “I’ll get the hang of it” whenever he failed to do things properly. At the end of the story, Bobby turned out to be the colonel himself, suggesting a hope that his son would soon “get the hang of it” against the odds and become a good soldier, too. In the second one, “Personal Notes on an Infantryman” (Dec. 1942) on the other hand, the army-recruiting officer is first baffled by the vigorous enthusiasm of an old army volunteer, Lawlor. Lawlor however proves himself a good soldier and the officer, who turns out to be Lawlor’s son, proudly ships him across to Europe.

As Warren French observes, Salinger had by then acquired enough literary skills “to achieve certain effects if he so desire[d]” (54), and his storytelling had reached a certain maturity with slick techniques. Furthermore, Ian Hamilton praises the brilliant way in which these two stories reflect the American society of those days—i.e., at the very beginning of World War II— and comments, “Salinger’s feel for the market was remarkably assured for a twenty-two-year-old” (60).

In fact, both stories have effective surprise endings and their endings must have brought laughter and cheered the readers’ spirit in those disquieted

² In this essay, Salinger’s stories related to the army or war experience are called “stories of war” in order to distinguish them from “war stories” which deal with fighting scenes directly.

days. They might have been encouraging to young apprehensive recruits in those days, too. What is more, Lawlor's adamant decision to commit himself to combat duty was apparently intended to reflect the belligerent atmosphere of the time and the national policy just after Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and promote patriotism. Accordingly it is apparent that Salinger understood the characteristics of *Collier's* as a popular magazine and how to sell his stories.

On the other hand, in these two stories, he casually praised the courage to fight in war and never referred to the fact that the military training was meant for killing people and that soldiers themselves might be killed in an actual battle. These attitudes of his toward war are too optimistic and shallow for Salinger in later years to agree with.

Chapter 2 During the Training Period: Establishing Attitudes toward War

During World War II, Salinger never took a clear anti-war stance. Yet the longer he stayed in the army, the more critical he became toward the army and war.

In April 1944, about two years after his enrollment, for example, Salinger published "Soft-Boiled Sergeant." In this story, Philly Burns's wife, Juanita, is easily moved to tears by heroic actions in war movies and Philly tells her about Sergeant Burke, whom he knew in the army, and points out to her how little appreciated and how lonely a real hero is in the army.

According to Ian Hamilton, the adjective, "Soft-Boiled," in the title was the editor's choice (84) but it strikes home because Burke's softhearted kindness is clearly opposed to the hard-boiled heroic actions praised in Hollywood movies. In this contrast, Salinger for the first time refers to insensitive inhumanity in the S.S. army. What is more, by relating its inhumanity to the shallow mind of American people represented by Hollywood movies, he ascribes the real cause of war and its essential inhumanity to fundamental human deficiencies in general.

In spite of his developing understanding of war and human nature, however, this story is "perhaps the most sentimental of all his stories" (59) as Warren French comments. Philly emphasizes Burke's isolation and loneliness and the difference between a real hero and heroes in Hollywood movies but Burke's sacrifice of his own life to save ignorant young soldiers at the end of

the story is nothing but such a melodramatically heroic act as is easily found in Hollywood movies.

It means that in those days Salinger began thinking about war more seriously than before but his understanding was not yet mature enough to describe it fully. This is also true of another story of war published in November 1944, "Once a Week Won't Kill You." It deals with the inner disturbance of "the young man" (23) who is departing for war. The nameless main character represents all young men in those days who had to join World War II. Yet the nature of his isolation and troubles is too personal to be generalized. As a result, the story seems to use war circumstances in order sentimentally to agitate the young man's sense of loneliness and helplessness.

The other story of war during this period, "Last Day of the Last Furlough," has similar shortcomings and is unabashedly sentimental. Still, because it was written just before Salinger left for the European front to join D-Day, it takes on some sincere and truthful feelings toward war that had not been observed in his earlier stories of war.

On the last day of his last furlough, Babe stands at the window smoking a cigarette, thinking:

This is my home. . . . this is where Mattie is sleeping. No enemy is banging on our door, waking her up, frightening her. But it could happen if I don't go out and meet him with my gun. And I will, and I'll kill him. I'd like to come back too. It would be swell to come back. (64)

Salinger indirectly indicates Babe's readiness to reveal his inner thought with the interpretive codes, a window and a lighted cigarette³, but Babe's love toward his home and his family is so openly expressed that those interpretive codes

³ Salinger uses what I name "interpretive codes," which always indicate certain fixed messages. They are more formulated than allegories, not to mention symbols. For example, "glass" always shows the partition between the inner mind and outside. In the case of a window, a kind of glass which one can look through, therefore, one who looks through a window or stands by a window keeps one's mind open to others. On the other hand, if one is looking at a glass, another kind of glass which only reflects one's own image, one's mind is closed. A cigarette is another interpretive code to indicate a tool of communication. When one lights a cigarette, one starts revealing one's real feelings. When one puts it out, one closes one's mind. I have discussed the details of Salinger's usage of the interpretive codes in my Japanese book of 2004, *Do Not Be Afraid of Salinger: His Multi-layered Texts and Postmodern Attempts* as well as in my English paper of 2013, "A Reconsideration of J. D. Salinger's Work."

are useless. What is more, his confession is unabashedly sentimental even considering the mental situation of a young writer going to the battlefield. Salinger in later years would never allow his characters to excuse themselves for killing people for any reason or accept any war or say, "I believe in this war" (62). Babe in this story is undeniably naïve.

On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that Salinger addresses him as "Babe" to indicate his naïveté, instead of using his real name, John F. Gladwaller. Salinger uses Babe's naïveté intentionally not only to express his unreserved love toward his home but also his thoroughly idealistic pacifism: "I believe, as I've never believed in anything else before, that it's the moral duty of all the men who have fought and will fight in this war to keep our mouths shut, once it's over, never again to mention it in any way" (62). His announcement is immediately controverted by his friend, Vincent: "I think you ask too much of human nature" (62). And Babe immediately admits his childishness in saying this: "He felt immature and a complete fool" (62). In this way, Salinger keeps the balance of Babe's idealistic pacifism with Vincent's adult realism. Yet it is notable that Babe's idealistic pacifism reflects Salinger's true inner wishes and predicts his writing attitude after World War II.

Chapter 3 From D-Day to the Discharge from the Army: Efforts to Overcome the War

The stories of war published from D-Day, through the subsequent battles till Salinger's return from Europe in 1946, are "A Boy in France" (March 1945), "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise" (Oct. 1945), and "The Stranger" (Dec. 1945). A huge shadow of the war is cast over these stories. During this period, Salinger's war experience was apparently too vivid for him to keep the objective distance necessary for him to handle war materials properly. As a result, the stories tend to be very sentimental, and as Ian Hamilton comments on "The Stranger," the last of the three stories: "The story itself is almost on the brink of tears" (90).

The first story of the three, "A Boy in France," is situated in a battlefield—Salinger's only story to use a battlefield as its background. Though the battle itself is not described, the cold rain suggests the severity of the battle during the daytime and Babe's mental exhaustion from it. Contrasted to the battlefield's bleakness is Mattie's letter from home. Its posting date, July 5,

suggests the warm summer sunshine to soften his chilled mind. In addition, the lack of the number “six” in it implicitly alludes to his undefiled innocent home to console his mind which is tired from the battle, for the number “six” is another interpretive code to indicate impurity in association with “sex.”⁴

Mattie’s letter also uses another interpretive code, “a cigarette,” to indicate its role of saving Babe from isolation. Mattie writes, “I’ll light your cigarettes for you without really smoking them” (92). “A cigarette” is one of Salinger’s most frequent interpretive codes and by “lighting a cigarette,” he always indicates that one enters into a sincere communication with others. Without inhaling smoke, i.e., without receiving any injury by lighting a cigarette, Mattie can help Babe regain communication with others. Mattie is a guardian angel for Babe.

In spite of the successful usage of the interpretive codes and Mattie’s lovely and charming image, Salinger apparently fails to control his emotions when Mattie expresses her love toward Babe in so many words, saying, “I miss you. Please come home soon” (92). Babe even repeats her words to soothe himself into sleep. The cruel reality of war in the background should not allow any easy salvation and such direct descriptions make the story maudlin in a way that merely reveals the young writer’s immaturity.

Likewise, in another work about Babe Gladwaller, “The Stranger,” Salinger’s uncontrolled sentimentality undermines his deepening insight into war. Babe, who has just been discharged from the army, stops by the apartment of Vincent’s former lover, Helen, on the way to take Mattie to a matinee. He tries to tell Helen the facts about Vincent’s death—how incidentally and unexpectedly he was killed. Babe’s “messy emotions” (18) which urge him to tell Helen about the drastic fact of Vincent’s death emphasize how cruel the war really was. It kills soldiers for nothing and will not even allow them to keep dignity and honor in their death. Yet, Babe’s situation of telling it to Helen is so inconsiderate as only to highlight Salinger’s tear-jerking efforts.

Though spoiled by its sentimentality, it is in this story, the last of the three stories written during this period, that Salinger’s main character for the first

⁴ As to the meaning of the number “six,” Charles V. Genthe discusses its role in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” and relates it not only to “sex,” but also to “the tigers of crass materialism and superficiality” (170) and “the gross material, sensual existence” (171) symbolized by bananas. The undefiled home indicated by Mattie’s letter will, therefore, also be free from silly materialism and superficiality.

time takes a constructive step to get over his own sufferings in consideration of other people's future. Babe suppresses his original wish to tell her the fact and, uncrossing his legs, tells Helen, "Vincent loved you something terrific" (77). Babe does not cross his legs again till the end of the conversation. "Crossed legs" is an interpretive code and Salinger uses this posture, in association with the eastern mediation posture, in order to indicate the deep inner communication. When Babe uncrosses his legs, therefore, he stops revealing his true feelings and hides them in order to comfort Helen with white lies, for he realizes that Helen needs those white lies to rely on in future.

If Babe's efforts to reassure Helen of Vincent's love may look sentimental, his courage in suppressing his own injured feelings for the sake of Helen's future happiness is not. It is Babe's altruistic self-sacrifice. He also plays a meaningful role for the sake of and in place of his dear friend who regrettably fell victim to the war. Here we can observe Salinger's decision to live for those who could not survive the war and make the best of his war experience for a better future.

"This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise," published just before "The Stranger," also concludes with a hopeful gesture even if Vincent's act is not so constructive as Babe's. In this story, there are thirty-four soldiers in a truck to go to a dance party but only thirty men can go. Vincent has been told to eliminate four men but he hesitates to execute the order. Both Warren French and James Landquist criticize Vincent's negligence (French 64-65, Landquist 18) but it should not be overlooked that Vincent is distracted by his missing brother, Holden, so much as to confuse those who cannot go to such a happy event as a dance, with those who are killed in war and lose their chance to live a happy life. This is why Vincent uses the verbs to indicate killing and thinks that "I plan to knife the first four man on my right," (54) or that "I might suggest that we shoot four of them" (147), when he has to reduce the number of the attendants. He also repeats, "Four must go" (54). It primarily means that four men have to leave the truck but it also suggests that four men have to die. For Vincent, those who have to leave the truck are the same as those who are killed on a battlefield. This identification can also be surmised from the fact that the soldiers in the truck do not have names. In war, men are killed at random without concern about who they are. When Vincent orders four men to leave the truck, he adds, "I do not know who you are" (148). At this time he plays the role of Fate,

who randomly chose his brother, Holden, as a victim on a battlefield.

In spite of Vincent's order to leave, however, a young boy who looks as young as Holden insists on staying and finally Vincent manages to allow him to rejoin them. He then calls to Holden, "Never mind this missing stuff. ... Show up somewhere" (149). Vincent apparently hopes that like this young boy, Holden will be given another chance to live and come home safely.

Vincent may be too concerned with Holden to play his own role properly. His interpretation of the situation may be self-indulgent and his effort to save at least one boy out of the four for a dance may be nothing but a sentimental self-satisfaction. Yet his strong wish for Holden's miraculous return is unmistakably sincere. It not only presents his genuine sympathy toward those who lost their family members in the war in those days but also his own strong wish for his killed fellow soldiers in the destructive battles he was involved in, such as the Battle of the Bulge. In this story, though Vincent's grief permeates it, Salinger has already been shifting from depicting the cruel reality of the war to considering what to do with the sadness and loneliness caused by it in order to achieve a better future.

Chapter 4 After the Return: Beyond the War Materials

After his discharge from the army in November 1945, Salinger stayed in Europe with a civilian contract with the Defense Department. Ian Hamilton relates Salinger's delay in returning to his marriage with a French girl, Sylvia (97-98). He also guesses "Salinger did take Sylvia back to the States, probably in May 1946 when his contract would have expired" (98). David Shields and Shane Salerno dug out more details. According to their book, Salinger married Sylvia Welter, who "was born in Frankfurt ... as a citizen of Germany" (175), "in the small town of Pappenheim, ten miles south of Weissenburg, on October 18, 1945" (177). "The Salingers arrived in New York City on May 10, 1946" (183). Yet their marriage was not a happy one as is revealed in Salinger's letter quoted in their book: "... *almost from the beginning, we were desperately unsuited to, and unhappy with, each other*" (186). "She [Sylvia] returned to Europe sometime in June 1946, only a few weeks after she arrived in New York" (185). Salinger's European experience generated by the war thus ended though their marriage was not officially annulled till 1949 (186).

In 1948, two years after his return from Europe, Salinger published five

stories. It was quite a fruitful year for him because three out of the five were published in *The New Yorker*, the magazine which Salinger had long aspired to appear in. They are "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," and "Just Before the War with the Eskimos." These three stories must have been satisfying to Salinger because unlike most of the early stories, they are later collected in *Nine Stories*. They are not, however, stories of war. In these stories the influence of World War II is easily observed, for example, in the direct cause of Seymour Glass's nervous breakdown in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the unjustified death of Walt Glass in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," and Franklin's disqualification as a soldier in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos." Nevertheless the elements of the war in these stories only reflect the background of the time. Their subjects are related to their main characters' lives which are deeply rooted in the well-off American middle class and are concerned with their material affluence and lack of inner satisfaction. If Salinger writes these stories as "a war writer," he does not find it necessary for "a war writer" to use his war experience or any war materials directly. For him, "a war writer" is only expected to deal with man's essential problems observed through his war experience, and with his fumbling search for their solutions.

That is one of the reasons why these three stories were successful and led the van of Salinger's stories after the war. With their main subjects of American middle class lives, Salinger could keep a sufficient distance from his personal war experience to describe the inside of the main characters tactfully with his typical interpretive codes. The stories are thus constructed in two clear layers; the surface directly-described charming story and the penetrating but indirectly-described inner story. In other words, they are attractive familiar stories for the reader to read while carrying important sophisticated messages about human deficiencies and invisible values learned through his war experience.

Contrary to these three stories published in *The New Yorker*, the other two stories of war during this period, "A Girl I Knew" and "Blue Melody," were written for the less sophisticated magazines, *Good Housekeeping* and *Cosmopolitan*. "A Girl I Knew" is the narrator's recollection of his little romance with a girl victimized in the Holocaust. "Blue Melody" also presents the narrator's childhood memory of a black jazz singer who died due to a delay in

treating acute appendicitis on account of color discrimination. Because both narrators have strong personal attachments to the victims, the discriminations which cause their deaths are all the more pathetically criticized. Nevertheless, the narrators' sorrows are expressed straightforwardly without using interpretive codes so that the stories cannot help being sentimental. What is worse, they never dig into human nature and the fundamental problems which cause discrimination.

While writing these stories, Salinger was apparently conscious of the Holocaust. According to the research by David Shields and Shane Salerno, "J. D. Salinger was one of the first Americans to witness the full evil of the Nazi regime when he went into a concentration camp in Germany in the spring of 1945" (156). Shields and Salerno also quote Eberhard Alsen's report about Salinger's nervous breakdown during the war: "Salinger's nervous breakdown was not due to the stress of combat ... because he was not an infantryman. Kaufering Lager IV was what broke Salinger" (167). The deep mourning for the victims of the anti-Semitism in "A Girl I Knew" and the color discrimination in "Blue Melody" clearly reflect his painful experience in such a concentration camp as the Kaufering Lager IV.

Yet these subjects must have been even more difficult than war for Salinger to discuss without falling into the binary of victims and victimizers because of his half-Jewish background. First of all, the subject of anti-Semitism was too personal for him because he had his own anti-Semitic experience in his childhood. Margaret A. Salinger, his daughter, describes how there were strong anti-Semitic conditions during Salinger's childhood:

Most Jewish young people in New York during the 1920s and 1930s ... would experience the rise of anti-Semitism, discrimination, and the Depression from within the closely woven fabric of [the] Jewish community. (29)

This anti-Semitic atmosphere in his childhood is also observed by another of Salinger's biographers, Kenneth Slawenski:

In the 1920s, religion and nationality became increasingly important the higher one climbed the social ladder. ... As the Salingers advanced upward and downtown, they shifted increasingly into an atmosphere of intolerance that would prove uncomfortable. (9)

Being half-Jewish complicated the subject all the more because it dislocated

him and confused his identity as Margaret suggests by quoting the comment of Salinger's older sister, Doris: "As my aunt Doris said, 'It wasn't nice to be half-Jewish in those days. It was no asset to be Jewish either, but at least you belonged somewhere.'" (28). Being half Jewish, Salinger must have been able to take the stances of both a victim and a victimizer even in front of the devastating sight of a concentration camp. And it is observed in his attitudes toward the German soldiers in "A Girl I Knew," too, which Eberhard Alsen points out referring to Salinger's remarks to Margaret Salinger:

Salinger goes remarkably easy on German soldiers who appear in the story. He would later tell his daughter, Margaret, that anybody—for instance, the clerk at the post office—could turn out to be a Nazi. (Shield and Salerno 107)

Even in "A Girl I Knew" and "Blue Melody," Salinger tries to maintain an impartial and understanding manner but their subjects were too complicated and painful for Salinger to deal with from a good objective distance at this time.

However, by avoiding dealing directly with the subject of discrimination or the battle scenes of the war, Salinger learned how to demonstrate a good outlook beyond the binary of victim and victimizer. And in "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" published in March 1950, he splendidly succeeded in treating human deficiencies as those of any man and every man. This story is his last story so far published that uses his war experience. Salinger may have regarded it as a compilation based on his war experience. In fact, it is highly praised in general. Even George Steiner, who was quite cynical toward Salinger's popularity and ridiculed the frenzied public reaction to his work as "The Salinger Industry," applauds it as "a wonderfully moving story, perhaps the best study to come out of the war of the way in which the greater facts of hatred play havoc in the private soul" (361).

In this story, Salinger makes the most of his literary techniques to describe characters' invisible and sophisticated interiors with visible and attractive interpretive codes. This indirect description gives Salinger enough authorial distance for him to handle the squalors of war calmly. What is more, it enables him to deal with delicate love and emotional contacts between Esmé and the narrator without becoming either sentimental or shallow.

For example, Charles, Esmé's young brother, has green eyes. The color green is a mixture of the color blue, indicating spiritual purity, and the color

yellow, indicating secularity. This color of his eyes corresponds to Esmé's open comment on his character, "Sometimes he's brilliant and sometimes he's not" (146) so that the coexistence of angelic elements and demonic ones without any distinction in Charles is unmistakably impressed on the reader. And as Esmé brings angry Charles back to make friends with the narrator, it is always Esmé who teaches him the difference between the good and the wrong and guides him to love. Likewise, Esmé teaches Charles how to write his message, "HELLO HELLO HELLO ..." (172). Without Esmé's help, he might have easily spelled the greetings with a little space and made them the moans, "HELL O HELL O HELL O ...," instead.

At the very beginning of the story, the narrator clarifies his intention in writing it; "Nobody's aiming to please, here. More, really, to edify, to instruct" (132). Esmé embodies what Salinger believes is necessary to save people from such a hell as "the suffering of being unable to love" (160). However, if such a clear message were conveyed directly, it would easily become a moral sermon and destroy the pleasure of the story. Moreover, if Esmé's sensitivity in seeing through the narrator's loneliness and lack of love and her efforts to fill the narrator's necessity were described directly, they would lose their sophisticated touch and their value would be reduced. Salinger's interpretive codes function as indispensable literary devices to describe what direct descriptions might defile and to convey his moral message under a lovely and most admired image of "the young lady" (136).

Without deciphering Salinger's interpretive codes, some critics mistakenly express their negative opinion on Esmé. John Antico, for instance, despises Esmé as "a cold, affected, and aristocratic brat" (327). She may be precocious enough to displease some adults who expect children to be childish and obedient. It is the combination of her youth and precocity, however, that brings out a miracle to Sargent X. She was deprived of a safe home by the war and her father's death, and was forced to grow up faster than her age. Thanks to her precocity, she is sensitive enough for the narrator's needs. On the other hand, she is still young enough to maintain a pure love free from self-consciousness. What is more, she can freely offer it to whoever needs it.

The nature of her spontaneous altruistic love is symbolized by sending her father's wristwatch to the narrator. The watch is the memento of her dead father. Though the narrator is almost a stranger for her, she can give

such a precious watch to him without any pretentiousness. Besides, “its crystal had been broken in transit” (172) so that the watch is as priceless as “a dead cat” (82-83) is for Seymour in “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters.” Seymour appraises it on the grounds that “no one could put a price on it” (“Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters” 83). The broken crystal also symbolizes the way in which Esmé’s love penetrates through the separation between the narrator’s mind and hers⁵ and saves him from isolation.

Esmé’s pure caring love, however, can only be a miracle that is realized in a passing moment from childhood to adulthood when both childlike spontaneous purity and thoughtful adult consideration coexist at the same time. This is why Sargent X “hadn’t the courage to wind it [the watch]” (172). The broken watch embodies the suspension of the happy moment with Esmé and he is afraid that the miraculous moment may be lost when the watch starts moving. The narrator also excuses himself from attending Esmé’s marriage ceremony. The marriage is an initiation into womanhood so that he might be disappointed at finding the grown-up Esmé in it without her childlike spontaneous pure love.

Esmé’s love is in fact so ephemeral and fragile that the narrator cannot help strongly apprehending that he might lose his belief in men and fall into hell again. It is why he needs to keep a distance from himself in the days of hell and describes himself in those days as the third person, Sargent X. However, as she teaches Charles to get over his selfish quality and develop his loving quality, Esmé helps the narrator to reestablish a relationship with others. She asks him to write an “extremely squalid and moving” (156) story for her when he claims to be “a professional short-story writer” (150). Thus the narrator writes this story and by doing so, he not only faces the hell of war squarely but also relates himself to other people—the readers.

If Esmé’s love is ephemeral and fragile, therefore, it is still the best thing that Salinger learned from his war experience. And as it was “truth, ... an invariable and omnipresent thing” (“Sorry for Writers?” 21) for him, he no longer needed war materials but tried to create “extremely squalid and moving” stories with more familiar subjects in the U.S. daily life.

⁵ Crystal is a kind of glass, which is Salinger’s typical interpretive code to indicate an isolated mind in the association with the glass which reflects one’s image. This is why the broken crystal can mean that Esmé’s love has reached for Sargeant X’s mind.

Conclusion

Salinger's decision to abandon war materials after 1950 can be detected from a conversation in *The Catcher in the Rye*, which was finished about the same time⁶ with "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" and was published one year later, in 1951. In this book, Holden remembers the conversation between D.B., his older brother who had been in the war, and Allie, his younger brother who loved poems and died young:

I remember Allie once asked him [D.B.] wasn't it sort of good that he was in the war because he was a writer and it gave him a lot to write about and all. He made Allie go get his baseball mitt and then he asked him who was the best war poet, Rupert Brooke or Emily Dickinson. Allie said Emily Dickinson. (182)

Here we can clearly observe Salinger's notion presented in his letter to *The Saturday Review of Literature*, that "a novel about war is one thing and a war novel another" (21). Besides, by placing a higher value on Emily Dickinson, a private poet dealing with the sophisticated inner being, than on Rupert Brooke, who dealt with World War I directly, Salinger announces that it is with one's inner being that he should be concerned as a serious war writer.

By not using war materials but concentrating on one's inner being, Salinger can also dodge such a danger as Babe refers to in "Last Day of the Last Furlough"—the danger that talking about a war might cause another war in future. Actually Salinger after 1950 held to this idealistic pacifism of Babe and set all of his stories in postwar everyday life in the U.S.A., though some characters like Seymour and Walter are naturally influenced by World War II. In those days, he also made a feeble but practical effort to establish a good relation with society as a writer. In 1950, even if his stories had been published in *The New Yorker*, he was still far from being famous and needed to work harder to establish his position in society.

Even then, however, he made what was "an unheard-of request for a fiction writer to make" to Little, Brown, the publisher of his first novel. That is,

⁶ David Shields and Shane Salerno detected from various testimonies that "Salinger carried the first six chapters [of *The Catcher in the Rye*] with him on the beaches of Normandy and into the Hürtgen Forest, through the concentration camp, and into the psychiatric ward" (244). Yet Shields and Salerno also discovered the fact that Salinger was working on this novel in 1947 and 1948 (246-47).

“Salinger decided he wouldn’t do any publicity” (Shields and Salerno 252). He “refused to talk to the public except through his book” (Shields and Salerno 252). The tremendous success of *The Catcher in the Rye* and the tumult caused by the banning of the book hardened his attitudes irredeemably. What is worse, *The Catcher in the Rye* brought in enough money for him to seclude himself. That aggravated his troubles in associating with others, though in his early seclusion, he still kept some social contacts and got married and had two children. Afterward, he built the wall around himself higher and higher while his works gradually and steadily retreated into private meditation. Then, as his last published story, “Hapworth 16, 1924,” betrays, his writing became too conceited and too sermonizing to win the reader’s sympathy.

One can, therefore, safely determine, at least as far as Salinger’s published stories and books are concerned, that several works around 1950, including “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor” and *The Catcher in the Rye*, are the best examples of what Salinger aimed to create as “a war writer.” And as is observed in “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” the last and the best story based on his war experience, the most important subject of his successful stories is not war or any human atrocities in it but beautiful human merits which compensate for human deficiencies. These human merits are the very qualities that Salinger discovered through his hardship during World War II and that he tried to focus on in his writing career as “a war writer.”

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