

Article

Franny's Jesus Prayer: J.D. Salinger and Orthodox Christian Spirituality

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Abstract: *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*—is a Russian hesychast text that was first published in 1881 and translated into English in 1931. It has gained popularity in the English-speaking world thanks to J.D. Salinger who mentions and re-narrates it in his stories “Franny” and “Zooey”. This reference has often been noted in both critical works on Salinger and studies dedicated to the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*. However, scholars have never actually attempted to fundamentally analyze the textual interconnections between Salinger’s stories and the hesychast work. In this article, the text of *The Way of a Pilgrim* is read within the framework of Salinger’s stories and is interpreted as being significant for his later texts. From the hesychast book Salinger borrows a number of images and presents its philosophy as a spiritual ideal. At the same time, he approaches it with a certain irony and exposes several pitfalls of incorrectly interpreting the Jesus prayer, as illustrated by Franny, one of Salinger’s characters. Having brought to light the nature of Franny’s mistakes and her peccant intention, Salinger reestablishes the hesychast ideal and connects it with Søren Kierkegaard’s principle of theistic existentialism.

Keywords: hesychasm; Jesus prayer; Russian Orthodoxy; *The Way of a Pilgrim*; elder; Salinger; Franny; Zooey



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The literary texts of J.D. Salinger (1919–2010) constitute a collision of various philosophical theories and religious practices among which theistic existentialism, psychoanalysis, Zen, and Vedantism occupy a special place. This collision is apparent in his *Nine Stories*. However, its revealing strengthened the feeling of the enigmatic nature of Salinger’s texts and often resulted in critics justifying contradictory or at least “different interpretations” (French 1963, p. 91) of his stories. The interpretive paradox was caused, firstly, by the complete absence of any comments by the author himself, and secondly, by his primary focus not on philosophical and religious reflection, but on presenting an exclusively objective world and characters given in specific situational sensations to the reader¹. In the Glass family stories, Salinger overcomes the enigmatic, supplementing the former concreteness with “problematic” dialogues of his characters who appear to be carriers of quite specific philosophical ideas and religious values. In the stories “Franny” and “Zooey”, Salinger actually employs a direct statement, and therefore these stories, to a certain degree, appear to be expanded commentaries to his *Nine Stories*.

It is significant that in the Glass family stories another religious tradition manifests itself—one which was not obvious in *Nine Stories*—hesychasm. In “Franny”, the eponymous protagonist Franny Glass tells her boyfriend Lane Coutell about the Russian hesychast book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, which is an instruction in the Jesus Prayer. She enthusiastically narrates the content of this book, and then twice in the story, when left alone, practices the Jesus prayer. In the story “Zooey”, Franny’s brother Zooey (born Zachary) tells his mother about the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, but unlike his sister, he does it somewhat ironically. Hesychasm and prayer thus become the focus of Salinger’s characters. It will be preliminarily noted here that hesychasm, in the case of Salinger, is controlled by the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard. As a result, in the Glass family stories one finds a combination of

East and West, Heaven and Earth, freedom and necessity, mysticism and rationalism, as well as contemplative life and active life.

“Franny” manifests the apparent irreconcilability of these extremes. In the story, the dialogue between Franny and Lane Coutell occupies a central place. Lane, a Yale student, is a dry, philological analyst who applies classical psychoanalysis to his studies on Flaubert. In his earthiness, attachment to psychic matter, Franny opposes the Jesus prayer. She overcomes the attraction to all things human, which is the hesychastic search for ideal experiential knowledge of God.

However, the practice of the Jesus prayer, as it turns out in “Zooey”, does not provide Franny relief. On the contrary, it aggravates her neurosis and results in a mental breakdown. In a conversation with Franny, Zooey offers her a slightly different path, the ideal that Kierkegaard referred to as “ethical”. He talks about finding God through an earthly mission. For Franny, her relationship with Zooey becomes a way to find Christ within herself and others, a path that leads from symbolic death to spiritual transformation. In this sense “Franny” and “Zooey” repeat the logic of *The Catcher in the Rye* that “may be read as a story of death and rebirth” (Miller 1968, p. 15).

As is known, it is thanks to Salinger that the Russian book *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the thematic center of the stories “Franny” and “Zooey”, became popular in the English-speaking world. Most critics who attempted to analyze it one way or another, as well as scholars of Salinger, note the important role *The Way of a Pilgrim* plays in his stories.

The *Candid Narrative of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father* (Otkrovennye Rasskazy Strannika duhovnomu svoemu otcu) was first published anonymously. As Svetlana Ipatova notes, the book’s authorship has been a matter of serious debate (Ipatova 2002, p. 301). However, the latest textological studies by Aleksei Pentkovskij (Pentkovskij 2018) convincingly prove that the author of *Candid Narrative* was Arsenii Troepolsky (1804–1870), and it was first published in 1881 in Kazan. In 1883, the second edition by Paisiy Velichkovsky was published, and the third was released in 1884. Subsequently, they were reprinted for Russian emigres by the YMCA-Press in 1930, and later editions by the same publishing house. The English translation of the book *Candid Narrative* by Reginald Michael French was published in 1931 under the title *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. It was exactly this book that was read by Salinger’s characters, members of the Glass family, first by the older brothers, Seymour and Buddy, and then by Zooey and Franny.

The *Candid Narrative*, or *The Way of a Pilgrim*, which consists of seven “stories”, was provided to Russian readers by Troepolsky as an anonymous text as if it had no authorship. This was meant to emphasize religious humility and insignificance of the author before people and God. The narrator has no name and is referred to as “Pilgrim”, which also accentuates his humility and generalized character of the figure that encompasses the collective experience of spiritual ascension and hesychast communion with God. Remaining an extremely earthly, ordinary layman, he at the same time acquires the common status of a pilgrim, a universal figure, who avoids a specific path.

Salinger could not help but pay attention to the intention of *Candid Narrative* since he himself tried to carefully hide his personality and biography from the public, playing down his personality and bringing it closer to anonymity in an act of humility. Salinger presented his personality indirectly, only in his works. He remained “in the public eye by withdrawing from it” (Alexander 1999, p. 26).

Unlike most hesychast texts, the “stories” of *The Way of a Pilgrim* are addressed not to ascetics, but “to the laity” (Ipatova 2002, p. 326), to a broad audience. Although the stories contain fragments of works by the authors of *Philokalia* (St. John of the Ladder, St. Symeon the New Theologian, Theoliptos, Nikiphoros the Monk, St. Gregory of Sinai, Kallistos and Ignatios the Xanthopoulos), the seventh or last story appears to be a theological dispute. In general, their author avoids theological intonation and adheres to the form of an ordinary oral conversation. In *The Way of a Pilgrim*, there are scenes that should be read allegorically, such as the fire in the pilgrim’s house (an allegory for the transitory nature of the earthly), the attack of the wolf (for temptation), the willingness to pledge one’s passport (willingness

to sacrifice the worldly for the spiritual, the desire to put one's duty before God above civic duty), and the healing of a woman, the wife of the ruler, choking on a bone (to spiritual cleansing). These texts do not appear to be a pure allegory like John Bunyan's (1628–1688) book *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)². This is the space of everyday events, concrete everyday circumstances, and random experiences. Events take place not in a timeless, conventional, space, but in Russia, in a specific historical epoch (the beginning of the 19th century) where the reader encounters specifically Russian types shown "in their concreteness" (Ipatova 2002, p. 324), representing distinctive social castes (landowner, priest, elder, teacher, professor, officer, merchant, fugitive soldiers, etc.). Concreteness, everyday life and realistic eventfulness are meant to create the illusion not of fiction, but of factuality, truthfulness, so that a didactic text is perceived as living proof. The practice of the Jesus prayer, conveyed in great detail, and the spiritual transformation that followed it would be seen in this light as quite attainable. Furthermore, it is addressed not to a narrow circle of monks, but for every person, ordinary laymen.

The "stories" of *The Way of a Pilgrim* are intended for ordinary people to read, for those not called upon to serve God, not chosen, and those who have not given up their earthly life. The stories retain a certain extent of complexity in regard to ascetic questions and at the same time present them as being inextricably linked to everyday situations and everyday experiences. It is likely that this is exactly what attracted Salinger. The worlds he created, peopled by characters and ordinary Americans busy seeking God or experiencing temptations or the despair of God-forsakenness (often unconscious), are also quite specific everyday spaces. Here, it is the singularity of any object that is always markedly emphasized, and experiences that are in essence religious are disguised in the shape of specific sensations, reactions or judgments. That, however, like in the *The Way of a Pilgrim*, does not exclude the allegories or allegorical gestures. The sun, sun rays from the window, and sunbeams in "Franny" and "Zooey" always symbolize the light that comes from God. The chicken sandwich that Franny orders at Sickler's, in its turn as some critics point out (Bryan 1961, p. 228; Lencina 2015, p. 118), symbolizes the Eucharist. Zooey, sitting in the sun and claiming that he always carries the sun with him is associated with Christ. The rationalist Lane Coutell "allegorically" turns his back on the rack with free Christian Science brochures by Mary Eddy.

The stories of *The Way of a Pilgrim* could have attracted Salinger due to an amusing combination of ascetic theory and practice, metaphysical reasoning, and concrete, everyday life, pieces of advice on how to transform one's theoretical understanding of prayer into spiritual action. As a matter of fact, the contradiction between "theory" and "practice" is indicated as early as in the first pages of *The Way of a Pilgrim*. The pilgrim seeks to master the ceaseless prayer and he seeks the answer to this vital question. However, every time he reads spiritual books or listens to sermons, he encounters only a general reasoning and a general understanding of prayer. All further development of the plot becomes a response to its initial search. Salinger, just like his characters, was interested specifically in those philosophical and religious theories that had practical efficacy and offered concrete practical ways to resolve spiritual problems.

However, it seems much more significant to us that in the stories of *The Way of a Pilgrim* Salinger was most likely attracted by a detailed representation and study of the nuances of experience, which was characteristic of ascetic literature. For a secular writer who meticulously constructs the psychological world of his characters, this text was an invaluable source of essential psychological patterns.

The Way of a Pilgrim is a hesychast text that asserts the possibility and necessity of contemplation of God for everyone, finding the kingdom of God within oneself, an internal connection with Christ and the ability to perceive the foundations of all things in their original design. This goal is achieved through the practice of the Jesus prayer that is constituted by the words "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". It must be performed incessantly so that it becomes an intrinsic part of one's being, and a person likens to the Holy Spirit who constantly prays. The oral prayer should transform into the prayer of the

heart, and, accordingly, the mind should blend into the heart. The prayer implies humility and revealing one to God, reaching the awareness of the fact that God sees you. “Stand in prayer facing the God,” notes Ignatij Bryanchaninov, “as if he sees you, stand like a criminal” (Bryanchaninov 2021, p. 275). Here it is essential to note that for the pilgrim, the name of God comprises an idiosyncratic power (Ugolnik 2016, p. 101; Pentkovskij 2018, p. 365; Bryanchaninov 2021, p. 287). The pilgrim quotes the ascetics who assert that invocation of the name of God kills not only passions but their operation as well.

At the very beginning of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the pilgrim, inspired by the words of the Apostle Paul—“pray incessantly”—sets off on a journey in the hope of finding someone who could explain them to him. The theological books that he reads and people who he meets cannot explain the essence of prayer to him. Finally, he finds an elder who becomes his mentor, teaches him, and introduces him to *Philokalia*. Under the elder’s guidance, the pilgrim begins to practice the “intellectual” prayer (*umnaya molitva*) and feels the inner changes happening within him. The elder dies but later comes to the pilgrim in his dreams and provides him with advice on how to do the right thing. Then, the pilgrim goes on a journey, visits villages, cities, meets people, including those who are skeptical about the Jesus prayer. Humbly, as it is proper for a person who has dedicated himself to God, he endures beating, persecution, and humiliation. However, more importantly, this is his inner spiritual journey that has nothing to do with his geographical logistics. The pilgrim performs a solo, independent ascension up the symbolic ladder, one that is called “a gradual transformation of the inner space into a temple” (Bagdasarov 2011, p. 91). He finds Christ, and in this discovery, he finds his true self. Prayer through practice becomes heartfelt. He stops articulating it and hears his heart resonating. The mind and heart that were separated previously, now are united and purified from passions. The changes occurring within him transform his perception of the world, which he now sees as fully divine. The pilgrim often feels the invisible light radiating from things. He reaches the level where he does not differentiate them and comprehends the wisdom of all earthly creatures.

Franny, in the eponymous story, retells the content of *The Way of a Pilgrim* to Lane, focusing on the episode of hospitality. Earlier, she goes to the ladies’ room and, having locked herself in a booth, takes out *The Way of a Pilgrim* and starts reading it. The prayer itself gives her a chance to get away from the fuss and noise of life around her that haunts her (“It’s getting so noisy in here I can hardly hear myself think”) (Salinger 1961, p. 4) and to overcome her own passions that bind her to the world and to people (“I’m sick of just liking people”) (Salinger 1961, p. 20), her false wisdom (“I’m ‘just so sick of pedants and conceited little tearer-downers I could scream” (Salinger 1961, p. 17). Finally, she can now escape from her own superficial ego in which everything is concentrated: (“I’m just sick of ego, ego, ego. My own and everybody else’s”. (Salinger 1961, p. 29). Michael Katz notices that “It is the pilgrim’s spiritual freedom that attracts the heroine to this extraordinary model” (Katz 2012, p. 539). Thus, the hesychast journey in Salinger’s story is defined as an alternative to primitive conformism and as the only way to salvation of the soul.

It can be easily seen that Salinger borrows certain images, situations, and characters from *The Way of a Pilgrim* and transplants them into his stories. In the second story of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, we encounter a steward of Polish origin who speaks skeptically about *Philokalia* and the Jesus prayer: “That, if I may say so, is enough to drive you mad. Besides, it’s bad for your heart (*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* 2012, pp. 74–75). Lane Coutell responds to Franny’s story and her explanation of the Jesus prayer in a similar way and in almost the same terms: the prayer, in his opinion, can cause heart problems: “I mean what is the result that’s supposed to follow? All this synchronization business and mumbo-jumbo? You get heart trouble? I don’t know if you know it, but you could do yourself somebody can do himself a great deal of real . . . ” (Salinger 1961, p. 39).

In the fourth story, when a pilgrim intends to go to Jerusalem, people insist on a deaf old man joining him as a companion. The deafness of the old man essentially symbolizes his detachment from the noise of the world. A man the pilgrim knows tells him: “He

belongs to this town, he's a good old man, and what's more he is quite deaf. So much so that however much you shout, he can't hear a word. If you want to ask him anything you have to write it on a bit of paper, and then he answers" (*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* 2012, p. 87).

In the story *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, there is also a remarkable figure of a deaf old man who takes a taxi with everyone else. Whenever asking him, Buddy writes his questions on paper. Passions run high around the old man, and yet he is completely detached, in an ascetical way, from what is happening. He is in a state of absolute peace and happiness. In the story, he becomes a companion and a living embodiment of a spiritual ideal for Buddy Glass.

By offering the reader the hesychast path as an ideal, Salinger at the same time draws the reader's attention to the fact that the Jesus prayer for some reason does not help Franny, it does not come to her with ease and leads to a nervous breakdown.

By shaping the horizon of the reader's expectation in the form of the spiritual ideal of hesychasm, from the very start, Salinger undermines this ideal. However, he does so only to reaffirm it. In "Franny" and "Zooey", the reader becomes a witness to the repeated mention of God's name (God, Christ). It parallels the manifold articulation of the fact that God's name holds miraculous power in *The Way of a Pilgrim*: "The Name of Jesus Christ invoked in prayer contains in itself self-existent and self-acting salutary power" (*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* 2012, p. 213). Franny makes it apparent: "< . . . > I mean all these really advanced and absolutely unbogus religious persons that keep telling you if you repeat the name of God incessantly something happens" (Salinger 1961, p. 39). In "Franny" and "Zooey", the divine name is mentioned on almost every page—but exclusively as an interjection or a swear word, as Buddy Glass notes, "as a familiar healthy American expletive" (Salinger 1961, p. 48). Salinger is deliberately ironic about hesychasts, implying that the repeated use of interjections cannot lead to internal change, and quantity will not transform into quality. Perhaps the repetition of the prayer will not lead to anything either, or the problem here lies not in practice but in the intention of the one who performs it.

What appears to be a factor moderating the hesychast pathos in "Franny", is the place where the heroine resorts to *The Way of a Pilgrim*. As a "secluded place" that hesychast theologians prescribe for prayer, Franny chooses the back booth in the women's restroom. Franny does exactly what the pilgrim and his teachers recommend to anyone who is praying: she finds a "secluded place", sits down, closes her eyes and steeps her thoughts into the "void-like black" (Salinger 1961, p. 22). It is worth noting that the setting chosen for the Jesus prayer can hardly be considered appropriate, it is rather ironically offensive to God, as well as the use of his name as an interjection. However, we can emphasize that what matters is not so much the prayer itself but the performer's attitude and state of mind.

The composition of "Franny" also accentuates the controversial nature of the ideal chosen by the heroine, or rather the ideal as presented in her mind. For the sake of discussion, the story can be divided into two parts, which are isomorphic, and are reflected in each other as in mirrors. In the first part, Lane shares with Franny his quite primitive psychoanalytic version of Flaubert. Franny does not approve of the very structure of his thinking; she clears her throat several times and interrupts Lane with inappropriate remarks regarding food and drink. In the second part, Franny in turn tells Lane about the pilgrim, and now he disapproves of the direction of her thoughts. He eats frog legs and constantly interrupts her with remarks about food. Warren French rightly points out that "One reason 'Franny' is an unusually well-balanced satire is that Franny's absorption in the Jesus prayer appears as egotistical as Lane's in his Flaubert paper" (French 1963, p. 143). At first glance, the compositional symmetry creates binaries: psychoanalysis—hesychasm, intellect—spirit, conformism—revolt. However, what we see here is, in fact, not opposition but rather the equation of things that seem irreconcilably opposite. In all his works, Salinger treats classical psychoanalysis ironically, and it would definitely be fair to assume that he presents hesychasm as its spiritual alternative. However, in both cases,

we deal with the practice exercised by ethically incompetent individuals. In Franny's case, both psychoanalysis and the hesychast Jesus prayer are only designed to soothe her, to help relieve her neurotic intoxication.

For Zooey, psychoanalysis mitigates neurosis and helps one adapt to society and primitive mass culture. He tells his mother: "You just call in some analyst who's experienced in adjusting people to the joys of television, and *Life* magazine every Wednesday, and European travel, and the H-Bomb, and Presidential elections, and the front page of the *Times*, and the responsibilities of the Westport and Oyster Bay Parent-Teacher Association, and God knows what else that's gloriously normal—you just *do* that . . ." (Salinger 1961, p. 108).

He is just as ironical in regard to the Jesus Prayer practiced by Franny: "And the main idea is that it's not supposed to be just for pious bastards and breast-beaters. You can be busy robbing the goddam poor box, but you're to say the prayer while you rob it" (Salinger 1961, p. 113).

As we will soon see, Zooey neglects neither psychoanalysis nor hesychasm. Dealing with Franny's case, he brings to light a characteristic common for psychoanalysis and hesychasm—the absence of a person's ethical choice and genuine religiosity. Without religious humility as an initial intention, it is impossible to set out on the practices of psychoanalysis and hesychasm. That is why, according to Zooey, Franny does not feel the purpose of the Jesus prayer while practicing it.

In hesychasm, the beginning of the spiritual journey is inseparable from religious humility. It manifests itself in finding a teacher and subjecting oneself to his will, in reading spiritual literature, in admitting that one is wrong before God and people (the latter is as essential). In the hesychast books, the necessity of submission to the teacher as an act of humility is constantly emphasized. *The Way of a Pilgrim* is also notable in this regard. It is exactly the search for teachers and the right books that the pilgrim begins his journey with. It is essential that from the very beginning, humility is set as a goal.

The search turns out to be long and difficult for the pilgrim. Neither the books that he finds nor the people he meets, even those from the clergy, can guide him and explain the essence of the Jesus prayer. There are very few genuine teachers in the world, as the author of *The Way of a Pilgrim* explains to us, and most of those who claim to be teachers are incompetent. However, it does not mean that one should give up on the attempts to find God and a true mentor. In the end, having traveled for a long time, the pilgrim after all finds an elder who becomes his teacher and explains the essence of the Jesus Prayer to him. As a matter of fact, the most important purpose of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, as well as of *Philokalia*, is to affirm the importance of a spiritual teacher (Ugolnik 2016, p. 106).

In turn, Franny rejects the prayer and ends up praying without permission and religious humility. She compares Lane to the college professors who, according to her, are all inauthentic without exception. Moreover, she indirectly rejects her genuine teachers Seymour and Buddy when she says that she took *The Way of a Pilgrim* from the library—whereas in reality, she found it on the desk of the late Seymour. Zooey attracts attention to this seemingly insignificant lie, and it infuriates him:

"He said she got it where?"

"Out of the library. At college. Why?"

Zooey shook his head, and turned back to the washbowl. He put down his shaving brush and opened the medicine cabinet.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Glass demanded. "What's the matter with that? Why such a look, young man?"

< . . . > "I asked you a question, young man. Why am I so stupid? *Didn't* she get that little book out of her college library, or what?"

"No, she didn't, Bessie", Zooey said, shaving. "That little book is called 'The Pilgrim Continues His Way', and it's a sequel to another little book, called 'The Way of a Pilgrim', which she's also dragging around with her, and she got *both*

books out of Seymour and Buddy's old room, where they've been sitting on Seymour's desk for as long as I can remember. Jesus God almighty".

"Well, don't get abusive about it! Is it so *terrible* to think she might have gotten them out of her college library and simply brought them"

"Yes! It is terrible. It is terrible when both books have been sitting on Seymour's goddam desk for *years*. It's depressing". (Salinger 1961, p. 101)

By unmasking Franny's lie, Zooey accurately discovers her wrong intention, her initial unpreparedness for the spiritual path, her lack of proper humility. A little later, he announces to Franny that she generalizes on the teachers' account and that he used to know a professor who was a great teacher and a great scientist: "I agree with you about ninety-eight per cent of the issue. But the other two per cent scares me half to death. I had one professor when I was in college—just one, I'll grant you, but he was a big, big one—who just doesn't fit in with anything you've been talking about" (Salinger 1961, p. 161).

Like a pilgrim, he notes that there are indeed very few true teachers, but this does not mean that they do not exist and that one should not search for them. In fact, like the author of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, Zooey reaffirms the importance of the role of the teacher in a world where there are almost no true teachers anymore. Here one cannot help but agree with Elvira Osipova who observes that Zooey functions as an elder for Franny (Osipova 2018, p. 190). Furthermore, Zooey reaffirms the importance of Seymour as a teacher (guru, elder). Ihab Hassan notes "And the success of Zooey heralds both the defeat and the apotheosis of Seymour: defeat because the youngest of the Glass children has at last achieved a measure of independence from the guru of the house, and apotheosis because this is precisely what Seymour would have wished" (Hassan 1963, p. 12). However, it should be noted that Zooey, acting as both a psychoanalyst and an elder, ironically distances himself from these missions. He emphasizes that he has put on a mask, that he is playing another role as a professional actor. After all, his task is not so much to instruct Franny in the spirit of hesychasm, but rather to make her embrace her earthly vocation—a theatre actor. It is only in the light of this earthly destiny that the meaning of the Jesus prayer can be understood as a spiritual journey, not a mere practice.

In addition to renouncing her mentor, Franny makes another mistake that points to the lack of religious humility in her. Ignatij Bryanchaninov considers "the rejection of unforgiveness and condemnation of loved ones" the first step in preparation for the prayer (Bryanchaninov 2021, p. 274). He argues that humiliation, malediction, and contempt for one's neighbor entail hatred. This is a manifestation of pride. As we can see from Franny's dialogue with Lane, this is what Franny is doing. She condemns, blames, and insults those around her: Lane, college professors, students, actors with whom she has to perform. Zooey points out her mistake, which is incompatible with the essence of prayer, and while doing it he refers to the priority of the mentors (Seymour and Buddy):

"But what I don't like—and what I don't think either Seymour or Buddy would like, *either*, as a matter of fact—is the way you talk about these people. I mean you don't just despise what they represent—you despise them". (Salinger 1961, p. 162)

Bryanchaninov notes that the neighbor is the image of God and that "Christ accepts our actions in relation to the neighbor as if they were done in relation to him" (Bryanchaninov 2021, p. 269). By despising people, Franny does not see the likeness of God in them, does not discern Christ in them. As can be recalled, in response Zooey gives Franny a Fat Lady monologue, which John Antico considers an "absurd" image (Antico 1966, p. 336). The image of the Fat Lady was invented by his brother and teacher Seymour. Seymour presents it to Zooey at the moment when Zooey felt contempt for those around him and refused to clean his shoes because of this:

"The studio audience were all morons, the announcer was a moron, the sponsors were morons, and I just damn well wasn't going to shine my shoes for them, I

told Seymour. I said they couldn't see them *anyway*, where we sat. He said to shine them anyway. He said to shine them 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 of times". (Salinger 1961, p. 200)

Zooey likens a "symbol for all that is repulsive" (Gettis 1978, p. 128), an ugly Fat Lady who is sick with cancer, on the one hand, to any weak and unattractive person, and on the other hand, to Christ who manifests himself in this person. Discovering Christ in oneself and in others is the real goal of the hesychast prayer.

Franny's failure with the Jesus prayer, which she performs by forcing herself and results in her fainting and a nervous breakdown, also stems from the fact that Franny is deprived of love for God and does not even realize it. In the second part of *Pilgrim Continues his Way*, at a certain point, the pilgrim gets lazy, unwilling to pray, and feels that prayer comes to him with great effort. He decides to confess his sins and turns to the confessor handing him a paper with all his sins listed. The confessor rejects this confession as inauthentic and tells the pilgrim that he did not write the main thing:

"You have not acknowledged, nor written down, that you do not love God, that you hate your neighbour, that you do not believe in God's Word, and that you are filled with pride and ambition". (*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* 2012, p. 165)

These words perplex the pilgrim but soon he would understand their meaning.

In a conversation with Zooey, Franny confesses her sins and weaknesses, but Zooey draws her attention to the fact that she does not really love God and Jesus Christ as his embodiment. He recalls that as a child, Franny denied Christ after she learned that he overturned the tables in the synagogue, threw idols around, and uttered words about the birds of the heavens, placing them beneath a human in terms of hierarchy. As it turned out, Jesus Christ did not align with her sentimental idea of him. She judges him and fell out of love with him. Zooey explains that this rejection of God remained with her since people do not change much from childhood. He encourages her to see God as he is and to pray to the real God, not a sentimental version of him: "If you're going to say the Jesus Prayer, at least say it to *Jesus*, and not to St. Francis and Seymour and Heidi's grandfather all wrapped up in one. Keep *him* in mind if you say it, and him only, and him as he was and not as you'd like him to have been" (Salinger 1961, p. 169). Zooey considers Christ to be the least sentimental and the most genuine teacher. He sees the purpose of the Jesus prayer in passing this very knowledge to people.

Thus, Franny makes a mistake about which the elder tells the pilgrim during their first meeting—the mistake is her seeking to measure God by a human yardstick. She projects her sentimental ideas about God onto Jesus Christ, thereby unconsciously manifesting pride.

The sentimental sensualism that colors Franny's perception of Christ is also evident in her attitude to the stories of the pilgrim. Zooey unambiguously points it out when retelling the contents of the book to his mother:

"He is a very simple, very sweet little guy with a withered arm. Which, of course, makes him a natural for Franny? With that goddam Bide-a-Wee Home heart of hers". (Salinger 1961, p. 110)

In "Zooey", Franny's sentimentality and sensualism are emphasized by her treatment of Bloomberg the cat. This treatment even makes up a small separate line in the story, which appears to be a kind of derogatory commentary to Franny's character that implicitly presents the heroine's inner world as sentimental and aesthetic. Having woken up, Franny immediately begins to show sentimental feelings to the cat by caressing and kissing him. Bloomberg reacts with hostility, but Franny is convinced that the cat enjoyed it.

““Good morning, Bloomberg dear!” she said, and kissed him fervently between the eyes. He blinked with aversion. “Good morning, old fat smelly cat. Good morning, good morning, good morning!” She gave him kiss after kiss, but no reciprocal waves of affection rose from him. He made an inept and rather violent attempt to cross over to Franny’s collarbone. He was a very large mottled-gray ‘altered’ tomcat. “Isn’t he being affectionate?” Franny marvelled. “I’ve never *seen* him so affectionate”. She looked at Zooey, possibly for corroboration, but Zooey’s expression, behind his cigar, was noncommittal” (Salinger 1961, p. 129).

Her sentimental and aesthetic concept of the cat appears to be at odds with the real image of the earthly creature, just as well as her concept of Christ does not align with his real essence. Franny continues to caress Bloomberg but once she starts processing the meaning of Zooey’s words, she pays less and less attention to the cat. When the moment of repentance comes, when she talks about ruining Lane’s evening (not authentic repentance, but a sentimental and sensual one), she hugs Bloomberg again:

“Here there was a marked break in her voice, and she began to be very attentive to Bloomberg again. Tears, presumably, were imminent, if not already on the way”. (Salinger 1961, pp. 149–50)

Zooey pays attention to this sentimental treatment of Bloomberg and notes the following:

“Say your prayer if you want to, or play with Bloomberg, but give me five minutes of uninterrupted silence”. (Salinger 1961, p. 156)

The Jesus Prayer and playing with Bloomberg are thus ranked together. Zooey’s remark reveals the common ground in those actions from the perspective of the driving force. It is the sentiment of a person whom Kierkegaard identified as “aesthetic”. When Zooey tells Franny directly about her sentimental mistake and she understands the meaning of his words, Bloomberg is no longer there:

“Franny was now facing directly into the sound of Zooey’s voice, sitting bolt upright, a was Kleenex clenched in one hand. Bloomberg was no longer in her lap”. (Salinger 1961, p. 165)

Franny’s playing with the cat, thus, explicates the corrupt basis of her religious impulse and attitude to the spiritual world: Franny succumbs to a dangerous temptation, against which the author warns the reader at the very beginning of *The Way of a Pilgrim*. An elder who appeared in a dream of the wanderer who had just been robbed by fugitive soldiers, told him:

“Let this be a lesson to you in detachment from earthly things for your better advance towards heaven. This has been allowed to happen to you to save you from falling into the mere enjoyment of spiritual things”. (*The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* 2012, p. 22)

Franny’s religiosity is explained precisely by her “spiritual lust”, a sensual impulse, while a Hesychast who prays should free himself from his will and remain in a state of dispassion.

It is also interesting that while explaining to Lane the essence of the Jesus prayer, Franny correlates it with Eastern practices. In *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the same is done by the steward who, essentially, is an opponent of the Jesus prayer. The steward compares the ascetic hesychasts to the magicians of India, and that results in a humble but decisive objection from the pilgrim. The magicians who distorted the meaning of God’s message, in his opinion, cannot be equated with the holy fathers who fulfill God’s will³.

Therefore, Franny clearly misreads the stranger’s stories, she follows the prayer literally but not its essence, and distorts its meaning with the wrong intention. It is exactly for this reason that she does not achieve the purpose of the prayer, it does not bring her peace; on the contrary, it aggravates her neurotic state. The prayer that Franny performs, as well as her state of mind before prayer, are in essence pride and denial of Jesus Christ. This is why Franny symbolically rejects the chicken sandwich and chicken broth. The reference

to a chicken sandwich in several of Salinger's texts (*The inverted Forest, Just before the War with Eskimos*), as well as that of chicken broth in "Zooey", degrade the signs of the Eucharist to the level of everyday life. It is a transfiguration of "a mundane situation into the Holy Sacrament" (Bryan 1961, p. 228).

The failure of Franny's "project" of the Jesus Prayer does not mean a total denial of it. Silence—as an extremely important element of hesychast asceticism—increases and becomes almost tangible as the story develops. Ihab Hassan points out that silence in the Glass Stories is not only a theme "but also a principle of their form" (Hassan 1963, p. 18)⁴. Pauses appear more and more often: the word 'silence' itself is repeated many times until silence captures the whole world of the story and the characters peopling it. Having calmed down and come to terms with herself, Franny lies in silence for a long time before falling asleep.

The hesychast ideal is almost achieved but only after Franny comes to the realization of the need to fulfill her earthly mission. It is here that Salinger supplements hesychasm with the religious and ethical concepts of Kierkegaard.

Salinger, as it is known, did not leave us any direct evidence of his philosophical interests. However, traces of his interests are obvious and have been noted by several researchers. One of his interests, as indicated by Thomas Brinkley (Brinkley 1976, pp. 49–55), was the philosophy of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). It played an important part in Salinger's worldview and its beliefs are reflected in his early texts. Judging by the way Salinger describes his characters, he was attracted to Kierkegaard's philosophy of the concept of the three stages of the human "self" (aesthetic, ethic, religious). The character of Salinger's early works is precisely an "aesthetic" person who experiences despair and tragedy. The idea of the three stages of human existence is substantiated by Kierkegaard in his treatise *Either/Or* (1843). An "aesthetic" person is an artist of life, immersed in pleasure, which can be sensual, intellectual, and even spiritual. An "aesthetic" person strives to control life, but suffers defeat on this path and experiences despair, a feeling of his own powerlessness. It is precisely this which occurs with Salinger's characters. The next stage is ethical. It requires a person to choose himself, to acquire his own existence, to compile the world, which at the aesthetic stage was disintegrated into fragments. *Either/Or* concludes with a fragment that describes the premonition of the religious stage, which presupposes a leap of faith, paradox, belief in the absurd and an individual's intimate connection with God. The idea of a religious life is elaborated upon in subsequent theological works by Kierkegaard.

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard distinguishes between the truly religious and the mystical. A mystic, in his understanding, is a kind of an aesthetical, sensual person, and in this context, it becomes clear why Franny's spiritual impulse is sensual, and her attitude to religion is sentimental. However, there is no obvious contradiction to the hesychast problematics. Contradiction and challenge arise when we recall Kierkegaard's words that the mystic is not "concrete" to himself and God (Kierkegaard 1987, p. 223). Zooey constantly emphasizes his concreteness and embodiedness. He smokes a cigar and claims it to be the ballast that binds him to the earthly world. He constantly emphasizes the need for an earthly mission for Franny. First, he talks about a film he starred in, where a farmer who has betrayed his calling dies, and then Zooey encourages Franny to return to the theater. Here, the Protestant ideal of active life comes into play, which opposes the ideal of contemplative life, the ideal paramount for hesychasm. We are also dealing with choice, a person's transition to the stage that Kierkegaard calls "ethical". "Franny,—as Brinkley puts it—at this point seems to be "choosing" wrongly, i.e., in the direction of an airy, insubstantial possibility in the realm of mysticism" (Brinkley 1976, p. 95). The ethical stage is where a person finds himself, takes a deliberate step that is inextricable with necessity. Here an individual sees himself as a concrete embodiment of God, as a product of the external world, one with certain talents and capabilities (Kierkegaard 1987, pp. 225–26). Kierkegaard talks about a person finding himself in the concrete and the internally infinite. According to Zooey, for Franny, that thing is everyday life and acting:

“I’d like to be convinced—I’d love to be convinced—that you’re not using it as a substitute for doing whatever the hell your duty is in life, or just your daily duty”. (Salinger 1961, p. 169)

Having found herself in concreteness and singularity, Franny can find Christ in herself, stand up before God and achieve religious humility. It is then that the true meaning of the Jesus prayer that Zooey talks about will manifest itself. A person will be endowed with the understanding of Christ.

Thus, Salinger establishes an ethical way of personality development for the implicit reader. The end of the story, however, remains open. Franny experiences joyfulness and peacefulness, taking pleasure in the dial tone which to her sounds like a “possible substitute for the primordial silence itself” (Salinger 1961, p. 202). It appears that she is coming to terms with a world that previously seemed disorganized to her. Here, there are two possible interpretations: (1) she finds herself on the threshold of a spiritual transformation, on the threshold of the ethical stage which Kierkegaard discusses; (2) she remains within the aesthetic stage. And, if this is so, then the new pleasure she is experiencing should be understood as her previous aesthetic attitude towards the world, in which only aesthetic assessments have changed.

In this manner, Salinger does not undermine the ideal of hesychasm, as it may seem at first. Rather, he constructs a new ideal in which hesychasm is one of the possible elements. Salinger reconciles it with Kierkegaard’s concept of the ethical, and by doing so he unites contemplative life and active life, the world of the spirit and the world of the body, East and West. The hesychast ideal is combined with that of Kierkegaard, the contemplative life.

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Notes

- ¹ The later story “Teddy” is an exception in this sense.
- ² Regarding the opinion that Bunyan’s book was a possible source for the author of *Candid Stories*, see: S. Ipatova (Ipatova 2002, pp. 312–15, 323–24), and A. Pentkovskij (Pentkovskij 2018, p. 347).
- ³ Regarding this paradoxical statement, see Z. Ugolnik (Ugolnik 2016, p. 115).
- ⁴ About the problem of how silence becomes a principle of poetic form, see (Ioffe 2005).

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