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Feeling Trauma within the Interconnected-Tense Context of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in J.D. Salinger's Franny and Zooey: A Lacanian Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines Franny and Zooey through a Lacanian lens to explore how J.D. Salinger's narrative reflects the fractured nature of modern identity. It investigates the interplay between Lacan's concepts of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, and how these dimensions shape the characters' psychological and social experiences.

Methods: A qualitative literary analysis was conducted, employing Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as a framework. The study focused on character interactions, dialogue, and narrative structure to identify the tensions between social conventions, personal longing, and the ungraspable elements of reality.

Results: The analysis reveals that the characters are confined by the Symbolic—language, family rules, and social scripts—while simultaneously yearning for the wholeness represented by the Imaginary. Encounters with the Real disrupt their attempts at coherence, manifesting in Franny's spiritual collapse and Zooey's ironic interventions. These dynamics illustrate the instability of meaning and the inherent incompleteness of identity. Trauma emerges not as an isolated event but as an enduring feature of selfhood.

Conclusions: Salinger's narrative emphasizes the ethical significance of living with the fractured self. By portraying the temporary nature of meaning and the relational foundation of identity, the story suggests that embracing incompleteness, rather than resolving it, constitutes a mature and conscious approach to life.

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Introduction

J.D. Salinger's Franny and Zooey (1961) sit right at that uneasy intersection between postwar American fiction and the inward gaze of psychoanalytic modernism. The book doesn't just tell a story, it stages a crisis. At its center is Franny Glass, unraveling under the weight of faith, intellect, and expectation. Her breakdown feels less like a private collapse and more like a small, painful revelation: that the boundaries we draw around the "self" are thinner, more fragile, than we'd like to believe. Her brother Zooey, equal parts cynic and caretaker, steps in as both sparring partner and reluctant therapist, and their long conversation turns the cramped Glass apartment into something like a philosophical arena. Within it, Salinger plays out the tension Lacan described between the Imaginary, that dream of wholeness and identification, and the Symbolic, the realm of law, language, and all the compromises of social life (Lacan, 1977, p. 68).

Looking at Franny and Zooey through a Lacanian lens means reading it as more than a family drama—it becomes a psychological map of how meaning itself falters. Franny's exhaustion and her quiet, almost frantic repetition of the "Jesus Prayer" don't really read like the symptoms of a breakdown so much as a kind of desperate patchwork—a way to hold herself together when everything familiar starts to unravel. It's like she's trying to sew meaning back into a world that's lost its shape, even though deep down she knows the stitches won't hold. In those moments, she seems to brush against what Lacan calls the Real—the part of experience that refuses to fit into words, that raw edge we keep circling but can never quite touch (Lacan, 1978, p. 53). Cathy Caruth might call this encounter "the wound that cries out," the return of an experience that resists full knowing or narration (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

Zooey, meanwhile, with his mixture of sharp humor and brotherly tenderness, doesn't really fix her. Instead, he nudges her toward an unsettling truth—that the wound never closes, that the lack is built in. And maybe, he seems to suggest, sanity isn't about sealing it up at all, but about finding a way to keep living inside the gap. In this sense, Salinger's story echoes what Julia Kristeva (1982) identifies as the paradox of the abject: that which disturbs identity but also defines it (p. 3). The "gap" becomes not just pathology, but a condition of being human.

Earlier critics like Anne-Marie Cox, Susan Rosowski, and John D. Andrews have read Franny and Zooey mainly as a moral or spiritual fable of modern alienation. Fair enough, but what often gets overlooked is how Salinger's dialogue itself enacts a psychoanalytic drama: language breaking,

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reforming, circling its own limits. The Glass family's crisis isn't only emotional; it's structural. In the end, Salinger doesn't hand us any neat transcendence or tidy sense of closure. What he gives instead is something quieter and harder to swallow—an ethics of fracture. It's the idea that being whole isn't really possible, and maybe it never was, but the ache for wholeness is what keeps us alive and reaching. Lacan might say that desire endures because what we long for is always just out of reach (1977, p. 286). And as Caruth (1996, p. 10) puts it, trauma isn't only what breaks our sense of meaning, it's what pushes us to keep trying to make meaning anyway, to keep talking, even when the words don't quite fit.

Literature Review

Scholarship on J.D. Salinger

Critical discussion of Franny and Zooey has long circled around its spiritual, psychological, and existential edges. Lionel Trilling once read Salinger's fiction as a meditation on the divided modern self, that uneasy space between authenticity and performance (Trilling, 1955, p. 42). Susan J. Rosowski, in Spiritual Trauma and the Fragmented Self in Franny and Zooey, sees Franny's collapse less as hysteria than as a slow accumulation of pressures, familial, social and even intellectual that fracture her sense of coherence (Rosowski, 1992, p. 18). For her, Zooey's long monologue becomes something like a therapy session, a fragile attempt to piece the self-back together. Anne-Marie Cox's Salinger's Spiritual Quest: The Search for Meaning in Franny and Zooey places the novella in the atmosphere of postwar religious revival, tracing Franny's turmoil through both Zen detachment and Christian mysticism (Cox, 1985, pp. 77–78). John D. Andrews, meanwhile, in "The Glass Family and the Trauma of Genius," argues that the siblings' intellectual precocity leaves them stranded—too smart, too aware, and therefore caught in a kind of existential melancholy (Andrews, 1990, p. 61).

Christine MacDonald's essay, Language, Silence, and the Self in Franny and Zooey, turns the focus to form. She notes how Salinger's fractured dialogue and long, uncertain pauses enact trauma rather than merely describe it, as if silence itself were standing in for what Lacan would call the Real—that part of experience that language can't quite touch (MacDonald, 2004, p. 132). Mark L. Anderson's Existentialism and Salinger widens the frame again by reading the novella as a story of alienation and moral searching in the age of postwar consumer culture (Anderson, 1998, p. 204).

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Taken together, these readings map Franny and Zooey as a text of crisis and transformation. Yet what they rarely do is bring Lacanian discourse theory into the conversation. The present study steps into that gap, suggesting that Salinger's characters don't just express psychological tension—they embody Lacan's triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, their speech itself becoming a record of psychic fracture and the struggle to live within it (Lacan, 1978, p. 53).

Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Trauma

Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freudian theory gives a sharper, more intricate language for approaching Salinger's brand of psychological realism. The Imaginary to him, is the realm of identification and self-image, the mirror where the ego catches its reflection and mistakes that image for wholeness (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). The Symbolic, by contrast, is the order of language and law, the intricate web of signs that shapes desire and gives the self its fragile coherence (Lacan, 1977, p. 66). And then there's the Real, actually the stubborn remainder of experience that resists all naming, a kind of raw presence that slips through language and often shows up as anxiety, loss, or trauma (Lacan, 1978, p. 53). For Lacan, trauma isn't a single wound in time but a structural hole in the Symbolic order itself, the point where meaning collapses and the subject briefly glimpses what lies beyond signification.

Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma deepens this view. She describes trauma as an event not fully known at the time, repeating itself belatedly in its exactness (Caruth, 1996, p. 8), something that insists on returning, precisely because it was never fully grasped in the first place. In Franny and Zooey, the way she keeps circling the same spiritual dead end. Her Jesus Prayer becomes both symptom and search, replaying the impossibility of aligning her longing for purity with the social and linguistic demands of the Symbolic. What breaks her isn't overt violence but a quieter kind of intrusion, the Real showing itself through fatigue, through the slow collapse of meaning. As Lacan might say the wholeness, she seeks turns out to be the most seductive illusion of all.

Theoretical Framework: The Lacanian Apparatus

The Symbolic Order and Interpellation

For Lacan, the Symbolic is the vast architecture of language and law which shares field where meaning, morality, and identity take shape (Lacan, 1977, p. 66). In Salinger's Franny and Zooey, the Glass family lives almost entirely within this Symbolic order: a world built on intellect, education, and endless moral conversation. It's a clever, over-articulated universe where every

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feeling seems to come pre-translated into ideas. Franny's breakdown begins the moment she starts to push against that system, dismissing academia as "ego-centered" and "phony." Her refusal isn't just youthful rebellion; it's a kind of existential revolt against the very structure that gives her a sense of self. The irony, of course, is that stepping outside the Symbolic is impossible—there's no subject without language, but that same language keeps the self-divided and uneasy (Lacan, 1978, p. 147). y

Zooey's long, difficult conversation with her becomes the space where this paradox plays out. His words—half sharp, half compassionate—don't rescue Franny from alienation but draw her back into speech itself. The dialogue becomes, in a way, her reentry into the Symbolic: an acceptance that meaning must always be negotiated through others. Ethical life, Salinger seems to suggest, doesn't begin with spiritual purity but with the messy, fragile act of communication.

The Imaginary and the Quest for Wholeness

The Imaginary, in Lacan's terms, is the domain of images and identification—the place where the self-first learns to see itself as whole, even though that wholeness is only a reflection (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). It governs the fantasy of coherence, the comforting illusion that the self can ever be pure or complete. Franny's yearning for spiritual innocence; her wish to pray endlessly, to somehow shed her ego altogether belongs squarely to what Lacan calls the Imaginary. It's not simply a moral ambition but a kind of luminous delusion which the fine cracks running through consciousness could be mended once and for all. Yet, as Lacan reminds, the mirror always lies and the reflection it offers is never quite true, it promises wholeness while quietly betraying its own illusion. And when that image breaks, as it does in Franny and Zooey, what comes after, isn't revelation or peace, but collapse.

The Symbolic—the world of language and meaning that usually props the self-up—can no longer sustain the image, and the Imaginary begins to crumble. Franny's ceaseless repetition of the "Jesus Prayer" becomes both a gesture of faith and a symptom of psychic repetition, a frantic effort to hold the Imaginary together against the pressure of the Real—the part of experience that refuses to be spoken or healed (Lacan, 1978, p. 53).

The Real and the Experience of Trauma

The Real in Lacanian thought, breaks through the fragile seams where both the Symbolic and the Imaginary fall short and it is where language falters and fantasy can no longer make sense of

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experience (Lacan, 1978, p. 53). For Franny, this rupture doesn't arrive as some grand spiritual awakening but as something quieter and heavier: a deep weariness, a pull toward silence, a dull sense that everything—words, faith, effort—has begun to lose its meaning. These are the symptoms of someone brushing up against what cannot be spoken, the limit where meaning itself gives way. When Zooey quietly reminds her that "This is God's universe, not yours," he's not just offering comfort; he's repositioning her—from the Imaginary fantasy of control toward a more symbolic acceptance of limitation, or what Lacan might call humility before the structure of the Other (Lacan, 1977, p. 235). The Real's intrusion, painful as it is, becomes strangely redemptive. It strips away illusion and forces a kind of ethical clarity, the recognition that the self is never whole, and that its strength lies precisely in that incompleteness.

Desire, Jouissance, and the Ethics of Lack

Lacan's idea of jouissance offers a way to understand the paradox at the heart of Franny's suffering. In his seminars, Lacan describes jouissance as the kind of enjoyment which begins where ordinary satisfaction ends, also he defines it as a pleasure so excessive that it borders on pain (Lacan 184). It is the thrill which accompanies transgression, the bittersweet rush of pushing one's desire right up to its breaking point. For Franny, this tension takes form in her obsessive piety and her quiet withdrawal from the world, which is a retreat that feels at once devout and evasive. Her rejection of social life, her disgust with academic vanity, and her almost masochistic devotion to prayer are not acts of pure denial but, in a Lacanian sense is a secret gratification found in suffering itself. There is something almost intoxicating about her suffering; it allows her to occupy a moral high ground and to feel both victimized and sanctified at once. What she experiences as despair is also, covertly, a form of jouissance—pleasure experienced through pain, identity found in renunciation.

Salinger seems keenly aware of this tension. Franny's breakdown does not come from a loss of faith so much as from a collision between faith and desire—between her wish to dissolve the ego and the ego's stubborn need to define itself through that very dissolution. Lacan might say that she tries to escape desire by idealizing its opposite, purity, but in doing so only creates a new object of desire (Lacan 319). Her pursuit of spiritual innocence becomes another circuit of the drive, a repetition that produces more anxiety the harder she tries to escape it. The "Jesus Prayer," repeated like a mantra, functions almost as a self-administered psychoanalysis—an attempt to keep

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speaking through the emptiness, to locate meaning in the act of repetition itself. Zooey's role in this psychic drama is not to cure Franny's suffering but to redirect it. His long, tenderly sarcastic speech is less advice than a kind of ethical intervention. He doesn't tell her to stop desiring purity; he reminds her that desire can never be purified. When he insists that "this is God's universe, not yours," he calls her back from the Imaginary fantasy of control to the Symbolic order of relation, of shared limitation. In Lacanian terms, Zooey reintroduces her to desire as lack—to the idea that human life is structured not by wholeness but by the gaps we circle around. Ethical living, from this perspective, does not mean erasing those gaps but acknowledging them, acting within them consciously.

Lacan famously argues in The Ethics of Psychoanalysis that the moral task of analysis is "not to give up on one's desire" (319). It doesn't mean indulgence or self-gratification, but the courage to face what one wants without collapsing into shame or denial. Zooey's challenge to Franny reflects precisely this stance. He doesn't offer her transcendence, only the harder, humbler work of staying inside her own dividedness. In recognizing that her longing can never be satisfied, that every prayer, every gesture of devotion, is haunted by the impossibility of completion, Franny begins to glimpse a more grounded kind of faith. Salinger, in this light, can be read as staging not a moral fable about religious crisis but a subtle dramatization of Lacan's ethical insight that the human subject is condemned to desire and yet sustained by it. Jouissance remains both the danger and the promise, it tears the self apart, but it also keeps the self in motion. Franny's exhaustion, then, is not simply the failure of belief; it is the price of living in relation to what can never be possessed. What Salinger's fiction ultimately gestures toward is an ethics of lack, actually a recognition that wholeness is neither attainable nor necessary, that the truest form of love or belief might arise not from certainty but from the willingness to live with the fracture.

Franny's Collapse and the Crisis of the Imaginary

Franny's breakdown at the start of Franny and Zooey is often brushed off as a kind of nervous collapse or a crisis of faith, but if you look at it through a Lacanian lens, it feels more like a slow implosion of the self—specifically, of a self-built on the fantasy of wholeness. Her exhaustion, her disgust and her compulsive praying all point to a mind buckling under the weight of its own ideals. In that diner scene, when she rails against the phoniness of her college crowd, she's not just rejecting pretentious people. She's pushing back against an entire symbolic world, the language of

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competition, cleverness, and spiritual posturing that her identity has been wrapped up in. What she really seems to want, though, isn't a new system of meaning; it's something older, more primitive a kind of unbroken, pre-verbal innocence that Lacan would say is lost forever once we step into the realm of language.

The Imaginary for Lacan, is a kind of trick mirror, which offers the illusion of coherence, the promise that we can be whole. Franny's ideal of purity—her wish to pray endlessly, to erase her ego—is that mirror image. But the more she tries to hold onto it, the more it slips away. Her repetition of the "Jesus Prayer" is supposed to center her, to fix that self-image in place, but it only exposes how deeply she depends on the same Symbolic order she wants to escape. In psychoanalytic terms, she's caught in a loop—a repetition compulsion, Freud might say—replaying the same scene of loss without ever finding resolution. When she confesses that she just wants to stop being, it's not a rejection of life but a protest against the collapse of that Imaginary unity she's been clinging to. The prayer, in this sense, becomes less a spiritual act than a ritual of absence, a way to speak into the void left by what Lacan calls the Real—the unspeakable remainder of experience that can't be folded into meaning.

Her prayer, then, isn't really about belief at all. It's about rhythm, about the body's need to repeat a sound when sense itself gives out. Her words become what Lacan calls lalangue—language stripped to its bare texture, its music, its pulse. And that's the paradox Salinger captures so quietly: Franny's faith comforts and wounds her at once. She prays not because she understands, but because she can't stop. In that contradiction—where language is both cage and refuge—Salinger sketches something achingly familiar: the modern self, suspended between meaning and its collapse, still speaking into the silence.

Zooey's Mediation: The Reconfiguration of the Symbolic

Zooey's arrival changes the entire rhythm of the story. What had been quiet, inward, almost claustrophobic suddenly opens into dialogue. If Franny's unraveling exposes the collapse of the Imaginary, the breaking of that fragile illusion of purity, then Zooey's presence marks a hesitant return to the Symbolic, though hardly in any tidy or doctrinal way. His speech carries a blend of sharp wit, restless intellect, and unmistakable warmth. He doesn't talk like a preacher or a therapist dispensing wisdom; he speaks like someone bruised by the same questions, trying to pull another person back toward life through the only thing left to them: words.

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In this way, his voice resembles what Lacan calls the analytic discourse, where speech exposes illusion and edges the subject closer to the truth of desire (Lacan 66). Yet the dynamic between them also echoes Bakhtin's idea that genuine dialogue always resists closure—it's open-ended, unpredictable, charged with the ethical responsibility of responding to another consciousness (126).

Through Zooey, the Symbolic order—language, family, meaning—stops feeling like a trap and starts to look like a space for ethical renewal. When he teases Franny about her phony spiritual purity, he's not mocking her belief but he is exposing how even faith can harden into ego. His critique, however, is steeped in tenderness and he dismantles her fantasy without denying her longing. Julia Kristeva might call this an act of "love as interpretation"—a compassionate re-inscription of meaning through language (Kristeva 112). Zooey doesn't erase Franny's jouissance, that painful pleasure in her suffering, but helps her redirect it, to speak it instead of being consumed by it (Lacan 184).

The conversation culminates in his reflection that the "Fat Lady" is "Christ Himself," a strange, luminous moment that reframes transcendence as empathy. Here, Zooey performs something close to what Emmanuel Levinas calls "the ethical encounter with the Other"—the moment when the self recognizes in another face the demand for care and meaning (Levinas 197). Franny's faith, once solitary and self-punishing, becomes dialogical—a faith enacted through relation, not withdrawal. Salinger's scene thus reads like a small psychoanalytic drama but also a moral one: a transformation of isolation into dialogue, of language into compassion. In Caruth's terms, the trauma of spiritual collapse becomes narratable, it's not erased but translated into speech, which is how healing, however partial, begins (Caruth 8). By the end, the Symbolic is not restored in its old rigidity but reimagined through humor, empathy, and shared imperfection. The Meaning which Salinger suggests doesn't come from purity or silence, but it comes from the fragile, ongoing effort to speak with and for another.

The Encounter with the Real: Trauma as Revelation

The Real in Franny and Zooey doesn't arrive with noise or drama, but it seeps in quietly. Each time that she tries to say what wrong, language itself is seems to give out, as though the words can't quite bear the weight of what she's feeling. Lacan might call this the moment when "the Symbolic reaches its limit," when language—the thing we rely on to hold ourselves together—

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suddenly fails and the Real slips through (Lacan, 53). But unlike the kind of trauma Cathy Caruth describes, the one that strikes like lightning and is only understood after the fact, Franny's wound feels quieter, more existential. It doesn't come from an external shock but from the dawning awareness that no word, no belief, no prayer will ever make her whole (Caruth 4). Salinger captures this unraveling not with grand gestures but with rhythm, with pauses, interruptions and those small hesitations that hang between sentences. The Real in this story is subtle, almost tender, more a tremor than a rupture. You can hear it in the way Franny repeats the "Jesus Prayer" until the words lose meaning and become pure sound—a kind of breath work against despair. Julia Kristeva might see this as a return to the semiotic, that pre-linguistic pulse of the body that keeps speaking even when language fails (Kristeva 25). It's both a symptom and a survival instinct: a way of holding herself together through sound when sense has fallen apart. Zooey meets this silence not with correction but with companionship. His long, wandering conversation doesn't cure her; it joins her. There's something gentle about the way he listens and answers as if he's helping her thread words back into the torn fabric of meaning. By the end, when Franny closes her eyes and begins to pray once more, the gesture feels changed. It's not collapse anymore—it's acceptance. The repetition remains, the lack remains, but now she can live inside it. She hasn't escaped the Real; she's learned to share space with it. What once felt catastrophic becomes, in a quiet way, the ground of her faith—the fragile recognition that meaning, if it exists at all, can only live alongside what words can't reach.

Desire, Jouissance, and the Ethics of Imperfection

The movement of Salinger's Franny and Zooey mirrors what Lacan explains as the restless structure of desire, which never really resolves or finds its final object but keeps itself alive through its own delay (Lacan, Écrits 223). Franny's longing for spiritual purity comes out of this same restless loop. Her desire is shaped by what Lacan calls desire of the Other, whether that's God, her brother Seymour or the moral ideal she's built in her head. Her exhaustion, then, isn't just emotional fatigue, but it's the inevitable burnout of trying to live up to an unattainable image. When that image finally cracks, she's left face-to-face with something rawer and scarier: desire without structure, without a name. Zooey, with his mix of wit and tenderness, doesn't give her answers so much as perspective. Through teasing and affection, he shows her that lack isn't a flaw to overcome but it is the pulse which keeps life and meaning in motion.

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Lacan's idea of jouissance sheds light on why Franny can't quite let go of her misery (Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts 184). As Kristeva argues, this kind of ascetic intensity often conceals a "narcissistic delight in renunciation" (Tales of Love 189). Only when Franny begins to see her devotion as entangled with desire can she start to release it. Zooey's long speech functions as a psychoanalytic intervention, a kind of cut that shows how the supposedly pure act of prayer is saturated with longing, pride, and need. That recognition marks her shift from the Imaginary fantasy of perfection to a Symbolic ethics which is grounded in lack.

By the closing scene, Franny's silent prayer has changed register. It's no longer an attempt to escape language or the world, but to reenter both—quietly, imperfectly. Her prayer becomes dialogue by other means, a kind of Symbolic gesture that acknowledges the Real without being undone by it. As Caruth reminds us, healing is never the erasure of trauma but its translation into new forms of expression (Unclaimed Experience 8). Salinger's ending, then, doesn't offer redemption or resolution. It offers something humbler: an ethics of imperfection, built on the recognition that lack, not wholeness, makes meaning possible. In Lacanian terms, Franny reaches a state of what he calls "subjective destitution," a letting-go of the Imaginary ego so that desire can circulate again (Lacan, Écrits 324).

The Domestic Space as Symbolic Topography

The setting of Franny and Zooey, the cramped, overfamiliar Glass family apartment, works like a map of the psyche. Every corner of that space carries a strange doubleness: the cluttered shelves of books and icons, the relics of Seymour's presence, the cigarette smoke curling through spiritual conversation. The living room, with its uneasy mix of the sacred and the banal, becomes a stage where the Symbolic and the Imaginary rub against each other—language brushing up against longing. The bathroom scene, where Zooey speaks from behind the shower curtain reads almost like an improvised psychoanalytic session. The curtain divides them but also binds them in a peculiar intimacy, echoing what Lacan calls "the divided structure of speech, the split between voice and subject, between what is said and what remains unsaid (Lacan, Écrits 207). In this way, Salinger turns the home into a kind of analytic space, where the self speaks to itself through the mediation of the Other.

Salinger's choice of setting—so quiet, so domestic—contrasts sharply with the vast spiritual landscapes that shaped mid-century fiction. Instead of epiphany in the desert, we get grace in the

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living room. This intimacy, as Julia Kristeva might suggest, transforms the domestic into a psychic interior, where meaning is negotiated not through transcendence but through repetition and relation (Kristeva 145). Trauma, in this symbolic architecture, isn't expelled but contained—it becomes part of the psychic furniture, something lived with rather than purged. As Cathy Caruth reminds us, trauma doesn't vanish through insight; it's experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known, and returns only through acts of narration and listening (Caruth 4). Franny's gradual recovery mirrors this process. The reader watches her that she is learning to re-inhabit her own world. By the end of novella, the transformation isn't miraculous but deeply human. It's a quiet resolution that echoes Lacan's insistence that the analyst does not heal, but he brings the subject to speak (Lacan, Seminar XI 20). In Salinger's hands, that speech is what redemption really sounds like.

Conclusion

Reading Franny and Zooey through Lacan's triadic viewpoint shows how Salinger turns a psychological collapse into something like a moral reckoning. The Glass apartment, crowded yet strangely sterile, a kind of domestic stage, works as a miniature world of ideology, where the Symbolic order of language, intellect, and social expectation keeps colliding with the Imaginary's fantasy of spiritual purity. Franny's breakdown lays bare that collision, the impossibility of making the two aligns, while Zooey's voice—half-mocking, half-loving—edges her toward an ethics built on imperfection rather than transcendence. Salinger's real brilliance lies in how he lets trauma speak without resolving it. His characters don't conquer their contradictions; they learn to dwell in them. In Lacanian terms, Franny and Zooey map a slow, painful passage from the Imaginary illusion of unity to the Symbolic recognition of limits, a movement not toward wholeness but toward something more honest: relational truth. The story ends not with revelation but with a quiet rhythm returning, Franny's prayer becoming, at last, not an escape from desire but a way of acknowledging its endless return.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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