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ABSTRACT

A discussion and analysis of a novel, "The Pigman," are given. The story is described as one that appeals to adolescents and also is a good means for exemplifying how an author works. The plot is described as the story of three lonely people--two teenagers and an old widower. It is a novel revealing the duality of life through the use of opposites in juxtaposition. Diction is one of the technics employed by the author, Paul Zindel, to exemplify the themes, e.g. language is used to enforce the theme of honesty versis phoniness. The novel's title introduces the first major animal metaphor. Animal imagery also reinforces Zindel's theme of what is real or honest as opposed to what is phony. With the books conclusion, the reader feels that perhaps the teenagers have at last learned to distinguish between appearance and reality. (Author/CK)

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The Pigman—Use It!

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How many novels have you used for classroom study that *everyone* thoroughly enjoys?

I have found one.

Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* has met with unqualified success among my students. Apparently they have been effective as public relations men, too, because students from other classes have come asking for copies to read on their own.

Zindel has presented us with a rare gift—a story students like plus a novel that is a veritable treasure for exemplifying how an author works—all wrapped up in one package labelled *The Pigman.*

The author has first of all written about people, actions, and ideas that appeal to adolescents *now.* Second, he doesn't answer the novel's questions: he forces his readers to search for their own answers. Third, the craftsmanship is clearly defined so the student can more readily appreciate the writer's skill, and so that he can be led to more complex novels. The brevity (159 pages) facilitates manipulation of the entire novel.

The Pigman by Paul Zindel[1] is the story of three lonely people—two teenagers, Lorraine Jensen and John Conlon, and an old widower, Mr. Angelo Pignati. It is a novel revealing the duality of life through the use of opposites in juxtaposition: adolescents and adults, death and life, honesty and phoniness, a fantasy world and reality, communication and alienation, good and evil. These theme elements are exemplified through the surface "fun and games" tone that masks deep inner alienation.

Diction is one of the technics employed by Zindel to exemplify the themes. The speech of the characters, particularly that of John, is predominately of a flippant tone and employs the currently popular teenage vernacular (unlike Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye,* swearing is not actually included). Yet what the persons involved are saying is far from being "flip." Each cries out for companionship, for understanding, for someone who truly cares about him as an individual. For example, John analyzes Lorraine in this way, "The way her old lady talks you'd think Lorraine needed internal plastic surgery and seventeen body braces, but if you ask me, all she needs is a little confidence" (p. 22). John also succintly summarizes his own and Lorraine's home situations when he explains why the telephone game is played at their friends' homes: ". . . at least they (their friends' parents) didn't mind if their kids used the house. Mine and Lorraine's we can't even go to. We couldn't anyway because her

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[1]Paul Zindel, *The Pigman* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968,), 159 pages. (All page numbers are from this paperback edition.)

mother doesn't have unlimited service, and at my house my mother is a disinfectant fanatic. . ." (p. 23). Mr. Pignati's specialty is telling jokes and maintaining a constant flow of good will. Zindel describes his voice as "jolly" and "bubbling" and his face as always smiling (p. 27).

Language is also used to enforce the theme of honesty versus phoniness. John observes that Miss King, an English teacher, tries to establish rapport between herself and her students by using slang expressions. Her attempts are unsuccessful. Mr. Pignati, on the other hand, speaks his own language and immediately establishes communication with John and Lorraine (p. 21).

In addition to the various levels of English utilized by Zindel, the metaphors employed enforce theme ideas. The majority of metaphors are animal metaphors. Often when a writer compares people to animals, he is gently pushing his reader to see himself objectively and to recognize his weaknesses with a sense of humor.

The novel's title introduces the first major animal metaphor. The image of the pig is a dual image. Today's reader associates the word "pig" with something cluttered, dirty, evil, or as identifying the "establishment" in a derogatory manner. Mr. Pignati, the Pigman, does live in a messy, cluttered house. But he represents to John and Lorraine security, friendship, warmth, love, and acceptance. At the same time, there is an underlying tone that something evil will occur as a result of the friendship. In direct contrast to the "pig" image as Mr. Pignati's given name, Angelo—implying angel, as a messenger or deliverer. In the Pigman's collection of "phony pigs" (p. 45), Mr. Pignati lifts a "large white pig with an ugly smile on its face" (p. 46). If these pigs represent the love-sentiment between the Pigman and Conchetta, why does the original pig have an ugly smile? In the pig, then, Zindel utilizes again his theme of duality. The irony is reinforced when John says of the Pigman, ". . . he was harmless—a little crazy—but really harmless" (p. 63).

A similar idea is seen in the comparison between the Pigman and Bobo, the baboon. Mr. Pignati is identified with Bobo—they are both old, both become ill about the same time, and when Mr. Pignati learns that Bobo is dead, he seems to give up and dies, also. But Bobo is described by Lorraine as "the ugliest, most vicious-looking baboon I've ever seen in my life" (p. 58). Perhaps Zindel's theme of surface appearance versus reality is revealed in this comparison; although Bobo looks vicious, he is harmless in his cage and apparently forms a friendship with the Pigman—"my best friend," explains Mr. Pignati (p. 58). Nevertheless, the potential for evil remains.

The baboon image as a comparison to man is used later in the novel when John says, "And maybe Lorraine and I were only a different kind of baboon in a way. Maybe we were all baboons for that matter—big blabbing baboons—smiling away and not really caring what was going on as long as there were enough peanuts bouncing around to think about—the whole pack of us—" (p. 155). This is emphasized in the last three para-

graphs of the novel when John devotes two single paragraphs to the single word "baboon" and then states that they build their own cages—just as people create their own lives.

The monkey image is used in a more lighthearted tone when the three friends visit the toy department at Beekman's and see the stuffed animals. They were enjoying a happy, carefree shopping tour when Lorraine comments, "We must have looked just like three monkeys. The Pigman, John, and me—three funny little monkeys" (p. 88). The toy department metaphor later, however, assumes a somber tone in the funeral scene when John observes that the whole thing was ". . . like being in Beekman's toy department to tell the truth—everything elaborately displayed. So many things to look at. Anything to get away from what was really happening" (p. 156).

Animal imagery also reinforces Zindel's theme of what is real or honest as opposed to what is phony as the animals employed for comparison are a combination of natural and artificial ones. John and Lorraine feel themselves to be in a "jungle" when the Pigman's death occurs.

Dream images are another facet of Zindel's technic—Lorraine's dreams tend to represent psychological fears of terrible events to come, while John's "daydreaming" makes him long for death as something better than growing up into the adult world he knows. Both John and Lorraine fear growing up. John states, "Maybe I would rather be dead than to turn into the kind of grown-up people I know. What was so hot about living anyway if people think you're a disturbing influence just because you still think about God and Death and the Universe and Love" (pp. 156-7).

Two interesting metaphors comparing man and machines (another set of opposites)are found within a page of each other. John describes the police and attendants at the funeral as performing a ritual for which they do not know the meaning: "I thought of machinery—automatic, constant, unable to be stopped" (p. 157). A few paragraphs later he reverses the comparison when he describes the flashing light of the ambulance as "pulsing like a heartbeat" (p. 158).

The loneliness of each of the three characters is basically the result of family situations. John, eleven years younger than his brother, is constantly compared unfavorably to him by his parents: "Kenneth never gave us any trouble," his mother remarks pointedly (p. 34); while his father reminds him, "Your brother is doing very well at the Exchange. He makes a fine living, and there's still room for you" (p. 66). John wants no part of his father's kind of life. He tells his father, ". . . I want to be *me*. Just me. Not a phony in the crowd" (p. 67). The irony here is that he wants to be an actor—a profession requiring the playing of someone else's role. John apparently does not recognize this inconsistency or cannot face a role of his own. In the meantime, John feels his parents regard him simply as an annoyance; they refuse to see him as a person. John observes, "They just seemed tired, and I seemed out of place in the house. I had become a disturbing influence, as they say (p. 94).

Lorraine's mother and father had separated while Lorraine was small, then several years later her father died; hence, Lorraine and her mother lived alone for a number of years. Mrs. Jensen works as a nurse and never allows Lorraine to forget what a hardship it is on her: "That school thinks it's easy for a woman to support a kid by herself—two dollars for this, five dollars for that. . . I can't even afford to get myself a pair of nylons" (p. 50). Her attitude toward men is that they are all sex maniacs; Lorraine relates how her mother is constantly warning her about not opening the door to strangers, not getting into cars and the like and she concludes: "Beware of men is what she's really saying. They have dirty minds, and they're only after one thing. Rapists are roaming the earth" (p. 97). Consequently, Lorraine's social life with John is kept from her mother for fear of reproval.

Although neither John nor Lorraine are understood or accepted as individuals by their parents, both young people seem to understand and accept their parents as they are. Lorraine feels pity toward her mother.

Mr. Pignati's wife is dead and he lives a fantasy that she is only off for a visit and will soon return. Mr. and Mrs. Pignati had apparently shared a beautiful married love that neither John nor Lorraine has witnessed in their own homes. Lorraine remarks, "I realized how many things the Pigman and his wife must have shared—even the fun of preparing food. . . It makes me think that the love between a man and a woman must be the strongest thing in the world" (p. 77). She feels sad that this was not true for her own parents.

John and Lorraine are drawn to Mr. Pignati as a person who gives them all the things they ever wanted and were denied in their own families: he treats them with trust and dignity as individuals; he plays with them; he takes them places for fun; he encourages them to do zany things like eating chocolate-covered ants and roller-skating in the department store; he shares his inner, personal life with them; he is always there when they want to come to him, but he does not force himself on them. In return, they bring to him companionship, youth, laughter, and loyalty. Zindel, however, suggests there is a limit to how far one can go in such a relationship when near the end of the novel, John thinks, "Trespassing—that's what he (the Pigman) had done. . . . We had trespassed too—been where we didn't belong, and we were being punished for it. Mr. Pignati had paid with his life. But when he died something in us had died as well" (p. 159). Again the theme of duality is exemplified, this time in relation to the subject of loneliness—each person is lonely and yearns for closeness with others; but if he goes too close, he will be punished.

Dishonesty in their parents is obvious to John and Lorraine—Mrs. Conlan does things like cheating on stamps at the supermarket, while Mrs. Jensen takes useful items from homes where she is nursing. It is ironic, then, that the three friends' relationship has been based on dishonesty—John and Lorraine, playing the "telephone game," tell the Pigman they are collecting for a charity, while Mr. Pignati pretends that his wife Con-

chetta is alive. Once they tell each other the truth, the bond holding them together begins to weaken and destroy what they had. It is literally the beginning of the Pigman's dying. At the same time, it seems to be the real beginning of John's and Lorraine's maturing.

In telling the story, Zindel uses a type of "diary" or "journal" form. John and Lorraine take turns writing chapters; thus the reader sees the events from two points of view—both through the adolescents' eyes. The adult point of view must be derived through what John and Lorraine relate.

A major portion of the novel is devoted to the "game" idea. John is introduced to the reader as a teenage boy who plays games as an attention-getting device and also as an apparent release for his frustrations (his "bathroom bomber" and "fruit-roll" games). John and Lorraine's friendship with Mr. Pignati is the result of a telephone game. Mr. Pignati entertains them with a series of puzzles and games, the games becoming progressively more real and more serious. At last the realization dawns that somewhere the "games" had become the game of life and death. Lorraine pleads silently, ". . . we didn't mean things to work out like this. We were just playing" (p. 144).

Zindel involves the reader by including little games in the text of the novel, such as the snake quiz, the psychological game, and the clippings from the "Dear Alice" newspaper column. This device very effectively makes the reader a part of the story.

Games ultimately come to represent the difference between appearance and reality. At last, when John and Lorraine look at each other after the funeral, John realizes, "There was no need to smile or tell a joke or run for roller skates" (p. 159).

With the book's conclusion, the reader feels that perhaps John and Lorraine have at last learned to distinguish between appearance and reality and have come to terms with it by accepting it as a challenge. John closes by writing, "They (baboons) build their own cages, we could almost hear the Pigman whisper, as he took his children with him" (p. 159). The price paid for "growing up" was high; now it is their individual responsibility to make their lives worthy of the price they have paid.