



The Characterization of Felix Salinger as the Main Character in Morris Gleitzman's *Once*

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengelaborasi karakterisasi Felix Salinger, tokoh utama dalam novel *Holocaust* karya Morris Gleitzman berjudul *Once*. Melalui analisis tekstual, penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa novel tersebut menggambarkan Felix Salinger sebagai bocah Yahudi berusia delapan tahun yang religius, berani, peduli, dan kreatif. Karakter religius Felix Salinger melibatkan toleransi yang kuat terhadap agama Kristen dan rasa hormat yang tinggi terhadap kekuatan yang lebih tinggi dalam berbagai nama mereka. Keberaniannya ditunjukkan ketika dia harus menyelesaikan banyak tugas yang menantang dengan mempertaruhkan nyawanya sendiri. Penokohan Felix Salinger didukung oleh karakternya yang jeli, penuh perhatian, dan tidak mementingkan diri sendiri. Kreativitasnya mengandalkan imajinasinya untuk menciptakan solusi atas berbagai tantangan yang dihadapinya, termasuk membuat cerita untuk menghibur orang lain sebagai bagian dari kelangsungan hidupnya. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa anak-anak bisa sangat tangguh dalam situasi yang menantang.

Kata Kunci: Penokohan, Novel *Holocaust*, Analisis Tekstual

Abstract

The present study aimed to elaborate on the characterization of Felix Salinger, the main character in Morris Gleitzman's *Holocaust* novel entitled *Once*. Through textual analysis, the study revealed that the novel portrays Felix Salinger as an eight-year-old Jewish boy who was religious, brave, caring, and creative. Felix Salinger's religious character involved strong tolerance toward Christianity and high respect for the higher powers in their various names. His bravery was shown when he had to accomplish many challenging tasks at the risk of his own life. Felix Salinger's caring characterizations were supported by his observant, attentive, and selfless characters. His creativity relied on his imagination to create solutions to various challenges he faced, including creating stories to entertain others as part of his survival. These findings imply that children can be very resilient in challenging situations.

Keywords: characterizations, Holocaust novel, textual analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Morris Gleitzman is an English-born writer who lives in Australia. Gleitzman has written numerous books for children, many of them translated into more than twenty languages, including the novel *Once* (2005), which is followed by six sequels: *Then* (2009), *Now* (2010), *After* (2012), *Soon* (2015), *Maybe* (2017), and *Always* (2021). The first novel, *Once*, and the six sequels are then known as the *Once Series* (<https://www.morrisgleitzman.com/index.htm>). According to the website of the British Council, Morris Gleitzman has won multiple awards for his children's novels, including three Children's Book Council of Australian Book of the Year in the Category of Young Readers in 1992, 1993, and 2009. The website of Penguin Publisher Australia and Gleitzman's official website refers to the writer as "Australian Children's Laureate" concerning the awards he has received from various Australian institutions. Gleitzman also won several awards from the British and German Governments.

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Morris Gleitzman's *Once* tells about Felix Salinger's adventure to find his parents during the Holocaust tragedy. Felix Salinger was the son of Jewish bookshop owners who left Felix Salinger in an orphanage at the beginning of the Holocaust, promising Felix Salinger that they would pick him up once the problems with their bookshop were fixed. One day, Felix Salinger saw a group of men, Nazi soldiers, burning the books in the orphanage, and he thought that there was something wrong outside of the orphanage. Felix was concerned about his parents because they worked as bookkeepers. He decided to leave the orphanage to find his parents and save the books in their bookshop. Felix Salinger met Zelda during the journey. When they arrived in the city, they were about to be transported with other Jewish children, but Barney saved Felix and Zelda and sheltered them in a cellar of a printing house. Unfortunately, their hideaway was found by the Nazis, and they were transported to the extermination camp by train. During the train journey, Felix Salinger and the other had a chance to jump through a big hole in the train. Felix, Zelda, and Chaya took a risk and jumped together. Fortunately, Zelda and Felix Salinger survived.

Academically, the novel *Once* has become the interest of numerous studies. [Kuhiwczak \(2007\)](#) examined the novel to discover how it presents a convincing character and its effect on the Holocaust presentation in the novel. [Kuhiwczak \(2007\)](#) discovered that the author used children's points of view to make the characters convincing. As a result, the Holocaust tragedy was not explicitly presented in the novel. [Gilbert \(2010\)](#) examined the narrative technique used in the novel and found out that Gleitzman narrated the story through Felix Salinger's storytelling to attract the reader. On the other hand, [Coles \(2012\)](#) chose to focus on the translation of the novel by analyzing the strategy used to present the trauma of war in the novel from English to Italian translation. [Coles \(2012\)](#) discovered that domesticating strategy was used to adapt the text to be acceptable for Italian child readers.

Following the direction taken by [Kuhiwczak \(2007\)](#) and [Gilbert \(2010\)](#), the present study sees the role of Felix Salinger as the main character is instrumental for the story. Similar to the position of Bruno in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Felix Salinger plays the role of a narrator. The use of children as narrators for telling the Holocaust presents the Holocaust from a naïve and unsuspecting yet courageous eight-year-old ([Gilbert, 2010](#)). [Rich and Percy \(2018\)](#) may be concerned that point of view may significantly affect how children perceive the Holocaust. However, as the book is aimed at children, it is essential to consider the psychology of the young readers in the face of traumatic tragedy as the Holocaust. [Rico & Fernández \(2011\)](#) emphasized that a child narrator in Holocaust literature may provide a psychological defensive mechanism that children often employ during traumatic events. However, it does not mean that one should shy away from introducing the Holocaust to children, as it would shed valuable education about one of the most painful tragedies in the history of humanity ([Bosmajian, 2002](#); [Gray, 2014](#); [McGlothlin & Kapczynski, 2016](#)). Looking at the importance of Felix Salinger as the main character and the narrator of the story in Gleitzman's *Once*, the present study will explore Felix Salinger's characterization to shed more understanding of the pivotal character. This study can point to the strength of Felix Salinger's characterizations as insights for parents and teachers about how children can be guided to be stronger in times of difficulties ([Saraswati et al., 2021](#)). At the same time, parents can use this study as a guide for evoking empathy about Felix Salinger's struggles as an exercise to build sympathy and empathy among children and students reading this novel ([Suwastini, Dantes, et al., 2020](#); [Yasamahadewi et al., 2021](#)). As argued by [Abrams \(1999\)](#), literature can reflect life, and at the same time, it can also affect life by affecting readers with moral messages included in a novel.

2. METHOD

The subject of this study is Morris Gleitzman's *Once*. The novel was firstly published in 2005 by Penguin Books, Australia. In the present study, the novel used was the 2010 edition by Henry Holt and Company, New York. The novel consists of 16 Chapters in a total of 163 pages. The study, however, was focused on the identification of Felix, the main character of the novel. The theory of characterizations used for identifying and classifying Felix Salinger's characterizations was from Gill (1995).

The study was textual analysis, where Morris Gleizman's novel *Once* is treated as a text consisting of various elements that construct a novel as a complete work with certain ideologies represented by the elements and their structure (McKee, 2003). Thus, the analysis of Felix Salinger's characterization was supported by the analysis of other elements in the novel. In the process of data analysis, the study employed the model of qualitative data analysis from Miles et al. (2014), which includes the simultaneous process of data collection, data classification, data display, and conclusion drawing. Close reading was employed during the data collection to get a general understanding of the novel. This understanding allowed the plot segmentation, following Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith's (2017) plot segmentation. In this process, a plot is divided into segments called sequences. Each sequence consists of one main event in the plot development. Each sequence can include subsequences, comprised of details of incidents around the main event of the sequence (Dewi, Suwastini, & Jayantini, 2021; Suwastini, Lasmawan, et al., 2020). This segmentation is aimed to ease the process of data analysis by presenting the novel in more manageable units of analysis. The data collection was conducted by identifying the subsequences that contain Felix Salinger's characterizations. This process was continued with the classifications of these characterizations to allow more coherent data display in the form of elaborations of Felix Salinger's characterizations. The conclusion of Felix Salinger's characterizations was derived simultaneously during the data collection, data classification, and data display in a repeated process to ensure a trustworthy conclusion.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the findings and discussion of Felix Salinger's characterizations in Gleitzman's *Once* (2010) as identified directly and indirectly in the novel through Felix Salinger's actions, thoughts, speech, and his dialogues with other characters, as well as from reactions of other characters toward Felix Salinger (Gill, 1995). Table 1 bellow summarizes Felix Salinger's characterizations in Morris Gleitzman's *Once*. Table 1 shows Felix Salinger's positive characterizations: religious, brave, caring, and creative. The following sections will elaborate on these characterizations.

Table 1. Characterization Felix Salinger in Morris Gleitzman's *Once* (2010)

No.	Characterization	Sequence	Frequency
1	Religious	1e, 3f, 4a, 4b, 14e, 15d	6
2	Brave	4a, 6a, 6d, 14b, 16j	5
3	Caring	1h, 7a, 16a, 16b	4
4	Creative	2a, 6e, 8a, 11e	4

Felix Salinger's Spirituality as Reflection of His Religious Character

Kemendikbud (2017) indicates that religion is an attitude that reflects the belief in God, which can be implemented through carrying out religious teachings, respecting other religions or beliefs, and living in harmony and peace with others. Felix Salinger was a child

from a Jewish family, but he was left in a Catholic orphanage. In the orphanage, he started practicing Catholicism. In the beginning, Felix Salinger did it to hide his real identity as a Jewish. However, after leaving the orphanage, he still prayed to God, Jesus, Mary, and the Pope, as reflected in subsequences 1e, 3f, 4a, 4b, 14d, 14e, and 15d.

In subsequence 1e, Felix Salinger had dinner with other children at the orphanage. Felix Salinger found a whole carrot floating in his soup bowl for the first time since he lived at the orphanage. Felix believed that no one had ever got a whole carrot in their dinner bowl. It was because the vegetables could not grow up in the mountain. Thus, Felix Salinger assumed that it was a miracle. Then, he thought the carrot was the sign from his parents, telling him they would pick him up from the orphanage after three years and eight months. Thus, he expressed his gratitude towards God. Felix Salinger felt thankful for both the carrot and the “sign,” thus, he expressed his gratitude as follows,

Excerpt 1 *“I can’t believe it. At last. Thank you, God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler. I’ve waited so long for this. It’s a sign,”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010: 3).

Felix Salinger expressed his gratitude by invoking God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler through his exclamation displayed in Excerpt 1. It is rather amusing that Felix Salinger also invoked the name of Adolf Hitler. He was the feared dictator of Germany from the ruling party Nazi, the reason why Felix Salinger had to live in an orphanage, away from his parents. While this is more fitting for another discussion, it is crucial to notice that Felix Salinger followed Catholic Orphanage unquestioningly, having faith in the teaching of Father Ludwik, Mother Minka, and Sister Elwira about the power that could decide upon their lives. Thus, Felix Salinger expressed his gratitude by invoking the names that he believed ruled his life: God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler, which represents the strength of his faith towards the higher power.

The same faith in God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler as the higher powers is expressed in subsequence 4a. In this subsequence, Felix Salinger managed to escape from the orphanage to find his parents. The following is Felix Salinger's description of his escape.

Excerpt 2 *“I slither down the mountainside through the cool green forest, feeling very grateful to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler. Grateful that after the Nazis left this morning, the nuns didn’t lock the gate. Grateful that this mountainside is covered in pine needles rather than tangled undergrowth and thorns.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.29).

Excerpt 2 above shows how Felix Salinger expressed how he felt “...very grateful to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler.” Felix Salinger believed that God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler had helped him escape the orphanage and the Nazis’ impending acquisition of the orphanage. Later in subsequence 14e, Felix Salinger also expressed his gratitude to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope when he found what he was looking for, escaped Nazis soldiers after being almost caught and found his way back to his shelter. Felix Salinger described his feeling as follows.

Excerpt 3 *“Thank you, God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Richmal Crompton. I thought I was never going to find my way back, but I know where I am now.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.141)

The words “Thank you, God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Richmal Crompton” show Felix Salinger’s unwavering faith in God, Jesus, Mary, and the Pope for helping him get the aspirin, the carrot, the book, and finding back his way to the cellar. This time, Felix Salinger left Adolf Hitler from his expression of gratitude because, at this stage, Felix Salinger had found out that Adolf Hitler was the leader of the Nazi party. Felix Salinger’s choice to preserve God, Jesus, Mary, and the Pope in his gratitude reflected the strength of his belief in God, Jesus, Mary, and the Pope as opposed to his vanishing faith in Adolf Hitler. However, the inclusion of Richmal Crompton, the author of the book that Felix Salinger found, maintained Felix Salinger’s innocence in his faith. Felix Salinger naively believed that the book had guided him back to the cellar where very sick Zelda was waiting.

Besides invoking God and other higher powers in his gratitude, Felix Salinger’s religiosity is also reflected in his praying habit. According to Dewi et al. (2021) and Febriana et al. (2014), praying is an act of someone who believes in God. In Gleitzman’s *Once*, Felix Salinger was revealed to be praying in subsequences 3f, 4b, and 14d. In subsequence 3f, a gang of Nazi soldiers came to the orphanage and burnt Mother Minka's books that she bought from Felix Salinger's parents' bookshop. Seeing that, Felix Salinger realized something wrong had happened outside the orphanage and decided to find his parents. Felix Salinger still joined the morning prayer with other orphan children despite his plan to find his Jewish parents, as described below. Felix Salinger followed the morning prayer activity with other children at the orphanage. It can be seen in the below excerpt.

Excerpt 4 *“Dodie opens his eyes wide even though we’re kneeling in chapel and meant to be praying.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.23)

The words “we’re kneeling in the chapel and meant to be praying” describe Felix Salinger joining the morning prayers before leaving the orphanage. Felix Salinger was in the chapel, which was the place for praying in the orphanage. He was also described as kneeling, which was a position for praying. However, Felix Salinger was described to be observing Dodie, who opened his eyes during the praying. It means Felix Salinger did not close his eyes either. This action may mean that he was not very religious because he was not praying properly. However, it should be noted that Felix Salinger was Jewish; thus, he was not supposed to join the morning prayer in the Catholic chapel. Nevertheless, he joined the prayer. This action can be read as a camouflage strategy for Felix Salinger to hide his Jewish identity. On the other hand, it can also be read as respect toward other religions, which is in itself a sign of spirituality (Dewi et al., 2021; Kemendikbud, 2017; Saraswati et al., 2021; Suwastini, Asri, et al., 2020).

In subsequence 4b, Felix Salinger’s spirituality is displayed both by invoking the Higher powers and the action of praying. In this subsequence, Felix Salinger was starving because he skipped breakfast before leaving the orphanage. Fortunately, he saw a house where he could get food. Thus, Felix Salinger prayed,

Excerpt 5 *“Thank you, God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler for answering my prayers. I’m sorry I started doubting you while I was lost in the fields. And blaming you for the scorching sun and lack of puddles to drink.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.32)

Excerpt 5 above describes Felix Salinger’s returning faith in “God, Jesus, Mary, the Pope, and Adolf Hitler Felix” after doubting them. It is also described that Felix Salinger had doubted those Higher Powers when he got lost, scorched by the sun, and thirsty. It is mentioned in the excerpt that Felix Salinger thanked these Higher Powers for “answering [his] prayers.” It means that when Felix Salinger was starving, he kept praying until his faith started to wane, only to return after Felix Salinger saw the house. Thus, this excerpt represents Felix Salinger’s faith, the temptation he experienced, and the revival of his faith. This series of events is highlighted in James 1: 12:18, where a believer will be enlightened in his journey of faith that strengthens his faith in the Higher Power (Utami et al., 2020).

The above discussions elaborate how Felix Salinger was revealed as a character with a strong spirituality. He was a Jewish who respected other religions, such as Catholicism, as equal religion. He was also shown to be praying. Most importantly, he was depicted invoking names of Higher powers such as God, Mary, Jesus, Adolf Hitler, and Richmal Crompton to represent his faith in these powers. Thus, while constantly working hard to find his parents, Felix Salinger was repeatedly shown to believe that God is the name of Higher Powers had always guided him, which reflects Felix Salinger’s religious character.

Felix Salinger as a Brave Boy

According to Stevenson (2006), being brave is fearless to be different from others, take chances, and face challenges. Similarly, Kinsella et al. (2017) state that bravery relates to the ability to face fear in dealing with danger or pain. In Gleitzman’s *Once*, Felix Salinger appeared as a brave child in subsequences 4a, 6a, 6d, 14b, and 16j.

In subsequence 4a, Felix Salinger managed to escape from the orphanage alone, although the journey was not easy. The orphanage was located in the mountain. Thus he faced many challenges going down the mountain for a mere eight-year-old boy. As the narrator, Felix Salinger described some of these challenges as follows.

Excerpt 7 *“I just walked out through the main gate. I slither down the mountainside through the cool green forest.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.29)

While Excerpt 7 simplifies Felix Salinger’s trip down the mountain into "slithering down" the cool green forest and makes it look like a fun experience on a slide in a beautiful green park, these words should be understood as a selection of diction meant for children's novel. To slither down a slide might sound fun, but if the slide was a mountain's side, it could mean rocks, boulders, bruises, and cuts for Felix Salinger if he tried to reach the village fast enough for a runaway orphan. However, Felix Salinger did not use any terrifying events to describe the experience. While this option can be read as a strategy for a children’s novel, diegetically, it can also be read as a reflection of Felix Salinger as a brave child. He might have been so focused on finding his parents and saving their books that he simply ignored all the hardship. Starting a journey alone requires much bravery (Blangsinga et al., 2021; Saraswati et al., 2021). In their analysis of Dory's adventure to find her parents, Artini et al. (2020), Suwastini, Lasmawan et al. (2021), and Utami et al. (2019) found that Dory was a brave character because she had to travel the ocean alone and face the danger of polluted

waters by herself. Although visually, the film included scenes in which Dory was terrified (Suwastini, Lasmawan, et al., 2020), the way she traveled alone and faced her fears and the challenges on her own was a reflection of her brave character. Thus, in subsequence 4e, Felix Salinger's description of his solitary journey reflects his brave character.

In subsequence 6a, Felix Salinger found out that his parents were not in their old house. Mr. Kopek said that all the Jewish people in his hometown were transported to the city. Felix Salinger was shocked and wondered about what was happened. Mr. Kopek warned Felix Salinger not to go to the city because it was hazardous. However, Felix Salinger still decided to go alone to the city. Felix Salinger decided to go to the city alone after knowing that his parents were not at his old house. He described his determination to find his parents as follows,

Excerpt 8 *“Once I walked as fast as I could toward the city to find Mum and Dad, and I didn’t let anything stop me.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.53)

The words *“and I didn’t let anything stop me”* in the above excerpt portray Felix Salinger as a brave child who was not afraid to face the upcoming terrible situation and would not be stopped by anything. Kinsella et al. (2017) state that being brave includes the determination to face danger or pain. Thus, Felix Salinger's courageous decision to still go to the city even though he knew that it was very dangerous reflected Felix Salinger's brave characterization. In the same way, Amanda Collier in Nicholas Sparks' *The Best of Me* bravely drove down the coast during a hurricane in North Carolina to fight for her love, which was considered a reflection of her brave characterization by (Dewi et al., 2021).

In subsequence 6d, in the middle of the journey to the city, Felix Salinger's steps were stopped because he saw a burning house. Felix Salinger came closer to the house to see if someone needed help. Felix Salinger was courageous to go inside the burning house and found a little girl lying on the lawn. It can be seen in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 9 *“I haul the unconscious girl up onto my back and stagger through the smoke and sparks toward the fence. The hot wire burns my arm as I squeeze through, but I don’t care. I just want to get me and this poor orphan safely hidden in the cabbages.”*
(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.57)

Excerpt 9 above shows how Felix Salinger helped the girl out of the burning house. He went *“through the smoke and sparks toward the fence”* while he had to carry the unconscious girl on his back. As an eight-year-old boy, Felix Salinger bravely faced the fire, courageously withstood the hot wire and the fire sparks that burnt his body. Felix Salinger's actions in this subsequence reflect his brave characterization because he courageously saved the girl even though it would probably endanger his own life too. In the same way, Widasuari et al. (2020) argue that Lucy's brave personality was seen from her brave actions in going to the Stone Table to take care of the slain Aslan and saving animals from the White Witch's castle.

In subsequence 14b, Felix Salinger was concerned about Zelda's condition. Barney asked Felix Salinger to get an aspirin from abandoned apartments around their shelter. It was after curfew that night, which means that all the Jewish people were forbidden to go outside. Nazi soldiers were on patrol around the ghetto to catch someone who dared try to escape. If anyone got caught by the Nazi soldiers going out after the curfew, they would be severely

punished. As a responsible adult, Barney asked Felix Salinger if Felix Salinger really would go out to get the aspirin for Zelda. Felix Salinger answered,

Excerpt 10 "Yes," I say. I know what Barney was going to say before Zelda opened her eyes. If we can't get her temperature down in the next few hours, she'll die.

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.135)

Excerpt 10 above shows that Felix Salinger assured Barney that he would get the aspirin despite the danger he would face. However, the threat from Nazi patrol was not the only pressure that Felix Salinger had to face. The statement "If we can't get her temperature down in a few hours, [Zelda]'ll die." It means Felix Salinger had to find the aspirin quickly, despite the Nazi surveillance. This timeframe would require Felix Salinger to move fast, leading to recklessness that could lead to his arrest. Thus, Felix Salinger needed to be fast yet vigilant, which required much bravery. It is similar to Dory's effort in saving his friends from the cargo truck in Disney's *Finding Dory*, where she needed to be fast and strategic while risking her own life to save her friends' (Utami et al., 2020). Determination to perform one's best in the face of challenging situations reflects brave character (Suwastini, Banjar, et al., 2020).

Kinsella et al. (2017) state that bravery involves impulsive decisions and actions without too much consideration. Felix Salinger's also impulsively decided to jump the Nazi train in subsequence 16j. The train might have transported the Jewish people to an extermination camp, where they would be killed or burnt alive, as described in Boyne's *Boy in Striped Pyjama*. Many train passengers realized the ill-fate waiting for them at the train's destination. Thus, when one of the train's planks fell off, the passengers started to jump off the speeding train under the Nazi's machine gunshots from the top of the train. Felix Salinger made his calculation and started to persuade his friends to jump. However, some of the children were afraid to jump; thus, Barney stayed behind with them, while Felix Salinger followed his instinct and jumped, as described below.

Excerpt 11 "I take hold of Zelda with one hand and Chaya with the other, and we jump."

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.161)

The above excerpt shows Felix Salinger's determination to jump after swift consideration of the risks. It was an impulsive action, based on his survival instinct to stay alive, that Felix Salinger jumped off the train (Setiawan et al., 2021; Suwastini et al., 2018; Widasuari et al., 2020). In Disney's *Finding Dory*, Dory was also very impulsive in her actions, as she would jump and take risks in his journey to find her parents and save her friends (Utami et al., 2020).

As an eight-year-old boy, Felix Salinger was described to be very brave because he decided to leave the orphanage that had been taking care of him and went back to his home to warn his parents about the book, embarked on his journey to find his parents, risk his life to save his friends. He relied very much on his naïve instinct to guide his decisions.

Felix Salinger as a Caring Friend

Stevenson (2006) states that caring is feeling concerned or interested in other people's condition, a cause, animals, and the environment, which can be shown through several behaviors, such as concern, sacrifice, selflessness, and contribution. Felix Salinger's caring characterization can be identified in subsequences 1h, 7a, 16a, 16b.

In subsequence 1h, Felix Salinger suddenly felt sad because he would probably leave the orphanage soon. He had to say goodbye to everyone, especially Dodie:

Excerpt 12 *“While I finish my soup, I try to think of a good thing I can do for him. Something to show him I’m glad to know him. Something to make his life here a bit better after I’ve gone, after I’m back in my own home with my own books and my own mum and dad.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.6)

It is described that when Felix Salinger was eating his soup, he thought about what he could do for Dodie because Dodie had been kind to Felix. It means Felix Salinger was considerate about Dodie's well-being. Felix Salinger was very thoughtful about making Dodie's life “a bit better” after Felix Salinger left the orphanage. Therefore, Felix Salinger's thoughts reflected Felix Salinger's caring personality because he still thought of Dodie's well-being even when Felix Salinger was not going to be around Dodie anymore. It means Felix Salinger was considerate about Dodie's well-being, reflecting caring characterizations (Blangsinga et al., 2021; Yasamahadewi et al., 2021).

In subsequence 7a, Felix Salinger nurtured Zelda after saving her from the burning house. They woke up on the haystack in a barn, and before Zelda woke up, he had already prepared breakfast for her from the bread given to him by Mr. Kopek. It is described,

Excerpt 13 *“Then I unwrap the bread and water. Zelda has a drink and I have a sip. I break her off a piece of bread and a smaller one for me. She needs extra because she’s injured.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.63)

In the above excerpt, Felix Salinger was depicted as nourishing Zelda by giving her the bigger part of the bread and having only the smaller portion for himself. The words “I break her off a piece of bread and a smaller one for me” show that Felix Salinger generously gave a bigger piece of bread to Zelda to raise her energy. Attending a sick person is an act of a caring person, as identified by (Dewi et al., 2021; Suwastini, Dantes, et al., 2020). Thus, Felix Salinger's action reflects his caring personality in which he was concerned about Zelda's condition, so he took care of her although he was also injured at that time.

In subsequence 16a, Felix Salinger was on the train journey to the extermination camp. It was unpleasant because the train was overloaded, and other passengers squeezed Felix Salinger. However, instead of trying to make himself comfortable, he was described to try to make others so:

Excerpt 14 *“I try and make myself thinner to give some of the old people more space. It must be terrible for them. I’m young and I’m used to going without food and water and space.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.154)

In the above excerpt, Felix Salinger paid attention to elderly passengers around him. He emphasized with their miseries that they had to be squeezed together into the overcrowded train, where there was not enough space for everyone to sit. The words “*I try and make myself thinner*” show Felix Salinger's care and sacrifice to others by trying to give more space to old people as much as he could. In that painful situation, Felix Salinger did not hesitate concerning other people's conditions and was not selfish. It is in line with the finding

from [Widasuari et al. \(2020\)](#) that Lucy Pevensie is a caring person, which was seen through her concern to Mr. Tumnus, who was under the imprisonment of the White Witch, her attention to Edmund Pevensie's anxious feeling, and her appeal to save Edmund Pevensie. Thus, Felix Salinger has a caring personality because he was thoughtful and considerate to do good things to other people even when he was in a terrible time.

Later in subsequence 16b, Felix Salinger observed that the train did not stop, so there were no toilet breaks. And then he noticed that an elderly woman used the corner of the train to relieve herself, but she had no toilet paper. Felix Salinger begged his imagination to think of something to help the woman. He offered his notebook to be used as toilet paper. The following excerpt describes Felix Salinger's actions and the other characters' responses to his actions.

Excerpt 15 *“Lots of other people hold their hands out for toilet paper and I rip pages out for them as well. Now I’ve only got pages left with stories on them. Stories I wrote about Mum and Dad. I look over at the people crouching in the corner, at the relief on their faces. Mum and Dad would understand. I rip the rest of the pages out of my notebook and wriggle past everyone to the toilet corner.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.156)

Excerpt 15 above highlights two responses from Felix Salinger's decision to hand out the pages of his notebook. The first reaction was, "[l]ots of other people hold their hands out for toilet paper," which means the other passengers had also been holding themselves in. Thus, when they saw that Felix Salinger had a solution for the toilet paper issue, they too started to relieve themselves, relying on Felix Salinger's notebooks for wipes. The second reaction was "the relief on [the passengers'] faces" after defecating, using the pages from Felix Salinger's book for wipes. Felix Salinger's help had made it possible for the passengers to relieve themselves in that train ride to the extermination camp. Although Felix Salinger felt sad that he had to tear the pages where he wrote his stories about his parents when the empty pages ran out, he convinced himself that "Mum and Dad would understand." The use of his parents as an excuse was an effort to convince himself that ripping those pages was the right thing to do. Felix Salinger selflessly sacrificed his most valuable belonging, the stories that would make his parents recognize him. Volunteering to help others by putting others' needs before one's own is an act of caring ([Saraswati et al., 2021](#); [Suwastini, Dantes, et al., 2020](#)).

Gleitzman's *Once* portrays Felix Salinger as a caring character by showing him as an attentive friend and a selfless human being. In the orphanage, he took care of other children, especially Dodie. During his journey to find his parents, he helped Zelda and nurtured her back to health. On the train ride to the extermination camp, he selflessly tried to make other passengers more comfortable and sacrificed his valuable notebook to help the passengers. Felix Salinger's actions were motivated by his kindness to help other people and facilitated by his attentiveness in paying attention to other people's needs.

Felix Salinger's Creativity

[Stevenson \(2006\)](#) states that creativity is an ability to come across new and exciting things. Further, [Stevenson \(2006\)](#) adds that creativity to convey new things could be anything, such as an idea, a painting, a piece of music, or an invention. Felix Salinger's creative characterization appears in subsequences 2a, 6e, 8a, and 11e.

In subsequence 2a, Felix Salinger was worried that his parents might not recognize him after three years to be separated. He tried to think of something that could remind his

parents about him. Felix Salinger then used the notebook given by his parents to write his stories about his parents. Together with the unique binding of the notebook and the stories, Felix Salinger believed that,

Excerpt 16 “...when they read it, they’ll know I’m their son because it’s full of stories I’ve written about them.”

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.11)

In subsequence 2a, Felix Salinger’s creativity can be identified by using the notebook’s unique characteristics and the stories he decided to write on the notebook. As an eight-eight-year-old boy, Felix Salinger observantly recognized that his notebook had unique binding and cover that no other children in the orphanage had a similar notebook. As a gift from Felix Salinger’s parents, who owned bookshops, perhaps the book was a special, expensive notebook worthy of being gifted to their only child. To use the notebook to write stories about his parents is another level of creativity. First of all, the stories would connect the book with the characters to connect Felix Salinger and his parents. Politically, Felix Salinger instilled his ideology about connecting back to his parents in his stories. However, writing stories with a specific purpose like that was a very creative talent for a child who had not reached the age of nine. Felix Salinger creatively rewrote the stories his parents had told him into the notebook. According to [Lucke \(1999\)](#) and [Stevenson \(2006\)](#), writing stories requires much creativity to make the stories interesting. In the novel, other orphan children liked Felix Salinger’s stories. Jankiel also learned from Felix Salinger about how to write stories.

In subsequence 6e, Felix Salinger and Zelda rested on a haystack because Felix Salinger was very tired from carrying Zelda. Zelda started to cry, asking for her parents. Felix Salinger tried to calm her down. He thought of various excuses to ask Zelda to stay quiet without telling her the truth that her wailing might be heard by the Nazis who killed her parents earlier that night. He thought about using the sheep as an excuse, but there was no sheep on the field. Thus, he persuaded Zelda to stay quiet so he could tell an interesting story:

Excerpt 17 *All right, I’ll tell you a story about a kid who spends three years and eight months living in a castle in the mountains.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.60)

Subsequence 6e depicts Felix Salinger's creative mind in trying to find why Zelda had to stay quiet without scaring her. He eventually resorted to his stories. He tried to tell the story about Zelda's parents going on a picnic, but Zelda said they did not go to picnics. Felix Salinger tried to make up a story about Zelda's parents on an airplane. She also refused because they did not fly an airplane. Thus, Felix Salinger went back to telling the story about a boy who lived in a castle in the mountains for “three years and eight months,” which interested Zelda. Felix Salinger's efforts to find ways to keep Zelda quiet were in themselves very creative. However, when he changed his experience of living in an orphanage in the mountains for three years and eight months into fiction about living in a castle, Felix entered a creative process of changing life stories into fiction ([Armstrong, 2006](#)).

Felix Salinger's stories told to Zelda proved to be instrumental in their survival. In subsequence 8a, Felix Salinger described how his stories distracted their minds from the fatigue of going on foot under the rain and hungry as they tried to reach the town where the Salinger lived. It can be seen in Excerpt 18 below.

Excerpt 18 *“Once I spent about six hours telling stories to Zelda, to keep her spirits up, to keep my spirits up, to keep our legs moving as we trudged through the rain toward the city.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.72)

Felix and Zelda had to walk from a village to the town on foot while starving, under the rain. They were hungry, tired, and cold. However, Felix's creativity had kept them going. Felix Salinger's creative stories were the instrument that kept them strong and saved. It is also essential to recall the analysis on Excerpt 15 from subsequence 16b. In this subsequence, Felix Salinger creatively devised the equipment that helped the passengers to relieve themselves: he tore the pages from his most valued belonging, the notebook, to be used for wipes. The fact that some of the stories Felix told to Zelda were also written in that notebook provides another interpretation: the stories also helped the elderly and the other passengers in that train to the extermination camp. Thus, Felix's stories saved a lot of people and fulfilled the Jews' final wish before they faced their final destination. Here, creativity became the key to Felix's survival, much the same way that Dory's creativity saved his friends and helped her find her parents (Artini et al., 2020; Utami et al., 2020).

In subsequence 11e, Barney asked Felix Salinger to help him tell a story to his patient while Barney gave them dental care to ease the patient's pain. It was because Barney knew that Felix Salinger was a good storyteller. This time, Barney's patient was a Nazi officer. Felix Salinger was afraid he could not tell an appropriate story to him. However, he tried to use his imagination to tell a story that would not betray his safety as a Jewish child in hiding from the Nazi soldiers:

Excerpt 19 *“I start making up the most exciting and thrilling story I can, with lots of vicious wild animals and poisonous insects who say nice things about Adolf Hitler.”*

(Gleitzman, *Once*, 2010, p.111)

From Excerpt 19 above, it can be observed that Felix Salinger had to modify his story as he was telling it. By this time, he had experienced the Nazi's cruelty towards the Jews and their children like himself; thus, he might be trapped into spilling a negative sentiment toward the ruling party to the tone of his story (Cox, 2005). Felix Salinger made sure that his characters said nice things about Adolf Hitler. However, Felix Salinger's creativity was very advanced, as he also revealed that the animals who said good things about Adolf Hitler were "vicious wild animals and poisonous insects." By association, these animals could refer to Nazi soldiers who hailed Adolf Hitler highly and used "Hail Hitler" as their army's salutation. Thus, while bootlicking the Nazi patient, Felix Salinger also creatively inserted a parable that critiqued the very person he tried to soothe. The fact that Felix Salinger succeeded in calming the Nazi patient with his parable can be interpreted further as a critique toward the Nazi's sympathizers' level of intelligence in derision in Felix Salinger's satire.

Felix Salinger's creativity in Gleitzman's *Once* was mainly depicted from his creative writing and his creative solutions for the challenges he faced, both in the orphanage and during his efforts to evade Nazi genocide. Felix creatively used his stories to survive the bullies in the orphanage, calm Zelda, survive a tiring journey and earn his safety under Barney's shelter, as well as in helping the passengers in the train. Facing challenges and solving problems by devising strategies is a sign of creativity (Suwastini et al., 2018). Thus, Felix Salinger's use of his creative mind to survive and to solve problems highlights him as a creative character.

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed Felix Salinger's characterization as the main character in Morris Gleitzman's. The analysis revealed that Felix Salinger was depicted as a religious, brave, caring, and creative child. Felix Salinger's religiosity was formed when he lived at the Catholic orphanage. Supported with his bravery and creativity, Felix Salinger as a child, could survive and solve his problem during the dangerous situation of the Holocaust tragedy. Further, Felix Salinger was still kind, sympathetic, and helpful to others even though he was also in trouble and suffering. From those characterizations, Felix Salinger as a child could survive during the Holocaust tragedy in which many Jewish people were killed tragically. Therefore, children who read the novel could learn from Felix Salinger's religious, brave, caring, and creative personality, allowing him to overcome various dangerous challenges.

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