

Holden Caulfield – A Faux Rebel?

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ABSTRACT

Through analysis of the importance of education in the novel *Catcher in the Rye*, the scope of this paper is to explore how genes and the environment come together in shaping a child's behaviour.

The matter of how nature versus nurture influences human development has been an ongoing discussion for a very long time and, at present, the matter is up to debate, as both nature (genes) and nurture (environmental factors) seem to play a very important role in human development. Education is a fundamental part of intellectual freedom and, one of its main values is enhancing how children view, exist in, and participate in the world (Rothwell, 2013). At the centre of this study will be one of the most popular “misfits” of American literature J.D. Salinger’s *Holden Caulfield*, who was and will remain a source of inspiration for many teenagers who, one way or another, refuse to accept conformity.

Holden is a young adult who lives in a society which he utterly neglects and the main purpose is to find out if he is indeed a rebel and a misfit or is he just a confused teenager in search of adulthood?

Keywords: Education, Genes, Nurture, Rebel, Teenagers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

To begin with, nature represents genetic inheritance and it is also influenced by other biological factors. Nurture is mainly influenced by external or environmental factors that can have an impact on human development. There is much truth to the power of heredity and the environment and as Haruki Murakami once wrote “human beings are ultimately nothing but carriers- passageways- for genes. They ride us into the ground like racehorses from generation. Genes don't think about what constitutes good or evil. They don't care whether we are happy or unhappy. We're just means to an end for them. The only thing they think about is what is most efficient for them” (2016:1). Furthermore, Judith Rich states “nature and nurture are the movers and shapers; they made us what are today and will determine what our children will be tomorrow.” (2009:3). Essentially, it is the parent who determines the future of the child and the way he will raise his child will eventually determine what type of person he will turn out to be.

Eric Berne argues that the child is “taught not only what to do, but also what to see, hear, touch, think and feel” (Berne, 2014). Furthermore, he believes that each person ends up at the age of six with a life script planned by the parents. A plan which tells them how their life path will be and how will it end up: winner, loser or somewhere in between. Thus, nature or genes are an important factor in a child's development however, what children experience during their lifetime is just as important as the things which they are born with. “Nurture” is not a neutral word, it has meaning. According to Judith Rich Harris, its literal meaning is “to take care of „or “to rear” and it comes from the Latin root that gives us nourish and nursing (“breast-feed”) (2009:4). A British educator Richard Mulcaster wrote “Nature makes the boy toward; nurture sees him forward” and three hundred years later Francis Galton- Charles Darwin's cousin- changed this phrase into “nature and nurture” becoming part of our usual language (Harris, 2009:7).

Nevertheless, the true father of the nurture theory was Sigmund Freud who assembled the entire scenario in which all the psychological problems of adults could be drawn back to traumatic episodes from their childhood undoubtedly implicating their parents as well. Judith Rich Harris explains the Freudian theory:

“two parents of opposite sexes cause untold anguish in the young child, simply by being there. The anguish is unavoidable and universal; even the most conscientious parents cannot prevent it, though they can easily make it worse. All little boys have to go through the Oedipal crisis, all little girls go through the reduced-for quick-sale female version. The mother (but not the father) is also held responsible for two earlier crisis: weaning and toilet training” (2009:12).

While it may be ascertained that Freud's theories had a great impact on academic psychologists, researchers nevertheless tried to investigate and find scientific evidence for several aspects of Freudian writings. A great number of scientists completely agreed with his theories however, behaviourism, a school

of psychology that was popular in American universities in the 1940' and 1950' rejected quite everything from Freud's philosophy (Harris, 2009:13). Peculiarly, though behaviourism generally accepted the main argument of Freudian theory nonetheless, what happens at the early age of a child's life- a time when the parents could influence a child's development- is crucial (Harrison, 2009:15).

The term "nurture" could be interpreted as a synonym for "environment" and this means that what influences a child's development, other than their genes, is the way they were educated. (Harris, 2009:4) Furthermore, this process is particularly evident in the work of writers such as Rousseau who in 1762 published *On Education*. In his study, he points out the fact that in the past the word "Education" was used in another sense and its meaning was "Nurture". He states that "we begin to learn when we begin to live; our education begins with ourselves, our first teacher is our nurse" (2015:155).

Furthermore, he believes that children who are overprotected and delicately nurtured during their infancy are more likely to die before their eight-year merely because of this overprotection from the mother (Rousseau, 2015:266). She believes that she is protecting the child from accidents and dangers; she is always by his side, guarding them with all her power neglecting the fact that she is creating a future vulnerable human being. Indeed, parents do not realise the implications of their actions in raising their child and once they do, the child already reaches maturity and for some of them, it may be too late. At the age of infancy, the child is more open to danger or to the "unknown" because he does not understand it and will bear changes more easily than a grown-up is able to do (Rousseau, 2015:267).

"Sickness and danger play the chief part in infancy [...] the child who has overcome hardship has gained strength, and as soon as he can use his life he holds it more securely. [...] there is less risk in using their strength than in sparing it. Accustom them therefore to the hardship they will have to face; train them to endure extremes of temperature, climate and condition, hunger, thirst, and weariness."

II. THE AGE OF CONFUSION: HOLDEN CAULFIELD REBEL OR DELUSIONAL MISFIT?

"The shape of society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable" (Epstein, 2008), a theme that is rampant throughout J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is, in our own conviction and as we shall explain in the contents of this paper, one of the greatest short novels of all times and although more than half-a-century has passed, this book remains a source of inspiration for many adolescents who refuse to conform and believe that, as Taylor Caldwell points out "it is human nature to instinctively rebel at obscurity and ordinariness" ("Taylor Caldwell quotes").

The novel had a great impact especially among adolescents perhaps because many of them could identify with the main character, Holden. He is a great example of an adolescent with great intellectual potential, vast qualities and a bright future ahead, however, is marginalised and excluded by many even by his own family only because he is counted as being "rebellious and different". The fact that Holden has been to three prep schools and has been expelled from each one indeed raises a question mark regarding his upbringing or his views towards the education system. He is portrayed as being a rebellious, pretentious teenager who is deliberately destroying his own future by rejecting everything and everyone who might suggest him stay in school. He most probably has heard his entire life from family, friends, and teachers, that he is a misfit, a rebel, a different, another, and by hearing this, he deliberately possesses this role. However, maybe he is just a sixteen-year-old teenager soon to become an adult living in a rather problematic society which has created an educational system that has so many unrealistic expectations from its students and Holden does nothing else but protect himself with cynicism, and bitterness and sarcasm which he yet gloriously masters.

Questions such as: How Holden Caulfield evolves as a human being in a society that he views as "phony"? How does the environment affect him and what is the peculiar nature of all these things? How the changes in the environment, society, education, political influences, family values and morals combined with physical genes determine his coming of age are all matters that carry important weight and will undoubtedly be examined closely. With that said the main question remains: is he indeed a rebel or is he just struggling to fit in a society that he cannot understand? These are the fundamental questions of this proposed paper and offering answers shall be done in a post-structuralist, deconstructed manner.

The fundamental objective is to make sense of Holden behaviour and his so-called rebellion against society "a society characterised by phoniness, superficiality and wrong values" (Will, 2010:9) and for this, it is essential to analyse some of the actual events that occurred during the 50' and 60' America. Furthermore, it is advised to think of how the adolescent, post-adolescent or young adult attitudes of the fifties and sixties were perceived by psychologists, psychoanalysts and sociologists.

It is important to understand the impact of the Cold War which “gave rise to an increasingly age-segregated society” (Jonnes, 2014:8). As Denis Jones points out in his book *Cold War American Literature and the Rise of Youth Culture*, “this separation allowed adolescents and young adults to begin to formulate an identity distinct from previous generations, and was a significant factor in their widespread rejection of contemporary American society” (2014:8).

Moreover, the events of the Cold War had a pivotal effect on the course of history that shaped American culture and not just in the latter half of the twentieth century. Michael Harrington, the author of *The Other America*, argues that “youth were on the eve of psychic mutations” and Richard Flacks observes that “youth were quick to embrace their status as something other-than-human and revealed in their incarnation as freaks of nature” (Jonnes, 2014:234). Furthermore, for sociologist Leon Sheleff, “there had never before been a generation so destined to bring about a deep-seated transformation in society” (2014:234). Poet and leading figure of the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg would announce that “We’ve turned a corner. It’s a bigger corner than the Reformation...It’s a corner on the order of the change between Paleolithic and Neolithic. It’s like one of the three or four major turns in the history of man- not just culture- but man” (Ginsberg, 1968:70).

According to Denis Jonnes, during that period, the changes seemed rather crucial, the youth culture deliberately started rejecting work, marriage, and family values of the postwar years and he quotes Benjamin De Mott, who states that “a cultural revolution was sweeping the nation; a major change had occurred to the inner landscape of time” (2014:241) and teenagers were starting to accept “a new sense of personal possibility” (2014:241). If previously, marriage, college and a career were the main aspirations, the postwar years it was a time for “revelations, personal epiphanies and rebirth” (Jonnes, 2014:249), a generation of youngsters pushed by a “force that made all things seem possible” (2014:249).

Holden’s confusion is caused because of the fact that he cannot understand the society in which he lives. In other words, Holden cannot identify with a world ruled by adults so he chooses a rebellious path trying to live an independent life. By doing this, he neglects school and refuses to obey rules. He does not believe in the education system and completely rejects the ideas and values of the adult world. Is Holden truly a rebel, as many scholars claim him to be, or is he just a confused teenager on a quest to find maturity?

In the eyes of the society, educational system, and family, except his sister, Holden is a lost cause, but instead of blaming the boy, we shall try to analyse why did he end up in this rather inconvenient situation. To society, Holden is a wild goose chase, but for Holden adulthood is a lost cause too. He has lost his faith in adulthood because adults have numerous times deceived him.

III. A NECESSARY PATH

Bettelheim Priest states that:

[...] an adolescent must leave the security of childhood, which is represented by getting lost in the dangerous forest; learn to face up to his violent tendencies and anxieties, symbolized by encounters with wild animals or dragons; get to know himself, which is implied in meeting strange figures and experiences (1976:226).

Mircea Eliade, in his book *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* studies the mysteries of birth and rebirth and the spiritual history of humanity. Here, he explains briefly the significance of initiation in a traditional society. Furthermore, he believes that the man of the traditional society comes to understand and assume the image of himself only through the initiation rite (1958:ix). However, the important matter is that all premodern societies “that lasted in Western Europe to the End of the Middle Ages, and the first World War” give meaningful importance to the ideology and techniques of initiation (Eliade, 1958: x).

As explained by Mircea Eliade, the term “initiation” means: “a body of rites and oral techniques whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated”. (1958:x). Philosophically speaking, throughout the initiation, a meaningful change happens in the existential condition of the novice. In other words, the beginner needs to pass through some stages in their life which might change their being from that which they obtained before their initiation. They need to become another. (1958:xi). Furthermore, Mircea Eliade explains that puberty initiation is substantial in understanding the premodern man and these “transition rites” are a “necessary evil” among those young of age in order to gain the right to be accepted in the adult life. (1958: x). The adolescent needs to pass through a series of initiatory “difficulties” as a result he will be accepted and recognised as a responsible person in a society.

“He learns not only the behavior patterns, the techniques, and the institution of adults but also the sacred myths and traditions of the tribe, the names of the gods and the history of their work; above all, he learns the mystical relations between the tribe and the Supernatural Beings as those

relations were established at the beginning of time” (Eliade, 1958: x).

Holder's journey begins in the metropolis of New York, in the confusing decade of the 1950' and as Alan Gordon states, in the editorial to the fall 2004 issue of the *Urban History Review*:

“For much of the Western civilization in the 20th century, the city has been more than a scene for cultural expression. That is, the culture of modernity, a culture involving rapid social change, mass society, and fragmentation did not just develop the city. It is a culture of the city” (Ghasemi, Ghafoori, 2010:74).

Furthermore, Harold Bloom points out in his book *J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* the city of Manhattan for many American writers was a plunge into Hell and it actually becomes Holden's Hell especially because of Holden himself, “who is masochistic, ambivalent towards women, and acutely ambivalent in regard to his father” (Bloom, 2008:43). Even if he does not admit it, for him the so-called “journey” he chooses to take throughout the city of New York in his quest in finding questions regarding his maturity. As he plunges into the unknown, he is quite disappointed when finding an insecure place full of strangers.

At that precise time, still suffering and grieving because of his younger brother Allie who had died of leukaemia and from the “irrational guilt of being a survivor”, Holder's mental health could not handle the tension of Manhattan (Bloom, 2008:43). Memory plays a crucial part in Holden's search for identity, as Gordon suggests “memories [are] negotiated over time and space, and situated directly in the urban context” (2004:3). New York, a metropolis which is changing constantly over time could affect Holden's psychological health especially because of his nostalgic mind “which depends heavily on the memories of the past for consolation” (Ghasemi, Chafoori, 2010:77).

Holden is seventeen in the novel, however, he sounds like an immature narcissistic thirteen-year-old boy whose desire is to be a catcher in the rye, as reflected by the following part of the novel where Holden outlines his desire:

“I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all [...] And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff- I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. [...] I know it's crazy but that's the only thing I'd really like to be” (Salinger, 1945:191).

He gives the readers the impression that he really desires nothing in this world, yet his dream is to save and protect children who could fall from the edge of the cliff. Furthermore, when his sister Phoebe asks him to name just one thing that he likes “You don't like anything that's happening [...] You don't like any schools. You don't like a million things. You don't. [...] Name one thing” (Salinger, 1951:189). Holden can't think of anything and he says “boy she was depressing me” (Salinger, 1951:189) after a while he claims that he likes Allie and he also claims that “I like doing what I'm doing right now. Sitting here with you, and talking, and thinking about stuff, and-“ (Salinger, 1951:189).

Even though at first sight, the passage above seems utterly innocent, it raises many questions. As Parvin Ghasemi and Masoud Chafoori point out “what kind of identity is Holden really aspiring to?” or “what does his identity signify? (2010:3). As Harold Bloom mentions in his book *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, J.D. Catcher in the Rye*, Holder's ambition to be a catcher in the rye is “to be a kind of secular saint, willing and able to save children from disasters” (Bloom, 2008:47). Caulfield's desire to be a catcher in the rye and to save children from the “cliff” is explained by Dr. P. Ghasemi: “the fall from the cliff means falling from the state of humanity into the state of commodity” (2010:39). In other words, Holden cannot stand seeing the children falling from the “cliff”, because once they fall, they will reach the adult world of “commodity and consumption” (Ghasemi, 2010:39).

It is at this point that we may notice a very strong resemblance between Eliade's theory of initiation – as a necessary rite into adulthood and Holden's falling from the cliff. While Eliade talks about the passage into adulthood as a matter of pride, of becoming a full-fledged human being, a logical step into a person's evolution, we can't help but wonder why does Holden have such a reluctance when it comes to the same matter, and whether, this reluctance is the root of his so perceived rebelliousness. For all intents and purposes, we may continue with the idea that Holden is a rebel, a misunderstood soul par excellence, however, should we take a step back and look at this paradigm through a lens of deconstruction we may come to an altogether different deduction.

Holden is not a rebel, nor is he the black sheep of the family as most readers would perceive him, he is a teenager who is damaged. As abrupt and against the grain as this may sound the evidence strongly supports such a claim. Holden sees the rite of passage into adulthood as a death, as a matter or event that must be

withheld for as long as possible. He is neither willing nor ready to step into adulthood simply because – shockingly said – he is there already. From the small amount of information, we get throughout the narrative he has suffered a lot of trauma while growing up. Distant parents and the death of his brother will have certainly left a great mark on him. In addition, with the previously mentioned absent parents, he will have had to assume the role of the guardian, the protector for his younger sister. This is, in fact, one way of becoming an (unwilling) adult. Holden saw his rite of passage thrust upon him, he did not ask for it, he wasn't fully done with being a devil-may-care type of teenager, and so, as the psychological adult that he is he accepts the role of the catcher in the rye. This is to say that he understands there's nothing he can do in order to get back the time he so deeply feels has been taken from him, as the rite of passage into adulthood is but a one-way door. However, he assumes the role of the person who shan't let that happen to other teenagers and youngsters. He knows how much he missed by being wrongly initiated, so much so that he can no longer stand idly by and let others go through the same tumultuous and, for the time being, unnecessary rite, a rite that was imposed by the very adults who were supposed to save him from falling off the cliff- hence his strong distrust of adult role models. Simply put, and in connection to Eliade, Holden is the catcher in the rye, the entity who shall guard the door into adulthood and only provide you the key when he is certain you shall have had time to enjoy your young years wholeheartedly.

Furthermore, this distrust of adults, who forced Holden into adulthood is also noticed by William Faulkner who examined Holden's concern was his inability to find and accept a mentor who could guide him and gain his trust (Bloom, 2009:50). Holden starts the novel with his first famous paragraph:

“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents have about two hemorrhages apiece of I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all I'm not saying that- but they're also touchy as hell” (Salinger, 1945:3).

Faulkner also describes Holden in one interview at the University of Virginia in 1957 and 1958:

“His story was intelligent, very sensitive young man who was in this day and time was an anachronism, was almost an obsolescence, trying to cope with a struggle with the present-day world which he was not fitted for, when he didn't want money, he didn't want position, anything, he just wanted to find man and wanted something to love, and he couldn't. There was nothing there.”

At the beginning of the novel, the author introduces Holden, an upper middle class adolescent who is using a specific teenage language in describing his childhood “[...] and what my lousy childhood was like” even though he hardly talks about his parents in the book he remarks the fact that they were all the time occupied, however, he softens up when he says “they're nice and all” (Salinger, 1945:3).

Looking back at his relationship with adults we come to the conclusion that he has none; no inclination to grow up, he refuses any advice from an adult, especially from his former teachers Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini. Both teachers, in fact, fail in getting Holden to finally reach development and as Keith Dromm points out, apparently Holden tries to isolate himself since only confinement could prevent him from connecting with other people, especially adults (2012:9). Moreover, he actually realises his inability to connect with others when he wonders whether he was wrong in judging Mr. Antolini (Keith, 2012:9).

This behaviour is typical for children of Holden's age, especially in a time that was “marked by McCarthyism, Anti-Communist sentiments and a booming economy that lead to a growing middle class with more financial possibilities” (Will, 2010:4). More and more children identify with Holden's behaviour, realising that they do not belong to a world characterised by “phoniness, superficiality, and wrong values” (Will, 2010:7) and the right step in finding themselves is to irrevocably reject the life of an adult. More precisely, the only solution thus is to “escape, flee; into an imaginary world” (Wild, 2010:7). Here we refer in particular to growing up in the fifties and early sixties America, however, this confusion of youth and Holden's experiences are rather universal and his perception of *phoniness* all around him “are reactions to the world that all fans of his story have had at some point in their lives” (Keith, 240).

Yuval Noah Harari explains in his study *Sapiens A Brief History of Humankind* that before the Industrial Revolution the everyday life of nearly every individual ran its course within three frames: the nuclear family, the extended family and the local intimate community (2011:399). He believes that living in a pre-modern family or community was not ideal at all because families and communities could oppress their members sometimes brutally. Nevertheless, such a person who lost their family or community had no job no education and no support in times of sickness and disease would impose even more oppression. (Harari,

401). Once the Industrial Revolution started, the position of the individual in society changed, over time states and markets used their power to break the traditional bonds of family and community. (Harari, 402). Individuals have become stronger because the state and the market take care of them instead. “We will provide food, shelter, education, health, welfare and employment. We will provide pensions, insurance and protection” (Harari, 402).

As a matter of fact, Holden, is a perfect example of what Harari explains:

“Romantic literature often presents the individual as somebody caught in a struggle against the state and the market. Nothing could be further from the truth. The state and the market are the mother and the father of the individual, and the individual can survive only thanks to them” (2011:402).

Holden is part of the transition between pre-industrial and the industrial revolution and he is learning to cope with the changes between these two stages and how Harari explains “the liberation of the individual comes at a cost. Many of us now bewail the loss of strong families and communities and feel alienated and threatened by the power the impersonal state and market wield over our lives” (2011:403). He lost the support of his family but didn't integrate yet into the modern society supported by the state and market. As Harari states: “Boys and girls run away from home could expect, at best, to become servants in some new family. At worst, there was the army or the brothel” (2011:401).

The reason Holden cannot establish a normal relationship with adults is that he lost the support of his family while he is not yet integrated into a modern society. We come to the conclusion that he also has difficulties in creating a normal relationship with people of his own age such as Ward Stradlater and Robert Ackley the two boys from Pencey Prep (his private school) he constantly criticises. Holden cannot have a normal relationship with an adult and the question is why he is afraid of becoming such an adult? Either nature or nurture keeps him from establishing such a relationship. He realises that by evolving or by establishing a normal relationship with an adult he surrenders into nurture. Or is the nature that also plays a role here?

We notice that he does not talk about love but of potential death and this death for him has a symbolic explanation: he refuses nurture- the society or the education that his parents or teachers gave him. Now he is beginning to evolve as a human being and he begins to understand the world as it is and its implications, however, he is not utterly convinced why he refuses nurture.

The main question is why he continuously keeps lying to people and why he cannot establish a normal relationship with an adult. The only person with whom he can have a normal conversation is his sister Phoebe who is younger than him. In her opinion, she believes Holden can still be saved from this society and nevertheless he is the only one who can save her because he is old enough to realise that once you fall from the “cliff”-nurture- there is no other way to come back. In his imagination, he is the victim who fell from the so-called cliff and now he believes that he can be a saviour for all those “innocent” kids who are too crude to understand the implications of “evolution”. Once you entirely grow up without realising that society is the one that shapes you the way it wants, there is no way of going back.

Taking from the fact that Holden is deeply afraid of the idea of adulthood, he carries on living in a lie. The matter at hand that ought to be discussed here is whether Holden's deep reliance on lies can be described as pathological? As previously established, Holden sees adulthood as a type of death- where everything that he used to end, and a cacophony of the unknown begins. Sociologically speaking his dismissal of adulthood can be understood as the human's general attitude towards change. If we are to accept that change is the only constant in life and that humans, as a populous, are in the vast majority afraid of change, then so is Holden. Change brings nothing good in this respect. Change takes you out of your comfort zone and it forces you to adapt, to find new patterns by which to lead your life. Holden is very much not adaptable and surely not willing to embrace change (even if this change already happened). As such Holden justifies his imaginary non-adulthood by making use of the ever-present lie.

Moreover, and certainly, in line with the overarching fear of death, we may put forward the educated guess that Allie's death is the key point where Holden became an unwilling adult. In this respect, Holden's fear of death is translated into his fear of becoming an adult. Adulthood as such, only brings evil, death, and certainly nothing that a teenager would desire. We may anecdotally say that Holden's go-to attitude is deeply rooted in the “Ignore it and it will go away” saying. While we all know that this cannot be a healthy way of going about life, we also understand that this is simply the first step Holden takes in his process of grieving – bargaining. Throughout the narrative, we do not see Holden progress to the next logical steps and we do not see him embracing acceptance of loss, embracing change, yet, we may now emotionally understand that his attitude is not that of a rebellious teen, it is that of an unprepared adult.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, it is clear that Holden is afraid of evolution and tries to escape the “evilness of the adulthood” (Will, 2010:5) thus choosing to follow the path of an imaginary world. Daniela Will also explains that Holden deliberately tries to take over five different roles: “the critically injured, the

movie hero, the runaway and the outcast, and the guardian angel” (2010:5).

The role of the critically injured is shown in different situations throughout the book. Holden constantly lies and even admits he is “the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life” (Salinger, 22). For example, when he meets the mother of a schoolmate on the train he starts lying to her first of all about his name and then about what a great son she has, even though he believes that he “is the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey (Salinger, 1945:71).

It is not clear why Holden intentionally keeps lying to everyone but probably his insincerity is linked to his desire to utterly escape uncomfortable situations. For example, the first time when he lies is when his former history teacher Mr. Spencer tells him to start thinking about his future before it is too late. Here, Holden finds himself trapped and immediately associates his teacher's advice with the necessity to grow up and the only way to escape this situation is to lie. As Daniela Will argues “lying for him is a way to escape confrontations with his problems to cope with adulthood and consequently death” (2010:6). Moreover, Holden’s insincerity is by some means altruistic, since he believes he is doing Morrow’s mother a favour because he likes her and he wants to protect her from the truth about her son (Keith, 2012: 11).

Also, the roles of the runaway and the rebel emphasise the fact that he deliberately wants to escape adulthood and completely refuses evolution. By choosing these paths, he is trying to run away from his problems also imagining “a possibility to avoid having to grow up and therefore agreeing to what society expects from him” (Will, 2010:26). Furthermore, he created this image of himself as a rebellious liar from the moment he stepped out of his school in “complete disappointment” (Keith, 2012:709).

“When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why. I put my red hunting hat on, and turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice, "Sleep tight, ya morons!" I'll bet I woke up every bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out. Some stupid guy had thrown peanut shells all over the stairs, and I damn near broke my crazy neck” (Salinger, 1945:59).

As for the role of the guardian angel it is the very title of the book (“catcher”) that refers to the saviour of those little children who could fall over the cliff. We become aware that Holden has suffered a trauma in the past when he lost his brother Allie whom he strongly idealises and the memories of his brother thus signify a way to escape the reality of the society he lives in by refusing the present and still living in the past. It becomes clear that after his brother's death Holden wakes up in a sort of confusing world and as Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya claims “Holden is affected by fear of instant extinction”.

“Every time I'd get to the end of a block, I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him” (Salinger, 1945:218).

Holden feels safe in places that “are associated with memories of his childhood because he can find in them his favourable identity” (P.Ghasemi, M.Ghafoori, 2010:78) but has difficulties in preserving his memories in a city which is “subjected to the tyranny of constant change” (2010:78). In other words, Caulfield refuses to change and refuses to lose his identity. He remarks: “I’ve left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don’t care if it’s a sad goodbye or a bad goodbye, but when I leave a place, I like to know I’m leaving. If you don’t, you feel even worse” (Salinger, 1945). From this paragraph, it is clear that he has difficulties in accepting transformation and prefers stability. Other examples could be: “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move” (Salinger, 1945) or “That’s one nice thing about carousels, they always play the same songs” (Salinger, 1945).

Erik H. Erikson defines this phenomenon of unconformity in his book *Childhood and Society*:

“Youth after youth, bewildered by his assumed role, a role forced on him by the inexorable standardization of American adolescence, runs away in one form or another: leaves school and jobs, stays out at night, or withdraws into bizarre and inaccessible moods. Once he is “delinquent”, his greatest need and often his only satisfaction is the refusal on the part of older youths, of advisers, and of judiciary personnel to type him further by pat diagnoses and social judgments which ignore the special dynamic conditions of adolescence. Their greatest service may be the refusal to “confirm” him in his criminality” (1950:308).

When looking at the American- English (Merriam Webster) or British- English (Oxford dictionaries) linguistic approach, the word “trauma” represents: “a deeply distressing or disturbing experience, emotional

shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis". Understandably, Holden's behaviour has a connection with some events in his life which were somehow considered traumatic. As Wan Roselezam and Wan Yahya argue Holden was one of the protagonists of the past era and even though the 1950's were considered an era of "optimism, unconformity and harmony" (2014:1) after that time many Americans were suffering from psychic pain (Wan Roselezam and Wan Yahya, 2014:1) and "many centers developed that year for increasing psychological complaints among soldiers and even common people" (2014:1).

Undoubtedly, Holden represents the misfit character of his generation who was marked by the trauma of the Second World War and as Babaee, Wan Yahya and Sivagurunathan argue "Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969) illustrates Billy, like a counterpart for Holden, Salinger and Vonnegut himself, who experienced "birth and death many times" and accepted "war and its destruction" (2014:1).

The Catcher in the Rye is based on Salinger's life experience and emphasises the struggle of living in a world of war and trauma. Scholars claim that his book is his biography "my boyhood was very much the same as that of the boy in the book" (Salinger, 1945:177). Babaee, Wan Yahya and Sivagurunathan quote Alexander Salinger who believes that "the war changed Salinger's patriotic, almost romantic view of war and military forever" and Salinger's daughter affirms that: (2014:2).

While the war was often in the foreground of our family life, it was always in the background. It was the point of reference that defined everything else in relation to it. [...] As long as I've known him, my father has never taken being warm and dry and not being shot at for granted. [...] The constant presence of the war, as something not really over, pervaded the years I lived at home (M. P. Salinger, 2001, p.44).

Holden is portrayed as a teenager who is drawn more to death than to life (Will, 2010:30) and we can easily observe this when he expresses his wishes to commit suicide however it is not clear if he is serious about his actions or not. For example, when he is alone in a hotel room in Manhattan he thinks of "jumping out the window" (Salinger, 94). According to Babaee, Wan Yahya and Sivagurunathan he believes that he will have the same fate as his brother Allie, suffering from a deathless disease, dying because of "a tumour on the brain", "pneumonia" or "cancer" and this would lead to his death "in a couple of months". More examples of his dramatic thoughts are depicted in the novel: "I was dying [...] I was drowning". According to Felman, "trauma is the feeling that "one is impotent to act"; he feels powerless "I thought I'd just go down, [...] and nobody'd ever see me again" (Salinger, 1945:178).

Many adults depicted in Holden's world could describe him as a confused teenager and one question that this novel might ask us as Droom Keith points out is: "is Holden's confusion his own fault or society's?" (2012:206). Furthermore, he explains that "the confusion of youth eventually gives way to the certainty and confidence of adulthood". In the end, even though Holden is categorised in the group of the "misfits of society", he has quite a normal attitude for a teenager who was raised in an upper-class family, attends boarding schools and had suffered trauma in the past. However, this does not mean that everyone should have an attitude as Holden has just because it is "a fairly useful attitude to have" (Keith, 2012:253). Keith Droom believes that:

"Many of society's goals and values are phony. The apparent confidence that adults have in them is often just a disguise for their own anxieties and can belie the fact that in their youths they were just as confused as Holden. The real lesson of the novel is that Holden is confused because society doesn't make any sense. In this way, society itself is confused" (2012:253).

The ample construction of the character embodies a teenager with many, seemingly paradoxical, character traits: a choleric temperament that then gives way to a fragile sensitivity, acts of courage followed by cowardice, and an insightful mind that still makes several irrational and foolish decisions. If the child is not compatible with the methods of learning, teaching or any sort of educational system, he tends to rebel and develop an aversion to any element that belongs to the educational sphere. Being excluded and immediately labelled as a "problem", he develops the outlaw's complex, however, his immaturity comes to light through his impulse-based decisions and certainly not through a balanced way of acting. The intimate perspective from which Holden's situation is presented offers us a look into his historical background and most of the valences that construct the character's personality. This fact justifies the character's decisions as uncompromising and irresponsible taken from a momentary emotional impulse in a childish way.

Depression, trauma, the fact that Holden continuously repeats that he is depressed, abandonment (Allie died and his other brother D.B. left for Hollywood), his loss of faith in adults, and constantly feeling misunderstood have made him into a very fragile teenager. His delicate state of mind developed his cynical attitude which was more or less his way of defending himself. Instead of everyone telling them what is the

“right” thing to do and why having a degree is so important, maybe his family should have supported him more during his traumatic experience regarding his brother. Holden’s wandering is more of a paradigm representing the need for education based on a system that takes into account the diversity of both personalities and temperaments of children than that of a system that is unilateral, rigid, and with unalterable rules. Holden’s problems are an example of the negative result of a rigid system devoid of empathy that treats students as subjects and future people for the benefit of society in an uncertain and unstable period.

In conclusion, our protagonist will remain an attractive survivor, and protector of children who might get caught in the abyss of a society which represents phoniness, superficiality and false values. As Harold Bloom states, Holden is still “derivative, but still highly likeable [...] he is potentially self-destructive, very nearly masochistic in his psychosexuality and religiously obsessed” (2008:69). However, this is what makes Salinger’s novel so fascinating and eager to read. He tries to explain to his readers that “winning a football game, having a nice car and many of the society’s other goals” (Dromm, 2012:6) are definitely not as important as our relationship with people.

Furthermore, Holden’s adventures are common to many youngsters who experienced confusion during their life and the book itself gives the young people who read it a sort of consolation that they are not alone in this world full of phonies and eventually this turmoil will pass as Donald W. Winnicott states “the cure for adolescence is the passage of time” (2012:129). Not just that, but also Holden manages to become the archetype for all teenagers and young adults alike who cannot seem to find a place of their own. While most those who can’t find a place are oftentimes thought of as being rebellious, and misfits, we could strongly argue that in all actuality they are not as such, but, to Holden’s credit, everyone else is just a phony.

Those who can’t understand and those who don’t want to understand are the phonies who are more afraid of change than Holden is. We might even go as far as to argue that Holden, as such, becomes the catcher in the rye not only for the youngsters who aren’t ready to face their metaphorical death, but he is there to also catch the adults, the phonies, who are not ready to accept that reality is actually different. He guides them as we are guided through his faux coming of age (206:122) and so we can unequivocally claim that in the end, youth is a disease- that heals itself, in the sense that while it brings a proverbial death it also brings a new, and if ready for it, beautiful beginning.

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