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# New character, old beliefs: A study of *The Catcher in the Rye*

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## Introduction

The modern era was marked by change; industrialization and technology being the main triggers. Industrialization not only changed the nature of work by making the work conditions unsafe, but also isolated the workers from each other and the overall work process, and substituted the abstract meaning of “value” from “wages” to one based on recognition (Flatley 29-30). This made people start considering work not only as a means to earn money to survive but something to boast about. Moreover, as new technologies diminished the importance of localities, focusing on the new urban areas, urbanization made people less open to the world around them, making them feel the need for protection from the outside. But despite their dislike, to not embrace this new culture made them feel lost or left out if they identified themselves as different from the community (Flatley 30). This is a paradox that the modern post-war society created simultaneously with its urban progress.

Furthermore, modernity is marked by a duality, which is one of the most important problems of it. On the one hand, there is failing at the moment of overcoming loss, on the other hand, it brought a sense of optimism, with utopian and revolutionary registers, this way, modernity is not just a set of transformations but it has something to achieve; it is a project to model the whole society (Flatley 31). This idea of modernity as a project is linked to those of the Enlightenment, i.e. “the promise of endless human perfectibility, progress, democracy, and universal equality, self-determination, better living through the advances of reason in the realms of medicine, technology, economy, and elsewhere” (Flatley 31), meaning, to achieve progress through reason. In contrast to this optimistic thought, what placed the modern individual in a depressive state, were these promises of the modern society, because of the impossibility to

fulfill them (Flatley 31). The term “modernism” refers, in that sense, to the practices used to attempt to deal with the gap between depression and optimism that the new society brought along, and it was art the sharpest weapon that could ease it or make it worse (Flatley 32). By this, art of any form is included, whether painting or writing, to name a few, as long as it managed to accomplish the task of trying to deal with the strong feeling that modernism could have brought to people.

Henceforth World War II, in 1950’s America, the economy was resonating and they became the strongest nation economically in the world. With this, Americans became more conscious of their class, after their society had suffered a crisis during World War I and II, ending in class discrimination. One of the many results of this was that the youth started wanting not only more freedom from the old conventional values that their parents were teaching them but also from society’s old rules. The new adolescent rejected the school system for being rigid and authoritative, which made the system treat them more like adults, destroying childhood innocence. The teenagers at that time were more likely to suffer from seclusion, non-conformity, restlessness, and feeling uncomfortable because of the fast change of American society, leaving the values of love, warmth, and sympathy substituted by selfishness, greed, and carelessness in that post-war American society (Hameed Mankhi 579). All these caused adolescents to consider the adult world as a negative aspect of society and as they approached a certain age in which they are more adult than a child, they started having a sense of not belonging anywhere as they kept rejecting the reality of their society.

J. D Salinger deals with the negative feelings of rejection of society in all the stories he writes. He specializes in making social and political judgments through adolescent characters. Such is the case in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the novel that is the object of analysis in this thesis.

The novel presents the themes of angst, alienation, innocence, identity, belonging, loss, connection, sex, and a strong critique of the superficiality of society. The main character is Holden Caulfield, a sarcastic young boy of seventeen years old when narrating –sixteen years old at the moment of the events– that after being expelled from prep school starts a search for meaning in a “phony” world, full of false and superficial people. But his tragedy starts when his little brother Allie died when Holden was thirteen, making him feel vulnerable and sensitive against the world around him. That is why he starts noticing how damaged and corrupted the world is, later rebelling against that and protecting the innocence of children. He refuses to adapt to his social reality and idealizes a world that should be more just, moral, empathic, caring, and not superficial. He romanticizes those ideas and thinks constantly about the past. Equally, he is constantly rebelling against society’s rules and conventions for a boy his age, mainly because of his impossibility to accept an environment that restricts his freedom, desires, and ideals. Consequently, as Holden has certain ideas in his head of what his reality should be, when he fails to face, change, or be in line with his reality, he suffers internally, in a way that affects his life and the events that occur to him –falling in self-sabotage at times.

More specifically, Holden dreams with a society in which there are no “phonies”, hoping he can live practically isolated, but at the same time, he wants a partner that is silent but with deep thoughts, someone that he could be with respectfully and without pressure, and he wants to have sex without losing his innocence, which is impossible. Holden’s major dream in life is to preserve the innocence in the world, that is why he wants to be “the catcher in the rye”, starting with protecting his and his sister’s innocence. The phrase “the catcher in the rye” refers to someone at the top of a rye field saving children from falling off the edge, metaphor which Holden uses to convey his desire to save children from adulthood. That idea is explained by the

death of his eleven-year-old brother Allie to leukemia; due to that Holden had a desire to protect the innocents. As this task begins to be harder every day, he started suffering from loneliness, alienation, anger, frustration, despair, and sometimes desperation. He rejects society, but society in turn rejects him. Bearing this in mind, this thesis considers Holden as a character who portrays romantic and transcendentalist ideas in a modern era which creates ambivalence and a façade upon himself, which is linked to the modern rebel-victim character. Ultimately, Holden's ambivalence, his false façade, added to psychological instability, is what drives his struggle with himself and society.

## Theoretical Framework

### I. The post-war society's new character

The post-war society brought a remarkable character into literature: the rebel-victim. This type of character emerges from a transformation of the classic literary hero into the more modern concept of the anti-hero; whose main characteristic is to be a rebel-victim. This rebel-victim is known for being an actor but also a sufferer, an outsider, “an initiate never confirmed in his initiation, an anarchist and clown, a Faust and Christ compounded in grotesque or ironic measures [and, he has two different limits: one] is nihilism, frenzied, self-affirmation, and psychopathy ... [and the other] martyrdom, immolation, defeat.” (Hassan, *The Character of Post-War Fiction* 3). That is to say, the characteristic of the anti-hero is this duality, the noticeable two opposite sides of themselves. It is possible to say that the characters show a façade in their social life, showing themselves as a joker and a rebel, but actually in their inner selves they are suffering a sadness that is rarely shown to the other characters.

The rebel-victim character was a rejection of the apparent post-war prosperity that many Americans believed in. J. D Salinger is one writer that used this character as the protagonist in most of his stories, if not all of them. In his writings, the characters search for an alternative to the new society, which ends in a quest that shapes his novellas; the themes he uses are about the influence of childhood on adult life; the instability of identity; and “the loneliness that results from feeling at odds with one's society, developing for some into an existential crisis.” (Graham 224). This reinforces the idea of society as an active factor in the character's emotions and the development of identity for adolescents.



Similarly, the new type of character of the mid-twentieth century was called by Edwards the “American Adam”, which went from a complete positive figure in the nineteenth-century of a self-reliant hero detached of all inherited status, the hero of new adventures, to a lonelier figure in a hostile world, only conserving the idea of this character creating its own story (90). This last part was discussed in the same article saying that from the very beginning of the novel Holden is trying to create his own story, different from anything before, when he starts introducing that he is not going to talk about his childhood just as David Copperfield does in his novel (using “that David Copperfield kind of crap” to show his scorn towards that idea) (Edwards 91). In line with this, Edwards says that there is a suggestion in the novel of a new mission for the Adamic hero, which was to break the pacifism only for the protection of innocents (92-93). This was more noticeable after Stradlater punched Holden and he put his red hunting hat afterward and revealed that he had only been in two fights and lost both and that he is a pacifist, even if the readers may not believe that, as in this book he is always irritating people around him.

## II. Romanticism and Transcendentalism

The concepts of Romanticism and Transcendentalism have to be further detailed in this section since they both present ideas that shape the main character of *The Catcher in the Rye*. On one side there is Romanticism, which was considered to be a partial rebellion against the Post-Industrial Revolution as the romantics laid their hopes in a non-industrial society (Smith 303). In the industrialized society predominated logic, procedures, and parameters, which the romantics did not agree with; they believed in the predominance of feelings. Another aspect of romanticism is that they rejected the imitation of, for instance, an ideal imparted by the people governing. Hence, romanticism admired originality, because that is the only way to express feelings and knowledge (Adams 420). With this in mind, the romantic believes that he can change society following his ideas, consequently they tend to fall in an extravagant egoism, limited by their imagination, and also, they are fascinated by the people that do the same, with unique and genius personalities (Smith 305). Summarizing, the romantics not only were focused on their inner selves as admirers of feelings, imagination, and originality but also, they needed to express it to the outside by rejecting logic through parameters and imitation.

Holden Caulfield fits with this description as he is marked by the constant rejection of his society. For him, people in that society are not deep enough in thoughts to accept them. He is constantly seeking his ideal society with people that understand the world as he does, which he never finds, except for his sister Phoebe. Moreover, his narrative revolves around his inner self most of the time, more than the other characters, which is expressed through a type of writing reminiscent of stream of consciousness. Further to this, this character, as well as the romantics,

has the determination to “Bring order to a world which seems to be condemned to eternal chaos, and in the process to define and comprehend man's place in the world... And it makes no difference that the understanding and order that are sought seem to be forever out of reach, and that liberation is never attained, but always pursued” (Smith 306). This way, the romantic finds himself with the obligation to fix his society, he lives for this pursuit, without caring if it can be achieved or not because as long as there is an opportunity, there is hope. At the same time, he would try to find their meaning in life while doing this, without caring that this idea goes beyond their understanding.

On the other hand, there is Transcendentalism, which is said to be an American manifestation of romanticism (Smith 303). Transcendentalists, as well as the European romantics, were critical of the business civilization that was developing around them, in America. It combined Romanticism and the Lockian Liberalism –which was based on individualism that pursues their goal in isolation and a modest individual contented with achieving just a small satisfaction of his needs and limited desires (Smith 305). Hence, transcendentalism was shaped by these two visions. Basically, the transcendentalists tried to use liberal means to achieve romantic ends (Smith 325), i.e., the isolated individual achieving the ideal society. Transcendentalism moderated the obsessions of romanticism and broadened the cramped view of human nature of liberalism. From another point of view, this new American ideal can be better explained by Thoreau.

Thoreau was the main exponent of that movement, placing its practical vision. Due to this, his transcendentalist words are one of the many inspirations to rebel against society for a fair cause. We say this because, his work “Civil Disobedience” invited his fellow American citizens to think by their criterion, fighting for what is morally right and not just accept what the

leaders of that society imparted on them. Among his many ideas, we remark the ones that invited the citizens to break the law if necessary to avoid committing a moral injustice and to “stop the machine” –the ones running the country (12-13); talked about how they had to live and depend upon themselves individually, being ready for any change, not having many attachments (17); taught that a State must leave the principles of reason aside to see that riches and honor are the real subjects of shame and not poverty and misery (17); reflected that the state might be superior in physical strength but not in wit or honesty, and that we all were born free to do our fashion (19). About this last point, Thoreau persuades the readers by explaining in a figurative, more poetic, way, “do as I do.... If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man” (19). That is, we should follow his example and believe in his words because men have the nature of being free to choose upon their own lives, as long as they are morally just, otherwise, they die, literally and/or figurative speaking, because they would be full of hate and frustrations.

Furthermore, Holden has characteristics of the old romantic view but he also has transcendentalist features. This is because he is aware of the reality of his surroundings, having frustrations due to it, and hence, rebelling against it, conscious and unconsciously, which makes him suffer even more. He suffers more about this because in his rebellion he is alone and contrary to what he says to the other characters in the novel, he needs a deep connection and understanding from someone once in a while, something that is visible in the thoughts that he tells to the readers.

### III. Id, Ego, and Superego

For a thorough analysis of this character, it is important to acknowledge one of the most recognized theories of Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. The theory is about the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego*. According to Freud, first, it exists the *id*, a psychological province that is unconscious. The *id* deals with satisfying the primitive instincts, energies, desires, anything that is part of the phylogenetic inheritance, which is connected to pleasure (Lapsley and Stey 5). In this sense, the person that has the *id* stronger than the others would be considered to have a psychotic psyche because the person is not able to control himself, just following his instincts, without reasoning beyond its desires and not thinking about the consequences of its acts. On the other hand, there is the *ego* which is also an unconscious psychological province. It has to do with controlling the natural instincts according to the reality of the person (Lapsley and Stey 5), like a mediator. Then, a person that follows its *ego* would be considered to have a healthy psyche because the person would be able to control its *id* and its *superego*, choosing what to take into account to be appropriate depending on the kind of situation the person is involved in. And finally, the *superego*, a conscious psychological province, the agent that observes the ego and measures it by its cultural and ethical ideals –usually represented to the child by the influence of parents–, leaving the narcissistic self-love aside (Lapsley and Stey 5). The person that chooses to follow just its *superego* has a neurotic psyche because it is constantly living under the influences of its ideals, never thinking about fulfilling his/her desires. The *superego*, then, can be considered to be a consciousness that punishes the *ego* with guilt if the ideals are violated.

Freud proposes that when one part of the *id* is near the influence of the conscious external world and of what can perceive around it, the *ego* is formed, although the *ego* and the *id* are both

unconscious (Lapsley and Stey 6). The *ego* has certain functions. Its main task is self-preservation. It masters external stimuli, which is of society around the person, “by becoming “aware,” by storing up memories, by avoidance through flight, and by active adaptation” (Lapsley and Stey 6), i.e., to intelligently control oneself, reasoning how to adapt to certain life or situation. It also masters the internal stimuli, which is the *id*, by trying to harness the libidinal drives and passions. That is an indication of a healthy personality, as it was said before.

Moreover, as stated above, the *superego* is involved with the neurotic personality, but what is more, it can be implicated in a variety of pathological conditions. When there is a prolongation of neurotic suffering as punishment for failing to achieve the demands of the *superego*, the person can resist any therapeutic recovery (Lapsley and Stey 7). In line with this, a person can suffer melancholia as a result of the *superego*'s appropriation of the *id*'s violence, directing it against the *ego*. In other words, such is the reproach of the “consciousness” (*superego*) about the “negative” instincts desires, that its extreme moralistic demand ends up with the individual suffering from melancholia when the moral and ethical ideals are obstructed by the inevitable reality.

## Analysis

### I. Holden's transcendentalist and romantic ideas in the modern world create ambivalence and a façade

Notwithstanding the several studies of the concepts in each previously explained section, which have a valid analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye*, there is no research that connected all of them in one work. By the same token, this thesis focuses on analyzing and inferring links of these concepts and Holden Caulfield's depressed and hopeless state in the novel.

To start with, as has been discussed, the romantic finds himself with the obligation to fix the chaos of its society, he lives for this pursuit, without caring if it can be achieved or not while there is an opportunity. That is one aspect that Holden Caulfield has of romanticism, as well as a rebellious attitude towards injustice. But he also has the part of transcendentalism that says they have to rely on oneself to do this, and that every individual has the right to control their own lives.

According to Hameed Mankhi (598), Holden represents the countercultural voice, in the sense that he is one of the first characters that represented the youth that advocated the self-enlightenment and individual experience without being eclipsed by a group. This way, *The Catcher in the Rye* became the bible of an entire movement, a countercultural movement. Furthermore, this search of Holden is seen throughout the whole novel, since the moment he is expelled from Pencey Prep, exploring New York on his own, avoiding his house, until he is interned in a mental institution and writes his story.

Another characteristic that Holden has of transcendentalism is the one of not having any attachments. This is something that Holden is characteristic of; he is unable to connect with his classmates, family, or any person he meets. Kegel (qtd. in Hameed Mankhi) says that

His [Holden] problem is one of communication: as a teenager, he simply cannot get through to the adult world which surrounds him; as a sensitive teenager, he cannot even get through to others of his own age. Holden and other youth do neither want to communicate with their society nor do they want to remain alone. Instead of attending a social gathering he was off by himself. He does not seem to grasp the idea of spending time with others who he should want to connect to but instead considers them phonies (592).

What this quote is explaining is that Holden not only has problems with communication because he is an adolescent that has difficulties communicating with adults, but in his particular case he has problems communicating even with people of his same age because he is an oversensitive character. Not all adolescents, especially in that consumer and superficial society, were as sensitives as him, or at least that is what we as readers can perceive from Holden's narration. This quote also illustrates one part of Holden's ambivalence that in this case is more general, from being a teenager. He wants to be by himself but at the same time, he wants to connect with others, something that he cannot admit openly but with his actions. Instead of admitting his feelings, he puts a façade of a derisive boy, almost as if he was superior to everyone else, to survive his reality in which he cannot find a person that would see life the same way as him.

By showing his constant attempt to call Jane Gallagher and Phoebe but never carrying it out, Salinger portrays the struggle of Holden to communicate without leaving aside his ideals. This is portrayed in the following quote.



The first thing I did when I got off at Penn Station, I went into this phone booth. I felt like giving somebody a buzz.... I couldn't think of anybody to call up. My brother D.B. was in Hollywood. My kid sister Phoebe goes to bed around nine o'clock-- so I couldn't call her up. She wouldn't've cared if I'd woke her up, but the trouble was, she wouldn't've been the one that answered the phone..... Then I thought of giving Jane Gallagher's mother a buzz, and find out when Jane's vacation started, but I didn't feel like it.... Then I thought of calling this girl I used to go around with quite frequently, Sally Hayes, because I knew her Christmas vacation had started already... but I was afraid her mother'd answer the phone...Then I thought of calling up this guy that went to the Whooton School when I was there, Carl Luce, but I didn't like him much. So I ended up not calling anybody.

(Salinger 55-56)

This quote illustrates the desperation of Holden to communicate with somebody, even people he did not know well, like Carl Luce, or that he did not completely like, like Sally. We see a number of excuses to not call each person he thought he could call. He could have called D. B and the problem was not distance per se but it was the idea of phoniness that comes with Hollywood that Holden rejected. With Phoebe, he decided not to call her because their parents would answer and he was avoiding them, his figures of authority that were trying to implement the system Holden was rebelling against. Another interpretation could be that he avoided Phoebe because she represented reality, as she was the only one to open Holden's eyes about what he was doing with his life, at the end of the novel. And about Jane, when Holden decided not to call her, he did not even find a good excuse. This behavior continued happening throughout the novel. He always put excuses not to call Jane. This shows an ambivalence of feelings: he wanted to speak but could not because he did not find the proper circumstances according to him.

Moreover, what Caulfield did not follow of Thoreau's transcendentalism is that he is not ready for any change in his life or his society. This can be connected with romanticism in the sense of their aversion to the new society that was born at that time and had some conservative ideas, like their fascination with nature; a going back to nature. Similarly, Holden has a fascination with his past too as he constantly mentions how good his life was when his brother Allie was alive. Such is his longing for his dead brother, because he was one of the few people he connected to, that he simulated communication with him sometimes. For instance, after the prostitute, Sunny, left his hotel room the first time because he refused to have relations with her, Holden said: "After Old Sunny was gone, I sat in the chair for a while and smoked a couple of cigarettes. It was getting daylight outside. Boy, I felt miserable. I felt so depressed, you can't imagine. What I did, I started talking, sort of out loud, to Allie. I do that sometimes when I get very depressed." (Salinger 90). This clearly exposed his problems dealing with loss. To dim his negative feelings when he feels depressed he would talk to the memory of his brother, but not a real and live person. This did not cure his depression entirely because he would feel lonelier.

Holden was also fond of the idea of the unchangeable time. This is represented by the figure of the museum. Holden states:

"The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move.... Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you.... I kept thinking about old Phoebe going to that museum on Saturdays the way I used to. I thought how she'd see the same stuff I used to see, and how she'd be different every time she saw it. It didn't exactly depress me to think about it, but it didn't make me feel gay as hell, either. Certain things they should stay the way they are. You

ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway.” (Salinger 110-111)

The museum works as a metaphor for the preservation of time, or of the past. This quote portrays the true fears of Holden, being one of the few times he allows himself to give information about his feelings and deep thoughts in life. He reiterates his idea that “certain things they should stay the same the way they are” in every phrase of this quote, and he laments that they cannot stay the same forever. This way, he expresses his fear of change, especially of growing up emotionally, or of the loss of innocence. This last idea is seen by the mentioning of his sister Phoebe and how every time she would go to the museum she would be different, as it happened to him. If we add that Holden got furious when he saw a vulgar word written on a wall of the museum, which is supposedly only for adults to understand it, it is evident his problems with the pass of time and loss of innocence. All this longing of the past is helpful to understand the melancholic side of the rebel-victim, that like the transcendentalists, is alone in his journey.

Continuing with romanticism, as it has been said before, it emphasizes creativity and individual genius, creating their social theory with the artists' view as dominant. The most important expression of this was one in which the aesthetic criteria of the artist, i.e. its whole vision of how the world around should be, was applied to the social and political ambits (Smith 307). We highlight the social aspect because this is manifested as the social judgment that Holden Caulfield labels people so he would reject the ones that do not figure in his idealization of people and embrace the few who do. This last point is complicated, as he only accepts and admires his little sister, his dead brother, and his older brother before he went to Hollywood, as part of his self-destructive behavior and of his fascination with the innocent and the corrupted. With part of his self-destructive behavior, we are referring to the fact that he selected just a few

people and rejected the rest according to his criterion of how people should be, in this case, creative and thoughtful children. By the fascination with the innocent and the corrupted, we mean that he was more likely to accept children because they were innocent and pure beings rather than teenagers or adults because for Holden they all are corrupted with the reality of society.

All these ideas of romanticism and transcendentalism that Holden has contribute to his ambiguity or dual characteristic which is part of the new modern character, the rebel-victim. As has been discussed, this type of character suffers a complexity of both rebelling against something for a good cause and suffering in silence a melancholy or desperation due to this undying pursuit and rebellion. This is one explanation of why the character finds himself in this inner-struggling situation, which makes him build a façade of a joker, for instance, to try to survive his melancholic part.

Furthermore, Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* is an adolescent that is exposed to the corrupt adult world. Unable to fit in either the adult world or the infant world, he feels lost and lonely, as an outsider. There is bitterness at the moment of growing up and Holden is suffering it, this is mainly because he does not want to lose his innocence (Hassan, *The Character of Post-War Fiction* 4). He uses his façade, the “positive” side to move around society. For example, in Pencey, Holden pretends to be a self-assured person, humorous, and superior to everyone else, but through his monologue, we perceive that he is, in fact, a victim of himself, the person that he created, and also a victim of society. The latter is because, as Holden rejects the “self-serving superficiality” of the new American society –which Holden terms as full of “phoniness”– (Graham 224), he looks for a deeper meaning in life, beyond all that. This rejection leaves him

with feelings of loneliness, as he is not able to create significant emotional connections with people, besides Phoebe.

By the same token, Holden, is in opposition to his world, but it is important to point out that this is not effortless, he “does try to affirm his existence, whether it be by protest, silence, or a response somewhere in between these two extremes” (Lundblad 764). Holden has, indeed, desires to communicate with people on his surroundings, but this is “constantly thwarted by the phoniness, indifference, and vulgarity that surround him” (Hassan, *Rare Quixotic Gesture* 273). In the same work, Hassan analyses, as well as the other authors mentioned above, Holden’s duality. In the sense that, Holden feels bitter towards the conditions that make him see this rejection of society as a burden. He is play-acting to overcome his hyper sensibility that cannot rise to the surface. By this play-acting Hassan means Holden’s insistence of lying for his amusement, harmlessly; this too “[affirms] his values of truth and imagination” (*Rare Quixotic Gesture* 273). Furthermore, it is interesting to see how Hassan interprets this as part of Holden’s desires of being “the catcher in the rye”; for him, this is the same as the quixotic gesture of Don Quixote, with the only difference that the quest, for Holden, is a journey in the search of self-discovery.

## II. The ambivalence, the façade, and the psyche of Holden Caulfield: how they were damaging him

This paper has already mentioned one of Holden's ambivalence; he wants to connect with people but he also rejects everyone he meets. There are more aspects of his ambivalence, albeit, that are going to be discussed in this section, and we will analyze how this is connected to his psyche and his suffering. For instance, Edwards (64) states that Holden "genuinely appreciates brief and isolated instances of kindness and accurately pinpoints phoniness in both high and low places; he is witty and his love for Phoebe is touching. But he himself is a phony at times, and he has virtually no self-awareness." This means that although Holden is constantly repudiating and criticizing "phony" people, shallow and false people, he does not realize that even though he is quite a contemplative and sensitive person that tries to be real, he can be phony at times. For example, Holden was very fond of lying, even though he declared that he hates when others are being false. He states: "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life" (Salinger 18) confessing that he lied to Mr. Spencer that he was going to the gym so he would have an excuse to leave the teacher's house. He also lied constantly throughout the whole novel in many instances, like when he lied about his name with a woman, mother of a classmate of Pencey Prep. He does it so easily. But unlike adults, his lies are for fun or to avoid exposing his true thoughts to people he thinks are not worth the effort. Thus, his lying might circle him with the phonies if we look it at surface level, but it is more complicated than that. Even if he does not realize why he does it, it can be said that he lies to protect himself, as a defense mechanism, and it is part of his façade to survive his depression. However, it is this same façade that depresses him even more.

Another example in which he shows contradiction is when he takes part in a convention that he declares many times as phony, going to the movies. It is important to clarify that from the very first page of the book Holden declared his hate for Hollywood, linking it to his older brother's leaving to write there. For Holden, everything of that world was wrong because they convert art into a business, and everyone is false, that is why he considers D.B to be a "prostitute" for selling himself to Hollywood. Holden admires a certain type of art, writing, it is noticeable when he shows affection for his brothers', and his sister's writing, this is a characteristic of romanticism that he has, and that is why he hates when people use that noble art for their own benefit. Holden himself even writes as he is our narrator, but he did not give credit to himself, "As a matter of fact, I'm the only dumb one in the family. My brother D.B.'s a writer and all, and my brother Allie, the one that died, that I told you about, was a wizard. I'm the only really dumb one" (Salinger 62-63). Furthermore, though he was annoyed by the simple idea of going to the movies, he goes anyway on some occasions, showing an ambivalence. One moment in the novel, he was bored in his dormitory in Pencey and he "started imitating one of those guys in the movies. In one of those musicals. I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them. Old Stradlater watched me in the mirror while he was shaving. All I need's an audience. I'm an exhibitionist." (Salinger 29). This quote portrays the necessity of Holden to make jokes for others to like him or to just be noticed, even if that means to use elements of something he hates, the movies. The fact that he did that imitation in front of Stradlater and that he says "All I need's an audience. I'm an exhibitionist", shows his necessity to fit in and to stand out, something that is contradictory to his beliefs, as he believes in the romantic and transcendentalist ideas of being original and true to oneself, respectively. When he cannot be true to himself is when he starts suffering. Additionally, it is interesting to notice how this urge to be noticed by

certain people changed throughout the novel, as at the end of it he practically wanted to disappear from the earth.

Most of the time, he goes to the movies when he thinks he has nothing else interesting to do. At the same time, he avoids being alone in his dorm when he is at Pencey Prep, which is odd because he is always rejecting and judging, always saying that everyone annoyed him, especially Ackley. Yet, when his friend Mal Brossard and him wanted to go for hamburgers and go to the cinema, Holden invites Ackley. What is more, Holden confessed that he already went once with both of them to the movies before and that “They both laughed like hyenas at stuff that wasn't even funny. I didn't even enjoy sitting next to them in the movies” (Salinger 36). Despite his rejection of them, especially in that circumstance, he still insisted on going accompanied. As a result, we have two facts that make Holden suffer, at least the beginning of his real suffering: the act of going to the cinema, a phony place, just so he will be doing something, and going with people that irritated him, in order to not be completely alone.

Forward in the novel, Holden presents signs of depression connected to the phoniness of people that enjoy going to the movies.

the worst part was that you could tell they all wanted to go to the movies. I couldn't stand looking at them. I can understand somebody going to the movies because there's nothing else to do, but when somebody really wants to go, and even walks fast so as to get there quicker, then it depresses hell out of me (Salinger 106)

What depressed Holden was the fact that people could be empty inside, with a short-sided vision of life in which the movies is the most important part of their week. He could not stand the society he was in. There is one chapter in particular in which Holden reaches the high point of



his depression when he is trying to convince Sally to run away with him to start a new life far from that phony society and the adult rules. She was trying to convince Holden that his idea was not feasible because he was not considering the practical issues, as they would run out of money soon and starve if they decided to move to another place. She also insisted that they were practically children still and that they could have time to visit all the places they wished after they finished college. All these irritated Holden because he knew it was the truth, but he could not handle the truth when is being told right to his face. Instead of accepting her words, he agitatedly said:

There wouldn't be oodles of places to go to at all. It'd be entirely different," I said. I was getting depressed as hell again.... We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to phone up everybody and tell 'em good-bye and send 'em postcards from hotels and all. And I'd be working in some office, making a lot of dough, and riding to work in cabs and Madison Avenue buses, and reading newspapers, and playing bridge all the time, and going to the movies and seeing a lot of stupid shorts and coming attractions and newsreels.... It wouldn't be the same at all. You don't see what I mean at all (Salinger 121)

What Caulfield is describing here is a typical routine of an adult that he has observed during his life. The idea of working all day for money, probably being away from his family, traveling in a taxi or a bus every day, and the movies: they are all the aspects of the phony adult life he had been complaining about throughout the whole novel. He rejected the supremacy of money because people treat different the ones that have more and people change with it, so the idea of his life depending on that discussed him and depressed him: "Goddam money. It always ends up making you blue as hell." (Salinger 103). Then, the idea of being away from his family was not

appealing to him because Phoebe was the only one he could feel good and himself with. The idea of traveling in taxi did not delight him much either because of the bad experiences he recently had in which the taxi drivers did not understand his questions about the ducks of the lake in winter, something that was important for him to know; he felt as lost as the ducks in winter with their home –the lake– frozen. And finally, there is his rejection of trivial entertainment methods like the movies, which was already explained. He knew those were all the outcomes of adult life if he was an adult in New York City and he desperately wanted to avoid this. That is why he ended up hating Sally at that moment for not believing and not understanding his ideas, treating her bad for the first time. Something that we see in a further chapter that upsets him in a way that he did not know how to keep living with himself, crying and imagining what could happen if he died.

Furthermore, his ambivalence is also reflected in his language. As Holden desires his own identity, he avoids being classified with other people as young as him. This is connected with the perception of them that he has, as hypocrites, empty, shallow, false characters, or in his words, “phonies”. Because of this dissociation he wants, Holden “never uses vulgarity in a self-conscious or phony way to help him be 'one of the boys'” (Costello 175). He only uses low-key swearing, albeit, to defend himself and the people he cares about. As an example, we have “bastard” and “sonuvabitch”, he uses them with a drastic change in meaning since they do not longer connote the accident of birth (Costello 176). Except when directed at people he dislikes or to defend something, as we said before, like when he insulted Stradlater over his treatment towards Jane Gallagher, he kept calling him a “moron sonuvabitch” (Costello 176). The same happens with the word “goddamn”, they increase suddenly in one of those pages. This kind of language, crude, is mainly used when Holden is addressing a schoolboy dialogue, but this rarely

occurs when he is addressing the reader, i.e. Holden as the narrator (Costello 176). In general, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, they tend to use a cruder language when the characters have angry emotions than when they are calm.

One contradiction with the idea of detachment to have his own identity is the fact that Caulfield breaks the grammar rules as any other of his classmates. This makes him part of the group of that particular age. Costello notices the following examples of grammar rules' violation:

His most common rule violation is the misuse of lie and lay, but he also is careless about relative pronouns ('about a traffic cop that falls in love'), the double negative ('I hardly didn't even know I was doing it'), the perfect tenses ('I'd woke him up'), extra words ('like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time'), pronoun number ('it's pretty disgusting to watch somebody picking their nose'), and pronoun position ('I and this friend of mine, Mal Brossard'). (180)

All these instances form a pattern that is repeated several times throughout the novel, that is why Costello considers that this shows an inconsistency in Holden's personality and behavior. This quote is worth noticing, also, because Holden claims that the only subject that he is not failing is English, yet, he keeps talking this way, not as he was taught. This way, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the language is utilized for stylistic and plot development purposes, meaning, "the language was not written for itself, but as a part of a greater whole", because it contributes to building the image of the characters, showing how typical but individual (imitative yet imaginative) they can be (Costello 181), as well as their language.

In line with Holden's depression, it is important to psychoanalyze the connections between the social aspects and Holden's mind. His melancholic state is too a product of the prominence of the *superego* of Holden over his *id*. As stated before, the *superego* is the psyche

of the moral ideal that society imparted and the *id* is the psyche of the instincts and primitive desires. Holden has been trying to oppose this *superego* but despite his efforts, it kept controlling his decisions every time he desired to follow his *id*. For example, with sex, he kept the old idea that said that people should have sex when they have meaningful feelings for each other, not because they just felt the physical desire. “I mean that's my big trouble. In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw... The thing is, though, I don't like the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it. I think if you don't really like a girl, you shouldn't horse around with her at all, and if you do like her, then you're supposed to like her face” (Salinger 58-59). The quote presents the ambivalence created by the struggle between the *id* and the *ego* which regulates him according to reality and the *superego*; every time he felt the want for sex, he would analyze the situation and overthink, he would think of any flaw in girls –most of the time he finds them phony after kissing for a while– to not carry out his *id*. However, we see regret at the moment of following the *superego*, “They tell me to stop, so I stop. I always wish I hadn't, after I take them home, but I keep doing it anyway” (Salinger 85). The fact is, even though Holden rebels against society, he still cannot leave the moral rules of the *superego* that were inserted in him throughout his whole life, and this is one of the reasons he has this ambivalence inside him that makes him struggle.

According to Holden, people who care only about sex and boast about it were one of the main problems with the world. He puts a façade to hide the truth that he wants to be erotic with girls but cannot fulfill this desire because that is contradictory to his beliefs. The façade of Holden is the one of a teenager that is “sexy” with women, as he wants to be sexually active, but he actually feels bad when he is about to do it; he puts his higher ideals at the top of his *id* (instincts), forgetting about himself, as he was not important in comparison to his mission of

being the catcher in the rye. This characteristic makes Holden a neurotic person with melancholia.

One of the crucial moments where Holden is near his mental breakdown is after the pimp Maurice beat him after Holden had refused to pay the prostitute Sunny more than the discussed before her arrival. Holden here almost fall for his *id*, his primitive desire to have sex for the first time, however, he listened to his moral ideas, once more. He thought that he would take advantage of Sunny, especially because she was a young prostitute, and instead of feeling sexy with her, he felt depressed thinking about the life that Sunny must have had. But also, he continued with his fear of losing his innocence, since he was stubborn about being the guardian of it. At the moment that Holden is hit, it was as if his own ideals –not the *superego*– physically hurt him to bring him to reality. Additionally, in this scene, the fact that Holden wanted to talk with her instead of having sexual relations, shows his desperation for connection and communication, looking for it even in the wrong places.

There are instances in which Holden follows his *id*. For example, when he decided out of impulse that he was going to leave Pencey that night (Pinto 11). He made that decision when was mad at all the students there and he did not overthink his decision to leave earlier than the planned. The same goes for the times he lies and his inconsistency in choosing his activities before returning to his parents' house: he is not reasoning and following his *id* every time he is doing something that seems part of him and does it (Pinto 12). Thus, his *id*, too, is part of Holden's humor. His humor consists of lying to amuse himself and the readers and when he mocks of others. That last point is seen in his language. His limited vocabulary and his figurative speech have a comic effect sometimes. For instance, when he speaks with a dramatic effect with a strong overlay of the individual (Costello 178), as in: "That guy Morrow was about as sensitive

as a goddam toilet seat.” (Salinger 52) and “He started handling my exam paper like it was a turd or something” (Salinger 13). It is the struggle between the *id*, the ego, and the *superego* that gives Holden melancholy.

## Conclusion

*The Catcher in the Rye* is an emblem of modern American literature and the countercultural movements. It was the most censored book in its period because of its language and its controversial themes, such as teenage sexuality, prostitution, depression, suicide, profane language, and violence. It inspired many young people but it also gave a sense of hopelessness to others. Through the character Holden Caulfield, the teenager whose life made a turn from normal to sensitive and critic since his younger brother died in 1946, Salinger was able to create a criticism of the post-World War II society which was based on pretenses and false optimism in a lonelier, scared America.

Although Allie died from leukemia, his death surely changed Holden's perspective of life. He started noticing the defects of his surroundings. At the beginning of the novel, when Holden tells the story when he was in Pencey Prep, it presents a critic of the new young generation that believes in the positivism promised after World War II, a consumer and capitalist society. Holden's story took place around the Christmas of 1949, a time in which the United States left its depression that usually surrounds war far behind, leaving a totally different society. The fact that it was near Christmas was important, as that is a time that highlights the phoniness of the world, and it clearly helps to irritate Holden more easily. The adolescents in Pencey, a boarding school, were preoccupied with their appearances and superficialities. They were self-involved, and not worried about the feelings and problems of others. That intervened with any try of Holden to connect, share ideas, and feel understood among his peers. Then, outside that school, Holden worsened when he saw the reality of the adult world in New York, that he once idealized. Women and men laughed at him for being a teenager pretending to be an adult. And

afterward in the story, after all his failed attempts to fit in and be a good person, when his mental pain became physical after the beaten by Maurice, he was almost without hope. Then, after he confesses his illusions with Sally and she told him that that was not possible, he falls in a state similar to depression. We see at this point a Holden that suffered in a way that he was unable to see the little human gestures that some of the characters could have done for him in his path.

The thesis was that Holden has romantic and transcendentalists ideas in a modern period and this creates his ambivalence and the facade typical of the then-new rebel-victim type of character. And that it was those elements, plus psychological problems, that made him suffer a struggle with himself and his society. Throughout the analysis section, it was confirmed this idea. Holden did have problems with his psyche because he allowed his *superego* to control some aspects of his life, as his sexual life, which was connected with the moral values and rules that society imparted upon him during his life. At the same time, his *id* struggles the *ego* and the *superego* through Holden's impulsive actions and decisions, such as suddenly leaving Pencey Prep a night he was not supposed to. Simultaneously, the modern world in which he lived increased his inner struggle. In other words, society influenced his deterioration.

He limited himself to follow old ideas such as romanticism and transcendentalism, making him a marginalized, rebel boy. But not just any rebel: a rebel with a cause. His cause was to protect the innocence from the corrupted adult world. Furthermore, he showed characteristics of old ideas such as of romanticism and transcendentalism, like the romanticizing of the past – through the allusion of the museum and the memory of Allie–, the constant critique of society through a rebellious attitude and actions, and his loneliness and alienation by the difficulty to communicate and connect with any person of the adult world.



It was confirmed too that these romantic and transcendentalist ideas, together with the influence of the *superego* of his society, his *ego*, and his *id*, made for his ambivalence and façade. However, Holden unconsciously created this façade to overcome his ambivalence and inner struggle, but had opposite results, it aggravated them, distancing him from others as he could not be real with people and it made him a phony sometimes; the very thing he despised. At one point, he left his façade out of desperation when Sally tried to reason with him that his ideas were never possible in their world at their age. He yelled at her and treated her badly, giving his *id* the control, which he regretted later, crying and with suicidal thoughts. That is what the facing of reality looked like for Holden.

It is important for teenager to read this book even in this time because it could help other youngsters that are going through similar difficulties to survive their problems. Until that part of the novel everything looked dark for Holden, but after the last scene in which he observed his sister Phoebe play in the carrousel while he was standing next to it, we perceive a more grown-up, happy Holden that understood that growing is inevitable and that the future is uncertain but as long as they stayed together they would be okay. Moreover, after his returning home –reality–, it can be understood that he comprehended he cannot change society and its people alone, that was only damaging him. That is why he was admitted in a mental institution at the end of the novel, writing his reflections in it; he understood at least that he had problems and that he needed help. Holden, then, is a figure that we can learn from to understand and live life better.

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