

Book review on holden caulfield: sociopath or everyman

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The minds of assassins generally teem with oddities. For example, Leon Czolgosz, the assassin of President William McKinley, was so devoted to his anarchist principles that he refused to talk to anyone whom he perceived to be an authority figure in the aftermath of the assassination. This included his court-appointed attorneys and the judge at his trial, which led to his attorneys attempting to secure a finding of insanity but ended up exasperating the jury, which only required an hour of deliberations to find him guilty of first-degree murder and sentence him to the electric chair. When he finally said some last words before his execution, they were “ I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people - the good working people. I am not sorry for my crime” (Seibert, p. 22). When modern psychiatrists have reviewed the results of Czolgosz’s case, they argue that if the crime had happened in more modern times, he would have been found not guilty in spite of his lack of cooperation.

Some assassins associate themselves with relics or other items as a part of carrying out their plot. After Mark David Chapman shot John Lennon, he pulled out a copy of J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* and started reading it until he was arrested. John Hinckley, Jr., who tried to assassinate President Ronald Reagan, was also the owner of a copy of Salinger’s most famous novel. However, his more conscious association was with a desire to impress actress Jodie Foster. Given the fact that *Catcher in the Rye* has sold more than 65 million copies, this may be more of an incidental association than that which Chapman had to the book. Chapman, as a Christian, was offended by Lennon’s open avowal of atheism. Chapman hoped that his deed would keep children from following Lennon down the path to atheism. As far as

Hinckley goes, it seems that the book was simply on his coffee table. After all, Lee Harvey Oswald owned *Catcher in the Rye* as well, but he also owned books by Marx, Hitler and Orwell, so it is difficult to pinpoint the source of the influence that drove him to kill President Kennedy.

A question worth asking in any event, though, is whether Holden Caulfield is the sort of type that would motivate a reader to commit a crime, and whether Holden himself is the type that would take a handgun along on an errand to bring down someone much more famous and (in his opinion) much more phony. One of the most obvious diagnoses for Holden is that he suffers from depression. Throughout the entire book, he is always talking about the fact that one thing or another is causing him to feel lonely or to feel depressed. A lot of the time, he fails to accomplish even the most basic goals. He emerges as a perpetual defeatist, which is one of the classic signs of clinical depression. The fact that he turns to alcohol to try and make himself feel better is just another possible indicator of depression; many people who suffer from that malady turn to alcohol to try and feel better. If everyone who suffered from depression turned into an assassin, though, there would not be many of us left. One of the more troubling traits that Holden shows is his penchant for delusions and fantasies. He will develop a crazy scheme, such as hitching a ride out to the West, or acting like a deaf mute, or working at a gas station. His fantasy quickly grows to include a deaf mute woman by his side on a huge homestead. After he has indulged his fantasy for a while, though, he will drop it just as quickly. This is one of the symptoms of bipolar disorder, which is marked by following an emotional amusement park ride that features great heights and tremendous lows. The

constant complaints that emerge from Holden's mouth - and particularly his penchant for foul language - could be signs of this condition as well.

However, if you've spent any time at all around older adolescents, you know that foul language is one of their favorite toys.

Another alarming trend in Holden is his Oedipal streak. He is always hitting on older women, trying to behave above his age and get alcohol served to him. Trying to gain access to alcohol isn't all that unusual for someone of his age, but making advances to older women is. The women from the Lavender Room, the hat check woman in the Wicker Bar, and the nun at the train station are all examples. When Holden is talking to Luce, it is the fact that Luce's girlfriend is 36 that excites Holden the most. When Holden brings a younger prostitute up to his hotel room, her youth turns him off, as he judges girls that are his age fairly harshly, except for his ideal Jane Gallagher, who he tends to see as a victim.

The fact that Holden is in a sanitarium of some sort at the novel's end, of course, is the most reliable sign that he has some mental disorder. However, there are so many other ways in which Holden represents all of us that it is difficult to say whether or not Salinger was not simply labeling us all as insane.

Works Cited

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