

Tracing the development of holden caulfield

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TRACING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOLDEN CAULFIELD “ That rare miracle of fiction has again come to pass: a human being has been created out of ink, paper, and the imagination.

” – Clifton Fadiman *The Boy Beneath the Hunting Hat*: An introduction to Holden Caulfield It’s the story of a nomadic adolescent; a young boy roaming the streets of New York City. He can’t go to school and he can’t go home. In the course of a few days, he runs across a series of unsavoury characters, people who appear genuine, but are not. He feels pursued at every turn by an overactive conscience. Holden Caulfield is a decent, principled young man, but the society of his elders constantly disappoints him: he is repelled by its materialism, its hypocrisy and its cruelty. Imagined and actualized by J.

D. Salinger in an attempt to find his own voice, Holden was introduced into America’s literary circle in the 1940s. Labelled as, “ America’s best-known literary truant” by the New York Times, and, “ The original angry young man” by Time Magazine, Holden Caulfield has continued to stir both academic speculation and cultural controversy since his inception, as a “ whole generation of rebellious youths discharged themselves into one particular youth” (Time Magazine). Ever since my first encounter with Holden, I have wanted to know and say more about him; to share whatever special kernel of human-ness he reveals with the many others who have been similarly touched. *The Catcher in the Rye* is the rarest of unifying experiences, one whose depth, difficulty and nuance are combined with widespread popularity. It’s a novel that people around the world have read with something more than casual interest, and not for the easier thrills of sex, murder or other such varieties of bad behaviour.

I can't disassemble him as a collection of allusions or authorial intentions any more than I can do the same for my own life. He is not simply a puppet of Salinger's imagination. He is too real. As Clifton Fadiman put it in the Book-of-the-Month Club commentary that accompanied *Catcher's* debut, "Read five pages and you are inside Holden's mind, almost as incapable of escaping it as Holden is himself (...). That rare miracle of fiction has again come to pass: a human being has been created out of ink, paper, and the imagination." It has been sixty years since the inception of Holden Caulfield, who has transcended the confines of his mid 20th century context, and transitioned from a seemingly flat archetype into a more complex round character. The best strategy in deciphering how Salinger allowed his adolescent anti-hero to become one of the most famous protagonists in American literature, is to assess the facts and figures: Holden's friends and family; his first appearances as well as his reflection of the author.

An examination of the public record; That is how we trace the development of Holden Caulfield. "He saw fakes everywhere" – Martin Sheen *Sonny With A Chance*: Jerome David Salinger Jerome David Salinger died on the 27th January, 2010 in his home in Cornish, New Hampshire, he was 91 years old; Six decades ago, he changed American literature forever. Salinger was born on 1 January 1919 in New York City, the second and last child of Sol and Marie (Miriam) Jillich Salinger. He had a sister, Doris, eight years older. Salinger's father, a successful importer of meats and cheeses, was Jewish, his mother Scotch-Irish.

Like most of Salinger's central characters, the family lived in the relative comfort of the upper-middle class. Not proving to be a good student, Salinger

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was sent to Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Pennsylvania after failing at the McBurney School in New York. Salinger later studied at Ursinus College and New York University. Salinger published a story for the first time at the age of 21 when he met and befriended Whit Burnett who was the founder and editor of the Story Magazine at Columbia University. Burnett encouraged Salinger's writing talent and published his stories in his magazine. Soon Salinger's work started making its way to more publications such as the Saturday Evening Post and Collier's.

Just when Salinger's writing career had started taking off, he was interrupted by the break of World War II and had to serve in the Army (1942-1944). It was during this time that Salinger started working on his masterpiece, giving birth to the legendry character of Holden Caulfield. The trauma from the war resulted in a nervous breakdown after which Salinger was hospitalized. While under treatment, Salinger met his first wife Sylvia. The two stayed in marriage for a short period of 8 months only.

In 1955, Salinger married again, Claire Douglas, daughter, of a noted art critic. Maintaining the marriage for a little more than 10 years, the couple had two children. Six years after his divorce, a new relationship bloomed when he noticed the name of Joyce Maynard, whose story in New York Times Magazine impressed Salinger after which he started a series of intense correspondence with her. Joyce soon moved in with Salinger and was lashed out after 10 months. In 1998 Joyce wrote about her experience with Salinger, describing him to be an obsessive lover. Maynard was not the end of Salinger's love life.

He was romantically involved with actress Ellen Joyce for some time after which he married Colleen O'Neill, a young nurse who remained his wife until his death. Salinger was showered with praise when his novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in 1951. Despite also receiving some very harsh criticism on grounds of promoting immoral views, the book, ironically became the most taught book of the 20th century with its inclusion in the curriculum of high school literature. A best seller for life, the book has sold over 120 million copies all over the world. *** “ There had not been a voice like that, so personal, so revealing, it seemed like somebody stripping away layers of your soul.” – Tom Wolfe *Holden in the Real World: Salinger's Imagination Brought to Life* Salinger began working on Holden Caulfield more than ten years before *The Catcher in the Rye* was penned.

‘ Slight Rebellion off Madison’, Holden's first (unpublished) literary appearance, was finally published in the *New Yorker* in December 1946 – five years after the magazine had purchased it. Written in third person, the story concerns Holden's date with Sally Hayes . As in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden expresses his hatred for school, which Sally doesn't understand, and he suggests that they run away together, which she refuses to do. The story is concise and, like all of Salinger's work, dominated by dialogue. What description there is tends to be comic, as when Holden's dancing style is described as, “ long, slow side steps back and forth, as though he were dancing over an open manhole,” a perspective on Holden that the first person in *Catcher* doesn't allow.

Despite the omniscient narrator, the story has much in common with the novel, sharing its tendency to shift unexpectedly from humour into pathos.

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Here, as in *The Catcher in the Rye* and many of Holden's later appearances, Holden can be witty, irritable, and melancholic in the space of a few short scenes. These rapid shifts are a distinct stylistic feature formulated by Salinger and mirror Holden's instability, caused by his own fractured perceptions of the society in which he lives. Through the objective third person narration of 'Slight Rebellion Off Madison' we grasp what Holden has to say, but we are not granted insight into how he feels; this short story is not subjective and lacks poignancy and immediacy. There are no hints in 'Slight Rebellion' of just how much "madman stuff" Holden would later endure. As of 1941, there is no Allie, no Jane Gallagher and no Phoebe.

There is just Holden Caulfield: an upper-middle class teenager who detests the phoniness of the adult world. The *New Yorker* picked up 'Slight Rebellion' in November 1941 and planned to publish it to coincide with the Christmas season. However, on December 7th Japanese bombers attacked Pearl Harbor, drawing America into the Second World War. The next day, President Roosevelt delivered his war message to Congress. *New Yorker* editors felt it would be rather improper to publish a story about a troubled young man at a time when so many young men Holden's age would soon be sent to the front lines. Salinger himself attempted to join the service in 1941, but was turned away because of a minor heart irregularity.

Roosevelt's plea for a strengthened, patriotic nation undermined Holden's misguided hatred of waiting on the bus or getting fussed at by Mr. Mr. Mr. 'Slight Rebellion off Madison' was put on indefinite hold. Salinger was undoubtedly disappointed, but remained undaunted, and continued to develop Holden Caulfield in fits and starts over the next ten years. Holden appears in two

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unpublished stories written in 1942, ' Holden on the Bus' and ' The Last and Best of the Peter Pans'. In ' The Last and Best of the Peter Pans', Holden remains in the background of the story, which began to shape the Caulfield family that would eventually grow into *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Vincent Caulfield, the narrator of ' Peter Pans' is the oldest of the Caulfield children and the model for DB in *Catcher*. Kenneth, a younger brother who dies unexpectedly, would become Allie. Also appearing for the first time was Phoebe Caulfield. Holden, however, is mentioned only once. Today, ' The Last and Best of the Peter Pans', which is in the Princeton library and on publication embargo until 75 years after the author's death, carries a sort of folklorish quality because it contains the first known mention of Salinger writing about a child needing to be saved as it moved towards a cliff. The first published mention of Holden Caulfield can be found in ' Last Day of the Last Furlough', where he made a substantial, though offstage, public appearance, printed in *The Saturday Evening Post* (July 15 1944).

The 1944 Technical Sergeant John F. Gladwaller, Jr. (main character in ' Furlough') seems to be a revision of the Holden Caulfield deemed unfit for public consumption in ' Slight Rebellion off Madison'. What protects ' Last Furlough' from melodrama is the presence of Babe's army buddy, Vincent Caulfield. Vincent has " a kid brother in the Army who flunked out of a lot of schools. He talks about him a lot.

Always pretending to pass him off as a nutty kid." While Babe anticipates fear and loss, Vincent is already experiencing them as his brother Holden has gone missing in the Pacific. This, then, was the first published mention of

Holden Caulfield. He is 20 years old, nine years younger than Vincent and – somehow – taught biology before enlisting in the army. But the Holden of *Catcher* is there, as Vincent tells Babe: “ I’d find him way in the back.

The noisiest, tightest kid in the place. He’d be drinking Scotch and every other kid in the place would be sticking to beer. I’d say to him, ‘ Are you okay, you moron? Do you wanna go home? Do you need any dough?’ And he’d say, ‘ Naaa. Not me. Not me, Vince. Hiya boy.

Hiya.’... And I’d leave him there”.

In May 1944, Salinger wrote a letter to his mentor, editor of *Storymagazine* Whit Burnet, claiming that he had about six Holden Caulfield stories on hand. What happened to them is unknown. Holden continued to appear in pieces between 1944 and 1946, but mostly through the eyes of his brother, Vincent. In December of 1945, Salinger published the story ‘ I’m Crazy’ in *Collier’s* . It was the first time readers heard directly from Holden, and would later become the opening chapters of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Despite the story’s underlying melancholy, the magazine described it as, “ the heart-warming story of a kid whose only fault lay in understanding people so well that most of them were baffled by him and only a very few would believe in him.” ‘ I’m Crazy’ begins with Holden on the hill, looking for a proper goodbye from “ Pentey Prep” (later “ Pencey “ in *Catcher*) and describes the conversation with his history teacher, old Spencer. There Holden explains his being out in the cold without coat or gloves, “ Only a crazy guy would have stood there. That’s me. Crazy.

No kidding, I have a screw loose.” The voice Salinger would eventually use to bring Holden to life was still developing at these early stages. In comparison to *Catcher*, there are far fewer curse words, and the word “slobs” appears where “phonies” would later. Overall, however, it is less comic than in the novel: Holden pities Spencer more overtly, and his reflections on his own situation are less subtle, “I wasn’t saying much that I wanted to say. I never do.

I’m crazy.” Comparing the two also emphasises how Salinger’s style sharpens in *Catcher*, where Holden’s musings are more vivid and succinct. After the lecture from Spencer, the story jumps ahead to Holden’s return home that night. He wakes up Phoebe and plays with his infant sister Viola, who, it seems, would make this single appearance and disappear forever. In their conversation, Holden and Phoebe walk right up to the, “catcher in the rye” vision, but the narrative stops short.

When Holden’s parents come home, rather than venturing back into the night, Holden enters the living room to tell them he’s back, having flunked out of another school. The story is much more conclusive about Holden’s future than *Catcher* and much less optimistic; he is sadly resigned to moving into the adult world of work, “I knew that this time when Father said that I was going to work in that man’s office he meant it,” and already believes that he will not become “one of those successful guys” and starts to ponder “where the ducks in Central Park went when the lagoon was frozen over.”

The choice of the first person point of view strengthens the reader’s identification with the narrator-protagonist and ultimately makes the reader care more about Holden’s personality than the events of the plot. The New <https://assignbuster.com/tracing-the-development-of-holden-caulfield/>

Yorker finally published 'Slight Rebellion Off Madison' in 1946. That same year, Salinger submitted a 90 page manuscript about Holden Caulfield to the magazine. It was accepted for publication, but strangely and suddenly withdrawn by the author.

Over the course of the following five years Salinger would publish his most famous early works. His earliest and most cryptic Glass family story, 'A Perfect Day for Bananafish', appeared in 1948, followed by the string of works that would be collected in *Nine Stories*. In 1950, Samuel Goldwyn firmly established Salinger's career as a writer by releasing *My Foolish Heart*, a Hollywood film adaptation of 'Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut' starring Dana Andrews and Susan Hayward. At this point, Salinger was being talked about a great deal, however, he was dissatisfied with the filmic interpretation of his story. This tainted experience with Hollywood is later reflected by Salinger in *The Catcher in the Rye*, where Holden admits, "If there's one thing I hate it's the goddam movies." The beauty of the short story is how much Salinger had left out; the ambiguity that allowed reader's to fill the gaps and participate with their own imagination.

Unfortunately for Salinger, the great delight for the producers was how much they could put in. Salinger's response was extremely violent, and he vowed to never sell another work to Hollywood again. The title of the film, and its accompanying movie poster, which depicts Hayward and Andrews in passionate embrace, were enough to prove that Hollywood had misrepresented Salinger's beloved work. On July 14, 1951, two days before *Catcher* hit the shelves, the *New Yorker* printed 'Pretty Mouth and My Green Eyes'. Between 'Slight Rebellion' and 'Pretty Mouth', Salinger's career had

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exploded, as he produced texts that engrossed his readers, through his disciplined craftsmanship in the popular form of the short story.

Salinger manipulated the limitations of this medium to involve the minds of the responder. He had become not only a respected writer, but also a famous one. It had been five years since any member of the Caulfield family had featured in a printed story. As far as the public knew, Holden Caulfield was dead and gone. “ I know the boy I am writing about so well.

He deserves to be a novel” – JD Salinger *The Cynic and the City: Holden and The Catcher In The Rye* Everything that Salinger had previously written was funnelled into his first and only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*; Jean Miller (close friend of Salinger’s for many decades), on *The Catcher in the Rye*, “ It was an accumulation of everything he had to say” . By the time *Catcher* appeared in 1951, the theme of the sensitive youth beleaguered by society was well established in the American novel. *Catcher* was published at the dawn of the age of the teenager; a new social category, newly economically empowered and hungry for culture. Salinger’s writing seemed to tap into the emotions of readers in an unprecedented way. As countercultural revolt began to grow during the 1950s and 1960s, *The Catcher in the Rye* was frequently read as a tale of an individual’s alienation within a heartless world. Holden seemed to stand for young people everywhere, who felt themselves beset on all sides by pressures to grow up and live their lives according to the rules, to disengage from meaningful human connection, and to restrict their own personalities and conform to a bland cultural norm.

Many readers saw Holden Caulfield as a symbol of pure, unfettered individuality in the face of cultural oppression. On the opening page of *Catcher*, Holden says, “ I’m not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I’ll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas.” There are, in fact, two Holden’s within the novel: the 16 year old Holden who the story is about, and the 17 year old Holden who is telling the story. The conversational and accessible voice that Salinger created succeeded in closing the previously established distance between Holden and his readers. The Holden who the story is about can’t get anyone to listen, yet the 17 year old Holden that narrates *Catcher* has found a way to tell his story.

Within a twelve month period, Holden’s vivid encounters with everyday life have allowed for an epiphanic perspective on his own existential crisis. By the time we have finished *Catcher*, we feel that we know Holden as thoroughly as any biography could reveal him, and one of the reasons is that he has not hesitated to follow his tale wherever whim and fancy lead him. Holden’s quest for identity drives the novel, and it is the revelation of his introspections that distinguishes Holden’s appearance in *Catcher* from his role in Salinger’s earlier works. As Salinger has privileged his readers with the emotions of a deeply psychologically disturbed protagonist, he has added a crucial dimension to Holden’s once flat archetype: Salinger granted permission for the public to share “ his” Holden. A major theme in *Catcher* is the adulteration of innocence.

Holden’s fixation with virtue, and his determination to conserve what little innocence the world has left, mirrors Salinger’s own palpable obsession with

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innocence. Salinger saw more combat in World War II than any other American writer. Whilst most writers who returned from the war crafted fiction based on battle, Salinger chose to write about a lonesome teenager pondering the inevitability of his own adulteration. Although Salinger does not directly address war in his novel, he conveys a sort of grief over the adulteration of innocence. Salinger ultimately suggests that the adult world doesn't just reject innocence, it destroys it. Similarly, Holden reveals his anxieties about maturation through his selective relationships with other characters in the novel.

Over and over again, Holden tries to reach out to people who might tell him that adulthood might be okay: cab drivers, mothers, prostitutes, old teachers. These equally marginalised characters are all adult figures who Holden has allowed himself to feel connected to. However, this sense of connectedness is founded on Holden's understanding that these adults aren't traditionally successful. They have managed to survive in the realm of adulthood without amounting or conforming to societal ideals of self-success, and Holden admires them for that. Holden's belief that innocence is destroyed during the process of maturation fuels his resentment towards time.

Holden likes the Natural History museum because, no matter what else changed in his life, it was always the same: it was like a little freeze-frame picture of his own childhood, a safe spot he could always come back to: "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.” The museum presents him with a vision of life he can understand: it is frozen, silent, and always the same. Holden can think about and judge the Eskimo in the display case, but the Eskimo will never judge him back. It troubles him that he has changed each time he returns, while the museum’s displays remain completely the same. They represent the simple, idealistic, manageable vision of life that Holden wishes he could live. It is significant that in the final sentence Holden uses the second-person pronoun “ you” instead of the first-person “ me,”

The only thing that would be different would be you.

It seems to be an attempt to distance himself from the inevitable process of change. But the impossibility of such a fantasy is the tragedy of Holden’s situation: rather than face the challenges around him, he retreats to a fantasy world of his own making. When he actually gets to the museum, he decides not to go in; that would require disturbing his fragile imaginative construction by making it encounter the real world. He wants life to remain frozen like the display cases in the museum. As the reader, we can see that Holden’s alienation is the cause of most of his pain. He never addresses his own emotions directly, nor does he attempt to discover the source of his troubles.

He desperately needs human contact and love, but his protective wall of bitterness prevents him from looking for such interaction. Alienation is both the source of Holden’s strength and the source of his problems. For example, his loneliness propels him into his date with Sally Hayes, but his need for isolation causes him to insult her and drive her away. Similarly, he longs for the meaningful connection he once had with Jane Gallagher, but he is too

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frightened to make any real effort to contact her. Holden's loneliness, a more concrete manifestation of his alienation problem, is a driving force throughout the book.

Most of the novel describes his almost manic quest for companionship as he flits from one meaningless encounter to another. Yet, while his behaviour indicates his loneliness, Holden consistently shies away from introspection and thus doesn't really know why he keeps behaving as he does. Because Holden depends on his isolation to preserve his detachment from the world and to maintain a level of self-protection, he often sabotages his own attempts to end his loneliness. For example, his conversation with Carl Luce and his date with Sally Hayes are made unbearable by his rude behaviour. His calls to Jane Gallagher are aborted for a similar reason: to protect his precious and fragile sense of individuality.

Loneliness is the emotional manifestation of the alienation Holden experiences; it is both a source of great pain and a source of his security. He depends upon his alienation, but it destroys him. *** “. . . 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. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all.” Phoebe asks Holden what he wants to do with his life. Holden responds with the above, which reveals his fantasy of idealistic childhood and of his role as the protector of innocence.

His response makes sense, given what we already know about Holden: he prefers to retreat into his own imaginary view of the world rather than deal with the complexities of the world around him. He has a cynical, oversimplified view of other people, and a large part of his fantasy world is based on the idea that children are simple and innocent while adults are superficial and hypocritical. The fact that he is having this conversation with Phoebe, a child who is anything but simple and innocent, reveals the oversimplification of his worldview. Holden himself realizes this to a degree when he acknowledges that his idea is “crazy,” yet he cannot come up with anything more pragmatic; he has trouble seeing the world in any other way. His catcher in the rye fantasy reflects his innocence, his belief in pure, uncorrupted youth, and his desire to protect that spirit; on the other hand, it represents his extreme disconnection from reality and his naive view of the world.

As the reader, we are attracted to this aspect of Holden's character because we truly feel for him, and beg for Holden to save himself. Salinger urges us sympathise with Holden, as we begin to recognise our own existential crises in Holden's epiphanic narration. Ultimately holden wants to be a universal protector of innocence, but he can't help but want to protect his own innocence. At the end of the novel, we come to the realization that the abundant and richly varied humour of the novel reinforced the serious intensity of Holden's frantic flight from adultism, and his frenzied search for the genuine in a terrifyingly phony world. The phoniness of society forces Holden Caulfield to leave it, but he is seeking nothing less than stability and love. His only comfort in this world of insanity is his little sister Phoebe who

he must protect at all costs from the phantoms of lust, hypocrisy, conceit and fear – all of the attributes which Holden sees in society, At the end, Holden delights in circles – He starts to see time as cyclic instead of linear; a journey to and from innocence that lasts throughout life.

This is the pinnacle of Holden's character development, as he has transitioned from a frustratingly cynical adolescent, to a more accessible protagonist that the reader can appreciate as fallible. " I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there." This is actually the single only time that Holden actually says he's happy—in the entire novel.

Holden breaks down as he watches his beloved little sister going round and round on a carousel; she is so " damned" happy. From that lunatic delight in a circle, he is shipped off to the psychiatrist – for Holden loves the world more than the world can bear. As we leave Holden alone in his room in the psychiatric ward, we are aware of the book's last ironic incongruity. It is not Holden who should be examined for a sickness of the mind, but the world in which he has sojourned and found himself alien. To " cure" Holden, he must be given the contagious disease of phony adultism; he must be pushed over that " crazy cliff." *** Holden Caulfield's role in *The Catcher in the Rye* was of pivotal significance in his ability to resonate in the literary world sixty years after his creation.

Whereas other famous literary protagonists have had the advantage of fame on the silver screen (such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick in *The Great Gatsby*), Salinger ensured that *Catcher* would never be appropriated into a film. In 1957, in a letter written by J. D. Salinger, he listed the reasons for which Hollywood would never touch his precious work, because of the, "immeasurably risky business of using actors." Salinger couldn't envision a child actress playing Phoebe or a young actor playing Holden.

Modern society is driven by the visual, where the quality of a text is arises exclusively from the plot. However, Holden has successfully tackled the demands of an image saturated society, solely through the authenticity of his voice. Salinger continued to write in his letter: "The catcher in the rye is a very novelistic novel. There are ready made scenes – only a fool would deny that – but for me, the weight of the book is in the narrator's voice, the nonstop peculiarities of it, his personal, extremely discriminating attitude to his reader – listener. He can't legitimately be separated from his own first-person technique" From 'Slight Rebellion Off Madison' to *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden has failed to escape his deepest fear; the fear of maturation. Holden has in fact matured in his development as a literary figure, and evolved from a distant voice to an accessible and highly distinctive voice loved and appreciated by millions across the globe.

It is only through analysing and understanding his transition from pen, to paper, to heart, that we can truly trace the development of Holden Caulfield. "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could

call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though." – The Catcher in the Rye