

# Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and the Crisis of Coming of Age: An Inevitably Fearful Move toward Growth

Dr. Ali Mohammadi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, English Language and Literature Department, Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, Turkey (Corresponding Author)

**Abstract:** *The Catcher in the Rye* is an iconic arguably quintessential American novel and an existential Coming-of-Age story that is both the adventures of a specific likable opinionated young narrator and a universal work that deals with highly relatable themes and symbols about society and modern living in America. J.D. Salinger had institutionalized forced depression and post-traumatic stress disorder after the war. After his discharge from the hospital, he began a critical work on *The Catcher in the Rye* deals with the crucial, but hard to talk about human issues of depression, sex, identity, alienation, the challenges of expression and processing feelings, suicide, homosexuality, perversion and taboo topics throughout his life. *The Catcher in the Rye* illustrates how Holden tries to find stability and acceptance in a broken society full of people who are always faking. Holden is tripping because he has a legitimate desire to search for beauty in human contact, nevertheless, he can't find it in a world of such ugliness. This is what makes Holden one of the loneliest characters in all of literature. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a powerful, upsetting, and intellectually provocative novel about growing up and reflecting on the human condition. In the end, this young naive boy pays the price for being too soft in a world twisted by deceit.

**Keywords:** Fear, Coming of age, Phoniness, Loneliness, Alienation

## 1. Introduction

One of the most highly debatable books which has ever been written about the fear of coming of age is J.D. Salinger's sine qua non book, *The Catcher in the Rye*. In his book, Salinger narrates the aforementioned problem through the eyes of a struggling high school boy, Holden Caulfield. Throughout the novel, this fear is dealt with in a plethora of different approaches by using symbols, motifs, context, etc. These concepts help readers observe the protagonist's development.

Thinking of Salinger, he was of some weird characteristics. For instance, he left the country to avoid reading reviews of *The Catcher in the Rye*; he believed that reading reviews is like walking down Madison Avenue with his pants down. Salinger burned even his fan mail; he refused interviews and told his agent to burn any fan mail that came to him. Salinger wrote *The Catcher in the Rye* as a soldier in World War II and finished it after his release from a mental hospital; he suffered from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of his wartime experiences. He did not want *The Catcher in the Rye* made into a movie; rather, he was famously resistant to any and all such attempts. It is also intriguing to insinuate that Salinger was once caught in a love triangle with screen legend, Charlie Chaplin. In 1941, the 22-year-old Salinger met and fell in love with 16-year-old Oona O'Neill, but the romance ended when Salinger went to war and Oona moved to Hollywood. There she met Charlie Chaplin and became his fourth wife. When Salinger read about the wedding in the papers, he was so angry that he sent Oona an immoral letter describing in disgusting detail his version of that wedding night.

As for the peculiar popularity of the protagonist in the novel, Miller sets forth "the very young are likely to identify with Holden and to see the adult world in which he sojourns as completely phony and worthless; the book thus becomes a

handbook for rebels and a guide to identification of squares"(8). To illustrate, *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most frequently banned books. It was banned for being anti-white, excess vulgar language, sexual scenes, immoral issues, excessive violence and so on. Quite shockingly, murderers loved *The Catcher in the Rye*. Mark Chapman, the man who assassinated John Lennon, was reading Salinger's novel at the time of his arrest. Chapman identified strongly with Holden Caulfield and believed he would become Holden when he killed Lennon; he even tried to legally change his name to Holden Caulfield; the book was also found in John Hinckley Juniors' apartment after he attempted to assassinate Ronald Reagan.

Bloom alleges that "Holden's definitive sense of American life is that it is largely "phony"--- a term he applies repeatedly throughout the tale to various contemporary definitions of success, ranging from the realms of corporate achievement, conventional marriage, social status, and "belonging" to physical attractiveness, Hollywood glamour, and athletics"(92).

Initially, *The Catcher in the Rye* opens with Holden Caulfield, the narrator, saying that he will tell what happened when he was expelled from boarding school. He's a likable and imaginative young man, but he is also unreliable and judgmental and he has a tendency to let his alienation, depression and various traumatic memories cloud his ability to fully enter the adult world. Holden is 16 during the story and he's been expelled from Pencey Prep school, a nice boarding school. Holden recounts the events that drove him away and decides to spend some days on his own in harsh unforgiving New York City. He returns home for the holiday letting his family knows he won't be going back to school. Having made such a decision, he seems to be of an outlandish and eccentric personality. Another freakish case in point is when Holden fought with his roommate over a date with a girl he had liked and respected. Then he takes the

Volume 9 Issue 8, August 2020

[www.ijsr.net](http://www.ijsr.net)

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

train and painfully tries to flirt with a classmate's mother; he takes a room in a seedy hotel which indicates his noble fantasies about girls.

Interestingly, Holden Caulfield likes to repeat himself a lot. In other words, he is famous for repeating his favorite catch phrases including phony appearing 35 times in the book and crazy 77 times! He firmly is of the opinion that folks' character is predominantly fake and artificial when he puts forth the question, "how would you know you weren't being a phony? The trouble is you wouldn't" (Salinger 224). He gets isolated from the crowd and heroically protects the innocence of children; something he struggles with as he transitions into adulthood. As a matter of fact, he stands in sharp contrast to his glimpses of phoniness, perversion, surface-level chatter and things like that that he catches from time and time again as he moves around New York. Holden longs for intimate company and seeks it out in various key characters like three women from Seattle drinking in a hotel bar. Sally Hayes is a girl he used to know that he goes on a date with and a prostitute named Sunny. As well as an older friend, Carlos, and most importantly his beloved sister, Phoebe, all the while drinking and feeling miserable and alone.

Holden sneaks home to visit Phoebe becoming convinced that he shouldn't run away and that ultimately his transition into adulthood won't necessitate his acting wild unrealistic fantasies. At one point, Holden visits his former teacher, Mr. Antolini, a man who cares for Holden and comforts him, but also strokes his head while he's a sleeping in an inappropriate way showing that even likable considerate adult allies are morally fallible adding to Holden's perception on phoniness and his distrust of the adult world and its complex ulterior motives. "Antolini's observation about Holden's long legs, his comment that he will be in the kitchen (rather than going to bed with his wife) and causal 'Good night, handsome' signify an ambiguous sexual identity" (Graham 72).

In fact, Holden Caulfield is introduced in the book as a person who is liable to behave rashly and recklessly. Unsurprisingly, his being a wildly non-conforming boy is the result of his mental disease and paranoid disorder. Graham concludes, "Holden Caulfield poses a challenge to this model because he disparages conformity as 'phony' and demands the right to be himself even if that means rejecting his own society" (70). Edwards opines that "the popular perception of Holden's account as the truth, whereas the world around him is wrong, is failing to ignore grave deficiencies in his character" (554). Holden escapes from his own reality and by doing so, he tries to put off the inevitable end through which he is reluctant to go. One of the purposes of this research is to enlighten the readers who missed out on the de facto meaning of the novel. Another aim is to clear out the subtleness and uncover the actualities within the novel. Having employed numerous provocative symbols and motifs, Salinger depicts "Gerascophobia", the fear of coming of age, in *The Catcher in the Rye* which will be spelled out as the discussion goes further.

To shed light on it, "gerascophobia may be related to internal experiences, such as thoughts, feelings and

fantasies. These are not based on solely fear but are also the result of negative predictions that are conditioned. Traumatized individuals come to avoid aspects of their normal lives, evading taking healthy risks, changes or intimacy. It is common for them to have high prevalence of apprehension, due to a deficit in affect-regulation skills and mentalization. This can be considered as a defensive dissociative that is directed at intolerable feelings and experiences of trauma, preventing its meaning being understood" (Perales-Blum hall et al. 4).

In the climax of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden watches joyfully as his younger sister, Phoebe, drives a carousel and realizes he must let her reach for the gold ring. *The Catcher in the Rye* ends with a 17-year old Holden recounting his experiences from a hospital in California where it appears his recovering from tuberculosis. Besides, while he refuses to answer questions about his future or what happened when he went home, he explains that despite his negative experiences, having talked about them made him realize how much he misses everyone and how he plans to return to school again. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a frequently banned book ironically because the story of transitioning from childhood into adulthood deals with challenging and emotionally evocative adult themes deemed inappropriate or too taboo for younger readers who may find themselves relating to Holden more than they may want to admit.

Holden's struggle is one that has endeared him to all manner of readers for decades and *The Catcher in the Rye*, the J.D. Salinger's only novel, was revolutionary not just for the way it dealt with adult language and themes, but how it did so in ways that were equally coarse and seamless, heartfelt and heartbreaking, a portrait of a young man's walk through an angry world and an unreliable narrator whose negativity speaks to his own traumas and losses, something considered by many readers and critics to be a masterpiece to this day.

## 2. Discussion

In the novel, the teenager, Holden Caulfield, is struggling with his growing-up process and depression by isolating himself from society. He craves for attention and wants to be noticed by others as he proclaims, "all I need is an audience. I am an exhibitionist" (Salinger 38). In the same chapter, with his roommate, Stradlater, at Pencey Prep school, Holden is in the bathroom and while he is busy, Holden starts dancing by imitating musicals in a funny way. Even if he hates musicals, he is just amusing himself and wants to amuse Stradlater to get his attention. Both examples are in the matter of seeking affinity. Holden fails as well since his friend ignores him and changes the topic as in the example above. Another example is, Holden states that "I act quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I am seventeen now... Sometimes I act like I am about thirteen" (13). It can be concluded that Holden also acts as if he is a child and immature to be recognized. He wants to be innocent like children. Even his friend, Carl Luce, says "same old Caulfield, when you going to grow up?" (187). It again signifies that Holden is trying to get people's consideration by pretending like a kid.

He does not want to grow up and become an adult. Subsequently, to separate himself from others, he resorts to portraying a child. At the same time, for the spotlight, he sometimes tries to act like an adult and attempt to behave like them; doing such as going to the bars, drinking alcohol and smoking a lot. Nevertheless, behaving this way, he still looks foolish and eventually gets frustrated. Additionally, Holden is expelled from three schools. He puts his life and future in danger only for affection. This can prove that he continues to be expelled from schools due to his craving for care. His mother is in depression as him owing to the death of his brother.

In reality, Holden's childish manners resemble museum in the book because he says, "museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a thousand times" (157). With this in mind, it means museums never grow up and stay young as Holden wants. One of the reasons he does not want to become an adult is that he comes across a little girl. When he offers her hot chocolate, she states she had to meet her friend and Holden says; "kids always have to meet their friend..." (155). Maybe he is scared that when he grows up, he will have no one around and become lonely. Accordingly, he opts for feigning young so as to not be alone. For instance, he always dates with Sally Hayes, even if she is insincere and dates a lot of guys. Holden has a fear of being forlorn and despondent. When he is in the lounge he asserts: "Anyway, it made me feel depressed and lousy again, and I damn near got my coat back and went back to the hotel, but it was too early and I didn't feel much like being all alone" (84). Along with this, he is frightened of dying. The death of his brother affects him and he is certain of that if he grows up, he will be dead. His teacher, Mr. Spencer, warns Holden for being irresponsible about his future and he adds Holden will realize that when it is too late. Afterwards, he claims "It made me sound dead or something. It was very depressing" (20). Taking another example into account, Holden refuses to sleep with Sunny, who is a prostitute. It can be understood that he turns his back at her in order to protect his innocent childhood. On the whole, these examples indicate that a teenager tries his best for attention and if the consequences would not be as expected, he would become depressed.

Steinbeck depicts infantile mentality by delineating that "when a child first catches adults out -- when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not always have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just -- his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child's world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing" (6). Considering the above-mentioned paragraph, it can be asserted that while children are growing up, they encounter and recognize that the world they live in is not a rose-coloured spectacle. In other words, world is not what they supposed before. They grow up and have to leave behind their innocent and pure world due to the real world's corrupted and hypocritical essence. Learning that adults are dishonest, they have flaws, they are not always right and can be wrong, and children

have difficulty in adopting themselves, so they get frustrated. When they grow up, they start to make the same mistakes. Once they make an irreversible mistake, they can never be the same again and destroy their future as well. It's all part of the growth.

In fact, Holden who cannot keep up with adults' world, experiences the same disappointments and breakdowns. As a result, he does not want to grow up as he is petrified of being a part of corrupted society; yet, he cannot hold himself back. He continuously considers the society as phony regarding his observations. One of the cases in point is that in an advertisement about his old school Pencey Prep, there is a picture which says "since 1888 we have been making a boy into splendid, clear thinking young men." (Salinger 4). Nonetheless, in his school, there is no student fitting the definition given in the advertisement. Holden knows they deceive people and wants to stay away from that kind of places. He is even expelled from three schools by failing his subjects and encountering deceitful people. Why he keeps failing can be explained by his dread, ending up phony and being corrupted like others. His father is a lawyer and in chapter 22, Holden says all lawyers make excessive amount of money and even if they save people, they do that because of the money they earn or because they want to be congratulated by others.

Much to his chagrin, Holden forgets his surrounding and starts to dream his fantasy life with his sister, Phoebe. In line with this, Graham upholds, "watching Phoebe on the carousel, Holden finds a 'mature, new perspective' and sees that she must be allowed to find her own way"(56). He considers her to be innocent and lovely. When he feels gloomy, he wants to spend time with his little sister in order to neglect everything and escape from outside world. They go to carousel together and even if he is soaked with rain, he keeps his eyes on Phoebe and feels pleased. Considering his dream world, Holden wears a red hunting hat. Its colour bears a resemblance to his dead brother and his sister's hair. He wears it not only to be unique and separated from others, but also for sensing his sibling by his side. As he does that, he escapes from his difficulties. This opinion can be proved when he utters, "My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection" (Salinger 275). As well as, in "this is a people shooting hat, I shoot people in this hat" (30), Holden sees his hat as a protector from dreadful situations.

As another compelling evidence for his profound propensity to remain in his pure, innocent and infantile world, I can refer to an old friend of Holden, Jane Gallagher, for whom he has feelings. Yet, he constantly delays to call her, because it appears that he remembers her as young and innocent. Also, he is scared of her possible changes. As a result, he wants to imagine her as the Jane of memories. Lastly, while Holden is ruining his life and disappointed by his surroundings, he has a big significant fantasy in order to save all children from the besmirched society. "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" (224). In view of these facts, it is quite likely for Holden to

long for protecting children from hypocritically changing, abusive and duplicitous adults.

Holden goes through hard times because of his father. Thus, he fails in school to not become like him, but he actually fails in his growing up process. As a result, he puts himself and his future at risk. Holden also observes that his roommate, Stradlater, is the same as him. Holden speaks of Stradlater as "he always looked good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway, if you knew him the way I did" (36). The reason why he speaks of him is that everyone considers him as handsome and friendly whereas the truth is that he is mean and dirty. Even if he is good-looking, Stradlater is not hygienic as he never cleans his razor.

Bloom maintains that "Stradlater is fairly conceited. He's a good-looking Prep school athlete with a notorious history of having sex with girls. He has a date with Jane Gallagher in the beginning of the novel and fights with Holden when he returns from that date" (22). Knowing the truth, Holden gets depressive. He stresses on Stradlater's appearance, saying it is deceptive as movies. Holden puts movies and his roommate in the same category. He says; "I hate movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them" (Salinger 38). In many chapters throughout the book, he says movies are phony considering actors, fake emotions and stereotyped roles. Moreover, without realizing, Holden enjoys imitating people around as he said, "when I am with someone that corny, I always act corny too" (79). Unlike Holden, Stradlater successfully moves into the adult world. Holden distrusts his roommate's adoption of adult behaviors. He wants the older teens' approval, but at the same time resents him. As a whole, he cannot run away from making the same mistakes although he complains about others for doing the same ones. This led him to suffer from depression and he anguishes and is unable to recover. Even if he desires to get better, he always fails to communicate with adults for some reasons.

Another incident which raises Holden's hackles in Chapter 24 is when Holden stays at Mr. Antolini's home, his former English teacher. He's the only adult whom Holden perceives as not being phony. He accepts Holden rather than judging him for his failures. Mr. Antolini doesn't order Holden to obediently do his homework. However, when Holden catches him patting his hair, it leaves him with uncomfortable confused feelings since for Holden, this act is a blatant evidence of sexual harassment done by someone whom he confided in more than anyone else around. Having been victimized by this, Holden's belief in the phoniness of everyone gets strongly cemented. Holden Caulfield mentioned in this chapter: "Mr. Antolini came up to our house for dinner *quite frequently* to find out how I was getting along" (188). Later at the same chapter, Mr. Antolini's abuse is incontrovertible. After they are treated to coffee by Mrs. Antolini. Holden's headache and exhaustion allows Mr. Antolini to avail himself of the current situation. A number of abusive hints in terms of Mr. Antolini's actions and discourse take shape throughout this chapter, for example, when Mr. Antolini says "All right. Good night, handsome" (198); or Holden's obscure but suspicious line

which articulates as "Then something happened. I don't even like to talk about it" (198).

The climax of the same chapter which is mentioned in the previous paragraph is when Holden wakes up to Mr. Antolini's touch. He becomes incredibly nervous and wants to leave the house immediately when he declares, "I started putting on my damn pants in the dark. I could hardly get them on I was so damn nervous" (199). As he is leaving the home, he wraps himself up as a taciturn person. It is learned at the end of the chapter that Holden has been exposed to sexual abuse since he was a child but unaware of the fact. He passes this message when he leaves the Mr. Antolini's house to the audience by bringing out: "boy, I was shaking like a madman. I was sweating, too. When something pervert like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff happened to me about twenty since I was a kid. I can't stand it" (200). Holden's anxiety attack illustrates that his body is aware of the violation, yet his brain, most probably consciously, is not. "The closer contact becomes, the more it is restrained by homophobia. However, instead of intimate contact being prohibited by homophobia, it often becomes highly stylized instead" (Plummer 258). From this, it can be inferred how homophobia in ascendant virility brings about profound nervousness within males, coercing them to promote and substitute an exaggerated masculine demeanour. In the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's hyper-masculine performance of his sexuality might be appertained to his childhood trauma due to sexual abuse which is committed by men. In the book, it is obvious that Holden's attitudes toward boys and men are rather impolite. He brushes nearly every single virile acquaintance of his off; however, he hangs on to the remembrance of his late little brother, Allie.

The same thing happens in chapter 19. He talks with his friend, Carl Luce. Carl's father is a psychiatrist and Carl suggests Holden should go talk with his father. However, Holden wants to learn whether Carl's father can heal him or not. Unfortunately, he does not get the answer. Both examples make Holden depressed and powerless. He cannot open up about his concerns. In the end, quite ironically, Holden himself becomes phony and struggles with anxiety.

When it comes to characters, there are a number of key characters in *The Catcher in the Rye*. First, is the protagonist, Holden Caulfield. He is 17 years old when he recounts the events that happened when he was 16. He's thoughtful, sensitive and a teen from a well-off family in New York. Holden uses stories to make sense of his life. Nevertheless, he's flunked out of several schools and refuses to participate in the sham world of adult work and play. Holden turns insightful beyond his years and childish in his confusion; his emotional traumas have deeply hurt him and he describes the world as he perceives it.

Phoebe Caulfield is Holden's 10 year-old sister. He speaks often of Phoebe's creative quirky traits. She doesn't like her middle name. So, she keeps making up new ones. She is creative like her brother Holden. She embodies the joy of childhood as Holden imagines it and she's the only person he truly trusts. Phoebe is less naive about childhood than Holden is. She rejects his discontent and forces him to

confront his traumas rather than flee them. Allie Caulfield was Holden and Phoebe's younger brother. He died of leukemia at age 11 when Holden was just 13. Additionally, remembering Allie's intelligence and sweetness comforts Holden. His memories of Allie become a lifeline when he's exhausted, ill or terrified. He also liked writing poetry. D.B. Caulfield is Holden's older brother and also a writer, but he is a writer that served in the army during World War II and now writes screen plays in Hollywood.

“Holden dislikes the movies because he thinks that they are “phony” and manipulative; he feels that his brother has prostituted himself by becoming a screenwriter” (Baldwin 83). Holden considers movies to be dummy. Thus, he regards his brother as a sellout who trades his talent for cash. On the other hand, Sally Hayes is a conventional teenager. She is adept at playing the roles that help teens find their place in the adult world. She and Holden have dated in the past and they still date when he goes to New York. Sally is rational, pragmatic, but wishy-washy. Holden sees her through his veil of bitter discontent as quite phony too. *The Catcher in the Rye* also deals with various symbols one of which is Holden's red hunting hat. Indeed, Holden's red hunting hat represents both his insecurity and creative personality. The bright red color appeals to his desire to be someone distinct. He also likes how it looks even if it is a little bit silly. When he wears the hat, he feels confident, but he removes it and even hides it when he's feeling insecure. Giving that hat to Phoebe is a sign of his appreciation for her. She loves and accepts him when she puts it on his head. *The Catcher in the Rye* itself is also a symbol. First of all, it is an allusion to Holden's want to protect children and a metaphor that he comes up with based on a fantasy about catching them from falling off a cliff.

Holden's misinterpretation of Robert Burns' poem, *Coming through the Rye*, is also representative of the creativity inside Holden. Another important symbol is Allie's baseball glove. It's covered in poetry written in green ink and it acts as a talisman for Holden. He lovingly describes the glove and his brother in the composition he writes at the beginning of *The Catcher in the Rye*. He is enraged when Stradlater so casually dismisses Allie's glove. The glove represents the importance of language for Holden. Stories and poems help them make sense of the confusing things that happen to him throughout his adventures. He speaks to Allie, the young poetry lover, when he's in an emotional distress. The Museum of Natural History in New York is an important symbol too. Moreover, displays are frozen and unchanging and they represent the world that Holden wishes he could live in; everything is comfortably still and solid; the exhibits are all in the same place every time he goes; flashes of beauty and history are caught mid moments and fixed in their forms. No new developments can happen in this sterile environment. It's a refuge and a trap for Holden who sees the adult world as full of change that happens too quickly.

Bloom elaborates on Holden's perception of life by postulating that “in Holden's world, you can't go back to childhood---- that's locked up in the Museum of Natural History, where Holden does not make it past the front steps-- - but you can't grow up either because growing up means becoming a phony”(124). Additionally, the docks in central

park are an important symbol. The Lagoon is symbolic of Holding's anxiety about impermanence. Some things in the park are permanent features; others change with the seasons. To illustrate, the pond sustains them in summer, but becomes hostile in the winter and the ducks fly away from their troubles; Holden fantasizes about fleeing to the west to start a new life.

According to Sitorius, “Metathesiophobia is the fear of change. It is the fear of letting go of the past, good or bad, and accepting the unknown of the future. It is the fear of not knowing where change will lead. This fear manifests, although in different ways, in most people at some point in their lives. How that fear is received, and whether it promotes change or evokes a desire to hide, defines the fear itself” (1). With the help of the definition that is given, one can assume Holden Caulfield to have Metathesiophobia, the fear of change. From the beginning to the end, one can observe the grotesque acts that Holden presents to the reader. He asks strange questions and makes the reader confused. To exemplify, his excessive concern about ducks is a sign of his obsession with changes.

In the following lines from the novel, his horror of change can again be tangibly observed: “You know those ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, that ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?” I realized it was only one chance in a million” (Salinger 78). This dialogue between Holden and a cab driver illustrates his apprehension. At first, the reader can genuinely think that he is worried about the ducks but in reality, he is thinking about his life and how he does not want it to change. He knows the answer to the question; yet, he is afraid of facing his problems. He sees how rapid it is for ducks to adapt to an unfamiliar environment while he is struggling with his own.

Salinger, in his book, asserts that “But I didn't see any ducks around. I walked all around the whole damn lake -I damn near fell in once, in fact- but I didn't see a single duck. I thought maybe if there were any around, they might be asleep or something near the edge of the water, near the grass and all. That's how I nearly fell in. But I couldn't find any” (200). Undoubtedly, he still cares about ducks and they are representing his changes throughout the novel. He does not stop wondering where they go and at the end it can be understood that he gets ready to have the answer he has been looking for, without the fear of becoming an adult. He accepts the necessities of alters and gets out of his comfort zone. There is some important context as well to go over for apprehending *The Catcher in the Rye*. The United States enjoyed widespread prosperity in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, but there was a cultural climate of paranoia about the rise of Communism and the perceived threat it presented to that prosperity. *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in 1951 and captures and reflects those tensions between success and fear. *The Catcher in the Rye* fluctuates thematically between hope and disillusion; certain elements of Holden Caulfield character paralleled the life of his creator, J.D. Salinger.

Holden, like Salinger, fails to thrive at school. Finding the conventional environments stifling and meaningless, he drops out a number of times. Both Holden and his creator find significance in meaning and narrative whether fact or fiction. Furthermore, in the manipulation of words, like Salinger, Holden seeks anonymity in New York City and fantasizes about disappearing. Salinger worked on the novel during World War II. Some biographers find in Holden's despair and anger the young writer's own wartime trauma. Initially published for an adult audience, *The Catcher in the Rye* was appropriated by teenagers who often saw themselves in Holden. What is more, critical reception to *The Catcher in the Rye* was and still is controversial. *The Catcher in the Rye* generated immediate praise, criticism, joy and outrage. The publisher that first made an offer withdrew when Salinger refused to tame Holden. Salinger quickly found another publisher; *The Catcher in the Rye* has topped lists of banned books for decades and when the novel debuted, it shocked rather readers in several ways mostly with its obvious use of taboo language and topics. The critical attitude with which Holden dissects society is a hallmark of *The Catcher in the Rye* and it quickly climbed to the top tier of The New York Times bestseller list. In addition, it garnered a book-of-the-month club listing right off the bat.

*The Catcher in the Rye* was incredibly influential and extends beyond the world of literature. The process of discovering one's adult identity and leaving the relative safety of childhood is a major authentication mark of *The Catcher in the Rye*. However crazy he may act from time to time, connection to other caring humans is possible. Since J.D. Salinger's death, some biographers have claimed that he worked on others stories about Holden and that these stories will someday be published. *The Catcher in the Rye* truly remains both beloved and uncontroversial on American classic.

Taking the salient themes into account, *The Catcher in the Rye*'s central theme is phoniness. Holden's observations are often accurate as adults engage in behaviors that are less than sincere for benign and selfish reasons. Holden seems to think that only he sees the phoniness for what it is. His willingness to call it out is what sets him apart; he uses this to avoid many adult interactions and the worst-case scenario is that it's very judgmental. He ducks opportunities to connect and uses this accusation as a shield. More important themes are alienation and identity. It's also worth mentioning that loneliness parallels the alienation that many feel as they search for identity and belonging. This is something that makes Holden somewhat universal. The two states bump up against each other; that is to say, identity is distinctive and requires setting oneself apart from others, but belonging requires acknowledging commonality so that bonds can be formed. Belonging can threaten identity. Holden's interaction with his peers at PenceyPrep school illustrates this tension. He often says that he wishes he could go home; he tries to make it as an adult in New York City. He is developing the identity that will sustain him in the coming years. Needless to say that home is what ultimately rescues Holden in his moment of crisis. In the meantime, Allie and Phoebe represent home.

On the flip side, sex is another important theme in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Conflicting views of sex and Holden's treatment of women leave him feeling alienated and fearful. He imagines himself as a protector or defender, but is worried about getting sexy around them. Holden is physically attracted to girls, nonetheless, he fails to take into consideration the idea that women too feel desire. In his thinking, they're always asking men to stop; the idea that Jane wanted to get sexy with Stradlater is one that Holden can't entertain. He does not quite understand his views toward sexual desire. His misinterpretation of the line from *Coming through the Rye* is ironic. The song toys with the idea of spontaneous secret sex. He takes it as a metaphor for keeping the children safe in the field. This insinuates that childhood is an important theme in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden views young children as pure and innocent and adults phony, even corrupted. Based upon his assumption, children are born innocent and then they are gradually corrupted by the world around them. Holden's view is oversimplified. He even takes a step further claiming that violence can be a part of children's lives. To substantiate, Allie's death from leukemia is a clear evidence that childhood is not truly sheltered. Holden's own memories of childhood seemed frozen and fragile. His tendency to romanticize childhood clashes with Phoebe's more practical view. He is right to cherish the years of childhood because children have the time to be curious. They start stories, however, they don't always finish them. They can love fiercely as Phoebe does, but they grow up. Last but not least, Windt-Val proposed that "personal names and place names are some of the most important tools of the author in the creation of credible characters placed in a literary universe, what gives the impression of being authentic. Many authors from different countries have related their view of significance of names and naming, not only as a source of information for the reader, but also as an important part of making the characters real to the authors themselves during the process of writing" (1). As it is stated, the protagonist's aptonym is also compelling for it reflects who he is and what he is doing. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, some of the characters are given their names for a purpose. To begin with, Holden Caulfield's, the main character's, name is given to emphasize on how he is "holding" himself back from what he detests the most, becoming an adult. Another interpretation is about Holden's last name, Caulfield; his last name relates to recurring theme of childhood innocence. A 'caul' is defined as a part of the amnion, one of the membranes enveloping the fetus, which sometimes is around the head of a child at its birth. The caul protects young children, just as Holden dreams to do when he tells Phoebe his ideal profession would be the catcher in the field of rye" (Garcia 2). Caul can also be a symbol of Holden's flaw in comprehending the convoluted lives which adults are dealing with. If his name is to be pronounced as Hold-on Caul-field, one can understand its hidden meaning which is his wish to keep his point of view in order not to alter and see the reality he is escaping from.

To give another example from the characters, Phoebe Caulfield's name has a part in the book. Phoebe is Holden's little sister whom he loves immeasurably. Holden mentions her as "you should see her. You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your life. She's really smart" (Salinger

87). The author gives her the name "Phoebe" which means bright, shine. As it can be discerned, Phoebe plays a big role in Holden's life; when she is mentioned; his words become affectionate which is a different side of Holden the readers have never seen before. Phoebe changes him by bringing happiness to his life when he is surrounded by dark thoughts. Ultimately, Bloom argues, "some critics have already pointed out that Holden is himself a phony--- that although Holden criticizes/ attacks/ shoots phonies, he's himself guilty of the very behavior that he criticizes" (194).

### 3. Conclusion

It can be concluded that J.D. Salinger is emphasizing on Holden's phobia on changing, growing old and becoming an adult. The impediments and awful experiences he goes through cause him to run away from the reality which is reaching the so-called maturity and being phony just as other grown-ups. Although he tries to postpone growing up, he eventually renounces and accepts the unavoidable facts of existence due to the fact that he does not want to be alone and die in solitude. With regard to his bewildering mental state, it appears sensible to enunciate that this teenager boy is running from reality and focuses on his dream world, which can be his utopia. He dreams of what he desires and it is demonstrated as babies, because according to him, young people are innocent and pure. Babies or children are different from careless, two-faced and ruined humanity. They do not completely comprehend what is happening and they live their dream world. It seems as if Holden's fear acts as a mirror for his coevals. The incidents he lives through are a part of ripening and it is common for minors to encounter some sort of depression and anxiety in the course of their puberty, especially if that child had a traumatic or abusive past. As a consequence of this matter, every one of them tries to find their own way to cope with the handicaps. Nevertheless, some of them make everything indeed worse, within the same way as Holden. Having been afflicted with "Gerascophobia", the fear of growing old, Holden foresees his exacerbating mental state, upcoming loneliness and his incapability to care for himself. This fear effectuates mental breakdowns and causes sufferers to act out abnormally. Holden, for example, changes his behaviours and lie about himself to nearly every person he meets because he cannot decide on whether he wants to be isolated or get involved in the community.

When all was said and done, it can be observed that the protagonist's behaviours throughout the novel are utterly affiliated with gerascophobia, the fear of growing old. This fear is drastically increasing with the psychological situations and events which Holden Caulfield experiences until the age of sixteen. Every event which he tries to overcome or ignore leaves behind serious havoc. Some of these havocs are realized by the protagonist and some of them are not. It would seem reasonable to argue that there is a plethora of factors which lead him to the very edge of the fear of coming of age. For instance, the death of his younger brother Allie, who died at the age of thirteen because he was suffering from leukaemia, traumatized Holden inasmuch as he feels guilty for not being able to help him get better. His lethargy towards Allie's death permits him to preserve memories and stories about him that harmonized with his

perspective and awareness of the humanity. The more Holden holds on the Allie, the more he is capable of holding on the childhood and purity. By and large, the phobia of coming of age has been affecting juveniles since the sophistication of mankind and *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the greatest books putting forward this controversial issue. From a reader's point of view, it can be understood that J.D. Salinger combines social problems, people's inner thoughts together with adults being frauds not only for perceiving a child's life, but also their mentality, to be exact.

### References

#### Books

- [1] Baldwin, Stanley. *Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. 2007.
- [2] Bloom, Harold. *J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*, Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, Edited and with an Introduction by Harold Bloom, New Edition, Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009.
- [3] ---, *J.D. Salinger*, Bloom's Modern Critical Views, New Edition, Edited and with an introduction, Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008.
- [4] ---, *J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*, Bloom's Guides, Comprehensive Research and Study Guides, Introduction by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007.
- [5] Graham, Sarah. *Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007.
- [6] ---, *J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*, Routledge Publications, 2007.
- [7] Miller, James.J.D. *Salinger*, University of Minnesota Press, 1968.
- [8] Plummer, David. *Regulating Male Intimacy. One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*. Harrington Park, 1999.
- [9] Salinger, Jerome David. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little Brown, 2001.
- [10] ---, *The Catcher in the Rye*, The Modern Library, 1945.
- [11] -Steinbeck, John. *East of Eden*. PenguinBooks, 1992.

#### Internet Sources

- [12] Edwards, Duane. "Holden Caulfield: "Don't Ever TellAnybodyAnything" ELH, vol. 44, no.3, 1977, pp. 554-65. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2872573?seq=1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872573?seq=1)
- [13] Garcia, Sarita. "TheCatcher in theRye – EtymologyandSynonyms of Characters' Names", 2006. pp. 2. Martita'sPlace- Literature in English and Spanish, [mhgaray.wordpress.com/2006/03/12/the-catcher-in-the-rye-the-etymology-and-symbllism-of-characters-names/](http://mhgaray.wordpress.com/2006/03/12/the-catcher-in-the-rye-the-etymology-and-symbllism-of-characters-names/)
- [14] Sitorius, Taylor. SponseredbyMix, Elizabeth "Metathesiophobia", 2014, pp. 1, DigitalCommons @ ButlerUniversity, [digitalcommons.butler.edu/urc/2014/artexhibition/1/](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/urc/2014/artexhibition/1/)
- [15] Windt-Val, Benedicta. "PersonalNamesand Identity in LiteraryContexts" *NamesandIdentities*. vol.4, no.2, 2012, pp. 1. Osla, <https://journals.uio.no/osla/article/view/324>