

## Holden Caulfield: Alien in *The Catcher in the Rye*

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### Abstract

In spite of the frequent critical statement that modern fiction is filled with alienation and estrangement, protagonists of many American novels strive toward a confirmation of both individual honor and social tenacity. Their efforts are frequently undermined by their own vague and unclear objective, defective interpretation, or skeptical escape; but lofty aspiration, strong faith, and vigorous efforts nonetheless demonstrate their heroic standing. Achievement is restrained by susceptibility to modern skepticism, detachment, isolation, and hostility; but heroism does not exist as much in the outcome of their attempts as in the course of struggle against defeat to attest the value of social responsibility, noble ambition, and spiritual maxims.

The isolation and detachment of Salinger's literary characters are generally instigated by an antagonistic or a sickening society; seldom do his characters experience disintegration due to particular flaws which they take no notice of. The descent comes to them naturally. They are often victims, but never instruments of their personal misfortunes. This essay attempts to provide valid explanations to the term "alienation" and pursue the traces of alienation in J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden Caulfield, characteristic of an alienated person, opposes everything found in the world of adults and candidly criticizes American culture.

**Key Words:** Alienation, isolation, modern man, estrangement, society, alienated man.

## Holden Caulfield: *The Catcher in the Rye* Adlı Romanındaki Yabancı

### Özet

Çağdaş romanın yabancılaşma ve uzaklaşma ile dolu olduğu yönündeki yaygın eleştirel beyana rağmen, bir çok Amerikan romanındaki kahramanlar hem bireysel onur ve hem de sosyal dayanışmanın onaylanması doğrultusunda çalışmaktadırlar. Çabaları çoğu kez kendi muğlak ve belirsiz amaçları, hatalı yorumlamaları, veya kuşkucu kaçmalarıyla baltalanmakta ancak yüksek arzu, güçlü inanç ve etkin çabaları yine de onların kahramanca duruşlarını göstermektedir. Başarı çağdaş şüphecilik, ayrılma, yalnız bırakma, ve düşmanlığa duyarlılıkla sınırlandırılmıştır; fakat kahramanlık sosyal sorumluluk, asil gaye ve manevi kuralların kanıtlanması adına verilen mücadele sürecinde bulunduğu kadar kendi çabalarının sonuçlarında mevcut değildir.

Salinger'in edebi karakterinin yalnız bırakılmaları ve ayrı tutulmaları genel itibariyle düşmanca davranan veya bıktırıcı olan bir toplum tarafından teşvik edilir; karakterleri farkına varmadıkları belirli bir kusur nedeniyle nadiren ayrışma hissederler. Alçalma onlara doğal görünmektedir. Onlar çoğu kez kurbandırlar, fakat hiçbir zaman kendilerinin kişisel talihsizliklerine alet olmamışlardır. Bu makale, "yabancılaşma" kavramının geçerli bir tanımını yapmakta ve J.D. Salinger'in *The Catcher in the Rye* adlı eserindeki yabancılaşmanın izlerini sürmeye çalışmaktadır. Holden Caulfield, yabancılaşmış bir kişiye özgün olarak, yetişkinlerin dünyasında bulunan herşeye karşı çıkmakta ve Amerikan kültürünü açık yüreklilikle eleştirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yabancılaşma, yalnız kalma, çağdaş insan, uzaklaşma, toplum, yabancılaşmış adam

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## Introduction

The society, which Salinger's characters strive against, does not have any place in it to house them. In order function well in society as they consider it, they would have to separate themselves; they would have to renounce something inside. They fail to comprehend just what that is, but they feel that naturalization in a hostile community necessitates a personality alien to what they must become. In this regard, they choose to be outsiders, and they possess the integrity to be reluctant to welcome what the new culture has to present. This desire is what Kenneth Keniston considers as the designating status of the alienated and detached person:

Alienation, once seen as the consequence of a cruel (but changeable) economic order, has become for many the central fact of human existence, characterizing man's 'thrownness' into a world in which he has inherent place. Formerly imposed upon men by the world around them, estrangement increasingly is chosen by them as their dominant reaction to the world (as cited in Josephson & Josephson, 1962, p.45).

The predicaments which Salinger's characters discover themselves in are the outcomes, Arthur Mizener firmly believes, of Salinger's "effort to define the Good American. For this tradition, American experience creates a dilemma by encouraging the individual man to cultivate his perception to the limit according to his own lights and at the same time committing him to a society on which the majority has firmly imposed a well-meaning but imperceptive and uniform attitude"(Mizener, 1959, p.210). Their predicament is that they are attempting to create an individual awareness with no knowledge of what it must be and while searching for hints from a community which is hostile to the internal demands of the individual. The attempt is of no significance. Karl Marx's analysis on the alienating aspect of man's labor is quite appropriate to the predicament of Salinger's characters when they refuse efforts to overcome alienation in the formation of alienation.

Salinger's characters, in spite of their flaws, possess an extraordinary respect for honesty. Some literary critics consider the struggle between truth and hypocrisy as the primary concern in Salinger's work. The alienated and estranged characters believe that they cannot achieve success through the existing standards of truth and value in their respective societies. Erich Fromm, in his studies on alienation, keeps coming back to this point again and again:

... [man] experiences himself, not as a man, with love, fear, convictions, doubts, but as that abstraction, alienated from his real nature, which fulfills a certain function in the social system. His sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can himself favorably, whether he can make more of himself than he started with, whether he is a success...(Fromm, 1959, p.142).

Man's duty is to discover some methods by which he can articulate himself in a way which is not hostile to the concealed demands of the self. Having no clear knowledge of what they really desire, Salinger's characters are pretty certain about what they do not want. They show no interest in achieving success in this community, definitely not as community determines the measure of success.

This article will attempt to pinpoint the elements of alienation in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, through careful and diligent analysis of the protagonist Holden Caulfield. But, in order to do that, a working definition of the concept of alienation will be devised by referring to the works of two of the prominent sociologists, Erich Fromm and Melvin Seeman in an attempt to clarify the shades of the meanings of this term.

## Alienation

The concept has been extensively employed in the contemporary literature, sociology and philosophy. Due to its extensive use in numerous fields of science, there has not been a common consensus on even its most principal aspects yet. As Iain Williamson and Cedric Cullingford highlight that “there is disagreement about the definition, debate over whether the phenomenon is a sociological process or a psychological state, or both, and confusion over the inevitability of the experience”(Williamson and Cullingford, 1997,p.263). Majority of the terms that acquired scientific touch are distinguished by a logical specificity of indications, precision of meanings within specific disciplines.

Erich Fromm has contributed notably to the spread of the term ‘alienation.’ He was considerably inspired by Marx’s “Early Manuscripts” and injected those inspirations in his book called *Marx's Concept of Man*. The issue of ‘alienation’ has occupied a dominant place in his discourses starting with his book, *The Fear of Freedom*. In fact, the concept of alienation is the principal matter in what, perhaps, is his most significant book, *The Sane Society*, in which he says: “I have chosen the concept of "alienation" as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character” (Fromm, 1990,p.110).

Fromm’s description of alienation is one of the most often cited definitions in the studies conducted on this phenomenon. Herbert Read uses it as an introduction to his work *Art and Alienation*, and it is the only definition used by Gerald Sykes in his two volume anthology, *Alienation*. Fromm states:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts--but his acts and their- consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced: with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively (Fromm, 1990,p.120).

The significance of this definition can be observed evidently when compared to the description of R.D. Laing, who, talking about the twentieth century man, states: “The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man”(Laing, 1983,p.28).

Fromm's description of alienation as a manner of experience grants him complete freedom to discover its social and economic roots, its modern disposition, and the nature of alienated man with regard to himself and to human beings. In *The Sane Society*, he selects alienation as the principal motive in his examinations of contemporary social attribute because he considers it as something which “touches upon the deepest level of modern personality”(Fromm, 1990,p.103).

Renowned sociologist, Melvin Seeman (1989) has claimed that the present day notion of alienation offers an archaic denotation which is pretty much in contrast with its significance in the 1960s. There is plenty of proof to confirm a declining romance with alienation in the social sciences. Seeman asserts that alienation is leading a secret life in contemporary theory and research. According to his estimates, this theme will continue to survive because the presumptions, included in the convention of the notion of alienation are fundamental for critical examinations in the fields of sociology and psychology.

Seeman formulated a model of alienation which comprises of five categories: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement (Seeman,1959,p.783). Despite critical reception, most researches on alienation have been led through Seeman's categories in a sociological framework.

### ***Powerlessness***

Seeman asserts that it is “the notion of alienation as it originated in the Marxian view of the worker's condition in capitalist society”(Seeman,1959,p.784). An individual feels powerless when he is treated like an object, subdued and deceived by other people or by inhuman mechanized systems such as technology and when he feels too weak and feeble to cause a considerable change in the orientation and or effect of this dominative force. The non-alienated edge of the powerlessness process would be independence and complete control.

### ***Meaninglessness***

Seeman suggests that this second type of alienation refers to “the individual's sense of understanding the events in which he is engaged”(Seeman,1959,p.786). This variant complies with the view that as an organization grows in size, the individual feels the difficulty to match small tasks to the general objectives of the very organization. He fails to realize how his role in the organization corresponds into the design of the entire operation. Seeman further says that “this second version of alienation is logically independent of the first, for, under some circumstances, expectancies for personal control of events may not coincide with the understanding of these events, as in the popular depiction of the alienation of the intellectual”(Seeman, 1959,p.786).

### ***Normlessness***

Seeman derives this third variant of alienation theme from Emile Durkheim’s depictions of the French word ‘*anomie*,’ which, in its conventional use, Seeman states, “denotes a situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior”(Seeman,1959,p.787). These socially unacceptable behaviors emerge when the below-mentioned social norms can no longer be effective in restraining the individual’s conduct.

### ***Isolation***

Isolation is much more than just a mere separation from the objectives and rules of the industrial society. For Seeman, the usage of this fourth type of alienation is “most common in descriptions of the intellectual role, where writers refer to the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards”(Seeman,1959,p.788). It indicates detachment from the community itself. It refers to the lack of a sense of belonging or liability to the professional role and the one or more centers of the business community.

### ***Self-Estrangement***

This final variant of alienation, Seeman states that it “refers essentially to the inability of the individual to find self-rewarding - or in Dewey's phrase, self-consummatory - activities that engage him”(Seeman, 1959,p.790). In this aspect of alienation, the worker or the housewife does not regard the natural value of the work or household chores as rewarding and self-fulfilling. C. Wright Mills remarks: “Men are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: One makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from It also”(Mills, 2002,p.188).

## **Holden Caulfield: Alien in *The Catcher in the Rye***

J. D. Salinger’s masterpiece *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most important books to emerge in American literature after World War II. The focus of intense censorship arguments for the period of thirty-five years and the source of utter confusion and distress to many literary critics, *The Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951, has managed to hold the interest of passionate American readers for many decades.

*The Catcher in the Rye* is both the longest and the most widely-read undertaking of Salinger. It is, with a brief disparity from the classical journey, a hero’s pursuit, and Holden Caulfield has frequently been

identified with “the hero of Goethe’s *The Sorrow of Young Werther*, Byron’s Childe Harold in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and more significantly to Fitzgerald’s Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*”(Lundquist, 1979,p.41). Holden’s aimless strolls through “the course of his story have been compared to those of Huckleberry Finn and Ulysses”(Lunquist,1979,p.71). But, despite being a hero fighting with evils monsters like Ulysses, Holden is a city wanderer experiencing social predicaments, who roams through the streets of New York in the wake of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Holden’s state also parallels Huckleberry Finn, paddling down the Mississippi river in pursuit of identity. It has also been asserted that “the descent into the underworld in the *Aeneid* and into the hell in the *Divine Comedy* provides a pattern” for the urban hell that Holden encounters (Lundquist,1979,p.71), but Holden’s hell is a particular inferno, an interior one. His own perspective of the world significantly adds to his personal sense of alienation.

The novel covers the incidents happening within the period of three days almost around Christmas time when Holden, a sixteen-year-old teenager, is expelled from his third prep-school due to his inability to pass from his subjects. He doesn’t want to go home and confront his parents, so he travels to New York with an aim of reaching at a decision about his future. He acts to be the “man-about-town,” sometimes humorously and sometimes pitifully, but always charged with solitude and isolation (Stevenson,1957,p.216). The shift from educational microcosm to macrocosm of a metropolitan city is solely sufficient enough to demonstrate his alienation, leading to his physical and emotional breakdown at the end of the novel. But a moment of epiphany revives him and enables him to complete his journey. Holden, like Ulysses, undergoes a figurative death and revival. His search has been for identity: wherein he doubts his place in a society he considers to be insincere or, in his own terms, “phony,” and he manages to come out with newly-acquired wisdom and the essential power to use it. Holden unwaveringly pursues the example of the classic hero. But his quest is distinctively modern because it does not consist of a physical test but an intellectual adaptation to his own culture. As Joseph Campbell states in *Transformations of Myth Through Time*, “If there is a path, it is someone else’s path, and you are not on the adventure”(Campbell,1990,p.211). Holden’s path is completely his own, and proceeds on it in his own respective way, thus designing an entirely modern type of quest.

Holden’s quest for orientation, like Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, renders him incapable of establishing connection with the adults as well as with those close to his own age (Magill,1991,p.105). His alienation is emphasized in his communication with cab drivers, classmates and women; nobody manages to comprehend what he utters and yet nobody pays attention to his solitude and isolation. He feels so alone that he ineffectively invites taxi drivers to have drinks with him, and telephones his old chaps after midnight only to give him company. His alienation is, partly, because of his failure to observe things from the eyes of other people. Holden’s estrangement is also demonstrated through the deserted and solitary scenes he passes over; the sleeping dormitory, empty hotel lobby and isolated streets all add to his alienation and estrangement (Magill,1991,p.105).

The most prevalent criticisms on *The Catcher in the Rye* involve the adolescence and recurrent attitude of the leading character, Holden Caulfield. Anne Goodman states that during the natural course of a long novel, the reader would start to grow tired of a character like Holden. Goodman commented that “Holden was not quite so sensitive and perceptive as he, and his creator, thought he was”(Goodman,1951,p.20). Some critics emphasize the fact that Holden has dropped out of three preparatory schools, and they use this to make a point that he is not completely prepared to enter into adulthood. David Stevenson commented that the novel was written “as the boy’s comment, half-humorous, half agonizing, concerning his attempt to recapture his identity and his hopes for playing a man-about-town for a lost, partially tragic, certainly frenetic weekend”(Stevenson,1957,p.216). On the other hand, reviewer Charles Kegel asserted that the novel could be read as Holden Caulfield’s “quest for communicability with his fellow man, and the hero's first person after-the-fact narration indicates . . . he has been successful in his quest”(Kegel,1963,p.53).

Even though he expects love and sympathy from other people, he quickly reaches at a conclusion and severely judges almost all of the people he encounters. He criticizes the entire humanity through the

upsetting incidents he inflicts upon himself. He abhors the human inclination to stay in groups, and he speaks angrily of his classmates:

Everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques. The guys that are on the basketball teams stick together, the Catholics stick together, the goddam intellectuals stick together. Even the guys that belong to the goddam Book-of-the-Month Club stick together (Salinger, 2001,p.170).

Then he demonstrates his dislike for his father's occupation as a lawyer when he comments, "All you do is make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot" (Salinger, 2001, p 223). He is different from students as well as professionals. As Jonathan Baumbach puts it: "By the time that he is finding fault with Sir Laurence Olivier and Christ's disciples, the reader realizes that something is definitely wrong"(Baumbach,1965,p.299). Holden is evidently an egotist "trapped in the web of his own highly individualistic discriminations ...away from the objective world into the world of his own fantasies"(Amur,1969,p.342). Unable to establish any meaningful relationship with the people around him, Holden considers that the best thing to do for him would be to leave the city and travel to the west. He says, "I could get a job at a filling station ... pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody"( Salinger, 2001, p.257). Huckleberry Finn speaks of a similar intention when he realizes that he can no longer tolerate society: "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me, and sivilise me, and I can't stand it. I been there before"(Twain,1994,p.220). However, even if there has been a place where he could stay in a deaf mute, Holden could not survive without the company of other people. Holden is still trapped in a prison: his character as a mature adult is barely shaped, and he understands how different he is from other people. Even though Seymour Glass is a well-educated and sophisticated version of an outsider, his solution of committing suicide to end his misery is truly not a rational choice in Holden's point of view. Rather, Holden seriously embraces the self-image of rebel, although he has no idea about what to do or where to go with it. He looks completely lost. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, aptly points out: "It is only those who know neither an inner call nor an outer doctrine whose plight truly is desperate; that is to say, most of us today, in this labyrinth without and within the heart" (Campbell,1949,p.23). It is interesting to state here that the communal features, which Holden verbally revolts against, had come to be the issue of the youth in the counter culture of the 1960s. Compliance, military dominance, self-restrain for financial advantage are all distasteful and repulsive to Holden as well (Lundquist,1979,p.67).

Holden's use of language also serves to highlight an important distinction between two worlds – the degenerated materialistic world and Holden's personal world of innocence. In the book, Holden makes use of both vulgar and learned idioms. His rude and vulgar speech his self-possessive, verbalized recognition of the weird values of his prep school mates; but in his personal and private world, which includes a secret goldfish, his dead brother, his sister Phoebe, Jane Callagher, the nuns, and all animals, he makes use of a literate and articulate English. The literary accuracy, with which Holden makes use of vulgar language in a common world, is varyingly detached, uncaring and phony, and educated speech of his private world beautifully surfaces when he describes the way he met with Jane Callagher:

The way I met her, this Doberman pinscher she had used to come over and relieve himself on our lawn, and my mother got very irritated about it. She called up Jane's mother and made a big stink about it. My mother can make a very big stink about that kind of stuff (Salinger,2001,p.40).

The novel, from the very beginning till the end, is full of Holden's dislikes and repulsion, and his primary repulsion is phoniness and hypocrisy of any kind. To start with, Holden is not upset that he is being flunked out of Pencey Prep because it is "so goddamn full of phonies": the principal, the wealthy trustee, Mr. Spencer the history teacher, and students. Mr. Spencer is an agreeable old man whose Mr. Chips act is only a minor twist from his sincere care for his students. The trustee, on the

other hand, is such a downright phony that Holden thinks that the most suitable remark on him is the one uttered by a student during the trustee's speech in church: a "terrific fart"(Salinger,2001,p. 23). Even the commercial advertisements which promote Pencey Prep are phony: "always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence...And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: 'Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men.' Strictly for the birds"(Salinger,2001,p .4). Holden fails to come up with anyone there who is sensible and reformed. And although almost all of its students are from well-to-do families, it is, in Holden's opinion, crowded with frauds. "The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has – I'm not kidding" (Salinger,2001,p.7).

Holden considers everlasting childhood to be a way of getting away from our phony culture and the adult world. He is quite reluctant to go down the 'crazy cliff' and to dive headlong into the world of adults which appears to be so phony, dreadful and challenging. Salinger perceives that the effort for self-identity is particularly confusing during the period of adolescence. The self should try to achieve wholeness and unity with people; but, however, Holden's odyssey continues, and after watching the Christmas show at Radio City Music Hall, his repulsion intensifies when he says "guys carrying crucifixes and stuff all over the place...I said old Jesus probably would've puked if He could see it – all those fancy costumes and all"(Salinger,2001,p.178). Holden's comment of the movie is not less critical and disapproving. He says: "all I can say is, don't see it if you don't want to puke all over yourself"(Salinger,2001,p.180). He further comments on phoniness:

You take somebody that cries their goddam eyes out over phony stuff in the movies, and nine times out of ten they're mean bastards at heart. I'm not kidding... Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will (Salinger,2001,pp.181,183).

And when he was sitting at the nightclub, he does not fail to recognize the phoniness of this place and makes the following comment -

If you sat around there long enough and heard all the phonies applauding and all, you got to hate everybody in the world, I swear you did. The bartender was a louse, too. He was a big snob. He didn't talk to you at all hardly unless you were a big shot or a celebrity or something. If you were a big shot or a celebrity or something, then he was even more nauseating (Salinger,2001,p.185).

Holden himself felt so nauseated that he almost becomes physically sick. He is thoroughly depressed and dejected with the world of adults and it makes him so repulsive that he feels like vomiting at it and everything else in it. He does not belong in this world and does not want anything to do with it. This idea of being a misfit renders Holden more emotional and he even starts crying when he realizes his messed up life. He says, "When I finally got down off the radiator [in the restroom of the club] and went out to the hat-check room, I was crying and all. I don't know why, but I was. I guess it was because I was feeling so damn depressed and lonesome"(Salinger,2001,p.198). Holden's alienation and estrangement originate from his sense of being disconnected from his parents, friends, school and community. Ernest Jones asserts that Holden's predicament has been quite common to every emotional adolescent for the last two centuries. He regards it as a phase of growing up, an indication and insight of alienation. Explaining Holden's reason for nausea, he states that "with his alienation go assorted hatreds – of movies, of night clubs, of social and intellectual pretension, and so on. And physical disgust: pimples, sex, an old man picking his nose are all equal cause for nausea"(Jones,1990,p.7). However, Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr. attract attention to the present split between the individual and his society.

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 an alien. To

“cure” Holden, he must be given the contagious, almost universal disease of phony adulthood; he must be pushed over that “crazy cliff”(Heiserman & Miller, 1999, p.10).

Even though he fails to communicate and blend in with the people he sees around himself, Holden has somebody in his life that he can depend on and ask for guidance. It is his English teacher from Elkton Hills School. Mr. Antolini is young, intelligent, supportive, and charming, and Holden has genuine respect for him. Sometimes, Holden thinks he is a bit too clever though, but, still, he turns to him for advice. He pays him a visit after he leaves Phoebe. Mr. Antolini is very kind and nice to Holden. After listening to Holden’s side of incidents befallen upon him, he feels genuinely concerned and provides him the following advice:

I have a feeling that you’re riding for some kind of a terrible, terrible fall. But I don’t honestly know what kind... This fall I think you’re riding for—it’s a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn’t permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement’s designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn’t supply them with. Or they thought their own environment couldn’t supply them with. So they gave up looking (Salinger, 2001, pp. 242, 244).

And then when he finished, he scribbles something on a piece of paper for Holden which was written by a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Stekel, who declared: “The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one”(Salinger, 2001, p. 244). Additionally, he advises Holden thus:

you’re going to have to find out where you want to go. And then you’ve got to start going there... And I hate to tell you, ... but I think that once you have a fair idea where you want to go, your first move will be to apply yourself in school. You’ll have to. You’re a student--whether the idea appeals to you or not. You’re in love with knowledge... Among other things, you’ll find that you’re not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You’re by no means alone on that score, you’ll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now (Salinger, 2001, pp. 245-246).

But after this excellent advice, Holden goes off to sleep on the Antolinis’ divan, only to wake up suddenly and to discover Mr. Antolini caressing his head. Paternal love appears to be very frightening and unusual for Holden that he starts wondering if Mr. Antolini has evil intentions, and the feeling bothers him so much that he abandons him and hurriedly flees Mr. Antolini’s home. Holden goes to Grand Central Station, sleeps on the bench feeling “more depressed than [he] ever was in [his] whole life”(Salinger, 2001, p. 252). Holden hits rock bottom. When he wakes up in the morning, he starts to think maybe he jumped to hasty conclusions about Mr. Antolini’s conduct. Holden appears as if he has lost all his purpose and reason. He says “Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I’d never get to the other side of the street. I thought I’d just go down, down, down, and nobody’d ever see me again”(Salinger, 2001, p. 256). This frightens Holden, and he starts contemplating about his brother Allie again, and asking Allie not to let him vanish. In an informative article entitled “Alienated Person in Literature,” psychiatrist Bella van Bark speaks of this ‘vanishing’ phenomenon as being typical feature of the alienated person and includes Holden as a wonderful example of this side of alienation (Van Bark, 1961, p. 191).

It is at this point in the story that Holden resolves to go west and pretend to be a deaf-mute, but, he realizes that he must first say goodbye to his dear sister, Phoebe. Going to her school, he leaves a message for her and demanding her to meet him during lunch-time in the park. But even the school makes him feel depressed. He notices that someone had written offensive words on the wall.

That’s the whole trouble. You can’t ever find a place that’s nice and peaceful, because there isn’t any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you’re not

looking, somebody'll sneak up and write "Fuck you" right under your nose (Salinger,2001,p.264).

Nevertheless, Phoebe gets message and meets Holden at the park. When Holden reveals her his plans to go to West and to work on a ranch in Colorado, even though she doesn't approve of his decision, Phoebe gives him her Christmas money to cover his travel expenses. Moreover, she also realizes that Holden feels very low-spirited and lonely. Therefore, she tells him that she will leave school, pack her suitcase, and accompany him. Although Holden is very touched by his sister's genuine and unconditional love, he cannot allow her to go away with him. At this point Holden displays a sense of responsibility that we have not seen before. He admits that he is his sister's caretaker and that he should make sure Phoebe returns back to school. Therefore, he puts his plan to go away on hold and promises to come home and face his parents.

The novel ends in an enigmatic and unclear manner. It is vague whether Holden will conform to the assurance of recovery that is indicated as he looks at the carousel. Holden's concluding words -"Don't tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" - implies that he is still troubled by the very problems he has encountered with from the start of the novel. He appears to be frightened and lonely, and he still feels dreadful of human interaction. His concluding remarks, on the other hand, indicates that he has started to get rid of the inexplicable skin of skepticism which he has built around himself. He has started to appreciate people around him rather than to reject them. His reminiscence - "missing everybody" - demonstrates that he is not as harsh and suppressed as he had been at the beginning of the novel. Pointing out this dilemma of Holden, Alfred Fowler states that "According to this searching interpretation, Holden is a truly tragic figure, a wanderer with no place to call his own, a pilgrim kept forever from Jerusalem"(Fowler,1957,p.196).

## Conclusion

Every person Holden encounters, with the exception of these three nuns, fails to meet with the criteria Holden seeks in healthy and sound interactions. Therefore he has no other choice but to alienate and estrange himself from the company of other people. As Pamela Hunt Steinle argues, "readers of the novel could construe Holden's sensation of 'disappearing' as well as his reliance on his dead brother's support as evidence of insipient rather than an imaginative preservation of self ... Yet this craziness is not only the consequence of Holden's alienation from society but also the very expression of that alienation"(Steinle,2009,p.98). The reader, noticing from the very start where the book will come to a conclusion, cannot help but wonder why Holden is locked up in that mental institution. He simply wants to retain his individual identity and does not wish to behave the way his society expects him to.

Literary critics tend to take a different stand with regard to Holden's inherent predicament. Hubert Cohen, in an article published in *Modern Fiction Studies*, asserts that Holden is "sick in body and mind alike"(Cohen,1966,p.363). Other critics, in the same fashion, interpret Holden's bewilderment about masculinity and adulthood as a sign of psychological malady. Duane Edwards, for example, suggests that the readers come to be an accomplice in Holden's mental disturbance because "like the psychoanalyst analyzing a dream, the reader can analyze what matters most: the distortions"(Edwards,1977,p.554). Edwards misinterprets Salinger's notion of psychological issues and steps on a trap Salinger sets. Because, Salinger challenges the society's concepts of acceptable and objectionable behavior throughout the book as well as tackles with certain issues of the field of psychoanalysis.

Pamela H. Steinle asserts that readers must realize "that Holden does not criticize historically central values of individualism, family, democracy, and equality: he critiques their faulty *enactment* in American society and lambasts the tautological replacement of morality with *normality* and its corollary value for conformity"(Steinle,1991,p.131). Teenager has been a cultural creation. Teenagers, according to Thomas Hine, have "qualities - the things we love, fear, and think we know about the basic nature of young people - [that] constitute a teenage mystique: a seductive but damaging way of understanding young people. This mystique encourages adults to see teenagers (and young people to

see themselves) not as individuals but as potential problems”(Hine,1996,p.11). This is exactly the problem which Holden’s parents and teachers anticipate in Holden. They have no idea about how to approach him and to handle this problem. The most drastic course of action involves getting Holden admitted to a mental institution. Holden’s attempts render him a very enchanting and fascinating character and it also allows Salinger to challenge the price for manhood.

Since the second half of the twentieth-century, no American author has managed to enchant and to fascinate significant number of young readers more than Salinger, whose novel *The Catcher in the Rye* might only stand behind *Of Mice and Men* in the required reading lists of high schools. And his literary fiction has succeed in inspiring other promising writers as well; author Harold Brodkey, for instance, regarded the novel as it “the most influential body of work in English prose by anyone since Hemingway”(as cited in Brozan, 1991,p.26), and Stephen Whitfield, on the other hand, considers it as “the indispensable manual from which cool styles of disaffection could be borrows”(Whitfield,1997,p.568). Carol and Richard Ohmann applaud Salinger’s sagacity “in imagining these hurtful things, though not in explaining them” or in indicating how they may be rectified. *The Catcher in the Rye* thus “mirrors a contradiction of bourgeois society” and of “advanced capitalism,” which makes striking promises but disappoints in their achievement and fair division (Ohmann & Ohmann,1976,p.35). In this regard, readers are inspired somewhat to realize the urgent requirement for transformation, even if, they are not capable of understanding Holden’s reflections on the enactment of such change.

Paul Levine, commenting on Holden’s place in his society, regards him as “a misfit in society because he refuses to adjust” and because “he cannot pass through its ‘dark night of the soul’”(Levine,1958,p.97). Holden appears to match completely with psychologist Kenneth Keniston’s depiction in his *The Uncommitted Youth: Alienated Youth in American Society*: those who possess the most means to survive but has nobody in life to cherish; those who are the most financially and communally blessed but experience the most intense discomforts of alienation (Keniston,1965,pp.7-8). One reviewer, T. Morris Longstreth accused Holden himself for his own isolation and solitude “because he has shut himself away from the normal activities of boyhood, games, the outdoors, friendship”(Longstreth,1951,p.7). It is a fact that Holden dislikes schools like Pencey Prep, in which “you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques” (Salinger,2001,p.170). But Holden stays trapped in his own period, incapable of connecting the dots from those a small group of friends to a vast society that might warrant some modification and transformation.

According to Pamela Steinle, *The Catcher in the Rye* “is an indictment of adult apathy and complicity in the construction of a social reality in which the American character cannot develop in any meaningful sense beyond adolescence” (Steinle,1991,p.136). The books also fails to provide any desire that this predicament might be treated. Steinle found a

division . . . over whether to prepare adolescents for or to protect them from adult disillusionment. . . . In the postwar period . . . recognition of the increasing dissonance between American ideals and the realities of social experience has become unavoidable, and it is precisely this cultural dissonance that is highlighted by Salinger’s novel (Steinle,1991,p.131).

Although he desires to save others from falling down the cliff, Holden cannot “catch” himself from his own descent – in fact, Holden’s image of “catcher in the rye” itself is a mere illusion. The childhood innocence may be present outside the world of adulthood but the inevitable course of maturity will ultimately discover all children transformed into adult “insiders,” and participants in the greater communal conditions either by choice or unwillingly. In this regard, Holden’s desire to stay “outside” the degrading effects of adult society is again coherent with the myth of American Adam theme in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Henry James and William Faulkner.

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