
UNIT 1 THE AUTHOR AND THE PLOT

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: The Author as Recluse
- 1.2 Summary of the Novel
- 1.3 The Plot
- 1.4 Critical Analysis of the Plot
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to critically analyse the plot of the novel; also, the author's personality is discussed to make you understand the connection between the work and the psychology of its author.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE AUTHOR AS RECLUSE

For a novel, which was banned from the reading list of schools and colleges, *The Catcher in the Rye* has come a long way to make it to the cannon. It is only in the fitness of things that you should read the text as part of your course in American Novel. Its popularity apart, there are themes in the novel which are typically American: New York setting, growing up, adolescent nonconformity and final affirmation of the family as a lasting institution.

A word about its famous author. Jerome David Salinger who became the most avidly read author of his generation after the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* on July 16, 1951. Interested to know more about the protagonist of the novel Holden Caulfield, the critics keenly looked for the details of early life of the author; but Salinger remained obsessively elusive and silent, steadfastly refusing to talk or write about his life. He became famously reclusive.

But true to the best selling tradition, which was peculiarly American before it became truly international, the American public, even that part, which demanded that the book be not read, became "hungry" to possess the famously elusive Salinger. Till date, this authorial silence has not helped in knowing how far the book is an autobiographical enterprise- that is how many scenes and characters have cognates in actual events and in Salinger's own life. Even now a lot of speculative writing is done to link the details of Holden to the early life of Salinger-though in America the impulse to see fiction, not as fact or history, but as autobiography is questioned by critics as dubious in value.

At one point in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield remarks: 'What really knocks me out in 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. 'J.D. Salinger himself obviously does not share this attitude. In an age and country where writers delight in making extravagant, public appearances - 'wearing funny hats', to use James Dickey's phrase - he has lived a deliberately' reclusive life. No photos or biographical details appear on the dust jackets of his books, and he has consistently refused to be interviewed or to let his works be reprinted in anthology. He recently defended this policy of reticence. 'It is my rather subversive opinion that a writer's feelings of anonymity - obscurity are the

second-most valuable property on loan to him during his working years' virtually all that is known about Salinger's life is that he was born in New York in 1919 of a Jewish father and Irish mother, and now lives in New Hampshire with his second wife and two children.

Yet even without the usual paraphernalia of personal publicity, Salinger's prominence has been assured since the appearance of his (and still his only full-length) novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, in 1951, with its distaste for the blandness and 'phoniness' of urban middle-class culture the novel perfectly caught the mood of young Americans of the day. High-school and college students idolized and imitated Holden Caulfield much as their earlier counterparts had aped Hemingway's Jake Barnes or Scott Fitzgerald's Blanche Amory.

Subsequently Salinger published *Nine Stories* (sometimes titled *For Esme - with Love and Squalor*; 1953). Since then he has been working on what he calls 'a narrative series.....about a family of Settlers in twentieth-century New York the Glasser.' Any echoes of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga that his description may conjure up are entirely misleading. Salinger's narrative of the Glass family has so far been confined to a handful of cryptic and tantalizing fragments. Seymour Glass, the eldest child, is described on the day of his suicide in 'A perfect Day for Bananafish' in *Nine Stories*. Other members of the family appear in *Franny and Zooey* (1961), and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour! An Introduction* (1963) a total of four long short stories originally published in the *New Yorker*. Their theme is essentially an expansion of the basic situation of *The Catcher in the Rye*: The effort of the sensitive and intelligent individual to come to terms with the complacent ad-mass culture that surrounds him. That quality of sensitive innocence which Holden Caulfield retained beneath his rebellious mannerisms has developed into a note of religious mysticism.

At the moment Salinger's critical reputation varies wildly. He has been hailed as a great novelist and dismissed as a passing fad. *The Catcher in the Rye* is viewed by some as an established classic and by others as a dated piece of sentimentality. Salinger's later work have been greeted as the fertile preliminaries to some future masterpiece along the lines of Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* and cited as evidence of a dwindling and fading talent.

Moreover, Salinger was born in 1919 to Jewish parents. After being expelled from several private preparatory schools, he finally graduated from Valley Forge Military Academy in 1938. He then went to Ursinus College in 1938 only to stay there for just nine weeks. Not long after, enrolled in Whit Burnett's short-story writing class at Columbia University where he wrote "The young folks", a short story for class assignment. Burnett later published this story in the literary magazine *Story* in the spring of 1940. After brief appearance as a writer in the *University Kansas City Review* ("Go see Eddie") and *Collier's* ("The Hang of it"). Salinger started writing for *The New Yorker*. His writing career however, was halted for a brief period when he had been drafted into the army. He received training for counter intelligence and served in Europe till he was discharged in 1945. A series of stories from 'Bananafish' to "Pretty mouth and Green My eyes" appeared in *The New Yorker* which not only showed his consummate artistry but went on to be recognized, with such authors as John O'Hara and John Cheever, as the New York school of fiction. (The term is used to describe the sharp, ironic style that characterizes the fiction of these writers). After *The Catcher in the Rye*, he kept writing stories intermittently till 1961 when he published *Franny and Zooey* to a huge critical acclaim and public reception. He published another collection of previously published stories *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: an introduction*. He last published Seymour Glass story in *The New Yorker* in its issue of June 19, 1965. Salinger has since been completely silent.

1.2 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The Author and The Plot

The Catcher in the Rye opens in a sanatorium, where Holden is recuperating from a mental breakdown. Holden, all of sixteen years, begins by describing his expulsion from Pencey Prep, a select preparatory school, prior to Christmas vacation. He spends the following two days in hiding in New York City.

Holden's roommate at the School is Stradlater, a handsome, gross amorist. On Holden's last night, a Saturday night, he is in a frenzy of jealousy because Stradlater has dated up Jane Gallagher, with whom he is in love. Jane and Allie, who is Holden's dead brother, never appear in the novel. They with Phoebe constitute Holden's emotional frame of reference. Holden loves Jane, but never calls her up. Instead, he keeps calling Sally Hayes, whose manifest phoniness gives him "royal pain". When Stradlater is out with his date, Holden agrees to do his classroom composition for him. He writes a descriptive essay about his dead brother, Allie's baseball mitt.

Holden, who feels he has written about a subject dear to him, finds that Stradlater crudely rejects it. Holden tears the composition up and gets into a fight with Stradlater who gives him a bloody nose. Holden decides he cannot stay in Pencey any longer.

Holden goes to say goodbye to Mr. Spencer, his nice old history teacher. He tells Mr. Spencer that, though he could not do well in the school, he liked him. He then gets worried that while his teacher is saying edifying valedictory things to him, he becomes acutely concerned about the quarters of the ducks in the Central Park lagoon.

To delay confronting his parents about his expulsion, Holden decides to loiter in New York City. While on a train to Manhattan, he meets the mother of an unpopular student he knew at Pencey and purposely embellishes her son's reputation to spare her feelings. Once in the City, he ventures into an adult life: visiting a Jazz club, asking for drinks and trying unsuccessfully to lose virginity to a prostitute.

Dissatisfied he wanders through the Central Park to see what the ducks are doing. Keen to find them, he pokes in the Grass and nearly falls in the water. Shivering and apprehensive of getting Pneumonia, he sneaks into his parent's apartment to see his dear sister, Phoebe.

The clever, precocious Phoebe, all of ten years, functions as Holden's salvation. She keeps trying her hand at novel writing. When Holden tiptoes into Phoebe's room, he finds her asleep. After a good look at her notebooks, where he finds she has changed her middle name to Weatherfield from Josephine, he wakes up Phoebe. She opens her eyes and tells him excitedly about the role she is going to do in a school play, then she gets to know that Holden has been expelled from the school. She hits him with her fists and then cries. He tries to explain that the school was full of phonies, which really depresses him. "You don't like anything that is happening" she asks. He tells her about his wish to be a "Catcher in the Rye", to stand at the edge of the cliff where a thousand children play. He elaborates further, "what I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff... That is all I'd do all day." He then tells about his intention to go west.

Holden then meets Mr. Antolini, another teacher he admires; after listening to his words of advice, comes back disappointed by the latter's gestures. He then goes to Phoebe's school to leave a note, then sees some obscenities written on the walls of the building. Horrified that children may see them he erases the vulgarities. But he finds the same obscene graffiti on the walls of National History Museum. Despondent, he accepts the fact that the world will not change despite his efforts to keep innocence.

1.3 THE PLOT

Holden Caulfield is a sixteen year old American boy, cynical and rebellious but deeply sensitive. He is expelled from Pencey Prep, the exclusive School to which his parents have sent him, for his failure to work. One Saturday he returns early from an abortive fencing match (he managed to use all the team's equipment on the underground) and stands in the school grounds trying to inculcate a sense of sadness about leaving. He then goes to say goodbye to his history teacher Mr. Spencer, who is ill at home. The interview is embarrassing, for Mr. Spencer is anxious to justify himself for failing Holden in his history exams, he insists on rehearsing the boy's mistakes. Holden gets increasingly annoyed and takes advantage of the earliest opportunity to leave.

He goes to his room and reads until he is interrupted by Ackley, an insensitive youth who lives in the same dormitory. They are joined by Stradlater, Holden's handsome and good-natured room-mate. Stradlater is going out on a date that evening and wants Holden to write an English Composition for him. Holden agrees but is jealous when he learns that Stradlater is going out with Jane Gallagher, a girl whom he himself had almost fallen in love with the previous summer. After a desultory evening in the nearby town Holden returns to his room and writes Stradlater's composition. He finds himself thinking of Allie, his young brother who died several years before. When Stradlater's comes back Holden's jealousy about Jane Gallagher returns. He provokes a fight, which he loses badly.

On impulse he decides to run away from school without waiting for the end of term. He takes the train to New York, travelling part of the way with the mother of one of his classmates, he tells her extravagant and untrue stories about how popular her son is. On arrival in New York he checks in at a hotel, rather than going to his parents' flat to tell them about his expulsion. He is annoyed that it is too late at night to phone his younger sister Phoebe.

He spends a restless night. In the bar he is refused alcohol because of his age and flirts unsuccessfully with a group of girls from out of town. In his room he finds himself thinking about Jane Gallagher again and resolves to go out. He pays a brief lonely visit to a nightclub. Back at the hotel he is accosted by the liftman, who offers to send a prostitute to his room. Holden accepts but when the girl, Sunny, arrives he does not feel like sleeping with her. She is puzzled and angered, even though he insists on paying. Left alone, he sits in bed smoking and brooding until the liftman and Sunny return to extort more money from him. Holden objects but the man hits and rifles his wallet Holden goes to bed miserably.

In the morning he phones to make a date with Sally Hayes; he does not like the girl much, but is lonely and desperate for company. He breakfasts near Grand Central Station. During the meal he falls into conversation with two nuns and, on a sudden impulse, insists on giving them a charitable donation from his own dwindling reserve of money. He goes over to Broadway to buy theatre tickets for his date with Sally and a record for his sister Phoebe. He wanders around Central Park on the off-chance of meeting his sister, but is unlucky.

Despite his mixed feelings about Sally, he is pleased to see her at the theatre that afternoon. During the interval, however, she is joined by a sophisticated young college boy and Holden gets increasingly annoyed at their affectedly intellectual conversation. When the play is over he takes Sally skating. As they drink coffee afterwards he launched into an inarticulate tirade against conventional people. He ends up by proposing that she run away and live with him in the country. When she will not take his suggestion seriously, they quarrel and part in anger. Holden goes to a bar to meet an old school friend Carl Luce, an intelligent but supercilious young man. He is angered by Luce's air of amused condescension and starts another quarrel. He

sits in the bar alone getting drunk, before making an incoherent apologetic phone call to Salley, Wandering around Central Park he drops the record that he had bought for Phoebe.

The Author and The Plot

Anxious to see his sister, Holden takes the risk of creeping into his parents' flat. Phoebe is awake and tells him that his parents are out for the evening. They chat together, and Holden feels relaxed and cheered by her company. He phones Mr. Antolini, a former English teacher, and makes arrangements to stay the night at his house. Holden's parents return unexpectedly but he is able to sneak out of the flat unseen. Antolini and his wife greet him sympathetically, but the teacher warns Holden that he is a dangerously confused and directionless young boy. In the middle of the night Holden wakes to find Antolini stroking his hair. Assuming the man to be making a homosexual advance, he storms out of the house angrily and spends the rest of the night in the waiting room of Grand Central Station.

The next morning he walks through the city feeling tired, hung-over and nervous. At last he resolves to leave and seek some rural hideaway where he can live in peace and quiet. But before departing he wants to say goodbye to Phoebe, so he leaves a note at her school asking her to lunch with him. When she hears of his plan she is desperately insistent on being allowed to come as well. To placate her Holden takes Phoebe to the zoo; for all his confusion and anxiety, he still finds a strange pleasure in her company.

In a brief concluding chapter Holden gives a summary account of the end to his weekend as a runaway. He finally goes back to his parents and is sent to a psychiatric hospital. There he is visited by his elder brother. D.B., once a promising novelist but now a Hollywood scriptwriter.

1.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLOT

"The Central and controlling image of recent fiction is that of the rebel-victim.' Few American novels bear out Ihab Hassan's generalization more strikingly than '*The Catcher in the Rye*'. Salinger transforms an apparently simple account of a high-school dropout's weekend excursion in New York into a poignant expression of modern alienation. For all his confused immaturity Holden Caulfield is an ideal iconoclast: he rejects the simple-minded esprit de corps of Pencey Prep, the classic American success story embodied in his brother's career as a Hollywood script writer and the pseudo-intellectualism of chic middle-class New Yorkers.

Holden's witty and cynical impiety does not steer from either rational thought or simple bloody-mindedness. It is the result of an honest sensitivity a type of holy innocence that recurs as one of the central values in Salinger's fiction. Holden's absolute refusal to accept the Phoney' so later alienates him from the established way of life that he can identify only with the oddballs and losers. He sympathizes with the prostitute who comes to his hotel room and even with the pimp who beats him up. He admires the child like vulnerability and wisdom of phoebe and obviously more than half envies his dead brother, Allie. Unable to envisage any place for himself in society (the most he can manage is an extravagant fantasy about a cabin in the woods) he becomes society's victim. His only refuge, as the novel's closing pages reveal, is the mental hospital.

From this account it is obvious that Holden Caulfield is a twentieth-century version of those loner heroes so beloved by American novelists. Most critics have been struck by the parallels with Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* in particular. In each case a young boy narrates, in conversational idiom, his flight from society. Holden, of course, flies into the heart of New York rather than the world of nature. But even in the city he dreams that familiar dream which has so long haunted the American

imagination – the simple country life ennobled by honest manual labour and the joys of romantic love.

Yet at the time when *The Catcher in The Rye* first appeared readers were struck more by its topicality than its traditionality. It was linked with other rebellious works of the 1950s like Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Psychologists found in *The Catcher in the Rye* an embodiment of Erik Erikson's theory of the adolescent 'identity crisis', while sociologists saw it as an illustration of David Reisman's conception of American society as a 'Lonely Crowd'. On a simpler level, millions of young people recognized in Holden Caulfield an image of themselves. The book became a cult. As Lawrence Lipton has testified in the *Holy barbarians* (1960), it exerted a crucial influence on the Beat Generation. (In this connection it is interesting to note that Salinger, like the Beats, has subsequently trod the path toward mystical religion)

The book's very pertinence as a sign of its times has tended to obscure the question of its literary value. Viewed as a work of art, rather than a social or psychological document, *The Catcher in the Rye* raises considerable problems. It is, of course, a superb technical feat. Its rendition of New York life is a triumph of realistic observation: the atmosphere of shabby hotels or of Central Park on a winter dark is brilliantly conveyed. Moreover, Salinger shows a mastery of Holden's rhythm and idiom of speech that can at times rival Twain's use of Huck Finn as narrator. Yet the very invocation of Huckleberry Finn serves to underline the weaknesses of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The essence of Twain's achievement is, that, while appearing to reproduce the artless narrative of a fourteen-year-old boy, he in fact manages to establish a mature and detached attitude to his hero. Salinger, by contrast, seems to identify almost completely with Holden; the result is a book which often shares the immaturities of its hero.

Some critics have been troubled by the novel's streak of sentimentality and morbidity. Holden Caulfield's compassion for other people – one can see it in his encounter with the nuns in Grand Central Station – and his innocent love of his sister can be genuinely moving. Yet the total effect is exaggerated, as Alfred Kazin has complained, it is 'too obviously touching'. In a similar fashion, Holden's almost obsessive preoccupation with his dead brother is presented without critical detachment. In fact, Frank Kermode suggests that the novel has a 'built-in-death wish'. Other readers have felt that the book asks them to accept Holden on his own evaluation as the last sensitive person alive. The portraits of the insensitive adults are very convincing but is it really credible that in all his wanderings Holden should encounter nobody, whether peer or adult, who is intelligently sympathetic towards his problems? As Philip Roth has pointed out, this note of spiritual elitism has come to sound increasingly loud in Salinger's work: 'this place and time is seen as unworthy of those few precious people who have been set down in it only to be maddened and destroyed.'

1.5 SUMMING UP

The novel, *The Catcher in The Rye*, which was banned in the 1950's is being prescribed in the colleges and universities where American literature is taught. A critical analysis of the plot tells you that *The Catcher In The Rye* is a witty story where protagonist, Holden Caulfield has become a classic example like Huck Finn. The novel has exerted a crucial influence on the Beat Generation.

1.6 QUESTIONS

The Author and The Plot

1. Discuss Salinger's personality and his work.
2. Give a brief summary of the plot of *The Catcher In The Rye*.
3. *Critically analyse the plot of the novel.*
4. What are the special features of the prescribed novel.

UNIT 2 THE MAIN THEMES AND CHARACTERS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Adamic figure
- 2.3 Pastoralty
- 2.4 Evolution of preparatory school
- 2.5 From Sickness to Health
- 2.6 Main Characters
- 2.7 Holden Caulfield: A Critical Analysis
- 2.8 Summing Up
- 2.9 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the text you will be able to follow the evolution of the Adamic figure in the imagination of America. This figure, while defining American literature in very important ways, is closely linked to the theme of Pastoralty. We have made an attempt in this unit to show the linkage between these themes. At the end of the unit you will understand how Salinger makes use of these themes in the novel. From the title to the effective deployment of the portal metaphors an attempt is made to trace these themes. After reading this unit, you will understand: the evolution of preparatory school in the light of the changes brought by modernization in the role of some of the educating agencies. The preparatory school has appropriated to itself some of the functions of the family and other agencies like the Church. The narrative includes Salinger's subtle critique of the culture of the preparatory school in the novel.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Friends let us look into the background to the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*; there possibly is no better way of looking into it than with a possible consideration of the title. The words 'Catcher' and 'Rye' instantly invoke the pastoral ideal that has been integral part of American experience, as well as American imagination.

In American literature, particularly in American novel one often comes across the themes of civilization, spatiality or the frontier and pastoralty; they, apart from being focussed exclusively and intensely, are explored in their inter-connectedness. The importance of these themes has to do with the origin and idea of America itself.

Also one of the important aspects of the novel is the way it describes the atmosphere in the preparatory school. The reader cannot but notice the fact of its importance in the scheme of the novel. The novelist takes a hard look at the culture of the preparatory school. The protagonist too is made to speak about the school in unsatisfactory and inadequate terms.

There possibly are two meanings that could be read in the text :one is the general malaise or the psychic disturbances caused by the industrial or postindustrial societies. Characters who occasionally appear in the text, like the parents of Holden Caulfield particularly his lawyer- father, give indications of not only transferring their authority over their child to the preparatory school, but also having psyches which are

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deeply anxiety-ridden. The second meaning, which gives Holden Caulfield the context to his actions, is the large conformity which informs or controls the preparatory schools in America. Salinger, rather ingeniously, makes Holden to hop from prep school to prep school in search of that space not yet affected by conformist control and gives in the process the prevailing atmosphere of the preparatory school.

2.2 ADAMIC FIGURE

When the puritan set his foot on the American soil his desire was as much to flee from the malcontents of European civilization as to give pure forms to his ideal, the idea of living the life of New Testament. He began to see himself unencumbered by ancestry, and inheritances; he sees himself as a 'new personality', 'an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling ready to face and come to terms with the new environment with the help of his own unique and inherent resources. In the vocabulary of puritan ideology, he saw himself as an Adam, an American Adam.

But this new Adam met another pristine figure on the American soil, who did not carry any trace of European civilization; what more he was living a life more innocent than that prefigured by him. This encounter gives the Adamic figure his first challenge and the American experience its ambiguity. However hard he tried to be different and begin his life anew, he was only reminded that he carried with him the traces of a civilization from which he wanted to flee. So he entered into a problematic relationship with the Indian; seeing the Indian as the other and at the same time trying to ingest the values of the Indian he encountered almost at every step on the territory. The civilizational man and the Indian in his natural environment, their interesting encounter over time, gave American Literature its major themes: the frontier, the pastoral and the dialectical images of machine and the garden. The Adamic figure variously became the source for the American writer to advance his theme and craft. From Hawthorne and Melville to Mark Twain and Salinger he constitutes an integral part of American fictional imagination.

2.3 PASTORALITY

The pastoral ideal has remained the persistent, even obsessive, theme in American literature. America as the new Eden, as a haven for those seeking perfect freedom, as a land in which such freedom is associated with a pastoral or purely natural dream, illuminates the imagination of large number of American novelists. That vision of innocence is the key ingredient in the American novel.

The 'little house on the prairie' or a hut, invokes the dream of magical existence. The house, in the vast prairie, while being the image of the world, is associated with innocence, spirit, freedom and even physical strength. These associated virtues of the pastoral have inspired writer after writer from Hawthorne, Melville and Thoreau to Mark Twain and Jack London. If Melville found the sea as the source of irresistible appeal and meaningful mystery in Twain, meaningful experience lies in mythical places, the river, the northwest territory, even in black Jim

The postwar novelist might not have stayed in a hut on the prairies, may be by the time he arrived on the scene, the prairies have been filled or spaced out and the frontier receded to closure. He felt it in the memory and as an archetype which made the loss all the more intense. This made him set his protagonist on search for the mythical locale in the next town, road or outpost. The obsessive seeking of a spatial dimension recurs in much of modern American novel. Though such seeking out of space found its archetypal expression in Moby-Dick, what marks the search and mobility of modern protagonist is a note of despair. For him the pastoral is only in

memory, the prairie is a lost world. The reason why he conveys his experience of limiting even stifling space through portal metaphors, and expresses the need to find a door which would liberate him from restraint to and sell him on a road to renewal and recreation.

So in the postwar novel, you will find versions of the pastoral. Many a novelist would set his protagonist, trying to come out of the his limiting civilized space, be it school, or some such civilizing institution, towards that magical locale where he could have feel of his dispossessed Eden. In Malamud's *A New life*, S. Levin, a representative European culture, seeks renewal, goes whale hunting, leather stocking experiences, floating on Mississippi raft, hunting 'big game', negating with every outing cultural assumption he has. You have many protagonists who, following Huck Finn's lighting out for Montana territory, reject the civilizational trap as unconnected to any primitive sources of energy. Brautigan's Trout fishing Kesy's *One flew Over Cuckoo's Nest* only testifies this need to break from the stifling traps. Friends, coming back to the point of relating *The Catcher in the Rye* to the above material discussed as background we will start with a consideration of the title of the text.

Let us start with the portal metaphor or reference to the door, which we have discussed above. Holden is not worried about his flunking, but about the stifling environment of the school. He hates Pencey Prep; the fact of his not being able to adjust to any of the preparatory schools, brings out the clear indifference, even hostility of the preparatory school. The hostility is obliquely expressed through his persistent rejection of his surroundings as 'phony' and his desire to go west, to space out. He would not like to do anything but allow his self to reach out in the rye fields, protect innocence and be part of it. His recurrent use of the word 'phony', his reference to various experiences with fellow students and other acquaintances as depressing point to a lack in and around the school, a lack which could be interpreted as the lost virtue of innocence, freedom and magical feeling associated with the pastoral. He, hence, would like to cross the door of the school to engage himself in the acts of renewal. The freedom of the American west and the vast rye fields just suit the intentions of Holder.

2.4 EVOLUTION OF THE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

A brief history of the evolution of the preparatory school in societies like the American society would help us in furthering our analysis. Analyzing the role of the preparatory school in terms of relating the individual to the American society Daniel F. Davis and Norman Langer articulate the views of David Riesman in the following words:

As societies become more technologically advanced... parents give up some of their authority to other institutions such as schools, the mass media, and peer groups....Riesman called this society "other directed"... other directed societies lead to stability and tolerance, but also foster conformity and loss of individuality.

Holden attended three preparatory schools: whooton, Elkton Hills and Pencey. These schools are representative enough for Salinger to delineate specific ambience of the preparatory school. Holden, in spite of his inability to adjust to the demands of the school, stays within the finely tuned collegiate culture of dates and movie going. Through the description of Holden's actions that Salinger situates all those agencies that seek to influence his development such as peer group, parents, and the mass media.

David Riesman traces the development of the preparatory school in his book *Faces in the Crowd*

The Main Themes and Characters

Livingston School, a boy's preparatory school... draws on the top of the Social system. Its masters are mostly graduates of Ivy League colleges....

The evolution of single-sex school boarding school has specific function. This kind of school was created in the nineteenth century "to educate, socialize, and monitor the male offspring of the professional and business classes". As modern societies began to develop in diverse industrial and administrative structures, traditional institutions like the church and the family began to cede some of their powers and functions. One such function which came to be transferred from them was the duty of educating and controlling the children. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries these institutions were supplanted, if not wholly replaced, by a whole range of new institutions like the school, the college and the firm. These new institutions became places where the young future professionals got extended periods of training and socialization.

Preparatory Schools can be seen in the context of the evolution of these new institutions in modern societies. They draw from the culture of the well-to-do social groups of the whole nation and blend into a kind of homogeneity. The school fits them to "behavioral uniform signifying to the world the social group to which they belong or aspire to belong." The endeavor is usually to cultivate "manly, christian character, having regard to moral and physical as well as intellectual development." Salinger, as it were to illustrate this motto of the preparatory school, includes the promotional statement of the Pencey prep which reads, "since 1888 we have been moulding boys into splendid and clear thinking young men".

The portrait of the culture of the Preparatory school is realized mainly through two ways. First is the way Holden invariably debunks the assessment of preparatory School customs and traditions. Second is Holden's ritualistic encounters with particular members of his peer group. These encounters assume ritualistic significance when they are repeated like exercises and interspersed with commentaries. Holden's commentaries on the value system of Pencey prep usually have the conclusion that the official vision of the school as cooperative caring family is a mask for an ideology of intense competitive struggle between its individual members. The idealization of the preparatory school contrasts sharply with Holden's expressed opinion of the ideology of the Pencey system. He describes to Sally Hayes:

You ought to go to a boy's school sometime...everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques.... Even the guys that belong to the goddam Book-of-the-month club stick together.

The philosophy of the preparatory school is also expressed in the metaphor of life as a game which is conducted according to the rules of fair play. The headmaster of Pencey, Dr. Thurmer, tells the same to Holden when he goes and tells that he is thrown out. "You should play it according to the rules", tells the headmaster. Holden's response to the advice just exposes the contradiction.

Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hotshots are, then it's game; all right -I'll admit that. But you get on the other side...then what's a game about it?

While such remarks of Holden as the above expose the contradictions of the culture of the preparatory school, he also exploits the system. He is very much the college man-about-town, adept at telephone dating techniques, habits of night clubs and hotel lounges. His ability to fathom the mind-set of his peers gives him an awareness of social and psychological messages. The way Holden negotiates various mediating agencies endears him to the readers.

2.5 FROM SICKNESS TO HEALTH

One of the mistakes in reading 'The Catcher in the Rye' is to assume—since Holden is under the treatment of a psychoanalyst—that the novel closes with some unsettled psychoanalytical questions concerning Holden's experiences and his future. This is not the case at all. Holden has been sick, but he has already been cured, and the resources of his personality are strong at the end, so strong that it is he, not the psychoanalyst, who possesses the insights. This can be seen in the three seemingly puzzling statements he makes in the final chapter. The first is when he responds to the doctor's question of whether or not he is going to apply himself when he goes back to school, by saying, "I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it?" (p.276). The second is when his brother D.B. asks him what he thinks about the story he has just finished telling, and Holden replies, "If you want to know the truth, I don't know what I think about it" (pp 276–277). And the third is when he ends by saying that he misses everybody he told about, even the pimp who beat him up after a pathetic encounter with a prostitute at the Edmont Hotel, and adds "don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (p.277). The meaning of these statements may be puzzling, but their purpose is not. They intended as Zen riddles or Koan, designed to present intellectual impasses that serve to indicate, sharpen, and define the elusiveness and indefinability of life. As Allan W. Watts explains it in *The Way of Zen*, "when the disciple comes to the final point where the Koan absolutely refuses to be grasped, he comes also to the realization that life can never be grasped, never possessed or made to stay still whereupon he 'let's go and this letting go is the acceptance of life as life——'". This is the insight, the illumination Holden has reached by the time his story is over and he has left his precept—laden anxieties behind.

Holden is thus not, as many of Salinger's critics have maintained, a tragic figure, a victim of modern society. He is not mentally defeated at the end, and he has surprisingly come to terms with the world in which he must live. Salinger's gospel is a positive one, showing "how exposure of the sensitive soul to the darkness of this present age can lead not only to sickness but also to healing."

What actually happens to Holden Caulfield as he moves from sickness to health in *The Catcher in The Rye* was not understood by most reviewers when the novel came out. Given the reputation and huge sales the book eventually achieved, it is surprisingly to look at the early reviews and discover that so many of them were negative, and quite a few even hostile. Jocelyn Brooke, writing in *The New Statesman and Nation*, was something of an exception, coming close to describing the novel as it is: "This is an odd, tragic and at times an appallingly funny book, with a taste of its own." The opinion of R.P. Charaues in *The Spectator* is more typical. "Intelligent, humorous, accurate and sympathetic in observation, the tale is rather too formless to do quite the sort of thing it was evidently intended to do." And in a direct attack on the book, Anne L. Goodman expresses an opinion she shared with a number of other critics in 1951. "The book as a whole is disappointing, and not merely because it is a reworking of a theme that one begins to suspect must obsess the author"

2.6 MAIN CHARACTERS

The main characters in this novel are as follows:

- i) Holden Caulfield – a seventeen year old boy who believes that world is dominated by 'phonies' and is in frantic search of some refuge;

- ii) Stradlater – a classmate at Pencey Prep whom Holden regards as a lecher;
- iii) Mr. Spencer – one of Holden's teachers who is kind but ineffectual
- iv) Phoebe Caulfield – Holden's younger sister who is sweet, innocent and precocious; and
- v) Mr. Antolini – a former teacher of Holden who is bright and sophisticated

2.7 HOLDEN CAULFIELD : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The *Catcher in the Rye* appeared in a sober and realistic time, a period when (by comparison with the 1960s) there was a general disenchantment with ideologies, with schemes for the salvation of the world. Salinger's novel, like the decade for which it has become emblematic, begins with the words, "If you really want to hear about it," words that imply a full, sickening realization that something has happened that perhaps most readers would not want to know about. What we find about directly in the novel is, of course, what has happened to Salinger's hero narrator, Holden Caulfield; but we also find out what has happened generally to human ideas on some simple and ultimate questions in the years following World War II. Is it still possible to reconcile self and society? Is it any longer possible to separate the authentic from the phony? What beliefs are essential for survival? What is the role of language in understanding the nature of our reality? Is it possible to create value and endow the universe with meaning? That Salinger deals with these questions in one way or another point to a problem with *The Catcher in the Rye* that has often been ignored or simply not taken seriously – that the climate of ideas surrounding the novel is dense, and that the book is not just the extended and anguished cries of a wise guy adolescent whose main trouble is that he does not want to grow up.

From the start in *The Catcher in the Rye*, we are struck with the bleakness of Holden Caulfield's life. His existence seems so gratuitous and contingent, so absurd and without apparent meaning that we wonder where Salinger could possibly go with such a story (or why he would want to go any where with it? Holden is so full of despair and loneliness that he is literally nauseated most of the time. He realizes how different he is from other people, yet his own personality barely exists. He is filled with a penetrating nothingness, and for all the advice he gets, no one can tell him what he must do. There is no rational way he can discover a way out of his dilemma, yet he must take action of some sort, and suicide is not it.

In describing Holden's predicament, one cannot avoid using existential platitudes, for Holden is, undoubtedly in the midst of an existential crisis. Yet for all his despair, Holden is not a character who adequately illustrates the bitter pessimism and seriousness of a character out of the writings of Sartre not does he convey the simple message of popular existentialism as suggested by Camus – choose a path, commit yourself, be yourself, realize your own dignity. Salinger conceives of character much the same way Sartre and Camus do, but his use of language, his humor, and his ultimate willingness to look elsewhere for his answers make him a far different writer, even though he begins at the same point: The world with all its obscenities.

The way Holden Caulfield sees the world is stated in the novel's most famous line: "If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn't rub out even half the 'suck you' signs in the world" (pg.262). It is ironic that this sentence is the one that is most responsible for the various bannings of the novel in the years following its appearance. The Detroit Police did not understand Salinger's point at all when they pulled the book out of the city's bookstores – that the controversial line, instead of being obscenity itself, is directed, as almost all of Salinger's fiction is, against obscenity. Holden tries to explain to us not only what is offensive, disgusting, and

repulsive to him in human behavior, but also what goes against prevailing notions of modesty and decency. "The things Holden finds so deeply repulsive are things he calls 'phony,'" writes Dan Wakefield, "and the 'phoniness' in every instance is the absence of love, and, often, the substitution of pretense for love."² Holden is a rebel, but he is hardly a rebel without a cause. He begins in a screaming rage against a society of convention, immorality, and the patently false, but he ends by establishing love and acceptance as a saving grace.

When Holden first introduces himself to us, it is difficult to believe that he is going to establish anything. He comes across as the classic screw-up. He has been thrown out of a series of schools, the latest being Pencey Prep in Agerstown, Pennsylvania, and he is undergoing psychiatric treatment in California. A remark by Stradlater, his old roommate at Pencey seems to pretty, well define his character. 'You don't do one damn thing the way you're supposed to' (p53) – Holden fails all of his subjects but one (English) his last term at Pencey, he succeeds in alienating himself from the other students, and he even fails as manager of the fencing team (he loses the team equipment on the subway). Yet he is a character type who has his own fascination for the reader. As Arthus Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr, emphasize, "American Literature seems fascinated with the outcast, the person who defines traditions in order to arrive at some pristine knowledge, some personal integrity.

Integrity – or at least frankness – is one of Holden's most engaging qualities as he starts his story with an extended flashback to the day he left Pencey, the kind of school that advertises itself in the back pages of certain magazines with a picture of a guy on a horse jumping over a fence (Holden says that he has never seen a horse anywhere near the place). It is the day of the year's last football game, but Holden goes instead to see "Old Spencer," his history teacher, who asked him to stop by before leaving school. Spencer, in a question that echoes throughout the book, asks Holden, "What's the matter with you, boy" (p.14)? As Spencer tries to lecture him that he flunked history because he simply did not know anything, Holden's mind wanders to a question of his own, one he returns to time after time in the novel. He wonders what happens to the ducks in the lagoon near Central Park South when winter comes. It is now winter for Holden, and what will happen to him?

Much has been made critically of Holden's obsession with the ducks, and in some ways the symbolism seems too obvious. But the ducks are another one of Salinger's signs, and they suggest a verse from the New Testament; "The foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Holden, in his perception of the phony, in his outrage against the obscene, and in his own ineptitude is estranged from both his society and nature. He is not, in this respect, a Christ figure, but he is most certainly a fool for Christ. Once he leaves Pencey, he does not have a place to rest, and his odyssey becomes the story not of a seeker after truth so much as the story of one who seeks relief from his madness through some saving grace, through some healing stroke.

Holden has often been compared to earlier characters in Literature. A substantial amount has been written showing his relationship to Huckleberry Finn – a connection that seems obvious enough given the first – person narration, the colloquial language, the emphasis on the problems of adolescence and the motif of the journey." Holden has also been compared to the hero of Goethe's *The sorrows of young*, Byron's *Childe Harold in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and, more significantly, to Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, in *The Great Gatsby*. The latter point has considerable validity, because both *Gatsby* and Holden are model characters of innocence and illusion in American Literature, and as one critic has stressed, "The central common characteristic of both *Gatsby* and Holden is adherence to a powerful, abiding illusion, while swirls around them a corrupt, hostile, essentially phony world." Salinger even goes so far as to have Holden say, "I liked *Ring Lardner* and *The Great Gatsby* and all I did, too. I was crazy about *The Great Gatsby* – old *Gatsby* old sport" (p 183). Surprising similarities to William Saroyan's *The Human Comedy* (1943) have been noted.⁶ In both novels there is an objectionable boy named Ackley, and the name of Saroyan's

hero, Homer Macauley, bears some metrical and orthographical similarity to Holden Caulfield. Each of the characters has a sister and two brothers (with one of the brothers either dead or dying), each gets into trouble in a history course, and each has an encounter with a prostitute.

But the similarities, as great as they are end there between Saroyan and Salinger: Holden is a much more memorable character than is Homer Macauley, and *The Catcher in the Rye* is, without argument, a much more important book than is *The Human Comedy*: its story is more subtle, its structure more complete, and its humor more outrageous.

Holden himself suggests another literary comparison that has not been given much emphasis in interpretations of the novel. About half-way through his monologue, Holden says, "If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus was that lunatic and all, that live in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times s much as the Disciples, that poor bastard" (p.130) **Holden is the lunatic in the tombs. He lives surrounded by death. One of his obsessions is his younger brother, Allie, who died from Leukemia at the age of ten.** Another one of his obsessions is James Castle, a boy at one of his former schools. Eikton Hills, who committed suicide by jumping from the window after being cruelly harassed by some of the other students. Holden is also like the lunatic in another way – he keeps hunting himself as he masochistically puts himself in one situation after another that can only lead to pain and revulsion. He goes places where he should not be, he calls up people who do not really want to see him or even begin to understand him, and he dwells on thoughts that can only cause him pain. Like the lunatic, he is possessed by not one demon, but many (the lunatic's name is "Leagion" because of his multiple possession) – the demon of fate and death, the demon of emptiness and meaninglessness, the demon of guilt and condemnation, the demon of despair, and the demon of jealousy. The casting forth of these evil spirits is what his story ultimately comes down to.

The extent of his possession is indicated early in the book when he learns that his roommate Stradlater's date for the evening is Jane Gallagher, girl Holden met the summer before last and with whom he is vaguely and uncertainly in love. After Stradlater leaves, Holden sits in his room and begins to think about what Stradlater might do to Jane. "God, how I hated him—" Holden later explains. "Most guys at Pencey just talked about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time.....but old Stradlater really did it...That's the truth." (pp 55, 63). He is driven by his jealousy to provoke a fight with Stradlater, who knocks him down and bloodies his face – the first of several injuries that Holden manges to inflict on himself in the course of the novel. But he is unable to stop thinking of Jane and Stradlater, and his own sexual insecurities along with his despair over the obscenity he sees all around him (Stradlater had a way of calmly sweet – talking girls into believing that he actually cared for them). Send him off on a self-destruction spiral that, paradoxically, leads to his redemption at the end.

Holden's demonic possession is apparent when he catches the train to New York with the idea of staying in a cheap hotel until the day when his parents expect him home. A lady board the train at Trenton, notices the Pencey sticker on Holden's luggage, and asks him if he knows her son at the school. Holden automatically adopts another personality. He tells her that his name is Rudolph Schmidt, casually lies to her about how popular and respected her obnoxious son is, and explains his own early departure by saying he is going to have an operation for a brain tumor. He evokes sympathy from her, and she is pleased with what he had said about her son, but it is all deception. In a phony world, phoniness works, but Holden's actions become increasingly those of a madman who seems less and less in control of them.

He goes into a phone booth at Penn station, but he cannot think of any one he could reasonably call at that late hour. He gets a cab, mistakenly gives the driver his home address, asks him to turn around, and then asks him if he knows what happened to the

ducks in the winter. The driver thinks Holden is nothing more than a wise guy, and drops him off at the Edmont Hotel. Holden checks in, goes up to his room, and finds no comfort in his anonymity and isolation. He looks out his window and watches a transvestite dressing up and parading in front of a mirror in a room on the other side of the hotel. In another window he sees a man and woman squirting water at each other out their mouths. "Sex is something I really don't understand too hot" (p.82), he says. He impulsively decided to call up a woman named Faith Cavendish, a part time paste into, whose number he obtained from a Princeton student a few months before, and asks her if she would like to have a drink with him. She offers to meet him the next day, but he loses his courage and backs off.

Shaken by his encounters with the inexplicable and the obscene, he goes down to the bar in the Lavender room of the hotel and begins to think of his sister, Phoebe – one of Salinger's infuriatingly precocious children. "You should see her," Holden says, "You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life." (p.87) The same age as Allie was when he died – i.e. ten years – Phoebe, like him has had nothing but A's since she started school. She has learned the dialogue of her favourite movie, *The 39 steps*, by Henrt. And she writes books about a girl detective named "Hazzle" Weatherfield. Phoebe and Allie symbolize innocence to Holden, but they are more than that. A major theme in the *New Testament* is that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven one must have the purity of heart that can be achieved only by becoming like little children, or as the critic Robert G. Jacob has stated it, "For Salinger, childhood is the source of the good in human life; it is in that state that human beings are genuine and open this love for one another. It is when people become curious in their relationships to one another, become adults, those they become 'phony' and logical and come to love the reasons for love more than the loved person."

That Holden himself sees childhood as the source of good in human life is indicated in the title of the novel. At one point in his wanderings through New York, he sees a father, a mother, and their six-year-old son who had all apparently just come out of church. The parents are talking to one another, paying no attention to the child who is walking in the street, next to the curb, with traffic zooming by dangerously close. Disturbed and fascinated by the scene, Holden gets close enough to hear the boy singing a song. "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." Late that night he sneaks into his parents' apartment to see Phoebe and tries to explain to her why he has left school by saying that he did not like anything that was happening at Pencey. **She replies by suggesting that perhaps his problem is just that – that he does not like anything, that he does not want to become anything (a lawyer, for instance, like his father), and that he does not want to do anything.** Holden passes, and then he tells her what he would like to be. He asks her if she knows the song the boy in the street was singing. Wise child that she is, she, of course, knows that it is a poem by Robert Burns, and further more, Holden has the words wrong. It actually goes, "If a body meets a body coming through the rye—" a significant difference, because it indicates Holden's subconscious desire to "rewrite," to change an order of things that he finds unacceptable. His reply to Phoebe is one of the most famous passages in the novel.

"I thought it was 'it a body catch a body,' "I said." Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around – nobody big, I mean—except me And 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'll just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be I know it's crazy" (p.225)

The 'fall' he is talking about is the fall from the innocence of childhood into the obscenity of adulthood. Holden, in his anger at the phoniness of Pencey Prep and other institutions imposed upon the young by the old wants a world populated by

sweet children whose skates need lacing, and by nuns who can teach English literature and be untouched by the sexual over tones in it.

The Main Themes and Characters

The problem, with all of this for Holden is that he is sixteen, he cannot remain a child— he cannot stand at the edge of the cliff and be the catcher; he must fall off into adulthood. But there are ways to fall, and ways not to fall, a lesson that is pointed out to Holden after he sneaks back out of the apartment and goes to visit Mr. Antolini, his old English teacher at Elkton Hills and now an instructor at X.Y.U. Mr. Antolini cannot approve of Holden's behavior, and tells him in a thematic echo of the work to be the catcher in the rye that Holden expresses to Phoebe, that Holden is riding for a fall. "This fall I think you're riding for— it is a special kind of fall, a horrible kind," Mr. Antolini explains. "The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keep falling and falling. The whole arrangement is designed for men who, at sometime, or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn't supply them with. So they gave up looking. They gave it up, before they ever really even got started." (p244). In other words, one may fall into disillusionment giving up on the possibilities in life as the innocent dreams of childhood are by necessity abandoned. Or one may break the fall, may even land, by realizing, that indeed there are things one's environment cannot supply, such as innocence. selfless love, freedom from obscenity.

Mr. Antolini expands his lecture to Holden by reading him a quotation from Wilhelm Stekel, a psycho analysis who was the colleague of Freud and Jung and the author of numerous works expressing his theories on the relationship between infantilism and maturity cites." The mark of the mature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause," Mr. Antolini, "while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." (p.244) Holden's immaturity on this point is apparent: As *The Catcher in the Rye*, he sees himself risking his own life— in fact, denying it through his refusal to grow up and through his wish to keep other children from doing so— on the edge of the crazy cliff. His conception is an over dramatized vision himself as a 'savior', nobly sacrificing himself for the sake of preserving what he takes to be the innocent and the good what he needs is to find something he can live for, instead of something he wants to die for.

At the centre of Holden's difficulties is the dangerous symbolisms of childhood and its innocence. His disgust with the adult world is so great that he is blinded to the realities of childhood. Infantile sexuality was once considered one of the most shocking aspects of Freudian thought. And one does not have to be a social worker to know that children often delight in writing the words on walls that Holden finds so offensive. Even Phoebe is depicted as being much more world than Holden perceives her being. For example, she indicates that she knows quite clearly what is going on when a boy in her class, Curtis Wrintraub, persists in following her around. What Holden must come to understand is that the scriptures do not say that one can become a child again.

Holden's experience with Mr. Antolini is a case in point. Mr. Antolini illuminates Holden's life, but Mr. Antolini's own life is representative of the kind of 'maturity' that is shallow and phony in itself. He has married an older woman for her money, and it is apparent that he does not love her. He is an alcoholic, he is drunk when he talks to Holden. His practical suggestion concerning Holden's future is a lame and unthinking defence of "applying" one self in school and pursuing a conventional academic career. And in the middle of the night, as Holden is asleep on the couch, Mr. Antolini makes a homosexual advance toward him. All this provides Holden with an emblem of what the adult world he has fallen into is true— the true and the obscene all mixed together." The more I thought about it, though, the more depressed and screwed up about it I got" (p.253), he concludes when he wakes up the next morning in the waiting room of Grand Central Station.

While talking to Mr. Antolini, Holden explains why we flunked his class in oral expression at Pencey: Mr. Vinson, the teacher spent most of his time arguing about

the importance of sticking to the point and avoiding digression. But, Holden says he likes listening to a speech better when someone digresses. Holden says this of Mr. Vinson. "He could drive you crazy some times, him and the goddam class. I mean he'd keep letting you to unify and simplify all the time. Some things you just can't do that to" (p.240). **Here you may note that Holden's life itself is not unified and simplified; it is in itself an extended digression leading in fits and starts toward a movement of illumination that is not the result of logical ordered thought.**

Going back to the story, Holden leaves the waiting room and is suddenly surrounded by the trappings of Christmas – Santa Clauses at every sweet corner. As he walks, he sees some workmen unloading a Christmas tree off a truck, and hears one of them saying to the other, "Hold the sonuvabitch up. Hold it up, for Chirtsave!" (p.255). Holden starts to laugh and then he is overcome by nausea – his dual reaction to the duality of the world. **As the humor in his monologue shows, Holden perceives the comic nature of human life. Yet this comedy is often the result of a depressing juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, a juxtaposition that is central to Salinger's art. Further, how to maintain a sense of the holy in the midst of obscenity is what Holden's character development all about.**

As Holden walks up Fifth Avenue, he experiences an hallucination that brings together all of his anxieties at once. Every time he comes to the end of a block and steps off the curb, he has the feeling that he will never get to the other side of the street; he will fall off the curb and disappear. He begins to pray to his brother, Allie not to let him disappear. In the midst of his anxieties over fate and death, emptiness and meaninglessness, guilt and condemnation, and despair, he appeals to Allie to save him, yet the memories of Allie and the seeming sacrilege of his death embody all of those anxieties in themselves. What he is actually praying for is a means of saving himself from himself through himself.

He rests for a time sweating on a park bench and thinks about escaping by hitch hiking out west and getting a job working at a filling station. He would pretend to be a deaf-mute so he would not have to talk to anyone, and he would love by himself out in the woods in a log cabin. **This is both a theme and a means of escape that run through American Literature and through the adolescent mind.** Holden, in what turns out to be the last gasp of his rebellion, buys the idea. He decides that he will go away, that he would never go home again, and that he would never go to another school. For saying good by to Phoebe, he goes to her school, and leaves a note telling her that he is learning town and that she should meet him at the Museum of Natural History at quarter past twelve if she can.

While waiting for Phoebe, Holden goes into his favourite room in the Museum– the mummies' tomb. He likes the room because it is always the same, just as he would like his world to be. **You must – as an intelligent student – note here that the only thing that interested him in his history course at Pencey is the ancient Egyptians' secret of preservation.** Then, in what leads to a moment of revelation, he notices an obscenity written with a child's red crayon on the wall! "That's the whole trouble," he finally realizes, "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 (p. 264). He even concludes that when he dies, someone will write "Fuck you" on his tombstone. Right away he is sickened and goes to the toilet, where he passes out and falls to the floor. This fall, which results from his realization of the essential obscenity of life itself, is the one he has been dreading, the fall from adolescence into adulthood. But he survives, although he is not sure why "I was lucky, though," he says. "I mean I could've killed myself when I hit the floor, but all I did was sort of land on my side. It was a funny thing, though I felt better after I passed out. I really did" (pg 265).

This is a lucky fall, a fortunate "fall. Only through coming to terms with the fallen nature of the world through his own fall can Holden achieve release. And in the next

scene, when he goes to the zoo with Phoebe and sits on a bench in the park watching her ride the carousel we see that he has left his idea of being *The Catcher in the Rye* behind" all the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, "he says quietly," and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (p 274) And suddenly Holden is surrounded by symbols that suggest rebirth, blessing, and hopefulness. It is raining, it is Christmas, and in the carousel's circular movement he obtains a true and vital vision of eternity to replace his old lunatic's love for the mummies tomb.

In the epilogue, we learn that Holden did finally go home, that he got sick, and that he wound up out in California in the psychiatric ward – an ending that at first seems to be another digression or, much worse, that contradicts the joyous scene at the zoo with Phoebe and the carousel. But the final chapter works to show the progress Holden has made in moving toward authenticity and understanding the essential question that is behind every good novel: what is the nature of reality? The answer resides in the dynamic relationship between childhood and maturity, between the static and the changeable, between thought and action, and between the outer and inner worlds – a reality that is "an existentialist datum of physical and emotional experience." This datum, which has its immediate basis in Christian thought finds its ultimate rationale in Buddhism – a crucial point in understanding the end of the novel, an ending that points directly to *Nine Stories*.

2.6 SUMMING UP

The major themes have been discussed in this unit. Also, the character of Holden Caulfield has been critically analysed.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the theme of pastorality in the novel.
2. Comment critically on the Preparatory School system
3. Critically analyse the character of Holden Caulfield

UNIT 3 THE LANGUAGE IN THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Language In *The Catcher In The Rye*
- 3.3 Use and interpretation of the colloquial idiom
- 3.4 Summing Up
- 3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you will be able to know Salinger's effort in not only giving permanent shape to a particular colloquial form of speech but also using it to achieve considerable authenticity in the portrayal of the character of Holden Caulfield. Salinger, however, takes care to fit such use of language to the total scheme of the novel.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The merit of *The Catcher in the Rye* can be justified not only on the basis of literary interest but also on the basis of linguistic significance. Just like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is studied for its dialect of 1884, *The Catcher* can be studied as an example of teenage vernacular in the 1950s. As such the book will be a significant historical linguistic record of a type of speech rarely made available in permanent form. However, the language of Holden, however authentic, is not the major intention of Salinger. Friends, what is of importance to us is the nice balance Salinger achieves between the artistic task of creating an individual character and investing him with a recognizable teenage language. Salinger achieves this difficult task by giving Holden an extremely trite and typical speech so that he can be both typical and individual in his use of them. Holden uses the phrases commonly used by the teenagers like 'I really did' to such a overpowering degree that they become a clear part of the flavor of the book.

3.2 THE LANGUAGE IN *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE*

Despite the praise the novel did receive and despite its success as a Book of the Month club selection, it was looked upon by many readers as a potentially dangerous, even seditious book. The character of Holden Caulfield was hardly the kind of model parents wanted for their children. "Fortunately, there cannot be many of him yet" T. Mom's Longstreth wrote with apprehension in *The Christian Science Monitor*, "But one fears that a look like this given wide circulation may multiply his kind – as too easily happens when immorality and perversion are recounted by writers of talent whose work is countenanced in the name of art or good intention. This reaction, based on a misreading of the novel that is now difficult to understand – Salinger is making a strong statement against immorality and perversion, was hardly confined to the pages of the Monitor.

A review in "Catholic World" centers on an objection that soon become the pivotal point in the controversy over *The Catcher in The Rye* and its being banned in bookshops, libraries and schools across the United States. "Not only do some of the events stretch probability, but Holdens character as iconoclast, a kind of latterday Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn, is made monotonous and phony by the formidably excessive use of amateur swearing and coarse language."²⁰ Again and again, reviewers, critics, and general readers passed over the essentially moral and religious themes of the book to profess shock at the language. For some, of course, it was not the language itself that was so disturbing, it was that Salinger puts the words in the mouth of a sixteen year-old boy. As Virgilia Peterson explained in making just such a comment about the book in the New York Herald Tribune Book Review, "Recent war novels have accustomed us all to ugly words and images, but from the mouths of the very young and protected they sound peculiarly offensive. There is probably not one phrase in the whole book that Holden Caulfield would not have used upon occasion, but when they are piled upon each other in cumulative monotony, the ear refuses to believe."²¹

It is Salinger's use of language that is one of the most distinctive qualities of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and an analysis of that language is essential to an appreciation of just what Salinger accomplishes artistically in the novel. If we look at the language in isolation it is crude, profane, and obscene by the standards of most people even in 1979 as well as in 1951. But if we look at the language and its relationship to the overall effect of the novel, another conclusion emerges, "Given the point of view from which the novel is told," Edward P.J. Corbett argues in a sensible article on the whole matter of *The Catcher in the Rye* and Censorship, "and given the kind of character that figures as the hero, no other language was possible. The integrity of the novel demanded such language"²² It is not simply a matter of realizing that Holden's language would not seem at all unusual or shocking to a real-life prep-school boy. His swearing is habitual and so unconsciously ritualistic that it contributes to, rather than diminishes, the theme of innocence that runs through the novel. In addition, Holden is characterized by a "desperate bravado"²³ – he wants to appear older than he is, and his rough language fits in with his concept of the corrupt adult world.

Holden's way of talking is, it must be realized, a device. Salinger is not directly interested in merely depicting the way a boy like Holden would actually speak – no more than Mark Twain was attempting to be "realistic" in the literal sense when he invented an idiom for Huckleberry Finn (an important thing to remember here is that Twain's novel, like Salinger's was widely castigated for its language and even banned because of it." Neither J.B. Salinger nor Mark Twain really 'copied any thing' Heiserman and Miller remind us. "Their books would be unreadable had they merely recorded intact the language of a real life Huck and a real-life Holden Their genius lies in their mastery of the technique of first person narration which, through meticulous selection, creates vividly the illusion of life gradually, and surely their narrators emerge and stand revealed, stripped to their inner most brings."²⁴ or, as Mary Mc Carthy has observed, "the artless dialect is an artful ventriloquial trick of Salinger's, like the deliberate halting English of Hemingway's waiters, fishermen, and peasants – anyone who speaks it is a good guy, a friend of the author's, to be trusted."²⁵

Salinger's genius does derive in large part from his ability as a literary ventriloquist. He is a writer concerned with messages, with stressing moral points and suggesting ways to move from despair to illumination. Holden Caulfield thus comes to embody Salinger's thought, but the language Salinger chosen to give him is so artfully controlled that the voice seems to come from some other source than the author. The problem a ventriloquist must always get around is to make his audience forget that the figure on his knee is just a wooden dummy, not "real", and this is what Salinger succeeds in doing in *The Catcher in The Rye* – something that does not always happen in his later work, where it is often all too apparent that he is carrying on a pretended conversation with characters who are only lovable puppets.

But even though Holden's language is artful pretense, it never seems pretended. Donald P. Costello in his thorough and insightful study of Salinger's use of language in the novel has uncovered some of the reasons why this is so.²⁶ First of all, Salinger does know enough about authentic teenage speech to establish a basic level of believability that he never departs from in the novel. Holden never says anything that he conceivably could not have said. Salinger manages, however, to individualize Holden though having him make use of certain repetitions in an unusually significant way. Like other teenagers of his time and place, Holden repeats and all and I really did, as well as the famous, if you want to know the truth. But these repetitions have a purpose beyond simple realism. Holden repeats I really did to establish that he is not phony. He repeats and all because of his eventual mystic ability to find the all in the other as he moves toward his final vision. And he repeats if you want to know the truth because that is what the book at last is about.

A second point about Salinger's language is that Holden's speech at first seems to be typical school boy vulgarity. But a closer look reveals that it is actually restrained to indicate Holden's sensitivity. After all, Holden is offended by certain uses of course language. The word fuck appears four times, but it is never a part of Holden's speech. Holden uses goddam often; but never the more offensive Jesus Christ or even for Chrissake except in repeating the speech of others one soon notices that the crudity of language increases when Holden is reporting what others say and other decreases significantly when he directly addresses the reader.

A third point concerns something Salinger has in common with Sinclair Lewis – his love for slang words and expressions. But unlike Lewis' work, Salinger's does not seem strikingly dated in its reliance on jargon, because the slang words Salinger selects are narrow in choice and carefully repeated words like lousy, pretty, crummy, terrific, quite, old and stupid. The repetition of identical words and expressions in different situations is, however, humorous and also. Shows the American characteristic of adapting nouns into adjectives and nouns into adverbs. He turns nouns into adverbs simply by adding a y, and we have vomity – looking, show-offy, pimpy and pervery. Perhaps more distinctive is his ability to use nouns as adverbs. "She sings it very Dixieland and warehouse, and it doesn't sound at all mushy" (p. 149)

But Holden is no mere illiterate adolescent. He reveals his education in the way he discourses on two levels at once. He uses, for example, the colloquial take a leak at one time and then the more genteel relieve himself at another – a shift in word – choice that contributes to the humor in the novel. Like a typical kid his age might do, Holden does violate some rules of grammar. He consistently misuses lie and lay, is uncertain about relative pronouns, and is a devotee of the double negative. But he is extremely conscious of his own speech and is especially critical of the language of others. His character builds through this consciousness and his eventual self awareness is made more acceptable through his ability to recognize the phony, the untrue, in his objections to the over use of such words as grand, prince, travelling incognito, and little girl's room. And it is often forgotten that Holden in revealing his character, is speaking, not writing. If he were writing, his grammatical mistakes would be fewer and he would never write so many fragments.

A close look at the language in *The Catcher in the Rye* leads to a conclusion stated memorably by Costello: "The language of *The Catcher in the Rye* is an authentic rendering of a type of informal; it is crude and trite, yet often somewhat individual; it is crude and slangy and imprecise, imitative yet occasionally imaginative, and affected towards standardization by the strong efforts of schools. But authentic and interesting as this language may be, it be remembered that it exists.....as only one part of an artistic achievement."²⁷ But, it is certainly a powerful part of Salinger's artistry and is a reminder of how careful a writer he is. His relatively small output is not due to a limited imagination, it is more likely due to his extreme care in choosing the words he is going to use.

Salinger's attitudes towards language further suggest a conceptual relationship between him and the philosophies of what was called The School of Linguistic analysis, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951), an Austrian who did much of his work at Oxford University.

3.3 USE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE COLLOQUIAL IDIOM

Holden's informal, school boy vernacular is noticeably typical in its 'vulgarity' and 'obscenity'. Some familiarity with prep school tells us that Salinger achieves an effect by not overplaying it. In fact Holden's restraints, an effect of Salinger's judicious use of the speech, help to characterize him as a sensitive youth who avoids the most strongly forbidden terms. When such terms are used or appeared he disapproves of them. He uses the divine name habitually in the weak form of 'God's sake', 'God' and 'Goddam'. The stronger words like 'Chrissake' or 'Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ' are used habitually by other characters like Allie and Stradlater. Holden never uses them in an unemotional scene; his favorite term is 'Goddam' which he uses to convey range of feelings (towards an object) Holden makes versatile use of the word 'hell'. While he had 'hell' of time with Phoebe, things can be either 'hot as hell' or 'cold as hell' 'sad as hell' 'playful as hell' or even 'pretty as hell'. Like other words this word too suggests a deviation from its original usage and meaning.

Friends when you observe the narrative, Holden's use of crude language or increases when he is reporting schoolboy dialogue. The slang increases when any one of the characters is excited or angry.

Holden's slang, typical of a teenager, is narrow and impressive, but very expressing imprecise. His choice of words, adjectives and, adverbs, is repetitive: 'lousy' 'pretty', 'crumbly' 'terrific', 'quire' 'old' 'stupid' - all used with little regard to specific meaning. He himself admits of his vocabulary:

Trite and repetitive as his vocabulary may be, he can be highly effective in generating power with it, like when he asks Stradlater, " get your dirty stinking moron a knees off my chest'.

Another typical aspect of Holden's language is that it shows adaptability and certain hilarious effect. For example he talks of handling, the 'exam paper like it was a turf or something'. Or 'that Geri Morrow was about as sensitive as a fodder triplet seat'. He sometimes turns nouns into adjectives with the simple addition of a '-y', 'pervert'. 'Vomity-looking', 'whory-looking', 'hoodlenny-looking', 'pimpy', 'snobby'. Often he chooses words rather cautiously to add on to the colloquial idiom an overlay of the individual. This also helps in communicating to his adult reader clearly and properly.

Salinger achieves an authentic rendering of a type of informal colloquial teenage American spoken speech. The immediacy of the speech is somehow kept alive in the entire book. The first person narrative, apart from serving other purposes, conveys this immediacy. Add to that the conscious choice of words by Holden. Salinger not only succeeds in creating a realistic character in Holden Caulfield, but conveys the ambience of a prep school as well.

The language, however authentic and interesting may be, is not written for itself, but forms part of a greater whole. It is only part of an artistic achievement.

3.4 SUMMING UP

Use of language is important for any author. It is Salinger's use of language that is one of the distinction qualities of the novel. The language of *The Catcher In The Rye* is an authentic rendering of a type of informal, crude and trite language of a teenager.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Write a long note on the language in *The Catcher*
2. Comment on the use of Colloquial words by Salinger.

UNIT 4 CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Critical Opinions
- 4.3 Manifestations of the Eastern influence
- 4.4 Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher
- 4.5 Summing Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Bibliography

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit an attempt is made to look at the influence of Buddhism on Salinger in creating the character of Holden Caulfield. Salinger, you may have understood at the end of the unit, makes Holden slowly come to terms with his problems and failures. This may help you in linking up your study of the novel to the larger aspect of the influence of eastern thought on American thought. Also, you will be able to appreciate the other criticism approaches discussed in this Unit.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Friends let me come to the aspect, which, if not very apparent in the novel, interest us, the eastern readers of *The Catcher in the Rye*: the importance of eastern thought, especially Buddhism to Salinger. One can almost say Salinger made Holden speak of his interest to go west and to the frontiers after he himself developed interest to go east, much in the manner of the saying by the Zen masters, "sometimes we go east, sometimes we go west". Salinger, after a brief stint in the army during the Second World War became disillusioned with his native culture and society and turned to the study of eastern thought. The portrayal of American society in the novel conforms to the radical nature of his disillusionment.

4.2 CRITICAL OPINIONS

The Catcher in the Rye is Salinger's only published novel. (It may be that the stories about the class family will take the shape of a novel of sorts eventually.) Its hero, Holden Caulfield, is a modern version of Huckle Finn, like him a moralist in spite of himself, racked by the frauds and shams and cruelties he sees everywhere about him. Huck, of course, comes through sound, and Holden may, too, but at our last glimpse of him he is still under treatment by a psychoanalyst.

The dominant objection to Salinger is that he is sentimental that he holds a number of unrealistic attitudes about life and society, especially his notion, that children are basically innocent and good and that they degenerate as they grow older, Salinger has confused his fondness for children: "Some of my best friends are children. Infact, all my best friends are children. It's almost unbearably for me to realize that my books will be kept on a shelf out of their reach." (In Windsor, at the library nearest Salinger's home, it is.)

However, not Salinger's attitudes but Holden's are relevant to *The Catcher in the Rye*. And it is completely believable that Holden—an adolescent with nerve endings where he ought to have skin—might love the innocence he sees (or thinks he) in children but not in adults. The psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, though less than enthusiastic about the novel, says it reflects "what every sensitive sixteen-year-old since Rousseau has felt, and of course what each one of us is certain he has felt."

Even antagonistic critics agree that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a fascinating, witty story. Indeed, one may extract from their comments a small anthology in praise of Salinger. For example, George Steiner, a hostile critic who objects that the reputation of the book is inflated, admits that "Salinger has caught with uncanny precision the speech and thought – rhythms of the young". And Harney Breit, discounting '*The Catcher in the Rye* as a serious novel nonetheless declares it." A brilliant tour de force, one that has sufficient power and cleverness to make the reader chuckle and – rare indeed – even laugh aloud."

In his article entitled "Against obscenity" *The Catcher in the Rye*, James Lundquist avers; "While it is dangerous to argue that *The Catcher in the Rye* derives from any particular earlier work or school of thought, it does, in many ways, embody the general intellectual interests of the 1950s. there was, for instance, considerable interest in anthropology and psychology in the decade. Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) became popular and influential when they appeared as paperbacks after World War II. Depth psychology, with its emphasis on the unconscious and the impact of myth, ritual, and archetype on the theory of instincts and man's primordial nature, shows up in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), C.G. Jung's *Psychology and alchemy* (1953), Lionel Trilling's *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture* (1955), and Otto Rank's *The Myth and Birth of the Hero* (1959). Holden Caulfield's story is not only told against a background of myth and archetype (like Ulysses, he is on a quest, and at the end of the novel we see him going through a symbolic death and resurrection), it is also an anthropological study of the rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood for an American of Holden's type".

In his book entitled *Contemporary American Literature*, Ihab Hassan writes;

"The meteoric career of J.D. Salinger (born 1919) seems to end in silence and voluntary obscurity. There is a time in the early postwar years when histories, deft and teasing, satisfy the needs of a youthful generation opposed to the spiritual vulgarity of their culture. Collected in *Nine Stories* (1953), the best of these narratives portray children or adolescents, various misfits in middle-class suburbia, who long for simplicity and truth. Their longing expresses itself in tender or bitter quixotic gestures; the gestures suggest something beyond satire or sentimentality. –

—/The novel mocks hypocrisy, egoism, compromise, and also comes close to sounding the note of dread. But whimsy and slapstick keep terror at bay; and Holden, though he can love only his sister Phoebe, retains the saving grace of vulnerability."

4.3 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE INFLUENCE

It may look far-fetched but one can say that the story of Holden Caulfield is modeled after the story of Buddha's royal origins and affluent upbringing. We have the rich and protective environment of a Prep school. Holden's lonely Journey starts with his alienation from the non-seeing groups of people around him. Salinger presents us with first glimpse of Holden's disinterest and disillusionment when Holden observes the excitement and involvement of the crowd over "the two teams bashing each other all over the place" and finds it ridiculous. He also wonders about the importance

attached to results of the football game. At Pencey one is supposed "to commit suicide or something of old Pency didn't win".

To think and make references to death is significant. In fact Holden shows continuing preoccupation with death that keeps him from participating in day-to-day activities of the school. As in the story of the Buddha, the reader, following the journey of Holden, meets death in the form of Allie and old age in the form of his teacher Mr. Spencer. In fact there is considerable focus on the theme of death in Holden's encounter with Mr. Spencer. Holden explains to Mr. Spencer, his teacher, his precise problem: he can not see life as a game because winners only have fun from this game. He would possibly like to see life at a deeper level that is without any disillusionment.

Holden has nobody to guide him to cope with death. One ordinarily turns to oldest people for guidance and wisdom. But the old people he meets seem to be "out of it". His grandmother, whom he describes as lavish with money and other gifts, does not see the needs of Holden beyond. Old Spencer, of course, "didn't know his ass from his elbow". And he fails to get guidance from the adults he meets, not even from his parents. Remarkably in the entire novel his father never appears even once whereas his mother is shown as talking to Phoebe as Holden hides in the closet. He tells about the different religions of his parents and their abhorrence at the mention of anything personal. When Phoebe suggests he become a lawyer like their father, he, describing the unconnected life style of his father's, says it doesn't appeal him at all. He finds his mother too is not of much help, particularly after his brother's death. He clearly finds that they live in two worlds; one of reality and the other of appearance which only convinces him of the phoniness of the adult world. Through several episodes in the text Holden reveals his anguished isolation from his family.

In spite of such set backs one positive value Holden holds dear to his heart is his attempt to see people as human beings who should not be hurt. He takes care not to use people as means to his ends. Even when he meets the girls, he essentially tries to establish a deeper and more meaningful relationship. He hates aggression, for him aggression may lead to violence or even death, which drives him "crazy if somebody is killed". He even shows signs that he has not come to terms with his brother Allie's death.

Holden dreams of an Edenic world beyond aggression. He would like to keep in fact the innocent world of childhood. He holds on to many things, which keep him from the reality of change. He tells, "certain things should stay the way they are" and then talks of glass cases to keep them from the walls, there by trying to keep children from assaults on their innocence. He also tries to be a catcher who keeps children from falling off the cliff or, one can say even innocence.

If suffering remains one of the noble truths of Buddhism, Holden qualifies for that because he goes through terrible states of suffering. Maybe the cause for his suffering is his failure to accept change and the concomitant effort/attempts to avoid change by clinging to things like Allie's Baseball glove or the broken pieces of Phoebe's record. He even avoids meeting Jane because he does not want to acknowledge her dates with Stradlater. This belief in continuity, Buddhist interpretations would say, is one great source of suffering.

After meeting Phoebe, he "felt good for a change". One reason is he meets a person who precociously sees through his lie and tells as much, without even hurting him. He sees in her what Buddhism would call of taking "care of each other". It is Phoebe who helps him to turn away from suffering and accept the work of natural forces which could lead him towards happiness.

4.4 HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND THE CATCHER

A reading of the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* will only convince the reader of a certain cultural and literary continuity. This continuity manifests itself when the text is read along with some earlier American fictional texts like *Huckleberry Finn*. The literary relationships make the continuity rather obvious.

Let us first see some narrative patterns and styles.

Huck initially flees conventionalities, constraints and the terrors of his place and father. On the river he meets murderous thieves, a treacherous fog, Negro hunters and a steamboat that rips through the raft and thrusts him among feuding country gentility. He sees a harmless drunk shot dead and a southern colonel almost lynched, observes some theatrical obscenities and at great personal risk saves the inheritance of three innocent girls. Experience teaches Huck that truth is usually weak, trouble best avoided and evil often inevitable. It confirms his love of beauty and peaceful security. But notably, in his greatest struggle, over Jim he acts spontaneously and defiantly for goodness. Huck eventually comes to the Phelps plantation, the homelike place where Jim finds freedom and where Huck will take leave of "sivilization" by going west.

Holden Caulfield, intensely troubled, escapes initially from the stupid constraints and violence of his prep school life. Like Huck, he enters a jungle world, New York City, where he knows his way around but from which he is alienated. There for two hectic days and nights he steers his course through battering adventures with fearsome dopes, morons and sluggers. On this journey Holden's Jim is primarily the recurring image of Jane Gallagher, an old friend who needs love and whom he loves with strange unawareness. Holden's Jim is also all little children, whom he would save from adult sexuality. Like Huck, Holden has a conflict. His adolescent sexual urges are somehow entangled with what is predatory in the "mean guys" he hates. They befoul his sense of the fine and good. Although not as self-sufficient as Huck, Holden is usually as realistic, and he too loves beauty and peace. Yet he values goodness above know-how, sophistication, style, and success. After a secret visit home, he plans to lead a hermit's life in the west, but is reconciled to the city by the love of his little sister Phoebe. Physically weakened and psychologically wounded, he is last seen recuperating in a sanitarium. Clearly Mark Twain and J.D. Salinger present parallel myths of American youth confronting his world-Huck Finn over many months, when time was expendable; Holden over two days when, Salinger seems to imply, time is rapidly running out.

Each novel employs an appropriate first person vernacular. Holden has the more "educated" vocabulary; he speaks with a modern schoolboy's idiom and slang and he can spell. Both boys observe accurately and swiftly. Huck's speech, usually dispassionate and matter-of-fact, is relaxed and flexibly rhythmical. Holden, frequently conscious of the smothering omnipresence of sex, draws most things taut. Nervous and jerky reiteration often points up his emotional tensions. His speech is sometimes raucous and jarring. He tends to rail and condemn. Huck's direct apprehension gives us an objective recording rich in implication. His version etches an open world, clear, solid, real, with living characters moving autonomously in it. Holden's tense outpouring is a convincing expression of his psychological unrest and of the release he is finding in psychiatric treatment. Both styles are effectively ironic and humorous.

In the characterization of the protagonist, *The Catcher in the Rye* is clear reminder of *Huckleberry Finn*. Holden wants to shepherd the young, to be the only big person around; But Huck is the youthful liberator of a grown man, and whether he knows it or not his effort is directed toward making maturity possible. Holden is a conscious idealist who yet says, "I kept wishing I could go home." The hope in Mark Twain's

novel is that a ragamuffin preadolescent acts maturely for what is good in an open society. The underlying despair of Salinger's book is that a privileged adolescent wants to act immaturely for what he believes is good in a society thickened into vulgarity.

Yet Holden is truly a kind of latter-day urbanized Huck. He is acutely sensitive to places and times, whether groping through a dark foyer in the early morning hours or relaxing in the cozy auditorium of the Museum of Natural History, where it "always smelled like it was raining outside, even if it wasn't..."

Huckleberry Finn and *The Catcher in the Rye* are akin also in ethical-social import. Each book is a devastating criticism of American society and voices a morality of love and humanity.

In many important matters, as we have just seen, Huck and Holden— not to speak of others like Jim and Phoebe—affirm goodness, honesty and loyalty. Huck does so almost unconsciously, backhandedly, often against his conventional conscience, and Holden does so with an agonizing self-consciousness and a bitter spirit. In each the perception of innocence is radical: from their mouths come pessimistic judgments damning the social forms that help make men less than fully human. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another", observes Huck after seeing the Duke and Dauphin tarred and feathered. And Huck assumes his share of the guilt. Holden, with searingly honest insight that gets to the root of sadistic practices and class jealousies, remarks: "I can even get to hate somebody, just looking at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them.... It's really hard to be roommates with people if your suitcases are much better than theirs..... You think if they're intelligent..... they don't give a damn whose suitcases are better, but they do. They really do". To Aunt Sally's question whether anybody was hurt in the steamboat accident, Huck replies, "No'm. Killed a nigger", and the blindness of a civilization is bared with terrible casualness. The same ironic exposure comes in Holden's apology for having to like a girl before he can get sexy— "I mean really sexy"— with her. So he remarks, "My sex life stinks". And Carl Luce, the modern expert on love, answers: "Naturally it does, for God's sake".

Such examples might easily be multiplied: the vision is often identical. Yet we must grant that the reliability and quality of Holden's vision are complicated, far beyond Huck's straightforward objectivity, by the loss he has sustained. As Holden recognizes, he is mentally ill. "I don't get hardly anything out of anything. I'm in bad shape. I'm, in lousy shape". Bad as the modern world is, his view of it adds a distortion not found in Huck's picture. Almost everyone in Holden's world is "phony"— headmasters, students, alumni, bartenders, movie actors, moviegoers, people who say "Glad to've met you" or "Good luck!" or "Grand!", virile hand-shakers, Holy Joe ministers, even partially bald men who hopefully comb their hair over the bald spot. The book reeks with Holden's revulsion and nausea. He experiences things in an aura of disgusting physical details. The park is "lousy" with "dog crap, globs of spit and cigar butts". A chair is "vomity" looking. A cab smells as though someone had "tossed his cookies in it". Moreover, although Holden keeps his innocent heart, his adolescence has riddled the innocence of mind, that naivete, which Huck in good measure still possesses. What Holden's heart seeks and responds to, his mind sees is violated everywhere by the mere fact of human maturity. Adult activities become expressive masks for adult sexuality. The four-letter word he reads with horror and erases on the wall of Phoebe's school follows him wherever he goes. In the quiet tomb of Pharaoh in the museum, he feels at peace for the first time— until suddenly he sees the same word in red crayon on the wall. Despairingly, hysterically, he thinks that even in death he will not escape that word which someone surely will write on his tombstone. A great difference between the two boys is measured by Huck's sensitive but reserved opinion of the obscene words on the wall of the abandoned house floating down the June rise; "the ignorantest kind of words...."

Certainly if Huck's vision reveals both the limitations and promises of democracy—the hope and despair—Holden's, in direct descent from Hunck's, focuses upon the despair. In the predatory wasteland of the city, Holden can foresee no future refuge or good. (Is it by accident that some lines of weary futility from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" are echoed in Holden's words to Sally Hayes: "It wouldn't be the same at all. You don't see what I mean at all"?) If he and Sally were married, Holden knows he would be an office worker "making a lot of dough, and riding to work in Madison Avenue buses, and reading newspapers, and playing bridge all the time, and going to the movies and seeing a lot of stupid shorts and coming attractions and newsreels". He accurately describes the commercialized Christmas spirit as something over which "old Jesus probably would've puked if He could see it". He damns the competitive drive for status. Even the cab drivers, primitives of the city, are suspicious, raw-nerved. And nowhere is there peace. Holden's view of modern war concludes: "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....." Neurotic or not, Holden's criticism often hits home.

Given such contrasting conditions, what moral destiny confronts the individual in the worlds Salinger and Mark Twain create? Like the Central Park ducks in winter, Holden is essentially homeless, frozen out. But Huck, although an outcast, is a true homemaker wherever he is. Allie's baseball mitt is all that is left to Holden of Allie's love, an unlike Huck, he seems unable to break through the ring of hostility to find new sources of affection. Deprived of real opportunity for the sort of soul-shaking sacrifice Huck makes for Jim, Holden expresses his love for Phoebe by the gift of a phonograph record—which breaks. Of greater significance, Huck has Jim; but Holden, so desperately in need of love, is one of the loneliest characters in fiction. Obviously Huck is not as critically wounded as Holden. He has far more resilience, a stronger power of renewal. Necessity shows him the wisdom of prudence, and his natural environment provides therapeutic primal sanities. Both boys are rebels—with a difference. Huck can often go naked, but Holden can defy convention only by wearing his "corny" red hunting cap. Capable of making a free choice, Huck outwits his enemies and rises above the compulsions within. He is a practical rebel like Thoreau. He runs away to confront and modify reality, and thereby he proves, for his day, the explosive force of individual ethical action. Holden runs off too, but his actions are usually ineffective, and the path of escape leads him deeper into the mire of his personal difficulties.

Huckleberry Finn, in short, recognizes necessity and freedom, the restrictions limiting moral accomplishment and its possibility. *The Catcher in the Rye* leaves us doubtful that the individual, even assisted by the analyst's best efforts, can ever truly escape the double trap of society and self. How well the two concluding scenes contrast these moral outlooks! Throughout *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden makes, and is, a telling criticism of our civilization: his "madness" in itself is a damning fact of our times; yet, doubly damning, what the "madman" says is often true, what he feels often unimpeachable. Supremely ironical, then, is our last glimpse of Holden making recovery and adjustment in the sanitarium—a prelude to compromise in the outside world—as Father Peter in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* cannot do. Holden says: "I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody". Modern therapy takes over; Holden will return. For Holden's sake we wouldn't have it otherwise, even though it's a return to the big money and the dopey newsreels. But we remember Huck with admiration and with confidence in his personal future as, Jim freed and the Duke and Dauphin in limbo, he says: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before".

No wonder Holden wants to remain forever the catcher in the rye—his free Territory—oblivious to the trap that maturity finally springs. His recessive traits suggest that the logical, perhaps desirable, end for him and his civilization is the pure silence of death,

the final release from imperfect life. Huckleberry Finn, as Philip Young has recently realized, appeals to rescuing death in the series of escapes-gliding, still and dark-made by Huck and Jim as the raft slips into the flowing, mythic river. Huck, too, has guilt feelings that, if sufficiently intensified, could conceivably lead to self-destruction. But such suggestions are muted in Huck's story, for Huck is committed to life. In Salinger's book death symbols are more pronounced, and death openly fascinates Holden not only for its horror but for the peaceful refuge it offers from the consciousness of life. Beneath the appealing and often hilarious humor, comparable to some of the best of Mark Twain's, life is felt in this book fundamentally as a ceaseless, pushing round of activity that one would be well rid of. Holden carries with him a dim sense of the eternal and transcendental.

We have seen that Huckleberry Finn and *The Catcher in the Rye* share certain ethical and social attitudes. Yet Salinger's critical view assumes a cultural determinism that in Huckleberry Finn, although always present, permits freedom through self-guidance. Salinger's viewpoint also draws upon a mystical sense merely inchoate in Mark Twain's imagination. We have seen too that Holden's neuroticism is both literary cause and social effect. It is Salinger's means of etching the modern picture the more deeply, and a product of the culture it so sweepingly condemns on moral grounds. But Mark Twain's moral vision is projected through the prevailing normality of Huck's temperament. It is eminently central; fundamentally there is nothing rigged about Huck's experience or eccentric in his responses. So Huck on a raft, as profoundly symbolic today as Thoreau in his cabin, is ever more meaningful as our national experience hurtles us along routes more menacing than the Mississippi. *The Catcher in the Rye*, always cautionary, often horrifying in moral tone, creates an overwhelming sense of that hurtling. The point is not that Salinger's moral vision is therefore defective. Rather, because his vision is lit by the sick lamps of civilization, *The Catcher in the Rye* is as appropriate to our age as Huckleberry Finn is to an earlier America. Salinger's novel, in fact, suggests great truths about our times, as Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* did, in polemic form, about an earlier age that was cankered, crude, materialistic, depraved. *The Catcher in the Rye* has the same awesome relevance to our collective civilized fate that more subtly pervades Mark Twain's masterpiece. Nowhere is its literary descent from Huckleberry Finn more clearly seen than in its critical modern dramatization of moral and social themes.

To conclude, the two novels are clearly related in narrative pattern and style, characterization of the hero and critical import—the three areas discussed in this paper. The relationship argues the continuing vitality of Huck's archetypal story, absorbed by generations and still creatively at work in contemporary thought and art. *The Catcher in the Rye* takes its place in that literary tradition spreading beyond Anderson, Lardner, Hemingway, Faulkner—that has one of its great sources in Huckleberry Finn. But the literary kinship of these two novels presupposes a type of cultural continuity more basic than the dynamics of literary tradition or than the persistence of Huck's story in the popular imagination.

4.5 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we have discussed the various critical interpretations of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Having read the unit, we hope that you will come out with your own interpretations of the novel.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the opinions of various critics
2. Critically compare *The Catcher with Huckleberry Finn*
3. Discuss the influence of Eastern Thought on Salinger

4.7 USEFUL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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