J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye as a Bildungsroman

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Filozofski fakultet

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

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Završni rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

Going through changes can at times be difficult to handle, especially for young people who are about to reach the adult years of their lives. In the years following their adolescence, they lose the sense of security they had for so long, and they rapidly have to adapt to the new way of life, which is filled with responsibility for themselves and those around them. During that time, they are not confident about their ability to adjust to those changes, so it is important for them to know that someone is willing to offer them support. While self-help books are more popular today than ever, a quality novel can still serve its purpose by helping adolescents accept adulthood, while at the same time giving them a good read and making them interested in literature. For generations, novels termed *Bildungsromans* have aided insecure adolescents, and one novel has done more in this respect than any other. In 1951, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* introduced the world to Holden Caulfield, a rebellious teenager with whom his real-life peers all around the world could connect. To this day many copies of *The Catcher in the Rye* are sold on an international scale, which is a testament to how much young people value Salinger's work, and how much the novel has helped them to mature. This paper will focus on the characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* appearing in the novel, and will discuss Holden's mental development on his journey to adulthood.

Keywords: *Bildungsroman,* J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, adulthood, adolescence, Holden Caulfield

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Introduction

Jerome David Salinger (1919–2010), better known as J. D. Salinger, was an American writer that changed history when he wrote his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. The main character of the novel, a hypersensitive, rebellious, 16-year-old boy named Holden Caulfield, turned J. D. Salinger into a literary legend and a rich man. Although *The Catcher in the Rye* was initially meant for adults, it has impacted adolescent lives far more than Salinger could have ever imagined. Countless teenagers recognized themselves in Holden. They shared his disgust for the adult world, and they shared the same views as Holden on many topics such as sexuality, love, and maturity. It all led to an astonishing number of sales, with around 250,000 copies sold each year, and more than 65 million copies sold since *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in 1951. The novel has consequently left a mark on popular culture (many television shows, books, movies, and songs were inspired by *The Catcher in the Rye*), but it also has had a negative influence on people. The novel is most famously connected with the assassination of John Lennon by Holden's fan Mark David Chapman, although Chapman was not the only murderer known to have loved the book. It is then understandable that, because of such events and in addition to the representation of prostitution, alcoholism, and child abuse combined with vulgarism, the novel has been banned in different countries and different schools in the decades that followed. By preventing children and adolescents from reading the novel, institutions did exactly what they tried to avoid – adolescents became Holden Caulfield themselves. Throughout the novel, Holden tries to keep his childhood innocence alive. He wants to protect himself, and all the children for that matter, from the adult world, possibly forever. It is clear that this feat is unachievable because it is natural to grow up and change over time. The themes incorporated in the novel are not there to be promoted or glorified, but to warn adolescents of the dangers this new life will bring to them, and also to make adults aware of their role in the process of maturing, which their kids are going through. Because of those obstacles and the experience Holden gains at the end of the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* can rightfully be determined as a *Bildungsroman*. A brief history of the *Bildungsroman* and its major characteristics will be given in the first part of this paper. After establishing the main characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*, in the second part of the paper those characteristics will be found and analyzed in the novel itself. The specific quotes from the novel will be used to show just how turbulent teenage years can be, and also to demonstrate how much Holden's journey changed him.

1. Bildungsroman

Coined in the 1810s by Karl von Morgenstern, the term *Bildungsroman* started to be used more often at the end of the 19th century. Although the examples of the *Bildungsroman* can already be found in the 18th century, this literary genre thrived during the 19th century, with many important works also published in the 20th century. While some experts may disagree, most say that the first major *Bildungsroman* was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published first in 1795. In his *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti points out that Goethe's novel gave birth to the *Bildungsroman*, and to the new, young hero whose actions we follow in such novels (3). According to Moretti, Goethe did so by seeing "youth as the most meaningful part of life" (3). The themes of such works can easily be discerned from the term itself. The term is of German origin, and in literal translation it is possible to translate it as "education novel" or "formation novel," since in German *die Bildung* means "education/form," while *der Roman* means novel. Simhachalam Thamarana offers a simple definition of the *Bildungsroman* in his "Origin and Development of Bildungsroman Novels in English Literature," calling it a novel that "intends to lead the reader to greater personal enrichment as the protagonist journeys from youth to psychological or emotional maturity" (22). Thamarana also lists the primary motifs of the sub-genre, such as the search for identity, coming of age, education, love, and the search for the meaning of life (24). The emphasis is placed on learning, but not only in an academic sense. The protagonists usually leave the comfort of their home and end up in an urban area where they have to face different challenges and live through painful experiences. Those experiences make them wiser, more socially intelligent, and they will mold the protagonists into adults. If certain events they went through are to repeat themselves, they will be ready to react much calmer and do the right thing. Thamarana finds that such themes have universal appeal because adolescents all around the world look for help in the process of growing up, and it is easier for them to connect with a protagonist who experiences similar difficulties in the novel as they do in real life (25). Despite the fact that every *Bildungsroman* follows a similar pattern, there are differences when it comes to the nationality of the writer. Thamarana notices that German novelists concentrate more on the internal, psychological struggle of the protagonist, while English novelists create young heroes who are in constant conflict with the outside world while trying to form their own identity (22). Based on European tradition, a third *Bildungsroman* style emerged in the United States of America and, according to Thamarana, it was "a combination of the German *Bildungsroman* and the Spanish picaresque," with the prime examples such as Mark Twain's

Huckleberry Finn and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (25). These novels, and many other novels of this literary genre for that matter, were a big success in America. The reasons for that can be found in the view that "an adolescent on the journey to maturity is the perfect metaphor for the United States: young, adventurous and optimistic" (Graham 117). The protagonist's journey from childhood to adulthood, as well as his final triumph over life, symbolize the fundamental values of American lifestyle. Americans appreciate bravery, and they believe that by being persistent a person can achieve his goals, his American Dream. On the other hand, Graham indicates that "American novelists have used the Bildungsroman . . . to expose the nation's short-comings" (117). Throughout history, the United States of America have fought in many wars, slavery was present for ages, and to this day there are numerous examples of class discrimination, racism, homophobia, sexism, and other various forms of discrimination on American soil, all of which makes American visions of freedom, equal opportunity, and happiness seem like false promises. Graham claims that American *Bildungsroman* heroes feel haunted by those past mistakes their parents or grandparents made, and because of that they do not feel optimistic about the adult world they are destined to join, so they are trying to avoid it at all cost (118). Both mindsets were presented in different American classics, and both styles of the American *Bildungsroman* attempted to differ from European versions as much as they could. Graham further lists the following differences between the European and the American *Bildungsroman*: the latter, in its more optimistic variant, tried to show that the rags-to-riches story was not a myth and that it was only possible in America, disproving at the same time the European perspective of cultureless Americans who lack a sense of civic duty; its more pessimistic variant questioned aspirations of the new nation, criticized society far more than the European *Bildungsroman* ever did, and it also contradicted the European style with its ending. The European *Bildungsroman* mostly ended with the main protagonist becoming a complete adult who realized his/her role in society by taking part in a ritual that symbolized the beginning of adulthood (such as marriage, parenthood, or employment). The American *Bildungsroman* lacked that ritual, and although the protagonist matured and learned a valuable lesson at the end of the novel, we still do not know how his/her life would go on from that point. The protagonist could dismiss the lesson he learned and remain immature, but he could also accept the responsibility of the adult years (Graham 119-24). The second style of the American *Bildungsroman* had a greater effect on world literature. With its young rebels who oppose the adult world, pop culture references, and slang use, this style of the American *Bildungsroman* has inspired many foreign novelists to

contribute to the genre. One of the most inspirational novels is certainly *The Catcher in the Rye,* which will be discussed in the following chapters.

2. *The Catcher in the Rye*

Published in 1951, *The Catcher in the Rye* is J. D. Salinger's most famous work. Salinger intended the novel for adults, but because Holden Caulfield, the main character, is a 16-year-old boy facing the challenges of puberty, the novel has gained a cult status among teenagers. Paul Alexander, the author of *Salinger: A Biography*, considers him to be a "prototype of juvenile delinquency of the 50s, the 'outlaw' mentality of the 60s generations, and the general discomfort of a major part of today's youth" [1](14). Holden is hypersensitive and disobedient. He is constantly moving from one school to another, and he is continuously going through mood swings – his emotional state can quickly go from happy to depressed, or from kind to angry. Holden is afraid of sudden changes happening to him in puberty, and he is having a very tough time dealing with such a stressful period of life. Holden's journey to adulthood is described as a "story of initiation, although it is only the protagonist who faces temptations while being aware of what his decisions mean, while those who set obstacles for him are completely preoccupied with themselves, and are unaware of their actions" (Šesnić 324). In addition, Salinger's novel depicts "a sensitive and rebellious adolescent protagonist, who . . . talks about his escape from the conformist world of adults, and about the search for innocence and truth that ends in a nervous breakdown, but also in an emotional awakening" (Kragić 947). Because of his journey, Holden is often compared to Huckleberry Finn, and some pundits, such as Zlatko Crnković in his book *Knjigositnice*, compare him with the legendary Don Quixote because of his search for "moral cleanliness and beauty" (292). Although he is somewhat similar to those characters, there is something original in Holden that attracts readers to this character. There are not many *Bildungsromans* that speak so well to teenagers in order for them to realize they are not alone and that there is someone who understands. *The Catcher in the Rye* covers a wide variety of topics connected with the process of growing up, and in the following chapters this paper will attempt to analyze all the hardships Holden goes through in order to see some optimism in adulthood.

[1] If not otherwise stated, all the translations from Croatian to English are mine.

3. The Problems and Challenges of Adolescence in *The Catcher in the Rye*

3.1 Childhood Innocence Versus Vices of Adulthood

The main theme of *The Catcher in the Rye* is definitely Holden's hatred towards the world of adults. Holden is at a crossroads in his life: he wants to remain a child and preserve his childhood innocence, but at the same time he is attracted to alcohol, cigarettes, and sex like an adult person. Based on this dilemma Holden is facing, Hubert Zapf distinguishes between four groups of Holden's actions (268-69). The first group would be the overemphasis of childhood with the events such as Holden's monologue about his virginity, or Holden's obsession with Jane Gallagher, the girl he used to spend time with when they were younger. He remembers the joyful moments they shared, for instance their golf games, or the mental image of Jane keeping all her kings in the back row when they played checkers. Holden even gets in a physical altercation with his roommate Stradlater in order to protect Jane's innocence. When Stradlater takes Jane on a date, Holden worries that he might have sexual intercourse with Jane, thus robbing Jane of her virginity and innocence:

> Some things are hard to remember. I'm thinking now of when Stradlater got back from his date with Jane. I mean I can't remember exactly what I was doing when I heard his goddam stupid footsteps coming down the corridor. I probably was still looking out the window, but I swear I can't remember. I was so damn worried, that's why. . . . If you knew Stradlater, you'd have been worried, too. I'd double-dated with that bastard a couple of times, and I know what I'm talking about. He was unscrupulous. (Salinger 22)

When Holden himself dated Jane, he never went further than hand-holding with her because they were younger. He cannot accept that Jane matured into a woman, and he does not want Stradlater anywhere near her. Holden also wants to call Jane throughout the novel, but he keeps giving up. Since Jane symbolizes the purity of childhood, this could be understood as both Holden's wish to remain a child and Holden's knowledge that it is not something he can do at this stage of his life. The second group of Holden's actions encompasses the actions that overemphasize adulthood. Holden frequently orders alcoholic beverages in bars, he is a heavy smoker, and he at one time even feels the need to pay a prostitute for sex. When he in the end changes his mind about having sex with a prostitute, he performs one of the actions that we can place in the third group – the rejection of the world of adults. Here Holden contradicts himself not once, but twice. He wants both to remain a child and to enjoy adult activities, until he

changes his mind again. The fourth group demonstrates Holden's indecisiveness and instability in its entirety, or the rejection by the world of adults. The events in this group are Holden's expulsion from school, as well as the beating he took at the hands of the elevator operator Maurice. Holden's depression is a result of the rejection from both worlds. He is trapped between childhood and adulthood, and the frustrating period of adolescence makes him feel like he does not belong to either world.

3.2 Childhood Authenticity Versus Adulthood Artificiality

Holden's hatred towards adulthood has its roots in the "phoniness" of the adult world. "Phoniness" is one of Holden's favorite words, and he uses it to describe everything he loathes in the world he is destined to join. Holden feels that the adult world is not genuine, and he hates the conformity in their everyday lives. He considers children to be far more authentic and real, so he wants to do everything in his power to maintain that originality himself. Whether it means doing simpler things such as dressing or talking differently than adults, or having a long monologue about the hypocrisy of movies, Holden is persistently trying to be as different as he can from adults. For example, by analyzing Holden's speech, we can notice some patterns in his vocabulary that symbolize his rejection of adulthood artificiality. Flaker thus asserts that Holden comes off as spontaneous because Salinger uses urban slang terms customary for New Yorkers of that time. By doing so, Salinger makes Holden's story much more convincing, and he makes it seem like we are indeed sitting next to Holden in the sanatorium while he is informing us of the events that happened to him. Flaker describes Holden's speech as infantile because of his constant use of polysyndetons, anacoluthons, and buzzwords. Flaker also notices Holden's use of implicit expressions, which can have many possible meanings to the reader (expressions such as "all that," "this stuff") but the meaning of which only the narrator knows (38-105). Holden's use of the phrase "old sport" is certainly one of the more interesting occurrences in the novel as it is a clear reference to another American classic, *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. It is unclear why Holden likes the novel written by Fitzgerald, since he would probably consider each character in the novel "phony" because of their lifestyle and priorities. A circle of rich people, fashionably dressed, going from party to party in their fast cars is not something that would attract Holden, especially when everything he does throughout the novel shows how much he opposes tradition. Holden does not seem to be a person who believes in the concept of the American Dream, and, in addition, he has a negative stand towards many other literary classics: he starts his story by insulting *David Copperfield*,

he is not really fond of *Romeo and Juliet*, and he considers *Farewell to Arms* to be "phony" (Flaker 153). Perhaps it was Jay Gatsby's inability to adapt to the present, caused by his missed chance at happiness with Daisy, that attracts Holden to Fitzgerald's novel. Like Gatsby, Holden wants to live in the past. He wants to remain a child and a nonconformist, despite the fact that life has different plans. One event in particular shows just how much Holden despises change: his remembrance of the field trips his elementary school class took to the Museum of Natural History. Holden's description of the Museum is filled with nostalgia, and it serves as a metaphor for his unrealistic aspirations of forever remaining a child:

> The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody'd be different. . . . Certain things they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway. (Salinger 65-66)

Holden fears change, and since the Museum always stays the same, it is one of his happiest childhood memories. He craves for a constant in his life, for something eternal, something that will never change. The traumatic period of puberty affects Holden, and he just wants something or someone he can rely on. In his analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Stanley P. Baldwin claims that "Holden's fears and desires are understandable, but his solution (avoiding reality) is impossible. Life is change. His feelings are typically adolescent, feelings shared by virtually everyone who is or ever has been his age" (79). Holden truly tries to avoid reality every step he takes. For example, when his younger sister Phoebe asks him what he would like to be one day, Holden does not name any professions. Although it is expected of a boy his age to already have a plan for the future, Holden seemingly does not want to pursue a career in anything. Instead of giving Phoebe an answer she was hoping for, Holden wants to be the catcher in the rye:

> 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'd 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. (Salinger 93)

Holden's imaginary job as a catcher in the rye serves as another metaphor for his wish to conserve his childhood innocence and genuineness. Because he knows what dangers await children in the world of grown-ups, and because he is familiar with the "phoniness" of it, he wants to save other children from that world. If any child comes in danger of falling down the cliff, which symbolizes adulthood, Holden will catch them and let them play in the field again. By continuing to play in the field, children will remain children forever, and they will keep their innocence intact. There are many more examples showing us that Holden really is at war with the adult world, but he does not strictly hate adults. Holden is also revolted by anyone who is trying to join the conformist world and become a member of the system he hates so much. He frequently says something offensive about his schoolmates, his roommate Stradlater, and his peers who he meets during his stay in New York. He often insults the schools he attended, Pencey Prep and Elkton Hills, because of the "phoniness" of the teachers, the school policy, and the students:

> Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. . . . They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." . . . They don't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. (Salinger 1)

It takes something as trivial as a slogan to upset Holden, and make him resent the whole institution. He is hypersensitive, which makes him complain about almost everything that surrounds him. Holden even criticizes the clothes adults, and those who want to become similar to them, wear. He is trying to express himself by wearing unusual items of clothing. For example, when his roommate Stradlater says that he spilled something all over his gray flannel, he asks Holden if he can borrow his hound's-tooth jacket. It shows us that Holden does not dress according to the fashion rules of that time. While other men, and the boys like Holden who will soon become men, wear suits and vests, Holden prefers his hound's-tooth jacket. Also, very early in the novel, Holden mentions the red hunting cap he had bought, which ends up to be a symbol of his originality, as well as his immaturity. The red hunting cap is a fashion statement. Holden wears it to show that he is nothing like the conformists he despises. He

voices his disgust with such people, once when on a date with Sally Hayes: “Then all of a sudden, she saw some jerk she knew on the other side of the lobby. Some guy in one of those very dark gray flannel suits and one of those checkered vests. Strictly Ivy League. Big deal. He was standing next to the wall, smoking himself to death and looking bored as hell” (Salinger 68); and once while having a drink at Ernie’s: “On my right there was this very Joe Yale-looking guy, in a gray flannel suit and one of those flitty-looking Tattersall vests. All those Ivy League bastards look alike. My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go to one of those Ivy League colleges, if I was dying, for God's sake” (Salinger 46). At Ernie’s, “Holden’s dislike for traditional adult clothing becomes evident in this statement and his purpose for wearing his red flannel hunting hat apparent. To Holden, a rebellion against anything that is considered to be adult-like is a necessity” (Howe 21). Apart from Holden's originality, the cap symbolizes his immaturity and his childlike persona. Whenever Holden plays with his hunting cap, pulling its peak around to the front or to the back, he starts to be more playful and acts like a child. Furthermore, the cap is a symbol of protection in the novel. The cap protects him from rain, but it is actually a metaphor for the protection it gives him from the cruel adult world. Finally, by calling it a “people shooting cap” (Salinger 12), instead of a “deer shooting cap” (Salinger 12), Holden implies that he wants to remain original, as well as to spite the world that expects him to follow their rules in order to fit in. Only children are worthy of Holden’s admiration, while everyone else, including his own brother D.B., makes him sick. He loves his brother but criticizes him for selling out and going to Hollywood to write screenplays, after writing short stories at the start of his career. Baldwin (87) asserts that Holden believes that movies manipulate people, and he considers everyone in that business, or similar businesses, a prostitute as, according to Holden, those people sold out for money, fame, and applause. Baldwin adds that Holden’s idea of children’s genuineness is represented in the scene in which Holden observes a 6-year-old-child dancing and singing without the desire to impress anyone. For the child, it is only a way of expressing himself and having a good time (Baldwin 87). The biggest reason why this genuineness, as well as the innocence mentioned in the last chapter, mean so much to Holden, is his dead brother Allie. Allie, who was two years younger than Holden, died of leukemia at the age of 11, and he never had a chance to lose those qualities. Allie is Holden’s closest connection to childhood because of the memories they shared. Kenneth Slawenski thus claims that entering the world of adults represents the betrayal in Holden’s mind. If Holden becomes an adult, he will have to abandon his dead brother, and thus lose the memory of his innocence and genuineness (Slawenski 207).

3.3 The Importance of Friends and Parents During the Process of Growing-up

The role friends and parents play in the life of an adolescent is huge. Although this is not one of the major themes/motifs in the novel, it is still important enough to be mentioned, because it could be the root of all the problems Holden has. From the very beginning of the novel, Holden seems like a lonely person. When he talks about the big game between Saxon Hall and Pencey Prep, he is one of a handful of boys at Pencey Prep who are not at the game, which "establishes Holden as an outcast. He is alone on top of Thomson Hill, separated from his peers, watching them from afar while presenting a monologue that expresses his alienation and disgust with the phony world around him" (Slawenski 206). Apart from indicating Holden's outcast status, the first scene tells a lot about Holden's social life, and the reader finds out more as he goes along. Holden is not asocial, he is quite talkative, humorous, and entertaining, but still there is no character, except his sister Phoebe, in the whole novel who could be described as Holden's friend. It would certainly be helpful to Holden if he were to have a friend of his age who could give him some useful advice on how to deal with all the pressure he is under. He does not get a chance to talk to such a person until he reunites with Carl Luce, who cannot really be called Holden's friend, but he did deserve Holden's respect. Although Luce partially helped Holden get to a solution, he has done that unconsciously.[2] Along with not having any friends apart from his ten-year-old sister, Holden also lacks adult supervision. He mentions in one of his monologues that his father is a lawyer, and his job takes up a lot of his time. His mother, on the other hand, is a sophisticated woman, and she seems to be a caring parent to Phoebe and Holden, but ever since Allie died she has been overcome with grief, which caused her to distance herself from Holden. While his parents are busy leading their own lives, Holden moves from private school to private school, he is far away from home, and although he does not seem to lack anything in a financial sense, he does not have an adult to turn to when times get tough. In his desperate attempt to find someone he could trust and seek guidance from, Holden turns to Allie. Slawenski notes that Holden "idealizes his dead brother, elevating him to a near-holy status. In the absence of adult supervision, he reinvents Allie as a reproachful parent-god. When he becomes depressed, he searches out his brother for comfort, and if he feels besieged, he actually prays to Allie" (207). In those times, we see how alone Holden really is. His dead brother is the only support he has during the most stressful period of life, so it is not strange that Holden does not want to grow up and let the memory of Allie fade.

[2] This paper will focus on their meeting in the later chapter about Holden's enlightenment.

3.4 Coming to Terms with Death

At Holden's age, one might experience a loss of their loved one. Until one reaches adolescence, it is highly unlikely that a person would lose a member of family or a dear friend. Teenagers often lose their grandparents at that age, and in rarer cases their parents. Holden, in particular, lost his younger brother Allie at a very young age, and it was expected from him to have a strong reaction to that loss. Adolescents usually cannot come to terms with such losses as they come to them as a shock at an age when they are not emotionally prepared for them. The same applies to Holden, who cannot stop thinking about Allie. Although Allie has been dead for three years, Holden was only thirteen at the time of his death, and the event left him traumatized. He talks to Allie when he feels like he cannot handle life anymore, and he also keeps carrying around Allie's baseball glove with him wherever he travels. Furthermore, Baldwin asserts that the image of Allie in the rainy cemetery haunts Holden because he cannot accept the fact that Allie is surrounded by dead people and tombstones (86):

> When the weather's nice, my parents go out quite frequently and stick a bunch of flowers on old Allie's grave. I went with them a couple of times, but I cut it out. In the first place, I certainly don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery. Surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all. . . . It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. . . . All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and then go someplace nice for dinner--everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it. (Salinger 83-84)

Holden's helplessness drives him crazy, and it is certainly one of many reasons why he is so unstable and insecure. Baldwin also connects Holden's fear of death with his fear of adulthood (86-87). Holden realizes it is time for him to stop being a child, but at the same time he does not want to grow up. Because of this internal conflict, Holden feels like he is going to disappear. Metaphorically speaking, his childhood is dying. Also, fighting the process of aging simultaneously means fighting death, as it is the culmination of life. Holden, however, cannot beat death because that is the way biology works. Nothing can bring his brother back, and nothing can slow down the process of growing up. It is bound to happen sooner or later.

3.5 Sexual Insecurities

Holden's confusions about the adult world are also reflected in his sex life. By the time they are Holden's age, teenagers already start noticing some changes happening to them, one of them being the process of sexual maturation. They start to detect their sexual needs, and their peers make them believe that it is an embarrassment if they have not fulfilled them when they reach a certain age, which can be very frustrating for adolescents and can lead into depression and anxiety. Holden is equally confused about sex as any other person his age would be. He craves for girls, he feels that he has biological needs, but he does not know how to react to this problem. Since he is a virgin, he is ashamed of what his peers might think of him. Many boys that age already had sexual intercourse, or at least claim they did, and that is why Holden feels vulnerable and afraid someone might make fun of him. Holden carries that burden, and he would like to get rid of it as soon as possible, even if it means having sexual intercourse with someone he has zero feelings for. Although that is his wish, he cannot go through with it. Based on Holden's attitude towards women, he is a romantic. On a couple of occasions in the novel, Holden admits that he cannot get really aroused if he does not have feelings for a girl, which would be completely reasonable if Holden did not think that he needs to see a psychiatrist because of it. This contrast between "sex maniac" Holden and romantic Holden is best seen in the prostitute scene at the hotel. Holden at first wants to have intercourse with a prostitute, but when she actually joins him in his room, he decides to not go through with the idea. Although his peers make Holden choose between respect and love, love seems to get the upper hand in this situation. Still, it is unclear whether society succeeds in killing the idea of love for Holden, since we never find out if he goes to see a psychiatrist because of his issues. James Bryan, who analyzed Holden's mental condition in "The Psychological Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye*," thus claims that Holden's roommate, Stradlater, and his colleague who lives in the room next to them, Ackley, represent the two choices Holden thinks he has (1066). Stradlater is a womanizer, at times he does not even remember the name of the girl he is going out with, and because of his good looks and physique he is able to seduce plenty of them. The seduction often results in sexual intercourse, since Stradlater does not accept no for an answer. On the other hand, Ackley is shy, anxious, and although he tells stories about sexual encounters he had with girls, Holden suspects that they are not true. Holden does not want to harass women like Stradlater, but he also fears to be too passive like Ackley, and thus remain a virgin. His fear of becoming one or the other almost makes him give up on love.

3.6 Family Expectations and Closely Connected Insecurities

When he talks about his father, Holden mentions that he is a lawyer, and that he is earning more than a decent amount of money. Based on his story about the suitcases, in addition to the fact that he goes to private schools, Baldwin argues that Holden's socioeconomic background is at least upper-middle class (79). Because of his socioeconomic status, his parents want him to be successful at Pencey (or any other school for that matter), and then join one of the Ivy League colleges. Holden certainly is not fond of this idea, so he keeps on flunking subjects in school, and is a continuous disappointment to his parents. Like many other teenagers, Holden cannot deal with such pressure, so he turns into an escapist. He first runs away from Pencey Prep, and then he decides to fully run away from home, which he luckily does not. Instead of talking about his own desires with his parents, he uses the wrong method of escaping his problems. Because he never shares his feelings with anyone, Holden starts to believe that no one truly cares about his well-being. In his work "Kings in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure. A Reading of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*," Carl F. Strauch notices Holden's usage of certain phrases throughout the novel, for example "if you really want to hear about it" (Salinger 1), "if you really want to know" (Salinger 31), or "if you really want to know the truth" (Salinger 50), and explains that these phrases are far more than just phrases; they are the evidence of Holden's insecurities, which resulted from the lack of communication he has with his parents. Strauch concludes that Holden firmly believes that there is not anyone who cares about him, and he feels alone in this world (9). It is natural to feel this way at that stage of life, and the solution to the problem is communication. If Holden were to reach out for help, he would most likely get it.

4. Holden's Development

During the time Holden spends living alone in New York, he is mostly confused, scared, and infuriated because of his helplessness to change something about the world. He opposes adulthood, and hates everything that comes with it. There are, however, the moments when Holden seems to have accepted the adult world and, in true *Bildungsroman* fashion, truly learns a valuable lesson in life. One of those moments takes place at a sandwich bar where Holden encounters two nuns who collect charity. Slawenski sees this event as some sort of a turning point for Holden as the nuns are the complete opposites from the two characters in the scene just before this one, the prostitute Sunny and her procurer Maurice (209-10). Sunny and Maurice could not force Holden into giving them another five dollars while he willingly gives the nuns ten dollars for charity. As Holden did a noble thing by giving this symbolic amount of money to the nuns, it is obvious to Slawenski that Holden can separate right from wrong. This event represents a small victory for everything virtuous in the world of adults, and it shows Holden that it is possible to be an adult and at the same time not to be phony. Slawenski concludes that Holden begins, from this moment on, to accept responsibility and change easier. Holden also has an epiphany after meeting an acquaintance of his, Carl Luce, at the Wicked Bar. As expected, Holden does not like Luce, but he does respect him because of his intelligence. He seeks advice about his sex life from Luce as Luce knew quite a lot about sex when they were together at Whooton School. In his review of this encounter, Seth Cassel focuses on Holden's admiration for Carl Luce (1). Holden considers Luce to be an "intellectual guy" (Salinger 73), and he thinks that Luce will help him out with his insecurities. Unfortunately for Holden, Luce does not feel like talking too much about his sex life with Holden, and he does not give Holden the answers he was hoping for. However, Holden starts to respect the process of critical thinking much more after his meeting with Luce as "Luce leaves a subconscious impression on Holden that intelligence helps one better understand the adult world" (Cassel 1). Luce also suggested Holden to speak with a psychoanalyst when they saw each other last time, and by the end of the novel we find out Holden spoke to one. According to Cassel, this is a healthy way of dealing with problems: Holden admits to having a problem, and he decides to deal with it in an intelligent way, just like Carl Luce would. Another moment when Holden realizes he should start to change his views on life and accept responsibility is when he has his talk with Phoebe about his future. Slawenski considers Phoebe to be Holden's savior because she unconsciously helps him realize what he has to do in life (211-12). The two key verbs in Slawenski's analysis of Holden and Phoebe's relationship are

“meet” and “catch.” When Holden asks Phoebe if she knows the poem “If a Body Catch a Body Comin’ through the Rye” by Robert Burns, she answers that “It’s ‘If a body meet a body coming through the rye’!” (Salinger 93). Slawenski argues that Holden subconsciously misquoted Burns, and all his problems are contained in the difference between these two verbs. The verb “meet” bears positive connotations, such as providing support to someone, while the verb “catch” bears negative connotations, meaning to prevent or forbid someone from something. Holden himself says that he did not know the lyrics at the time he spoke with Phoebe, but by the time he ended up in a sanatorium, he realized that it was his job to meet children in the rye, not catch them. He tries to keep childhood memories alive by force, and wants children to stay children by all means. However, children at times need support, not protection. Holden, as an adult, has to take care of his younger sister, but he also has to let her take a chance in life. In addition to correcting his verses and making him realize his role in life, Phoebe also plays a trick on Holden, which makes him choose between childhood and adulthood. Slawenski regards the event when Holden tells Phoebe he wants to run away from home as the final lesson Holden learns in the novel, and this event marks the final step Holden takes towards accepting his place in the world of adults (212). Phoebe will not let Holden leave without her, which causes Holden to try making a deal with Phoebe. He tells her to go back to school, and he will then unpack his bags, but it is a deal Phoebe will not accept. For Phoebe, Holden is still trying to “catch” her by compromising with her, and the goal is for Holden to start “meeting” her. She tells Holden to shut up, and Slawenski sees this as the exact moment Holden starts to change. When Phoebe runs away from Holden moments after, he does not follow her because he knows she will follow him. He lets Phoebe take her own road, but he makes sure she knows he is around by yelling out her name. Holden finally starts to meet and stops catching. This causes Holden to feel happier than he felt in a very long time, which is most evident in the carrousel scene:

> I went over and sat down on this bench, and she went and got on the carrousel . . . Then the carrousel started, and I watched her go around and around . . . All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, 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 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. (Salinger 113-14)

By trying to grab the golden ring that the dispenser presents to carrousel riders during the ride, Phoebe is symbolically taking a chance in life. Baldwin considers this event more important

than the one where Holden and Phoebe argue over his decision to leave his family home. Baldwin argues that Holden's "acceptance of Phoebe's need to 'grab for the gold ring' indicates that he sees her as a maturing individual who must be allowed to live her own life and take her own risks. At this point, he finally sees that children have to do this, and adults must let them. That's a step forward from believing that he must be their protector" (80). Holden definitely starts to accept responsibility and does not feel the need to run away anymore, because he loves his sister and he wants to be there for her whenever she needs him. Although Salinger does not end the novel on a completely positive note and does not reveal the reader whether Holden's process of maturation is finished, James Bryan thinks that Salinger gave Holden's audience a reason to believe that he will adapt to the adult world even more than he already has: "The richness of spirit in this novel, especially of the vision, the compassion, and the humor of the narrator reveal a psyche far healthier than that of the boy who endured the events of the narrative. Through the telling of his story, Holden has given shape to, and thus achieved control of, his troubled past" (1074). Holden benefits from retelling the story, and his mind is at a better place than it was when he left Pencey Prep.

Conclusion

The Catcher in the Rye has turned J.D. Salinger into a household name in American literature. Because the novel speaks so well to adolescents, it has become an instant success among them. In the context of the American *Bildungsroman*, it is a prime example of the newer writing style, which opposes tradition and calls out all of society's weak points, failures, and setbacks. In a typical American *Bildungsroman* fashion, the novel does not end with the main protagonist becoming a full-fledged adult. At the end of the novel, there is not any ritual that welcomes the main character into the adult world. The reader can only suspect what will further happen with the protagonist, based on a few hints the author gives to him. The main character of *The Catcher in the Rye*, a sixteen-year-old boy Holden Caulfield, is easy to connect to when one is an adolescent. On the other hand, Holden does not sit well with many important people at educational institutions, which resulted in the novel's censorship, as well as bans in certain schools, libraries, and colleges. Despite that, the novel sells well even to this day, perhaps because the younger generations of the 21st century are closer to Holden's mental breakdown than any other generation ever was. Although on the surface it may seem as if Salinger encourages teenagers to behave the same way Holden does, *The Catcher in the Rye* is actually more of a guidebook for them. By reading about Holden's adventures, adolescents can learn from his mistakes. They can discover how to deal with responsibility and, also, how to assimilate to the adult way of life, which awaits them. Since Holden deals with sexual insecurities, family expectations, and family loss, adolescents can apply the lessons he learns on those topics to their own life. Salinger lets them know they are not alone, and whenever they need someone with whom they can connect with, they can read about Holden, which is, generally speaking, one of the purposes of *Bildungsroman.*

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