

## **Alienation as a form of self-protection; the painfulness of growing up in the book "The Catcher in the Rye" of J.D. Salinger**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at understanding the difficulties of life of a teenager and his alienation in order to protect himself with the example of "The catcher in the Rye" by J. Salinger. The object of research in this paper is the process of revealing a teenager as a person, Holden, and preparing this person for adult independent life.

**Key words:** teenager, growing up, alienation, painfulness, bildungsroman, self-protection.

### **Introduction**

American writer J. D. Salinger wrote a novel called "The Catcher in the rye", published serially in 1945-1946 and as a novel as a whole in 1951. The novel is directly related to wartime because Salinger wrote the early drafts of The Catcher in the Rye when he was a soldier during World War II. The protest of the individual against social apathy and conformity, voiced in Salinger's novel, at one time made something of a revolution in the public consciousness, but the problems raised by the writer, such as alienation as a form of self-defense and growing up, remain relevant today, and therefore the interest in the novel is still great among the widest audience. The object of the study is the image of Holden Caulfield in the novel "The Catcher in the Rye" by D. D. Salinger. The subject of the study is the study of the psychological portrait of the main character and his relations with the surrounding world.

Salinger gave the narrative a confessional tone. In front of the readers is the very personal diary that teenagers are embarrassed to start. They associate themselves with the hero, arguing and agreeing with him in their hearts, not trusting anyone with their secrets. In addition, literary critics use such a term as "novel-growing up" in relation to the work. The genre of the "Catcher in the rye" is bildungsroman, a word taken from the German lexicon that means "romance" and "education", are peculiar coming-of-age stories in which the main teenage characters reflect and develop ideas about what it means to be a morally and spiritually mature person.

### **Literature review**

Chicago Tribune columnist Paul Engle (1951) said the book about Holden was *"emotional but not sentimental, dramatic but not melodramatic, and honest but not just salacious."* Engle also described the character of Holden, saying that the image of Holden was typical of a teenager. He praised the book, noting that it is not just another story about youth, supplemented by general thoughts about youth and growing up. Engle wrote (1951): *"An effort was made to make the text narrated by the boy himself as accurate as possible and at the same time as imaginative as possible. In this she succeeds in many ways."* "The Catcher in the Rye" is not just a novel about growing up with the usual problems, but rather a unique story of a unique child. It is rare to find a character, real or fictional, as dazzling and seductive as Holden Caulfield.

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S. Finkelstein, in his study "Existentialism in American Literature" (1989), emphasizes that Salinger was inspired by the philosophy of existentiality and reflected it in the novel. Finkelstein considers this statement an example of *"how important it is for an artist to be able to interest society in a new type of psychology that has developed under the influence of modern historical events."*

Ann Goodman (1951) believed that in the process of reading such a long novel, the reader would eventually tire of a character like Holden Caulfield. Goodman wrote: *"Holden was not as sensitive and insightful as he and his creator thought."* She also stressed that Holden was so self-centered that any other characters in the book, with the exception of Holden's sister, Phoebe, were not real at all. She wrote of Salinger's novel, *"The Catcher in the Rye is a brilliant tour de force, but you can expect something more from a writer with Salinger's undeniable talent."*

### Analysis

Alienation as a form of self-defense. Throughout the novel, the protagonist tries to escape from the outside world and eventually becomes its victim. As he told Mr. Spencer, his teacher, he feels trapped on the "other side" of life, and he's constantly trying to find his way into a world he feels he doesn't belong in. As the story progresses, we realize that Holden's alienation is his way of protecting himself from the outside world. He constantly wears his hunting hat to show off his uniqueness, that he is not like everyone; he uses his isolation from other people as proof that he is the best around: *"The way I wore it, I swung the old peak way around to the back-very corny, I'll admit, but I liked it that way. I looked good in it that way."* (Chapter 3). We can see that Holden's alienation is the cause of much of his pain. He never addresses his emotions or tries to discover the source of his problems. He is very much in need of human communication and love, but his protective wall prevents him from seeking such interaction. Alienation from the people around him is at the same time the source of Holden's strength, as well as the source of his problems. For example, Holden's loneliness makes him call Sally Hayes and go on a date with her, but his thoughts and need for isolation because of her behavior makes him insult her and drive her away. In the same way, he misses the meaningful connection he had in his childhood with Jane Gallagher, his neighbor, but he's too scared to make an attempt to call her: *"I thought of giving old Jane a buzz, to see if she was home yet and all, but I wasn't in the mood."* (Chapter 15).

The painfulness of growing up. Holden is an unusual hero for bildungsroman, because his main goal is to resist the very process of growing up. Holden is afraid of change and overwhelmed by complexity, according to his thoughts on the historical museum. He wants everything that goes on around him to be easily explained and recorded forever, like statues in a museum: *"The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd moved. The only thing that would be different would be you."* (Chapter 16). In particular, the author shows the image of two worlds in Holden's imagination about his goal of life: he thinks about childhood as a field of rye, where children play; adulthood for these children of Holden's world is equivalent to death—a fall from the edge of a cliff: *"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."* (Chapter 22). The ideas created in his understanding of two opposite worlds: childhood and adulthood allow Holden to isolate himself from the world, thereby protecting himself from it.

The main character of the work "The Catcher in the Rye" - Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old teenager. His name, which has become a symbol of youthful nonconformism (Nonconformism

is the desire of an individual to adhere to and defend attitudes, opinions, results of perception, behavior, etc., directly contradicting those that prevail in a given society or group), came from the phrase "hold on a coal field" - "hold on to the scorched (coal) fields". The author initially laid in the name of his hero social disorder and discord with the surrounding world. The hero is a sympathetic, kind, timid, understanding teenager in art, but at the same time irritable, impulsive and grumpy. Despite the fact that he is a supporter of everything natural, the teenager very often deceives people around: *"I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful."* (Chapter 3). Holden's speech is full of jargon, he lacks not only experience, but also the language means to express his pain and inner feelings - it seems to him that it always hurts to express himself: he constantly omits, breaks off phrases, saying: *"I don't want to go into this", "I'm not going to tell you my whole damn autobiography or something like that", "You still won't understand me"* (Chapter 1). As a storyteller, he speaks in the same uninhibited and rough manner that is common to many young readers, they understand his language as well as his feelings, thoughts and experiences. The author managed to get into the psychology of a person who is between two borders. It is not yet fully formed, but it already claims to be complete. At first, the hero seems to us an unpleasant grouch, who is not satisfied with everything around him. He reaches out to people, constantly thinks about them, but at the same time gets annoyed with every little thing and eventually leaves. He tries, but he doesn't want to grow up, stuck in a transition period where there is no turning back, and there is a haze of uncertainty ahead. Loneliness both weighs on him and elevates him in his own eyes. Holden is most oppressed by the prevailing spirit of universal deception and distrust among people in American society. He suffers heavily from the hopelessness, the doom of all his attempts to build his life on the justice and sincerity of human relations, from the inability to make it meaningful.

Phoebe is Holden's younger sister, who is only 9 years old. Holden loves her very much, she is a little perfection for him, she combines kindness, hard work, and innocence. Holden describes it this way: *"...You should see it. In all your life, you have never seen such a beautiful and intelligent child. She's very smart. I mean, she's had all the A's since she started school...You'll like her."* (Chapter 13).

Holden's younger brother, Allie, died of leukemia at the age of 11, when Holden was 13. Allie was very interested in sports and writing poetry, which is why he wrote poems on his left field glove so that he would have something to read when he was on the field. Holden often thinks of Allie, especially his baseball glove, which Holden uses as the subject for Stradlater's essay. Holden loved Allie very much, but when Allie died, Holden lost the ability to truly love without fear. When Holden needed help or felt very alone, he always felt like Allie was there, talking to him.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the heroine is idealized by Holden. This is a dreamy and romantic nature, with lofty feelings. Holden idolizes her, but does not dare to admit his feelings, and the girl goes to the self-confident and cynical Stradlater. A stunning girl, unlike any of the others, with whom Holden spent a lot of time one summer, whom he trusted: *"I held hands with her all the time, for instance. That doesn't sound like much, I realize, but she was terrific to hold hands with. Most girls if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand dies on you, or else they think they have to keep moving their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they'd bore you or something. Jane was different."* (Chapter 11).

### Conclusion

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that insincerity, misunderstanding and, as a result, protection in the form of alienation from this problem leads to problems of growing up of children, which, both at that time and in our time, are the most common problems of our society,

as Salinger clearly showed in his hero Holden. Holden is a pure person who only wants sincerity from other people. Unfortunately, there is only one such person in his life - his younger sister, and that is why he wants to become a "catcher of small children before the abyss of adulthood". After reading the work "The Catcher in the Rye" and studying the scientific literature, you can make a sad conclusion: the young generation of the United States is on the edge of a cliff, on one side of which is life according to the laws of good and justice, and on the other - the abyss of hypocrisy and evil. Holden, in my opinion, is one of the few people who keeps an entire generation of Americans from falling into the abyss of immorality. With his thoughts and actions, he shows that you cannot live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy, self-satisfaction, immorality, you cannot be indifferent.

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