Niceness and Phoniness in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Yutaka KATO

I

J. D. Salinger started his literary career as a short story writer. His early stories, written mostly for the slick magazines in the course of ten years, were interesting in their own way and found a response in a limited circle of sophisticated readers. At best, however, he was generally regarded as a clever writer with some talent. Serious interest in his work was rather slight until *The Catcher in the Rye* was published by Little, Brown and Company on July 16, 1951. Only with the success of this first book-length story, he came into the limelight of the literary world. This doesn't mean, as a matter of fact, that the book was an immediate enormous success. Although it made the 'best-seller' list in the New York Times, it was only in fourth place even at the peak of its popurality and could not stand comparison with the Caine Mutiny by Herman Wouk, who received the year's awards for the best novel. It was only after the publication of the paper-back edition nearly two years later that it began to have an ever-widening circle of readers, especially among the young generation.

Salinger may be called a very strange figure in the world of letters. In his private life he lives the life of a recluse. He believes he needs this isolation to devote himself to his creative activity. Especially since his attainment of reputation as a rising writer, he has withdrawn himself more and more from society. Even his picture on the dust jacket of *The Catcher in the Rye* was removed at his request, when

its third edition was issued. With very few exceptions, offers both from book-clubs and Hollywood were refused. His workshop is a concrete-block cell on the premises, where he takes a packed lunch and can be reached only by phone. It seems that his social needs, if any, are met only by his wife and children. His posture as a writer, coupled with his interest in Zen Buddhism and other Oriental philosophy, is often taken up for discussion in connection with the assessment of his works.

II

The Catcher in the Rye is narrated in the first person and in teen-age colloquial speech. In the first chapter, Holden Caulfield, the hero of the story, now under psychiatric treatment in a sanatorium in California, begins to tell about his three-day odyssey after expulsion from Pencey Prep for bad grades in four subjects and general want of application:

> This is the madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run down and had to come out here and take it easy.

In the concluding chapter, he reflects upon what he has told about:

> D. B. asked me what I thought about all this stuff I just finished telling you about. I don't know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don't know what I think about it.……It is funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.

Framed between these two chapters develops chapter after chapter the pathetic story of Holden Caulfield, a 16-year-old drop-out, academic and social, just on the brink of adulthood, who, in his own words, "gets depressed" over the phoniness of the world he has to face everywhere and every time. The backdrop against which each action or event occurs is Pencey Prep in Agerstown, Pennsylvania and New York where he wanders about before and after his temporary home-

coming to see his little sister Phobe. But as it is in the form of a confession or oral statement to his psychoanalyst, his narration is so episodic and digressive that any plot-summary in brief is hardly possible. It might be said in this connection that the action itself in this novel is neither important nor significant, though amusing and smile-provoking as befits a boy in an adolescent crisis. What is more important in it is the psychological states of the hero, whose three-day odyssey is both a flight and a quest. In another way of speaking, it is a story of conflict between innocence and experience——the nice dream world of an impressionable adolescent and the phony adult world surrounding him. David D. Galloway, the author of *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* is sufficiently convincing when he says:

> As an impressionable adolescent making his first tentative movements into an adult world, Holden becomes a sensitive register by which the values of that world can be judged. From the opening pages of this novel the world is seen to be fragmentary, distorted and absurd——in Holden's own vernacular, "phony". It is an environment in which real communication on a sensitive level is impossible, and when Holden unsuccessfully tries to explain his spiritual pain to Sally Hayes(C R, 173), there is certainly more than a coincidental suggestion of Eliot's 'J. Alfred Prufrock' in the frustrated cry, "You don't see what I meant at all".
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> Holden does not refuse to grow up so much as he agonizes over the state of being grown up. The innocent world of childhood is amply represented in *The Catcher in the Rye* but Holden, as a frustrated, disillusioned anxious hero, stands for modern man rather than merely for the modern adolescent. He is self-conscious and often ridiculous, but he is also an anguished human being of special sensibility. Even though he is often childishly ingenuous, and his language is frequently comic, Holden must be seen as both a representative and a critic of the modern environment.

III

The modern environment or the phony world in Holden Caulfield's eyes, is indicted in its various fields. That which comes first in this indictment is, of course, the field of school management. Pency Prep which has "kicked him out" is described by him to be one of the worst phonies:

> Pency Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. I never even saw a horse anywhere near the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture it always says: 'Since 1888 we have been moulding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men.' They don't do any more damn *moulding* at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I don't know anybody there that was splendid and clear thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably *came* to Pencey that way.

Another example of the phoniness of management at Pencey Prep is exposed by Holden's reference to the same meal served on Saturday nights in its dormitory:

> It was supposed to be a big deal, because they gave you steak. I'll bet a thousand bucks the reason they did that was because a lot of guy's parents came up to school on Sunday, and old Thurmer (the headmaster) probably figured everybody's mother would ask their darling boy what he had for dinner last night, and he'd say, 'Steak'. What a racket. You should've seen the steaks. They were these little, hard, dry jobs that you could hardly even cut. You always got these very lumpy mashed potatoes on steak night, and for dessert you got Brown Betty, which nobody ate,... .

As for Elkton Hills, his previous school, of which we come to know later from the scene of his interview with old Mr. Spencer, who has

flunked him in history, he recalls that one of the biggest reasons why he left there was that he was surrounded by phonies. He says that "they were coming in the goddam window", and adds further that he particularly hated Mr. Haas, the headmaster, who was such a sycophant as to try to ingratiate himself with the well-dressed, wealthy parents who drove up to school on Sundays.

Besides such general discontent he expresses in connection with the phony school management, his school life, too, has to meet event after event which depresses him more and more. What the reader may find particularly comic in this connection is the case of "this guy Ossenburger", an undertaker who contributed a dormitory wing to Pencey, his Alma Mater. This "hot-shot guy" comes up to school in a big "goddam" Cadillac and the boys have all to stand up in the grandstand and give him a locomotive (a cheer). The next morning, in chapel and with Dr. Thurmer, the headmaster, sitting right next to him on the rostrum, "he makes a speech that lasts about ten hours. He starts it off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us boys what a regular guy he is" and then goes on telling what a devoted believer he is, too, "getting right down on his knees to pray to God, whenever he is in some kind of trouble or something." Just in the middle of his speech, however, Edgar Marsalla, the guy sitting in the row in front of Holden, lays a terrific fart——a well-timed response appropriate to the occasion. For this disturbance in chapel, Dr. Thurmer makes all the boys have compulsory study hall in the academic building the next night, plus lengthy lecturing, of course.

On the morning of his last day at Pencey, he goes in to New York with the fencing team as the not too competent manager of it for a meet with McBurney School. They don't have the meet, however. This is because, preoccupied with the map he keeps getting up to look at to know where to get off, he leaves the foils and equipment and stuff on that subway. He is ostracized on that account by the whole team the whole way back on the train. The same day (Saturday) is also the day of the last football game of the year with Saxon Hall. "It is

a very big deal around Pencey. Everyone is supposed to commit suicide or something, if Old Pencey doesn't win." After he gets back from New York in the afternoon, he takes his position way up on top of Thomsen Hill overlooking the whole field where the two teams bash each other all over the place. He can hear his buddies "all yelling, deep and terrific on the Pencey side." Yet, he is all alone and never comes down from there to join them.

On the surface this seems to show that he is lacking in boyish enthusiasm, and under the circumstances, it may possibly be so, too. In point of fact, however, he isn't a type of boy who is easily carried away by his own enthusiasm. In a way he is intelligent and self-conscious. Mere blind following is just out of the question for him. All the time the boy has some unnameable questions to ask of himself quite like an adolescent with anguish deep in his heart. Conformity, therefore, just goes against the grain with him. It must be known that as a boy of special sensibility and awareness, the boy in this crucial period of growing up urgently needs understanding, sympathy and guidance of all around him. But in an environment in which he finds himself, no such help from the outside is possible. This is clearly shown by the interview between old Mr. Spencer and the boy that takes place the same afternoon. What the old teacher offers the boy at this special request of his to come and see him is nothing but the unpleasant impression of his garrulity and dirty personal habits. For that matter, Holden's background (that is, his family) is also far from adequate. His mother is ill and nervous; his father is a busy corporation lawyer who is a mere success hunter. He, therefore, has little or no parental guidance. Indeed, he has his big brother D. B. whom he once respected as a writer (but who has since prostituted his pen out in Hollywood), his little sister Phobe whom he really trusts with affection and his little brother who is now dead and whose memory he still cherishes dearly. But strictly speaking, this family is not functioning properly at all. It may even be said to be almost in a state of disintegration.

Saturday evening Holden spends his last hours at Pencey with two dorm-mates. One is Acklay, a nasty and unpopular senior, with a pimpled face, unbrushed teeth and dirty finger-nails, who, "rooming right next to him, barges in on him about eighty-five times a day." He squeezes his pimples and cuts his nails with Holden's pair of scissors even where he will walk on them in his bare feet. The other is Stradlater, the handsome, sexy and egotistic room-mate, whom Holden considers a secret slob. Actually each of them proves nothing but a nuisance to him in this critical situation, for self-centered and indifferent, they take advantage of him only for their insensitive and selfish ends without showing him any understanding and sympathy. That very evening, after forcibly borrowing Holden's hound's tooth jacket, Stradlater dates, probably with one idea in mind, the visiting Jane Gallagher whom Holden knows well and particularly wants to protect from the fearful situation that may possibly arise. What is worse, a further request is made by Stradlater to write an English theme for him during his absence, for he knows writing ability is the only merit Holden can be proud of. Later, after his return from his date, bickering naturally occurs over the written composition and also over his dating with Jane, and Holden is finally slugged into submission in a fight, much to his chagrin. He then goes for possible consolation to Acklay who is in bed but still awake. Acklay, however, is only anxious to get rid of him, as he has to go to Mass in the morning. Ignored and feeling still more lonesome and rotten, Holden asks Acklay, a catholic, about joining a monastery, which, in fact, is nothing but a fantasy of the moment for this hard-driven boy in need of sympathy and consolation. This, however, unexpectedly angers Acklay, so much so that he suddenly "sits way the hell up in bed" and says any attempts to make cracks about his religion is inexcusable. It is at this very moment that Holden, all of a sudden, decides to get out of Pencey ——right the same night and take a room in some inexpensive hotel in New York where he will just take it easy till around Wednesday when he figures his parents will receive the headmaster's letter.

Luckily he is loaded with pretty much money enough to last him for some time. When he is all set to go, with his bags and all, he stands for a while next to the stairs and takes a last look down the "goddam" corridor. His isolation or estrangement is complete and he feels like crying. Putting on his favorite red hunting hat, with the peak turned around to the back the way he likes it, he yells in his last desperation, "Sleep tight, ya morons!" so loudly that he wakes everyone up. One more misfortune awaits him, for he nearly breaks his "crazy" neck slipping on the peanut shells thrown by some stupid guy all over the stairs.

IV

Here begins his odyssey or adventures that he calls the madman stuff. It consists mostly of his abortive attempts to enter an adult world. Failure at every turn, however, makes him all the more depressed over its phoniness. It is, in fact, the loneliness or more precisely, estrangement of this frustrated and disillusioned boy of innocence that drives him to attempt incursion into it. Although attainable nowhere, his real or inmost desire is for a world of love and understanding and a refuge of tranquility.

As may be expected of a 16-year-old adolescent, it is quite inevitable that he is often made conscious of sex in spite of himself. Even on the train to New York after he clears out of Pencey, when he meets an attractive lady who turns out to be the mother of one of his classmates, he feels strangely perturbed and tries to be suave and sophisticated, telling her needless and unfounded lies about her son not necessarily out of kindness alone. Such attempts to romanticize himself so as to make him seem to himself and to others as if he could be accepted to be inside the threshold of adulthood are made time and again after his arrival in New York.

At the Edmont Hotel, to which he takes a taxi after his final decision not to call anyone at that late hour, he discovers in the rooms

across the court a female impersonator dressing and a man and a woman squirting water (or maybe highballs) out of their mouths at each other. At the sight of "these perverts and morons", as he calls them, there follows his own self-analysis about matters of sex, in which, for the moment, he thinks himself "the biggest sex maniac you ever saw", although he admits his ignorance about such matters after all. And in such a mood he calls, in the middle of the night, a girl named Faith Cavendish, whose address was given him in the previous summer by a chance acquaintance at a party. In the ensuing long conversation with this girl who is not exactly a whore but very near being one, he again tries to be suave and sophisticated, but the engagement proposed by him is, politely refused, of course, on the ground that it is very late.

Holden often takes it in his head to call one whom he loves or is concerned about, but after thinking it over, gives it up in the end. This is generally a time he has an acute feeling of estrangement and loneliness and is nostalgic toward the world which warms his heart but from which he is separated. It is just the case with him, when he decides and undecides to call his little sister Phobe before going down to the Lavender Room (hotel bar) and Jane Gallagher on his way out from the bar to the lobby. After long digressions about these two girls, he tells about his *aventure* or escapade in the Lavender Room with three girl-secretaries from Seattle, Washington and also about his visit to Ernie's, a Greenwich Village nightclub and his unexpected encounter with a girl, a former date of his brother D. B.' s. His experiences at both places are depressing, however.

In the Lavender Room, the waiter puts him at a bad table and refuses to serve him alcohol, besides. He manages to get the three girl-secretaries to dance with him. One of them he finds to be exceptionally good at dancing but all of them to be dopes from their speech and behavior. He somehow feels, it is true, that when jitterbugging with her as partner is over, he is half in love with the girl good at dancing because of the thing about girls that is inexplicable. But while dancing

with one of them, he happens to know that they are here just on the chance of finding movie stars and that their chief concern now after failing to find any is to go for their hunt to Radio City Music Hall early in the morning. They leave Holden and retire, without even offering to pay part of the check amounting to no less than thirteen bucks. At this Holden gets greatly depressed over what an alarming influence the movie industry, the show business and the like exercise upon such dopey, provincial girls.

In the Greenwich Village nightclub, he is again given a bad table after waiting for some time; so crowded is the place with prep school and college students already free for Christmas. This time he can get a Scotch and soda, his favorite drink, since "the place is dark and all and besides, nobody cares how old you are". At tables around him can be seen many young couples of self-styled intellectuals, namely, funny-looking guys and funny-looking girls engaged in empty and pointless conversations or in secret, unsavory acts disgraceful beyond measure. What depresses him more, however, is Ernie, the pianist who is supposed to be something holy, when he sits down at the piano. With an arrangement (a big mirror, a big spotlight and all) to set him off, he puts in his playing "all these dumb, show-offy ripples in high notes and a lot of tricky stuff". And when he is finished, "everybody clap their heads off and old Ernie turns around on his stool and gives this very phony, humble bow". For this Holden lays the blame on Ernie and his audience alike. He says, "If I were a piano player, I'd play it in the "goddam' closet."

Still more depressing is his chance encounter with Lillian Simmons with whom his brother D. B. used to go around a lot but who now comes up to him with a naval officer in tow. Small talk between her and the boy is, of course, inevitable, although he greatly hates this vamp in the guise of an intellectual but only adept in lip-and eye-service and lacking in sincerity. The phony girl invites him to join them for a drink, but he declines and leaves. His aside comment on the absurdity of having to say, "Glad to've met you to somebody

I'm not at all glad to have met" reflects the extent of his disappointment at the phony world he can by no means evade.

Interspersed with many more digressive confessions about himself which show his naivety and ingenuousness, the next two chapters (13, 14) mostly deals with his encounter with Sunny, a prostitute, back in the Edmont Hotel, "lousy", as has already been told by him, "with perverts". It is partly because of his own bravado that he is entrapped into it by Maurice, the elevator boy. Face to face with the girl who is all business in matters of sex but cares much about her "brand clean" green dress so as not to get it "all wrinkly", Holden feels sort of sorry for her, gets more depressed than sexy and attempts to engage her only in conversation. On a plausible pretext he finally succeeds in turning her away after giving her a five-dollar bill, as Maurice has told him. But later, Maurice, together with Sunny, puts in an appearance in Holden's room and demands another five of him by threats of violence. Words of dispute are bandied with each other between them. In the end Holden not only loses another five-dollar bill but is heavily smacked by this tough pimp and shakedown artist. Afterward Holden imagines his role of revenger as in a movie, but of course, he is not gifted so much with physical brutality as with a ready tongue. And the result of it all is:

> What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory.

As always, his is the case of ending as a victim.

V

Holden awakens around ten o'clock after a short sleep. Although he is hungry, he decides not to call room-service for breakfast for fear that they may send it up with Maurice of the night before. Next, for a while, he thinks of calling Jane Gallagher but again decides against

it, as is his wont. He finally calls Sally Hayes and succeeds in making a date with her for two o'clock that afternoon. He has four or five hours to kill before this date, but he checks out of the hotel. He then goes to Grand Central Station, which is the transportation center of New York and where naturally travelers and commuters of every sort and business and social affairs of every description are constantly in turmoil. And here begins his second-day odyssey. As a starting point of his second-day odyssey, however, this place of confusion is a particularly fitting one for his troubled state of mind, for his neurotic condition is more firmly established by now.

With the worsening of his neurosis, the interlocking of niceness and phoniness in this novel seems more and more to characterize his odyssey from now on. For that matter, glympses of his inner world of innocence can be obtained most frequently from the digressions and reflections peculiar to his confession. By the same token it is an almost verbal pattern for him to say, "You felt sort of sorry for her" or "I felt sorry as hell for him" even in regard to those characters whom he at first looks upon with ridicule, contempt or aversion. In this way old Mr. Spencer, unpopular Acklay, Harris Macklin and Dick Slagle, both his room-mates at Elkton Hills, the prostitute Sunny and many others are recalled with sympathy, understanding or compassion. Even the ducks he used to see in the lagoon in Central Park arouse concern in him time and again as to what will become of them in the wintertime.

At Grand Central Station Holden checks his bags and then goes into a little sandwich bar to have breakfast or brunch. Two nuns with very inexpensive suitcases come in and sit down next to him at the counter. The breakfast they order is just toast and coffee, while he eats "bacon and eggs or something". The frugality and humility of the two nuns somehow overwhelms him with pity, and out of his rapidly diminishing stock of money, he offers them a ten-dollar contribution, which they decline at first but finally accept with gratitude. His brunch over, he has still two more hours to kill, so he goes to a record shop in Broadway

to buy his little sister Phobe a record named "Little Shirley Beans" which he is sure will please her. Then he goes to buy tickets for a show to take Sally Hayes to it when she comes. During his wandering both to make such purchases and to kill time, he happens to find right in front of him an apparently poor family of three——father, mother and kid of about six——returning home from church. The kid is walking, as a kid often does, in the street right next to the kerb in a very straight line and is singing and humming to himself, quite oblivious of anything and anybody around him, 'If a body catch a body coming thorough the rye". In sharp contrast to the crowded Sunday pleasure seekers and the busy traffic of motor-vehicles, this is particularly refreshing to Holden, "making him feel better and feel not so depressed any more". And this experience makes an indelible impression on him: the reason why he later fantasies himself in the role of a catcher in the rye. It is inevitable that the more he becomes frustrated by the phoniness of the adult world, the more he feels attracted by the innocence of children's world. Throughout the book there are many instances in which he enviously looks with tenderness and love on children free from the evils of the adult world.

Holden then takes a cab to Central Park on the chance of finding Phobe at the Mall where she may possibly be skating, as is her wont. Just a few kids, but nowhere around is his little sister to be seen. Among the few kids, a little girl about his sister's age attracts his notice, and after having a brief exchange of questions and answers with this girl about the possible whereabouts of Phobe and doing a small act of kindness in helping her tighten her skate, he next goes to the New York Museum of Natural History to which formerly he and his sister used to go all the time. Although he does not actually go into the museum, he is now reminded of his trips to it in the past led as a schoolboy by one of his former teachers. His great admiration for the life-like exhibits in the museum is here expressed in the usual form of digression. The reason given for it is that everything in it permanently stays unchanged as opposed to the

constantly changing human world he sees around him. This shows that, left at a loose end his quest is now for something that remains static and safe——a refuge of tranquility in other words.

When Sally Hayes finally arrives, they take a taxi to the theater to enjoy the Lunts' performances, which Sally simply adores, but which, he thinks, are too good and therefore, phony, as in the case of Ernie in the Village club. During the intermissions of the performances, he gets disappointed to find Sally quite adjusted to the detestable phony world through her conversation with an Andover student. Later, at a table in the adjoining bar of Radio City, where they go ice-skating at her suggestion, Holden, on the spur of the moment, asks her in a sudden serious conversation whether she hates school and all that stuff, as he does. She replies that "it's a terrific bore", but that "she doesn't exactly hate it". He thinks that school is full of phonies but she doesn't. She even says one can get much out of school, if only one tries. Baffled and excited, he then makes a sudden proposal for a retreat with her into the woods and an idyllic married life between them. Sally, who is now fully sophisticated and worldly-wise, at once points out the fantasticalness of his idea and tells him that there will be "oodles of marvelous places to go to", if they become married after he finishes college. No understanding, and with his "nice" or tranquil refuge from the phony maddening world denied, he is as helpless as ever.

They part in the end, fed up with each other. Holden then calls Jane Gollagher again but no one answers. After making sure in his address book who may be available for the evening, he calls Carl Luce, his student-adviser at Whooton (his first Prep) and now a student at Columbia, and gets him to agree that they will meet for a drink at ten o'clock at the Wicker bar, on the Fifty-fourth. Holden has a bit of time to kill till ten o'clock, so he goes to the movies at Radio City, as it is near. Both the stage show (a special Christmas presentation) and the movie he again finds utterly phony. The show is spectacular but nonsensical; the movie sentimental and artifical. His

comment on the one is: "Jesus would've puked, if He could see it", and on the other; "All I can say is, don't see it, if you don't want to puke all over yourself." In the movie hall two figures attract his notice in particular. One is the drummer in the orchestra. "He only gets a chance to bang them (the kettle drums) a couple of times during a whole piece, but never looks bored when he isn't doing it. Then when he bangs them, he does it so nice and sweet, with this nervous expression on his face." The other is a seemingly kind-hearted lady who weeps throughout the film and yet keeps telling her own little kid who is with her to sit still and behave well, when he is bored and wants badly to go to the bathroom. Both give him food for thought on human nature.

Holden is found next in the Wicker bar, in "this sort of swanky hotel, the Seton Hotel". He arrives there a little earlier than the appointed time, so that he spends some time people-watching before Carl shows up. The Wicker bar is one of those places that are supposed to be very sophisticated, so that it is crowded with phonies that evening, too. Both the floor show and the presence of flits Holden finds particularly disgusting.

After Carl's arrival, the conversation naturally turns to the topic of sex matters. Holden's curiosity is whetted by the account of Carl's Chinese mistress who is a sculptress about thirty years old and with whom he says he is to have a date a couple of minutes later. Dodged tactfully in the end, however, he is given a heartless piece of advice that he should go to a psychoanalyst, which Carl's father is. He gets very lonesome and asks Carl to stay a little longer. This rejected, he feels himself more in a tight corner, with no help available at all.

VI

Holden remains alone in the Wicker bar, continues drinking and gets quite drunk. He is baffled in every crazy attempt he makes, with

no further developments to cheer him up. Finally, to sober up, he soaks his head in one of the washbowls in the washroom. He doesn't even bother to dry it, sitting for a while on a radiator with water dripping down his neck. With his money depleted (only 4 dollars and 30 cents left) and no hotel room to go back to at that late hour of Sunday, his downward slide becomes more and more definite. He gets his coat and Phobe's "Little Shirley Beans" record at the checkroom, and after having his red hunting hat put on his still wet head by the kind hatcheck girl, he goes outside and then starts walking over to Central Park, his childhood haunt, to see 'what the ducks (in that little lake) are doing' and also "if they are around or not". Just as he gets in the park, he drops Phobe's record, which breaks into "about fifty pieces" but which he gathers and puts into his coat pocket. He keeps walking in the dark and at last finds the lake partly frozen, and partly not frozen with no ducks seen anywhere around. In the meanwhile, he feels very cold, his teeth chattering and a shiver coming upon him. He is afraid he may get pneumonia and die. The fear of death not only reminds him of his brother Allie's death, his funeral and his tombstone in the cemetery but also makes him think of his own possible death and his sister Phobe's grief over it which he is sure will be the result. And it is this which induces him to resolve to sneak home and see his little sister without the knowledge of his parents.

Back at the apartment which is his home, he is lucky enough not to find anybody but Phobe who is asleep in D. B.'s room where she likes to sleep when he is away. He doesn't try to wake her up right away but to reassure himself of his home-coming, spends some time, wandering about the room, touching her things and reading her books. The reunion between brother and sister when the former wakes the latter up begins with extreme joy and happiness on both sides. She lets him know where their parents are for the evening and also tells him about a play at school which she is going to be in. He, on his part, tells her about the "Little Shirly Beans" record and gives her

the pieces of that broken record, which she is delighted to take. All the while, however, he is obsessed with the fear that his parents may barge in on him at any moment, so strong is his sense of guilt at his repeated failures on the other hand. While talking on about one thing or another, she becomes suspicious and guesses at last why Holden is back at that late hour and not on Wednesday at that. "Daddy'll kill you" is her prompt comment. She flaps on her stomach on the bed and puts the "goddam" pillow over her face. Whatever he says, she whose understanding and compassion he has all along been seeking and whom alone he trusts to be his savior, turns a deaf ear to him.

Holden does his best to maneuver and coax Phobe into conversation until she relents and begins to talk to him again. Pressed hard for an answer, he then starts to explain what he calls "a million reasons" for his failure. As demonstrated throughout the book, the reasons are the disillusionment and frustration he has had in his school life and in life in general. He cites such examples both at Pencey and Elkton Hills one by one. Not convinced, Phobe sharply asks him to think of one thing he likes and name it. His reply is "I like Allie.... And I like doing what I'm doing now. Sitting here with you, and talking about stuff and·····." Unsatisfied, Phobe points out that Allie is dead and gone and that talking isn't real. He defends himself by saying, "Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake——especially if they were about a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're alive and all." Still unsatisfied, Phobe, who has a greater sense of reality, persists in asking him to name what else he'd like to be——a scientist or a lawyer or something. He rejects both science and law——science "because he is no good in it" and law "because lawyers are phonies who actually do not go around, as they should, saving innocent guys' lives". However, an idea ——something crazy, as he calls it——suddenly comes across his mind and he thinks he now knows what he'd really like to be. This is based upon a faulty reading of a poem by Robert Burns which he has heard a boy singing and humming to himself during his wandering

in the daytime: "If a body meet a body through the rye." His explanation to Phobe in this connection is:

> I thought it was if a body catch a body. 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 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 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.

It is not in the phony adult world but in the nice world of children that Holden thinks he can find the only worthwhile task. Since he sees in the adult world nothing but the adult phoniness that blocks his way everywhere and every time, he wants to take refuge in the nice world of children, where he fantasies himself in the role of a protector or savior who will stop children from entering the adult world of phoniness and keep them in a state of arrested innocence. This, however, is an impossible dream, the absurdity of which he himself knows well, saying repeatedly, "I know it's crazy." Naturally Phobe doesn't say anything for a long time, though she listens to him carefully, and all she says when she says something is just "Daddy's going to kill you."

Holden, therefore, has to search for somebody else to sustain him now. That "somebody" is his former English teacher at Elkton Hills, Mr. Antolini, who presently teaches at N. Y. U. Both have since been on visiting terms with each other in New York and Holden thinks Mr. Antolini is not only the best teacher he's ever had but also a man of keen intellect and moral concience. He takes it into his head to call him up as his last resort, and goes into the living room where the telephone is. He tells him honestly he has flunked out of Pencey and is kindly invited to come right over. In the short space of time

after he gets back from the living room and leaves the apartment to go to see Mr. Antolini, the somewhat strained relation relaxes between brother and sister, and with the return of love between them, they enjoy dancing for a while——very childlike, though somewhat absurd under the circumstaces. When their parents come home, Phobe does her best to protect his brother and shows him so much compassion and sympathy that she replenishes his purse with all her Christmas money——every penny of it. At parting in the dark room with the light turned off to keep them from being seen, Holden, becoming almost hysterical, embraces his little sister and weeps low so that nobody can hear him. Thus, without the least knowledge of his parents, he successfully sneaks out of the apartment.

On arrival at the swanky apartment over on Sutton Place, Holden is received by Mr. Antolini himself in his bathrobe and with a highball in one hand. The interview begins in an atmosphere which shows that there is ease and rapport between them; only the outcome of it is not satisfactory. For one thing, Holden is exhausted and not at all well. His state of mind is in confusion, besides. For another, Mr. Antolini is quite drunk, and as he talks on, he becomes enraptured by the sound of his own rhetoric, as is often the case with teachers. His advice may be good enough, but he doesn't realize that what the boy urgently needs is not his lecturing in high-flown language but a gesture such as will restore tranquility to his troubled mind. It is not until the boy gets bored and even yawns in his teacher's face that the couch is at last fixed up for him to lie down. Then happens the worst. When Holden wakes up all of a sudden, he feels Mr. Antolini sitting on the floor right next to the couch in the dark and sort of petting or patting him on the head. This startles him greatly, and he instinctively interprets it as a perverted action. The idol has fallen. He has to go outside again in the early morning when it is just becoming light.

At Grand Central Station where he finds himself next, Holden starts thinking about Mr. Antolini and changes his mind.

I wonderd if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe he just, liked to pat guys on the head when they're asleep. I mean how can you tell about that stuff for sure? You can't.……I mean I started thinking that even if he was a flit he certainly'd been nice to me.……

Surely Salinger does not provide enough evidence either way. The least that can be said is that the reader is made aware of the eccentricity of the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Antolini. As for Holden's retrospection about the matter, however, it shows his ambivalence as is often demonstrated throughout the book. The out and out hating business is simply impossible for him. It is that he simply gets depressed or disappointed, with the result that he is more and more confused. Whenever he thinks retrospectively of anything or anybody, he somehow starts missing them, which is the reflection of niceness in his inner world.

VII

Holden's last day odyssey begins at Grand Central Station again. He happens to find a magazine left on the bench next to him and starts reading it. One of the medical articles carried by it makes him suspect that he has cancer and is going to die. To cheer him up as well as to appease his hunger, he starts walking way over east, where there are pretty cheap restaurants. After dropping in at a very cheap-looking restaurant, he again starts walking toward Fifth Avenue. While walking up Fifth Avenue where a fairly Christmasy atmosphere prevails, he suddenly has an uneasy feeling that he'll go down, down and that nobody'll ever see him again. This is the hidden death-wish that comes upon him time and again when his mental depression is very great. As he walks along, he desperately begins to talk to his dead brother Allie, asking for help, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear." He still goes further and then sits down

to rest, for about an hour. Finally he decides to go away, out West this time and live a sort of Thoreauan life there. He even fantasies that he will pretend to be a deaf-mute, live in his cabin near the woods (not right *in* them) with a beautiful deaf-mute girl who will be his wife, and have children of their own whom he and his wife will teach how to read and write by themselves. Thus, he thinks he can avoid more contact with people all around than necessary. All he has to do before he hitch-hikes out West is to see Phobe once more and return her Christmas money. He goes to her school to find somebody in the principal's office who will deliver a note to her classroom. The note tells her he is going to hitch-hike out West that afternoon and asks her to meet him at the Museum of Art near the door at a quarter past 12. At the school while going up the stairs to the principal's office, he suddenly feels sick, sits down for a second and then finds profanity written on the wall opposite. That drives him crazy:

> I thought how Phobe and all the other kids would see it and how they would wonder what the hell it meant, and how some dirty kid would tell them——all cockeyed naturally——what it meant, and how they'd *think* about it and maybe *worry* about it for a couple of days.

He even imagines how he would kill the person who wrote it, although he admits he wouldn't have the guts to do it. Finally he rubs it off, fearing all the time that some teacher may catch him and think he has written it hmself. After delivering his note to the principal's office, he goes down by a different stairway and there he sees another '—you' on the wall. He again tries to rub it off, but this time he finds it scratched on, with a knife or something. He says, "If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn't rub out even *half*'—you' signs in the world". The catcher in the rye asserts itself in him, but he has to realize that his work of salvation is hopeless and impossible.

Holden has more than half an hour to kill before he can meet Phobe at the museum. While waiting for her at the museum, he encounters

two little kids who ask him to direct them to where the Egyptian mummies are displayed. When he takes them to where the mummies are, they become frightened and run away. He sort of likes a row of mummies that remain still and unchanged and enjoys the peace and quiet there, when all of a sudden he again sees '—you' on the wall, written with a red crayon or something, right under the glass part of the wall. This time, however, he somewhat resigns himself to the insensitiveness of people or the phoniness of the world, for that matter. He says:

> You can never 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 '—you' right under your nose. Try it sometime. I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say 'Holden Caulfield' on it and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say '——you'.

It is inevitable that he has to remain baffled and frustrated for ever in his quest for niceness. On that account he feels ill and nearly passes out. After his recovery from it and while waiting for Phobe, he again begins to daydream about his ideal home in the West. He conceives various designs of his life there. But this, of course, is a mere daydream. Assistance, if ever there is, has to come from Phobe, his dear little sister. When she arrives, she asks him to let her go out West with him. This unexpected and unsolicited proposal is more than he can accept. He advises her to go back to school. This is because he realizes that he will then deprive her of many opportunities open to her. Argument goes on for a time between brother and sister. Finally Holden promises that he will go home, giving up his idea of going out West, and tries to coax Phobe away to the zoo in the park. At first she obstinately keeps walking on the opposite side of the same street, but by the time they get to the zoo, they are somehow reconciled to each other. In the zoo, they find a carousel with a few

little kids riding on it. He remembers her fondness for the carousel as a tiny little kid and urges her to go for a ride on it. Holden buys Phobe a ticket. She goes and sits down on a big, brown, beat-up-looking old horse. Then the carousel starts with music accompaniment. Holden sits on a bench and watches her go around. He sees Phobe as well as the other kids trying to grab for the gold ring and feels somewhat afraid that she may fall off the horse. He, however, realizes:

> 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 is bad, if you say anything.

It may be said that he is now a little closer to the world as it is than before. Anyway, when Phobe comes over to him after the ride and tells him she is not angry with him any more, he insists that she should try another ride and again promises to go home without fail. He also emphasizes that he really did go home afterwards. The second time when Phobe gets back on her own horse, it begins to rain very heavily. Everybody except those kids on horseback go over and stand under the roof of the carousel. But Holden alone remains on the bench in the rain. He watches Phobe keep going round and round. He feels extremely happy and contented, though he doesn't know why. He is given a few minutes of joy at last.

VIII

The Catcher in the Rye was a controversial book. As soon as it began to be widely read among high school and colledge students, it drew forth a strong protest against Salinger's use of profanity in the text from school board officials, principals, librarians and parents. These people regarded it as an immoral and corrupting book, and certain communities and some school boards went the length of condemning or banning it. It is small wonder that the book should have made them very uneasy, for instances have not seldom occurred in the world of letters in which the use of profanity caused misun-

derstanding among those who cursorily read literary books without any regard to their literary merit.

Aside from this kind of objection, however, serious critical studies have come out in abundance, too. The critics of Salinger and his works are strangely divided in their opinions. Some are highly sympathetic, while others are unsympathetic or even hostile. Whether sympathetic or unsympathetic, these critics on both sides seem to go a little too far, besides. And this is only natural, when it is considered that both Salinger as a writer and the characters created by him can be subjected to various interpretations.

In point of fact, Holden Caulfield, the hero of The Catcher in the Rye, is not free from inconsistencies and contradictions. At every turn he says he gets depressed over the phoniness of those around him and especially, over that of the adult world, but the occasional comments or remarks he drops during his digressive confession reveal that he himself is not always consistent in his speech and behavior. Some critics cite examples of this kind and accuse him of his own phoniness. This, however, may be a little beside the point. After all, Holden is still an adolescent of limited experience and perspective. As such, consistency is something that can't be expected of him. He even gives the reader an impression of being a very comic figure, without, however, any such intention on his part. The point, therefore, is that with all such inconsistencies and contradictions, we are intended to see him as an innocent adolescent of special awareness and sensibility who at the crucial period of growing up, is intently seeking an environment congenial to him.

Holden has a dream which is impossible of realization, so long as the surrounding world remains as it is. What he seeks in his dream is nothing but a nice world of stability and love. When he visits the Museum, he is struck with admiration at various exhibits which remain static and unchanged for ever. To his troubled mind this appears an ideal world of order and stability, but just then under the glass part of the wall he sees '—you'. written with a red crayon

or something. He proposes to Sally Hayes a retreat into the woods and an idyllic married life between them. The proposal is flatly rejected by worldly-wise Sally by reason of the unreality of his idea. At the latter part of his odyssey he further contemplates hitch-hiking out West, where he will work as a deaf-mute filling-station operator, marry a girl who is also deaf-mute and have a family. This, of course, ends as a mere fantasy after all. In the matter of love, he has, needless to say, his little brother Allie and his little sister Phobe. This, however, is affection, though very deep, between siblings. The former is dead and gone, while the latter, who is his savior in a way, is still a mere child. Evidently he has a strong love for the weak, especially for those who are simple, innocent and pure in heart. Out of his fast diminishing stock of money, he makes a 10-dollar contribution to the humble, frugal nuns he meets at Grand Central Station. He helps a little girl to tighten her skate at the Mall in Central Park and two little boys to locate the display of Egyptian mummies at the Museum. He is deeply moved by a small kid who, oblivious of everything around him, sings the song, "If a body catch (meet) a body coming through the rye", as he walks in a straight line close to the kerb. When he visits his little sister Phobe's school, he rubs out '—you' on the wall because of the bad influence he fears it may have upon simple and ingenuous schoolgirls. He even fears for the ducks in the lagoon, when it freezes over. All this is the manifestation of a kind of universal love he has in his heart and it culminates into his messianic aspiration, that is, his ambition to be the catcher in the rye.

Life for Holden however, is full of phonies: the unfeeling prep school roommates, the hypocritical teachers, the group of perverts, the stupid women in the Lavender Room, the self-styled intellectuals in Ernie's, the affected night-club pianist and theatrical performers, the tricky pim and prostitute at the hotel, the conventional girl friend and the egotistic student-adviser. Indeed, wherever he turns, what life offers him is nothing but disillusionment and frustration. Nowhere can he

find any place of refuge or safety where communication on a sensitive level is possible. His life experience is so destructive that even his death-wish not seldom comes to the surface.

Only at the end of the story it seems that Holden is found somewhat in compromise with the world as it is. His sudden insight, when he watches Phobe and the other kids on the carousel, 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 is bad, if you say anything to them." Further he tells about his extreme joy at the sight of Phobe going round and round with the music accompaniment of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes". Such sudden insight or what may be called a climatic epiphany or revelation is presented in many of Salinger's earlier and later stories and is variously criticized in relation to his professed interest in Zen Buddhism and other Oriental philosophy. However, so far as *The Catcher in the Rye* alone is concerned, it is somewhat ambiguous whether this means Holden's final acceptance of the world. What is clear here is that he is no longer the cather in the rye—he has given up his desperate faith in his messianic mission. As his concluding remark in the Californian sanatorium, he talks about forgiveness, "Don't ever talk anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody, even that goddam Maurice." Here he seems to forgive every phony of the world, indeed, but it is no less true that he cannot forgive any and every phony except in memory. Between oppressive realities and his nice dream world, there still remains a tragic gulf for ever.

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