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Jerome David Salinger: A Spokesman for the Disillusioned and Lost Adolescents

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Abstract

Adolescence is a beautiful transitional phase of a human life. It carries one from innocence to maturity, from childhood to adulthood and prepares a child for the roles that society expects from an adult. *Adolescence* not only marks some major physical changes but also cognitive transitions in children. And usually this expansion of personality leads to “*identity crisis*”. An adolescence psychologist penned, “Not until adolescence does the individual develop the prerequisites in physiological growth, mental maturation and social responsibility to experience and pass through the crisis of identity.” (Erikson, 1968, p.91). Jerome David Salinger is one of the most influential writer who affiliated his writing’s major elements with this issue. He represented himself as a spokesman for the lost and *disillusioned* youth of post World War II. He delineated this painful transition in almost all his works that include a novel and various short stories. His most important work *The Catcher in the Rye* along with the other short stories make a massive volume of adolescent’s experiences. This paper deals with those issues, dexterously articulated by Salinger’s characters. And as the cure to a disease is in disease itself therefore, the paper would explore the imminent solutions for the raised issue.

Keywords- Adolescence, Disillusioned, Identity Crisis, Salinger, Transition

Children are unblemished and spiritually pure beings and when they come in contact with empty values of human life, an ideal world seems to shatter before them. During the phase of adolescence they start contrasting between what they have been taught and what is to be followed in the world to survive. This enlightenment and awareness of the sorrows of human world attacks their thinking process and makes them doubt everything and everyone around them. Salinger primarily used children as his subjects to show the decadence and shallowness of adult world. He wrote one novel i.e. *The Catcher in the Rye* and a collection of short stories narrating lives of Glass siblings compiled in *Nine stories* collection and all his work revolves around the lives of disillusioned children and their struggle to habituate with the real world. All of Salinger's adolescents suffer through the same transitions and try to reach to

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their readers with their unique journeys, stories and problems. They suffer extreme isolation, isolation from the adult world and portray their griefs by various artistic instruments constituting symbolism, dialogues and inferences.

Holden Caulfield, the most exemplary character delineated by Salinger vividly depicts his lonely and alienated life in modern New York city. His two and a half day adventures show his abhorrence for the city life. He searches for decency and a truthful life and struggles against growing up. He is placed in a problem. As an adolescent, Holden really explores for pure vision, truthfulness, and respectability. Be that as it may, his activities and contemplations meet with naked rejection by many who might cry with one voice, "Holden, why don't you just grow up?" truth be told, Holden speaks to the uniqueness in man in a world which has lost its soul for the idealism.

In the novel Holden is ordinarily against both the realism and grotesqueness of our society or against the ugliness of the grown-up world. Holden's solitary genuine companion, his sister Phoebe, complains that Holden doesn't like whatever's going on. However he doesn't make an exceptionally palatable move since he comes up short on any genuine positive program for killing the shades of malice he discovers surrounding him. In every manner, he resembles a searcher for optimism—an endeavoring to locate the great and the flawlessness in man. Almost certainly it would not be distinctive to understand the fakes, the phonies, and the backstabbers whom Holden so disdains.

They really comprise a reasonable composition of what the way of life stands as. They are a piece of reality which Holden doesn't see, is never ready to see, or in certainty decline to see. The phonies, the bores, and the double crossers are one a player in mankind. It is the reality that everybody must acknowledge. Also, maybe this is the primary reason that Holden's search for idealism and truthfulness is at last broken.

Adolescents idealism is found as Holden continued looking for earnestness, for trustworthiness between individuals. His repeated insistence, "I mean it, I really do," gives credence to this search. Furthermore, when Holden experiences exceptionality, as he does with his sister Phoebe, he responds positively to it. Holden, like all of teenagers, is very sensitive to the good and vulnerable to the shrewdness in the society. He may regularly be criticized for being too vulnerable about the realities of society to live in it. Maybe the adolescents are too sensitive to even think about ignoring it, to look the other way, to pull back, as the supposed balanced and occupied grown-ups pull back into their defensive shells when they look with society's fear and ugly realities. Holden essentially can't acknowledge the shameful acts and offensiveness that encompass him. However, he can meet them head-on. It is to the adolescent's extraordinary credit that, in disdain of various thwarted expectations, he trusts that there must be good some place among the world. For whatever length of time that the immature can clutch the conviction that there are outside partners to his optimal self, he can continue onward. At the point when this vision of his independent

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society is at long last broken in his experience with the universe of the real world, the teenagers must trade off or horrendously pull back from the universe of the real world.

The ideal resistance of children is something worth notice, for it is bridled to hopeful despite the fact that it is unworkable in the hard universe of the real world. There must be some propriety in resistance to a false, lying, and beguiling society. Most youths in the long run grapple with things as they seem to be. They surrender their hopeful thoughts of working for any radical changes in the social structure or in the way of life's regular framework. Holden was not able do this specific thing. So he is both seriously commended and savagely denounced.

Even Holden cannot find a suitable place to stay throughout the novel. On his way to Old Spencer, he feels that after crossing the street he may disappear. The strange thought of Holden reveals that he is afraid of advance, because he is not sure what awaits him. He is afraid he can vanish or fall into misery. What Holden says and does here reflects the state he's in, he doesn't have to go anywhere; he doesn't see where he's going in life; he's going to wander around in New York City, which is foreshadowed. It involves a critical period of his life, meaning the inevitable transition from adolescence to adulthood. The adult world is so disgusting, obscene and fake that he fears entering in it. Holden faces this difficulty, however, with courage. His sister Phoebe asks him in the middle of the book what happens to him. He answers that he pictures thousands of young children playing a game, but nobody is there. Holden stands himself at the edge of the insane cliff. What he has to do is catch and protect each child when they begin to cross the cliff.

He'd just like a catcher in the rye. That's the only thing he'd really like to be. "I thought it was if a body catches a body, I said, Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids and nobody's around...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 catcher in the rye and al. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy" (Salinger, 1951, p.224-225). Holden became a lasting symbol of the restless youth of America. The nervous breakdown of Holden at the end of the novel appears to be totally contemporary in a society whose young people are as troubled and yet as challengingly hopeful as ever.

Precocious but disillusioned Glass siblings

This paper also examines J.D. Salinger's Glass family dynamics. Salinger told stories of the Glass family through various short story installments, such as Franny & Zooey, Nine Stories, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction and other installments not found in collections.

Eccentricities are the norm for today's societal standards. Nothing but J.D. Salinger through the Glass family of has defined and shown the importance of these eccentricities.

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Each child, raised in the family was a prodigy, had his own problems and uniqueness. It is evident through critical works that each glass represents a different gift and defect that ultimately characterizes it. In my investigation of each character separately in the order that they appear in Salinger's texts and also in conjunction with their eldest sibling Seymour, it is clear that the survival of the Glass children's identities depends solely on Seymour.

The oldest and most important glass brother, Seymour, was first created by Salinger. He is most vulnerable and intellectually superior. Seymour is actually the most talented of the Glass kids. The Glass children were always perceived to be different from society's norms, both by their own standards and by others' and were decisively "a non-conformist family" (Wiegand 122). But it was their oldest brother, Seymour, who was the catalyst for their non-compliance. Even after his death, Seymour affected them and their choices psychologically. He shaped their personalities, careers and education to such an extent that they were never the same, and in the end it became psychologically impossible for them to assimilate without each other in society because of their own creation of truth. He has an innate ability to see and focus beyond the corrupt world and also the innocent beauty of life, like the appreciation of wax and olives for children. (Salinger, "Bananafish perfect day"). This appreciation not only enables him to identify what is important in life, but it's his intelligence that also gives this ability to his siblings and engraved his ideas flawlessly in them. Seymour wants his brethren to succeed in life, from a spiritual point of view especially. He encourages his siblings to turn back from the secular life and embrace the concept that knowledge for the sake of knowledge is the key to a higher level of awareness and spirituality.

Seymour committed suicide and thus intensified his important role in the lives of his siblings. Seymour is the most talented of the Glass children, mainly because he discovers the true importance of life before his death: the idea that a belief is all that is necessary for a successful spirituality. Since Seymour discovered this, he felt it safe to escape through his suicide. For the surviving Glass siblings and the readers, Seymour's absence raised many unanswerable questions; without the presence of the all-knowing teacher, the remaining siblings not only had to deal with his absence, but also with the emotional scars Seymour inflicted on them. Although physically absent, Seymour is so important that the identities of his siblings are partly caused by post-traumatic stress around him.

There were some sensitive adults, however, such as Eloise, Buddy and Zooey Glass who realize the impossibility of returning to the world that surrounds them, not only their childhood but more importantly contemporary world. They are, however, like Holden, refusing realities and living in an imaginable ideal world of them. Other Glass siblings, such as Boo-Boo and Seymour Glass, are actually trying to get back to childhood. But Boo-Boo is refused entrance onto Lionel's boat, and Seymour sees the bananafish that prompts his suicide. Both attempts are unsuccessful. Adults may not enter the world of children that is veiled in innocence and uncontaminated by the sick values of the world. This idea is underlined in Franny and Zooey when in the story Buddy Glass meets a four-year old girl. He

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asked the names of her boy-friends. She replied, "Bobby and Dorothy." She does not realize that Bobby and Dorothy are of different sexes and cannot both be boyfriends. This difference is irrelevant to her, because she classifies them both as closely related partners. Adults, of course, would notice the difference in outward physiology, but recognizing that a child has an unbiased outlook causes permanent adult isolation, because adults have lost their pure values. They cannot search for the inner qualities that make a horse-seeker. It's spiritually the children of Salinger are superior to adults.

Since the death of Seymour so profoundly affects every member of the Glass family, they each have problems with the displacement of emotion and a tendency to fix beliefs and ideas that alter them, and therefore each sibling loses his desire to live when Seymour dies. Franny is looking not only for a belief system, but also for a connection to Seymour. The education that Franny received makes the reader wonder who is to blame for her identity issues. In regards to post-traumatic stress, there are always events that raise "questions of causation and with these, issues of blame and responsibility" (Kolk & 42 McFarlane 489). Since Salinger has Franny experiment with her role as an adult, the trauma of Seymour's suicide combines with her own identity confusion. Identity confusion "would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (Caruth 17).

Due to Franny's desire to play an adult role in society and to maintain the education she received as a child, the subconscious of Franny is unwilling to deal with the suicide of Seymour. The subconscious of Franny was repressed because Seymour is such an important factor in shaping her being. In order to achieve this higher spirituality, Franny repeats the prayer of Jesus in an effort to draw closer to Seymour, illustrating that Franny has emotionally transferred her need for Seymour to her need for spirit. Because of the repression of her problems with the suicide of Seymour, it is clear that Franny never came to terms with his death. In an unconscious refusal to continue the path of her life and instead to obsess the prayer of Jesus, Franny's life metaphorically stopped.

Considering Buddy Glass in the saga, with the suicide of Seymour, Buddy suffered a great deal of repression. He was unable to cope with the death of Seymour, because there was no one after him. When Seymour died, Buddy became even more reclusive and gave up his old life for someone who was alone. Through the suicide of Seymour and the related post-traumatic stress elements, the life of Buddy metaphorically ended and he decided to live the memory of Seymour. This solitude is inexplicable because Buddy is surrounded by friends and family who parallel the feelings of solitude of Seymour. Seymour, however, identifies with his own personal loneliness and takes advantage of it in order to further alienate himself from the rest of society. In this case, Buddy tries to avoid the absence of Seymour. Since he realizes that it would be impossible at a young age and this realization is reiterated as an adult when Seymour dies, Buddy simply opts to become emotionally closer to Seymour, and thus his actual self dies. All that survives through death is the spirit of the deceased, and that is all

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that Buddy wants to survive himself, since all that is left of Seymour. This emotional connection is similar to that of Franny's quest for a belief system, but Buddy found that his belief system was entrusted to Seymour, while Franny was in the fat lady of Seymour.

The Glasses, however, are no longer children; they are adults struggling with the world through indiscriminating love. For Salinger to be child means basking in the warm, light of innocence. In this sense, the glasses are children (or children), because, although they are mature physically, they are still holy innocents. In dealing with the glasses, the entire slant of Salinger's childhood has changed since his early short stories. With the glasses, Salinger shows how the once innocent children have to deal with a society that they are uncomfortable living in.

Freedom attained after escape and fall

Holden Caulfield, the protagonist, is one of the American heroes, but with a big difference. He appears to be involved in both kinds of pursuits at once; he has to go home and leave. Unlike other American Knight errors such as Huck Finn, Holden seeks virtue for Love. He is going to be good. When the kids play on the Clifftop in the rye field, Holden wants to be the one who catches them before they fall off the cliff. He is not inclined to the courage. He's not driven towards woman's love. Holden is driven to love his fellow man, the virtues of charity. Like these American heroes, Holden is a wanderer because he must be good, also he has to be more of a bad boy than the puritanical Huck could have imagined. To be catcher in the rye in this world is possible only at the price of leaving it.

The quest of Holden can be indicated in a number of ways. In a sense, his quest to preserve an innocence that is in danger of disappearing—the innocence of infancy. In a different sense, the quest is a quest for an ideal but inhuman love that meets all requirements but does not make any. Maybe in its deepest sense, the quest of Holden is a quest for identity, a quest for self. And that self he discovers is a human self and a self that cannot break the 'magnetic chain of mankind;' he cannot deny the love within him when he begins to miss all the people he tells.

Millions of young Americans of Fifties and Sixties felt closer to Salinger than to any other writer. "... as many people have accepted Salinger's characters, Holden Caulfield as a brother and Seymour Glass as a private and sainted memory." In the first place he speaks their language, he not only speaks it, the talk of his characters, is so to speak, righter than right. The voice of Holden Caulfield is a voice we instantly recognize, and yet there is just that always of stylistic intensification that always distinguishes good dialogue.

The search for Holden was more of a pilgrimage. He struck everywhere through the mask of pretension. Despite hurts and revolts, his pursuit of real people continued. He sought the genuine, the sincere, the pure, the innocent, the beautiful; he tried to purify himself; he gave himself in great hands; he refused to be normal because it was a phony. Holden, however, is not just a rebel. His compassion is the strongest thing in him. He is filled with tenderness to his sister Phoebe and to all children. He is touched by all the people he meets

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occasionally on his pilgrimage—the woman on the train, the girls in the night club, the nuns at the station—and he always wants them to be at peace and to be happy. He finally feels sorry for those who hurt him. Holden is a rebel in true sense. He revolts against the world of adults. But his revolt takes the form of an escape from this world. He does not want to become grown-up himself.

J. D. Salinger sought to convey his own commentary on society as a whole and reiterate the concept that young people are innocent and beautiful, as illustrated in Seymour's interactions with a little girl on the beach in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Salinger also acknowledged that no one can remain pure and beautiful for eternity; that he examined a family that was the antithesis of average in an effort to promote eternity. This may be the inadvertent commentary of Salinger on himself; he seems to believe that he is one of those talented adults. Salinger tried to get his readers to embrace their internalized youth, because by their innocence they would definitely reach a spiritual nirvana.

The glass children are the product of this attitude and are the medium of the religious ideals of Salinger. The Glass family has the ability not only to teach and build each other, but also its readers, who will always take away a religious realization after reading and understanding their stories.

The brotherhood between Seymour and Buddy is particularly profound and Salinger shows that through their complex relationship, they share their aspirations for their siblings to see beauty in a corrupt world. This results in a much deeper and more united relationship. Although competitive in nature, the brothers created the "curriculum" that educates the youngest glass children, but also inadvertently influences the other siblings. The curriculum was designed by the brothers not only to enhance the abilities of their siblings, but also to please the brothers themselves through the tradition of the Glass family, to ensure that the youngest are also educated, and this educational system recognizes that both Seymour and Buddy want to protect Franny and Zooey until they are intellectually ready for reality.

We see, especially through the non-conformist characters like Buddy, Holden and Zooey that even in the worst of the situations Salinger characters continued their walk with more pomp and discipline. They are undoubtedly perplexed, but they never gave up understanding this life. All of these children represents modern man and his anxieties in truest sense.

Conclusion

No matter how much turbulence Salinger's character had faced during their journey but the manner in which they rose and understood the situation is commendable. They all had their unique ways of dealing with the distress. Holden made peace with his situation and came out more mature, Seymour escaped his conditions to make his siblings learn something more significant, Zooey too stood up strong and all other children were capable of carving their ways even in psychological obstructions.

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J. D. Salinger's works are universal as the problems that he touched are relevant in contemporary world too. The crisis is same and even grievous today. This paper concludes that these adolescent problems that Holden and Glass siblings confronts have a great influence on them, resulting in their erroneous behavior and negative attitudes toward people, society and all around them. We can learn from these adolescent problems that Holden meets; and both parents and people in society promote care and love, especially to children, so that they can develop a healthy outlook on world and can grow up in a sound way.

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