

“Love and Work” in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, is widely supposed to have been so dissatisfied with the “phoniness” of most adults that he was rebelling against the adult world. Actually, the reverse is the case. Because Holden lacked confidence that he would be successful in the realms of “love and work,” the two quintessentially adult realms, Holden kept finding fault with the adult world. It is, therefore, inappropriate to view him as a rebel.

Key words: the adult world, love, work

1. Introduction

The protagonist of J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Holden Caulfield, is widely regarded as a rebel. As Edwin Haviland Miller suggests, the novel is viewed by most critics as “a commentary by an innocent young man rebelling against an insensitive world” (61). Sarah Graham, for example, calls it a “conventional novel of teenage rebellion” (33). As to the novel’s most important conflict, Eberhard Alsen’s following view is a representative one: “The novel’s central conflict is between Holden and the adult world. It is due to Holden’s unwillingness to become part of this world because most adults he knows are phonies [. . .]” (56). It is my belief, however, that Holden kept finding fault with adults in order to justify his unwillingness to become a member of the adult world. His unwillingness largely stemmed from his realization that being a responsible mature adult entailed a number of difficult tasks.

Let me quote here a passage from Erik H. Erikson’s *Childhood and Society*, which I find uniquely relevant to the proper understanding of *The Catcher in the Rye*:

Freud was once asked what he thought a normal person should be able to do well. The questioner probably expected a complicated answer. But Freud, in the curt way of his old days, is reported to have said: “Lieben und arbeiten” (to love and to work). It pays to ponder on this simple formula; it gets deeper as you think about it. For when Freud said, “love” he meant *genital* love, and genital *love* [. . .] (264-65).

It goes without saying that both the questioner and Sigmund Freud were talking about “a normal *adult* person.” When we read *The Catcher in the Rye* keeping in mind Freud’s idea about what an adult person should be able to do well, we may get the wrong impression that

Holden was quite familiar with it.¹ It is because Holden's basic problems were closely linked with his sense of being unprepared for dealing with "love and work" in the adult world.

In this paper, I will attempt to analyze the novel with a special emphasis on Holden's attitude toward the two essential elements which Freud seemed to cogently suggest constitute our happiness.

2. The Frame of Reference

Before embarking on the examination of Holden Caulfield's attitude toward love and work in detail, let us review some data about him and the novel itself in order to facilitate the later discussion.

As for the time scheme of the novel, Michael Cowan's statement is quite to the point:

There are in *The Catcher in the Rye*, as in most first-person narratives, at least three "times" represented: the present of the narrating itself, the past that is being "remembered" and recreated or represented by the present narrator, and the even "earlier" past that is remembered by the characters (including by the narrator as a character) in the primary past being narrated. (43-44)

The present of the narrating is 1950 and Holden is "seventeen" (13). The past that he is primarily concerned with is the period of a few days in later December, 1949, when he was "sixteen" (13). At that time, his parents and Phoebe, his sister, were living in an "apartment" (203) on "[East] Seventy-first Street" (154) in New York, and we can reasonably assume that they are still living there. Phoebe is now "ten" (88). D. B., Holden's elder brother, was working as a movie script writer in Hollywood in December, 1949, and he still is. Allie, Holden's younger brother, died of leukemia on "July 18, 1946" (49) at the age of eleven.²

On a Saturday in December, 1949, Holden decided to leave his dormitory before he was formally expelled from Pencey Prep, a single-sex boarding school in Pennsylvania. He had failed in four out of five subjects. He already had a record of expulsion from two other prep schools, the Whooton School and Elkton Hills. According to Phoebe, Holden had failed "in every single subject" (217), at least at one of these two schools.

There is no textual evidence to determine which of these two schools Holden attended first or how long he attended them altogether. The general impression, however, is that, even at Pencey Prep, the third prep school which he attended, Holden felt that he was still too young to be sent away from home to a distant boarding school. As a matter of fact, we can speculate that Holden deliberately got expelled from each prep school in order to go home. When he was in his dormitory room with Ackley, a friend of his, Holden started "horsing around" (29):

[. . .] I pulled the old peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way, I couldn't see a goddam thing. "I think I'm going blind," I said in

this very hoarse voice. "Mother darling, everything's getting so *dark* in here. [. . .] Mother darling, give me your *hand*. Why won't you give me your *hand*?" (29)

This playacting suggests that Holden was in search of maternal attention. Unfortunately, his mother "hasn't felt too healthy" (140) since Allie's death, because "she still isn't over [it]" (201). Holden tells us that "[s]he gets headaches quite frequently" (231) and "[h]alf the time she's up all night smoking cigarettes" (206). In one of his fantasies, he imagined himself coming home at around 35 to see a dying family member,³ after living in a cabin in the West all the while. Holden fantasized that his mother would "start to cry and beg [him] to stay home and not go back to [his] cabin" (265). It is obvious that Holden was, at the time of the fantasizing, in need of maternal affection.

When he successfully extricated himself from Pencey Prep, Holden did not want to go home until his parents had somewhat recovered from the shock of the news of his expulsion. He decided to have "a little vacation" (67) in New York and go home on Wednesday of the following week. His "nerves were shot" (67) at the time, and he hoped that he would go home "all rested up and feeling swell" (66).

At the time of the narration, Holden says, "I'm seventeen now, and some times I act like I'm about thirteen" (13). In a similar vein, he says, "I [. . .] act sometimes like I was only about twelve" (13). At the same time, however, he says, "Sometimes I act a lot older than I am [. . .]" (13).⁴ These comments of his by themselves suggest that he is going through a difficult transitional period of adolescence, the period of growth that bridges childhood and adulthood. The situation was much worse in December, 1949.

When Holden tells his story, he is a patient in a California hospital. We can readily deduce that Holden went home on Monday, two days earlier than he originally planned.⁵ It appears that Holden got "sick" (276) soon after he went home. It also appears that he was hospitalized shortly after he got sick. Concerning the subject of his narration, Holden says:

[. . .] I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this 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. (3)

Holden is somewhat equivocal about the nature of his sickness. All he says is: "[. . .] I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these checkups and stuff" (8). He does refer to "one psychoanalyst guy" at the hospital, but there seems to be no grounds to conclude, as James Bryan does, that Holden is in "a mental hospital" (31).⁶

3. Love

It is widely, and erroneously, believed that Holden rejected the adult world as such. Actually, he had adopted many mannerisms of adult males of his own accord. Smoking and drink-

ing are two of them. Holden was, therefore, chagrined when he was not served an alcoholic drink at bars because he was a minor (90-91, 168). There is no doubt that Holden also associated smoking with adult masculinity. Brooding on his being “yellow” (115), Holden imagined that he wouldn’t have called the person who had stolen his gloves at Pencey Prep a thief in his face. He would simply have kept saying, “All I know is my gloves were in your goddam galoshes” (116-17). He would leave the thief’s room “without even taking a sock at him” (117). Then he fantasized as follows: “I’d probably go down to the can and sneak a cigarette and watch myself getting tough in the mirror” (117). One time, after a quarrel with Stradlater, his roommate, Holden started smoking a cigarette in their room. He says he smoked “to annoy” (54) Stradlater, who strictly observed the dormitory rule against smoking. It appears, however, that he did it to assert in his own way his adult masculinity. Stradlater had “a damn good build” (34) with “broad shoulders” (34), while Holden was “skinny” (140). Stradlater was “a very strong guy” (39), while Holden was “a very weak guy” (39). As Holden says, “I was personally acquainted with at least two girls he gave the time to” (63), Stradlater was sexually experienced. On the contrary, Holden was still “a virgin” (120). By smoking, Holden seems to have been making a pitiable attempt to gain the upper hand of Stradlater.

Holden was quite at home with such superficial adult mannerisms as smoking and drinking. He had, however, great difficulties in dealing with what Freud viewed as the two necessary components of successful adult life: (sexual) love and work. Let us first examine here Holden’s complex attitude toward sex. As he says, “In my *mind*, I’m probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw,” (81) sex was constantly on Holden’s mind. When Holden tried to engage Carl Luce, his former student advisor at the Whooton School, in a discussion about various matters related to sex, Luce taunted Holden with such remarks as “Same old Caulfield.” (187) and “Is this going to be a typical Caulfield conversation?” (188). Luce’s remarks clearly indicate that Holden had been caught up with the idea of sex for some time.

As I pointed out earlier, Holden was a virgin in December, 1949 (and he still is at the time of the narration in 1950 [120]). Nevertheless, he had had his own share of experience of petting and necking. He says that he “spent the whole night necking with [a girl] named Anne Louise Sherman (82) and that he and Sally Hayes “necked so damn much” (138). He had not been averse to having coitus. Whenever an opportunity “to lose [his] virginity” (120) had presented itself, however, Holden had elected not to avail himself of it. It is ironical that Holden makes the following derisive comment about Ackley, a former schoolmate of his: “He was a virgin if I ever saw one” (49). We can easily infer that Holden was acutely aware of his own lack of sexual experience.

Holden says that he stops at the crucial moment because girls tell him to “stop” (120). At the same time, he says that he stops because he feels sorry for girls as they lose “their brains” (121) when they really get passionate. I believe that we are meant to take these reasons as Holden’s justifications for not attempting to have coitus with girls. Holden himself regrets his decision to stop afterwards: “I always wish I hadn’t [. . .]” (121).

Upon arrival in New York from Pencey Prep, Holden checked in at the Edmont Hotel.

Shortly after that, feeling "pretty horny" (82), Holden called up Faith Cavendish, a young woman that he had a reason to believe would let him have sex with her. She suggested that she would meet Holden on the following day, but he declined her offer. He does not give us a reason for his refusal to see her. It seems appropriate to assume, however, that he was after all afraid to meet an older woman with reputed sexual experience, because he might be cornered into a situation in which he had to make love to her. Clearly, Holden had doubts about his sexual potency.

Let us now consider Holden's encounter with Sunny, a prostitute. In answer to the suggestion by Maurice, an elevator operator at the Edmont Hotel, Holden agreed to have a prostitute sent to his room. It is impossible to prove (or disprove) it, but I believe that the principal reason why Holden did not go through with his initial plan to have sex with Sunny is that, as a virgin, he was afraid that he would not be able to adequately perform as a healthy adult male. After Sunny arrived at his hotel room,⁷ Holden kept delaying having sex with her by repeatedly trying to engage her in conversation. As the ultimate excuse for not having sex with Sunny, Holden concocted a story that he had recently had an operation on his "clavichord" (126) from which he had not fully recovered. It is likely, as is usually understood, that the term "clavichord" was derived from "clavicle." In any case, it is obvious that Holden was citing an imagined bodily defect. Our discussion, however, should not stop there. It is of great importance to note that Holden explained to Sunny that the organ in question was located "quite a ways down in the spinal canal" (126). He was clearly suggesting that this operation on an organ not far from his genitals had an adverse effect on his sexual function. We can never tell whether Holden knew that an injury in the sacral region near the bottom of the spinal cord could actually cause impotence. Roughly speaking, however, that is in effect what he was hinting at. Therefore, Sanford Pinsker is quite off the mark when he implies that the said operation is linked with the idea of Holden's "impending death" (29).

On hearing Holden's explanation of his condition, Sunny, who found him "cute," (126) sat on his lap. Holden says, "Then she started getting funny. Crude and all" (126). Evidently, Sunny began to try to arouse Holden, most likely laying her fingers indirectly on his penis. Sunny finally gave it up as Holden kept insisting that the operation prevented him from having sex with her. Quite displeased, Sunny finally left the room.⁸

We cannot determine whether Sunny concluded that Holden was simply telling a fictitious story and that he was actually impotent. One can reasonably argue, however, that Maurice, Sunny's pimp, reached that conclusion. That is why he acted the way he did after Sunny, who came back with Maurice, took from Holden's wallet five dollars that Maurice and Sunny both claimed that Holden owed them. Holden says, "Then what he did, he snapped his finger very hard on my pajamas. I won't tell you *where* he snapped it, but it hurt like hell" (135). Even without having Holden tell us, we can be certain that Maurice tried to hurt him on the penis because, as Holden must have been fully aware, Maurice considered him to be impotent. What was unbearable to Holden, in my opinion, was the idea that Maurice could have been right.

Maurice subsequently knocked Holden down, punching him heavily in the stomach. The

fact that Maurice was a “huge” (132) guy who obviously had a plenty of sexual experience must have added to Holden’s sense of humiliation.

After Maurice and Sunny left his room, Holden began to pretend to have been shot in the stomach by Maurice. In the ensuing fantasy, Holden imagined himself taking revenge on Maurice by shooting him in the stomach six times with an automatic. As Holden admits, he was imitating a character in one of the “movies” (136). As Sarah Graham cogently asserts, “[t]his strategy shield[ed] him from the reality of his situation,” (53) but it was effective only temporarily. About an hour later, he had a strong impulse to commit suicide by “jumping out the window” (136) just as James Castle, a former classmate of his at Elkton Hills, “jumped out the window” (221) to kill himself, after refusing to go back on what he had said about Phil Stabile, another student there.

It appears that James Castle was also hurt genitally:

[. . .] Stabile, with about six other dirty bastards, went down to James Castle’s room and went in and locked the goddam door and tried to make him take back what he said, but he wouldn’t do it. So they started on him. I won’t even tell you what they did to him—it’s too repulsive—but he won’t take it back, old James Castle. (221)

Castle appears to have been more brutally treated than Holden, but we can assume that Holden’s situation was much worse. No one seems to have been in doubt about Castle’s sexual potency.

James Castle came to Holden’s mind when he was demanded by Phoebe to name one thing that he really liked. To the best of my knowledge, no critics have questioned Holden’s liking of Castle. Is it true, though, that Castle’s manner of ending his life is in any way commendable? As Clinton W. Trowbridge says, he died “for a principle,” (25) but it was clearly a principle not worth dying for. It is important to realize that Holden chose not to mention James Castle to Phoebe. I believe that it was because Holden somehow knew that he would not be able to defend Castle’s act. Phoebe, a realist, would have said, “He shouldn’t have died for such a small thing!”

There is a previous instance when Holden had a suicidal impulse in Chapter 7. Holden was imagining that Stradlater just had sex with Jane Gallagher on their date. Jane was a girl that he felt very close to him.

It just drove me stark staring mad when I thought about her and Stradlater parked somewhere in that fat-assed Ed Banky’s car. Every time I thought about it, I felt like jumping out the window. (63)

It is generally understood that Holden wanted to commit suicide at this time because he felt that he had failed to protect Jane. He could have warned her about sexually aggressive Stradlater but he deliberately chose not even to see her.

Holden met Jane Gallagher in the summer of 1948 when her family and Holden's were neighbors at a summer resort in Maine. Holden and Jane used to play checkers and Jane had a habit of keeping all the kings in the back row. Concerning this habit of hers, Peter Shaw's following comment is the most convincing of all:

[. . .] Jane's withholding her kings may be said to symbolize the suspension of maturation typical of this adolescent period—even as it typifies the static, sexually unthreatening relationship Holden has had with her. For, like young people, the pieces on a checkerboard must keep moving forward. Or, as the game's technical term has it, they must keep "developing." On reaching the back row they have in effect achieved maturity, and are accordingly "kinged." By not moving her kings out of the back row, Jane solves the problem presented by the unavoidable process of maturation. She has made it one of *arrested development*. (103)

This is all true, but Jane might have changed by the time she had a date with Stradlater in December, 1949. If she had not changed, why would she have agreed to date such a boy as Stradlater? Holden obviously chose not to see her because he was well aware of the possibility of her drastic transformation. But then, if she had already become sexually experienced, what was there for Holden to despair of? In view of what later triggered his suicidal impulse after the fiasco with Sunny and Maurice, it is reasonable to assume that Holden's sense of sexual inadequacy was behind the suicidal impulse reported in Chapter 7, too.

As I have pointed out, Holden assumed that Stradlater had sex with Jane at the time of his suicidal impulse in Chapter 7. It is important to notice the earlier reversal of Holden's and Stradlater's roles. Holden wrote Stradlater's composition, while Stradlater was presumably having sex with Jane Gallagher. Holden must have felt that it should be the other way around. That is, Holden should have been the one that was making love with Jane and Stradlater should have been writing his own composition. That is, Holden was in despair not because he was worried about Jane but because he was poignantly aware that he was not ready to confront her as a sexually mature male like Stradlater. If he had been merely worried about Jane, would he have wanted to kill himself by jumping out the window?

In the course of his roaming in New York, Holden thought of talking with Jane on the phone six times. Four times he did not dial her number, saying that he "wasn't in the mood" (82, 137, 262) or he "wasn't much in the mood" (195). One time Holden thought of calling up her mother to find out when Jane's vacation started, but did not make the call, saying that he "didn't feel like it." Two times he did actually dial Jane's number. At one time he immediately hung up because Jane's mother answered the phone. Holden says that he "didn't feel like" (151) even asking her if Jane was home yet. The other time no one answered the phone. Our general impression is that Holden never really wanted to talk to Jane, because he felt that he was not ready to confront Jane as a sexually mature male. He knew that he could not respond to Jane as Stradlater presumably did on their date.

What happened in the apartment of Antolini, a former teacher of his at Elkton Hills, was the final straw for Holden, who was homophobic. When Carl Luce gave “sex talks”(185) at the Whooton School to Holden and some other boys, Holden as well as Luce categorized homosexuals as “perverts”(185). It was something quite natural for them to do in late 1940’s. What frightened Holden and the other boys was Luce’s assertion that sexual identity is unstable and one could become a homosexual “practically overnight”(186). When Holden woke up to find Antolini touching him on his head, he initially felt a strong revulsion against Antolini, who, in Holden’s assessment, proved to be a homosexual.⁹

After escaping from Antolini’s apartment and spending the rest of the night at Grand Central Station, Holden started reviewing the incident in the apartment:

I started thinking that even if he was a flit he certainly’d been very nice to me. [I thought] how he went to all that trouble giving that advice about finding out the size of your mind and all, and how he was the only guy that’s even gone near that boy James Castle [. . .] when he was dead. (253)

At this point, Holden was no longer homophobic. He was now able to appreciate Antolini in spite of his presumed sexual orientation which was antithetical to his own. This is something remarkable in the sexually repressive era in which the novel is set. What he could not brook was the fact that another possibly homoerotically-inclined mature adult appeared to have found him attractive. Holden says, “That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid”(252). Holden had a deep anxiety about his sexual potency, and Antolini’s act intensified his anxiety about his sexual identity. Holden must have felt that there was something fundamentally wrong with him. This feeling subsequently led him to entertain a fantasy of escape to the West.

4. Work

We have so far examined Holden’s attitude toward sexual love. Let us now turn our attention to his attitude toward work, which is the other necessary component of successful adult life. We cannot pinpoint the reason, but Holden somehow did not want to engage in any serious work in the adult world. My guess is that the whole thing started with his sense of being unwanted by his father, who is “a corporate lawyer”(140) and is “quite wealthy”(140). Obviously it was his father that decided to send Holden to a series of prep schools, hoping to have Holden go to “Yale, or maybe Princeton”(112). As I stated earlier, the general impression is that Holden felt that he was still too young to be sent away from home to distant boarding schools. It is most likely that Holden felt unwanted at home. Just as he was in search of maternal love, he still needed his father’s close attention and care. As I have already pointed out, we can speculate that Holden deliberately got expelled from each prep school in order to be reunited with his family at home. At least we know that Holden was not expelled from Pencey

Prep in spite of his desire to continue to attend the school. Antolini referred to a letter sent to Holden’s parents by the headmaster of Pencey Prep to the effect that Holden came “unprepared to all [his] classes” (242). Holden offers several criticisms of Pencey Prep, but all of them are cursory and ultimately immaterial. No wonder, because he is simply trying to justify his quitting the school.

All the critics who idolize Phoebe as the epitome of childhood innocence and wisdom conveniently ignore the fact that she implied that Holden should consider becoming “a lawyer” (223) like their father. Indeed, a lawyer is a valid profession. Holden, however, answered as follows:

“Lawyers are all right, I guess—but it doesn’t appeal to me [. . .]. I mean they’re all right if they go around saving innocent guys’ lives all the time, and like that, but you don’t *do* that kind of stuff if you’re a lawyer. All you do is make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot. And besides. Even if you *did* go around saving guys’ lives and all, how would you know if you did it because you really *wanted* to save guys’ lives, or because you did it because what you really wanted to do was be a terrific lawyer, with everybody slapping you on the back and congratulating you in court when the goddam trial was over, the reporters and everybody, the way it is in the dirty movies? How would you know you weren’t being a phony? The trouble is, you *wouldn’t*.” (223-24)

What should really matter is whether lawyers do save “innocent guys’ lives” or not. Everything else is secondary. We get the impression, therefore, that Holden was criticizing lawyers here largely because he was resentful of his father, who happened to be a successful lawyer. Holden was justified in feeling resentful to his father, who made demands on Holden, while remaining distant and aloof. It does not, however, provide a reason for discrediting his profession. We should also notice the wording, “the way it is in the dirty movies,” in the latter portion of the quotation above. It clearly indicates that Holden was basing his criticism of lawyers on their portrayals in movies, without having any direct knowledge of their profession.

It should also be pointed out here that Holden appeared to have felt that he could not emulate his father just as he could not emulate Stradlater. It is likely that he was thus motivated to belittle his father’s profession.

Holden makes several strange or contradictory remarks about various jobs. He has every right to criticize Ernie, a pianist at a night club, for being “a big snob” (110), showing off his skills with a spotlight on his face. When Holden says, however, “If I were a piano player, I’d play it in the goddam closet” (110), he is being ridiculous. He forgets that Ernie plays the piano for a living.

In his conversation with Sally Hayes, Holden criticized, somewhat unintelligibly, most New Yorkers’ obsessive interest in cars:

“Take most people, they’re crazy about cars. They worry if they get a little scratch on them, and they’re always talking about how many miles they get to a gallon, and if they get a brand-new car already, they start thinking about trading it in for one that’s even newer. I don’t even like *old* cars.” (169-70)

Less than twenty-four hours later, however, Holden fantasized about getting “a job at a filling station somewhere, putting gas and oil in people’s cars” (257).

He was very frivolous about his future profession. He told Phoebe that he would get a job at “a ranch” (214) when, as Phoebe pointed out, he could not “even ride a horse” (216). He even voiced his idea of joining “a monastery” (65) to Ackley, when he was not even a Catholic. In this sense, Sally’s mother was right in her estimation that Holden “had no direction in life” (78). Holden could not have been otherwise, because he was primarily going against his father. At the same time, Holden knew, instinctively or otherwise, that work is one thing “a normal [adult] person should be able to do well.” Accordingly, a large portion of his criticism of the adult world was a form of justification of his position of having no direction in life.

5. Other Issues

Obviously, caught between childhood and adulthood, Holden was having trouble in coping with change and growth and the passage of time in general. In the first place, the passage of time took away from him his beloved younger brother. Allie’s untimely death left a permanent scar on Holden’s psyche. When Allie died, Holden damaged his right hand as he “broke all the windows in the garage” (50) out of overpowering grief and rage. Even now, Holden cannot make a tight fist with his right hand. The bodily scar is an eloquent index to his psychic one. Furthermore, it appears that Holden became acutely aware of our mortality after Allie’s death. Even if we can enjoy longevity, unlike Allie, the final outcome is the same: unavoidable death. We cannot specify the time, but it seems certain that, some time after experiencing Allie’s death, Holden developed a morbid fear of death. He began to hate whatever was associated with death.

Holden makes fun of the fact that the wing of the new dorm in which he used to live at Pencey Prep was named after Ossenburger, a former graduate who had donated a substantial amount of money to the school. He makes fun of it because Ossenburger was successful in a nationwide undertaking business. We have already examined some of Holden’s strange or contradictory remarks about various jobs in the previous section. Holden’s attempt to undermine here the value of Ossenburger’s business and discredit Pencey Prep is also misdirected. Clearly, Ossenburger’s profession had nothing to do with the quality of education given at Pencey Prep.

Along the way, Holden began to detest aged people, because they reminded him of gradual decay and eventual death. We should realize that Holden’s antagonistic feeling toward Spencer, a teacher at Pencey Prep, was largely based on Spencer’s advanced age and the accompa-

nying physical decline.¹⁰

Holden reveals his disgust at old people on several other occasions. For instance, about a bellboy at the Edmont Hotel, Holden says:

The bellboy that showed me to the room was this very old guy around sixty-five. He was even more depressing than the room was. He was one of those guys that comb all their hair over from the side to cover up the baldness. (79-80)

Holden shows his disrespect to an aged woman who was on the staff at Phoebe’s school, describing her to us twice as “around a hundred years old” (261). He also makes what he must think is a witty remark about her: “You hate to tell *new* stuff to somebody around a hundred years old. They don’t like to hear it” (261-62). In an attempt to cite to Phoebe one of the reasons why he found Pencey Prep objectionable, Holden commented on the silly behavior of an old graduate who paid a visit to his alma mater. We notice that Holden’s disgust with this man had derived more from his feeble condition due to his advanced age than from the silliness of his behavior. Holden was disgusted by the fact that “[the man] was out of breath from just climbing up the stairs” (219). Holden said to Phoebe that the man was one of “the jerks that graduated from Pencey Prep around 1776,” (218) stressing his strong dislike of aged men with his hyperbolic expression.

Holden was (and still is) strongly attracted to the idea of changelessness. He says, in the present tense, “Certain things they should stay the way they are” (158). We might be tempted to agree with him, but we should realize that life *is* change. Holden should learn to accept the fact that growth and aging are inevitable part of the natural process of life. He should also learn to accept the fact that we *are* born to die. These facts do not negate the necessity of his endeavor to prepare himself to be a happy and mature member of the adult world.

At this juncture, it should be pointed out that there are indications that Holden was, probably unconsciously, questioning his attitudes and moves. For example, Holden tells us that he “damn near broke [his] crazy neck” (58) when he was in the act of leaving his dorm at Pencey Prep for good. He also tells us that he “fell over [the suitcase] and damn near broke [his] knee” (122) when he was about to answer the door when Sunny arrived. We can interpret the second fall as indicative of Holden’s feeling that he was in the process of doing something he should not have been doing. We can apply this interpretation to the first fall. That is, Holden was not absolutely sure that he was right in leaving Pencey Prep. Holden fell down again when he was sneaking out of the Caulfield apartment and he “nearly broke [his] neck on about ten million garbage pails [. . .]” (234). This fall suggests that Holden was in doubt as to his wisdom in running away from his parents.

We have discussed two of Holden’s faked bodily defects: blindness and the problem with his “clavichord.” He concocted stories about other imaginary physical defects. Near the conclusion of his conversation with the mother of a student at Pencey Prep, Holden told her that he was about to have an operation on his “tumor on the brain” (75). To the elevator operator of

the building where the Cauldfield apartment was located, Holden said that he had “a bad leg” (205). He imagined that there were problems with his “hormones” (254) and that he would die of “cancer” (254) in a couple of months. He actually suffered from a “headache” (238, 239, 240, 242, 252), nausea (255, 260), and “diarrhea” (265). Furthermore, he “passed out” (265) once, hitting the bathroom floor in a museum. Subsequently, he twice thought that he was going to “pass out” (267), although he didn’t. We can argue that all of these imaginary bodily defects and supposed or actual illnesses are psychosomatic indices, revealing the fact that Holden was aware that his attempt to escape from reality was misguided.

6. Conclusion

We have examined the way Holden rationalized his resistance to maturation. He was not a rebel as is commonly understood. He was, almost against his will, finding fault with the adult world, because he lacked confidence in his capacity to successfully join that world.

Holden was essentially right when he told Spencer, “I’m just going through a phase right now” (20-21). He is quite young, and he still has a plenty of time to learn to become an adult male who can do well in the realms of love and work, quietly accepting his fated death. The two quintessentially adult realms are important, because they are the loci where we have meaningful interaction with others.

Notes

1. He could not have read *Childhood and Society* before experiencing the central events in his narration, because its original version was published in 1950. The core events took place in the previous year. See note 2.
2. Holden tells that “[Allie] was two years younger than [he] was” and that he “was only thirteen” (50) at the time of Allie’s death in 1946. We can conclude that Allie died at the age of eleven. Holden also tells that he was sixteen in the twelfth month of the year in which the central events of his narration took place and seventeen at the time of the narration. It is clear, then, that the central events of his narration took place in December, 1949.
3. In this fantasy, Holden says, he might come home [. . .] “in case somebody got sick and wanted to see me before they died” (265). As Holden fantasized about letting Phoebe and D. B. visit him at the cabin after he went back to it, it is possible that he was covertly thinking of his father as a dying family member.
4. It is quite understandable that Holden told Sunny and Maurice that he was “[t]wenty-two” (119, 123), because he was dealing with a prostitute and her pimp. It is not easy, however, to fathom the reasons why he said that he was “eighty-two” (198) to a pianist at a bar and “forty-two” (199) to a hat-check girl at the bar.
5. Holden tells us that he “did go home” (274) after Phoebe’s rides of the carrousel in Central Park, which took place on the day following “Sunday” (154).
6. Among others, Peter Shaw also asserts that Holden is in “a mental institution” (98).
7. The room number was “[t]welve twenty-two” (119). We have already noted that Holden sometimes acts as if he was only about “twelve” (13). We know that Holden falsely told Maurice that he was

“[t]wenty-two”(119), just as he was to tell Sunny that he was “[t]wenty-two”(123). Is it possible that Salinger is here playing with these two numbers, implying that Holden, at the age of 16, was engaged in something that he was not supposed to be?

8. After Sunny was gone, Holden “sat in the chair for a while and smoked a couple of cigarettes” (129). As I pointed out earlier, Holden associated smoking with adult masculinity. The gesture here, therefore, appears to suggest that Holden was trying to recover some of his undermined sense of masculinity. Shortly later, after remembering how Sunny called him a crumb-bum, Holden “smoked another cigarette” (131).
9. Let me add that I myself do not believe that Antolini was making a homosexual pass at Holden. When Holden was frantically getting ready to leave Antolini’s apartment, he found that his former teacher had “his trusty highball glass” (250) in his hand. The evidence is not conclusive, but it seems to be implied that Antolini had the same highball glass in his hand when he was touching Holden on the head. If Antolini had any serious homosexual intent, he would not have had such a cumbersome article in his hand.
10. Quite appropriately, Spencer was a history teacher. He taught the subject most strongly linked with change, mutation, and the rise and fall.

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