

STYLISTIC FEATURES OF HOLDEN CAULFIELDS LANGUAGE IN THE J.D. SALINGER THE CATCHER IN THE RYE. CENTRAL METAPHOR

Master student of SamSIFL: Karimova Nigora Xolboyevna
Scientific supervisor: Ayupov Ayubxon Faridovich

ABSTRACT

The novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, is generally perceived as an ordinary story of Holden Caulfield who is expelled from yet another school and spends two days aimlessly wandering through the wintertime New York City. Reading the novel's episodes, characters, setting and figures for symbolic meaning promises better insight, although still some critics simply deny the novel's symbolic value or analyze symbols out of the context of the novel as a whole. In this thesis, I propose that these symbols need to be read in relation to the novel's central symbol of the "catcher in the rye". Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to re-examine the use of symbols and symbolic elements in *The Catcher in the Rye* in relation to the overall meaning of the novel and especially to the novel's central metaphor. First, it is thus necessary to thoroughly focus on Holden's catcher fantasy and its attributes. Consequently, we need to explore how the symbolic elements are used in order to convey meaning through the conflicts set out by the central metaphor and examine their influence on the pattern of the symbolic structure of the entire novel.

Keywords: metaphor, idealism, to "meet", "to catch", dilemma of sexuality, death.

Central metaphor

To fully understand and appreciate the novel's story with its crafted symbolism and structure, it is necessary to pay a close attention to what is generally considered the novel's central metaphor, Holden's ideal and fantasy of being the catcher in the rye. The catcher fantasy is distinctly presented to the reader three times throughout the novel; most obviously in the very title *The Catcher in the Rye*, which alone shows its major significance. However, references and connections to this central metaphor are scattered over the whole span of the novel, which makes it a powerful key to the whole story and understanding its symbolic structure. Upon analyzing this metaphor of being the catcher and its closely accompanying events as well as thoughts Holden communicates to the reader, much about Holden's personality, his inner state, motives and conflict is revealed. And moreover, the central metaphor is an essential resource

for the structural pattern supported by the symbolism and interrelated imagery so masterfully crafted by Salinger.

Holden confesses his ideal of being the catcher to Phoebe when she accuses him of not liking anything and asks him what he would like to be in the future:

Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around-- nobody big, I mean-- except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.

While the title foreshadows the basis of the novel beforehand, placing this passage later in the book is quite convenient. The reader is at this point already aware of Holden's attitudes and character traits as well as the recurring imagery. When paying attention, we can see the pattern and layers provided in the catcher metaphor, which are as if summing up the main themes and motifs. These are usually representing Holden's inner conflicts and are presented to the reader through various adolescent-related issues of growing up that are idealism, looking for own identity and its crisis, isolation and alienation, death and sexuality.

Idealism and search for identity

As it has been established, Holden's catcher fantasy embodies the main themes represented by typical adolescence-related issues. The fantasy itself displays Holden's idealism because it depicts an unrealistic state he resorts to from a place of despair. When speaking about ideal, Trowbridge, in fact, describes Holden's journey as a plight of the idealist in the modern world. We can directly see a clear example of Holden's idealism when Phoebe urges him to name something [he'd] like to be, first suggesting traditional professions such as a scientist or a lawyer. Nevertheless, Holden immediately rejects such options. He is on a search for truth in the world that has been dominated by falsity. Holden establishes that being a lawyer is honorable if you are advocating on the side of the innocents. But he dismisses the possible virtues and is convinced that the dishonest motivation is prevailing:

Even if you did go around saving guys' lives . . . how would you know if you did it because you really wanted to save guys' lives, or . . . because what you really wanted to do was be a terrific lawyer, with everybody slapping you on the back . . . the way it is in the dirty movies?

Coming through the rye

The emphasis on contrasting Holden's idealistic and unreal escapist fantasy world with his inability of facing choices and situations in real life shows yet another possible attribute of the binary oppositions. He creates his fantasy based on the misheard lyrics of the song sung by a little child, which is in fact real poem. Salinger is using this parallel and represents the fusion of binary opposites . . . through a pairing of elements of the novel with elements that have foundations in the real world. Perfect example of this pairing is again provided by the central metaphor. Before Holden describes his catcher ideal, he asks Phoebe if she knows the song "If a body catch a body comin' through the rye." She immediately corrects him, saying it is a poem by Robert Burns with the words "if a body meet a body." Each of them is alluding to a distinct source. Holden is referring to the boy singing, representing the element and event that took place specifically in the world of the novel and Phoebe to the original and real poem. Thus, it is necessary to focus on both of these sources of the catcher fantasy because they are explicitly mentioned for the reader. As a result, we are able to make the connection to the prominent themes and reveal other layers of the metaphor.

Death

The basis for Holden's catcher fantasy is planted in his head when he sees a little child blithely walking next to the curb by the roaring traffic, singing "if a body catch a body" with his parents not paying any attention to him. Rather than being unduly alarmed with the careless behavior of the parents, Holden shares his enthusiasm for the child whose singing made him feel "not so depressed anymore." Much like in the other various instances throughout the novel, there is again contrasted genuineness of childhood with the artificiality of adulthood. Holden praises the boy by saying how he was "swell" and "singing for the hell of it." He exhibits genuine childish immediacy as the child has not yet learned to experience the world in terms of categories. What depresses him is then mirrored in the next paragraph with the depiction of people going to movies, in Holden's eyes the epitome of artificiality and fabrication, which as if represents the mindless act based on the social conventions.

To meet vs. to catch and the dilemma of sexuality

When we look more at the allusion of *Coming Through the Rye*, G.W. Napier states in 1878 *Notes and Queries*, that the original words of the poem are almost impossible to pin down due to its many different versions and alterations, even the version featured in the *Works of Burns* was known around long before him. This and the fact that the old versions of the poem come in the different modern English translations, therefore make it a bit tricky for proper analysis and interpretation.

In conclusion, Holden is constantly looking for some connection, he is trying to reach out, but instead he either digresses from such ideas or he focuses on their negatives and confronts the phoniness in his environment. Accordingly, Holden is often regarded as a rebel. Edwin Haviland Miller even notes that most critics view the novel as a commentary by an innocent young man rebelling against an insensitive world. But it is not about rebellion or unwillingness to join the adult world, but about Holden constantly finding fault with his environment in order to justify this unwillingness. This conflict then increases in intensity as his vision of inner and outer falsity becomes more and more overwhelming which is captured by his emotional decline.

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