



FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND BUSINESS STUDIES
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Holden Caulfield's Narcissism Revisited: A Psychoanalytical Study
of the Protagonist in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Sara Hayward

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Abstract

Jerome David Salinger's Holden Caulfield, the protagonist in *The Catcher in the Rye*, is seen through the lens of psychoanalytical literary criticism. He is a complex character, who is torn between his dreams and emotions. He is often depicted as a liar, a rebel who drops out of school or as a depressed young man who is admitted into care for his mental problems. Some of these issues are hidden in the vernacular teenage language. The image of Holden as having a personality that is in line with narcissism is therefore discussed. The intention is to question whether or not Holden shows symptoms of a narcissistic personality. Contrary to the personality traits that some critics have described, this essay focuses on the sides of Holden's personality that show empathy, generosity and love, despite the traumas of his childhood.

Key words

The Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger, Freud, psychoanalytical literary criticism, narcissism

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to highlight the arguments why the character Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* is often misunderstood, and therefore described as showing a narcissistic behaviour. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a bildungsroman first published in 1951. There are many essays and articles written about the protagonist Holden Caulfield, the main character and narrator. He is clearly an interesting character to analyse. The character goes through a change throughout the narrative, from leaving Pencey where he gets expelled, to being admitted into mental care. The journey itself can also be interpreted as a metaphor for Holden's emotional development, as he leaves behind his immaturity and the conflicts caused by not conforming. J. D. Salinger's book *The Catcher in The Rye* has been read and analysed through the literary perspective of

psychoanalysis. In addition, articles, essays and books discussing the narrative from the psychoanalytical perspective have also been read, in order to compare various viewpoints and arguments to discuss the topic of this essay.

The important part of this essay is to argue whether Holden really is showing signs of the narcissistic behaviour that many critics claim. Therefore, this essay highlights contradictions to that understanding, as he also shows qualities such as generosity, empathy and love. To support this claim, there are examples from the narrative which focus on other sides of the protagonist, such as caring qualities that are not in line with the idea of narcissism.

Psychoanalytical Theory

This essay is based on the psychoanalytical literary perspective. The character Holden Caulfield can be considered to have been unfairly judged in a negative way by several literary critics. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the character from a viewpoint that is more understanding of why he is the way he is. It is highly relevant to aim towards understanding the motives and feelings of the character in question in order to understand the character's own viewpoint. By doing just that, a literary critic may come closer towards understanding what J. D. Salinger is trying to portray through Holden. At first, Holden may easily be seen in a negative light, but after a close analysis it may become clear to the reader that the character has many characteristics that are considered positive in today's society. Therefore, this particular character may need more attention in order to be understood and fully appreciated.

According to Peter Barry, an important aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis is the awareness of the conscious and the unconscious mind. That means that, for a literary critic, verbal and physical actions, as well as dreams and desires, are all significant in order to

understand what is happening inside a character's mind. Barry explains that in Freudian psychoanalysis, patients are encouraged to speak freely in order to bring conflicts and repressed fear out of the unconscious mind. By using this form of therapy, repressed emotions are supposed to be released. The aim for this kind of method in psychoanalysis is to treat patients with mental illness and it is the therapy that Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is famously known for (Barry 97). Freud's theories of the unconscious mind and the way that psychoanalytical therapy was used in his time is no longer regarded in the same way. Nevertheless, it is important for literary critics to understand the connection between sexuality, instincts and the human mind. Barry writes that it was not Freud that first discovered the unconscious. Despite that fact, Freud's theories made the awareness of the unconscious into an influential role in psychoanalysis, which is still used and has great importance in literary criticism (Barry 97).

In psychoanalytical literary criticism, it is of interest to study when and why an author lets a character speak freely and share dreams and thoughts in a narrative. This is important because it is used in order to analyse a character by interpreting their thoughts or dreams as well as the spoken words. When characters in a narrative share their innermost thoughts by talking about their dreams, fears, needs or desires, a literary critic can use that information to analyse the personality and the relationships with others (Barry 101). Literary critics look for feelings and motives that are buried in the unconscious, from the character's personality or from the author. Barry explains that Freud meant that dreams are used as an "escape-hatch or safety valve" which the repressed feelings could use to find a way out into the conscious. Freud meant that the repressed emotion used the dream as a disguise (101). In other words, the dreams allow characters to show the real meaning and wishes as dreams are not censured the way spoken words are. Barry compares this with a person who is dressing up

in order to look like someone else, and thereby uses the disguise to have access to what was denied before (101).

According to Barry, Freudian psychoanalytic critics consider the overt content in the narrative to be associated with the conscious mind. The covert, or the hidden meaning in the work however, is associated with the unconscious mind. Barry writes that the hidden meaning in the text is “what the work is ‘really’ about” (107). The unconscious mind is what Freud calls the id, and the conscious mind is called the ego. A third level in a human’s personality is called the super-ego. This is known as the conscience in Freudian psychoanalysis. These three levels are all different parts of a personality. Barry explains that the unconscious motives of the author or of the characters in a narrative are important in psychoanalytical literary criticism, because they show the real character. The message from the author can be interpreted through the speech or actions of the character. Focus is on the unconscious because what we experience in our conscious mind is only a fragment of the whole picture. Our instincts and fantasies are in the unconscious. The unconscious is revealed in dreams, and that is why it is important for Freudian psychoanalytical critics to understand how to interpret dreams (Barry 107).

Barry writes about how psychoanalysis also includes defence mechanisms such as repression, which means ignoring conflicts that are unresolved and thereby removing them from the conscious (97). According to Barry, repression occurs when a problem is unresolved, ignored or even forgotten. It can also occur when a desire is unadmitted. A traumatic experience is often linked with repression, as it can be “forced out of conscious awareness and into the realms of unconscious” (98). According to psychologist Arlin Cuncic, a traumatic experience may result in a state of avoidance. One form of avoidance is escaping. One form of escaping can be seen when someone is daydreaming in order to be sociable, as it is similar

to fantasy and a way of avoiding reality. It does not always mean that the person is really escaping as in the meaning of leaving (Cuncic).

Sexuality is an important aspect of Freudian psychoanalytical literary criticism. Literary critics use the interpretation of Freud's sexual development stages, the oral, the anal and the phallic stage, in order to understand and explain a character (Barry 98). However, in Freudian psychoanalysis, the instinctual libido or the sexual drive, does not only refer to physical action. Barry writes that in psychoanalysis the ideas of the human sex drive relate to the life instinct, which is called Eros, as well as with the death instinct, which is called Thanatos (98). Eros and Thanatos are both found in the unconscious mind. Thanatos can include various feelings about death, such as fear of death as well as fascination of death. Another important aspect of the psychoanalytical literary criticism is that of symbolism. The unconscious is analysed through symbolism. Symbolism is the theory of interpreting objects as having other meanings than simply the obvious. However, Vera Panova writes that a symbol does not have to be an object in the narrative. It can also be an action, such as having to hide in your home due to the fact that there is no place for you if you do not follow the rules (62).

According to Barry, a Freudian interpretation of symbols often carries more than one meaning. Barry explains how a symbol is associated with something, which in turn becomes associated with something else. In literature, symbolism is not as simple as letting an object replace an emotion or a person. Symbols in dreams are of interest, "since dreams don't say things, they show things" (101). In literary criticism, fantasies or daydreams include symbols that can be interpreted in the same way as any other dream. Furthermore, Barry writes that Freudian interpretations usually includes the idea of searching for phallic symbols in objects, but he claims that it is "often highly ingenious, rather than highly simplistic" (101). Barry writes that psychoanalytic literary criticism emphasises the role of conflicts between

generations, siblings and conflicts within the individual (107). The family dynamics are interesting because of the many interpretations that can be made. In the Oedipal complex, a commonly used example is when a child shows resentment towards the father in favour of the mother. In literary criticism there are also many examples of the Oedipal complex which also includes sibling rivalry and similar competition in a family. The Oedipal complex is also found in the writers of every generation. Barry explains how each generation has a “struggle for identity” and that they work “under the ‘threat’ of the greatness of its predecessors, as an enactment of the Oedipus complex” (106). Regarding parental attention in a narrative; it does not have to be between a parent and a child, it can also involve a parental figure, such as a teacher. In psychoanalytical literary criticism, a critic searches to find signs of fixation of a parent in the narrative.

In *Medical News Today*, Christian Nordqvist explains facts about narcissism from a psychological perspective. According to the author, some of the signs within the description of a narcissist are the belief that one is superior, lacks empathy or that one constantly craves attention or admiration. The interest in others is limited, for someone who is narcissistic. Moreover, a person with narcissistic personality disorder tends to be preoccupied with success and power. There are also difficulties in maintaining a healthy relationship with others, as well as symptoms of jealousy, arrogance and selfishness. In order to be diagnosed as a narcissist, one needs to show several of these symptoms (Nordqvist). A person with a narcissistic personality usually lies to others without hesitation. Nordqvist also states that in order to diagnose a person to be narcissistic, the symptoms must be chronic. According to the organization Mayo Clinic, people who suffer from narcissistic personality disorder can “have an exaggerated sense of self-importance” or “a sense of entitlement and require constant, excessive admiration”. It is also a narcissistic trait to behave in an envious matter, but also to believe that others are envious of them (Mayo Clinic staff).

However, in Freudian psychoanalytical literary criticism, this means that a character who has a strong fixation with itself is usually interpreted as being a narcissist. These characters are often depicted with a strong need for attention. It is also characters who demonstrate a lack of empathy and usually show selfishness. The first part in this essay presents how some critics have interpreted the protagonist Holden and his personality. Many critics have depicted him as having narcissistic traits. Secondly, there is a section which is structured around the use of language; the unconscious and the conscious mind, as well as the voice of the narrator. This also explains how the writing technique creates a relationship between the author and the reader. The next part discusses symbolism and metaphors. In this essay, the focus is on two major symbols that are frequently repeated in the narrative: ducks in Central Park and a baseball mitt. By discussing symbolism and metaphors that appear in the narrative, this essay attempts to interpret some of the character's fears and desires.

The following section deals with Thanatos, the instinct of death. This is portrayed through Holden's traumatic experiences. Reasons for Holden's feelings of guilt and grief are attempted to be explained in relation to the concept of Thanatos. Family dynamics between siblings is an important aspect of this section. Further, there is a part that deals with inter-generational conflicts. This essay gives examples of situations in the family where authority is an important aspect in order to understand the relationship between the main character and the parents. There are also examples of maternal fixation, where fascination is aimed towards other women than the mother. It also deals with relationships with different father-figures. There are examples of the relationship between the main character and other adults of which some are interpreted as father figures, such as the big brother D. B. and Mr. Antolini. The aim is to describe and interpret parental attention, or rather the lack of parental attention.

Escapism and avoidance are the themes of the following section. In this essay, there is a comparison of Thoreau's escape to Walden and Holden's desire to escape society. The next part of the essay deals with emotions, such as empathy and generosity. Eros, the instinct of life and love, and Thanatos, the death instinct, are discussed in relation to each other. Holden's conflicting feelings regarding death as well as love are discussed. Finally, the last section deals with dreams and desires of the protagonist. Again, Eros is discussed here. The covert meaning of the narrative is interpreted and used in order to explain the thesis statement, which questions whether the protagonist really is a narcissist or not.

Critics about Holden Caulfield

According to James E. Miller, Holden is described as "a bright but sick boy whose psyche needs adjustment" but also as an "ideal rebel" as well as a "neurotic misfit" (8). Miller also states that Holden is actually more complicated than "his admirers are willing to recognize" (8). One of the signs of being a narcissist is the inability to maintain a healthy relationship. There are some critics that emphasise this side in Holden. According to Lingdi Chen, Holden's behaviour "reaches far beyond any normal teenage impulses," and he "has negative attitudes towards almost everything and everyone he meets" (146). A narcissist usually has a self-image of own self-importance that is inflated. According to Jay Anthony, the alter ego that Salinger creates through Holden's voice allows him "to insulate himself from both responsibility and consequence, an inherently narcissistic goal, but a uniquely necessary one for Holden in his search for an authentic identity" (1). On an online news site, Binoy Kampmark writes that the narrative was "considered obscene for its encouragement of self-love and self-pity on a massive, antisocial scale" (Kampmark). Frederic I Carpenter describes Holden as "a boy who is badly mixed up" (12). David D. Galloway calls Holden a "misfit hero" (227). The word "misfit" needs to be read in its historical context, as the norms

in society have changed since Salinger wrote his book almost 70 years ago. The profane teenage vernacular language itself caused a lot of emotions when it first was published.

When Holden communicates with someone, he is not as confident as when he shares his inner thoughts. This is evident when he lies to various people, for example his teacher, the nuns, the three women at the bar, or maybe most excessively, to Ernest's mother on the train. When Holden and Ernest's mother are talking, Holden is aware of her reactions when he lies and praises her son. He also considers not lying as he regrets it a little bit. In his view, "mothers are all slightly insane" (Salinger 60) and he also thinks that she should know her son's true personality, but feels that "mothers aren't too sharp about that stuff" (Salinger 61). This is interesting, because he tells the psychiatrist that he thought she had a nice voice and she smiled at him. "She looked at me and sort of smiled. She had a terrifically nice smile. She really did. Most people have hardly any smile at all, or a lousy one" (Salinger 59).

Holden does not always act according to his own ideals and morals, which seems to lead to frustration. He gives the answer that he thinks others want to hear. He makes a conscious choice to lie to Mrs. Morrow. He has nothing to benefit by doing so, apart from getting the attention that he feels he needs. However, Holden likes her and keeps on lying because he can see that it makes her feel good about her son, although he really dislikes Ernest. This shows that Holden tries to be kind. He does not lie in order to hurt her feelings. Instead he attempts to make Ernest look important for Mrs. Morrow's sake. Miller points out that Holden goes through a quest. According to Miller, Holden goes "through a number of guises" (13). One of these occasions is when he lies and introduces himself to Mrs. Morrow as Rudolf Schmidt. This is explained by Miller as being a part of his search for identity, "a search for the self" (13). However, in Holden's case, he is very much aware of his lying, and he lies in order to avoid conflicts.

The Conscious and Unconscious Mind

The story builds up from introducing the protagonist as troubled, to being admitted to a psychiatrist in a mental institution. Holden tells his story from the psychiatric clinic. This was written in a time when psychoanalysis was increasing in popularity, and Holden tells the same story to the psychiatrist as to the reader. This places the reader in the same position as the psychiatrist, who is able to decide what seems to be reliable and what is not. There is much focus on Holden's emotions from the very beginning of the narrative until the end. The reader can follow Holden's inner thoughts and make their own idea of what signs he shows for the need of mental care. Everything that happens in the narrative is related to Holden's reactions.

In Freudian analysis, a text has an unconscious message or voice. According to Freud, there are three different versions or levels of consciousness. These levels are the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious. This narrative is written in the first person, sharing Holden's direct conversation with his psychiatrist. It is also told in a manner that shows his inner voice, the conscious that he reasons with. The story is told in line with the concept of Freudian psychoanalysis, which allows and encourages the patients to speak freely without interruptions. All of Holden's thoughts and memories are constantly told to the reader, mostly as clearly as spoken words.

To Freud, dreams and fragmented ideas are as important as conscious speech. Holden's consciousness is shared through monologues; all his reactions are presented that way. Randall Stevenson explains this method as the reader gets an insight to the mind of the narrator. Holden tells a psychiatrist his experiences but the reader is not told any of the questions that the psychiatrist might have asked Holden. This is interesting because it is important to understand what his reactions are and what he might leave out. The unspoken words carry a message as well as the spoken words. Stevenson also writes that "what this

form gains in inwardness might need to be balanced with loss of objectivity, or range of vision” (121). Throughout the narrative, Salinger uses Holden’s teenage voice as the narrator. This helps the readers feel empathy for the main character, as well as focus on his thoughts just like his psychiatrist does. One word that Holden repeats a lot is ‘phony’. He uses it for many different things, such as people around him, but never on children. This is important as it shows that Holden takes trust seriously, and that someone who appears fake or false is an emotional trigger for him. Holden swears a lot and uses slang words. This is contradictory since he likes literature and he despises profanity from other sources, such as the graffiti outside Phoebe’s school. As he is the sole narrator and speaks this way to his psychiatrist, it shows how Holden with his choice of words would be considered a rebel at the time.

There is evidence that the father is strict when it comes to language. The mother tells Phoebe “You heard what your father said about using that word” (Salinger 191) when Phoebe uses the word ‘lousy’ to describe her dinner. This is interesting because the mother uses exactly the same word when she asks Phoebe “what was lousy about it” (Salinger 191), straight away after reprimanding her. Holden hears this as he hides in the closet and remembers their conversation, as he retells it to the psychiatrist. However, at first readers may only notice his profanity, his exaggeration, or his negativity. Moreover, by reading between the lines and by learning more about Holden, the reader can learn to see beyond his first attempts to distance himself from others. Bennett and Royle discuss that Salinger’s writing technique makes the author absent and puts the reader in a relationship with the author as well as the narrator. “The author, in other words, is not so much an “actual” author at all: rather, it is your personal projection, your idea of the author” (21). By revealing many personal details, fantasies and dreams, Salinger presents Holden’s vulnerability. Salinger uses a method of writing which includes omitting information. Hence, the reader needs to use their own personal imagination in order to understand the situation.

The way Holden talks about his childhood “I don’t feel like going into it” (Salinger 1) is one example of how the information is left out in order to engage the reader. Also, he does not explain what the bullies did to James Castle prior to the suicide. “I won’t even tell you what they did to him - it’s too repulsive - but he still wouldn’t take it back, old James Castle” (Salinger 183). Throughout the book, Holden speaks directly to the reader in this way, catharsis is evoked, and Holden gets empathy. Bennett and Royle write that the reader can hear “the seductiveness of the confiding, colloquial voice” (19). Holden tries to forget about death but even when he does not speak about it, he cannot erase the memory of neither Allie nor James Castle. With Holden as the narrator, in the manner that he speaks about death, the unspeakable becomes familiar to the reader.

Symbolism in The Catcher in the Rye

Symbolism is important in psychoanalytical criticism. In this narrative, one of the symbols that stand out is a baseball mitt. It is a relic that Holden has kept from his dead brother. Holden idealizes the memory of Allie. “But it wasn’t just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody” (Salinger 40). The fact that he comments on that indicates that other family members got angry. Inside the mitt, Allie had written a poem that he used to read when there was nothing to do during the game. The reader is not told which poem it is, only that it is a poem by Emily Dickinson. This poem would most likely have a theme about death, but it is not mentioned. Holden tells Phoebe of his dream where children are playing on the rye field. Baseball is likely to be the game that he was thinking about, as it is one of the most popular games for children in the USA. Furthermore, the fact that Allie played baseball makes a connection to the desire of wanting to be the catcher. The position of catcher is quite highly regarded as one of the most important positions in the game because of the amount of control

it entails. The responsibilities of a catcher include, quite obviously catching the ball, along with throwing the ball to all other bases, calling types of pitches and pitch locations to the pitcher and dictating an overall regulation of the game and players involved.

When Holden is with Jane he shares his close, personal thoughts, such as the baseball mitt. Holden uses the baseball mitt in order to create a story for his roommate Stradlater's homework. This causes a conflict between the two roommates and Holden loses control of his emotions. The main reason for their fight seems to be the fact that Holden has been worrying about Jane during her date with Stradlater. This is often regarded as jealousy by many critics, but can also be interpreted as a sign of Holden being protective. He knows how badly Stradlater had treated other girls before, and does not want that to happen to Jane. He also reacts strongly when Stradlater does not appreciate his effort on the homework for him. Stradlater does not seem to understand the importance of the baseball mitt, which represents Allie. When Holden writes about the baseball mitt he feels close to Allie. He comments that he "sort of liked writing about it" (Salinger 41). He shares something personal with his roommate but it is misunderstood. This explains Holden's rage towards Stradlater when they start to fight.

Holden tells the psychiatrist that he was preoccupied with the thought of where the ducks go during the winter. Some critics suggest that the irrational worry about the ducks in Central Park is a metaphor, which stands for Holden's future. In literary criticism, this kind of metaphor is important because it indicates how Holden thinks about his life. He worries about what will happen to them if they stay out in the cold during the winter, or if someone will come and take them away. One possible interpretation is that he is getting more and more concerned about himself and his chances to survive in society. He wonders if someone should take responsibility over them, such as the zoo, or if they fly off. This also indicates that he wonders if he should stay or leave, as he is thinking about leaving to go out west. He asks two

different taxi drivers about the ducks, but already knows that there is little chance that the drivers would know. "I realized it was only one chance in a million" (Salinger 65). It is clear that he is anxious and not satisfied with their replies. Holden cannot stop worrying about the ducks, and although it is dark, and he is alone, he struggles to find the pond in order to see if the ducks are there. The fact that he actually goes to the pond in the night to search for the ducks, shows that he is stressed and confused.

Michael Cowan discusses the connections between the authors Thoreau and Salinger. According to Cowan, Thoreau lost a brother due to illness, and leaves society in favour of life in solitude. Cowan means that Thoreau was trying to get through "complicated feelings of grief, envy, guilt, and relief" (49). Further, Cowan presents similarities between these two narratives, such as the frozen pond in the winter, as well as the thoughts of how Mother Nature takes care of things. (49-50). Most probably, the reader can assume that Holden would be aware of Thoreau, and his escape in *Walden*. However, unlike Thoreau, the escape is only a dream for Holden.

Thanatos

Many readers and critics try to find out what is wrong with him, rather than look for the answer in the world that he is lives in. The Freudian perspective in psychoanalysis takes interest in the childhood and memories from that period in a person's life. Holden is often analysed as having gerontophobia, which means that he fears the idea of growing up. However, in this essay, the focus is rather on evidence that shows the contrary, as we look at his desire to be mature. One of the most dominant memories presented in the narrative is the loss of his brother Allie. In the beginning, Holden explains that his younger brother was very

loveable and intelligent. His answer to his younger sister Phoebe, when she wants to know at least something that he likes, is that he likes Allie (Salinger 184).

The night Allie died was a traumatic night for Holden. He slept in the garage after breaking all the windows. “I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon we had that summer, but my hand was already broken and everything by the time, and I couldn’t do it. It was a very stupid thing to do, I’ll admit, but I hardly didn’t even know I was doing it, and you didn’t know Allie” (Salinger 41). This shows his feelings of guilt. He tries to explain that if we had known Allie, we would have understood his behaviour. The fact that he slept in the garage the night his brother died shows that he had to deal with the loss of his brother all alone. The way Holden tells this indicates that he tries to make excuses for his behaviour at the time. By stating “and you didn’t know Allie” (Salinger 41) he shows that there was something he did that night that was wrong, but it was because of his grief. “It was a very stupid thing to do, I’ll admit that, but I hardly didn’t even know I was doing it” (Salinger 41). This is important, because here Holden explains to the psychiatrist that he was not fully aware of what he did. He recalls this memory as an unconscious action. Holden states that he broke all the windows in the garage with his bare fists” just for the hell of it” (Salinger 41), and then later tried to do the same with the car windows. This shows how overwhelmed with grief he is. First he tells the psychiatrist that he was hardly aware of doing it. Then he explains that he did it “for the hell of it” (Salinger 41). However, Holden informs the psychiatrist that his parents were going to seek help for him when Allie died. “I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all” (Salinger 40). The readers are not told if his parents asked him to stay in the garage, as a punishment for his behaviour. Salinger leaves out what happens when Holden’s parents find him, with a damaged garage and broken hands, after a night of loneliness.

According to Joyce Rowe, the injured hands are a “symbolic relation to the greater self-mutilation which the loss of childhood signifies to him” (80-81). However, it appears that he never did go to a psychiatrist, although he shows that he understands his parents’ suggestion. “I don’t blame them. I really don’t” (Salinger 40). Holden seems to understand his parents concern about his reactions or well-being. He does not try to blame anyone else for this incident. He even tries to explain that it is not as bad, although he is in pain when it rains, by saying “I mean I’m not going to be a goddam surgeon or a violinist or anything anyway” (Salinger 41). Due to Holden’s injuries on his hands, he was in hospital when Allie was buried. Holden is told details about the funeral by his brother D. B. This indicates that they are close. In fact, all four of the Caulfield children appears to be close, and the common sibling rivalry that is found in Freudian psychoanalysis cannot be seen here. In fact, there are more signs of the contrary. When Holden describes his siblings, it is clear that he admires them.

However, as Holden praises his sister and his brothers, it may seem that he is putting himself down. According to Jack Salzman, there are signs that Holden feels guilty about his brother’s death. “The guilt does not seem to spring from anything obvious as repressed sibling rivalry: the jealousy, ‘the dumb one’ in the family feels toward a brilliant, saintly brother. Surely some of it stems from the fact that it was Holden who was spared while his more deserving brother was lost” (48-49). Peter Shaw also observes that Holden seems to feel responsible for his brother’s death. In addition to his own guilt, the way that Phoebe “killed Allie too” with her way of joking and speaking, indicates that Holden feels that Phoebe also has some responsibility over Allie’s death. (100).

The way Holden reacts when Allie dies has nothing to do with narcissism. He shows strong emotions and grief due to the loss of his brother. He was only thirteen years old when his brother died and he struggles to come to terms with the loss of Allie. His reaction to

break something is therefore a normal way of coping with something that seems impossible to deal with. Sometimes he speaks with his dead brother, such as when he needs help. This is also a natural thing to do for a person who is grieving. Holden tells the psychiatrist that he communicates with his dead brother Allie when he feels desperate. He is conscious of doing it but it seems as if he drifts in and out of conscious and unconscious behaviour when he talks with his brother. "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie" (Salinger 213). This is of importance as it shows that Holden cannot control his emotions. He eventually decides to leave New York and therefore he plans to meet Phoebe in order to say good bye to her. He wants to give her back the money that he borrowed. Even in his desperation to leave, he still considers Phoebe's feelings before his own. A narcissist would not do that.

Inter-generational Conflicts

Holden does not speak very much about his mother. She is mentioned in a few places, and it is clear that Holden is aware of his mother's grief over Allie. She is described as "nervous as hell" (Salinger 170) and that she has not got over Allie's death. According to Joyce Rowe, Holden's mother "is too nervous and anxious herself to do more than pay perfunctory attention to her children's needs" (89). The fact that Holden hides in his own home, when only the mother and Phoebe are at home, shows that he has a great deal of respect, or fear, from both of his parents, not only for his father. Moreover, he feels guilty when he packs the skates his mother had recently sent him, and he pictures how she went to the store to buy them for him. She had bought him the wrong kind of skates, hockey instead of racing, but Holden does not seem to blame her or feel irritation towards her ignorance, but simply focuses on her feelings of being hurt when she will learn that he has failed school again. This contradicts the way Chen describes him; with a behaviour that is "far beyond any normal teenage impulses" (146). In fact, his behavior shows respect towards his mother.

His reflection on this matter is a sign of maturity, and again it proves that Holden can feel empathy for someone else. In fact, at the stressful time when he packs his belongings, he focuses on his mother's feelings, not only on his own emotions. He also reflects on his mother's feelings regarding the relationship with Jane, when he explains that his mother did not like Jane nor her mother, due to the fact that they did not greet her when they met. Regarding being expelled from Pencey, Holden explains "My mother gets very hysterical. She is not too bad after she gets something thoroughly digested, though" (Salinger 54). The fact that Holden does not seem to blame his parents for anything can be interpreted as he is taking responsibility of his actions. He shows maturity by not blaming anyone else. However, he is reluctant to share information about his parents to the psychiatrist, and avoids conflicts regarding them. According to the Freudian psychological approach, this avoidance indicates that Holden has problems with authority. Holden seems to feel that his mother is still preoccupied with the loss of Allie, and therefore he is neglected. He repeats this a couple of times. It is not difficult to understand that Holden needs parental attention. He knows that he will be noticed every time he is expelled from a school. According to Billi Gordon, it is vital to have social attention. "Excessive attention seeking is not a character flaw. It is a brain rewiring response to early developmental trauma caused by neglect". The same author also explains that neglect does not have to be the same as the lack of love (Gordon). Holden does not say that his parents do not understand him, nor does he say that they do not listen to him or that he feels unloved. However, the fact that D. B. or Holden's teachers seem to be more involved in his well-being can also be interpreted as evidence that there is a distance between Holden and his father. On the other hand, as he is away at the boarding school during the terms, it is natural to form a parental like relationship with the teachers. The fact that he does not want to call Phoebe late at night, because she will likely be in bed, is that he is afraid that his mother will answer. This means that he is not even prepared to speak with her on the

phone. Yet, in front of the psychiatrist, he has nothing negative to say about his parents. In fact, when he imagines his own death, he feels 'sorry as hell' for them. Holden seems to search for maternal attention both during his conversation with Ernest's mother and with the nuns. He comments on their friendly smiles and their kindness. He makes comparisons between these women and his own mother, such as when he imagines if his mother would collect money for charity like the nuns. This is interesting because although he does not express any bad feelings towards his parents, he still chooses to avoid them. This shows that he understands what their reactions will be.

Holden's father is depicted as a distant character. The fact that he is neither mentioned nor described much encourages the reader to make up their own image of him. He is after all the main reason why Holden decides not to go home. Phoebe tells Holden that their father will kill him, which is most likely a figure of speech, but still a strong enough reason to stay away from the home. Phoebe repeats this several times. Holden tries to calm her down and assures her that he will not be killed. "The worst he'll do, he'll give me hell again, and then he'll send me to that goddam military school" (Salinger 179). Salinger lets the reader use imagination to work out why Holden does not speak more about this idea of military school. The fact that Holden does not consider it an option to tell them the truth about being expelled once again indicates that he knows what will happen to him. Holden never claims that he has done his best to succeed at school. Nevertheless, he seems to know what is waiting for him if he fails. There is an absence of his parents throughout the narrative. Neither Holden, Phoebe or the former teacher Mr. Antolini seem to consider that they should or could contact the parents in order to help out at the situation, at least not as far as Holden is aware. They all know that Holden has been expelled before and that he has been sent to a new school. There does not seem to be any chance for Holden to have an opinion about his education. The fact that he would rather sleep on a bench at the Grand Central Station instead of returning home

shows that he has no expectations of getting support from his parents. He knows that his father is away, but he does not go home to speak to his mother either. This is directly after the upsetting incident with Mr. Antolini, whom he trusted. Holden believes that he might have been molested but even that experience is not a strong enough reason for him to seek his family's protection. Moreover, he does not contact his brother D. B. for advice or support although he seems to be the closest adult in Holden's life.

The reason that Holden is failing in school seems to be linked with his problems to conform, rather than with any cognitive issues. It is evident that Holden is considered to be a good student in some subjects, such as English. He mentions many authors and books that he has read, and imagines that he would call the authors. Holden reflects on which authors he would like to talk to, and which he would not. This does not seem to make much sense as some of the authors are dead. Interestingly enough, despite his interest in books, he says "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot" (Salinger 19). This is interesting as reading and writing seem to be one of his strengths. This is most likely why his roommate Stradlater asks for Holden's help to write his essay. Holden often comments on intelligence, and considers reading to be important. This could indicate that Holden has very high standards to live up to, such as his brother who is a famous screen writer and whom he admires.

According to Rowe, there is a problem of communication between the adults that are close to Holden. "Those adults who should serve as moral tutors and nurturers are neither wholly absent nor fully present" (89). His father spoke with Mr. Antolini about Holden being expelled again but they did not contact Holden. The fact that he does not think it is possible to come home after being expelled due to shame and a likely chance to be punished is understandable, but to choose to stay away for a few nights only in order to make sure the mail arrives before he comes home is irrational. In the beginning of the narrative, Holden says that his parents "would have about two hemorrhages a piece if I told anything

pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father" (Salinger 1). He is described as nice but "touchy as hell" (Salinger 1). This indicates that Holden is not prepared to say everything to the psychiatrist, as he omits most of his thoughts regarding his father. That could be a sign of fear of his father. Holden shows understanding towards his parents' reaction, but does not seem to be met with the same understanding from them. Holden is avoiding discussing his parents to the psychiatrist and protects them instead of accusing them of supporting or understanding him. The fear or respect of authority still seems to be present. Although Holden is supposed to be hiding out in New York for a few days, he acts as if he wants to be found and seen by his parents, or that somebody will tell them that he is around. When he visits Phoebe at home in the evening, he seems to hope that his mother will notice him. "It was a helluva lot easier getting out of the house than it was getting in, for some reason. For one thing, I didn't give much damn any more if they caught me. I really didn't. I figured if they caught me, they caught me. I almost wished they did, in a way" (Salinger 194).

Holden's brother D. B. is somewhat of a father figure to him. Holden seems to feel that he has not only lost one brother but two, since D. B. moved to California. Holden is disappointed in D. B. because he writes scripts for the movies instead of writing books. According to Rowe, Holden tries to take "revenge by reviling him for "selling out" to Hollywood" (89). Further, John Seelye points out that despite Holden's hate for movies, he has seen many of them, and refers to different movies and heroes from movies frequently. (25). Furthermore, it is evident that they are close as it is in California where Holden finally is admitted to psychiatric care. Also, it is D. B. who might drive him home to the parents. This is across the country, as the home is in New York. There could be other reasons why Holden is in this particular place, but nevertheless, it is likely due to the fact that D. B. lives there. He also visits him "practically every weekend" (Salinger 1).

However, instead of contacting his brother D. B. when he is in trouble, Holden calls Mr. Antolini. It is late at night and although Holden is at home already, he leaves the house and goes to his former teacher instead. This indicates that Holden is troubled. It shows an irrational side of him. He is afraid to face his parents with bad news. The Antolini couple do not act as if this is unusual, but simply take him in and prepare for him to stay the night. The reader is not told if he has turned to them for help before, but the Antolinis seem to be quite casual about his late visit. It could mean that they had expected him to contact them. Holden knows that they might call the parents, and therefore it is a risk-taking decision to contact his former teacher. Mr. Antolini tells Holden that he had had lunch with his father a week or so earlier. Holden does not seem to worry that Mr. Antolini will contact his father. This can seem a little strange, as the reason why Holden avoids going home is to wait until the letter arrives from Pencey. Neither Mrs. Antolini nor Mr. Antolini attempts to make a phone call to Holden's parents, as far as the reader is aware. There are also no indications that the Antolinis try to persuade Holden to go home. Nevertheless, Holden's former teacher shows great concern and tells Holden that he is worried about him. "I have a feeling that you're riding for some kind of terrible, terrible fall. But I don't honestly know what kind...Are you listening to me?" (Salinger 201). Mr. Antolini might be worried that Holden is suicidal and that this is why he talks about falling. However, as Jonathan Baumbach points out, it is Mr. Antolini that falls, when Holden loses the trust he had in him (66). For Holden, the experiences from his childhood that he recalls as "something perverted" seem to be in his conscious mind. He tells the psychiatrist "I don't even like to talk about it" (Salinger 206), but it is not repressed from his memory. He avoids further comments from his earlier experiences. His strong reaction to this incident; the "sweating like a bastard", the "shaking like a madman" and the urge to escape explain his awareness of it being wrong (Salinger 208).

The reader can follow Holden's thoughts and his physical reactions, such as his sweating and his shaking. If he is telling the truth or not is up to the reader to decide. The story is only told from Holden's own perspective and he often exaggerates. Salinger leaves out what really happened to Holden when he was younger. The reader must decide if Holden is telling the truth or if he is imagining what has happened. His strong reaction makes it trustworthy and indicates that he has unpleasant memories from previous similar incidents. However, Holden eventually changes his mind about Mr. Antolini when he reflects about the good things that Mr. Antolini has done, not just for him but for the dead James Castle too. Holden makes excuses for Mr. Antolini's behaviour, such as thinking about how he did not seem to mind that Holden called him late at night, and that he opened up his home for Holden, to stay for the night. He also acknowledges the advice he got "about finding out the size of your mind and all" and most importantly, that Mr. Antolini was "the only guy that'd even gone near that boy James Castle I told you about when he was dead" (Salinger 210). These are all signs of Holden as a conscious thinker, a young man who is aware of his thoughts and his actions. The initial fright he felt when he woke up at Mr. Antolini's couch, is no longer as strong.

When Holden reflects on what happened at Mr. Antolini's apartment, the reader is told that Holden has been in similar situations before. He does not explain further what kind of situations he is referring to. He describes it as "something perverty" but then there is no more mentioning of what had actually had happened. Holden implies here that he has been molested or touched inappropriately "about twenty times since I was a kid" (Salinger 208). Holden's reaction is strengthened by the fact that he considers holding hands with Jane was satisfactory, whereas sex was not necessary. It also explains his strong reaction towards the thought of Stradlater and Jane together. Holden is still bothered about the memory of Jane's stepfather, naked around her, and the idea of her meeting Stradlater upsets him. "Stradlater

was a very sexy bastard” (Salinger 34). He remembers when he was on a double date with Stradlater and a girl, he heard Stradlater’s date keep saying “No- please. Please, don’t. Please” (Salinger 52). These experiences make Holden protective and worried over the fact that Stradlater had a date with Jane. Again, this can be mistakenly interpreted as jealousy, but it is evidence of how the character wants to protect Jane.

Repression, Escapism and Avoidance

After a traumatic experience, a person can end up in a state of avoidance. This means that it is difficult to find hope for the future, or they might feel fear of the surroundings. Some people refuse to talk about the trauma, and they might also try to block out the thoughts about it. According to psychologist Arlin Cuncic, there are three main forms of avoidance, which includes avoidance in a social situation, escape and partial avoidance (Cuncic). His anxiety when he crosses the street and starts to talk to his dead brother can also be described as a state of avoidance. It seems as if Holden has developed this strategy in order to protect himself from getting too close to someone. This explains why he struggles to get close to people, such as Sally when they meet for a date. The fact that difficulties regarding being close to other people is a part of the description of narcissism (Nordqvist), does not automatically mean that Holden is a narcissist. Not all people struggling to maintain relationships with other people are narcissists. In Holden’s case, his problems may well come from for example the trauma of his brother’s death, absent parents or depression.

Holden imagines that he will leave New York and hitchhike out west, where he could live without anybody knowing him. He does not mention that he will contact his brother who lives in California, which can indicate that it is not an option as he would probably be stopped by his parents. He enjoys this daydream, although he knows it is a crazy dream,

which he tells the reader. In Holden's imaginary life, he pictures himself as being deaf-mute in order to not have to speak ever again, and he even pictures a deaf-mute wife. He plans that if they have children, they could hide them and teach them at home. "I got excited as hell thinking about it. I really did. I knew the part about pretending I was a deaf-mute was crazy, but I liked thinking about it anyway. But I really decided to go out West and all. All I wanted to do first was to say good-bye to old Phoebe" (Salinger 214). Holden obviously seems to dream of escaping society. This shows how pressured he feels. The fact that he does not want to speak to people again is interesting. Holden seems to enjoy talking; in fact, he speaks most of the time. This indicates that the character finds communication a source of conflicts, and therefore better to avoid verbal communication in a marriage as well. This narrative is told directly to the psychiatrist, and this could indicate that Holden is losing interest of explaining, or getting uncomfortable in expressing his thoughts.

The story consists of both Holden's thoughts but also his therapy sessions. It appears that he avoids certain issues and therefore he thinks that it is better not to speak about them. Apart from speaking with the psychiatrist, Holden also turns directly to the reader. When he does not communicate verbally, he shares his thoughts and ideas or worries in his unique and personal way. In psychoanalysis, the patients usually speak without too many interruptions from the psychiatrist. Barry explains "The classic method of doing this is to get the patient to talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining 'buried' in the unconscious" (97). This is exactly what Salinger lets Holden do, and he shares his thoughts in a similar manner. According to John Seelye, Holden has nowhere to go where he can find peace. There are people all around him, both at the boarding school and obviously in the streets of New York. When he sneaks back to his own home, he has to hide in the closet when his mother comes home. He is also surrounded by people at the hotel where

he went in the first place in order to rest, before facing the fact that his parents would be upset over the letter from the headmaster (27). This seems to stress Holden, and he starts to plan his escape from the city. Holden would have studied both Twain and Thoreau, and he knew about the life at *Walden*, far from society and the demands that come from a life with others.

According to Angel Daniel Matos, there are some episodes in this narrative that are ambiguous, and the part where Holden leaves his former teacher's apartment in the middle of the night is one of them. Further, Matos explains that it is not clear what Holden means with some of the words that he uses. "Pervert" is one of those words that Holden uses frequently, and therefore it is not clear how strong meaning it has (3-4). Here, Holden shows symptoms of avoidance, such as when he avoids to talk about traumatic incidents. However, he does talk about several experiences that are traumatic, such as his brother's death and James Castle's suicide, and therefore that critique is not valid. Besides, many of the symptoms of avoidance can also be explained by the lack of sleep, excessive intake of alcohol and stress and it is therefore difficult to know where the symptoms developed from. It is not signs of a narcissistic personality, but it shows desperation.

The fact that Holden contacts the teacher shows that Holden has trust in him. Holden understands that Mr. Antolini could contact his parents. This could also indicate that Holden hopes that someone will contact them, or that he simply did not know where else to turn. Despite hiding from his parents, especially his father, Holden still manages to meet people he knows. In a city as big as New York, that is hardly a coincidence. Holden goes to the bar where D. B. has taken him before, and this is where he meets D. B.'s ex-girlfriend. He stays near Central Park which is in his own neighbourhood, with the likelihood of meeting more friends of the family. This shows that he is not really hiding and that he hopes to be found. Moreover, he tells the psychiatrist that he only had a few names in his address book,

and that seems to be an indication that he does not have any close friends to contact. These are signs of desperation and fear, rather than narcissism.

Holden shows signs of avoidance by wanting to escape. The fact that he asks Sally to come with him the first time he considers escaping shows how irrational his idea is. It shows how depressed and desperate he is, and how he tries to find another solution than returning home. He cannot see any other way out of his problems and therefore he feels the urge of running away from the city. However, Sally does not share his ideas, nor does she seem to understand how desperate he is. According to Bennett and Royle, ambivalence is a Freudian concept. They state that it is possible to “feel both attraction and repulsion, love and antipathy towards the same person” (245). The part that Holden seems to regret when he asked Sally to join him when he escapes, seems to be the fact that it was Sally he asked, not the fact that he wants to escape altogether. The evidence for this is that he brings up leaving New York one more time. The second time he plans to leave he wants to go on his own.

Holden is preoccupied with imagining his death. By stating that he “really felt like committing suicide” may not necessarily mean that he has a desire to die. However, he clearly wants to escape from his problems. It is not an act of selfishness or immaturity, but a way of trying to handle the situation he is in. Rowe discusses the fact that the reader is deprived of finding out what happens when he comes home. “We are left with the sense of a society that Holden can neither accept nor escape” (90). Holden seems to be left on his own when it comes to solving his problems.

Eros

When Holden is in Central Park he imagines his own funeral. Holden shows concern over his parents, and especially about his mother as he knows “she still isn’t over my

brother Allie yet” (Salinger 167). He can think of one good thing however, and that is the fact that he knows his mother would not let Phoebe go to his funeral, because she is too young. His father’s or D. B.’s reactions are not mentioned here. Still, Holden shows empathy towards his family by reasoning like this. Eventually, after he has imagined what would happen if he dies, he decides to go home to see Phoebe one last time. Holden seems to believe that he will get pneumonia and die. Another example of Holden showing concern for another person is when he moves his expensive suitcase and puts it under his bed. He tells the psychiatrist that he is doing this in order not to embarrass his roommate who has an inexpensive looking suitcase. He is sensitive and caring enough to understand that his roommate is embarrassed about his luggage and he tries to take his snotty remarks as a joke. His reasoning about the suitcases shows that he has empathy. “It depressed holy hell out of me, and I kept wanting to throw mine out or something, or even trade with him” (Salinger 117). It is a sign of maturity to notice his friend’s embarrassment, and it shows that he wants to put things right. It shows that the character is capable of feeling empathy and that he wants to avoid unnecessary conflicts. By placing his own suitcases under the bed, shows that he makes an active choice of unselfishness in order to make his friend feel comfortable. This is important as it indicates that the character shows empathy and has an interest in others. Those characteristics are not in line with a narcissistic personality.

When Holden interacts with the two nuns, he shows them generosity by donating ten dollars, even if they were not actually collecting money at that time. He also offers to pay for their breakfast, and he feels guilty when he discovers that they only had coffee and toast while he had a big breakfast himself. He tries to picture other women that he knows, such as his mother, his aunt or Sally’s mother do a charity job. He reflects on why he likes the nuns. “You could tell for one thing, that they never went anywhere swanky for lunch” (Salinger 123). He likes the way the nuns smile at him, similar to the way Mrs.

Morrow had done on the train. He also comments on how friendly they are even when he accidentally blew smoke in their faces. Holden feels very embarrassed and stupid about this and apologises “like a madman” (Salinger 122). Holden is surprised when James Castle asks if he could borrow a sweater. He claims that they did not know each other well. Still, he shows him kindness and generosity by letting him have the sweater. James wears it when he commits suicide. Clinton W. Trowbridge suggests that Holden and James Castle are “symbolically identified through Holden’s sweater” (74). Stradlater was wearing Holden’s jacket when he went on the date with Jane. It is unclear if Holden knew about the way James was treated by the other boys before he asked if he could borrow the sweater. It does not seem as Holden let him use it out of pity. Nevertheless, it shows that Holden is friendly and that he is trying to do what is right. He seems honest when he talks about this to the psychiatrist. “If you want to know the truth, I almost didn’t lend him my sweater. Just because I didn’t know him too well” (Salinger 184). In psychoanalytic criticism, this is an example that is described as repression. Barry explains that this is coming from “ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires or traumatic past events” (Salinger 97). Holden also shows generosity towards Stradlater when he lends him his jacket when he goes to his date with Jane. This proves that the character is capable of more than the “self-love and self-pity” that Kampmark describes in his article (Kampmark).

The fact that Stradlater asked Holden so casually to write the essay for him, indicates that Holden had helped him with similar homework before. This shows that Holden is willing to help someone, even when he has nothing to gain from it. Although he has flunked most subjects himself, he still makes time to help out his roommate. Similarly, generosity is shown when another student had borrowed his typewriter. The important part here is that he lends them his personal belongings despite the fact that he does not consider himself to be a close friend to them. The generosity he shows is therefore done out of

kindness. There are several examples of how Holden is showing empathy and generosity and his way of doing so are not in line with a narcissistic personality.

The only person outside the family that saw the baseball mitt was Jane, as Holden showed it to her. According to Holden, their relationship was different. He showed her the mitt as a way of sharing his own pain with her, in an attempt of comfort. Holden seems to be able to connect with Jane because they can share deep emotions, such as talking about Allie. “She was interested in that kind of stuff” (Salinger 84). Holden explains the fact that he considers holding hands with Jane was satisfactory, whereas sex was not necessary. “I held hands with her all the time, for instance. That doesn’t sound like much, I realize, but she was terrific to hold hands with” (Salinger 86). He comments that she always reads books and poetry. This also shows that Holden is not a narcissist because he admires other people for things that they are good at. When he describes her, he shows love and satisfaction; “Jane was different. We’d get into a goddam movie or something, and right away we’d start holding hands, and we wouldn’t quit till the movie was over. And without changing position or making a big deal out of it. You never even worried, with Jane, whether your hand was sweaty or not. All you knew was, you were happy. You really were” (Salinger 86).

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the libido, or Eros, is the opposite of death, the Thanatos. According to Barry, this is “a controversial notion” (98). Holden admits that he is a virgin, and it seems like his most intimate contact with a girl is his encounters with Jane. When he is with her, he can share more personal thoughts, such as the baseball mitt. However close they may have been during the holiday, Holden never contacts Jane during the three days in which the narrative takes place, but he is very close to doing so a few times. He is excited to hear that she is at his school, when she came for her date with Stradlater. Even though she is waiting for Stradlater when he is getting ready for the date, and there is plenty of time to see her, Holden still chooses not to go to her. Further, he hesitates to call her, and

meets Sally instead. This way, the image of Jane remains exactly the way it was during the summer holiday in Maine. Eros, in this case his relationship with Jane, and Thanatos, as in the death of Allie, both occurred during the summer in Maine. This could be the reason why Holden finds it better to leave his memories of Jane as just memories of innocent love.

Dreams and Desires

The only thing that Holden can picture himself doing is to help others. He wants to be caring and he wants to rescue other children; not just his own sister. This desire is evidence that Holden tries to be kind and good. Being the catcher in the rye, would mean that he alone is the one who saves other children. No other grown-ups are around in his dream; it is only him. According to Barry “dreams don’t say things, they show things” (101). Holden wants to be needed, he wants to be someone important. This image of Holden as the catcher, the saviour, is far from an immature narcissist that he is sometimes depicted as. Through his desires Holden shows unselfishness as well as empathy. As explained by Harold Bloom, “Holden’s sympathy with others is immense” (2). Christopher Parker defends the common opinion that Holden does not seem to like much in his life. “Some people condemn Caulfield as “not liking anything”, but he does. He likes the only things really worth liking, whereas most of us like all the things that aren’t worth liking” (16).

As there is a great focus on dreams in Freudian psychoanalysis, it is important to understand Holden’s dream to be the catcher. Holden shares this dream with his sister Phoebe, after being pressed by her to come up with something that he likes. She is upset that he does not seem to like anything at all, and asks him to mention at least something. Salinger focuses on the thoughts in Holden’s mind, his innermost wishes. However, this dream is more of a wishful thinking, a fantasy, or a desire, but nevertheless important in its symbolism.

Bennett and Royle explain that according to Freud, a desire is never giving full satisfaction, because the way humans function, we constantly turn to something new (253). When Holden talks to his sister he shows his soft and caring personality. Whenever Holden is around Phoebe, he changes a little bit, because she brings out good memories. He wants her to be safe and happy, and she reminds him of childhood memories that are positive. There are memories of them doing things together, such as taking Phoebe to the park when she was younger. He admires her in many ways, such as the way she writes, how she dances and also how she looks. He gives credit to their mother for dressing Phoebe in a very nice way. He reflects that she was not good at buying skates, but she was excellent at getting nice clothes for Phoebe. There is no hint of jealousy here.

When Holden wants to meet her one last time before leaving for the west, Phoebe brings her suitcase and declares that she will go with him. The reason this is interesting is because it is now that Holden starts to change. He realizes that she cannot come with him. The dream that he had was not real, but a fantasy. He does not want her to be a part of something that it is not good for her. These are all typical features of a bildungsroman, where the protagonist has developed as an individual and is now more mature in the way he understands his place in society. Holden feels responsible of Phoebe and tries different methods to make her listen to him. First he tries to talk to her. When that does not work he gets angry, but Phoebe does not seem to care. Finally, he wants to change her mind by trying to do something that makes her happy. Therefore, they end up at the zoo, as it is a familiar place where they used to come when they were younger. Childhood memories and maturity play a big part here. Holden remembers that he and D. B. used to take Phoebe to the carousel, and now she thinks that she is too big for the ride. He encourages her to do it anyway, which she does. When Holden watches her, he feels happy. At first Holden worries that Phoebe might fall off, but then he realizes that he cannot save her or other children from falling. They

need to fall off, and that is okay. Mistakes will happen and there is no reason to stop that from happening. This is relevant because it is a turning point in the narrative. Miller states that the dream of being the catcher in the rye is gone, when Holden allows himself to let go of his worry over Phoebe. According to Miller, this is because “as Holden has fallen, Holden can be happy” (18). Holden does not want to upset his sister. He understands that if she comes with him, her life would be at risk. When Holden watches his sister he feels happy and changes his mind. This is Holden’s moment of epiphany. “I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I was so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don’t know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could’ve been there” (Salinger 229). The fact that he is soaked by the pouring rain is a symbol of being clean. He is pure and willing to return home. Holden trusts his sister so instead of running away, he listens to Phoebe and follows her home. By learning that he cannot prevent everything that might be bad, Phoebe becomes his salvation.

Conclusion

Throughout the narrative, Holden shows how much he struggles to follow the norms of society. This makes him appear as an outsider. The character is depicted as having strong resistant behavior, which makes him look troubled and rebellious. His problems to conform socially causes him to fail. For some readers, these could indicate symptoms of a narcissistic personality. However, when Holden interacts with the nuns and Ernest’s mother, he enjoys their company but gets nervous and therefore he lies in order to protect himself. Holden shows empathy in many ways. He shows that he is understanding regarding his mother’s grief and he shows generosity towards the nuns. Furthermore, Holden feels guilty about the inexpensive suitcase, and he tries to come up with a solution to make his roommate

feel less embarrassed. He shows that he is very upset about the way James Castle was treated. In addition, he feels protective of Jane when she goes on a date with Stradlater. All these personalities, such as generosity, guilty, or the feeling the need to protect are signs of Holden Caulfield not being a narcissist. However, Holden's unbearable loss of his younger brother Allie makes it difficult for him to behave as is expected of him. He tries to hold on to the memory of Allie. Therefore, he channels the love he feels for his sister Phoebe into a dream where he is the saviour. He wants to protect her simply because he loves her and he does not want anything bad to happen to her. The fact that he finally allows her to be the one that catches him instead of the opposite, is a sign of hope. Even when society fails him, Holden does not surrender.

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