

**JEROME DAVID SALINGER**  
**THE CATCHER IN THE RYE (1951)**

As a novelist, J.D. Salinger belongs to a distinct group of American writers who began their literary careers during or immediately after the Second World War, the so-called "young novelists" – James Baldwin, William Styron, etc.

The Ctcher in the Rye confirmed and sustained his reputation and gained him a position as one of the most important American writers of the young generation. The book is nevertheless a first-rate novel and one of the most convincing studies of adolescence ever to be written by an American. Salinger is widely seen as a keen students of children. In 1951 he published The Catcher in the Rye – a touching psychological study of adolescence, in which he views the American way of life through the eyes of a teen-age nonconformist, *Holden Caulfield*, a twentieth century rival of Twain's Huck Finn. Holden is a person whose defining quality is his inability to behave according to the strict morals and social code of the day. Salinger's sensitive and defiant school boy defies conventions and remains innocent about them. Holden images himself protecting a group of children happily playing in a rye field, from falling into a nearby precipice: "keep picturing these little kids, playing some game in this big field of rye....Thousands of little kids, and nobody around – nobody big, I mean except me. And I am 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 are running and they don't look where they are going. I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all."

Facing hypocrisy, Holden dreams of innocent childhood, of a never-ending game. The symbol is obvious- Holden will be the one who catches children not to fall into the precipice of adulthood, preserving their pure and innocent state.

The excerpt from the book (chapter 9) concentrates on the idea of Holden's obsessive retreat into a fantasy world symbolized here by his genuine concern for the fate of the ducks in Central Park. It illustrates Holden's loneliness and alienation from the "phony society" full of taboos, norms and convention which are but a front for its lack of purpose, hypocrisy and prejudices. Salinger observes in his hero the so-called "phenomenon of immaturity", the desire not to grow up of the post-war young American generation. Holden is rejected by society (dominant theme of the novel is the helplessness of the adolescent – half child, half adult – in an adult society). But since society doesn't give "a damn" about him, he doesn't give "a damn" about it either. He creates a world of his own, emphasizing his higher sensitivity and thirst for purity. His rejection is complete when he cannot communicate with the cab driver, who, all the other grown-ups in his life, is a "corny wise guy". When he tries to find out from the driver where the ducks on the lagoon near Central Park South go in winter, the driver thinks he wants to "kid" him. The idea is that Holden feels he is a helpless duck himself, with no place to go either. At the same time, his concern for the

fate of the little ducks is genuine, standing for and accounting for his innocent and tender inner nature. But no one is concerned with his feelings. Holden's final attitude towards the cab driver is one of bitter revenge. He ironically assumes the pose and language of a man of the world and, in a very elaborate English, gives him his reasons for changing his mind about the address. He tells the driver he is "travelling incognito", acting, in his own words, "corny with somebody that's corny".

This novel, written in the first person, is a masterpiece of extended monologue, it is all related in Holden's own defiant, ungrammatical, slangy and cryptic way of talking and yet manages to express great subtlety and insight. Salinger uses the real, colloquial words and phrases, repetitions, lacking any adornments or stylistic devices. Thus, we notice in it frequent Americanisms, (booth, guy, mac) slang words (corny, cab) colloquialisms ("then I thought of", "and all") and the use of a rare word ("incognito") employed with a comic effect.

The point of view used by Salinger gives more authenticity to the story. He allows the central character to relate his "adventures" in his own way and language. Such a point of view is called – first person narrative. But Holden is an objective character. He is objective about himself even when that objectivity may reflect discredibly upon himself.