

ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR DERGİSİ THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi/The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 14 Sayı: 82 Kasım 2021 & Volume: 14 Issue: 82 November 2021

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

ÇAVDAR TARLASINDA ÇOCUKLAR: 20. YÜZYILIN ORTALARINDA BİR ASININ ORTAYA ÇIKIŞININ TARİHİ VE FELSEFİ ARKAPLANI

HOLDEN CAULFIELD: HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF A MID-20TH CENTURY REBEL

Olena Boylu*

ÖZ

Jerome David Salinger'in tek romanı olan Çavdar Tarlasında Çocuklar, 20. Yüzyıl Amerikasını yansıtan en canlı temsillerinden bir tanesidir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Büyük Buhran ve İkinci Dünya Savaşında yaşananlar Amerika toplumunu derinden sarsmış ve savaş sonrası dönemde toplumun birleştiği en temel nokta konsensüs ve barış içinde yaşamak olmuştur. ABD Başkanları Harry S. Truman'ın ve Dwight D. Eisenhower'ın siyasi, sosyal, ekonomik ve kültürel bağlamda yürüttükleri politikalar Amerikan toplumunun konformizm, tüketim ve muhafazakarlık yönünde evrilmesine neden olmuştur. Romanın baş kahramanı olan Holden Caulfield, dönemin asi kahramanı temsil etmektedir New York şehrine yaptığı yolculuk aracılığıyla tecrübe ve deneyimlerini aktarmaktadır. 20. yüzyılın ilk yarısında ön plana çıkan belli siyasi, ekonomik ve felsefi gelişmeler kahramanın karakterini ve kişiliğini etkileyerek toplumsal düzene karşı çıkan bir isyancıya dönüştürmektedir. Bu noktadan yola çıkan çalışma romanın felsefi ve tarihsel bağlamını ortaya koyarak dönemin ruhunu yansıtmayı ve Amerikan kahramanının isyankâr yönüne olan etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Amerikan edebiyatı, Amerikan Tarihi, Politika, konformizm, Muhafazakarlık, Amerikan romanı, Varoluşçuluk, Jerome Salinger.

Abstract

Jerome David Salinger's only novel *Catcher in the Rye* provides one of the most vivid pictures of the mid-20th century United States of America. Experience of the Great War, the Great Depression, and the World War II deeply affected American society and after the war ended the only target became a society in consensus. Presidencies of Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower shaped the political, social, economic and cultural agendas of the following decade. A period of conformism, conservatism and consumerism began and the American society changed drastically. The protagonist of the novel, Holden Caulfield, who delivers a story of his journey to the New York City, represents the rebellious character that emerged during this period. While looking for the roots of this type of personality it becomes obvious that the historical and philosophical background of the USA and the world in general plays a crucial role in the formation of such a hero. Peculiar political, economic, and scientific events that unfold during the first half of the 20th century affect his profile and turn him into a rebel against the established social order. Hence, analyzing the historical and philosophical context of the novel and the events revealing within the story, the article aims to clarify the effects of the zeitgeist on the character of the American hero and his rebellious identity.

Keywords: American Literature, American History, Politics, Conformism, Conservatism, American Novel, Existentialism, Jerome Salinger.

*Red Scare is a term used by anti-leftist groups in the US in order to stress the imminent escalation of communism and anarchism within the country. Used for the first time after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia and lately during the McCarthy era.



1. INTRODUCTION

With the end of the World War II American government and society entered a new period that was marked by several significant events like the unfolding Cold War, Korean War, Civil Rights Movement and developing affluent society. At the end of the War, the USA appeared as the least harmed and the most profitable country. While European allies like France and England were devastated by the enemy and had to be reconstructed from the ashes, America became the leader of the world both in financial and political terms. The economic stage of the world changed drastically because previously strong European countries turned to the debtors of the US so the Second World War became a perfect opportunity for the country to gain its power back after the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The administration of President Harry S. Truman that lasted from 1945 till 1953 was the period of conservatism, conformism and consumerism. Obviously, conservatism transpired from the "containment policy" which was developed by Truman administration and was embraced by the government when the world was bipolarized, as the Western capitalist and the Eastern communist blocs. This division established the basis of the so-called Cold War which lasted over forty years and determined the "facet" of these four decades. While on the foreign front this "competition" between the two superpowers continued in Korea and later Vietnam, the main target of the American government became to prevent the expansionism of the communism around the world that is why they continued to resist the opposite power even thousand miles away from the homeland. In this kind of atmosphere, beginning from 1947, the domestic anti-communistic movement arose again (besides the wave of the 1920s) and the so-called McCarthy era began. This Red Scare was another "fruit" of the Cold War period and its begetter was a Senator from Wisconsin Joe McCarthy who "manipulated these fears to his own advantage" and who was "the most successful and frightening redbaiter the country had ever seen" (Norton, 1986, 498). Claiming that there were many communists, spies and Soviet sympathizers within the American government, McCarthy caused numerous arrestments including Julius and Ethel Rosenberg who were taken into custody in 1950. David Halberstam in his book *The Fifties* writes that "there were, in those days following the war, a great many speeches given in civic clubs and chambers of commerce in towns throughout America about the need to get back to Americanism, returning to the American way, and the domestic danger of Communism and Socialism" (Halberstam, 1993, 9). The senator continued to dim the water until 1954 spreading his ideas not only over the federal government but also over the United States Army so when in December he was censured by the Senate the country took a deep breath.

Due to such horrifying experiences like the World War II and domestic threats exaggerated by McCarthy, people were pushed into the shell of their homes where they were protected and happy. The effects of the potential threat or the illusion of it created a peculiar mindset in social and cultural sphere of the US. The microcosmic resistance to this outer enemy became an ordinary American middle-class family that would become a strong "ring" in the whole chain of the American society. Its elementary parts became at least two children, who will represent the future of the country; a house with a TV Set, dishwasher, stereophonic sound system and a car or even two would be better. "An American public that had known deprivation and sacrifice for the last decade and a half began to enjoy unprecedented prosperity" says George Brown Tindall in his *America* (Tindall, 1993, 838). Moreover, the author adds that "fears generated by the Cold War initially played a key role in encouraging orthodoxy" which will become the basis for the conforming culture that developed during the post-war years (Tindall, 1993, 844). Thus, as the government officially proclaimed that there was no economic crisis expected, American people began to believe that the better days have come that is why "The expectation of unending plenty ... became the reigning assumption of social thought in the two decades after 1945" (Tindall, 1993, 839). One of the main income sources became manufacturers since on the international stage, as it was mentioned above, devastated Europe left the field and America used this chance. On the other hand, due to the potential threat of the Cold War and the governmental spending on defense and military researches such industries like electronics, machinery and others significantly developed. Hence, domestic gears, cars and houses became the first things to be bought after the war by the families which were waiting for this opportunity for a very long time.

Moreover, another factor that nourished this consumerism fever became the increase in population that began when fifteen million soldiers returned home and started to build their families causing "the baby-boom" that would give the country its "fresh blood". Consequently, between the years of 1946 and 1964 American population grew by forty million or thirty percent of the total population what was later analyzed as one of the most significant increases in the history of the country. More babies and more families created a demand "for



diapers, baby food, toys, medicines, schools, books, teachers and housing” (Tindall, 1993, 840). Consumerism and conformity turned the society into a homogeneous mass that was living in similar houses, riding similar cars and watching similar TV shows. Warren French in his introductory part for *The Fifties* analyzing the decade states that “‘Tacky’, which Webster’s controversial Third International Dictionary defines as meaning ‘marked by a lack of style or good taste,’ is the word for the 50s” (French, 1970, 1). Since the aim became not the quality but the quantity, the production of this new mass society was supposed to be quick and sailable. Therefore, for example so-called ticky-tacky houses of Levittown that began the suburbanization of the country became one of the symbols for the zeitgeist. Providing loans, the Federal Housing Administration made it easier for veterans and other citizens to buy a house, whereas road construction and growing car industry afforded the communication with the city centers. As a result, new suburban life was established with all the necessities and many Americans found themselves in front of TV sets with full stomachs and relieved minds. Besides, going even further American government provided to its people not only materialism but spiritual support as well. This became one of the main targets of Eisenhower, who replaced Truman in 1953 and who believed that without Supreme power there cannot be an American way of living. Therefore, “In God We Trust” appeared on all American currency and people became encouraged by the idea that this comfortable world, that they have created, was actually God’s will and as Reverend Norman Vincent Peale stated, “Flush out all depressing, negative, and tired thoughts” (Peale in Tindall, 1993, 847).

However, those who examined closer this emerging society realized that nothing was that perfect and that there were “cracks in the picture window” as John Keats called it and lately named his book in which he attacked this new kind of life and called the suburbia “homogeneous, postwar Hell” (Keats in Tindall, 1993, 849). One of his sarcastic statements is as follows:

You can find a box of your own in one of the fresh-air slums we’re building around the edges of American cities inhabited by people whose age, income, number, of children, problems, habits, conversations, dress, possessions, perhaps even blood types are almost precisely like yours. (Keats in Halberstam, 1993, 139)

David Riesman went even further in his *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and analyzed a new personality that appeared within this new order claiming that “an assured, self-reliant personality ... had been dominant in American life throughout the nineteenth century. But during the mid-twentieth century a new, other-directed personality had displaced it” (Riesman in Tindall, 1993, 849). Hence, according to the author, this new type of personality preferred to be well-liked in his surrounding than to be “free” of social norms. In other words, one of the most significant points became the vanishing individualism which was destroyed by this solidness of the society and the psychological state like depression, alienation, and loneliness became typical in the middle of the century.

This disturbing picture at home made intellectuals and writers ask some challenging questions like “Was postwar American society becoming too complacent, too conformist, too materialistic?” (Tindall, 1993, 838). While the average family was satisfying its appetite in a supermarket buying the goods that will make their American Dream come true, more sober part of the population began to question this hedonism. John K. Galbraith in his book *The Affluent Society* (1958) called people to turn their eyes inside the country where poverty was spreading very fast that would be later proved by Michael Harrington with the numbers and statistics in his book *The Other America* which he published in 1962.

On the other hand, the philosophic post-World War II ambience in which American writers created their heroes and wrote their novels was conceived by several significant scientific and intellectual ideas that affected not only the nature of these protagonists but also the plot of a novel itself. The inception of the new point of view on the universe happened at the very beginning of the twentieth century when a young physicist Albert Einstein challenged the scientific world with his discoveries. Through the centuries people continued to live in a Newtonian Universe, which was quite mechanical and calculable. As it was believed the main rules were already framed and the rest was possible to be solved via the human capability for reasoning. So, although there were lots of things to be learned still the mankind had a hope for the better since it was in their hands to explain the unknown. However, when Albert Einstein put forward his theory of relativity this “stable” and “soluble” universe slipped away because according to him every stable could change according to the speed of light. Assuming it as the only constant, what was previously proved by Michelson-Morley studies, Einstein stated that there was no absolute time and space but that those vary according to the speed of the object. In other words, if the Newtonian world was relatively predictable and organized, Einstein’s became limitless and uncertain thus pushing the mankind into the abyss of darkness. Therefore, on the eve of the First World War humankind was introduced to a completely different universe and due to the complexity of it the



gap between the ordinary man and a scientist began to grow wider. Moreover, this chasm became even bigger when the atomic bomb, which was used for the first time towards the end of the Second World War, devastated a nation so people realized that previously “worthwhile” science from now on had no limits in both ways. Subsequently, even if an ordinary man didn’t catch up with whole theoretical details of Einstein’s ideas, which were projecting even nuclear power for the future, he realized this new science when his government practiced it during the warfare. So as Horton states in *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, “Without being able to grasp the full implications of the new science, he nevertheless felt a sense of haunted insecurity in a world in which inconceivable forces of destruction could be unleashed at any moment” (Horton, 1974, 458). It should also be mentioned that this feeling of insecurity also has its socio-economic roots in the nation that passed through one of the deepest financial downfalls in its history that started in 1929 and is known as the Great Depression which showed how a huge and at that moment most powerful nation can get knocked out only in one day. Finally, losing the faith in national and economic security as well as in the peace in the world after two great wars this new and more experienced person of the Post World War II period was exposed to such challenging ideas like existentialism and nihilism which were already on agenda for several decades in the circle of European philosophers.

Although Existentialism never was the most favorable idea on the American land due to its highly negative nature still this philosophy found its place largely in the sphere of visual arts but not as early as it did in Europe. Only in 1947 when William Barrett, who at that period taught philosophy at New York University, wrote an essay for *Partisan Review* under the name “What is Existentialism?” American thinkers and artists began to follow and analyze ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre who was already one of the most important spokesmen for this philosophy and who developed his own existentialist ideas on philosophical approaches. However, the foundation of the movement was laid by such significant 19th century thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Friedrich Nietzsche. The weak side of this group became the difference of their religious preferences that varied between atheism and different forms of Christianity. That is why Existentialism never could formulate its doctrine that would represent their school of thought. Nevertheless, this disagreement on the ground of religion didn’t harm the core of the philosophy which would be the meaning of existence itself. The main object for the investigation of these people became the man himself as well as his emotions, ideas and the meaning or purpose of his life. Instead of analyzing such concrete issues like mathematics and science they focused on the abstract side of life.

George Cotkin in his *Existential America* writing about the development of the movement in the New World says that “In America existential ideas functioned not as benumbing forces but as goads to action and commitment” (Cotkin, 2003, 7). Alongside he adds “Existentialism, American style, also jibes well with American antinomianism, that willingness of the lonely individual to rebel against entranced authority in the name of his or her most intense beliefs” (Cotkin, 2003, 8). This revolt solution was the main idea of the French philosopher Albert Camus whose essay under the name of *The Rebel* was published in 1951. Camus believed that this existential idea of futility of life and the search for the essence is an absurd situation since it is fruitless. Absurdists, whose spokesman Camus already had become, believed that it was impossible for an individual to find this sense of existence and it was quite alike to the situation of the mythological hero Sisyphus, who was doomed to push a stone up to the top of a mountain only to see how it falls down again and again. And Camus states that the only resolution of this situation may be the revolt so even a little hope for rescue may help a person to continue his or her existence. This philosophical ground influenced the literary world greatly. Centralizing on the life experience of the heroes, novelists that appealed to Absurdism, tried to explore the human nature in the situations when the essence or purpose of life cannot be found. Using satire and dark humor those authors created the heroes who desperately, just like Sisyphus, were looking for their answers. Hence, this frantic but revolutionary hero can be found in many fictional stories that appeared after the World War II and one of the best examples that still preserves his place within the literary world became Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Jerome David Salinger, known for his mysterious and controversial attitude, is considered to be one of the most significant writers of the mid-20th century America. His only novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, which was widely criticized after the publication, is regarded as one of the essential classics of the American literature. The book was published in 1951 by Little Brown, which on the contrary to the other publishers, agreed to print this sensational novel. Walter Allen analyzing the book in his *Tradition and Dream* writes that “In some very important aspects, it is the American novel of its generation, for in Holden Caulfield Salinger has created a myth-figure with which millions of young and youngish Americans have identified themselves” (Allen, 1964, 329). However, not only young generation was impressed by the story of seventeen-years-old boy but the society in general reacted to the novel since not only the content but also the style of the author appeared to be



“provocative”, especially, for the period immediately after the Second World War. The very first lines of the novel sounded like a proclamation of the new era in literature, “If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it ...” (Salinger, 1991, 1). It was a completely “new voice”, offensive and radical, that became a reason for the novel to pass through a long period towards recognition which was marked by prohibition and harsh criticism. However, even today, after seven decades from the publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* still is known as a cult book and Holden Caulfield as the voice of the young America.

The novel begins in a mental institution where the hero is put after a breakdown he suffered following his adventures in New York. The whole story is a flashback to the past when Holden decided to run away from his school Pencey Prep and went to the New York City before his parents would learn that he is expelled. The boy tells that he is sick of everything and everybody around him and that the only way out for him is to run away. He also tells about his little brother Allie, whom he had lost few years ago, and as we understand through the story this tragedy psychologically affected the boy and became one of the reasons for his depression. Screaming, “Sleep tight, ya morons!”, Holden escapes the school and starts his physical and psychological journey during which we try to understand the inner world of an adolescent who is so mad on the world around him (Salinger, 1991, 52). Holden spends three days in the City and encounters different people and through these situations and dialogues the reasons for the boy’s rebellious attitude become obvious. During this trip Holden continues to utter his dissatisfaction with the people around him but at the end of his adventure he understands that this kind of behavior negatively affects his little sister Phoebe, who is the only human in the whole world for whom he hasn’t lost his hope. That is why he decides to return home and consequently finds himself in a mental hospital telling his adventures to us.

Holden’s outrage towards people concentrates our attention on the society in which the hero is growing up because the density of his anger astonishes the reader from the very beginning. Salinger displays the absurdity and artificiality of the American society of the post-World War period and criticizes it via Holden’s slang language, which, by the way, became a main target for the conservative critics. According to Sanford Pinsker, whose criticism on the novel under the name *Innocence Under Pressure* is widely known, “Novels like *The Catcher in the Rye* suggest that all was not well, that the decade’s very conservatism, newfound prosperity, and most especially, its heavy pressure to conform took an enormous toll. In this sense Holden Caulfield was an emblem of the decade’s spiritual restlessness and capacity for rebellion ...” (Pinsker, 1993, 8). So the author assumes that the very spirit of the period affected the society in a negative way and as Philip Roth, who became another member of the army of the critics for this particular period, indicated “The American writer in the middle of the twenties century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meager imagination” (Roth in Tindall, 1993, 851). One of these authors was Jerome David Salinger whose *Holden Caulfield* showed the reader all the disgrace of the American public, which lost its control and innocence after the Second World War by surrendering to the modern life and capitalistic rush. Thus the author became one of those rare writers that preferred to point with the fingers on the absurdity of the modern society rather than playing three wise monkeys. *The Catcher in the Rye* and its Holden’s “most immediate effect is of being magically on top of contemporary life, catching events in the making and plucking phrases right out of the mouth of social history” and while providing the reader with a true picture of the period the author didn’t spoil the image with the fairy tales of the “happy life” famous during the 1950s (Poster, 1990, 25).

Holden Caulfield, a seventeen years old boy, starts to criticize the society he was growing in from the very beginning of the novel. His very first complaint comes to his older brother, D.B., who previously used to be an ordinary writer whose short stories were “quite good” according to the boy. However, after his brother went to Hollywood Holden says, “Now he is out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there’s one thing I hate, it’s the movies. Don’t even mention them to me” (Salinger, 1991, 2). Hollywood and its every product represent corruption for Holden because consciously, or subconsciously due to his age, he understands that mass media is one of the strongest tools of the government that controls and steers the society, and 1950s was the time of the Hollywood movies, television and “rags to riches” stories that nourished and misled the dreams of the ordinary people. Therefore, Holden, whose one of the famous writers was Thomas Hardy and who preferred classics for reading, hated his brother for “prostituting” his talent in a place where art was commercialized and produced only for money. On the other hand, immortal classics, which the young hero liked to read, represented the opposite of the tacky-tacky products of the period which were consumed as fast as they were produced leaving no trace behind.



The next thing that irritates the character is his school and everybody in it. Pencey Prep, as it is understood from the context, is a private and expensive school and according to Holden "The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has - I'm not kidding" (Salinger, 1991, 4). Before entering Pencey, Holden ran away from other schools but again he cannot stay in this one either. The reason is the factitious, or as he calls it "phony", atmosphere which money creates and Holden is aware of it, although he is young. He sees how people treat each other according to the status they possess which can be represented by a new car or a job position or even a simple suitcase. According to Carol and Richard Ohmann, whose Marxist criticism of the novel arose interest among the intellectuals, one of the best examples that shows how the capitalistic society crashes into the individuality with the class pressure is the monologue of Holden about the suitcases which, even among children or students, represent the person and the class where he or she belongs:

The thing is, it's really hard to be roommates with people if your suitcases are much better than theirs - if yours are really good ones and theirs aren't. You think if they're intelligent and all, the other person, and have a good sense of humor, that they don't give a damn whose suitcases are better but they do. They really do. It's one of the reasons why I roomed with a stupid bastard like Stradlater. At least his suitcases were as good as mine. (Salinger, 1991, 109)

Although Holden hates Stradlater who is one of those rich boys, handsome and popular, he prefers to stay with him in the same room because next to him he won't fill himself as a snobbish bourgeois since his family is financially strong as well. Hence the novel is a critical reflection of the life controlled by class discrimination and domination of it in every sphere like education, career, and even personal relationship since the girls in Holden's school prefer to date Stradlaters, not Holden, who finds all these social frames as a prison for humanity. This obsession of people to create a life they already know in every detail is not a perspective for our hero. He knows that the only reason he is going to school is to learn enough to find a job which will bring him enough money to buy a car which will be later replaced by a newer one. Incidentally, obsession with the cars is another aspect that drives our hero crazy because he cannot see a point for men's automobile passion especially because he knows that it won't satisfy them:

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. I mean they don't even interest me. I'd rather have a goddam horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake. (Salinger, 1991, 131)

Salinger stresses not only the foolishness of the situation in which people were dragged in by this competitive system but also the dehumanizing side of it. As if mechanization affected not only the material world but spiritual as well, so an animal seems a better alternative for the hero because it is of flesh and blood with emotions and intelligence while humans turned into some selfish and senseless machines.

Wherever Holden goes he meets emotionally exhausted people who live according to the rules of the conformist society and his alienation from these people grow with every new day. Like for a man, who once graduated from Pencey and later donated money to the school so one of the wings of the dorm was caring his name, Ossenburger Memorial Wing. When this man makes a speech in a church Holden observes him and says "He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me, I can just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs" (Salinger, 1991, 17). This kind of speech nauseated the hero because talking about the spirituality in such a materialistic way shows the rotten personality of the man and the society that listens to him. Towards the end of the novel, when the hero realizes that there is no way out for him and that one day, when he reaches maturity, he would have to communicate with those people he decides to run away to the woods and pretend that he is deaf-mute so nobody would talk to him.

I figured I could get a job at a filling station somewhere, putting gas and oil in people's cars. I didn't care what kind of job it was, though. Just so people didn't know me and I didn't know anybody. I thought what I'd do was, I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. (Salinger, 1991, 198)

The alienation of the protagonist grows with every page of the novel and we realize that it becomes impossible for him to survive in the established order. People around annoy and disappoint him so he permanently says "People never notice anything" / "People never believe you" / "People always clap for the wrong things" (Salinger, 1991, 9/37/84). That is why Ernest Jones evaluating the problems of Holden writes:



His sense of alienation is almost complete – from parent, from friends, from society in general as represented by the prep school from which he has been expelled and the night-club and hotel world of New York in which he endures a week-end exile while hiding out from his family. With his alienation go assorted hatred – of the movies, of night clubs, of social and intellectual pretension, and so on. (Jones, 1990, 24)

The author stresses that Holden definitely doesn't fit the society and he doesn't want to, that is why he tells everybody what is on his mind but this time people find him strange what again separates him from the others and makes him a scapegoat. Finally, after he understands that he cannot change anything, he explodes and says "I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will" (Salinger, 1991, 121). He prefers to see another war, which would clean all the dirt, than trying to fulfill the expectations of his family and the public because he believes that this society is "sick" and when a hero cannot keep up with the social norms there are two ways to escape: the first one is to hit the road and the second one is to return to the innocence of the childhood, live in a fantasy what later in the most cases ends with a psychosis.

Thus, the hero's existential face is visible through his rebellion against the materialism and shallowness of the society while his stress on the uniqueness and vitality of the human nature reminds us the ideas of the main spokesmen of this movement. On the other hand, the negative characteristics of the hero like swearing, smoking, tactless and disrespect that he shows to people around him makes him a typical anti-hero and rebel that doesn't suit the society around him so, consequently, turns into a victim of it. And the victimization process in *The Catcher in the Rye* continues through the whole adventures of the boy in the New York City where he goes with the little sum of money and few belongings.

This loss of hope within the character spreads widely after the World War II due to the disasters like atomic bomb and Holocaust that showed of what the humanity was capable. Pamela Hunt Steinle assumes in her *In Cold Fear: The Catcher in the Rye Censorship Controversies and Postwar American Character* that:

... American Experience was repeatedly divided into categories of pre-twentieth-century "innocence" and post-World War II "beyond innocence", making it clear that the end of the World War II brought about a profound change in sensibility – that "something happened" that made America specifically, and the Western World in general, distinctively different from its historical past. (Steinle, 2000, 32)

The issue of whether an American lost his innocence or not always remained disputable but the point that the world changed never could be argued. That is why Lewis in his *American Adam* analyzing the nineteenth century "hero" didn't include in his work the age of the containment. However, in the epilogue he states that the difference between these two periods is that in the 20th century a hero has to find the hope and innocence within himself because the outer world does not provide them anymore. Holden Caulfield is the hero who through the whole book is looking for these vital parts of the life in the society but when he realizes that nobody cares or plans to pull people out of this mess he chooses a mission for himself as a "catcher in the rye".

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. (Salinger, 1991,173)

Just like Jesus, who was sent to save the people, Holden dreams of saving those little children who are still full of life and who haven't been turned to senseless and blind creatures by the social norms. If it could be possible Holden would not grow up either but he realizes that this would happen anyway. His desire to stuck in time or even go back as far as possible is obvious when he walks in the museum of art and says that he would like to be like that Eskimo who stays there for years and doesn't change. Holden wishes he could stay as a young boy and according to Hassan "The retreat to childhood is not simply an escape, it is also a criticism, an affirmation of values which, for better or worse, we still cherish; and the need for adolescent disaffiliation, the refusal of initiation, expresses the need to reconceive American reality" (Hassan, 1961, 260-261).

To conclude, it can be said that Jerome David Salinger and his *The Catcher in the Rye* created an effect of an earthquake in the stability of the 1950s. Some critics saw Holden as an arrogant adolescent who criticizes the class to which he actually belongs. They believed that the only problem of the boy is a usual rebellious



nature of every youngster who passes through the puberty period. However, the opposite view proclaimed The Catcher one of the most important literary works since Hemingway period because the journey of a young boy, who hit the road in order to find a simple truth or a hope for existence in the “phony” world, reveals serious social and cultural problems of the American society at the middle of the 20th century. Holden’s frankness shocked the conservative part of the nation but reflected the feelings of the young generation that was growing up. The search for morality and old traditional values like honor and respect reflected the necessity of the retrospective glance for the people in order to realize the negative side of the modern state of mind. The main accusation of the young boy became the hypocrisy that was ruling within the society and the ironic point appeared to be the impossibility of escaping it. That is why he dreams of saving as many children as he can so this country will have a brighter future.

KAYNAKÇA

- [Allen, Walter. *Tradition and Dream: the English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1964.](#)
- Cotkin, George. *Existentialist America*. Maryland: the Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.
- French, Warren. “The Age of Salinger.” *The Fifties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*. Ed. Warren French. Florida: Everett/Edwards, inc., 1970.
- Halberstam, David. *The Fifties*. USA: The Amateurs Limited, 1993.
- [Hassan, Ihab. *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1961.](#)
- [Horton, Rod W. and Herbert W. Edwards. *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*. 3rd ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.](#)
- Jones, Ernest. “Case History of All of Us.” *Major Literary Characters: Holden Caulfield*. Ed. Harold Bloom. USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990.
- [Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1955.](#)
- [Norton, Mary Beth, and David M. Katzman. *A People and A Nation: A History of the United States*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.](#)
- Ohmann, Carol and Richard Ohmann. “Reviewers, Critics, and *The Catcher in the Rye*.” *Critical Essays on Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990.
- . “Universals and the Historically Particular.” *Critical Essays on Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990.
- [Pinsker, Sanford. *The Catcher in the Rye: Innocence Under Pressure*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.](#)
- Poster, William. “Tomorrow’s Child.” *Critical Essays on Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990.
- [Salinger, J. David. *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1991.](#)
- [Steinle, Pamela Hunt. *In Cold Fear: The Catcher in the Rye Censorship Controversies and Postwar American Character*. Ohio: Ohio UP, 2000.](#)
- [Tindall, George Brown, and David E. Shi. *America: A Narrative History*. 3rd ed. Vol.2. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993.](#)