

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze**

**Pedagogická fakulta**



**DIPLOMA THESIS**

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**HOLDEN CAULFIELD AS A LIMINAL CHARACTER**

**Holden Caulfield jako postava na prahu dvou etap lidského vývoje**

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2013

I would like to express my gratitude to the supervisor of my thesis,  
Mgr Jakub Ženíšek, for his guidance and support.

Prohlašuji, že jsem svou diplomovou práci zpracoval samostatně a  
uvedl jsem všechny použité prameny.

V Praze dne 2. května 2013

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## **Abstract**

This Diploma thesis deals with the character of Holden Caulfield, the main protagonist of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, identifying him as a liminal character. It is concerned with the term liminality and inbetweennes. It focuses on evidence of his inbetweennes by means of the examples from the novel itself. It illustrates the examples of his position between childhood and adulthood by way of some of Holden's manners, behavior and talks.

## **Key words**

Liminality, inbetweennes, childhood, adulthood, J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

## **Abstrakt**

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá postavou Holdena Caulfielda, hlavní postavu románu J.D. Salinger *Kdo chytá v žitě*, přičemž tohoto hlavního hrdinu vnímá jako člověka na prahu dvou etap lidského vývoje. Zaměřuje se na pojmy liminalita a meziprahovost hlavní postavy. Práce hledá a představuje prvky jeho meziprahovosti ze samotném románu. Uvádí konkrétní příklady pozice hlavní postavy mezi dětstvím a dospělostí prostřednictvím Holdenova chování, myšlenek a dialogů.

## **Klíčová slova**

Liminalita, meziprahovost, dětství, dospělost, J.D. Salinger, *Kdo chytá v žitě*

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# 1. Introductory statement

Ever since the character of Holden Caulfield was brought to light by J.D. Salinger more than 60 years ago, readers all around the world have been mesmerized by this immensely appealing character.

The readers who took a liking to Holden started to discuss the character, his qualities, behavior and last but not least, Salinger's incredible power to create a teenage character relatable to so many readers.

Those readers who saw themselves in Holden Caulfield began to identify with Holden making him their fictional hero.

This popular response was also one of the impulses that stimulated considerable scholarly interest in Holden's character.

The thesis will concentrate on Holden Caulfield as a liminal character; a character who stands on the threshold between two life periods, namely childhood and adulthood.

The first part of the thesis will provide the readers with a short biography of J.D. Salinger, the author of this novel *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Secondly, I will put some light on the term "liminality" and do my utmost to elaborate on this concept so that the readers could understand and conceive what "liminality" means theoretically. It will be done by means of a wide range of examples from the works written by various competent authors having touched and explored the term "liminality" as well as its close variants.

And thirdly, the thesis presents the analysis of Holden's complex personality and illustrates numerous specific examples based on the novel itself showing the evidence that Holden Caulfield may be regarded as being a liminal character.

## 2. J.D. Salinger – biography

Jerome David Salinger was born in New York City on New Year's Day, 1919 to a Jewish father and a Christian mother. The son of a wealthy cheese importer, Salinger grew up in a fashionable neighborhood in Manhattan. As a child, Salinger seemed to be solemn and quiet. As far as siblings are concerned, Jerome had no brothers and only one sister, called Doris, who was eight years his senior (Lundquist 6).

In terms of the education, Salinger attended public schools in Manhattan's upper west side. His grades were far from being outstanding. At the age of thirteen, Salinger's parents enrolled him in Manhattan's McBurney School, which was a very prestigious institution. Unfortunately, one year later, Salinger was forced to leave the school because his results left a lot to be desired (Lundquist 7).

Salinger finally settled on the Valley Forge Military Academy in the Pennsylvania Hills in 1934. Two years later, Salinger graduated from this Academy. What seems to be intriguing is that Salinger not only starts to shape his writing talent here completing his first short stories but also develops a sense of being an outcast, missing a closer touch of his family (Lundquist 7).

Furthermore, Valley Forge turns out to be the model for Pencey Prep in *The Catcher in the Rye*. To be more precise, there is evidence that one of Salinger's fellow cadets jumped from a window which might be referred to the character of James Castle in *Catcher* and equally another cadet, somewhat like Holden, was expelled, ending up in a mental institution (Lundquist 7).

After graduation Salinger attended writing classes for a few weeks at New York University, which came in useful, since during the great depression Salinger enrolled in a short-story writing class. This might have been quite beneficial during the crisis. Money was in short supply but there was an expanding market for short stories resulting in a relatively high demand for such short stories. In other words, people were using their little money for cheap entertainment such as magazines with short stories (Lundquist 9).

However, it was not until 1940, when his first published story was released. Salinger stated many times that he was especially comfortable in writing short stories. His only piece of

writing which does not seem to be a short story is his masterpiece, namely *The Catcher in the Rye* (Lundquist 12).

In 1942 Salinger was drafted in the Army and one year later he was transferred to Nashville, Tennessee, with the rank of Staff Sergeant. Afterwards he joined the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps and relocated to England. World War II raged in Europe and what is an immensely absorbing fact is that Salinger took part in the D-Day invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 (Lundquist 13).

In France Salinger encountered Ernst Hemingway, who was a part-time war correspondent there. Salinger regarded him as being friendly and generous and they got on well together (Lundquist 14).

Upon his return to the United States and civilian life in 1946, Salinger wrote more stories, publishing them in many respected magazines. He was deeply affected by the war and some of his stories are based on this cruel experience. Salinger usually portrays war as being dull and dreary. What Salinger depicts is loneliness and boredom, which is the worst danger for the soldier (Lundquist 16).

As Salinger's pieces of writing became more serious and his writing more famous, the author began to display the tendency to hide from the public. He strove to escape publicity as much as possible. Eventually Salinger secretly rented an apartment in New York where he put the finishing touches to his only novel *The Catcher in the Rye* which he had started some time ago but put on ice for some years (Lundquist 27).

“Salinger was famous for not wanting to be famous. He claimed to loathe any sort of public scrutiny” (Hamilton 4).

In 1951 the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* was published to the great enthusiasm of readers. “Shortly before the *Catcher's* publication, Salinger wanted no publicity of any sort and he was also demanding that his photograph be removed from the back cover, which later really happened” (Hamilton 115).

By the time the novel was released, Salinger left for Great Britain doing his best to avoid the tumult of publication and any further engagement in the marketing. What he had in mind was to travel around the British Isles and come back to the USA long time after the hubbub around the novel had died down (Slawenski 195).

Nonetheless, the author succumbed to the temptation of curiosity and made his mind up to return home five days before the American publication of the novel. The masterpiece came out on 16 July 1951 in both US and Canada. The novel won a lot of praise which Salinger justly deserved (Slawenski 197). This can be demonstrated by the following quotes:

“‘The Catcher cult catches on’ was a typical mid-fifties headline” (Hamilton 155).

“In most of the newspaper reviews, there was a note of genuine astonishment” (Hamilton 117).

“The US reviews praised the novel’s depth and found it remarkable, absorbing, unusually brilliant and funny. Nevertheless, there were also less favorable reviews but these were relatively few in number and generally found fault with the novel’s language. A number of critics were offended by Holden’s repeated use of ‘goddam’ and especially the term ‘fuck you’. In 1951, these were shocking expletives for any novel” (Slawenski 198).

However, as Lundquist writes: “*The Catcher in the Rye* is a novel that fights obscenity with an amazing and divine mixture of vulgarity and existential anguish, and it does this through a style that moves the narrative effortlessly along on a colloquial surface that suddenly parts to reveal the terror and beauty of the spiritual drama that Holden enacts” (Lundquist 68).

There is a parallel between Holden and Salinger. Salinger wrote a letter in which he admits that the boy-hero Holden turns out to be a portrait of the author himself when young (Hamilton 66).

In the same year that *The Catcher in the Rye* appeared, Salinger published a short story in *the New Yorker* magazine called “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” which proved to be the first in a series of stories about the fictional Glass family. Over the next decade, other “Glass” stories emerged in the same magazine such as *Nine stories*, *Franny* and *Zooey* (Lundquist ix).

As far as his private life is concerned, Salinger continued to live a quiet life in New Hampshire with his wife Claire and their two children Margaret Ann and Matthew born in 1955 and 1960 respectively (Lundquist 30).

Beginning in the early 1960s, as his critical reputation waned, Salinger began to publish less and to disengage from society. Since 1965, Salinger has been silent (Hamilton 190).

This reclusiveness, ironically, made Salinger even more famous, transforming him into a cult figure (Lundquist 31).

Salinger was literally bombarded by offers by various people in a wide range of matters. However, the author remained adamant. To be more specific, Salinger, for instance, refused to sell his major works to the film studios (Lundquist 16).

“Salinger refused requests by Elia Kazan, Billy Wilder and Steven Spielberg to render Holden onto stage and screen. In 2003, he threatened the BBC with litigation over a planned television dramatization of *The Catcher in the Rye*” (Slawenski 390).

On 1st January 2010 Salinger turned 91. Nevertheless, as January drew to a close, Salinger’s health began to deteriorate. J.D. Salinger, a very private and unapproachable person for the public, passed away on 27<sup>th</sup> January causing genuine grief for all people loving his stories. Needless to say, his stories had immensely touched the hearts of millions of people all over the world (Slawenski 392).

### **3. Intro Liminality**

#### **The origin of the word “Liminality”**

The term “liminality” appears to be a semi-neologistic and therefore slightly nebulous expression. The Second Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary does not include such a word. However, it does have an entry for “liminal,” which is an adjectival form describing “pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process” (Oxford).

Both expressions (liminality and liminal) originally come from the Latin word “limen” meaning “threshold”, i.e. literally the bottom part of a doorway having to be crossed to enter. In other words, it might indicate a place between outside and inside of something.

Liminality refers to a transitory, in-between state or space. As a transitory space it points to the temporal border.

Firstly, the term was introduced by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor W. Turner, who engage liminality to illustrate the transitory stage that is typical of rites of passage in various cultures.

Secondly, as far as literary, post-colonial and cultural studies are concerned, both the notion and the term have been effectively extrapolated and re-appropriated to define an existence on the border, or on the threshold, dividing distinct spheres as well as identities. Homi Bhabha, a cultural theorist, for example, refers to the liminal in post-colonial literature as a potentially disruptive in-betweenness.

Lastly, there is yet another racially flavoured term that is closely connected to “liminality” and it is “double consciousness”. This term was introduced and coined by an American sociologist, civil rights activist and author, W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois described the term to be applied to an individual whose identity seems to be divided into two or more aspects referring to African Americans. Moreover, there is a connection between Du Bois and Frantz Fanon’s work. Works of Frantz Fanon on colonialism show evidence that colonized peoples also experience the condition of double consciousness.

The following pages will deal with each contributor in turn more thoroughly.

## **Arnold Van Gennep**

The term “Liminality” was first introduced to the field of anthropology in 1909 by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in his work *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep concentrated on the rituals of the African tribes (Van Gennep 1960: 19).

This work proves to be substantial to the development of the concept of liminality. It describes rituals or rites of passage in which the participants cross a boundary or threshold between adolescence and adulthood.

To be more specific, it deals with the ambiguity or hybridity that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when the participants do not hold their pre-ritual status any more, however, they have not yet initiated the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete.

Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals as having the structure as follows (Van Gennep 1960: 19-21):

- 1) Preliminal rites
- 2) Liminal rites
- 3) Postliminal rites

Van Gennep explains the first part of the process (Preliminal rites) to be the rituals leaving something behind and separating from the previous practices. The second part (Liminal rites) indicates the rituals performed in the stage of transition. And the third part (Postliminal rites) points to entering the new stage (Van Gennep 1960: 27).

## **Victor W. Turner**

Victor Turner, an anthropologist, made a fairly groundbreaking contribution to his field by introducing the concept of "liminality" into the anthropological discourse. Turner first formulated his theory of liminality in the late 1960s and it proceeded to be a fundamental theme in his work. Turner's work on liminality is based on Van-Gennep's three-part model of the Rite of Passage.

Turner spent five years in the Zambian tribe Ndembu exploring and studying their society and a great deal of his early work is based on his experiences with the study of their rituals.

It is particularly important to note that Turner took an interest in the second phase of Van Gennep's structure that deals with the transitional or liminal stage, that is to say, the stage where an individual has been divested of his or her usual identity and lies on the verge of personal or social transformation.

"The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner 1967: 95).

"The liminal individuals are dangerous to those who have not gone through the liminal period. In addition, liminal individuals have no status, insignia, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows" (Turner 1967: 98).

The features of liminality or a liminal person (somebody on a threshold) are ambiguous since this position and this individual defy, or more precisely, are incompatible with the network of classifications being in the cultural space under normal circumstances. "Liminal individuals are neither here nor there, being betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony" (Turner 1969: 95).

Moreover, their ambiguous and indefinite features seem to be in a lot of societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. These features are expressed by various symbols in the sense that liminality is often compared with death, pregnancy, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, wilderness or even with solar and lunar eclipse (Turner 1969: 96).

Furthermore, liminality means that the higher status does not exist without the lower one. What is more, the individual, who holds the higher position, has to experience what it is like to be in a subordinate position (Turner 1969: 98).

In addition, the liminal characters are individuals that (1) are situated in loopholes of social structures, (2) are located on the edge of societies (3) are ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Turner 1969: 122).

What is more, according to Turner, liminality brings about a state he refers to as “*communitas*”. Turner explains that *communitas* is a relatively structureless society that is based on relations of equality and solidarity and that is opposed to the normative social structure (Turner 1969: 96).

In other words, *communitas* is referred to anti-structure. The social structure and *communitas* make up two major models for human interrelatedness. These models are defined as follows (Turner 1969: 96).

“The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less.” The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (Turner 1969: 96).

Not only does the latter model of human interrelatedness involve liminality, but it also includes marginality and inferiority. As an example of *communitas* in modern Western society, he mentions the “Beat generation” and “the hippies” (Turner 1969: 97).

To put it in a nutshell, liminality seems to be a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point and as such it is a state that appears to be temporary and interestingly enough, it is a state that ends when the individual is reincorporated into the social structure.

## Homi Bhabha

The Indian-born cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha makes an effort in his introductory chapter of *The Location of Culture* to put light on the "liminal" negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions.

Bhabha explains that it is not possible to consider cultural identities to be pre-given cultural traits that define the conventions of ethnicity. Nor is it possible to view "colonizer" and "colonized" as separate entities that define themselves independently (Bhabha 2).

“It is not the colonist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges” (Bhabha 45).

Furthermore, Bhabha proposes that the negotiation of cultural identity includes the continual exchange of cultural performances that in turn create a mutual recognition (or representation) of cultural difference. Bhabha continues to state in the passages below, this "liminal" space is a "hybrid" site that witnesses the production (rather than just the reflection) of cultural meaning.

“Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (Bhabha 2).

According to Bhabha, liminality not only relates to the space between cultural collectives but also between historical periods.

“We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’...here and there, on all sides...” (Bhabha 1).

“These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity...” (Bhabha 1).

Homi Bhabha uses the Renée Green’s metaphor of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York, which displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed: “I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas” (Bhabha 3).

“The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designation of identity becomes the process of symbolic interaction. The connective tissue that constructs the difference...The stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 4).

In other respects, as far as the genre of fiction is concerned, this hybridity or in-betweenness might be applied to the main character of Gemmy Fairley from David Malouf’s masterpiece *Remembering Babylon*. Malouf portrays Gemmy as being an English castaway living among aborigines for 16 years before crossing back into European civilization. There his identity is immediately called into question. Gemmy seems to be an ‘in-between creature’, occupying an uncertain cultural space, with no-one able to determine with which culture he should be identified.

## **W.E.B. Du Bois**

W.E.B. Du Bois was an American sociologist, who in his writings fought for equality and struggled against racism.

He introduced the term “double consciousness” into the study of African American psychology in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* referring to African Americans considering themselves, not only individually, but also as a group, through the view of the society they take part in (Black 393).

In other words, “In *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, Du Bois famously described black Americans as possessing what he called a double consciousness, caught between a self-conception as an American and as a person of African descent” (McWhorter).

Du Bois states “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is particular sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 1965: 215).

Du Bois adds that this produces “ ‘two-ness’ - an American and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings since African Americans want to be both “Negro and...American, without being cursed and spit upon by their fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in their faces” (Du Bois 1965: 215).

In other words, having “two-ness” is what DuBois calls double consciousness. In addition, being both African and American leads to psycho-social tensions and it forces these individuals to identify themselves into two social worlds (Black 394).

## Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon was a French-Algerian writer and philosopher writing about colonialism.

According to Marc Black “It is not just American blacks, though, who are forced to view themselves through the perspectives of others while those others do not have to share such burden on such second sight. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and in *Black Skin White Masks*, reveals that colonized people have DuBoisian double consciousness too” (Black 396).

“Fanon reveals exactly the colonized struggle of twoness that Africans Americans share” (Black 396).

Fanon writes: “Speaking as an Algerian and a French...stumbling over the need to assume two nationalities, two determinations, the intellectual who is Arab and French..., if he wants to be sincere with himself, chooses the negation of one of these two determinations. Usually, unwilling or unable to choose, these intellectuals collect all the historical determinations which have conditioned them and place themselves in a thoroughly universal perspective” (Fanon 1968: 155).

“The conflicting two perspectives, or the two identities and selves, seem comparable to the “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings...” that define DuBoisian two-ness” (Black 396).

Frantz Fanon seems to be closest to DuBoisian double consciousness when he writes:

“Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself...His customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with the civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (Fanon 1967: 110).

To put it simply, double consciousness can develop because one learns to view oneself through the perspectives of others (Black 400).

## 4. Analytical part

The practical part of this thesis will deal with the examples of situations, dialogues, inner monologues and various thoughts and dreams of the main character Holden Caulfield. The examples will be taken from the novel itself.

These extracts are supposed to demonstrate and illustrate that Holden Caulfield can be referred to as a liminal individual; somebody who stands on the threshold between two stages of human life. To be more specific, as far as Holden Caulfield is concerned, these two periods include childhood, the world of play, and adulthood, the world of work.

In other words, the contention of this thesis is that Holden Caulfield can be legitimately termed a “liminal character”, echoing the anthropological Turner definition rather than the cultural/ethnic connotation of Homi Bhabha.

As already noted, the Turner definition is concerned with the anthropological process of an individual and his/her periods of human development. As for the main character of the novel, Holden appears to be in the stage of slowly but surely leaving the childhood and nearing a potential initiation into manhood (Opland 25).

As James Lundquist, a writer of Salinger’s biography claims: “The book is an anthropological study of the rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood for an American youth of Holden’s type” (Lundquist 61).

What is fairly intriguing and fundamental here is that Holden does not want to grow up. He does not desire to abandon childhood which is pure and innocent. Needless to say, it is an uphill battle. He feels the utmost disgust for the adult world. For Holden, the adult world embodies adherence to certain rules; the loss of innocence by means of, for instance, losing virginity; the loss of genuineness which the adult world invariably replaces by corruption and phoniness. Moreover, Holden feels that he does not belong anywhere, that is to say, he seems to be an outsider in the society. He tends to be out on a limb. Sadly said, he would prefer to be dead rather than to be among those phony adult people around.

It may therefore even be summarily argued that Holden is a liminal character in temporal terms (teen age) while also being a marginal character in spatial terms (social and topographical outsidership, largely by choice).

In other words, Holden seems to be far from longing for becoming an adult.

As J. Opland in his Notes on J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* points out: "Holden wants to protect the innocence that is threatened by adult corruption... Holden is an adolescent, on the threshold of maturity and he is reluctant to leave behind the purity and innocence of childhood" (Opland 19).

Moreover, Kenneth Slawenski states: "Holden Caulfield is a character of contradictions. Even his physical description displays the opposites that make up his personality. At 16, he is clearly caught between adolescence and adulthood, with the tumult of conflicting emotions" (Slawenski 201).

James Lundquist adds: "The world cannot allow people to remain children for long. But what if the children do not want to? What if they refuse to become organization men? When that happens, a character like Holden Caulfield emerges" (Lundquist 65).

The practical part will elaborate on these concepts and features in more detail using the passages from the novel.

Nonetheless, before the thesis embarks on the concrete, practical instances and features of Holden Caulfield's liminality, here is a brief summary of Holden's qualities, properties and characteristics.

Firstly, the most visible property of Holden Caulfield proves to be his sensitivity. There is no doubt that Holden is sensitive to the outer world that surrounds him.

Secondly, Holden seems to express kindness. He may be legitimately summed up by the "salt of the earth" epithet. J. Opland writes: "Holden has a number of positive virtues. He is basically kind. He is certainly serving other people such as lending Ackley his scissors, lending Stradlater his jacket, lending Woodruff his typewriter, and last but not least, writing Stradlater's essay for him" (Opland 17).

Thirdly, Opland adds: "He is compassionate, constantly feeling sorry for others in a genuinely sympathetic way and charitable, when he insists on giving the nuns a donation" (Opland 17).

Fourthly, Holden demonstrates that he is fairly considerate, for instance, when he tells the lonely Ackley to accompany him on an outing or he buys tickets for the hunt show since he knows Sally will like it (Opland 17).

These instances of generosity and compassion very poignantly draw reader's attention to the fact that Holden's heart is in the right place.

Fifthly, there are both love and hatred inside him. He does not seem to be able to keep a lid on his emotions. Holden loves strongly; however, Holden's hates overpower and dominate him when he cannot name one thing that he really likes while being asked about it by his sister (Opland 18).

What is more, Holden often criticizes people around him. Although he aims this criticism at people around him, he does not feel comfortable with his own weaknesses too.

He is critical of people who are not very interesting, people who are not secure, and above all, people who are "phony". Holden applies the term "phony" to people who are too traditional or classic.

Lastly, Holden also shows apathy for his future. This fact is also connected with liminality as was mentioned in the brief elaboration on the term itself.

## **5. Practical analysis**

### **5.1 Temporal liminality**

#### **5.1.1 Adolescence as liminality**

First of all, it must be stressed that adolescence plays a pivotal role while identifying the liminality in this riveting novel. In other words, this is the most obvious liminal aspect of Holden's personality and the central theme of the book.

It goes without saying that adolescence proves to be a crucial period in people's lives. It seems absolutely natural for a human being who left the period of childhood that he/she must go through adolescence on the way towards adulthood. Hence, one might point out that adolescence plays an essential role between those two periods.

An adolescent is generally exposed to ambiguous treatment which suggests both childhood and adulthood. It means that some people encountering an adolescent might regard him/her as a child, while other people may consider him/her to be an adult. Therefore, adolescents may be even confused why certain people treat them like children while at the same time other people approach them in a different way.

Parents tend to be those people considering their adolescents to be still children. This attitude may be in sharp contrast with the relatively respectful treatment they may be getting from people outside their family, such as neighbors, shop assistants.

These two different approaches are of major importance since they enable adolescents to realize a change more easily. Adolescents tend to be aware that something is coming to an end and something else is beginning.

They might be dubious about it for a certain amount of time, not knowing what is going to happen to them but they certainly start to sense a change. They begin to notice that while some people seemed to treat them with adult condescension only a few months ago, these very same people slowly start to act more equally towards them now.

Some adolescents might even feel a sense of panic out of it since change does not necessarily have to epitomize a positive thing. Some adolescents might perceive it as a dangerous thing in their lives and they may strenuously oppose it, trying to do something impossible, something that goes against nature, namely to suspend their childhood.

Some adolescents desire to distance themselves from any painful change trying their best to find a way to slow or even stop time from flowing. Their upheaval might sound trivial, insignificant and of no importance, however, for them it might be one of their first hard battles of their lives.

Now let me concentrate on the question why these youngsters so long for adolescence to be preserved.

Adolescence seems to be time when participants indulge in a relatively trouble-free period. Without any doubt, they are exposed to problems of various natures, yet after reaching adulthood those problems appear to be relatively insignificant in hindsight.

Adolescence might still offer protection. It might be something like a hideout that works when needed. It has the ability of liberating adolescents from the reality and problems of the adult world. After any wrongdoings or any problems, adolescents can retreat into these hideouts and retrieve their position in their society more easily. Metaphorically said, it works like a life buoy that prevents them from drowning despite their careless actions.

Needless to say, all teenagers are not identical in their reluctance to come to terms with that change. Some may soon realize that the quicker they adapt the stronger and more successful they are going to be. There might even be adolescents who look forward to being adults, trying to emulate adult behaviour, by means of smoking, for instance. Nevertheless, this may only be a game for them when they take up different roles than they possess themselves attempting to boost their confidence and invigorate their position among their peers and simultaneously enjoy their time at that moment.

The main character of the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* does not belong in this group of teenagers who would welcome adulthood with their open arms. On the contrary, Holden Caulfield does his utmost to defer the arrival of adulthood.

In the novel, the reader can follow Holden's poignant fight against adulthood.

### **5.1.2 The timeframe of the plot**

Having a liminal personality, that is to say, existing on the threshold of two periods, or more precisely, being between two different parts seems to be demonstrated when the structure of the plot itself is taken into consideration.

The entire narrative of the novel appears to be squeezed between Holden's school and his return to his parents. It seems like a gap between two scheduled responsibilities.

Holden's school marks are far from brilliant and with the exception of English, at which he is good, he has difficulties with other subjects and sadly he is forced to leave the school. As Holden remarks, it is not the first school that he is thrown out due to his bad marks.

Holden even leaves Pencey a few days before he is supposed to and by doing so he even magnifies his anger at Pencey and everything that he associates with this school.

Nevertheless, if he came back to his parents who live in New York, he would start another chapter of his life searching for other possible schools to complete his education. Without any doubt, this notion haunts him and he tries to avoid it at all costs.

Holden himself confirms this when he says that he cannot go back to school, however, adding that he cannot return to his parents either. He is left in the phase that he can go neither there nor there, or put it better, he can go neither back nor forward in his life. Holden seems to be desperate since he does not know where to go.

Holden himself unwittingly confirms this when he says he hailed a cab but had no idea where he should go because he was not supposed to be at home until Tuesday so he actually had two more days (Salinger 139).

By and large, both leaving school and eventual coming back to his parents create border points of the liminal phase that represents the entire plot of his narration.

### 5.1.3 Liminality as Limbo

The mindset of the main character can be quite aptly described by religious phraseology, namely by the term Limbo.

The term Limbo is closely connected with the term liminality since latin word *limbus* refers to words such as “edge” and “boundary” that are associated with the term liminal that, as already mentioned, means “threshold” or “temporal border”.

According to the theologians of the Catholic Church, Limbo implies an idea about the afterlife status of people who pass away in Original Sin without being ascribed to the Hell of Damned.

It must be said that no Christian Church has indoctrinated the idea of Limbo officially.

The idea of Limbo encompasses the underworld, in other words the hell. To be more specific, one of those parts of the underworld is the Limbo of Infants.

The Limbo of Infants indicates a hypothesis referring to the permanent condition of those who passed away in infancy and were not baptized. To put it in another way, these infants were not old enough to be capable of committing any personal sins, but neither did they manage to be freed from the Original Sin (Likoudis).

This general principle or idea might be metaphorically connected to Holden Caulfield. Not necessarily in the original sense. Holden does not seem to be a religious person and stating that he tends to consider himself to be a sort of an atheist, yet his description of religious topics might show certain tentative leanings towards it. It may be said he might be in the process of searching for his attitude towards these things. What is also essential to say is the fact that he is too young to have a strong opinion on it.

Nevertheless, the fact is that Holden is not baptized. It does not appear to be a tradition in his family. Holden says that both his parents are atheists (Salinger 130, 131).

As already noted, Limbo means, to put it briefly, not being baptized and not being alive while having no sins. Holden Caulfield seems to follow this idea since he does not want to proceed into adulthood that is a period of sins for him.

What makes the limbo metaphor quite productive and meaningful in connection with Holden's character is the fact that he is willfully trying to evade adulthood and he wishes to remain a child forever. He would like to be a child that is innocent and not marked and burdened with any sins. The analogy between Holden's notion of eternal childhood/adolescence and the Christian notion of Limbo thus resides in their provisional sheltered status which signifies on precarious temporality and eternity, but also on immobility and immutability.

What is then related to this idea of Limbo is that by condemning adulthood and equally not wishing to be part of it Holden makes it clear that he would stop the time. Holden is really concerned about the Quixotic effort to stop time from flowing. He wants to stop the inevitable consequences of the passage of time at all costs (Opland 24).

For Holden the change means something very unpleasant. Things should remain as they are. Nothing ought to be altered. According to Holden, a change provokes trouble. Through Holden's talk about the museum we may gather insights into what Holden has in mind concerning the change.

Holden makes an effort to highlight the idea of the museum. What he considers to be the best thing about the museum is the fact that everything always stays right where it is and it does not move. No matter how many times you go in there, every dummy is performing the same action. Nothing is different. Nothing is changed (Salinger 157, 158).

Holden cherishes this unchanging place and is captivated in there. It seems like Holden would like to be one of those unchanging figurines stranded in time.

Nonetheless, the museum is not the only place where Holden feels its serenity and is comforted by its unchanging exposition. The second place Holden mentions is his former school that his sister Phoebe is currently attending.

Holden reminisces about the inner part that has not changed. This fact makes Holden truly happy and he opens his heart to the reader.

At first Holden does not seem to be so certain whether he will remember what it is like inside. However, then he adds that it is precisely the same as it was at the time of his school years. The place certainly stirs up many memories for Holden. Holden portrays some of those things that have not changed. Holden makes it clear how he values these things that still occupy the interior of his former school. He also feels a pang of nostalgia from those years in the past (Salinger 259).

Nevertheless, Holden is aware that his dream of unchanging time cannot come true. It is a fact of life. One has to grin and bear it.

J. Opland adds: "Holden's desire to stop the flux of time is futile, of course, but this does not stop him from wishing to do it. Children will grow up, lose their innocence, become adults and later die: this is inevitable" (Opland 24, 25).

Holden states that it would be really good and nice to put certain things in some showcases and not touch them anymore since some things ought to be left untouched and unchanged. Holden feels a tinge of regret of not being able to do it.

In other words, he might like to be left alone in the limbo state, placed behind the glass and being untouched by adulthood and its inevitable human sins and being virtually dead, indicating no future and no continuance of his life.

The symbol of death will be dealt with in greater detail in section 5.3.

This again implies that Holden does not want to grow and reach adulthood. He would rather stay where he is. Any change would make him uncomfortable. Holden enjoys being in this liminal phase.

Yet another plausible association with the limbo state or the idea of limbo of infants is Holden's heartfelt affinity with children. One that desires to remain a child forever tends to have a great relationship with children. Throughout the novel Holden makes it crystal clear how he admires and respects children and how he holds them in high esteem.

This huge pleasure of Holden's is apparent, for instance, when he encounters two kids in the museum. He takes a shine to them immediately and takes pleasure in chatting with them about the mummies from the museum that these kids are looking for.

It should be pointed out that in his dialogue with these kids Holden does not have any difficulties transforming himself into a person of roughly the same age as the children he is talking to, creating the atmosphere that the conversation does not involve two children talking with an adolescent but actually a chat including three flippant and playful boys (Salinger 262, 263).

Another example portrays Holden watching his sister Phoebe on the carrousel. He gets great enjoyment out of observing her. Holden confides in readers that suddenly he feels on cloud nine when he sees her going around.

He marvels at her grand performance on the carrousel and seems to be mesmerized by her childlike virtues. Holden appears to be oblivious of the surrounding environment of other adult people and his peers. He pays an undivided attention to his younger sister making her a central point of his interest and simply cannot take his eyes off her (Salinger 275).

To conclude it is music to Holden's ears when he observes and talks to children. He has nothing but praise for them.

What must be highlighted here is also the plausible analogical connection between the term limbo of infants and Holden's brother Allie. Allie died of leukemia three years before Holden starts to recount his story. He passed away very young, which must have left Holden deeply shaken. Here the term limbo of infants might be accurately applied since Allie had not been baptized before his passing and what is more, Allie was too young to commit any sin, particularly the sin of "phoniness" and corruption which Holden almost invariably ascribes to the adulthood. Holden realizes that his brother died innocent and he preserves the memory of his brother tightly in his mind. Holden glamorizes his late brother so that he even promotes him to a near-holy status regarding him as consoling power when Holden is in a pickle (Slawenski 201).

However, what Holden appreciates highly and puts emphasis on is Allie's innocence. The topic of innocence will be dealt with later in section 5.4.

There is yet another explanation for Limbo. With the exception of the religious meaning, Limbo may also mean a state when you uncertainly await something significant. This might refer to any decision one is going to have to make about their future.

In addition, one finds themselves in a period when one is not sure about the consequences of what they have already made. It seems that one is placed in that liminal phase where they are not sure what to do, taking no action. One prefers to stay where they are.

Holden Caulfield is conscious of this phase. He is reminded of the precarious state of affairs by his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, who is worried about Holden.

Despite the fact that Mr. Spencer is giving Holden a bad mark from history and technically causes Holden's expulsion, both of them get along with each other very well. Holden demonstrates his affection for his old teacher. Not only does Holden tend to agree with Spencer that he deserves this bad mark from history but he also shares Spencer's opinion that he seems to be in this limbo phase.

Holden really makes it clear that he is conscious of it when he remarks that Mr. Spencer need not worry about him because he will be fine because he just undergoes an unpleasant phase of his life.

It also seems that Holden tries to calm both his teacher and himself that everything will be fine while stating that actually everybody undergoes something like that in their lives (Salinger 20, 21).

Nevertheless what is so special and immensely intriguing about Holden is the fact that he clearly desires to stay in this phase. He longs to remain in the limbo state for a while, going neither back to school nor home. Holden states this at the end of the novel when he is sitting on the bench for quite a considerable amount of time feeling low and thinking about never returning home and never attending any other schools (Salinger 257).

What is so heartbreaking about Holden is that he does not seem to have any future. He lacks any motivation that would propel him towards his future life. He does not have any realistic ideas as to what he could do in the future, any desires for days, months and years to come. He is fed up with everybody and everything. Lundquist writes: "Holden is filled with penetrating nothingness" (Lundquist 38).

He is a prisoner of his own mind and he seems to be baffled by the surrounding world.

Mr. Spencer is not the only person who is driving at this problem of Holden's. Mr. Antolini, Holden's teacher at the school Elkton Hills, also seems to be anxious about Holden's situation. He expresses his worries about Holden's future life.

Antolini does his best to throw some light on Holden's problems. He points out that Holden seems to be very close to a horrible fall.

He continues to explain this fall as something not easily discerned. In other words, it appears to be hard to become aware of it and realize it at the right time.

Mr. Antolini says: "The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling" (Salinger 243).

Antolini also intends to warn Holden and have him realizing this state. He concludes that Holden is dying in a noble way (Salinger 244).

To summarize, Holden is given advice regarding his problems. People seem to care about him; however, he does not seem to realize the seriousness of the situation. He is blissfully unaware of any far-reaching consequences this might have in his future. He does not know what is at stake.

He favors being in that Limbo state over trying to change things that might make him happier and more contented in his life. He deplors any possibilities of transformation. Moreover, he is doomed to fail in his life and he does not take it seriously. His disinterest towards future is apparent and it might jeopardize his chances of being respected in his potential adulthood.

## **5.2 Spatial liminality**

### **5.2.1 Liminality as a transient existence**

Liminality is closely connected with being an outsider, that is to say, not belonging to any group or part of something. In other words, it means to be between something or not to be involved in something.

In addition, it refers to the state when an individual is excluded and isolated. The individuals that are labeled as outsiders do not necessarily have to be introverts. They might rotate between introversion and extroversion. They may enjoy the company of some people; however, they might not relish the idea of spending time with other people.

Outsiders are prone to be unstable individuals. They might even have mood swings.

Being an outsider need not be for the individual's entire life. It may last only a certain amount of time when these people do not know where they stand. It might be only a passing fad.

People change during their lives. There are plenty of factors that have effect on them, such as the individual's period of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, seniority), the individual's background, society that they live in, appearance etc. However, nobody is predestined to be an outsider.

Holden Caulfield seems to be one of such spatially and socially marginalized individuals. He gives the impression of being a willing misfit in a society that does not match his expectations. He represents an outcast in the novel, albeit a lovable one. Holden shows and expresses his sympathy for the underdog, unloved and the rejected such as Ackley, or James Castle, since he also finds himself in this situation. Equally, he finds himself out of step with society (Opland 20).

Characters like Ackley are undoubtedly part of our society since this society encompasses everybody: the young, old, extroverts, introverts, friendly people, unfriendly people, smart individuals, unwise people etc.

Outsiders, however, embody a group of people that are not deliberately so visible, ostentatious, conspicuous or even flamboyant very often. They prefer to distance themselves from mainstream people since they seem to fear potential setbacks and failures.

It must be highlighted here that these people are not incompetent. They do not lack skills and abilities of all kinds. They are just impeded and prevented from certain actions by their minds.

Furthermore, it may also be linked with insufficient confidence. They are afraid of making an exhibition of themselves. They lack confidence thinking that they are subordinate to others and feeling the complex of inferiority.

On the other hand, these outsiders' idiosyncrasy may make them strange and odd for other people. They are liable to be out of the common run.

Nonetheless, some of them might be quite likable and even lovable like Holden, for example. As a result, some readers may even identify themselves with these likeable outsiders. These outsiders remind them of their own flaws and troubles. They might even console and comfort them or even invigorate them.

By and large, these characters seem to have power to raise the readers' spirits. As a consequence, these readers crave for their deeply moving story and are eager to think about them and search for more information.

However, one should be careful not to end up similarly since some people might be easily susceptible to these characters' idiosyncratic and quirky demeanor.

All in all, Holden is far from being a pillar of the society in the traditional communitarian sense, i.e. a dependable cogwheel in a machine.

Now let us examine some examples of Holden's outsidership.

Holden does not accompany the other pupils down at the pitch that hosts the last game of the year. Everybody takes part in this event with the exception of Holden.

He describes the atmosphere of the match that appears to be fairly crucial for Pencey. It seems that Holden feels a tinge of regret when he states that virtually all students from Pencey are cheering their hearts out for their school except for him (Salinger 5).

It should be said that he does not regret supporting his school, which seems to be fairly phony for him. He actually feels aversion towards his school. What he is sad about is that he is left alone.

A classic example of spatial and social liminality is provided by a rather episodic situation within the novel, when we see Holden standing outside his colleagues when he sadly admits at the beginning of the novel that he has been ostracized by the fencing team for losing the equipment.

Holden explains that he was a manager of the fencing team that just returned from New York. As a manager his task was to keep an eye on the equipment and also check where to get off while going by the underground.

What happened was that Holden successfully announced where and when to get off, however, he forgot to take the equipment with him. As a consequence, they had a considerable delay, resulting in hostile and unsympathetic remarks from his teammates (Salinger 6).

Hence, Holden made a decision to observe the game from far away accompanied by nobody. Thus, at the very outset of the narrative, we see the main protagonist involuntarily swap centre (managerial position) for periphery (a dejected outcast).

Holden also feels to be an outsider when he dances and chats with the three girls at Lavender Room, a pub. Holden does his best to strike a conversation and break ice with these three girls and he does fine, however, the girls are not so cooperative and Holden is far away from them as for the flow of the conversation. They do not have much in common. By and large, he feels he is different (Salinger 95, 96, 97).

Holden has a feeling of being different even more palpably when he describes some people around him in the bar. He regards himself as being estranged from others since other people talk about utterly stupid things. He feels like a fish out of water. This feeling generates an inexorably judgmental or dismissive attitude towards his surroundings, which is something that defines Holden throughout the entire novel.

Holden nicely describes how he is surrounded by jerks. He paints a colorful picture of the conversation of a young couple. He mentions a funny-looking behavior of this young couple who is sitting very close to Holden and drinking and trying to sip their drink as slowly as possible, not giving any hint that the other person's speech is boring.

Since Holden is eavesdropping on the dialogue, he makes it clear how tedious both of them are. He concludes by stating that the dialogue on his right appears to be even worse (Salinger 111, 112).

What is more, Holden turns out to be there alone. He says that he starts to feel like a fifth wheel without a company drinking and smoking because he has nothing else to do (Salinger 112).

What is crucial here is the fact that Holden emphasizes how his peers are different and dreary, however, at the same time he feels lonely and wishes to be there accompanied, even with a jerk. In other words, although he disdains these people, he would give his all to strike up a conversation with them.

Holden stresses that he is not willing to follow the mainstream at any rate when he cannot care less about how he appears in public.

When Holden leaves the pub he mentions the freezing weather outside. He puts on his red hunting hat with the earlaps down not being concerned about his appearance (Salinger 115).

Moreover, there is yet another example how Holden is sensitive about the situation when he feels sort of redundant when his date Sally meets a boy with whom she was in the pub once. Holden is in the shadow of Sally's acquaintance and is left just to listen to their conversation.

Holden recounts how he feels so useless since that boy virtually stole her from him. On top of that, Sally does not even try to give that boy a cold shoulder; she seems to be enjoying his company. Holden describes his mounting anger together with his negative opinion on that guy (Salinger 165, 166).

Furthermore, Holden opens his heart to Sally why he feels to be an outsider. He wants to make it clear why he cannot be involved in a circle of friends or schoolmates.

Holden confides in Sally that she is the only reason why he is still in New York. Holden continues to complain about his schoolmates and their different interests and how they talk about nothing else than football, girls, drinking alcohol and other raunchy topics all the time.

He also tells her how he is fed up with the trend that his schoolmates tend to create silly cliquey groups not letting some peers to join in. Holden explains that there are basketball cliques, Catholic cliques etc. (Salinger 170, 171).

What is sad here is that Holden indicates that he is not a part of any such cliquey group. Needless to say, in spite of despising such cliques, he would like to be engaged in one of them. This state of mind can also be described as liminal, as we see Holden walking a tightrope between longing and contempt.

This is a recurrent topic which surfaces several times in the novel. Holden gives a very similar explanation again, although not to Sally this time but to his beloved sister Phoebe. She is curious about Holden's miserable situation.

Holden explains why he is expelled from the school that it is actually sort of liberation for him from his phony schoolmates who lock their rooms while having bull sessions and letting anybody come in since that particular person seems different for them.

Holden uses the example of his schoolmate Robert Ackley, a pimply, boring guy, who more or less epitomizes the true outsider in Holden's narration. According to Holden, Ackley is the type who is abused and bullied by his schoolmates. He is not a part of any cliquey group either.

Ackley does not seem to be capable of becoming involved in any such groups. Holden portrays him as a facetious, zany and rather oafish person.

While it is true that Holden does not try to bring out the best in Ackley, it might be said that sometimes Holden has sympathy for him. Perhaps it is partly because Holden regards him even as a more hopeless outsider than himself (Salinger 217, 218).

It appears that Holden attacks the superficiality of companionship and mistreatment of weak individuals. He manifests how the society is devoid of moral values.

And what is more, he implies how those people who have no conscience might easily make life a living hell to those with clear conscience. Unfortunately, Holden turns out to be a vulnerable human being who takes it too much to his heart.

Holden is not the only person through whom we are aware of his state of being an outsider. There are other characters providing us with this fact.

Holden's roommate Ward Stradlater asks Holden to write a descriptive essay for him since he has no time to do so. After some coaxing and cajolery, Holden eventually agrees to do what Stradlater wants.

Not having any suitable topic in his mind, Holden chooses a peculiar thing to describe. He writes the essay on the subject of his brother Allie's baseball mitt. It looks as though Holden enjoys writing about it. He nicely talks about his late brother and reminisces the time they spent together horsing around, enjoying the marvelous time of childhood.

Nevertheless, Holden's enthusiasm about his written essay does not last for long. It comes to an abrupt end when Stradlater returns and starts reading Holden's piece of writing. After finishing the reading, Stradlater hits the roof and Holden seems to be at the receiving end of Stradlater's anger.

Stradlater tells Holden vigorously that he did not want the essay on such a weird topic like a baseball glove and that he thought that Holden might have written something about a room or a house. They end up in an argument.

However, what is important here is that Stradlater tells Holden that he fails to do everything that is expected from him. In other words, according to Stradlater, he cannot do anything that he is supposed to do and does it differently.

There is no doubt that Stradlater has in mind that Holden sticks out from the rest and do not belong to the mainstream (Salinger 53). By throwing spotlight on a hopelessly insignificant or marginal object, the baseball mitt of his late brother, Holden signifies on his own vantage point which is also hopelessly off-mainstream.

Another person who thinks about Holden is his ex-schoolmate, Carl Luce. He suggests Holden should visit a psychoanalyst. Holden meets Luce in a pub and feels like talking about his sex life that is pretty much non-existent.

Holden complains about his problem of not being in the mood to have sex with a girl that he does not like so much. To put it in another way, he cannot persuade himself into having sex with a girl he hardly knows.

Carl Luce pokes fun at Holden's trouble and thinks Holden is weird. He advises him to visit Carl's father, who happens to be a psychoanalyst (Salinger 191, 192).

Another example comes from Sally's mother. It portrays what she thinks of Holden. It is, however, through Holden's inner monologue. Holden wants to call Sally but is scared that her mother might pick up the phone.

He says that Sally's mother is not particularly fond of Holden and that once she told Sally that he lacks a direction in his life and is wild (Salinger 78, 79).

Last but not least, here is what Mr. Antolini tells Holden: "You're a very very strange boy." "I know it," I said" (Salinger 250).

To sum up this spatial and social liminality, not only is Holden conscious of his estrangement and being somewhat different but he also desires for a change. Nevertheless, this change does not concern a time change as was already noted. This change is illustrated by moving somewhere or making different friends and meeting different people. Undoubtedly, he is not happy with the present state and would like to get away from it all.

Holden even contemplates rather extreme solutions to his dilemma, as can be demonstrated by his talk with Ackley in the dormitory.

Holden asks Ackley, who is allegedly a Catholic, what he should do to join a monastery (Salinger 65).

The idea of joining a monastery demonstrates the environment totally different from the surrounding world. One can presumably find serenity and tranquility there and what is more, their lives will undoubtedly alter.

Although Holden is just “toying with the idea”, this may be seen as a frank admission in which he acknowledges his marginal and transient status and seeks any relief from his predicament, extraordinary as it may seem (Salinger 65).

Holden gradually expresses his desire to flee the place where he is and intensifies his wish.

At first, Holden wants just to escape from Pencey when he suddenly makes his mind up and states that he intends to get out of there at once, which he eventually does (Salinger 66).

Afterwards Holden continues. He desires to recharge his batteries when he says that he checks in at a hotel to unwind until Wednesday, a day when he is supposed to be at home. He confides in a reader that he is in need of a short holiday (Salinger 66, 67).

His yearning culminates when Holden paints a romantic picture of leaving New York and longs for fleeing the civilization. He seems to be at the end of his tether so he expresses his dissatisfaction to Sally.

He would like to seek peace in the untouched wilderness and is doing his best to persuade Sally to accompany him. Holden tells her that he knows a man from Greenwich Village who has not yet paid Holden ten dollars so he could lend them a car for a few weeks.

Holden foolishly puts forward that they could dwell in the cabin camps in Vermont and there he would jump at the chance of some job opportunity.

To Sally’s amazement, Holden even proposes that they might get married there. This momentary creative imagination makes Holden go into raptures. Unfortunately, this can hardly be said about Sally. Holden’s idea is greeted with derision and not surprisingly turned down (Salinger 171).

At the end of the novel Holden makes a similar wish to leave NY. There is an apparent desire to go somewhere where he would not know anybody, that is to say, to be anonymous, unnamed and unknown.

In other words, Holden neither wants to talk to anybody nor stay in contact with anybody. He would like to be as free as a bird. He prefers not to be among people and wants to keep himself to himself.

He would start hitch-hiking on his way westward. He would take up a job at a gas station and pretend to be a deaf-mute in order to avoid futile conversations with other people. With some unsavoury humour, one might argue that the execution of this plan would also result in a liminal situation, with Holden being (sonically, not physiologically) mute, though not deaf.

What is also quite amusing is that Holden would even desire to have a deaf-mute girlfriend. And moreover, when he mentions his potential children, he would rather bring them up out of the civilization, without the contact of other people and other children (Salinger 257, 258). Again, a mediation between socialization and self-imposed spatial isolation which may be summarily described as liminality.

Last case of borderline spatial negotiations may be seen in the fact that Holden even uses the hyperbolic idioms of “vanishing” or even “invisibility” to flesh out his feeling that he is unable to fit. Holden has a feeling that he is slowly disappearing.

In other words, he does not see himself as belonging anywhere. This might be dismissed as a figment of his imagination, yet it also clearly implies that Holden does not feel to be a member of the society, thereby embracing both marginal and liminal quality.

Holden states his feeling at the beginning of the novel as well as at the end when he is striding along Fifth Avenue in New York. Suddenly he claims that every time he nears the end of a block he feels as though he was descending, being lower and lower.

Holden is terrified that no-one would ever spot him again. He pretends to talk to his brother and begs Allie not to let him disappear (Salinger 8, 256, 257).

This evokes a feeling of alienation for Holden from the surrounding world. He seems to be closer to his late brother. This, on the one hand, might be a bit sinister, but on the other hand, it may also be somewhat comforting since Holden takes his brother as something like his personal God, who protects him as was already mentioned earlier (Slawenski 201).

## 5.2.2 Symbolic spatial liminality

Now it might be useful to elaborate on the title of the book and what it actually means. J.D. Salinger did not label his gripping story with the name *The Catcher in the Rye* by accident. What lies behind is one of the most crucial philosophical notions found in the story.

However, before this part throws some light on this issue, it will supply readers with the practical example from the story so that they could perceive the point better.

The example illustrates the part when Holden cannot take his eyes off a lovely scene where parents are going along the street with their kid, who is singing: “If a body catch a body coming through the rye”. It might be said that it is a key line of the whole book.

Holden portrays a nice scene happening on Sunday where a family is possibly coming out of a church. Holden is striding behind them and paying an undivided attention to the parent’s child, who seems to be a boy about six years old. Not being aware of going quite close to the street, the boy is blissfully happy and is humming and singing. Holden seems to take an interest in this boy even more and comes closer to hear the boy’s song. Then Holden says that the boy is singing the song: “If a body catch a body coming through the rye”. This song arouses Holden’s interest and makes him feel great (Salinger 150).

When talking with his sister Phoebe, Holden tries to give a reader an explanation why this particular song turns out to be so fundamental and underlying for him.

As a reply to his sister’s question on what Holden would like to be, he thinks that he would like to be the Catcher in the Rye. It is suitable to use the exact quotation from the novel:

“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 224, 225).

Holden sees himself in the position of a catcher that would risk his own life to save children from a fall from the cliff. Needless to say, this cliff seems to represent the border between

childhood and adulthood and this fall denotes the fall into adulthood. In other words, Holden would like to prevent children from becoming adults, thus preventing their future potential sins of phoniness and adult corruption.

The general idiom of “cliff-hanging” actually qualifies as an ultimate lexicalized metaphor for liminality – hanging between life and death. The narrator uses this extreme spatial metaphor as a hyperbole, which indicates the threat that children, according to Holden, face when reaching the phony world of the adults.

The fact that Holden makes an effort to keep children far away from adulthood implies that he would like to preserve their innocence forever. Without any doubt, innocence seems to be another vital part for explaining Holden’s liminality. Hence, innocence will be elaborated on in-depth in the section Psychological liminality (5.4).

As far as the “cliff-hanging” idiom is concerned, it demonstrates the part between life and death that actually prefigures Holden’s suicidal thoughts. This is addressed in the upcoming subchapter 5.3.

### **5.3 Existential death-wish as a liminal category**

As already mentioned, Holden would give his all if he did not have to become an adult. So it is particularly important to say, that Holden would prefer to die rather than to join the adults. He pictures himself to be dead very often.

Holden's frequently vocalized death-wish clearly evokes the classic existential dichotomy between clinging on life (despite the suffering) and choosing death.

It is death that Holden talks about very frequently since it not only stops the flux of the individual's time but it also impedes individual's sins.

In general, this rather dismal and gloomy thought tends to be part of every human being and might proliferate at one point when an individual is far from being contented with his/her life. It mainly gains in strength in the human period of adolescence since in this period an individual might be most vulnerable and lack self-esteem.

Individuals need not be sure of their future and they constantly search for their life passage. What is more, they are not firmly rooted anywhere because they do not have any children yet, which would certainly kindle life motivation in them.

What gives food for thought is the fact that people who are seriously considering suicide actually qualify as being liminal characters since they appear in the period between life and death. In other words, they are on the brink of leaving life and approaching death.

Holden was confronted with the proximity of death twice, through the premature death of his beloved brother Allie and the suicide of his ex-schoolmate James Castle. Especially his brother's death was a bitter pill to swallow for Holden and he does not seem to have come to terms with it yet.

Needless to say, these two events must have left its mark on him and Holden talks about death several times and sometimes in more detail. He seems to be unable to put death off his mind.

Holden recounts how he is sitting on the bench in cold weather trembling from freeze. His teeth are chattering and he is wearing his favorite red hunting hat, which seems to be full of hunks of ice now. He is afraid of catching pneumonia.

Holden vividly imagines his death and proceeds to describe his funeral. He visualizes how people are coming to his funeral and discussing him with their friends and family. He also talks about his brother Allie and his funeral.

Holden seems to be comparing his funeral with Allie's. He imagines what other people would be saying and especially what his mother would be doing. Since Holden is undoubtedly attached to his mother and loves her, he expresses his regret about seeing his mother crying over his death and not knowing what to do with his belongings.

He feels very sorry for her because she has not come to terms with his brother Allie's death.

Holden forms a sinister picture of how they are putting his coffin in a cemetery and adding the tombstone with his name. Subsequently, Holden talks about other people who are placing flowers on him, which Holden condemns and says that he would not like people to put any flowers on his body.

Eventually he states he would rather have no grave and that he would much prefer just to be thrown into the river (Salinger 200, 201).

In this inner monologue, Holden shows considerable sensitiveness as he is envisioning the implications of his death in such detail, that he would feel very sorry for his mother not knowing what to do with his stuff. There is a clear sign of Holden's compassion and conscience and what is more, one might even spot a hint of certain responsibility for what he might actually "cause" to his parents.

For all his dismissive adolescent posturing, the notion of being dead certainly brought a lump to Holden's throat.

It is worth mentioning that on the one hand, Holden is quite fascinated by death as to describe these gloomy pictures and on the other hand, he worries about death.

It is mentioned when Holden talks about cancer and its symptoms. He describes how he once read an article about how people can recognize that they have cancer. He explains that one must have some sores in their mouths that seem to be hard to get rid of. He continues to fantasize about how he has some of these sores in his mouth and so he is scared of having cancer (Salinger 254).

Even though Holden proves to be worried about death and its consequences for his family, especially his mother, father and his sister Phoebe, he talks and wishes to be dead several times throughout the novel.

Once in a while, Holden expresses a half-hearted death wish referring to his mood. Inevitably Holden's mood has a huge impact on his repeated death wishes.

To present one more, Holden is considering committing suicide when he is lying in bed at a hotel in New York. He states that he would like to jump out of the window. However, he changes his mind since he imagines how all those people around would stare at his dead body chatting about it and making it a special event of their day (Salinger 136).

All in all, Holden seems to be intrigued by the topic of death and especially his own death. He is not afraid to talk about it and tries to show ostentatiously that it would be liberation for him not only because he would not have to think about his future life, especially the selection of his future school, but it would also bring him closer to his beloved brother Allie. And moreover, it would impede his future sins, preserving his innocence that he is so craving for.

In other words, it would stop the inevitable consequences of the passage of time like in the essay he writes for his history class where he muses over ancient Egyptians who mastered preserving embalmed corpses for hundreds of years (Salinger 16).

The reasons which Holden mentions to explain his suicidal deliberations are not out of the ordinary. Holden suffers from loneliness, sadness and depressions.

Holden Caulfield seems to be a contradictory character. In spite of his desire to leave New York and live in the middle of nowhere without any people around, he makes it clear that he feels rather lonely. He points out his loneliness very frequently.

He looks high and low for somebody who would accompany him. Undoubtedly, he is in low spirits. It appears to be associated with his emotional state that he does not know what to do and where he belongs to. Again, it refers to liminality, that is to say, not belonging anywhere.

The novel supplies us with an enormous number of examples of Holden's feelings of loneliness as well as sadness.

When he is in the Ackley's room, Holden often repeats and stresses that he feels lonely. After some discussion with Ackley in the night he says that he is lying on the bed of Ackley's roommate and feeling lonesome. Ackley fell asleep and Holden does not have anybody to open his heart to. Then he goes to the window to look outside and states that the street looks fairly depressing since there are not even cars on the street (Salinger 62, 63, 64).

He continues to feel lonely when he is on the point of leaving Pencey. Holden packs his necessary belongings and sets off into a freezing night. According to Holden, this makes him fairly sad and miserable (Salinger 66).

The same night when he is in New York, Holden hails a cab. He is clutching at straws. He turns out to be so down that he even asks a taxi driver for a drink. He suggests a driver having a cocktail with him since he has plenty of money. Needless to say, he desires to have somebody to talk with (Salinger 79).

While describing New York at night, Holden gives an account of empty streets and some accidental chuckles which make Holden feel fairly low (Salinger 106).

After leaving one of New York bars, Holden again expresses his sadness and assures himself that he is not going to be alone any more (Salinger 110).

When Holden's ex-schoolmate Carl Luce is about to leave the pub, Holden even implores him to stay for another drink since he has nobody to talk with and feels terribly lonesome (Salinger 193).

At the end of the novel, Holden confides in a reader that he misses several people. He states that he misses Ward Stradlater, Ackley and even Maurice, a guy who once punched him in the hotel. He continues to tell a reader that it is not advisable to say anything to anybody because once you do it, you start pinning for everybody (Salinger 277).

These states of loneliness and sadness inevitably bring depression as a result. When Holden is about to leave Pencey he recounts how he has to pack his suitcase with new ice skates that he was given by his mother.

He forms a picture of his mother going to shop and buying him ice skates just to make him happy. And he actually does not do anything to please her since he is expelled from his school again. This thought depresses Holden considerably. He even points out that every time he is given a gift, he is tinged with sadness because he visualizes how that particular person bought him the present and tried to cheer him up, however, Holden might not even have appreciated that at that time (Salinger 67).

Holden also comments on his cowardice. This can be aptly exemplified by the situation when Holden finds out who has stolen his gloves, but he does not seem brave enough to take any action himself and the more he considers this, the more he feels depressed (Salinger 117).

While being with a prostitute, Holden repeatedly expresses his depression. He feels depressed while he is arranging a night with a prostitute as well as when Sunny, the prostitute, pulls her dress over her head. Instead of feeling in the mood of having sex, he confides to readers that he is feeling blue. As was already mentioned, this has to do with his conscience (Salinger 123, 129).

Holden also describes how New York might be a depressing place, even though Christmas is about to start and Holden is far from having a whale of time. He comments on the Central park how untidy it turns out to be. The benches seem to be full of gobs of spits that one is afraid to sit down. Holden mentions how it does not seem at all that Christmas is actually near. He even adds that he has the feeling that actually nothing seems to be coming, which certainly sounds fairly depressing (Salinger 153).

The more the novel nears its end, the more often Holden seems to express his unhappiness, melancholy, grief and depression. When he wakes up one morning during his days in New York, he states that he feels more depressed than he has ever felt in his entire life (Salinger 252).

Lastly, Holden thinks about Mr. Antolini and the abrupt departure from Mr. Antolini's flat owing to the Antolini's alleged homosexual inclinations. Holden says that the situation gives him food for thought. He cannot leave it behind because he does not know what to think about it and that makes him even more depressed (Salinger 253).

On the one hand, Holden esteems Mr. Antolini since he considers him to be a very fair person and what is more, not a phony adult, but on the other hand, he cannot quite make out Antolini's demeanor towards Holden in the night. Holden concludes that Antolini might have just patted him because he was drunk and so Holden dismisses his accusation as a trifle and an unimportant thing.

The bottom line is that Holden takes everything to his heart. He thinks about trifles too much and magnifies them. This brings him depression.

He seems to be in a vicious circle and does not know how to get out. Sinister thoughts are swarming into his mind and he is vulnerable to blot them out. On top of that, Holden abounds

in great conscience. However, his conscience seems to be far from easing this tension bringing to his life instability.

It goes without saying that his state might hit the bottom very soon.

Holden has evidently difficulties dealing with life around him. He seems to be on the verge of having a nervous breakdown. Allegedly, Holden recounts his story from a mental institution, where he spends some time to improve his condition. He is pondering about everything that has happened to him. He still feels weak; however, one can sense that there is a light at the end of the tunnel (Salinger 276, 277).

At the end of the novel Holden unexpectedly appears to accept the world that surrounds him. He expresses this notion in the zoo when he talks about Phoebe's fall and that he has to let her fall if she does. It may symbolize the fall from childhood. He slowly starts to realize that the fall is a necessary evil (Lundquist 53).

This imminent future is really unstoppable. Surely it might cause an individual hardship to realize it and to come to terms with it. One had better not to tempt the fate. But rather, one should empty their heads from such thoughts and laugh them off. After all, laughter heals and the earlier one realizes it, the better. What will do is just to make them believe that the next human period will be even better. With some support from their peers, everything is going to be fine.

## **5.4 Psychological liminality**

First of all, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of this section in order to secure intelligibility.

Psychological liminality encompasses topics such as:

- Holden's features of maturity and immaturity
- Holden's resentment towards adult people
- Holden's mediating between innocence and experience

Holden Caulfield proves to be a very complex personality. Hence the question of maturity or immaturity seems to be quite intriguing. At first, it would be worth elaborating on the meaning of these words, namely maturity and immaturity.

The question who is still immature and who is already mature might be hard to answer, however, the next paragraph tries to bring some light on it.

There are two factors that should be taken into consideration. The first factor is the individual's outer self and the second factor is the individual's inner self.

The outer self refers to the appearance of the individual. On the one hand, it means whether he looks mature, alternatively precocious to people around him. It might comprise features such as secondary sexual characteristics. To be more specific, Holden is well-known for gray hair at the sides of his head. On the other hand, it represents the immaturity of the individual, in other words, the individual has not yet reached features for being classified as mature.

However, for the topic of this thesis the most vital factor turns out to be the individual's inner self. This touches on the individual's demeanor as well as his qualities and character. The point is whether an individual tends to behave closer to a child or an adult.

Hence, this section will put emphasis on some evidence concerning Holden's inner immaturity.

The bottom line is that the character of Holden Caulfield stands on the cliff separating childhood and adulthood. He does not seem to be a child any longer; however, he is not an adult yet. Nevertheless, what is essential here is that Holden shows his immaturity very frequently.

The dialogue between Holden and his ex-schoolmate Carl Luce illustrates Holden childish behavior. Holden reveals that Carl is able to discern whether somebody is homosexual or not. When Holden meets Carl in the pub, Holden tries to impress Carl by saying that he has a gay for him. To be more specific, Holden means that he is also able to identify one. Apparently, Carl Luce is no longer at the same wavelength as Holden and considers him immature as far as his jokes are concerned. Luce uses the rhetorical question stating when Holden is going to grow up at last (Salinger 187).

The very same dialogue includes another such feature. Their discussion continues and Holden is tempted by Luce's remark that Luce's girlfriend comes from China. Holden is impressed and replies that he might also go to China because he is discontented with his sex life. Luce's response involves an allusion to Holden's immature mind (Salinger 191).

Holden's liminal status is commented on by other characters in the novel, typically when he is told to act his age. Holden expresses other people's comments on his behavior through his narration. He admits that he uses a poor range of vocabulary and also that his behavior does not correspond to his age.

What is more, Holden considers himself to be twelve rather than seventeen. Holden uses an amusing contrast when he says that despite having gray hair at the sides of his head, he acts like a twelve-year old boy.

He confides in a reader that he is sick and tired of hearing constant remarks on his age and on the immature way in which he acts. What is interesting is that Holden partly agrees to other people's opinions and partly dismisses them (Salinger 13).

There is yet another absorbing notion about liminality in Holden's monologue which precedes the above scene.

Holden mentions: "It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true" (Salinger 13).

This might be explained that according to Holden something may be between two borders like liminality. To be more precise, Holden says that it is partly true, which means that Holden admits that something may not be completely true, yet it may not be untrue either. It may be situated somewhere between. Holden also adds that adult people deplore this concept.

Furthermore, Mr. Antolini proves to be another character who notices Holden's immaturity. This hugely contributes towards Holden's realization of his own immaturity.

Basically, Antolini gives Holden a lecture on the topic of the relationship between infantilism and maturity with the help of the quotation of Wilhelm Stekel, who was a psychoanalyst and also Sigmund Freud's colleague.

Mr. Antolini makes an effort to advise Holden against wasting his time trying to remain a child forever. He suggests Holden decide immediately about his future. Antolini continues to

stress that Holden is a student, thus it would be highly advisable to focus on education. No matter how appalling the idea might sound, it is of crucial importance.

What is fairly stimulating is Mr. Antolini's recommendation to read some records of men who were troubled by the same problem like Holden since there have been numerous people undergoing such hardship. By reading these records Holden should get the idea of his particular difficulty and do his best to deal with it according to his own consideration. This might come in useful for Holden and help him reach adulthood painlessly (Salinger 244, 245, 246, 247).

From time to time, Holden exhibits his childishness. Holden says that he does various things for a laugh like placing his hat so that he could not see anything and exclaiming that everything is plunged into darkness and he is begging for help (Salinger 29).

Another example of childishness appears to be when he asks the cab driver where the ducks go in the wintertime. Holden seems to be really curious about this futile thing. Holden obsessively makes an attempt to find this out twice in the novel (Salinger 106, 107).

In addition, Holden and Phoebe make an exhibition of themselves in the store when they try on several shoes pretending to be interested in them. However, they poke fun at the shop assistant, who has to serve them and show them various types according to their wishes.

Here, Holden does not seem to represent Phoebe's older brother who ought to act as a man and let her see the right manner. Instead, Holden is liable to transform himself into a similar aged child like his sister and become her fellow in horsing around (Salinger 256).

Like children, Holden abounds in a vivid imagination.

Having sent a prostitute to Holden and afterwards by means of violence forcing Holden to pay him a sum of money, Maurice leaves Holden's hotel apartment. Holden visualizes the bloody scene. He forms a picture of being shot by Maurice. While telling it, Holden is in his element.

Holden describes how after being shot he crawls into the bathroom and back with a drink to calm his nerves. He takes his gun and goes after Maurice. Although bleeding heavily, he pulls himself together and finds the strength to take revenge on Maurice. Holden's fertile imagination ends with the true Hollywood scene. After killing Maurice, Holden is embraced

and nursed by his girlfriend while smoking a cigarette and enjoying his “15 minutes of fame” (Salinger 135, 136).

Sometimes there are situations where Holden comes very close to adulthood. It is either by his height and his gray hair or by his rare moments of taking responsibility.

Holden’s rare moments of assuming responsibility might symbolize his potential adulthood. The following instance illustrates his responsibility for his little sister Phoebe who wants to go away with Holden. Here, surprisingly, Holden demonstrates his consciousness and adult concern in order to talk his sister into going back to school. Actually, it seems to be the first time that Holden has appeared in the position of an adult, that is to say, somebody that ought to be reasonable. He is also given a hard time by his sister. In addition, it is the first time that Holden has realized what it is like to be in the adult position. This scene takes place practically at the end of the novel.

After Holden confides to Phoebe that he is going to leave New York for a certain non-specific far-flung place, his clever sister sets her mind on accompanying him. She might envisage a possible change of his mind. By doing so, she may achieve that Holden will reconsider his decision.

Holden seems to realize that he has come up against a brick wall and changes his mind. He cannot take his sister on a dangerous trip far away. Holden makes up his mind to return home. Here, a reader might be a witness of Holden’s acting in an appropriate way almost for the first time (Salinger 269, 270).

There is a sharp contrast between Holden's view of adults and children. While he seems to be in seventh heaven talking about children, he points out the hypocrisy and ugliness of the adult world. Holden makes it clear that adults belong to a group that he despises and condemns.

In the following situation Holden directs his harsh criticism not only at the woman but also shows his disapproval with the film itself.

Holden depicts the scene taking place in the cinema. He describes a woman that is watching the movie with her kid. The kid implores his mother to take him to the toilets; however, the woman does not seem to even listen to him and is instead immersed in the plot of the film, which is dull according to Holden.

Holden manifests his hatred towards this heartless woman, whose cheeks are streaming with tears while watching the romantic movie, but simultaneously, this woman comes across as a rather tyrannical human being not accompanying his child to the toilets (Salinger 180, 181).

The yawning gap between Holden's attitude towards adults and children turns out to be fairly visible in the following part. Holden beautifully depicts his little sister that is sound asleep.

While Holden is temporarily and secretly at his home, he enters his sister's room and sees her in bed. Holden makes a nice description of how it is a great look of his sister while sleeping. He says that she has her mouth open, however, she looks lovely. Then he makes a parallel to adults that they look terrible while sleeping with an open mouth (Salinger 206, 207).

Holden's resentment against adults might be understood as a revolt against them. It seems to be apparent that when somebody does not desire to be an adult, they possibly tend to hate adults. Holden's dissatisfaction and outrage at adults is illustrated by means of their phoniness.

Everybody Holden meets is 'phony'. He refers this word to people that seem to be too traditional and conventional and to people who attempt to make something look better than it really is. Holden does not want to reach adulthood since adults come across as too phony and for Holden 'phoniness' almost denotes adulthood.

One of these phony people and Holden's target of his criticism turns out to be the headmaster of Holden's ex-school Elkton Hills. His name is Mr. Haas and Holden portrays him as all sweetness and light. Holden highlights what he thinks about him, particularly, what a phony person the headmaster appears to be.

Holden explains that one of the reasons why he left Elkton Hills was his headmaster Mr. Haas. Holden even stresses that Haas was many times worse than Mr. Turner (the principal of Pencey). Holden says that Haas was in the habit of shaking hands and chatting with parents of his pupils. He would be pleasant and sweet only to parents who were worth it. Nevertheless, he changed his behavior towards parents who were looking corny (Salinger 19).

To Holden this demeanor reeks of hypocrisy. Holden abhors two-faced people and he is sore on those who condescend to other people. Holden's hatred gains in power when he feels low. Holden aims to criticize the traditional institutions such as his school. Holden clearly implies that Pencey is a phony place. Right in the beginning chapter, Holden seems to be blackening his school's name. What Holden especially puts emphasis on is the way his school tries to tempt and lure boys into attending the institution. Holden describes how Pencey attempts to advertise its strengths. However, according to Holden, these strengths leave a lot to be desired and what is more, sometimes they even lack truth (Salinger 4).

Holden's hatred is also noticed by other people, especially his younger sister. What she is pointing out is the fact that Holden does not like virtually anything that is happening around him (Salinger 220).

Actually, according to Holden, the whole story seems to be full of phony people that he is sick and tired of. On top of that, he is scared by the outlook that he might become one of these phony adults in the future.

Slawenski writes: "The most prominent of Holden's contradictions involves his condemnation of 'phoniness', which he rails against while indulging in fabrication and pretence, going as far as to call himself 'the biggest liar'. Such attitudes sometimes annoy readers who, looking for a character with qualities that are easily identifiable, find fault in Holden's apparent hypocrisy. His contradictions serve a number of purposes. They portray his inconsistencies and lend reality to his character, which is life-like in its complexity. They also define him as a typical adolescent. On another level, Holden's contradictions serve to mirror the balance in which *The Catcher in the Rye* is constructed" (Slawenski 201).

All in all, Holden's irritation with adults might derive from his love and protection of children. Moreover, as an adolescent, Holden does not give the impression of being even-tempered and level-headed. He seems to be defiant, deluded and highly-strung. He is far from being tactful and laid-back.

Nonetheless, all these bad qualities might be part of his liminal phase. In addition, he expresses exasperation with adults since he is unaware of what it is like to be an adult. Holden has not experienced the problems that adults have to face on a daily basis. Childhood and adulthood differ immensely and an adolescent such as Holden cannot yet perceive the role that adults play in “the world’s huge theatre”.

Adolescents are prone to having the feeling that they are the smartest and most experienced people in the world. However, by doing so, they may just cover their insecurity and uncertainty. The bottom line is that they get this message as soon as they reach adulthood. In other words, they will not understand reality until they put themselves in adult’s place.

By and large, it is extremely easy to criticize people being in charge and having to make decisions. What is far from being easy is to make these decisions and bear responsibility of those who criticize you.

The following pages of this subchapter will deal with a feature of considerable importance, namely innocence. Holden has a soft spot for children and is attached to them since they possess the virtue of innocence. This seems to be something that children are endowed with and adults have already lost.

For Holden the main embodiment of innocence seems to be his brother Allie. The death of Allie came as a cruel shock to Holden. Holden does not seem to get over this dramatic event. Allie has one thing that Holden values highly and it is innocence. It appears that Holden was deprived of innocence the day when Allie passed away. It might be said that Holden ceased to have two things at the same time, i.e. his brother and innocence. Holden believes that if he were an adult, he would abandon Allie and subsequently lose his innocence forever (Slawenski 201).

Holden delights in talking and reminiscing about some moments spent with Allie. He imagines how he is chatting with his brother and planning a bike trip with their mutual friend Bobby Falon. He describes how they would meet in front of Bobby's house and ride their bikes towards Lake Sedebego, carrying some food to have a bite. Holden nicely talks about these beautiful moments from his childhood pretending that they are here and now (Salinger 129).

Furthermore, Holden associates innocence with virginity. The subject of losing virginity often appears in the novel. Sex seems to be something closely connected with adulthood. In the novel Holden recounts his opportunities of losing virginity; however, he has never taken that advantage and is still a virgin. He has always backed out.

Holden indicates that he considers himself to be a compassionate boy since when he was really close to losing virginity, his girl wanted him to stop. Unlike most guys, he grudgingly stopped and lost this opportunity. Hence, Holden seems to be very righteous, well-mannered and gentle boy since he cares about his girls and is afraid to do some harm to them (Salinger 120, 121).

This might be linked with his wish to hold himself and his girls within innocence, that is to say, within childhood. He keeps his innocence because he regards it as being more important

that losing virginity and moreover, he does not want to follow this activity that is more connected with adulthood.

When he is on the point of having sex with a prostitute at the hotel, Holden surprisingly chickens out since he finds her too young. Holden reconsiders it and says that he would rather have a chat with her. It seems like something holds him back. Needless to say, what holds him back is his well-developed conscience. By having sex with her, he would virtually turn her into adulthood, which he rejects (Salinger 124, 125).

There is also a lovely, innocent relationship with his friend Jane Gallagher. Holden seems to be really intrigued by Stradlater's date with Jane.

Holden feels frustrated by Jane Gallagher's innocence. She is a friend of Holden's and he finds out that his roommate Stradlater is going to have a date with her. Holden is playing with fire when he insists on knowing details about Stradlater's date.

When Holden grasps the point that Stradlater actually made love to Jane, things reach fever pitch and Holden has a short fist-fight with Stradlater, in which Holden loses considerably (Salinger 61).

Holden confides in a reader that he does not understand sex. He wants to get this fact off his chest so he contemplates about it (Salinger 82).

Innocence appears to be far more important than sex for Holden. He makes it clear that he prefers kissing a girl and holding her hand to having sex with her. In other words, he favors that kind of innocent dating. It gives him more pleasure.

Holden recounts how he had such an innocent date with Jane and how they were holding their hands while watching the movie. This was a very special thing for Holden, that made his day and he was extremely happy about it (Salinger 103).

Holden encounters two nuns in New York. Another symbol of innocence seems to be these two nuns for Holden. Holden strikes up a conversation with them.

Holden has a lovely chat about Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. The nuns would like to know what Holden enjoyed most about the play. Holden's inner thought implies that he cannot tell them about the sexual part that appealed to him. So he thinks up a different part to please the nuns (Salinger 144).

His decency is apparent here. He would like to neither insult nor disgust anybody.

Last but not least, Holden aims innocence at his little sister Phoebe. In Holden's mind she might have taken over the role from Holden's deceased brother Allie. She might be the epitome of innocence among the living children.

Holden thinks about children and their innocence that might be ruined and corrupted by some traces of perverseness. He feels revulsion when he sees the inscription "Fuck you" scribbled on the wall at school. He is dying to find the culprit and punish him. Holden thinks about the consequences of this inscription. He worries about children who would possibly see it and be unaware of what it actually means. What is more, Holden is concerned about the way these children might find the meaning of it. He imagines how some older pupils might explain this to younger ones in a vulgar way. This is what makes Holden feel furious since these older pupils would disrupt children's innocence (Salinger 260, 261).

What is funny is that this is not the only inscription "Fuck you" that he finds and comments on. During his walk inside his former school he spots other two examples. Holden says in resignation that when he dies and has his tombstone with his name and relevant information, there would be certainly scribbled "Fuck you" too. This just makes him incandescent with rage (Salinger 262, 264).

Nevertheless, what Holden should realize is that these scriptures cannot be eradicated. They seem to be part of adolescent development, no matter how inappropriate they may sound. One cannot get rid of all bad qualities from these pubescent boys and girls. This is a fact of life and nobody has such power to change it.

While children are growing up, they perpetually absorb different items of information. Unfortunately, they cannot avoid some vulgarisms. This is natural. This might seem to be the evidence of experience, which will sooner or later touch them whether they like it or not.

Overall, Holden objects to losing his innocence owing to his compassion towards children and their frivolous, carefree and unspoiled character that impresses him. What he admires is their purity and their blissful unawareness of adult topics. In comparison to adults, children are unscarred by phoniness. They abound in genuineness that is extremely precious for Holden. That is the key element for which Holden fights, even though it seems to be in vain.

## 5.5 Civil disobedience/ non-conformity as a liminal category

As already noted, Holden is frozen between childhood and adulthood. He assiduously maintains the period where he still nominally belongs. There is no desire to move on. He does not want to reach another phase that is marked with adults, that is to say, people who are supposed to abide by certain rules and comply with regulations of the adult world.

He would rather not carry the ball. He would prefer to stick to children who seem to be unaware of conformity that makes life difficult. Not to mention, he tries to protect himself from the pain and disappointment of the adult world.

Holden resists the conformity that is connected with the adult world. He is a teenager who resents behaving the way he is supposed to. The major reason why he does not want to do things the way he is supposed to, might be associated with the way how he detests the adult world. He desires to distinguish himself from adults so much that he strives to do things the other way around.

Holden subconsciously indicates his revolt against social convention when he, for instance, wears his hunting cap back to front. He says that it is the way he likes it (Salinger 24).

He tries not to stick to the mainstream. He does not do everything that others do. That is precisely the thing that he loathes and calls it phony. He manifests this when he is not willing to support his school in its football game.

What is more, he does not take part in his lessons regularly since it is something that everybody is expected to do so. As a result, he fails four subjects out of five, which only proves his deep resentment towards schools.

Holden talks about his English classes where students were supposed to talk about various topics adhering to it as much as possible. When they diverged from the topic, the teacher would shout “digression.” Holden recounts these hard lessons and speaks his mind that he is strongly opposed to that since it left a sour taste in his mouth.

Holden claims that he actually likes this digression since it is absorbing (Salinger 238).

This digression might symbolize nonconformity, so in this sense Holden makes it clear that he likes when somebody does not stick to the rules.

What also seem to go against conformity are Holden's frequent lies. There is no doubt that Holden tells lies on a regular basis.

Holden tells us that he regards himself as being a big liar. He says that when he goes to the shop to buy some magazine, he is prone to tell everybody that he is heading for an opera. (Salinger 22).

Holden seems to take pleasure in lies.

Holden is pulling the leg of Mrs. Morrow, mother of Holden's schoolmate. He tells her about his son's popularity and success and even that her son was almost elected to be president of the class, which was all untrue (Salinger 73, 74).

What is more, not only does Holden tell Mrs. Morrow the wrong name, but he also comes up with a morbid lie that he has a tumor in his head (Salinger 75).

Holden also lies to Marty that he has caught a glimpse of Gary Cooper. Marty is dancing with Holden in El Morocco (Salinger 96).

Besides, Holden lies to the elevator boy in the house where Holden's family lives in order not to be suspected of going to the flat of his parents, which the elevator boy might reveal to them later (Salinger 204).

His frequent lies might be the evidence of his nonconformity and that he struggles to defy traditions. It also appears that he would like to escape from the society that adheres to certain rules. He would rather live according to his code, which is the teenage code.

However, for Holden the teenage code takes a different turn. It is a special code that not every teenager wants to follow. It seems to be a code that derives from hopeless situations of desperate individuals, that is to say, outsiders. Therefore, it turns out to be one of a kind. To be more specific, this code might be classified as a liminal code, which differs from the adult code and equally it does not correspond with the mainstream teenage code. The overall liminal quality can be summed up by the statement that Holden is hovering alternatively between truth and lie, responsible/irresponsible behaviour and/or constructiveness/destructiveness.

## 6. Conclusion

Holden Caulfield comes across as a rather complex personality. He shows signs of being a fairly sensitive boy who has difficulties dealing with the world around him. Moreover, Holden undergoes a hard period of life. Nobody seems to be on the same wavelength.

He gives the impression that he does not realize the far-reaching consequences of his acts and his behavior. In other words, he seems to be resigned to his fate. What is more, Holden does not know which way to turn in his life.

He appears in the phase between childhood and adulthood. The thesis presents a large number of specific situations where Holden moves in his acts between these two stages of human development.

What propels his alternating and varying behavior proves to be the fact that he is caught between childhood and adulthood. Holden realizes that he already left the period of childhood even though it turned out to be rather dismal for him. He has a particular liking for the period of childhood and children in general; however, he becomes increasingly more conscious that he cannot remain in the period of childhood forever. Metaphorically said, he sits on the fence.

Nonetheless, what is crucial here is the fact that Holden makes a desperate effort to keep himself from becoming an adult. Be that as it may, he is fighting a losing battle.

The thing is that he severely condemns and strenuously objects to all adults. What Holden highlights is that adults come across as corrupted, perverted and phony. This resentful and dismissive attitude towards maturity and adulthood echoes Romanticist notions of childhood as an uncorrupt and pristine state which tends to be gradually (and deplorably) compromised by imported social virtues. As a result of this, the character of Holden can also be seen as a continuation of this Emersonian or Whitmanesque argument which also tends to see the liminal awkwardness of teen age as a reluctant yet regrettable downward slide towards the conformity and “phoniness” of adulthood.

Holden Caulfield resists conformity, trying not to adhere to adult rules. He also struggles so as not to lose his innocence. Holden wants to secure lasting innocence. Even though he is close to losing virginity several times, he has not succumbed to this temptation.

Overall, Holden grudgingly left childhood; however, he has not reached adulthood yet. Hence, he can be classified as a liminal character on multiple levels.

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