

Resistance as Madness in *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Abstract—J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) is a story of Holden Caulfield's crises with his society. Holden is a teenager who has a lingering position between accepting and rejecting the cultural codes of his decade. In this paper, we intend to analyze Holden's resistant character based on Foucauldian concepts of madness, power and resistance. Heading this aim, we explain how society eliminates the resistant individuals in Foucauldian views. Through close reading of the text, we intend to find a relationship between madness, power and resistance. We also hypothesize that in this context Holden's resistance to disciplinary power is regarded as madness. Moreover, we hypothesize that Holden like a sociologist figure scrutinizes his society to figure out society's madness by following the cultural codes. However, because of his individuality and resistance, he is considered mad and eventually is sent to a sanitarium to be cured. Furthermore, we observe that Salinger challenges society's cultural codes through Holden's crises and presents a new form of resistance to social norms in his novel.

Index Terms—madness, resistance, disciplinary system, power, cultural codes

I. INTRODUCTION

Madness has always been an ambivalent concept in man's life. Desired or not, madness has a strong presence in the history of human being and it immortalizes itself through the writings of the men of letters who were attracted to madness. Madness exists in our life, our philosophy, our medicine and our mind that one cannot deny its influential role in shaping our existence.

In the history of madness, different philosophers and psychologists attempt to bring different definitions for madness. Some regards it a mental disorder and some regards it an anomie that is a "sociological madness [that] depicts characters estranged from society's "sane," "normal" or "rational" behaviors." (Reiger, 2011, p.8) Hence, we will locate this study within philosophical realm of madness that defines madness based on its relation to the social norms and conventions. Thus, we analyze *The Catcher in the Rye* through Foucauldian lens since Foucault is the only thinker who denies the existence of madness and argues that society's vital need for homogeneity degenerates individuals as madmen. Furthermore, Foucault denounces psychiatry for utilizing power to normalize the madman.

Foucault in *History of Madness* presents an interconnected relation between madness and reason. In this light, Foucault (2006a) has defined the madman as:

The madman leaves the path of reason, but by means of the images, beliefs, and forms of reasoning that are equally to be found in men of reason. The madman therefore is never mad to his own way of thinking, but only in the eyes of a third person who can distinguish between reason and the exercise of reason. (p. 184)

Thus, we comprehend that in Foucauldian term, the definition of madness is reliant on the definition of reason in a specific time and place; which means that whatever is observed against the common sense of the period is considered madness even if it may appear more logical than the accepted norm.

Foucault (2006a) argued that the madman is the figure who breaks the "fastidious conformity" of society and consequently brings upheavals and unrest. Therefore, he is more an asocial factor than a mind empty of reason and recognition. Thus, we can assume the madman as a person whose ideals does not compatible with the rest of the society and he resists the accepted norms. (Foucault, 2006a, p.346)

II. MAD HOLDEN VERSUS MAD SOCIETY

Madness is one of the most salient concepts that are used in *The Catcher in the Rye*. So far, Holden's madness has been the focal point of many critical papers written on *The Catcher in the Rye*; nevertheless, the significance of this study lies in the point that we focus on society's madness rather than Holden's madness; because in our view Holden is not a madman but he is a social observant figure. Like a sociologist, Holden scrutinizes the society and he is aware of the impending danger of losing a genuine idea and intellect that results in losing individuality and authenticity. As a matter of fact, what Holden criticizes as "phony" is proposed as sanity and social accepted behavior; therefore, it is clear that Holden's resistant behavior would be regarded as madness. So far, all critics have been unanimous that Holden is a problematic character and due to his problems he is sent to a sanitarium.

On the contrary, we argue that all these critics miss this ironical point that as much as the society regards Holden mad, Holden cynically refer to his surrounding people as madmen. There are many occasions in the novel that Holden verifies people's madness, while there is no actual evidence of his own madness, except that he is sent to a sanitarium at the end. Thus, in our view society is mad; however, since Holden resists to conform to society's madness, his resistance is considered as madness.

There are several occasions in the text that make Holden say "I can't stand it", "it makes me so depressed I go crazy" and "it drives me crazy." As an example, observing "fuck you" on the walls drives Holden "crazy." (Salinger, 1991, p. 200-01) When Holden thinks of Jane having sexual relationship with Stradlater and imagines that she may turn to be a conformist as well, he drives "starking mad." (Salinger, 1991, p. 48).

When D. B.'s ex-girlfriend thinks that being in Hollywood is marvelous and "a big deal", she drives Holden crazy. (Salinger, 1991, p. 86) Mr. Spencer's habit of repetition drives Holden crazy because people should not "say something twice that way, after you admit it for the first time." (Salinger, 1991, p. 10) And when they are visiting the cemetery and it starts raining, the way people flee to the warmth of their cars nearly drives Holden crazy. (Salinger, 1991, p. 156)

Evidently, Holden goes crazy by any behavior that is regarded as common or normal in the society. Therefore, for Holden the mere cultural codes of his society is the cause of madness and in our view, he doesn't follow the norms in order to be safe from the epidemic madness.

In this respect, we refer to Foucault's (2006a) explanation of "a practical consciousness of madness" that allows the majority the right to exclude the individuals as madmen. Foucault (2006a) has stated that:

The merely critical consciousness that those outsiders have somehow deviated rests on the consciousness that they have chosen a different path, and there it finds its justification, at the same time becomes brighter and obscure, turning into unmediated dogma. (p. 165)

Foucault (2006a) continues that the problem of madness in this form of consciousness is the difference between the definition of madness and reason and madness is measured based on the scale of devotion to the group who are the "bearers of the norms of reason." (Foucault 2006a, p. 165)

Thus, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden functions as an asocial different individual who must be normalized. Holden is a dangerous factor who breaks the established conventions of the society; therefore, he is regarded a mad individual.

It is clear that Holden does not believe in the validity of the norms and antithetically, he regards madness as following the cultural codes. The evidences in the text that verify people's madness in Holden's views are as follows:

When Holden goes to check in the Edmont Hotel, he takes off his hunting cap in order not to look eccentric. Very soon Holden realizes that he is the only normal person in the hotel: "I didn't know then that the goddam hotel was full of perverts and morons. Screwballs all over the place.... The Hotel was lousy with perverts. I was probably the only normal bastard in the place." (Salinger, 1991, p. 61-2)

In the hotel, Holden looks into other rooms through his window and he is fascinated by their madness; a man was trying a woman's night dress and a couple was squirting their drink all over each other's face. Holden cannot comprehend how they can enjoy such a game. Although Holden confesses that he is able to "think of very crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up," (Salinger, 1991, p. 62) after he analyzes the couple's game, he concludes that it is madder than his maniac thoughts:

I don't like the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it. I think if you really don't like a girl you shouldn't horse around with her at all, and if you do like her, then you're supposed to like her face, and if you like her face, you ought to be careful about doing crumby stuff to it, like squirting water all over it. (Salinger, 1991, p. 62)

There are other instances in the text that Holden points to people's madness; like when Ernie plays the piano, "people went mad" and when he finishes "everybody was clapping their heads off." (Salinger, 1991, p. 84)

Holden knows he can make Sally mad just by buying her a ticket for a show with the Lunts in it:

I didn't much want to see it, but I knew old Sally, the queen of the phonies, would start drooling all over the place when I told her I had tickets for that, because the Lunts were in it and all. (Salinger, 1991, p. 116-17)

It seems that Holden cannot escape people's madness and wherever he goes he is stuck in their insanity. Holden goes to watch a show in order to kill the time and he gets depressed by observing people's madness. Holden's description of the show indicates his aversion of people's madness: "The Rokettes were kicking their heads off... the audience applauded like mad.... thousands of them kept singing 'Come All Ye Faithful!' like mad." (Salinger, 1991, p. 137)

Holden is not able to enjoy the show because apparently he is the only individual among the audience who can picture the actor "practicing to be a guy that roller-skates on the stage." (Salinger, 1991, p. 137) For Holden it sounds absurd and mad.

In another club, Holden again perceives people's madness. For Holden, getting overexcited by a French singer is madness: "she'd sing some dopey song, half in English and half in French, and drive all the phonies in the place mad with joy." (Salinger, 1991, p. 142)

As it is stated, in this context madness is defined in relation to the norms; thus, whether or not Holden is right in perceiving other's madness, he is proved to be mad by the authorities because Holden is not able to fight with the established norms. In our view, Holden's madness in this text is his punishment for his being a "goddamn minor" and a resistant individual. (Salinger, 1991, p.70)

However, observing people's madness and their ignorance of their mad status results in Holden's deep depression. Mr. Antolini is the only person who understands the nature of Holden's depression. Mr. Antolini affirms Holden that one day he will find that he is not "the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior." (Salinger, 1991, p. 189)

Regarding Mr. Antolini's forbidden sexual tendencies, we can assume that Mr. Antolini is confused and frightened as well when he continues that, "You're by no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now." (Salinger, 1991, p. 189)

The important revealing point about Mr. Antolini is his indirect advice for Holden to resist the established norms by making records of his troubles. Mr. Antolini enlightens Holden to open a new path for the future individuals by immortalizing his "madman stuff." We think Mr. Antolini's advice is one of Holden's motivations in retelling his story despite his parents' disagreement:

Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them--if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry. (Salinger, 1991, p. 189)

We believe that Mr. Antolini exposes his own disgust of the controlling education when he asserts that Holden's writings would not be considered as education. Nevertheless, Mr. Antolini may not be courageous enough to utilize the same strategy and he prefers "to live humbly for a cause." (Salinger, 1991, p. 188) It can be construed that Mr. Antolini may have found himself too mature or old to die nobly and he expects Holden as a young immature to accept the responsibility when he pronounces: "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." (Salinger, 1991, p. 188)

In this respect, we declare that Mr. Antolini's advice in immortalizing the resistance by writing about it is the second form of Foucauldian resistance that is "aesthetics of existence." Thompson (2003) explains that:

An "aesthetics of existence" means then that just as any technician, artisan, or artist, always crafts a new work under the guidance of critical scrutiny, examining what has been achieved thus far, recalling the rules of the art itself, and comparing the former against the latter. So are we, for Foucault, to fashion new sorts of non-fascistic subjectivities, working under the direction. (p. 124-25)

In our view, any work of art that has an enlightening rule in widening people's view about the truth is considered an "aesthetic of existence." In this form of resistance, no social or legal rule is broken however, they are fundamentally weakened when their validity is put to question; a task that Mr. Antolini asks Holden to accomplish.

III. HOLDEN AND RESISTANCE

So far, we have observed that how Holden reveals his different character that results in his being depressed and alienated. In *The Catcher in the Rye* there are lots of rules and norms that are deployed in the society by the term of "to be supposed to." Holden is obliged to follow these rules; antithetically, he can't find any logic behind them. As an example, he is supposed to like the Disciples because they are selected by Jesus and he is set to believe that, "if I didn't like the Disciples, then I didn't like Jesus and all." (Salinger, 1991, p. 99)

However, the Disciples annoy him because "they were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down." (Salinger, 1991, p. 99)

It is clear that Holden prefers anti-social individuals to the supposed normal people. Holden confesses that although he is not a religious person, he first likes Jesus and then the lunatic character of the Bible because of their individual character. As it is obvious, Christ was punished because of preaching the ideas that were different from society's cultural codes.

Bloom (2008) has regarded Holden's admiration for the outcasts and the lunatic because of his self-destructive characteristic. On the contrary, we argue that Holden regards society's acceptable behaviors as destructive madness. Moreover, Holden exposes no sign of masochistic attitudes in the text except when he breaks his fist after Allie's death. As Shaw (1993) has explained, Holden's reaction to Allie's death is a common reaction among the kids because he feels guilty for his inability to save Allie from death. (p. 104)

Elsewhere, Holden refers to Wicker Bar that is supposed to be a sophisticated place. However, Holden disrespects Wicker Bar for deploying phoniness because it makes people hide their genuine character in order to look acceptably sophisticated. Holden abandons Wicker Bar because, "the phonies are coming in the window." (Salinger, 1991, p. 141)

Ernie's club with its supposed to be holy music is another place that is "jam packed with prep school jerks and college jerks." (Salinger, 1991, p. 83) However in Holden's view, Ernie's playing is far from being holy "for God's sake." (Salinger, 1991, p. 38) Holden believes that, Ernie is nothing more than a "big fat colored guy" who is a "terrific snob" that "won't hardly even talk to you unless you're a big shot or a celebrity or something." (Salinger, 1991, p. 80) Although Holden admits that Ernie is a talented pianist, he sometimes feels like "turning his goddamn piano over." (Salinger, 1991, p. 80) It is obvious that Holden does not enjoy what he is supposed to adore.

In this respect we disagree with Edwards (1977) who believed that Holden is not a resistance and his rebellion is all fantasy. We argue that accrual of these contradictions between Holden and society presents Holden as an individual who resists accepting society's "shoulds." From the beginning of the text, Holden proves that his character and story is

going to be different from the traditional bildungsroman texts. Holden's intention in not following the "shoulds" of David Copperfield's traditions indicates another contradiction in Holden's personality that makes him a resistance:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. (Salinger, 1991, p. 1)

To relate Holden's resistance and difference to madness, we refer to Foucauldian view that states that the disciplinary society for having a better control over the members creates groups and classifies people according to their personality and potentiality. The disciplinary system attempts to homogenize people by appointing them to different groups. As Foucault (1995) has founded:

[Disciplinary power] dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude,' a 'capacity,' which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection...[d]isciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination (p. 138)

Foucault (2006b) argues that in a disciplinary system there are always some counter normal figures who do not conform to the mainstream of normalization. Foucault in *Psychiatric Power* has stated that these people are considered residue in the disciplinary system and they are "unclassifiable":

Disciplinary systems, on the other hand, which classify, hierarchize, supervise, and so on, come up against those who cannot be classified, those who escape supervision, those who cannot enter the system of distribution, in short, the residual, the irreducible, the unclassifiable, the inassimilable. This will be the stumbling block in the physics of disciplinary power. That is to say, all disciplinary power has its margins. (Foucault, 2006b, p. 53)

Likewise, Holden does not fit into any groups that are shaped by the disciplinary system. He does not enjoy social gatherings like games, he resents mass-culture for deploying phoniness, he refuses to submit to controlling agents' rules, he is not able to have a healthy relationship with his peers, and worst of all, he reveals society's vicious facades. Thus, Holden is regarded a residue; a mad residue who must be cured. For Foucault, the disciplinary system regards madman as the "residue of all residues" since he is "inassimilable" to all forms of disciplines in the society. (Foucault, 2006b, p. 54)

IV. HOLDEN'S END

The socio-analytic Holden wonders in New York, observes people's madness and gets depressed of people's madness and ignorance. Nevertheless, when he finishes his journey he comes into a disappointing conclusion: Not only he is not able to change anything, but also he is merging with the consumer society. In our view, Holden's feeling of disappearance while passing the street implies his fear of dissolving in the mad society.

Holden experiences his disappearance in two occasions in the text: first, at the beginning of his adventures, and then towards the end of his journey. We think Holden's first experience functions as a prediction for his final disappointing conclusion.

In a "terrifically cold crazy afternoon" with "no sun" to shine on people's mind, Holden feels for the first time that he is "disappearing every time" he crosses "a road." (Salinger, 1991, p. 5) Holden does not specify the reference of the term "terrifically cold" and in the first reading it may look related to the weather. However, when we go further it may well imply the freeze of people's mind. I think from the beginning, Salinger puts these clues to show the frustration of the society who is not willing to accept any changes.

In the second disappearance, after gathering more experiences from society's madness, Holden feels that, "I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me." (Salinger, 1991, p. 197) We think Holden's fear is reasonable. There are many occasions in the text that Holden repeats people's madness, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unconsciously; thus, prefiguring his unavoidable fall into society's madness, Holden entreats Allie to help him not to dissolve in the common madness. Since Allie dies before the society finds time to change him into a "docile-body", Holden clings to Allie as the only figure who can rescue him:

I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him. (Salinger, 1991, p. 198)

Reaching the end of his adventures, Holden is deeply back warded from his ideals that even his dream of being a catcher in the rye sounds crazy to him: "I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy." (Salinger, 1991, p. 173)

There are different interpretations about Holden's being a catcher. Steinle (2007), Shaw (1993) and Galloway (2008) have related it to Holden's attempt in saving society's innocence. In contrast, Edwards (1977) has regarded Holden's dream as his "unwillingness to distort the truth by ignoring- or even changing the facts." (p. 555)

However, we argue that Holden intends to save the kids from falling into madness more than anything else. He comprehends his inability to survive himself and the rest of the society; hence, he targets his aim to save kids from the danger of madness because they are his only hope for a better future.

In the final chapter Holden states that a lot of people and especially the psychoanalyst, ask him if he is going to "apply" himself with the school. We think the question shows the psychiatrist's efforts in homogenizing Holden with

the society. As Foucault (2006a) has stated, the knowledge of psychiatry aims to alienate the madman with his self in order to change him to an acceptable member of the society:

From that point on madness no longer indicated a certain relation between men and the truth – a relation which, silently at least, always implied freedom; what it indicated instead was a relationship between man and his own truth ... While previously he was a Stranger to Being ... now he was held trapped in his own truth and thus exiled from it. A Stranger to himself, Alienated. (Foucault, 2006a, p. 516)

According to what is stated above, the madman would achieve his truth only the time he got alienated to himself. This is the foremost goal of the moral therapy; correcting the madman by making him a stranger to himself and by making him more similar to a desirable object for the psychiatrist.

Similarly, Holden also is under the pressure of being homogenized and his assertion shows that whatever decision he makes, he will not apply himself with the society he has been banished:

“It's such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it? The answer is, you don't. I think I am, but how do I know? I swear it's a stupid question.” (Salinger, 1991, p. 213)

Holden narrates his story after he is supposedly cured by the psychiatrist; however, he does not show any difference from the Holden he was in his story. Seemingly, even the psychiatric power has failed to change Holden to a submissive character, at least until the time of narrating his story.

Therefore, we can conclude that the psychiatrist has not been successful in alienating Holden from himself. Holden's decision to write his accounts proves that he still believes in his resistance and he decides to change his strategy from “tactical reversal” to “aesthetic of existence.”

It is evident that when Holden fails to submit to society's norms he is excluded from society and he is sent to a sanitarium as the last chance to be cured, or in a better sense to be homogenized by the psychiatric power. Hence, Holden becomes a candidate for asylum to bring intellectual comfort for disciplinary system. This is Holden's punishment for his non-conformity to the social norms.

V. CONCLUSION

In this fresh analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* we argued how Holden's resistance to cultural codes of his society is regarded as madness. We explained that Holden's madness is characterized by his resistance to social maxims that he considers destructive and maddening. Whereas the previous readings of *The Catcher in the Rye* approached it as a story of Holden's madness because of his adolescence problems, we put my focus on Holden's normal state as a socio-analytic figure and proves that as much as the society considers Holden a madman, Holden observes society's madness and gets depressed of their ignorance.

Utilizing Foucault's theoretical framework, we explained that Holden has no sign of madness, and just because his reasoning and views are in contradiction with the society he is considered mad. Thus, in *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden is perceived mad because of his non-conformity although he believes in society's madness because of their blind following the cultural codes.

Holden is an outcast because he cynically presents follies and brings unrest. Holden's resistance and criticisms make a breach in controlling agents' homogenizing function, therefore society prefers to exclude him in order to restore its tranquility. Therefore, in this context, Holden's resistance to cultural codes is regarded as madness.

Moreover, we believe that Salinger as the creator of Holden employs “aesthetics of existence” strategy to question the validity of the cultural codes of the era. Through Holden, Salinger poses questions, presents follies and asks readers to compare Holden with other characters of the text to judge between madness and sanity. Holden, through his three days journey in New York, requests the readers to question the validity of what they have accepted as social norms.

Salinger presents *The Catcher in the Rye* as his strategy to deconstruct the power of controlling institutions. Through Mr. Antolini, Salinger instructs all the individuals to immortalize their resistance by keeping records of their individual self; the task that he has accomplished by writing *The Catcher in the Rye*.

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