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# Elements of the Beat Generation Writings in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled "Elements of the Beat Generation Writings in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*" has been completed under my supervision by Anu Shakhya in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English. I would like to recommend this research be examined by an external examiner.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Elements of the Beat Generation Writings in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur by Anu Shakya has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

*This thesis explores the elements of the Beat Generation's writings in J. D. Salinger's* The Catcher in the Rye. *The novel articulates a protagonist, Holden Caufield, who is laminating upon the bygone days and has no sense of urgency in rectifying his mistakes. He is absorbed in lustfulness and maddened with modern desires including boozing, squandering, and strolling. On the one hand, the protagonist resembles American standardization and on the other hand, he rejects the social convention by redefining sexuality, religion, and philosophy which is similar to the aspirations of the Beat Generation which was booming during the context of the novel. In this connection, this study focuses on four specific questions: Why does the protagonist stand in liminal space? What purpose does the novel serve in igniting the Beat Generation's writing? How does J. D. Salinger imbue the aspiration of the Beat Generation and in doing so, how does he challenge American standardization? To answer these questions, the research embodies the new historicist perspective, especially dealing with Stephen Greenblatt's notion of new historicism or cultural politics, and argues that Salinger's protagonist is neither an absolute representation of Americans nor an active activist of the Beat Generation. He gives double exposition, the dark reality of American culture, and the result of American standardization. The study claims that Salinger has adopted the elements of the Beat Generation writings that include sexuality, religion/philosophy, and economy not only to show his alignment with the movement but also to illuminate the unprecedented desensitization of Americanness that impuissant the present, unavailing the sterile future of the American culture.*

Keywords: Americanness, liminal space, transition, brutality, sterilization

J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) aligns with the Beats Generation in denouncing American culture. The protagonist, Holden Caulfield, represents a Beats Generation activist who dissolves in the American spirit and forecloses their bottom line values that construct 'Americanness.' Although the protagonist's adventure encompasses a concise trip to New York City, his encountering the locals and American atmosphere while visiting the clubs and pimps exposes the psychic repository he bears. In this sense, Salinger's representation of a protagonist like Caulfield, an anti-hero—who rarely fits in the heroic conventionality, exposes Salinger's literary association with the Beats Generation in revolutionizing the American way of life through the critical observation of American culture and sterilization of its magnanimity.

*The Catcher in the Rye* is the story of a teenager: Holden Caulfield, narrated by Caulfield himself to the doctor, who diagnoses his illness, most probably tuberculosis. The story encapsulates three layers of timeframes: present, recent past, and distant past. In the present, Caulfield describes his recent two-week visit to New York City in the doctor's cabin. He goes two weeks back and starts narrating his purposeless visit and the incidents that took place in New York while talking about himself. Interestingly, the description of the distant past, his childhood, comes into play—intermingling with his recent past—as the narration of the recent past proceeds.

Caulfield is a disillusioned underaged guy who strives to find his location in the modern American world. He exposes that he was expelled from Pencey Preparatory Academy because he failed all the subjects except English. As he decides to run away from his home to New York City, he says, "I've left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don't care if it's a good-bye or a bad good-bye, but when I leave a place I like to know I'm leaving it" (4). His strolling

around the cities provides him with undergo a range of experiences, meeting different characters including the prostitute Sunny, the phony intellectual Carl Luce, and the innocent little sister of a friend, Phoebe. The way Holden engrosses himself with these people ignites his intimate desires to intermingle himself with his inner thoughts and social conventions that formulate his life differently. He participates in sexual affairs, hires prostitutes, smokes heavily, and spends money extravagantly.

The progression of the novel leads to Holden's isolation and anxiousness. He grapples with thoughts of suicide and feels a strong desire to protect young children from the corrupting influences of the adult world. When the novel concludes, Caulfield is standing on a cliff overviewing a field of rye. Imagining himself as the 'catcher in the rye,' a savior of children from falling off the edge, he says: "I'm sorry I told so many people about it. About all I know is, I sort miss everybody I told about . . . Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (29), which suggests he is nostalgic and in anxiety of loosing the most important thing in the life: childhood.

When *The Catcher in the Rye* was in print on 16 July 1951 for the first time, the immediate response was moderate and not as ear-pleasing as it became in the later decades. In fact, according to Donald P. Costello, "In addition to commenting on its authenticity, critics have often remarked—uneasily—the 'daring,' 'obscene,' 'blasphemous' features of Holden's language" (173), that curtailed *The Catcher*'s popularity. However, the novel freed its clutches in the latter half of the 50s and from the '60s. It accelerated the pace, making the history of the best-selling novel and most-read fiction in the academic circle. Interestingly, "it was compared with *Huckleberry Finn* and *Ulysses*, also reckoned as the American *Don Quixot*e" (174). Critics, moreover, did not fail to compare Salinger's Caulfield with James Joyce's Stephen

Dedalus—the alter ego of Joyce and the protagonist of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

At large, the novel's outreaching ability magnetized the audience and scholars across the globe to investigate it from polymorphous avenues. Moreover, the text itself underscores a diagrammatic portrait of the protagonist that draws the researchers to explore the novel to its length. One of the interesting remarks, for example, hints at Clinton W. Trowbridge, who scrutinizes the novel from the perspective of the symbolic structure of the text and argues that "*The Catcher in the Rye* is the story of a quest, a search for truth in a world that has been dominated by falsity, the search for personal integrity by a hero who constantly falls short of his own ideal, who, in fact, participates in the very falsity he is trying to escape" (682). He asserts that the novel transpires the protagonist's attempt to unearth truthfulness in the fallacious world, entrapped in the colossal density of the deluded atmosphere. In this relevance, for Trowbridge, "The dramatic power of the novel stems from two things: that the hero's conflict is both internal and external and that it increases in intensity as his vision of inner and outer falsity becomes more and more overwhelming" (682). Thus, Trowbridge concludes that the protagonist's inability to comprehend the camouflage of the environment he confronts derails him to the difficulty of overcoming internal and external conflicts.

Trowbridge's observation reveals the instability of the protagonist and his dilemma in stabilizing his life in the fleeting environment. However, what remains unanswered is Salinger's implication in representing characters like Caulfield. Undoubtedly, Caulfield's coming-of-age and American culture are intermingled in the novel, which shows Caulfield's struggle with internal and external conflicts. Nevertheless, there are specific purposes Salinger absorbed in creating such a

character. For Donald P. Costello:

> Even though Holden's language is authentic teenage speech, recording it was certainly not Salinger's major intention. He was faced with the artistic task of creating an individual character, not with the linguistic task of reproducing the exact speech of teenagers in general: Yet Holden had to speak a recognizable teenage language, and at the same time had to be identifiable as an individual. This difficult task Salinger achieves by giving Holden an extremely trite and typical teenage speech, overlaid with strong personal idiosyncrasies. (173)

Costello points out the protagonist's substantiation of a real teenage boy during the 1950s in American society. He encourages readers to experience the American lad in totality, who is befuddled with idiosyncratic assumptions. Costello's observation of the novel is based on the comparison of the protagonist with the American teenager of the 50s. Moreover, Costello hints at youngsters' confrontation in the school environment when American standardization was marching forward. Against this backdrop, Costello contends: "The language of *The Catcher in the Rye* is . . . an authentic artistic rendering of a type of informal, colloquial, teenage American spoken speech . . . it is crude and slangy and imprecise, imitative yet occasionally imaginative, and affected toward standardization by the strong efforts of schools" (181). However, he admits that "authentic and interesting as this language may be, it must be remembered that it exists, in *The Catcher in the Rye,* as only one part of artistic achievement. The language was not written for itself but as a part of a greater whole" (181). In this sense, Costello considers the novel as a microcosm of American society, especially, encapsulating teenagers' voices in American typification.

Since Caufield's way of living and suffering is revealed through his language, the urges that compel him to speak the way he speaks become the vantage point of the

observation. The causative factor of the speeches, perhaps, is impossible to track down to its root; however, James Bryan has strived to come up with a psychological perspective to answer this difficulty. Bryan accords, “[y]et the novel's resolution, like all of Salinger's mature fiction, transcends sociological indictment in affirming individual responsibility. When Holden answers for his own life as he verges toward some rather dreadful appropriation of his own, he begins to come to terms at once with himself and society” (1066). Bryan agrees that the novel exceeds the societal limit for individual freedom. For him, Caulfield tries to assimilate into the societal discourses but finds society in himself. He reflects the protagonist as a revolutionary who paves the way for societal reconfiguration.

Bryan is right in the sense that the protagonist debunks the morals of the society in which he lives. For example, Caulfield says, “I’m sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don’t care too much for the other stuff in the Bible” (Salinger 107). In this sense, Caulfield’s assertiveness towards Jesus and evaporation with the Bible shows his eagerness to be a torchbearer rather than a benevolent follower. However, since the protagonist’s way of life is extremely oscillating between what he wills and what he does, Bryan’s observation fails to incorporate Caulfield’s fleeting nature. To fill this gap, Danielle M. Roemer significantly sheds light on Caulfield’s incredible behavior and shows his incredulity in the following ways:

> In the case of personal narration, the speaking self is necessarily separate from the self that is spoken of. The narrator creates a sense of some other, typically past identity, framing it as an object of attention. As a result, personal storytelling can be said to function as a mode of separation. Making and marking a sense of distance, it is developed in the gap between agent and object, between sign and referent. (5)

Roemer reluctantly separates Caulfield's will and action. In doing so, he observes that the protagonist's narration is concentrated on the past experience that mechanizes himself subtly in distinguishing agent and action. In other words, the narration of the story is neither tilted nor constant yet works as a drifting bridge that, at the same time, connects and separates the past and the present. Thus, for Roemer, Caulfield stands on the shaky foundation that oscillates between what has been and what is being, which relegates him to the realm of distorted and unfixed character rather than revolutionary.

Along with Roemer, Carl F. Strauch and Salinger evaluate the novel from the fragmented identity of the protagonist. Observing the novel's aporetic structure, Strauch and Salinger point out, "Except in scattered and fragmentary flashes, it has thus far escaped attention that Salinger sharply accentuates the portrayal of Holden with a symbolic structure of language, motif, episode, and character" (6). Moreover, they add, "when the complex patterns are discovered, the effect is to concentrate our scrutiny on a masterpiece that moves effortlessly on the colloquial surface and at the same time uncovers, with hypnotic compulsion, a psychological drama of unrelenting terror and final beauty" (6). Strauch and Salinger slightly hint at Caulfield's psychological state, yet interestingly, they praise this quality of the novel which adds structural credulity that makes the novel convincing. Thus, they conclude:

> Salinger has employed *neurotic deterioration, symbolical death, spiritual awakening, and psychological self-cure* as the inspiration and burden of an elaborate pattern-verbal, thematic, and episodic, that yields the meaning as the discursive examination of Holden's character and problem out of metaphoric context can never do. *Structure is meaning*. (7)

Strauch and Salinger show the scattered psychological state of the protagonist; however, praise the technique and do not fail to ensure the pattern itself is the

meaning of the text. They valorize the structure and claim that the novel's meaning lies underneath the protagonist's aporetic narration.

Be it Bryan, Roemer, or Strauch and Salinger, their locus of observation stands on the structurality of the novel. They have investigated the protagonist from a similar vantage point though their findings differ in terms of meanings they have inferred. Taking a significant departure from the observational point of view, thus, Carol Ohmann and Richard Ohmann take a crucial turn in navigating the audience for a different contextual meaning. Subtly, Ohmann and Ohmann investigate the interest of the critiques and the contextual history of the American tussle with the Korean state, and discuss the novel in the following ways:

> The novel does not, of course, mention the conflict between East and West. It does mirror a competitive, acquisitive society, where those who have, keep, and press for the same society put half a million troops on the field in Korea and sent Harriman to Teheran and Sherman to Madrid. *Catcher*, to anticipate our argument at this point, is precisely revealing of social relationships in midcentury America, and motives that sustained them, and rationalizations that masked them. (19)

For Ohmann and Ohmann *The Catcher in the Rye* is a literary medium to subdue the voice of oppression caused by the United States over other marginal countries like Korea, Teheran, and Madrid. Moreover, they claim that although the novel scarcely implies the historical context, it is the depiction of American society during the mid-twentieth century to conceal their notoriety and maintain superiority. Ohmann and Ohmann’s analysis may have been a political investigation and an interest in excavating American reality concerning other smaller countries. Still, their part of observation gives a significant lens to this research to observe the novel from a new

historical perspective. Their research paves the way for further exploration in unearthing how the novel responded to American society when the Beats Generation movement inflamed resistance against American hypocrisy.

This research incorporates comparative literature to investigate the relationship between Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and the Beat Generation. As Wlad Godzich argues, "[*In the field of comparative literature*] within the prevalent organization of knowledge, it is incumbent upon comparatists to inquire into the relationship of culture to givenness, to its other" (28). Defining its nature and principle it stands on the fundamental ground, Godzich describes comparative literature and its dimension in the following ways:

> It is thus an active principle rather than a passive one, as the term *givenness* may have connoted. It should be clear that it does not manifest itself as such within the culture, for culture is a construct in response to it. If it has any existence within the culture, it is figural, although it may be better to view it as the operator of certain effects. (28)

For Godzich, comparative literature dispenses interconnectedness with cultural forms of the time, be it literature dealing with the culture or culture dealing with the literature. Moreover, he underscores the responsibility of comparatists to investigate the relevances of the cultural behavior that handles the literary domain. In this relevance, this research compares the novel and the Beat Generation for two significant purposes. Firstly, although Salinger never openly considered himself an activist of the Beat Generation movement, as did Jack and Allen, his implicit reaction was interconnected. Thus, to foreclose his responses to the American culture through his supportiveness of the movement comparison between the novel and the movement becomes crucial. At the same time, to unearth his 'yeah say,' in his literary remarks

this research incorporates comparative literature as a methodological framework. Secondly, to investigate what significant Beats aspirations Salinger adapted to react to Americanness, this research undergoes subtle literary comparisons that deal with the societal issues then. In doing so, the observation is strengthened through a new historicist perspective because it allows us to observe the past from the present. The documented history does not verbalize itself nor do any people have yet confirmed Salinger’s alignment with the Beat Generation, but the exploration of the elements of the Beat Generation's writings permits the researcher to examine their nexus in political and national interest that demolished the cultural supremacy of American values.

This research observes *The Catcher in the Rye* from a new historicist perspective to scrutinize the issue more succinctly because although the researchers so far have explored the novel from multifaceted avenues, there is a gap in understanding the work of art from a historical location in which the novel was incubated. Furthermore, the novel corresponds with the burgeoning situation by then that includes homosexual liberation, sexual freedom, social stratification between rich and poor, and American standardization which demand new historicist observation to penetrate the underbelly of American culture that was influencing Salinger to hatch literary piece of art like *The Catcher in the Rye*. Thus, purposively, the study imparts Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of cultural poetics (new historicism) in which one is “committed to the project of making strange what has become familiar, of demonstration that what seems an untroubling and untroubled part of ourselves . . . is actually part of something else, something different” (11). Moreover, since every literary work encapsulates a certain historical frame or historical evidence to some degree, *The Catcher in the Rye* is no exception. Thus, as Greenblatt necessitates

understanding history from the present because for him, the "past [is] inextricably bound up with [the] response to the present" (224), this research deals with the historical implication of the novel and the issues it encompasses. Since the new historicist perspective allows the researcher to be involved in specifying the reciprocity between the aspiration of the author and the context of the novel, the theoretical lens is necessitated to explore the politics behind Salinger's purpose in articulating the protagonist, who is beyond the parameter of changing American individual. While incorporating Greenblatt's advice of the historical documentation based on the observer's circumstances in the present tantrum, the locus of the research remains in the context of the text, investigating the text along with the Beat Generation Movement.

Since the investigation of the research aims to unearth Salinger's alignment with the Beats Generation in countering American culture, it adopts a comparative analysis research framework to show how Salinger was not different from Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in advocating for a countercultural literary movement. However, instead of taking a diverse literary piece from the Beats Movement, it undergoes analyzing Ginsberg's *Howl* to exemplify thematic resemblance. This literary work will be merely a supplement to explore how Salinger corresponds with the aspirations of the Beat Generation. The research, therefore, is a new historicist reading, observing the past from the present, of the text that compares Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* with the Beat Generation Movement.

The Beat Generation Movement emerged in the early 1940s and became popularized in the 1950s. Although it seems to be an interesting event in the historical paradigm, it went through crucible stages and was a reaction against the then-American society tormented by the post-world scenario. Following the Second World

War, according to Jamie Russell:

> Junkies were big news in the late 1940s. Many veterans had returned with drug habits that they'd picked up after being wounded and given shots of morphine. Meanwhile, on the home front, the war had meant that stolen drugs were frequently available on the black market, fuelling a sudden rise in morphine and heroin addiction that continued well into the 1950s (and beyond). The media were obsessed with junkies—their lifestyle, criminal activities, and depraved sexual acts. (9)

Russell sketches the picture of American society in which the war not only demolished the physical structure of social fundamentals but also the bearer, who regulates it. In such menace, where the societal function derailed from the common practices, Christopher Gair argues, "The Beat Generation emerged, noting not only the causes of alienation at the time – most significantly, a culture of consumption that invited conformity alongside restrictive sexual mores that indicated intolerance of transgression – but also the extent to which many 'ordinary' Americans found these values repressive" (10). In this sense, the Beat Generation was an inclusive movement that strived to encapsulate the stratified society in a common whole, maintaining a reasonable distance in equalizing them. For this affirmative action, "the Beat Generation saw themselves as serious artists, immersed in canonical and avant-garde materials and attempting a revolution in American literature, even at a time when little of their work had been published outside small college magazines" (26). Their attempt marked a significant presence in reconstructing American culture and the way they experience their life.

The post-world war scenario, undoubtedly, demanded a reshuffling of pre-war comprehension of life and society because the world had witnessed unprecedented

terror of human brutality. However, Americans were yet idealizing obsolete values "by the re-adoption of a culture of consumption (echoing both the 1890s and the 1920s) that encouraged the rapid standardization of family life and celebrated the belief that the nation was entering a golden age in which science would offer increased leisure and luxury for all" (12). Subtly, they were perpetuating the grandiosity of Americanness and advocating for standardized forms of social construction where inequality of race, gender, sex, economy, to name but a few, flourish. In this realm, Matt Theado argues that "[The Beats Generation] heralded a refreshing *new age of social and literary freedom*" (748), where they imagined the destructive images of American brutality and cultural hypocrisy. Julie Armstrong discusses the spirit of the Beat Generation in the following ways:

> By associating with people considered to be living on the margins of society, the Beats were rebelling against Cold War politics and the conservative values of the time. Even though they were well educated and generally from middle-class backgrounds, the Beats renounced capitalism, seeing it as being destructive to the human spirit and antithetical to social equality. In addition, they were rebelling against the strong sexual taboos of mass culture and set out to push back boundaries and indulge in experimentation with sexual practices, drug taking, and spiritual transcendence. (61)

Armstrong renders the American values and Beat's renouncing against the prevalent practices by then. Specifically, she bounces on the backdrops of the American post-war transition and Beat's attempt to disfigure the obsolete convention that they thought was a hindrance for new American imageries where people from margins suffocate. In this context, Salinger published *The Catcher in the Rye* which aspires to align with the Beat's aspirations.

Perhaps it is absurd and incredible to argue that Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* embodies the spirit of the Beat Generation; nevertheless, not merely because the novel and the movement sprung in the same era but also because of their harmonious disharmonizing attitude towards American culture they bear resemblance. For instance, Salinger's protagonist is a premature boy who has little awareness about the harshness of the world. Moreover, he is likely a psychotic patient, though not explicitly mentioned, more untrustworthy and less believable because, at the beginning of the novel, he says:

> 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 1)

Caulfield's dialogue is noteworthy because while introducing himself to the anonymous listener, perhaps the doctor he visits because he has caught tuberculosis, he tells his background first and says he does not want to tell it. Moreover, he is quite explicit in describing his 'lousy childhood' and his habit of reading Charles Dickens' writings; nevertheless, he refuses to show his interest in narrating them. Indeed, he does it for two reasons: "In the first place, that stuff bores [him], and in the second place, [his] parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if [he] told anything pretty personal about them" (1). In this regard, he passes indistinguishable comments upon his parents, saying, "They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially [his] father. They're nice and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell" (1). His remark about his parents seems concerning in the initial description but the last line turns the observation upside down.

Caulfield's incomprehensible attitude in reflecting his opinion and intention makes him not even close to believing him. However, Salinger had deliberately chosen such a character to disclose American society because when America was crooked in remapping social structure, aporetic observation was the precise avenue to expose the reality underneath. Caulfield represents the American psyche of the time and his contestatory behavior reflects distorted American reality. As Michael G. Barbour asserts:

> Immediately after the war . . . [f]ragmentation was in the air, pervading the American psyche. People picked up and translated its vibrations into the practice of government, science, literature, and the arts. Cultural fragmentation was a major theme in the fifties, evident in concepts of race, nationalism, and U.S. politics. (48)

Caulfield is fragmented in his lustfulness and befuddled by his inner willingness. He does not understand his keen interest nor is he capable of being a stable character. Indeed he is an underage guy—not mature enough to participate in mature stuff—yet tries to trespass the limits and sneak an overview of the world around. This means Caulfield represents American citizens of the time who were unknowingly tormented and disturbed by societal values. Caulfield is, therefore, a vantage point in overviewing the American people and their post-war scenario.

If Caulfield represents American folks then the question emerges how does Salinger counteract American society and bonds with the Beat Generation at the same time?  To this, firstly, Salinger puts his protagonist in the liminal space and gives double access to the framework that sheds light on the trend of American culture. Secondly, considering Caulfield's inner desire, he associates him with the Beat Generation movement as an antidote to the American culture. In this connection, three

specific elements of the protagonist become the cornerstone to illuminate these two issues, namely, sexuality, religion and philosophy, and economy. Firstly, Salinger portrays his protagonist as a lecherous teenager. He has an untameable desire to horse pony girls. He contends, “I keep making up these sex rules for myself, and then I break them right away. Last year I made a rule that I was going to quit horsing around with girls that, deep down, gave me a pain in the ass. I broke it, though, the same week I made it--the same night, as a matter of fact” (68). Moreover, when he travels to New York City he meets a woman in the seat of the train. In that case, Caulfield says, “She was around forty or forty-five, I guess, but she was very good-looking. Women kill me. They really do. I don't mean I'm oversexed or anything like that--although I am quite sexy. I just like them, I mean” (58). He is insensitive towards women; insensitive in the sense that neither age nor type makes any impact upon his desire. He narrates his mind-triggering thoughts in the following ways:

> In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw. Sometimes I can think of very crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up. I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each other's face. (67)

Caulfield desensitizes himself because he valorizes sexuality. His imagination is full of erotic kinds of stuff and his primary motif anchors in womanizing and enjoying the moment. Interestingly, he admits: “I'm twelve, for Chrissake. I'm big for my age” (78) and opines: “Sex is something I just don't understand. I swear to God I don't” (68). Caulfield’s sexual urges relegate him to the regime of a sexual vampire but at the same time, he admits that he is unaware of sex. He is confused, no Salinger strategically made him confused to show two realities simultaneously. On the one

hand, Caulfield represents the transition of American teenagers who were involved in sexual affairs more publicly in recent decades because as Joseph E. Scott and Jack L. Franklin remark upon Albert Ellis' work who explored sexual content in the news media. They point out, "Ellis concluded that the mass media not only contained more references to sex in 1960 than in 1950 but also were more endorsing and accepting . . . of almost all forms of sexual practice" (197). The point is America was gradually shifting towards the wider acceptance of sexuality and in this regard, Caulfield is not an exception. He is an autonomous character who exemplifies the American teenagers by then.

On the other hand, Salinger criticizes heterosexual normativity and shows its darker consequences. Caulfield is a heterosexual male; he constantly searches for women to hunt and he ends up undoing what he wanted to do. Interestingly, he roams around the streets, visits clubs, and even calls a prostitute but this is his urges that sharpen his sexual gaze over women which turns him into a sexual vampire, making the other gender, especially female, an implicit pray. He unhesitatingly contends: "I mean most girls are so dumb and all. After you neck them for a while, you can really watch them losing their brains. You take a girl when she really gets passionate, she just hasn't any brains. I don't know. They tell me to stop, so I stop. I always wish I hadn't, after I take them home, but I keep doing it anyway" (100). Moreover, while remembering one of the books he read in Whooton school, he commensurates the character Monsieur Blanchard and his sophisticated definition of women's bodies. He points out, "woman's body is like a violin and all, and that it takes a terrific musician to play it right" (101) in which he shows his agreement. The point is he subordinates women and considers them to be an irrational creature. He undertakes women like a commodity.

However, it is not Caulfield’s fault. There is a subtle politics hidden beneath. To be more precise, interestingly, while showing Caulfield as a patriarch, Salinger criticizes heterosexual norms like the Beat Generation. Armstrong illuminates Beat's understanding of sexuality in the following ways:

> The Beats rejected the mainstream values of America and were drawn to its underside, where there were drug addicts, prostitutes and swindlers. The content of the Beats’ work, therefore, was highly influenced by the dark side of society and much of their writing takes the reader on a journey into this darkness. They were rebelling against normality and the prudish attitudes towards sex that existed in the conservative 1950s. (79)

Armstrong points out that the Beat Generation came out of the clouds of darker America and its hypocritical sexual attitude. They were redefining sex from different perspectives, defending homosexual attitudes. The American society indulged in heterosexual normalcy which was marginalizing other forms of sexual discourses like gay-lesbian sexuality. In response to that, Peter Hegarty mentions, “Within the large port cities of the United States, gay men and lesbians rejected the definition of their behavior as deviant, sinful, and sick and achieved new levels of political consciousness of their oppression as a minority group” (413). As a result, “One consequence of increased gay and lesbian consciousness in the postwar era was the formation of homophile societies aimed at improving the social status of homosexuals” (413). In this scenario, “The Beats' model of heterosexuality regulated more than the women whom brotherhood had marginalized. Exemplifying the sheer reach of cultural legacies, it shaped their homosexuality as well. Men wanted other men, as well as women, to submit to them, and assume a feminine role” (Stimpson 380). The Beats did not merely problematize the conventional pattern of sexuality but

also projected its bitter consequences which are projected in Salinger's novel through the depiction of the protagonist. It is not to argue that Salinger was advocating homosexuality but rather to show how Salinger was also against the American sexual convention and how he was in the Beats melody. Indeed, Caulfield shows heterosexual attitudes but his underage behavior is what Salinger denounces to sterilize American sexual grammar.

The second major issue that Salinger amply articulates in the novel is religious dogmatism, especially Christian dogma. His protagonist is a cunning character who renounces religion with a poetic use of language. For instance, he says: "I'm sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible . . . If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones" (Salinger 107-8). Caulfield admits he is an atheist but does not hesitate to say he loves Jesus. In this sense, what he is against is the doctrine like the bible and religious behavior. For instance, he says, "When I was in bed, I couldn't pray worth a damn. Every time I got started, I kept picturing old Sunny calling me" (109). More subtly, he confirms that "Catholics are always trying to find out if you're a catholic even if they don't know your last name" (121).

While giving a remark upon Catholics, Caulfield at the same time shows the blind faith of the religious sects. In doing so, Salinger reflects the religious dogmatism that American society is engulfed in which was similar to the Beat Generation's responses to religious practices. For Carl Jackson, "The Beats may be considered the vanguard in . . . American religious consciousness, marked by the rejection of institutional religion, a questioning of Christian values, and an affirmation of the possibility of new religious meaning to be found through mystical experience,

hallucinogenic drugs, and Asian religion" (52). Instead of religious values, Jackson points out, the Beats were tilted towards the spiritual philosophy of the Asian continent. According to Armstrong, "Indeed, the Beats were asking big questions about human life and (wo)man's place within the universe. They were on a spiritual quest: beat to beatitude; suffering to joy; misery and sin to enlightenment and blessedness" (73). However, Jackson argues that the Beats had an affinity for cultural reasons:

> Traditionally, American writers and intellectuals have looked to Europe for their inspiration and sense of identity. In view of America's parent-child relationship, such an identification with European civilization was inevitable. Throughout most of its history, American writers and thinkers concerned with creating a distinctive national culture have juxtaposed their views to those inherited from Europe. Positively as well as negatively, European ideas were central to America's search for identity. Obviously, the situation has changed as Asia has increasingly impinged upon the consciousness of Americans. (53)

For Jackson, the Beats were trying to redraw their identity from the Asian perspective, especially by enticing themselves with spiritual philosophy rather than anchoring their American identity with European origin. In this sense, the Beats were voyaging towards a new realm of interpreting themselves and sketching their relocation from an alternative perspective. This instance is common with Salinger's protagonist. Caulfield is aberrant towards Christianity; nonetheless, he adores and follows Jesus not as a religious creature but as a virtuous sage. Moreover, he also loves the Eastern way of interpreting life. He admits: "I simply happen to find Eastern philosophy more satisfactory than Western. Since you ask" (157). In conversation with Carl Luce, Caulfield's student advisor at the Whooton School who is three years younger than

him, when Luce tries to clarify and asks him, “You do? Wuddaya mean ‘philosophy’? Ya mean sex and all? You mean it’s better in China? That what you mean?” (158). In response, Caulfield says, “Not necessarily in China, for God’s sake. The East I said” (158). The conversation between these two characters is noticeably common and a matter of general interest but when Luce asks, “Must we go on with this insane conversation?” (158), Caulfield shows his intensity of interest by replying, “Listen, I’m serious . . . No Kidding” (158). Moreover, as Luce comments on Eastern tradition: “They simply happen to regard sex as both physical and spiritual experience” (158), accepting the philosophical distinctiveness of the Eastern way of understanding sex, Caulfield says, “So do I! So do I regard it as a wuddayacallit—a physical and spiritual experience and all” (158). In this conversation, Caulfield’s understanding of sex and spiritual life shows similarity with the Beat Generation. It leads to the understanding that Salinger was not different in accepting religion and philosophy as far as the Beat Generation is concerned.

However, while showing Caulfield’s affinity with Eastern philosophy, it would be unfair to say Saliner has portrayed a character with the Beat Generation's aspiration because Caulfield does not hit the limit of the Beat Generation activist to its fullest. the Beat Generation was not merely accepting the sexual philosophy of the East. In fact, they were taking it as the fundamental mechanism to regulate their life. They read the *Upanishad, Bhagavad Gita,* and *Vedas* to underscore their grammar of morals and ethical values and to find the destiny of life—discovering the inner self. They produced revolutionary writings to justify their positions and rationalize their way of life. For instance, Jack Kerouac wrote *The Dharma Bums*, Allen Ginsberg wrote *Howl*, and William S. Burroughs published *Naked Lunch.* Besides sex, their motive was to change the social structure, showing the darker reality of American

society which was engulfed in the vastness of madness. As Allen Ginsberg writes, I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness / starving hysterical naked / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking / for an angry fix," (Ginsberg, Lines 1-4), he sterilizes the social structure obliqued by vain necessities that has not only caused serious damage over its firmness but also made hollow in terms of humanity and productivity.

Contrarily, Salinger's protagonist imparts a partial understanding of the Eastern philosophical route. Even his sexual understanding implores his modified version because when he says sex is spiritual and physical, he adds certain conditions to his assertion. For example, he says, "It depends on who the hell I'm doing it with" (158). He recants his words and admits: "I know it's supposed to be physical and spiritual, and artistic and all. But what I mean is, you can't do it with everybody—every girl you neck with and all—and make it come out that way. Can you?" (158). In his opinion, sex is a choice which is subjective and selective. Moreover, for him, sex can neither be spiritual nor physical nor artistic unless it entails the interest of the individual who is participating. In this sense, where the Beat Generation was challenging the American conventional sexual comprehension, Salinger was negating the universality of sexual principle through the perspective of the protagonist. It is to say, that Caulfield accepts the Eastern definition of sexuality but at the same time shows their inconsistent and incompatible definition of sexuality that undermines individual freedom and subjective experience in the sexual process.

Although Caulfield takes a significant turn in understanding sexuality from a different vantage point, it is not to argue that he was in acceptance of the philosophical and intellectual dominance of the time. Like the Beats Generation activists, who were susceptible to intellectual discourses that were regulating

American culture, Caulfield is also reluctant over the intellectuals and their philosophical stand. According to Stephen Toulmin, “If the positive program of [the] formalist philosophy of science was highly influential in the United States, its negative program was perhaps even more so” (147). Indeed, Toulmin informs the structural motif of the American intellectuals and their new tendency to underscore the social convention. He points out: “Once the history of science began to ‘take off’ in the United States around 1950, a general agreement quickly developed among the scholars directly involved, about the proper topics of research within the field” (149). The locus of the investigation was undoubtedly an empirical search of human behavior in societal discourses; however, their search was adamant in the commonality and universality of human affairs because “In particular, they focused their discussion sharply on issues ‘internal to’ the intellectual development of the various natural sciences” (149). This tendency of scholarly practice was what displeased the Beat Generation writers. Undeniably, as Armstrong points out: “Although the philosophy of the Beats was considered to be antiacademic, the seeds for the Beat movement were sown in an academic environment, as they originally met at Columbia University in the early 1940s” (59).

However, for the Beats, “It was agreed that art must view the world in a new light, one not restricted by convention or repression, but one that strived for unmediated self-expression and produced literature that was experimental and took risks” (59). In the same light, Caulfield has bellicose responses towards such intellectual propensity. He unhesitatingly admits: “These intellectual guys don't like to have an intellectual conversation with you unless they're running the whole thing. They always want you to shut up when they shut up, and go back to your room when they go back to their room” (158-59). When Caulfield criticizes the intellectuals—

jeopardizing their scholarly practices, guided by dominating aspirations—Salinger strives to show his hostile responses over the intellectuals who have lost their control to listen to the alternative way that could possibly redeem them from the guilt of tempest. In other words, Caulfield is Salinger's mouthpiece and through his words, he yields intellectual impotence of the time to fertilize society which has become barren because of the stubborn nature of the scholars.

Thirdly, both the Beat Generation movement and Salinger share an antithetical gaze over economic stratification. According to Armstrong, "The Beats' philosophy was one of anti-materialism and stressed the importance of bettering one's inner self over and above material possessions" (72). The post-war culture of America was in a rapid transition; however, the standardization of social structure was deconstructing the particularity of social wholeness. In such division, "by taking bits and pieces of each of these subcultures, the Beats began to create a new lifestyle that rejected mainstream I Love Lucy American culture in favor of the restless energy of the underworld" (Russell 11). Moreover, describing the interest and roles of the Beats, Russell asserts:

> The one thing that characterizes all the Beat writers is their willingness to throw themselves into the underbelly of American society in search of kicks. Being cool meant finding an alternative to the mainstream and, in the 1940s and 1950s, the alternative lifestyles were to be found in the cities' bars, ghettos, and downtown clubs. (11)

Russell clarifies that the Beats were trying to move away from the comfort chair and foreclose the unseen lifestyle of the American people. Through literary practices, they dared to challenge material life and tried to valorize marginality which was economically distorted. One of the most crucial aspects that must be undertaken

while reflecting on the economic resistance of the Beats is that "Even though they were well educated and generally from middle-class backgrounds, the Beats renounced capitalism, seeing it as being destructive to the human spirit and antithetical to social equality" (Armstrong 61). In this sense, the Beats were genuinely against the economic disparity because they considered spiritual humanity over economic possession. This aspect of the beats is reverberated in *The Catcher in the Rye* but in a different texture. In representing this fabric of the Beat's aspiration, Salinger has made Caulfield the locus of representation. In other words, Salinger has provided all the capitalist traits to his protagonist, and in doing so he has mirrored American society in Caulfield's reflection.

American society was recuperating from the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s which was dissociating social integrity and consolidating capitalistic mode of social behavior. Armstrong describes these happenstances more palpably in the following ways:

> With the trauma of the Second World War in the past, this was a time of economic growth and a large-scale expansion of the middle classes, which perpetuated the concept of the 'American Suburban Dream'. The 1950s was a period of conformity, an era which was considered to be both socially conservative and highly materialistic in nature. Consumerism became a key component of society, with buying trends being influenced by many American cultural and economic aspects such as advertising and the widespread availability of bank loans. (58)

As society gradually recovered from two disheartening phenomena, the Great Depression and the Second World War, it assimilated towards a new tendency to dwindle social rupture. American culture flourished against the backdrop of

capitalistic trends. However, at the same time, the social dichotomy of economic standards and compulsive consumer culture was kicking the notion of human individual freedom and dignity into the stake. The transformation called for bulky prices for those who could not afford them.

To satirize the American tendency and the consequences of the phenomenon, Salinger keeps Caulfield at the center of the exposition and illuminates the consumer behavior of the Americans by then, showing its deteriorated result. Caulfield owns money from his father and he says, “My father's quite wealthy, though. I don't know how much he makes--he's never discussed that stuff with me--but I imagine quite a lot. He's a corporation lawyer. Those boys really haul it in. Another reason I know he's quite well off, he's always investing money in shows on Broadway” (116). Caulfield represents the American youth with economic potential. His behavior is engulfed in extravagant financial expense. In one of the incidents, when coming out of the hotel and heading towards Grand Central Station to meet Sally Hayes, a beautiful lady who Caulfield dated, he narrates the event in the following ways:

> While I was in the cab, I took out my wallet and sort of counted my money. I don't remember exactly what I had left, but it was no fortune or anything. I'd spent a king's ransom in about two lousy weeks. I really had. I'm a goddam spendthrift at heart. What I don't spend, I lose. Half the time I sort of even forget to pick up my change, at restaurants and nightclubs and all. It drives my parents crazy. You can't blame them. (116).

Caulfield divulges his consumerist behavior and his way of life in American culture. Although he is aware of his parents’ disposition, he keeps doing what he desires—undermining their disregard. In fact, when he ran away from his home to New York City, his parents were unaware of his outgoing. His visit is solely his decision and

whatever he does in New York has nothing to do with his parents' concern. He roams around the street, smokes heavily, drinks alcohol despite being underage, and pays money for a prostitute though he does not horse them. With his experience, he opines, "There isn't any night club in the world you can sit in for a long time unless you can at least buy some liquor and get drunk. Or unless you're with some girl that really knocks you out" (82). In totality, he is an appropriate locus for the observation of American Culture in transition. However, interestingly, to represent a teenager with such attributes itself is a revolutionary step that Salinger took to underscore the depleted American atmosphere. When the social structure was on the way to a new realm of social standardization, Salinger portrayed a character who did not fit in the format of social pervasiveness.

Unquestionably, Salinger succinctly did two significant things while depicting Caulfield in consumer culture. On the one hand, he sketched a dirty picture of American society incongruent with social belief. On the other hand, he resembled the Beats Generation activist because according to Russell, "Back in the 1950s, the Beats were obsessed with exploding society's taboos, from drugs to sex to censorship" (7). Caulfield denies the social convention and does something that questions social grammar. He is involved in sex, addiction, and social taboos, trespassing the social limit and exceeding societal boundaries. In this sense, as John Bodnar points out: "The progenitors of change are not disruptive teenagers but defiant adults" (21), Caulfield is not a disruptive teenager but a defiant adult who is unhealthily famous for his notoriety to call for social transformation.

In conclusion, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* depicts an implicit agreement with the aspiration of the Beat Generation movement. It incorporates three specific concerns of the Beats namely, sexuality, religion and philosophy, and economy to

satarize American culture through the lens and experience of Holden Caulfield. The novel locates Caulfield in a liminal space to make the mouthpiece of the writer himself. Given the mischievous attributes of his protagonist like sexuality and addiction, Salinger mirrors American culture in the great transition, showing him as an outgoing character, Salinger aligns with the Beats to rebel against the standardization of Americanness.

Significantly, Caulfield adopts Eastern philosophy while comprehending sex like the Beats; however, he has a skewed understanding of sexuality which is refashioned in his own way. He criticizes Catholics, Christianity, and its dogmatism which is equivalent to Beats' hostile responses to religious values. As the Beats were rectifying themselves and cultivating inner-self through the Eastern philosophical route, Caulfield merely took philosophy as a mechanism to pursue a sexual goal. While dealing with the economic aspect, Caulfield becomes a reflection of double articulation. On the one hand, he is a typical American teenager who is engulfed in consumer culture; on the other hand, a revolutionary character who undermines the social taboos and enjoys his personal and individual freedom through economic tantrums. Thus, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is a literary attempt to critique American culture and most importantly, an amplified voice that supports the Beats generation movement to transform American conservative dogmatism.

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