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Undressing J.D. Salinger: Fashion and Psychology in The Catcher in the Rye and Teddy

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UNDRESSING J.D. SALINGER: FASHION AND PSYCHOLOGY IN *THE CATCHER*
IN THE RYE AND "TEDDY"

by

ALICIA HOWE

(Under the Direction of Richard Flynn)

ABSTRACT

From Holden Caulfield's red hunting hat to Teddy McArdle's torn and dirty shirt, J.D. Salinger hides more information about his characters' mental state of being in their clothing than in their speech and actions. Taking into consideration the historical period in which Salinger's works were written, this paper looks closely at the fashion Salinger uses to illuminate psychology in *The Catcher in the Rye* and "Teddy."

The color scheme, fabric and make of Holden's red flannel hunting hat is examined and compared to other popular hats of the time to show how Holden's hat becomes a symbol for his bipolar disorder. Teddy McArdle's entire outfit is examined and compared to the fashion of other characters in an effort to prove that Teddy's clothing represents his conflicted nature. By evaluating both stories, this thesis makes a connection in the work of J.D. Salinger between clothing and psychology.

INDEX WORDS: J.D. Salinger, Clothes, Psychology, Fashion, "Teddy", *The Catcher and the Rye*, Vedantic philosophy, Hunting hat, Teddy McArdle, Holden Caulfield

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DEDICATION

For Dale and Shari Howe, who taught me how to read in between the lines.

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CHAPTER 1

SALINGER WRITES WHAT SALINGER KNOWS, AND SALINGER
KNOWS CLOTHES**My First Time with J.D.**

I read my first Salinger work when I was in my first year of graduate school. Of course, it was *The Catcher in the Rye*. Why wouldn't it be? I had heard of the book before. I saw it on the most banned book list while reading an article about the travesty that was the Harry Potter series being taught in high school. But mostly, I heard the book title being uttered by male friends who had what I would call an inappropriate infatuation with Holden Caulfield. They would praise Holden, usually saying something like "finally, a character I can relate to" or, my personal favorite, "that Holden, he's someone who really sticks it to the man."

Oddly enough, my female companions responded much differently to Holden. I remember asking my mother if she ever read *Catcher* and her groaning in disgust before telling me how much she hated Holden. She thought he was just a spoiled brat who complained too much. Another one of my girl friends, after reading it for a class, said she too did not see what the big deal about Holden was. "He's a compulsive liar," she said, and questioned why anyone would ever look up to him.

I admit, before reading the novel I passed it off as one of those boy things. One of those novels that captures the heart of every male I know but leaves me wanting the time I spent reading it back. Perhaps my previous labeling of *Catcher* as a "guy

thing” is why it took me so long to read the novel in the first place. But after I finished it, I remember thinking something that the majority of readers probably don't. After the final chapter, I closed the book and thought to myself, “what a cool hat.”

I myself am a hat woman. There's nothing better than a great newspaper boy hat or a brightly colored toboggan when I'm down in the dumps. So, when I first read about Holden's red hunting hat, I was intrigued. Above all else I loved just how quirky the image was of a New York City boy at Pencey Prep Academy wearing a red flannel hunting hat with ear flaps. But more importantly, I liked how Salinger used the hat in his fiction.

Holden's hat gives alters his mood. His demeanor changes once the hat is placed on his head or taken off. I know from personal experience just how much putting a simple hat on my head can make me feel better. I've had days where finding just the right hat makes everything else irrelevant. This is what I loved about *Catcher*. I wasn't in love with the main character – I honestly can't stand him – nor did I marvel in the way it was written – truth be told, I think Salinger's short stories showcase his writing style much better; but the fashion in the novel, the way Salinger describes clothing, that caught my attention. It left me wanting more.

What I found while reading other works of Salinger is this: what first attracted me to Salinger in *Catcher* was evident in every piece he has ever published. Clothing,

more than anything else – setting, facial features, body types – is what Salinger writes about. Hats, jackets, t-shirts, pants and dresses, they are all described in detail.

Take Salinger's 1942 short story "The Long Debut of Lois Taggett," for instance. In this story Salinger bases love on clothes, having his main character Lois initially love her husband because he "had the most gorgeous rack of ties; wore such luxurious broadcloth shirts; was so marvelous, so masterful, when he spoke to people over the telephone; [and] had such a fascinating way of hanging up his trousers" (29). "Personal Notes on an Infantryman" is another work in which Salinger uses clothes. The opening passage gives great insight into Pete Lawlor, the middle-aged father who tries to join the army late in life:

He came into my Orderly Room wearing a gabardine suit. He was several years past the age—is it about forty?—when American men make living-room announcements to their wives that they're going to gym twice a week—to which their wives reply: "That's nice, dear—will you please use the ashtray? That's what it's for." His coat was open and you could see a fine set of carefully trained beer muscles. His shirt collar was wringing wet. He was out of breath. (96)

In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" Sybil, the little girl who befriends the unstable Seymour, is seen "wearing a canary-yellow two-piece bathing suit, one piece of which she would not actually be needing for another nine or ten years" (23). Franny sports a "sheared raccoon coat" when readers are first introduced to her in *Franny and Zooey*.

All of these works, and many others of Salinger, show just how much he writes about clothes. The Burberry jackets, the red hunting hats, and the yellow bikinis, they all show Salinger's desire to use clothing into his fiction for some greater purpose.

But seeing this trend in Salinger's work made me want to know more. I became curious as to why Salinger describes clothing in detail. I wanted to know what difference it makes if Franny wears a raccoon jacket or a pea coat. I needed to find out why Holden didn't just wear a fedora like everyone else. The fashion in Salinger's fiction had me wanting more.

Unbuttoning the Top Button

I once had the delightful opportunity to listen to director and screen writer John Singleton speak to a rather large body of Georgia Southern students during my undergraduate career. During question and answer time, an aspiring writer asked Singleton how he came up with such unique ideas for his scripts. The answer Singleton gave has stuck with me throughout my academic career. He simply responded: "I write what I know." Singleton is, of course, not the only person to express this idea.

Author Natalie Goldberg builds books around Singleton's phrase. The concept of writing down the bones, or writing what you have uniquely experienced in life, seems to help many writers gain the edge over others. Goldberg says in *Writing Down the Bones*, "Writers end up writing about their obsessions. Things that haunt them; things they can't forget; stories they carry in their bodies waiting to be

released” (38). These obsessions authors carry with them often turn into common themes in their works. What they are haunted by in their real life seeps into their fictional works.

Flannery O’Conner wrote what she knew in all of her short stories, capturing the dialect and quirky customs of the South she grew up in. Benjamin Franklin’s personal financial tactics made their way into all of his works. It seems as though this concept of authors writing what they know should be looked at more closely when evaluating American writers. After all, the authors who changed the way American literature was written – Mark Twain with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Langston Hughes with “Harlem” and “I too, Sing America,” and J.D. Salinger with *Catcher* – wrote exactly what they knew best.

All this talk of authors writing what they know naturally leads me back to my original search to find purpose behind Salinger’s detailed description of clothing in his works. By looking at what Salinger was haunted by in his life, I hope to uncover the story of clothing in his fiction. For Salinger, popular fashion, the normal and acceptable attire of the average American, troubled him in his life and as a result became a major concern in his literary career.

Of what little we do know about Salinger, one thing is for certain: he was always in a place that put restrictions on what he could wear. Salinger spent one year of his pre-college days at “a private institution, Manhattan’s famed McBurney School” (French 22). A college prep academy and a private school, McBurney had a strict dress

code Salinger had to adhere to. But he does not stay there long. As French notes, “He reportedly flunked out after a year [and] in September, 1934, his father enrolled him at Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania” (22).

In one of the very few biographies written about Salinger, Ian Hamilton gives insight into Valley Forge: “There is indeed something studied and artificial about the school’s appearance: the dressed-up boy soldiers; the short-haired bushes, symmetrically spaced, as if they too were on parade; the canons and flags that seem to be stationed around every corner of its spotless, neatly shaven grounds” (22).¹ So here the creator of Holden Caulfield is, in a world of perfectly shaped bushes and freshly pressed military uniforms. Salinger must have disliked his time at Valley Forge, as many of his classmates do not remember him ever talking fondly about it.

One classmate states, “his conversation was frequently laced with sarcasm about others and the silly routines we had to obey and follow at school.”² Both of us hated the military regime and often wondered why we didn’t leave the school. I believe Jerry did everything he could not to earn a cadet promotion” (Hamilton 23). The routines of the school, especially the required uniform rules, became a subject of

¹ I use the word biography rather loosely here. No biography has ever been authorized by J.D. Salinger himself. Ian Hamilton came close with *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, not so much in that Salinger had approved it to begin with, but that Salinger actually took him to court for using letters he found from Salinger to his friends that were donated to the Princeton, Harvard and University of Texas Library. In the case, *Salinger vs. Random House Inc.*, Hamilton was forced to discard all the information from those letters and label his work as “criticism,’ ‘scholarship,’ and ‘research,’” but not a biography (*Salinger vs. Random House Inc.* 1).

² Unfortunately, in Ian Hamilton’s book he is unable to place names with quotations, as he promised the people he talked with that they would remain anonymous.

laughter to Salinger. Salinger never followed dress code as another student recalls, “His uniform was always rumpled in the wrong places. He never fit it. He always stuck out like a sore thumb in the long line of cadets” (23).

Disregarding dress code wasn't enough for Salinger, though; he needed to make fun of it and did so quite frequently. One of the most notable occasions Salinger pokes fun at Valley Forge's dress code, according to Hamilton, was when his mother visited him at school: “One day Salinger's mother came to visit the school. She commented on the red flashes that some boys wore on their caps (these were awarded for meritorious conduct of one sort or another). Salinger told her that she must at all costs avoid speaking with these boys. The flashes, he said, were worn as punishment for using profane language” (25).

Salinger's early reaction to standardized dress is telling, to say the least. The author had a disdain for anything that suggested conformity and assimilation. Social rules then, especially the proper way to dress, became a joke to Salinger. To him, to dress properly, and to fit in with the rest of the crowd was to give up personal freedom. Much like he viewed the red flashes on his peers' caps, Salinger views fashion etiquette as obscene.

But Valley Forge was not the only time he was faced with following a dress code. After high school, Salinger, according to French, “worked as an entertainer on the Swedish liner *M.S. Kungsholm*” (24). Such a job meant yet again, a standard

uniform, which did not go away any time soon for Salinger. In 1942, Salinger joined the army after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (24). Yet again, he was placed in uniform.

Salinger's time at Valley Forge, aboard the *M.S. Kungsholm*, and at army bases can be seen as major experiences in his earlier life that haunted him in his later years. He hated the idea of forced fashion so much that he decided to make his own style in his fiction. His disdain for clothing makes his way into many of his works, where the heroes and heroines are usually dressed in clothing unique to the setting.

In *Catcher*, Salinger sets Holden Caulfield apart from the rest of the characters through his red hunting hat. Teddy McArdle is also ostracized in "Teddy," as he is hardly dressed appropriately for a cruise line in his white t-shirt and baggy shorts. Why Salinger does this in "Teddy" and *Catcher* is expanded upon in the subsequent chapters.

One thing is for certain: Salinger knew exactly what he was doing when he thought of Holden and Teddy's dress. He knows clothing rituals. He is acutely aware of the effect clothing has on the mind and works this into both *Catcher* and "Teddy."

My job in this paper then, is to take the clothing Salinger dresses his characters in and unravel it. Alison Lurie once said the following in her book *The Language of Clothes*:

In language we distinguish between someone who speaks a sentence well – clearly, and with confidence and dignity – and someone who speaks it badly. In dress too, manner is as important as matter, and in

judging the meaning of a garment we will automatically consider whether it fits well or is too large or too small; whether it is old or new; and especially whether it is good condition, slightly ruffled and soiled or crushed and filthy. (13)

What Lurie talks about here is clothing in context. In order to judge whether clothing is fashionable or not, Lurie believes one must look at the world surrounding the clothing. Only when a person's clothing is taken into context can the clothing be deemed suitable or outdated, dirty or clean. Holden's hat, odd as it is in the streets of New York, would not seem out of place if he were a lumberjack. Teddy's rough-looking clothes might not be abnormal if Salinger would have made him homeless. In order to find out why Salinger describes clothing in more detail than anything else in his fiction, the clothing itself must be torn apart and sewn back together in a historical and textual context. Only then can the true meaning behind the clothing in Salinger's work be revealed. Only then can Salinger's fiction be undressed.

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING HOLDEN: REBELLION, ASSIMILATION, AND PSYCHOLOGY
IN *CATCHER*

“But as it proceeds on its insights [. . .] The Catcher in the Rye becomes more and more a case history of all of us.” – Ernest Jones³

Menace to society, adolescent icon, psychological mystery: for years critics have been trying to pinpoint Holden Caulfield’s place in the world of fiction, either labeling the New York teen as an adolescent revolutionary worthy of being idolized or a repulsive representation of male life in the 1950’s. A whiny teenage boy and an adult with profound ideas, Holden Caulfield simultaneously embodies adult and adolescent characteristics, a dichotomy which eventually drives him insane as he unsuccessfully searches for his place in society.

Popular in Holden criticism is the notion that the high school dropout represents a high standard for adolescents. Holden, in Louis Menand’s eyes, speaks for teenagers everywhere. Menand claims that, “Salinger is imagined to have given voice to what every adolescent, or at least, every sensitive, intelligent, middle-class adolescent, thinks, but is too inhibited to say, which is that success is a sham, and that successful people are mostly phonies” (2). To the majority of adolescents, Menand believes, Holden Caulfield becomes their spokesperson against adulthood. He becomes a standard to live up to, a prodigy for adolescents who are repulsed by the

³ “A Case History of All of Us,” 176.

world of adulthood, a teacher who gives “content to chemistry” about “the whole emotional burden of adolescence” (2).

Agreeing with Menand about Holden’s iconic stature among adolescents is Leerom Medovoi, who praises Salinger for creating a character who rises against the commodity mentality of the 1950’s and creates a segue to the free-thinking of the 1960’s. Medovoi claims that Holden, in a world obsessed with consumerism, desires to be unsuccessful by the 1950’s standards: “Holden, in his objection to commercial culture, is a democrat who abhors capitalist organization of his social world by economies of unequal status and wealth” (278). Holden’s rebellion against consumerism, according to Medovoi, becomes his reasoning behind classifying adults as “phonies” and privileging childhood: “The children Holden adores [. . .] share an innocence of commoditization, whether financial, symbolic or sexual” (278). In his title, Medovoi ends up praising Holden’s revolt against the standard way of thinking during the era in which *Catcher* was written by labeling the boy a “Paperback Hero” for his time.

While Menand and Medovoi make solid arguments for Holden as a powerful icon for adolescents, both critics overlook Holden’s mental illness. Holden, after all, admits himself to a medical institution where he can “take it easy” due to the “madman stuff” that occurs after he gets “pretty run-down” (*Catcher* 1). The fact that Holden receives medical treatment for his emotional breakdown becomes irrelevant to such critics, because adults are the cause of his breakdown. Menand states that

Holden “is not crazy; he tells his story from a sanatorium (where he has gone because of fear that he has t.b.), not a mental hospital. The brutality of the world makes him sick” (5). Whatever Holden suffers from, the cause of his illness becomes the fault of “phonies.” Such a claim as Menand’s overlooks other works of Salinger, such as “I’m Crazy,” where a younger Holden pronounces he is, in fact, mentally unstable. Furthermore, Menand’s claim denies Holden any responsibility for his own life, and, as a result, makes Holden a poor model to adolescents, as he merely teaches them angst without solution.

One of the most recent evaluations of Holden involves looking at the adolescent as a confused hypocrite. Many new critics take the point of view that Holden, while constantly calling those around him “phonies,” fails to see his own phoniness. Countering previous theories that Holden represents an adolescent icon, Edwards writes, “What these writers ignore is that Holden shares in the phoniness he loathes; that he lives by his unconscious needs and not the values he espouses; [and] that he withdraws from rather than faces the challenge of personal relationships” (554).⁴ To Edwards, Holden complains about the phoniness of the adult world, but he takes part in the phoniness himself.

Jonathan Yardley supports Edwards’s notion that Holden represents the phoniness he hates. Yardley centers in on Holden’s two-facedness throughout the

⁴ The theories Edwards refers to in his articles are those of from Carl Strauch, Charles Kegel, Iban Hassan and Louis Menand

novel and tears him apart for his hypocrisy saying, “I shared Caulfield’s contempt for ‘phonies’ as well as his sense of being different and his loneliness, but he seemed to me just about as phony as those he criticized as well as an unregenerate whiner and egotist” (1). Here Yardley presents a recent criticism of *Catcher*: he zeroes in on Holden’s ability to be a hero and a hypocrite at the same time.

To critics like Yardley and Edwards, Holden is all bark but no bite. In Yardley’s own words, “Holden is a rebel and all that – ‘the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life,’ ‘probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw’ – but he’s a softy at heart. He’s always pitying people” (2). While Holden preaches about being “phony,” he constantly contradicts himself. He wants to fight against phonies, but as Edwards puts it, “simply won’t make the effort” (555).

Such negative critiques of Holden bring to light his immaturity yet fail to even acknowledge his revolutionary ideas. While critics who praise Holden fail to see his sickness, critics who are quick to cast him in a negative light fail to look at his radical views on adult life as positive. Holden does, after all, embody a popular consensus of adulthood by adolescents and should be praised for doing so. In order to see all sides of Holden, critics must merge their ideas and look at Holden as an antagonist or protagonist, an innovative adult and an immature adolescent.

In order to merge these ideas, critics must first take a different approach to analyzing Holden. While academics have concentrated on Holden’s dialogue and actions throughout *Catcher* as a means to identify the character as antagonist or

protagonist, an important feature – one that may blur the lines between categories and identify what illness Holden Caulfield actually possesses – has been left by the wayside: Holden’s red hunting hat. This is not to say that an assessment of Holden purely based on dialogue and actions is inaccurate, but incomplete. While the critics mentioned above produce a valid answer to the question of Holden’s identity, they limit themselves and Holden by placing him into one category. Yes, he is an immature adolescent at times. True, Holden is also a rebel who starts some sort of adolescent revolution against growing up. All of these opinions are valid because Holden Caulfield suffers from a nervous breakdown after his brother Allie dies, and, as a result, shows bipolar behavior. Wanting to stay in the world of childhood he remembers Allie best, in and simultaneously trying to assimilate to the adult world, Holden constantly changes moods throughout the novel. Holden’s sickness is apparent in *Catcher*, and Salinger lifts it into a metaphor through his red hunting hat. Just as Holden puts on, takes off, and shifts around his red hunting hat, so he changes moods.

In order to recognize the importance of Holden’s hat to the novel, we must recognize what Salinger wants us to do with Holden as readers. From the first time we see Holden appear as a character in his starring role in *Catcher*, Salinger shows Holden as a troubled man with a mental illness. First appearing in *Collier’s Magazine* in 1945 in a short story called “I’m Crazy,” Holden bluntly tells his audience before leaving Pencey Prep that he is, as the title suggests, crazy:

That's me. Crazy. No kidding, I have a screw loose. But I had to stand there [outside of Pencey Prep] to feel the goodbye to the youngness of the place, as though I were an old man. The whole school was down below in the gym for the basketball game with the Saxon Charter slobs, and I was standing there to feel the goodbye. I stood there—boy, I was freezing to death—and I kept saying goodbye to myself, “Good-by, Caulfield. Goodby, you slob” (36).⁵

Not only does Holden admit his illness the first time readers see him, but he also gives evidence for his mental instability by standing in the freezing cold saying goodbye to himself.

His second appearance in the literary world doesn't prove much better. Published in 1946, “Slight Rebellion off Madison” is Salinger's prologue to “I'm Crazy.”⁶ In this story, Holden's illness becomes evident when he asks his friend Carl Luce a hypothetical question about going crazy: “you're one of these intellectual guys. Tell me something. Supposing you were fed up. Supposing you were going stark, staring mad. Supposing you wanted to quit school and everything and get the hell out

⁵ Later on, Salinger implements parts of “I'm Crazy” into *The Catcher in the Rye*, still keeping the overall theme of Holden's mental illness at the forefront. It could be argued that “I'm Crazy” is the short story version of *The Catcher in the Rye* or is at least its starting point, as it possesses a lot of the same story line.

⁶ It is important to note that while “Slight Rebellion off Madison” appears to be written after “I'm Crazy,” it actually wasn't. *The New Yorker* actually accepted “Slight Rebellion off Madison” in 1941 and had planned on printing the story that December. However, due to the attack on Pearl Harbor, publication was pushed back all the way until 1946. Thus, “Slight Rebellion off Madison” should be seen as a prologue to “I'm Crazy.”

of New York. What would you do?” (38). Such a question sets up Salinger’s readers for Holden’s admittance to being mentally ill in “I’m Crazy” and prepares them for his full-blown bipolar behavior in *Catcher*.

These two earlier appearances of Holden Caulfield should be a clue as to what Salinger does with him in *Catcher*. Obviously, Salinger wants to play around with the idea of someone going crazy and uses his early works about Holden Caulfield as experimental pieces before writing *Catcher* in 1951. Such an experiment beforehand prepares his readers for a more difficult psychoanalysis of Holden in *Catcher*, as they are not only given the job of recognizing Holden’s illness, but diagnosing it as well.

Once again we hear of Holden Caulfield’s mental instability from his own lips, a mere paragraph into *Catcher* when the narrator introduces his own story by saying, “I’ll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy” (Salinger 1). Holden proclaims himself a madman once again, although he never tells his audience why he is actually considered mad. Holden simply lets his audience know of his mental instability and his quest to get better by being in a “crummy place” which he hopes to leave in the “next month maybe” (1).

This ambiguity leaves the audience to draw their own conclusions about Holden’s sickness. In essence, Salinger makes his readers aware of Holden’s condition by having Holden state he is mentally ill in “Slight Rebellion off Madison” and “I’m Crazy” and then turns his faithful followers into therapists by having Holden explain

his case without diagnosing himself in *Catcher*. Readers are simply given what happens to Holden through the patient's eyes and then are left to diagnose him.

One critic who recognizes the psychoanalytical possibilities Salinger creates in *Catcher* is James Bryan, who calls for a "clinical approach" to the novel: "While a fair number of critics have referred to Holden's 'neurosis' none has accepted Salinger's invitation – proffered in the form of several key references to psychoanalysis – to participate in a full-fledged psychoanalytical reading" (1074; 1065). Bryan takes on Salinger's challenge in his article and identifies several important points in the novel that severely influence Holden's mental breakdown, but never actually draws a conclusion as to what type of illness Holden has. Bryan becomes a therapist who notices the symptoms and even goes as far as to write a report supplying evidence that Holden has some sort of disorder, but never actually diagnoses him.

Holden's hat holds the key to diagnosing Holden and taking Salinger up on his challenge. Holden's red, flannel hunting hat, which he buys off a city street vendor for the price of one dollar, appears in *Catcher* an astounding thirty-nine times. The wandering teen constantly takes the hat off and puts it back on in moments of nervousness and uncertainty. The hat, which he purchases in a whim, becomes his identity and ultimately his sickness. Sometimes his identity leans more towards that of a profound adult while wearing the hat, while other times, he acts more childish than a five year-old. Thus, his hat becomes the very symbol of adolescence: the struggle between childhood and adulthood. More importantly for Holden, the hat

becomes a symbol for his sickness. In essence, Salinger uses the hunting hat to create a physical symbol of Holden's back and forth mindset between becoming an adult and staying a child, between adhering to popular culture and breaking away from the "phonies," between childlike immaturity and an adult responsibility.

It is no coincidence that Holden purchases his red hunting hat on the day "the madman stuff" starts to happen (1). After visiting Mr. Spencer and going back to his room, Holden puts on the red hunting hat he purchased that very day: "I took off my coat and my tie and unbuttoned my shirt collar, and then I put on this hat that I'd bought in New York that morning" (17). Holden's purchase of the hat on the day he chooses to begin his narrative signifies the connection between the hat and his sickness.

Such a connection between clothing and psychology is not rare and has long been a topic of literary and cultural criticism. What someone wears represents what they believe and, more importantly for Holden, what mood they are in. Even in Holden's decade, the link between clothing and psychology was well known. J.C. Flugel, in his 1930's book *The Psychology of Clothes*, states that the first thing people react to upon meeting another human being is their clothing:

Apart from the face and hands [. . .]what we actually see and react to are, not the bodies, but the clothes of those about us [. . .]indeed the very word "personality," as we have been reminded by recent writers, implies a "mask," which is itself an article of clothing. Clothes, in fact,

though seemingly mere extraneous appendages, have entered into the very core of our existence as social beings. (15-16)

According to Frugel, clothing shapes social existence whether the wearer wants it to or not. Such a psychological theory like Frugel's would have been known by Salinger, if only realized on a superficial level. After all, the aphorism "clothes make the man" was around way before Salinger's time and even modernized by Mark Twain, who writes "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society" (942). More than likely Salinger knew just what placing a flannel red hunting hat on Holden would do to his image: it would make him a mismatched identity in a clearly-defined fashion era.

According to Shirley O'Donnel, male fashion in America during the 1940's and 50's meant clean cut suits, and even cleaner cut hats: "the period between World War II and the mid-fifties, when the atomic and space age began to take shape, was a time of transition from the image of the broad-shouldered he-man who fought the war to a new silhouette, slender and with a faintly Edwardian flavor[. . .] The most-popular hat for town or business wear was the snap-brim fedora" (153-4). In an American post-war consumer culture, men who wore the ever-so-popular fedora were seen as classy and composed, up-to the minute and fashionable.

Also popular in the time period of *Catcher* was gray flannel; this made its way onto hats, pants, and the widely-worn suit. The gray flannel suit became a staple for the typical everyday man as the authors of "Mass Society and Its Critics" point out,

noting how the model for post-war conventional manhood was found in such clothing:

The society that emerged out of the Second World War was given many names, as it evoked powerful images of conformity, loneliness, homogenization, standardization, and mediocrity. Individuals had become faceless figures in gray flannel suits, working in anonymous organizations and living in the little boxes made of ticky-tacky that Malvina Reynolds made fun of in her song. For intellectuals it almost seemed as if T. S. Eliot's nightmare vision had been realized: the open spaces, the wide frontier had become the wasteland of the mass society.

(Arden 34)

As seen above, males who went with the fashion of the time along with the somewhat terrifying mass society purchases donned gray flannel any way they could. In a consumer culture, men who didn't wear the "uniform [that] hung around for years covering Cary Grant and becoming a metaphor of ambiguous conformity" didn't fit in (Twitchell 205).

Such a man is Holden Caulfield, who breaks the stereotypical fashion mold of his time by wearing a hunting hat with ear flaps instead of a fedora made of red flannel instead of gray. Holden obviously associates the ever-so-popular gray flannel with assimilation to adulthood. Multiple times in the novel he makes fun of men who wear such clothing and identifies them as a part of the phony world he hates so much.

One instance displaying Holden's disregard for fitting in occurs during his late night visit to a New York club, where he comments on a man wearing such clothing: "On my right there was this very Joe Yale-looking guy, in a gray flannel suit and one of those flitty-looking Tattersall vests. All those Ivy League looking bastards look alike. My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go to one of those Ivy League colleges, if I was *dying*, for God's sake (Salinger 85)."

Holden's dislike for traditional adult clothing becomes evident in this statement and his purpose for wearing his red flannel hunting hat apparent. To Holden, a rebellion against anything that is considered to be adult-like is a necessity.

By choosing a red flannel hat instead of gray he goes in the exact opposite direction of emulating the majority; instead, he associates himself with the minority. Historically speaking, red flannel in the United States was worn by an extremely small minority. Up until Holden's time, red flannel was best known for being the dress of slaves and baggage porters. Slaves often wrapped themselves in red flannel to protect themselves against evil spirits according to Michael Gomez, who gets this theory from several ex-slaves who all state that "red flannel was a source of protection against evil" (205). Baggage porters also wore red flannel. But instead of using red flannel to protect themselves against evil, they wore the fabric as a way for their clients to easily identify them in a busy station. Winchester T. Wilbur says:

Passengers were calling frantically for porters to help them with their luggage. Porters were trying to find the passengers who wanted help

with their luggage, but because of the great throng milling in and out of the station it was quite difficult to make the right connections. But as in all other things some one individual outwits their competitors, and in this case it was James Williams. It occurred to him that if he could cause more people to see him it would speed up his earnings and make him more in demand. Williams therefore adjusted around his porter cap a piece of red flannel [. . .] Thus Mr. Williams birthed the institution of Red Cap. (6)

Thus, red flannel was associated with the minority by the time Holden came around. For Holden to wear flannel that is red is for him to immediately send a statement to the public that he wants to be in the minority, and that he, much like the slaves, tries to protect himself against the majority.

On one hand, while Holden's hat says he is a radical rebelling against adulthood, it simultaneously links him with childhood. The color red not only is associated with Holden's hat in *Catcher in the Rye*, it is linked with the hair color of his two younger siblings: his deceased brother Allie and his beloved sister Phoebe.⁷ Holden talks about being able to see Allie's red hair "one hundred and fifty yards" back while playing golf. Phoebe's red hair is associated with Allie's in Holden's mind

⁷ I think it is safe to say that the color of his other sibling's hair is irrelevant to this point, because D.B. is an adult. Holden doesn't want to be associated with the adult world, and therefore doesn't want to emulate the actions, dress, or appearance of D.B., whom he refers to in the novel as "a prostitute" (Salinger 2).

who says, "You ought to see old Phoebe. She has this sort of red hair, a little bit like Allie's was" (Salinger 67). While the two siblings Holden cares the most about have red hair, he does not. As a result, Holden uses his red hunting hat as compensation for his hair color. Holden already feels inadequate compared to Allie and Phoebe, as he mentions halfway through the novel, saying, "She's [Phoebe] had all A's ever since she started school. As a matter of fact, I'm the only dumb one in the family [. . .]my brother Allie, the one that died, that I told you about, was a wizard. I'm the only really dumb one" (67). By placing the red hat on his head, he becomes closer to Allie and Phoebe.

In one sense, Holden wants to be more like his siblings because he wishes to stay in the world of a child; in another, he really wants to be what Allie and Phoebe are in the novel: children who are well on their way to becoming socially acceptable adults. As mentioned above, Phoebe gets perfect scores in school. Allie, in Holden's words, composes himself perfectly all the time: "He never got mad at anybody. People with red hair are supposed to get mad very easily. But Allie never did, and he had very red hair" (38). For Holden to want to be like Allie and Phoebe is for him to want to be the child who perfectly adapts to homogenized adulthood.

Thus, for Holden, his hunting hat represents his rebellion against the ideal man in the 1950's and his desire to assimilate to such a social role. He is in fact wearing a hat, a stereotypical fashion of the day, yet rebels against typical fashions by making it a hunting hat instead of a fedora. And he does wear flannel, a pattern

brought into style by the President Eisenhower, but makes sure it is red, much like his sibling's hair. Therefore, the hat itself becomes representative of Holden's own struggle to stay a child or become an adult, as it is a mismatched fashion object lingering in between the division of boy's and men's clothing.

Early on in the Pencey Prep chapters, we see the emergence of the hat as a symbol for Holden's sickness. The very reasoning behind Holden's one dollar purchase shows one of his many moods – mature rationality. One of the first conversations Holden has with his readers on the day of the hat purchase is about his failure to be a good leader. He notes this failure when he tells how he lost the fencing team's equipment saying, "I was the goddam manager of the fencing team. Very big deal. We'd gone to New York that morning for this fencing meet with McBurney School. Only, we didn't have the meet. I left all the foils and equipment on the goddam subway" (3). Here Holden shows his inability to be a responsible adult. He loses the very things his team puts him in charge of and consequentially loses the respect of "the whole team [. . .] the whole way back on the train" (3). While he acts like the ostracism of the fencing team does not bother him by saying, "It was pretty funny, in a way," the exclusion of his colleagues clearly is upsetting to Holden. His distress about the situation is noted in the last three words "in a way," which shows his uncertainty that his irresponsibility is funny and his certainty that his actions are actually sad (3). Holden's realization of his shortcomings quickly becomes his motive behind his impulse purchase of the hat.

It is only after Holden's irresponsibility that he buys the hat. He notes this casually while describing the accessory, "It was this long red hunting hat, with one of those very, very long peaks. I saw it in the window of this sports store when we got out of the subway, just after I noticed I'd lost all the goddam foils. It only cost me a buck" (17). Holden's failure to be a responsible male and team leader, which brings back up once again after telling us of his purchase, becomes his purpose behind purchasing the hat. He feels insecure as an accountable male, so he buys the hat – the most masculine hat which he finds in the most masculine store – as a way to compensate for his shortcomings.

How exactly Holden's new purchase makes him feel better is how the hunting hat evolves from a simple fashion accessory to a metaphor for his illness. The first thing Holden does when he puts the hunting hat on is read a book, a very intellectual and adult-like act that compensates for his stupidity of losing the team equipment. But it is not just any book, it is *Out of Africa*, a memoir by Isak Dinesen of Europeans settling in Africa, which Holden "thought was going to stink" but actually liked, a book whose author disguised her real name, Karen von Blixen-Finecke, and takes on the personality of Isak Dinesen in the literary world, a book whose author might seem appealing to a teenage boy who lingers in between moods (18). Holden even admits to being fascinated with Isak Dinesen, saying, "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're done reading it, you wish the author who wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like

it. That doesn't happen much though. I wouldn't mind calling this Isak Dinesen up" (18). Thus, with his new hat and fascination with Isak Dinesen, Holden puts on the role of an intellectual adult and leaves behind his irresponsibility.

While Holden does wear the hat of a grown-up for a short time at the beginning of the novel, he quickly takes it off and puts on the role of an immature adolescent as soon as Ackley emerges to find him reading. Holden, annoyed and unable to focus on his reading puts his book down and picks up the typical characteristics of a teenage boy:

I put my book down on the floor. You couldn't read anything with a guy like Ackley around. It was impossible. I slid way the hell down my chair and watched old Ackley make himself at home. I was feeling sort of tired from the trip to New York and all, and I started yawning. Then I started horsing around a little bit. Sometimes I horse around quite a lot, just to keep from getting bored. (21)

Holden, disturbed during his reading time, switches back to a more appropriate mood for his age while being with Ackley. He does not continue to read, but immediately starts acting like a blind man fumbling around the dorm, an action which prompts Ackley to call him "nuts," and casts Holden in an immature light (21).

Holden's swift change in mood from adult-like intellectualizing to childlike horsing around is noted once again in his hunting hat, which changes positions on his head. Before Holden's immature personality can take over the intellectual personality,

he must first change the way he wears his hat: “What I did was, I pulled the old peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way, I couldn’t see a goddam thing. ‘I think I’m going blind,’ I said in this very hoarse voice. ‘Mother darling, everything’s getting so dark in here’” (19). Yet again we see Holden switching moods just as he changes the way he wears his hat.

Holden does not stay in this childlike frame of mind for long, but slips into a very adult-like investigative state. After continuing his role of an immature adolescent by “doing this tap dance just for the hell of it” while talking to Stradlater in the bathroom, Holden seems to suddenly change moods. He removes his hat when Stradlater asks where he bought it and switches to a more serious mode. Holden then starts to ask Stradlater questions. First he questions the identity of the mystery woman and rattles off guesses like “Fitzgerald,” and “that Phyllis Smith babe” (30). Yet, when he learns it is Jane Gallagher, he “nearly dropped dead” (31).

Holden’s infatuation with Jane causes him to put back on the hat of the intellectual while Stradlater is on his date with her. When Stradlater gets ready to leave, Holden tells us of his nervousness, saying, “I pulled the peak of my hunting hat around to the front all of a sudden for a change. I was getting sort of nervous all of a sudden.” In order to calm his nervousness, Holden turns around his hat, and plays the part of the adult intellectual once more by writing Stradlater’s composition.⁸

⁸ It could be suggested here that while Holden assumes the personality of the intellectual adult, he also plays the role of Stradlater. By doing Stradlater’s work, Holden in essence becomes Stradlater.

Yet, when Stradlater comes back from his date, Holden becomes uncomfortable again and slips back into his detective mode. When Stradlater fails to mention anything about his date with Jane willingly, Holden starts asking him questions: “He still didn’t say one single solitary word about Jane. So finally I said, ‘You’re back pretty goddam late if she only signed out for nine-thirty. Did you make her late by signing in [. . .] Did you go to New York [. . .] If you didn’t go to New York, where’d you go? Where’d you go with her if you didn’t go to New York’” (41). Holden’s interrogative side comes out in full force upon Stradlater’s return. When Stradlater finally admits he and Jane spent the evening in his car, Holden has a psychotic shift and immediately goes back into child mode, trying to “sock him” and “break his goddam throat open,” but failing miserably.

Concluding the Pencey Prep chapters, Salinger plays with the hunting hat once more, having Holden put it on in a final assertion to himself that he can handle being an adult. Holden speaks of this instance:

When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor.

I was sort of crying. I don’t know why. I put my red hunting hat on,

Much as Karen von Blixen-Finecke hides under the name of Isak Dinsen when she writes, so does Holden hide under Stradlater’s name, but composes the piece himself. Thus, when Holden becomes Stradlater, in his mind he also becomes Jane’s date. This is why his nervousness calms down. Holden cannot compare to Stradlater in a physical contest; however, he does beat him at an intellectual one. While Stradlater is physically present with Jane, Holden is intellectually connected and emotionally peaceful for the time being.

and turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice, "Sleep tight, ya morons!" I'll bet I woke up every bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out. (52)

Holden cries like a child until he puts on his hunting hat, changes moods and pretty much tells Pencey Prep and its inhabitants to go to hell before leaving forever.

Later on in the novel, right before entering the Edmont Hotel, Holden takes off the hunting hat he uses for child-like comfort while riding into the city because it doesn't look adult enough. He says, "I'd put on my red hunting cap when I was in the cab, just for the hell of it, but I took it off before I checked in. I didn't want to look like a screwball or something. Which is really ironic" (61). What once was a security blanket reassuring Holden while he went into New York, now becomes an enemy to the adolescent. Holden takes off his hat because he knows he needs to switch over to a mature mode and fit into the adult world.

For the rest of Holden's time in the hotel and the jazz clubs, we don't see the hunting hat. Not until Holden goes to the museum, which he is quite nostalgic about,

does the hunting hat reappear:

I took my old hunting hat out of my pocket while I walked, and put it on. I knew I wouldn't meet anybody that knew me, and it was pretty damp out. I kept walking and walking, and I kept thinking about old Phoebe going to that museum on Saturdays the way I used to. I thought how she'd see the same stuff I used to see, and how she'd be different every time she saw it. It didn't exactly depress me to think about it, but it didn't make me feel gay as hell, either (122).

Here we see Holden putting on his hat to once again go back to the world of childhood. After experiencing the adult life for a couple of days, he longs to be back in the museum seeing the same thing Phoebe sees every day. In this instance, Holden's hat becomes his portal to the world of childhood, where he can see the things he used to and escape the adult world.

After leaving the museum and attempting, once again, to be a part of adult life, Holden goes to the Wicker Bar "in this sort of swanky hotel" (141). When he realizes it isn't much fun, seeing it is much like his life at Pencey Prep, he goes down to the check out room, and starts to cry:

When I finally got down off the radiator and went out to the hat-check room, I was crying and all. I don't know why, but I was. I guess it was because I was feeling so damn depressed and lonesome. Then, when I went out to the checkroom, I couldn't find my goddam check. The hat-

check girl was very nice about it though. She gave me my coat
 anyway[. . .]I showed her my goddam red hunting hat and she liked it.

(153)

Again we see Holden's hunting hat providing him childlike comfort when he is tired of the adult world. Holden uses the hat to immaturely grab the attention of the hat girl and as a result feels better by doing so.⁹

The next to the last time we see Holden's hunting hat in his possession, we see him taking it off to blend into the adult world again. On his way to see Phoebe he takes off the hat "as not to look suspicious or anything" (157). In order for Holden to fit into the adult world for the final time, he must once again switch off his child mode and take off his hunting hat.

Ultimately, by the end of the novel, Salinger has left his readers enough evidence to diagnose Holden's sickness. He gives the hunting hat as a clue, and expects us to link it with Holden's mental illness. After all, Holden doesn't wear a red flannel shirt, he wears a red flannel hat that sits on his head, a hint from Salinger that should be completely evident. But what does Salinger want his readers to think about Holden's sickness?

The answer to this question can be found at the end of the novel, in quite possibly the most important appearance of the hat. Holden gives the prized hat to his

⁹ The word "girl" is important here. Holden never once refers to her as a woman, but a girl. Thus, the hat is used to impress another child, not an adult.

younger sister Phoebe after a late night visit: “I took my hunting hat out of my coat pocket and gave it to her. She likes those kind of crazy hats. She didn't want to take it, but I made her. I'll bet she slept with it on. She really likes those kind of hats. Then I told her again I'd give her a buzz if I got a chance, and then I left” (180).

Holden's gift to Phoebe becomes significant in recognizing what Salinger is trying to say about mental illnesses. On one level, for Holden to give Phoebe his prized hunting hat, which he wears throughout the whole novel, is to provide her with a personal possession in return for her Christmas money she gives him; on a more significant level, to give Phoebe his hat is to give her himself, in hopes she will accept him even though he is sick. Even though Phoebe doesn't want to take the hat, he makes her and anticipates it will become as important to her as it is to him, in hopes that she will hold it so close to her that she won't even want to take it off while she sleeps, in hopes that by wearing his hunting hat, Phoebe will understand, accept and identify with Holden's mental struggle.

However, while Holden desires Phoebe to accept his illness, she dismisses it. The one person Holden holds dear in the novel rejects the most symbolic element of his personality. The next day, before Holden leaves, Phoebe gives his hat back to him, leaving him alone in his struggle.

But what are we to make of Phoebe's rejection? Is Salinger trying to impose upon us the idea that the mentally ill should not be accepted by society? That those whose flannel is colored differently don't belong? Salinger is merely ahead of his time

by accepting mental illness in a time period where such an idea was looked down upon. Phoebe's rejection of Holden's illness can be seen as society rejecting the idea that mental illness can be the cause for seemingly irrational actions. She too is scared, as society was in the 1950's, to accept the idea of chemical imbalances causing disruptions in personalities. This is Salinger's way of rethinking mental illness in a time period where accepting the mentally ill was unacceptable.

After all, critics of the time period were not exactly thrilled by Holden or the idea of mental illness being a cause for disruptive personalities. Take Morris Longstreth, who writes in his 1951 article about the terror of emulation upon *Catcher's* release: "Fortunately, there cannot be many of him [Holden] yet. But one fears that a book like this given wide circulation may multiply his kind—as too easily happens when immorality and perversion are recounted by writers of talent whose work is countenanced in the name of art or good intention" (11). Longstreth's panicky fright about people like Holden being accepted gives a good idea about the mindset towards mental illness during the post-World War II era.

Even lovers of the book seemed to hate the idea that Holden couldn't quite adapt to one world or the other. Christopher Parker, who praised Salinger for being innovative, even dismissed Holden for his inability to conquer his own mind saying, "He'd met a dilemma—like all the rest of us; he didn't give in and he didn't ignore (like most of the rest of us). And he couldn't find any other solution except good old

Phoebe on the carousel. You could say he was trying to find himself, his identity, and all that; but that's a lot of categorical nonsense—who isn't" (257).

But for Holden, all he wants is for someone to accept his hat, as Robert Moore points out saying, "He doesn't want anyone to solve his problems for him. He isn't seeking easy solutions but, rather, the therapy of having someone care enough about him to listen to him, genuinely and sincerely and with love-and squalor, if you like" (160). All Holden wants Phoebe to do is listen to his problems, to give him a sign that it is okay for him to have this illness. But Phoebe ultimately chooses to give Holden's hat back and Holden ultimately goes to a place where he is accepted, a mental facility.

The simple rejection of Holden as a decent human being by society demonstrates the need for such fiction in order to bring mental illness to the forefront. Of course, Holden does not portray the perfect figure of male adulthood in *Catcher* because Salinger does not mean him to be that sort of character. Holden Caulfield, in all his adult and child-like glory, brings awareness to the many hats bipolar people wear, both in their mental illness and in their differing roles in society.

CHAPTER 3

A PAUSE AND A NOTE ON SALINGER

*“As a man discards
worn out clothes
to put on new and different ones,
so the embodied self
discards
its worn-out bodies
to take on other new ones.”*
– *from the Second Teaching of the Bhagavad Gita*¹⁰

As seen in *Catcher*, Salinger’s time spent wearing a uniform at Valley Forge and the Army had a lasting effect on his fiction. Salinger’s disdain for popular fashion is shown through Holden’s hat, which becomes the very antithesis of stylish dress and highlights an important psychological feature in the character. For Salinger, being unfashionable is not a bad thing. For a character to wear clothing that is unpopular is for that character to step towards individuality and away from conformity.

Even though he is psychologically unstable, Holden is not to be looked down upon for being different. If anything, Holden should be recognized as a key character for understanding Salinger’s work. Holden’s hat not only represents his psychology, but simultaneously gives readers a glimpse into what Salinger is trying to do with clothing in his literature. Characters who dress differently than others in Salinger’s pieces are usually psychologically different than those that surround them.

¹⁰ Miller, 1500.

Let's go back to the stories mentioned in Chapter One. Pete Lawlor, the older man who barges into an army interview wearing a pit-stained jacket in "Personal Notes on an Infantryman," is clearly different than the other men in the office. The clothing of the soldiers surrounding Pete is starched, neatly pressed and tucked in where it should be. Right away Salinger sets Pete apart from the rest of the characters in the story.

In *Franny*, the raccoon jacket she wears definitely puts her in a category of her own. The other train passengers are seen wearing rather standard attire for just getting off a train. Pea coats and simple dresses seem to be the standard dress code for the other female passengers. Yet, Franny adorns herself in raccoon fur and instantaneously sets herself apart from the rest of the crowd.

Of course Sybil's yellow bikini in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is immediately contrasted with Seymour's heavy attire. Seymour is seen wearing a terry-cloth robe, a piece of clothing that, when compared to the lightweight material swimsuits are made with, seems rather heavy. Thus, Sybil is immediately contrasted with Seymour just by her clothing. In all of these stories, Salinger uses fashion to set characters apart from one another. Their psychological differences are initially highlighted by their style.

As we shall see in chapter four, Salinger does the same thing with Teddy McArdle's clothing. Teddy is immediately set apart from the rest of the characters in

the story simply by his clothing. But before moving on to a textual analysis of Teddy, we must first look back at what influenced Salinger most while writing this story.

While Salinger composed *Nine Stories*, he also developed an interest in Eastern philosophy, especially the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Salinger became so enthralled by the religion, that he even tried to convince his publisher to translate a book that dealt with Vedantin Sri Ramakrishna: “Salinger apparently discovered Vedanta via the bibliography of the Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna, for in March of 1952, he sent a copy of *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* to a British publisher urging him to bring out an English edition” (Hamilton 127). If Salinger was so adamant to bring Vedantic works to the United States, he was probably inclined to put core beliefs of the religion into his works.

Just as other beliefs of Salinger make their way into his works, so does his religious point of view during the time “Teddy” was written. Of course this is most evident in his alter-ego Buddy Glass, who holds the exact same religious viewpoint as Salinger in “Seymour: an Introduction.” At the beginning of the story, the author disclaims rumors that he practices Zen Buddhism and sets the record straight as to what he actually practices:

(Would it be out of order for me to say that both Seymour's and my roots in Eastern philosophy - if I may hesitantly call them 'roots' - were, are, planted in the New and Old Testaments, Advaita Vedanta, and classical Taoism? I tend to regard myself, if at all by anything as

sweet as an Eastern name, as a fourth-class Karma Yogin, with perhaps a little Jnana Yoga thrown in to spice up the pot). (208)

An advocate of Eastern philosophy, both Salinger and Buddy Glass implant their religious beliefs in to “Teddy,” as seen through the main character himself.

Sri Ramakrishna, the man Salinger read about and wanted to produce an English biography of, has characteristics much like Salinger’s Teddy. One such commonality between Sri Ramakrishna and Teddy is their belief that religious practices always trump social traditions. When Sri Ramakrishna was a boy he, like Teddy, had a disregard for social practices if it meant abandoning his religious beliefs.

When Sri Ramakrishna was around ten, he accepted his first bhikha¹¹ from a woman blacksmith, even though social norms suggested he receive it from a family member or someone in the same class. Sri Ramakrishna broke away from social norms because he had promised the woman long before that he would allow her to be the giver of his first bhikha. For him, to break a promise would be a far worse crime for him to commit than to disregard social customs. Actions such as these were common in Sri Ramakrishna’s life, as noted in *The Life of Ramakrishna*: “Even at that tender age, Sri Ramakrishna’s every act had its meaning, and that his unerring intuition empowered him to recognize religious sincerity and to prefer it to social regulations, which necessary as they are under ordinary circumstances, must be set aside” (26).

¹¹ To receive the first bhikha in Vedantic philosophy is to receive a first alm from someone in the same caste as your own. For Sri Ramikrishna to obtain his first bhikha from a woman from such a lower caste than him was frowned upon.

Salinger's infatuation with Sri Ramakrishna can be seen in "Teddy," as Teddy McArdle shares the same disdain for social norms as the young Sri Ramakrishna. Teddy fails to adhere to social norms when it comes to dress, because he feels it interferes with his religious beliefs. Yet, Teddy is also different from Sri Ramakrishna in one respect: he is not completely committed to Vedantic philosophy. All this, as we shall see in chapter four, is highlighted by Teddy's dress.

In Teddy, we see Salinger *Writing Down the Bones* as Natalie Goldberg puts it, of not only clothes, but religion as well. The spiritual enlightening of Salinger has a dramatic effect on the way the author uses clothing. Clothing is no longer used as a catalyst for mood change, but a channel to proclaim faith. It is no longer a symbol of sickness, but a sign of strength. Keeping Salinger's religious views in mind, let us turn to "Teddy."

CHAPTER 4

TEDDY'S DIRTY WHITE T-SHIRT: CLOTHING AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

IN "TEDDY"

"What this reader loves about Mr. Salinger's stories is that they honor what is unique and precious in each person on earth. Their author has the courage--it is more like the earned right and privilege--to experiment at the risk of not being understood"

– Eudora Welty

Catcher caught critics' attention simply because they did not know whether to cast Holden Caulfield as a hero or villain. Two years later, Salinger found himself in the critics' spotlight again for a completely different reason: his publication of "Teddy" in *The New Yorker*. What would later become the final piece in *Nine Stories*, "Teddy" had critics and readers asking one question: what in the hell just happened?

Based on the opening pages, "Teddy" seems like a simple story about a ten-year-old boy and his family enjoying a vacation aboard a cruise line. The sun is shining, the cruise staff is smiling, and Teddy McArdle is getting ready for his swimming lesson. But in true form, Salinger switches the plot just when the reader gets comfortable, exposing Teddy as anything but ordinary and killing off a member of the McArdle clan. Exactly who dies at the end of "Teddy" is precisely the reason Salinger's short story got so much attention. With an ambiguous ending, readers are unsure if Teddy kills his sister Booper by pushing her into an empty pool, or if it is Booper who does the pushing, sending Teddy to his death.

Such a vague ending left critics and readers alike baffled. While Salinger received praise for other tales in *Nine Stories* for being unique, “Teddy” seemed to frighten readers. One anonymous reviewer states the tale “seems to verge on being an ogre” (“Nine” 98). He continues bashing “Teddy” by saying “[Salinger] reaches a new level of nightmarish reality” (98). On one level, readers were horrified at the death Salinger sneaks in at the end; on another, readers disliked the tale because Salinger doesn’t spell out who actually dies. Unlike “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” where readers are fully aware that Seymour Glass kills himself while vacationing, “Teddy” creates a feeling of discomfort not only because of the death, but because of the ambiguity. The death at the end of the story is not spelled out for readers.

The response to Salinger’s confusing ending is rather ironic, since Salinger deeply wants his readers to understand his work. Alsen Eberhard explains Salinger’s surprise endings in *Nine Stories*, noting the author’s desire for his readers to read stories like “Teddy” multiple times: “The surprise endings of ‘A Perfect Day for Bananafish,’ and ‘Teddy’ are not merely narrative tricks as in some of Salinger’s apprentice pieces. Instead, these surprise endings seem to be designed to make us re-read the stories in order to find explanations for the unexpected behavior of the central characters” (81). To Eberhard, the obscure ending of “Teddy” is not meant to deter Salinger’s readers from finding out who really dies – it is not a cruel trick or an elitist stunt – but a challenge intended for the reader. Salinger wants his readers to put as much time into reading his stories as he puts into writing them.

One can see upon re-reading “Teddy,” that clothing yet again plays a vital part in Salinger’s work. The fashion Salinger emphasizes major qualities in his characters. In every blouse, pant and jacket is a clue about a “Teddy” character. But to understand the fashion in “Teddy,” and the meaning behind clothes, readers must first become acquainted with the man who writes Teddy’s tale: Buddy Glass.

Fictional author and alter-ego of Salinger himself, Buddy Glass makes his biggest appearance in “Seymour: an Introduction,” a short story where the author writes directly to his readers.¹² Talking about everything from his beloved brother Seymour to his most hated questions by fans, Buddy gives his readers an inside look into his creative mind. Such an advantage serves readers questioning the ending of his story “Teddy” rather well. In the middle of his ranting and raving about the uneducated, Buddy devotes a section to inform his readers about a tool he finds rather helpful in evaluating stories:

The terrible subject of clothes should get in here somewhere. What a marvelous convenience it would be if writers could let themselves describe their characters' clothes, article by article, crease by crease.

What stops us? In part, the tendency to give the reader, whom we've never met, either the short end or the benefit of the doubt - the short

¹² Since Buddy Glass and Salinger share biographical information as well as core beliefs, most of Salinger’s better known critics assume Buddy Glass is Salinger in fictional form. It is also a well known fact that Buddy Glass narrates “Teddy,” as he talks about the short story in “Seymour: an introduction.”

end when we don't credit him with knowing as much about men and mores as we do, the benefit when we prefer not to believe that he has the same kind of petty, sophisticated data at his fingertips that we have. For example, when I'm at my foot doctor's and I run across a photograph in *Peekaboo* magazine of a certain kind of up-and-coming American public personality - a movie star, a politician, a newly appointed college president - and the man is shown at home with a beagle at his feet, a Picasso on the wall, and himself wearing a Norfolk jacket, I'll usually be very nice to the dog and civil enough to the Picasso, but I can be intolerable when it comes to drawing conclusions about Norfolk jackets on American public figures.¹³ If, that is, I'm not taken with the particular personage in the first place the jacket will cinch it. I'll assume from it that his horizons are widening just too goddam fast to suit me.¹⁴ ("Seymour" 185-6)

What Buddy says in the above lines becomes important to understanding attire in "Teddy." The author admits that he sees clothing as an easy way for writers to let readers into the minds of their characters. Since Buddy judges the "up-and-coming

¹³ Norfolk jackets are loose suits with a belt of the same material wrapped around it and box pleats in the back. The suits were mainly produced to make shooting easier, while wearing a suit.

¹⁴ It is important to the overall argument that clothing is an important tool used by Salinger to magnify the psychology of his characters that we note that this is Salinger's alter-ego talking. Thus, it could be suggested that Salinger himself believes exactly as Buddy does in the above quotation.

American public personality” in *Peekaboo* by his Norfolk attire, he assumes and expects his readers will do the same. Buddy suggests then, that readers “clinch” any apprehensions or beliefs they may have about characters based on the clothing worn by the characters in question. First impressions and final conclusions on characters in Buddy’s work should be based upon their clothing, not their words or actions. A character’s first appearance in a Buddy Glass piece is a critical one, becoming an important clue to his personality, his place in the story and even his psychological state of being.

The physical appearance then, of main characters in Buddy Glass’s “Teddy” becomes important in understanding the story. The dress of Teddy, Booper, Mr. and Mrs. McArdle, and Mr. Nicholson becomes more than just simple fashion. Comparing the raggedy clothing Teddy wears to the fashionable attire the rest of the characters adorn themselves in turns out to be an important clue in discovering the mysterious ending of the story. If readers take into consideration the attire in “Teddy,” what at first appears to be a tragic tale ending in death becomes an intelligent story about religious contradiction.

Just as Holden’s red hunting hat plays a vital part in understanding the plot in *Catcher*, so does Teddy’s incongruent attire shed light on the abstract ending of his debut tale. Teddy’s apparel is the first we see in the short story. Mentioned in the second paragraph, Teddy’s dress is anything but acceptable on a cruise line. Seen wearing “dirty, white ankle-sneakers, no socks, seersucker shorts that were both too

long for him and at least a size too large in the seat, an overly laundered T-shirt that had a hole the size of a dime in the right shoulder, and an incongruously handsome, black alligator belt,” Teddy sticks out sorely in a crowd that wears top of the line clothing while vacationing (167). In a world where clothing should not have a spot on it and fit perfectly, Teddy makes a statement against tradition by dressing in torn clothing and dirty sneakers.

Take into consideration the fashion of other characters aboard the cruise line. The first people we see Teddy juxtaposed against are Mr. and Mrs. McArdle. Only making their appearance for a few pages at the beginning of the story, the McArdles are seen being lazy and loving every minute of it. Aboard the cruise line, on which the McArdle’s are travelling back to the United States after vacationing in England and Scotland, Mr. and Mrs. McArdle are doing nothing and wearing hardly any clothes. Mr. McArdle is on the bed “lying supine, in just the trousers of his pajamas, a lighted cigarette in his right hand” while Mrs. McArdle is first introduced to readers simply wrapped up in a white sheet (166).

With the McArdles hardly wearing anything, the reader’s attention is drawn to their accessories. The relationship between Teddy and his father is immediately highlighted by Mr. McArdle’s 20 pound Gladstone bag.¹⁵ The leather bag, which became a hot item among travelers in the early 1900’s, shows the difference between

¹⁵ The fact that Mr. McArdle spends twenty pounds on a bag is another sign readers should pay attention to. Spending twenty pounds in 1953, merely years after the end of the Great Depression, is a rather frivolous expenditure, especially for a bag.

father and son when it comes to material possessions. Teddy couldn't care less about the bag. A bag is simply a bag to Teddy, no matter what it looks like or how much it costs. Teddy's lack of concern for quality luggage is shown as Teddy stands on Mr. McArdle's "new looking cowhide Gladstone" in order to "better see out of his parents' open porthole" (167).

Mr. McArdle on the other hand, feels much differently. The first words Mr. McArdle speaks to Teddy, and the first line of the tale itself, are threatening ones, warning Teddy of the consequence he will obtain for standing on his precious Gladstone. Mr. McArdle says, "I'll exquisite day *you*, buddy, if you don't get down off that bag this minute. And I mean it" (166). Here we see how Mr. McArdle feels about his bag: he sees it as a sign of wealth. Mr. McArdle wishes to keep his expensive bag in tip-top condition. If Teddy damages the bag, he simultaneously damages how Mr. McArdle appears to the public.

Lawrence Langner makes the connection between fashion and social status saying, "Man from the earliest times has worn clothes to overcome his feelings of inferiority and to achieve a conviction of his superiority to the rest of creation, including members of his own family and tribe, and to win admiration and to assure himself that he 'belongs'" (12). Mr. McArdle, although he is a radio personality, desires to portray himself as a wealthy citizen. To him, the Gladstone symbolizes wealth, and to damage the piece of luggage is to damage his reputation.

But Mr. McArdle's Gladstone is not the only material possession Teddy has no care for; Mr. McArdle's Leica camera also becomes subject to Teddy's indifference. Teddy gives Mr. McArdle's Leica to his younger sister in order to keep her entertained and out of trouble aboard the ship. Teddy's decision to give Booper the camera does not sit well with Mr. McArdle, who screams at his son for giving a young girl such expensive equipment:

“You gave her the *camera!*” he said. “What the hell's the idea? My goddam Leica? I'm not going to have a six-year-old child gallivanting all over-”

“I showed her how to hold it so she won't drop it,” Teddy said. “And I took the film out, naturally.”

“I want that camera, Teddy. You hear me? I want you to get down off that bag this minute, and I want that camera back in this room *in five minutes* – or there's going to be one little genius among the missing. Is that clear?” (172)

Mr. McArdle gets angry once he realizes his Leica is in jeopardy. He cannot believe such an expensive camera was handed off to a child.

But to Teddy, handing off the camera to Booper is not a problem, but a solution. Teddy wants to keep Booper from “meandering all around the deck chairs again, bothering people,” so he gives her the camera (172). He does not see the issue as severe when his dad is yelling at him. Instead, he nonchalantly interrupts his

fathers ranting, reasoning that it will be alright because he taught Booper how to hold the camera properly. While Teddy only sees entertainment in the Leica and has no problem giving it to Booper, Mr. McArdle only sees dollar signs being thrown away.

Oddly enough, although Mr. McArdle cares deeply for his Leica and his Gladstone, he does nothing to protect them. Even when he is angry with Teddy for standing on his Gladstone bag, Mr. McArdle still cannot bring himself to exert any energy to get up out of bed and protect his beloved piece of luggage: “Viciously, with more a whimper than a sigh, he [Mr. McArdle] foot-pushed his top sheet clear of his ankles, as though any kind of coverlet was too much for his sunburned, debilitated-looking body to bear” (166). Instead of getting up and taking the bag away from Teddy, or going and getting the Leica from Booper, Mr. McArdle simply lies on the bed. Mr. McArdle is simply a man who wants to have the fine things in life – expensive bags and pricey cameras – but is too lazy and careless to get out of bed and protect them when they are in danger of being damaged. Thus, the McArdles are presented as materialistic tourists who want nothing more than to have the world cater to them from the comfort of their own bed.

Teddy, on the other hand, is juxtaposed against his parents’ laziness in the first two pages. For one, he is the first McArdle in the story shown fully dressed. Teddy is clearly going somewhere in the story. Watching the world from his bed is not an option. Not only is Teddy dressed, his clothes are worn down. He has a hole in the shoulder of his shirt. He has clearly worn his outfit many times, which suggests he

does not care about how he appears to the public in any way, shape or form. Even his hair is in need of trimming.

Some may be quick to blame Teddy's poor fashion sense on his age, saying that he is merely a ten-year-old boy who has no idea about dressing properly. Yet, we see that Teddy is more than aware of proper dress code aboard the ship when it comes to his sister. Teddy is seen dressing Booper adequately enough to go about on the ship. When Mrs. McArdle asks Teddy to go find his younger sister so she can make sure she is properly dressed, Teddy replies, "She's adequately covered. I made her wear dungarees" (171). While on one hand Teddy is quite young, he is also extremely aware of socially acceptable norms. He knows what Booper had on when she initially tried to leave the McArdle's room would not do, so he made her change. It is not that Teddy is unaware of how to dress; he simply makes a choice to be different.

Readers can notice Teddy's difference as he walks to his swimming lesson, passing others aboard the cruise ship that look nothing like him. He first passes a woman who works for the liner in the passageway to the main deck: "From the opposite end, a huge, blond woman in a starched white uniform was coming toward him, carrying a vase of long-stemmed, red roses. As she passed Teddy, she put out her left hand and grazed the top of his head with it, saying, 'Somebody needs a haircut'" (174). As seen in the above passage, Teddy isn't even dressed as nicely as the cruise ship employees. The woman's clothes are also white like Teddy's, but are much more presentable. She has them pressed nicely and they are clean. Teddy's clothing on the

other hand is loose and raggedy. His appearance is even reprimanded by the woman, who humorously tells him he needs a haircut.

But this is not the only person who is better dressed than Teddy. When the boy goes to the purser's desk on the main deck to ask a question, he meets a sharply dressed "good-looking girl in a naval uniform" with a "lipsticky smile" (174; 175). She too is dressed better than Teddy. Then there is Booper's shuffleboard friend Myron, "a very small boy" who wears "a cotton sun suit" (176). Teddy doesn't seem to fit in fashion wise anywhere on the ship. He isn't dressed well enough to be an employee on the ship or a guest.

Teddy's fashion doesn't prove to fit in much better once he gets to the pool. His appearance is the reason for his isolation by the pool as noted by the narrator of the story:

Only one or two of the reclining passengers spoke to him – that is, made any of the commonplace pleasantries adults are sometimes prone to make to a ten-year-old boy who is singlemindedly looking for the chair that belongs to him. His youngness and single-mindedness were obvious enough, but perhaps his general demeanor altogether lacked, or had too little of, that sort of cute solemnity that many adults readily speak up, or down to. His clothes may have had something to do with it, too. The hole in the shoulder of his Tshirt was not a cute hole. The

excess material in the seat of his seersucker shorts, the excess length of the shorts themselves, were not cute excesses. (178)

It becomes clear at this point in the story, that Teddy's clothing makes him stand out aboard the cruise ship. His dress is so far away from being fashionable that people beside the pool won't even greet him casually.

There is, of course, one man who does talk to Teddy by the pool, and his fashionable presence also sheds light on how poorly Teddy is dressed. While lounging in a chair and writing in his journal, Teddy is interrupted by Bob Nicholson. Before we know anything about Mr. Nicholson, we first see what he is wearing. Here Buddy goes into great detail about clothing yet again:

He [Mr. Nicholson] was dressed, for the most part, in Eastern seaboard regimentals: a turf haircut on top, run-down brogues on the bottom, with a somewhat mixed uniform in between – buff-colored woolen socks, charcoal-gray trousers, a button-down collar shirt, no necktie, and a herringbone jacket that looked as though it had been properly aged in some of the more popular postgraduate seminars at Yale, or Harvard, or Princeton. (183)

Mr. Nicholson's dress, contrasted against Teddy's is professional, academic, and representative of the upper class. Buddy makes it a point to say that Mr. Nicholson dresses like an Ivy League academic. If the McArdle's are portrayed as being lazy based on their attire at the beginning of the story, then Mr. Nicholson is the exact

opposite. Through his dress, Nicholson becomes a symbol of the higher education. But more importantly he becomes part of “phony” world.¹⁶

Looking at the difference in attire between the central characters of the story, it becomes clear that Teddy is different from the world he lives in. Introduced after his parents and before Mr. Nicholson, Teddy is situated in between a world of laziness and a world of prestige education, neither of which he belongs to. Teddy’s clothes places him in a world apart from his family, his friends, and his acquaintances on the ship.

To those unfamiliar with Salinger’s work, Teddy’s clothing might symbolize rebellion against parental figures, since the boy initially seems like a troublesome character to the story. He disobeys his father by continuing to stand on his Gladstone, and his style is unfashionable, messy, and careless. Teddy seems like a mischievous boy, one who prides himself in being different simply to gain attention.

Yet, Teddy’s clothing means much more than simple rebellion for the purpose of gaining affection. The world Teddy’s shabby clothes belong in is one where physical appearance does not matter. In fact, it is a realm where dressing fashionably does not help a person’s way of life, but hinders it.

¹⁶ The “phony” world was first introduced in *Catcher in the Rye* is a staple in Salinger’s work. Character’s in the phony world will more than likely be part of an Ivy League crowd or in the upper class. As opposed to other characters, those in the “phony” world are often seen as living such a prestigious life that they become separated from the rest of society and therefore are not “real.”

Eberhard Alsen seems to know exactly what world Teddy belongs to as he talks about the incorporation of some ideas from Vedanta philosophy in “Teddy”:

Salinger’s conversion¹⁷ to Vedanta Hinduism is reflected in the story ‘Teddy’ (1953). The story is a Socratic dialogue between the ten-year-old child prodigy Teddy McArdle and a skeptical education professor by the name of Bob Nicholson. In that conversation, Teddy provides an exposition of the basic ideas of Vedanta Hinduism: the belief in reincarnation. (10)

Teddy talks about practicing the basics of Vedanta philosophy multiple times in the story. He writes in his diary “Try the sports deck for meditation tomorrow morning before breakfast but do not lose consciousness” (180). Thus, Teddy meditates in order to become one with Brahman. He also talks of his previous reincarnations with Bob Nicholson, who turns out to be a scholar studying the young boy.

Long before the young boy ever talks about his faith in the Vedanta, we see that he sets himself apart from others through his attire. By dressing not caring about his appearance, Teddy is reducing the importance of worldly possessions in his life and practicing core principle in Vedanta philosophy. In his book *The Brahma Sutra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life*, S. Radhakrishnan talks about letting go of the unreal

¹⁷ Here, Alsen uses the word “conversion” as a trope. While Salinger does study Vedanta philosophy, he never technically converts. In order to convert to the Vedantic sect, one must first be part of a monastery for a certain amount of time, then actually participate in his own “funeral,” killing off the old self and birthing the new, Vedantic self. Salinger never does that; therefore, he never truly converts.

to attain release:¹⁸ “Ś. opens his commentary with the statement of the existence of the pure Self free from any impurity as the ultimate truth[. . .] In our waking life we identify the Self with many unreal things but in dreamless sleep, when we are free from phenomenal notions, the nature of our true state as blessedness is partially released” (31).¹⁹ To practicing Vedantins desiring to attain release, material possessions become nothing more than “phenomenal notions” of the world. Clothing, housing and financial status becomes unimportant as it can block the pathway to enlightenment. A serious believer of Vedanta philosophy will renounce anything that has to do with outward appearances.

Thus, it becomes clear why Teddy dresses himself in raggedy clothing. Teddy desires to reach enlightenment, as William Stein notes, and as a result tries to leave behind any attachment to material possessions:

Teddy, like the creator Brahman, remains the detached spectator of his inescapable involvements in time and history. As an adept in the discipline of yoga (its meditative techniques), he has achieved the state of *jivanamukta* (release from the egotistical desires induced by the attachment to external things). (253)

¹⁸ To attain release, according to Radhakrishnan, is “to recognize the highest truth as *Brahman*” (36). Once this is realized, believers no longer have to go through reincarnation, for they have reached the highest stage and are one with God.

¹⁹ “Ś,” according to Radhakrishnan, is the name of the famous Hindu commentator on the *Brahma Sutra*. He is estimated to have lived from A.D. 788-820. In Hindu belief he yielded many disciples who also went on to comment on the meanings behind the *Brahma Sutra* (27-8).

For Teddy to get to the final stage of enlightenment, he must get rid of “egotistical desires” and “external things.” Only then can he get to the stage where he can become one with God.

Teddy, for the most part, does get rid of the external in the story. Yet, one accessory Teddy wears compromises his path to enlightenment: the black alligator belt. All the rest of Teddy’s clothing can easily be seen as a metaphor for his faith. The color white, which Teddy chooses as his primary color in his outfit, signifies purity and spirituality. It also represents the very thing Teddy is trying to fight against: materialism. Lurie explains: “Because it is so easily soiled physically as well as symbolically, white has always been popular with those who wish to demonstrate wealth and status through the conspicuous freedom from manual labor” (185). As Lurie points out, the wealthy wear clean white clothes to show just how unlikely they are to get dirty. But Teddy’s white attire is anything but clean. His white sneakers are filthy, and he eventually wipes cigarette ash on his shorts after cleaning up his father’s mess. For Teddy, wearing dirty white clothing becomes his way of showing his disapproval of materialism.

However, the black alligator belt sends quite a different message. Salinger himself notes that the belt is out of sync with the rest of Teddy’s outfit by saying it is “incongruously handsome” (167). Perhaps by Salinger placing such an adjective in the sentence, he is trying to give us a clue as to what the belt means. The belt is obviously meant to stick out. The black dominates the white completely and the shiny finish

draws the human eye to it, not Teddy's torn clothes. The fact that it is made out of alligator denotes that it is expensive and hard to attain. For Teddy to wear such an accessory is to block his path to enlightenment.

It would seem that Teddy would discard anything in his life that causes his pathway to enlightenment to be hindered as it has already been once in his previous life. Teddy talks of his fall from grace as a man in India due to his relationship with an unnamed woman, saying, "I met a lady, and sort of stopped meditating[. . .]I would have had to take another body and come back to earth again anyway – I mean I wasn't so spiritually advanced that I could have died, if I hadn't met that lady, and then gone straight to Brahma and never again have to come back to earth" ("Teddy" 188). Since Teddy stopped meditating, he stopped going down the path to enlightenment and as a result was reincarnated as an American boy.

We know, of course, that Teddy is not happy with his last reincarnation. He leaves India, the go-to country for any believer of Vedantic philosophy and is placed in America, the consumerist capital of the world. Teddy hates being in America as it is such a materialistic society and questions his reincarnation, saying, "I wouldn't have had to get incarnated in an *American body* if I hadn't met that lady. I mean it's very hard to meditate and love a spiritual life in America. People think you're a freak if you try" ("Nine" 188). As seen by the above quote, Teddy seems angry with his new social status in life.

But as much as Teddy hates his reincarnation, he gives into the materialistic society he dislikes so much by wearing the alligator belt. Teddy does not completely renounce the outward appearance as a true student of Vedantic philosophy would, but rejects some things, while keeping others. Just as Teddy chose to keep the woman he loved in India, even though she blocked his pathway to enlightenment, so does he choose to keep wearing his black alligator belt.

Teddy's choice to wear the belt shows his conflicted nature. He is not completely dedicated to Vedantic philosophy – partly because he is not happy about his reincarnation, and partly because he wishes to be connected to his family in some way, even if it means being thrown off the path to enlightenment a little. Therefore, it becomes obvious that Teddy's belt becomes his way of proclaiming his struggle between believing fully in Vedantic philosophy and completely renouncing the ways of his family. Teddy cannot completely deny materialism because to do so would be to disconnect from his materialistic family and to depend solely on a philosophy that put him in an undesirable place.

It is evident that Teddy is dissatisfied and conflicted with his current state. It is also evident that the boy is aware that he can choose between two moments to die: one on the day of the story, the other much later in his life. He writes in his journal: "It will either happen today or February 14, 1958 when I am sixteen" (182). Teddy is aware he is going to die and is even more conscious that he ultimately can choose when to give into death. Perhaps he gains this acuteness via his meditation, or

perhaps he just has an innate feeling. Either way, Teddy knows that death will come to him on that day or when he is sixteen, and he knows he holds the power to choose his moment to die.

Teddy's conflicted nature seems to give him a reason to want to leave America, as Alsen points out: "Teddy McArdle chooses to die on the earlier of the two possible dates because he finds it too hard to lead a spiritual life in America and he wants to move on to a new incarnation in which he can make a better advancement toward union with God" (102). Alsen makes a good point. Teddy chooses to give in to death in order to gain a better life. Since Teddy is so torn between his a materialistic life in America and his spiritual life it is easier to accept death that day. Doing so eliminates two problems at once. Teddy, by choosing to accept death on the earlier date, not only gets to reincarnate to a different place, but he is also able to separate himself from his materialistic family and worldly temptation.

Teddy does end up choosing the first date. Teddy knows the pool is empty and he knows his sister will come and push him. He even foreshadows his death to Nicholson:

I have a swimming lesson in five minutes. I could go downstairs to the pool, and there might not be any water in it. This might be the day they change the water or something. What might happen, though, I might walk up to the edge of it, just to have a look at the bottom for instance, and my sister might come up and sort of push me in. I could

fracture my skull and die instantaneously[. . .]That could happen all right. What would be so tragic about it, though? What's there to be afraid of, I mean? I'd just be doing what I was supposed to be do that's all. (193)

Even though Teddy knows what will happen by the pool, he goes to his swimming lesson anyway. He consciously chooses that day as his day to die because he has no qualms about leaving America. As Alsen puts it, "He wants to move on to his next incarnation" (82).

By the end of the story, the struggle between religion and family becomes clear. The final passage shows Nicholson, "halfway down the staircase" hearing, presumably, Teddy falling to his death (198). Nicholson, the man who tries to figure out the essence of Teddy's psychology throughout the whole story, is literally standing right on top the biggest clue. Teddy, much like Nicholson in the final paragraph, is constantly stuck halfway between enlightenment and emotional connections with those unlike him. All this, in true Salinger style, is hidden behind a torn, white shirt and a black alligator belt.

CHAPTER 5

HOW TO DRESS PROPERLY IN SALINGER'S WORLD

“Clothes are inevitable. They are nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible” – James Laver

Unfastening the Final Button

My mind goes back to Buddy Glass's statement about clothing in "Seymour: an Introduction." Salinger paints pictures of every single one of his characters in his work, taking the time to describe them "article by article, crease by crease," and making sure the character is dressed in the appropriate attire ("Seymour" 185). Whether it be a Norfolk jacket or a raccoon coat, a black alligator belt or a red flannel hunting hat, Salinger uses clothing in a spectacular way.

From Holden Caulfield's red hunting hat to Teddy McArdle's torn and dirty shirt, J.D. Salinger seems to have hidden more information about his characters' mental state of being in their clothing than in their speech and actions. Through Holden and Teddy, we see that in order to be considered fashionable in Salinger's works, a character's clothing must mirror the most important aspect of the psyche.

For Holden, this is his sickness. His hat represents his wavering state of mind. Holden uses his hunting hat to switch moods simply by turning it around or taking it off. In essence it becomes the controlling device for his mood. Sometimes his identity leans more towards a profound adult while wearing the hat, while other times, he acts more childish than a five year-old. In essence, Salinger uses the hunting hat to create

a physical symbol of Holden's back and forth disposition, between becoming an adult and staying a child, between adhering to popular culture and breaking away from the "phonies," and between a childlike mood and an adult one.

Just as Holden's red hunting hat plays a vital part in understanding the plot in *Catcher*, so does Teddy McArdle's white, torn t-shirt shed light on the abstract ending of his debut tale. For Teddy, fashion becomes the ultimate form of religious confliction. Teddy wears dirty white, raggedy clothes to show the world he could care less about being wealthy, but then tops his outfit off with a black alligator belt. Teddy's clothing is used as a symbol for his conflicted nature and a clue for why he chooses death on the date he does. Believing that death brings another life in another place, Teddy chooses to go to the pool that day so he can reincarnate into a different, less materialistic place than America.

Thus, the purpose of clothing in Salinger's work is to illuminate the psyche. Let us turn back, one last time, to those stories mentioned in the first chapter. If Salinger decided to put Sybil in a black bikini instead of a yellow one, the girl's role in the story would have changed. Peter Lawlor wouldn't seem so out of place if Salinger had him wearing a perfectly crisp and clean suit. Franny Glass would seem just like every other girl if she didn't have on her raccoon coat. Of course, all these characters would be drastically different had Salinger changed their clothing. What these characters wear is the first clue readers get about their psyche.

If Sybil had been placed in a black swimsuit instead of her yellow bikini, readers might place her in the same psychological category as Seymour. She may have been perceived as a dark child who enjoys hanging out with a depressed married man about to commit suicide. But instead of likening Sybil to Seymour, Salinger uses the swimsuit color as a contrast. The yellow bikini Sybil wears becomes a symbol of her innocence and kindness towards Seymour. While Seymour is gloomy throughout the story, Sybil becomes the ray of sunshine and the essence of happiness. Thus, Sybil's swimsuit gives readers a clue about her psyche.

The same case can be made for Pete Lawlor in "Personal Notes of an Infantryman." Had Pete shown up to the recruiting office dressed sharply, there would be no question about admitting him into the army. But because he dresses sloppily, the recruiting officer is uncertain about his work ethic. After all, if someone shows up to an interview in a pit-stained, un-tucked shirt, the employer will think twice before hiring them. Because Salinger dresses Pete in clothes that make him appear out of place, the recruiter questions his place in the institution.

But, Salinger once again proves that just because somebody dresses differently doesn't mean they aren't capable of getting the job done. Pete ends up being one of the best soldiers recruited, despite his age or initial appearance. The recruiter praises him for his hard work, saying, "There wasn't any one call-it-by-a-name phase of Army life that knocked him out or even down. He pulled K. P. for a solid week, too, and he was as good a sink admiral as the next one. Nor did he have trouble learning to

march, or learning to make up his bunk properly, or learning to sweep out his barrack” (“Personal” 96). Here, Salinger pulls a trick on his readers. The first appearance of Pete, while messy and highly unprofessional, leads readers to believe he is not a hard worker; yet, the pit-stains tell a different story. Looking back at Pete’s outfit, the pit-stains on his suit prepare readers for the hard work that Pete does at the end of the story. The stains signify Pete’s dedication, and his loyalty to the army.

Then we have Franny Glass’s raccoon coat. The entire purpose of “Franny” is to express a dislike towards conformity. Franny talks with her boyfriend Lane about how she hates that women all look alike. She despises the college men in her department who may think they are different, but are actually exactly the same. She is bored with assimilation. Thus, her coat reflects her individuality. She wants to be different. She does not want to turn out like the other girls who came off the train with her. Her raccoon coat is her way of breaking away from the world of pea coats and cashmere sweaters.

Every single article of clothing that Salinger mentions in his work can be used to critically evaluate the minds of his characters. Holden, Teddy, Franny, Sybil, and Pete: these characters all show how Salinger uses clothing to illuminate the psyche in his fiction. Each article of clothing tells us something about the characters’ psychology.

Taking it All Off

It is rather amazing that Salinger has taken something which once haunted him and turned it into something beautiful through his fiction. While Salinger was troubled by the idea of adhering to fashion rules at Valley Forge, he has no problem making his own rules for clothing in his fiction. Good clothing and fashionable clothing is measured by its ability to give his readers insight into his characters' minds'. The good clothing in Salinger's work will use color, pattern and fabric to illuminate its wearer's mindset.

Salinger, as odd as he is about adhering to social rules, made an unspoken rule of his own in all his work: clothing must mirror the psyche. He took something that was once negative in his life and turned it into a positive in his fiction. More importantly, Salinger draws his reader's eyes back to detail, merging clothing and speech into beautiful stories.

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