

20th Century American Novel II

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) by J. D. Salinger

Main Characters

- Holden Caulfield
- D. B.
- Allie
- Phoebe
- Mr. Spencer
- Sradlater
- Jane Gallagher
- Ackley

Why is Holden an unreliable narrator?

- He says so!
- I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful. If I'm on my way to the store to buy a magazine, even, and somebody asks me where I'm going, I'm liable to say I'm going to the opera. It's terrible (Ch.3).

-
- Flashback
 - He is in a weird place

-
- Doesn't talk about his feelings
 - The whole team ostracized me the whole way back on the train. It was pretty funny, in a way (Ch. 1).

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.
(Ch. 7)

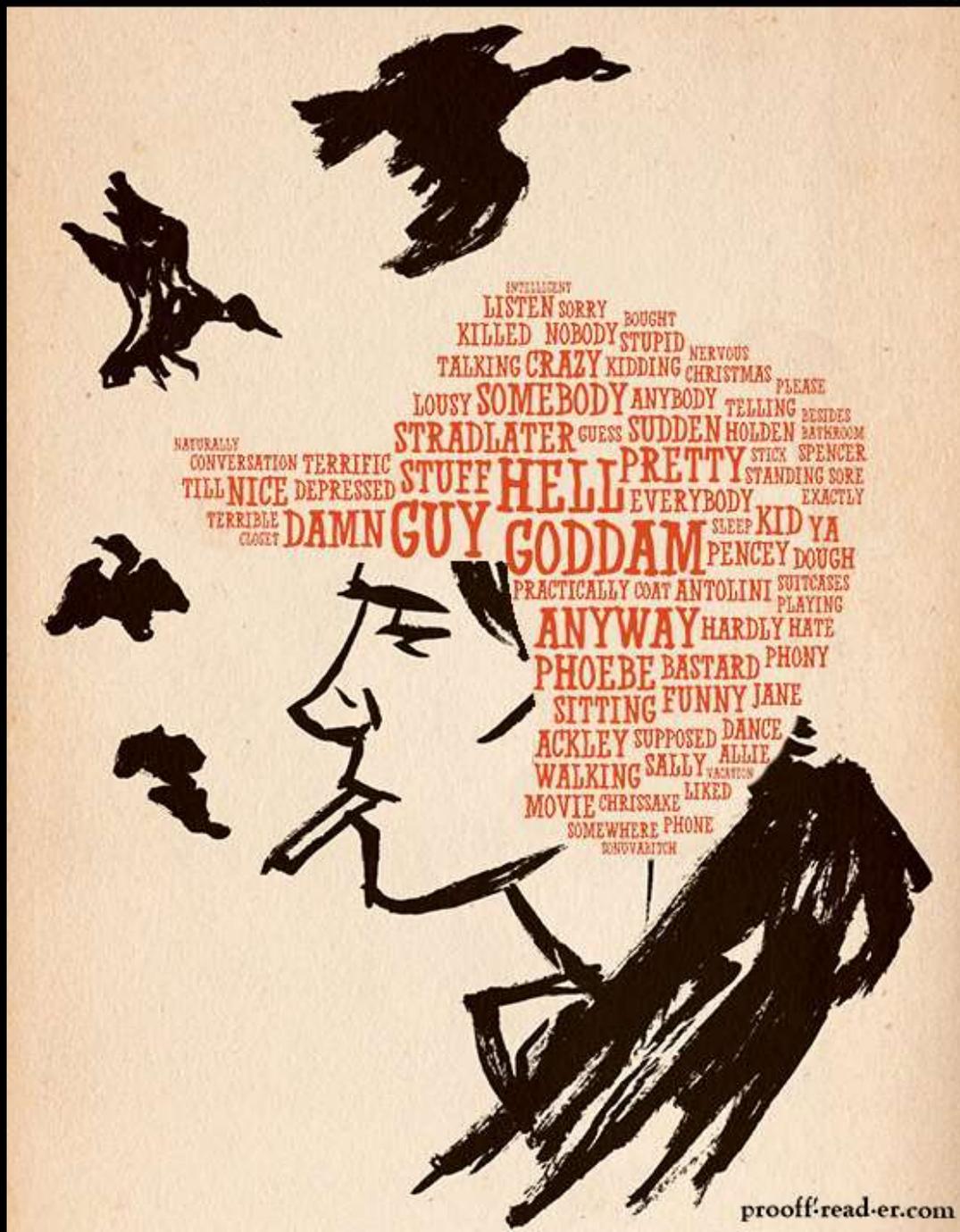
- Exaggerates
- There was a shower right between every two rooms in our wing, and about eighty-five times a day old Ackley barged in on me (Ch. 3).
- He was looking at this picture of this girl I used to go around with in New York, Sally Hayes. He must've picked up that goddam picture and looked at it at least five thousand times since I got it. He **always** put it back in the wrong place, too... (Ch. 3)

It was the last game of the year, and you
were supposed to commit suicide or
something if old Pencey didn't win (Ch. 1).

-
- Inconsistent and contradicts himself
 - If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies.
Don't even mention them to me. (Ch.1)

I got bored sitting on that washbowl after a while, so I backed up a few feet and started doing this tap dance, just for the hell of it. I was just amusing myself. I can't really tap-dance or anything, but it was a stone floor in the can, and it was good for tapdancing. I started imitating one of those guys in the movies. In one of those musicals. I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them. Old Stradlater watched me in the mirror while he was shaving. All I need's an audience. I'm an exhibitionist (Ch. 4).

- He likes horsing around
- Then I started horsing around a little bit. Sometimes I horse around quite a lot, just to keep from getting bored. (Ch. 3)
- I call people a “prince” quite often when I’m horsing around. It keeps me from getting bored or something. (Ch. 3)



Phony

What I liked about her, she didn't give you a lot of horse manure about what a great guy her father was. She probably knew what a **phony** slob he was. (Ch. 1)

One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by **phonies**. That's all. They were coming in the goddam window. For instance, they had this headmaster, Mr. Haas, that was the **phoniest** bastard I ever met in my life. Ten times worse than old Thurmer. (Ch. 1)

You should see old Ossenburger. He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in the river. Anyway, he gave Pencey a pile of dough, and they named our wing after him. [...] He started off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down on his knees and pray to God. He told us we should always pray to God—talk to Him and all—wherever we were. He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me. I just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs.

Chapter 1 (Introduction)

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. 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.

I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my brother and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crumby place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end. He's going to drive me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those little English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't use to. He used to be just a regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.

Self-description

I'm quite a heavy smoker, for one thing—that is, I used to be. They made me cut it out. Another thing, I grew six and a half inches last year. That's also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddam checkups and stuff. I'm pretty healthy, though (Ch.1).

I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen. It's really ironical, because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs. I've had them ever since I was a kid. And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve. Everybody says that, especially my father. It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true. I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age (Ch. 2).