

SOLE FEATURES OF J. D. SALINGER'S STYLE
IN RELATION TO HIS FICTIONAL WORLD

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B. A. Soochow University, Taiwan, 1974

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

Approved by:

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Some Features of J. D. Salinger's Style
in Relation to His Fictional World

The impact, especially on young people, of J. D. Salinger's fiction is one of the interesting phenomena of post-war American literary history. Though not the only post-war American writer to reflect the psychology of adolescence and youth, Salinger's hold on young readers of his time seems to have been unique. In a symposium in the March 9, 1957 issue of The Nation, a symposium which sought to identify the major influence upon college students of that time, many professors claimed Salinger as the principal influence. For example, Stanley Kunitz said that "The only young novelist I have heard praised vociferously is J. D. Salinger. . . ." ¹ R. J. Kaufmann considered The Catcher in the Rye "a book which has complexly aroused nearly all of them." ² Despite the fact that Salinger has not published any signed fiction since June 19, 1965, in The New Yorker, his characteristic matter and manner has continually remained fresh in readers' memories. This was evidenced in the sixties in a J. D. Salinger special number in Modern Fiction Studies, wherein many scholars looked at Salinger's fiction from different angles. ³ In the seventies critics' enthusiasm has hardly been on the wane. ⁴ It is indeed proper for Henry A. Grunwald to note that "Salinger has spoken with more magic, particularly to the young, than any other writer since World

War II."⁵ Salinger's fictional world, in which youthful sensitivity typically opposes itself to adult and institutional phoniness, of course contributes to his success. But, more interestingly, his popularity seems to be due largely to the peculiarly effective style with which he evokes his fictional world and at the same time creates a bond of intimacy with his reader. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that "Salinger depends more than most prose writers on the fine shading of his style to convey his meaning."⁶ This paper will survey some of the salient features of Salinger's fictional world and then attempt to show how the famous Salinger style serves to enhance the depiction of that world.

First among the elements of Salinger's fictional world are the characters, typically youthful (in outlook if not always in years), sensitive, and alienated from the world of adults. Perhaps the most typical of them is the protagonist of The Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield. Throughout the book, Holden feels, more often than not, that he is alienated from the insensitive "phony" world. His school, Pencey, is "full of crooks" (p. 7) such as Dr. Thurmer and Mr. Spencer, who are in one way or another phonies, although they are his teachers. Holden also has trouble getting along well with his schoolmates, because they often demean themselves by doing something dishonorable or immoral. For example, his roommate, Stradlater, "a secret slob" (p. 35), not only at least "gave the time to" two girls with whom Holden is personally acquainted but also beat Holden

black-and-blue. Ackley, whom Holden tries to help, remains entirely unsympathetic with him after he is beaten by Stradlater. These persons represent in varying degrees the evils and inhumanity of school life Holden stands against.

But, Holden's sense of separation is not limited to his life on campus. In his four-day wandering after leaving Pencey, his sense of tension between himself and the world is deepened more and more. The social evil and phoniness culminate perhaps in the incident of Maurice, the pimp in the hotel. When introducing a prostitute Maurice tells Holden that he will charge "five bucks a throw. Fifteen bucks the whole night" (p. 119). However, he comes back later on to ask Holden for five more dollars although Holden has already paid the prostitute five dollars and retained his virginity. Holden's justifiable argument results in Maurice's inhuman brutality: he punches Holden's abdomen. In addition to Maurice, such minor characters as the waiters in the club, taxi drivers, hotel perverts, club entertainers, his brother's old lover Lillian, Sally's acquaintance George, his former Student Adviser Luce, and even Mr. Antolini all serve to express Holden's alienation, because these people are more or less like Maurice, insensitive, phony, and corrupt.

In like manner, tension between the young and their world is to be found in Salinger's other stories. The other youth-heroes or -heroines, like Holden, suffer from the world as it is, and find themselves isolated.

In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Seymour divorces him-

self from the adult world. He cannot get along very well with his young wife, Muriel, whom he calls "Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948"⁷ and he does not stay in the hotel with her. On his way back to the hotel room, he shows his incompatibility with the adult, sophisticated world by suspiciously accusing a strange woman of staring at his feet, which is plainly untrue.

In "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," Elcise, who "was a nice girl" (p. 56) in the past, finds herself isolated from her insensitive friend, Mary Jane, because Mary cannot really understand her; from her husband, because she does not love him; from her daughter, Ramona, because she does not like her own marriage; and from her servant, because she has become entirely careless of anybody else.

Little Lionel in "Down at the Dinghy" runs away from home many times, probably because he feels isolated from the adult world. The latest running away, which is the main concern of the story, has to do with the servants' criticism of his father. To Lionel, the adult world is too complicated to live in securely.

Other characters such as Sergeant X in "For Esmé--with Love and Squalor," Arthur in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," the young man in "De Dauzier-Smith's Blue Period," the title character of "Teddy," and Jameston in "The Young Folks" are in varying degrees alienated from and victimized by the corrupt, phony world in which they live.

Cut off from their parents and family, teachers, friends, society, these characters are, of course, apt to feel lonely.

And indeed loneliness is the overwhelming theme of J. D. Salinger's fiction. He particularly implies that the causes of the characters' loneliness are lack of love, lack of friends, lack of communication. This subject matter was easily recognized by the readers of the 40's and 50's, because loneliness is "a deformation, and a malady . . . in America"⁸ and particularly "the spiritual malady of the age."⁹ Salinger's fiction, as David L. Stevenson points out, "convicts us, as readers, of being deeply aware of a haunting inconclusiveness in our own, and in contemporary, emotional relationships-- members all of the lonely crowd."¹⁰

As we have already seen, throughout The Catcher in the Rye Holden is always isolated from society. He has difficulty identifying with people around him. His teachers do not understand him; his friends are unsympathetic; the people he meets are either perverts or phonies. In the book his parents never talk face to face with him; either they don't understand Holden or they don't care for him. Holden's best teacher, Mr. Antolini, is, in the long run, "a pretty sophisticated guy . . . a pretty heavy drinker . . . [and even] a little oiled up" (p. 236). His favorite author-- his brother, D. B. is now "out in Hollywood . . . being a prostitute" (p. 4). In this wide world he has no confidant to whom he can speak his mind. His brother, Allie, and his sister, Phoebe, are the only two persons he really loves, yet Allie "got leukemia and [already] died" (p. 49), and Phoebe is still too young to understand him. The whole

situation being so desperate, Holden daydreams of "joining a monastery" (p. 65) to lead a secluded life. He also fantasizes about becoming a gas station worker, deaf and mute, somewhere in the West. He is so very lonely that he cries out quite frequently: "I felt so lonesome . . . I almost wished I was dead" (p. 62), "I had no place to go" (p. 139), "No home to go to" (p. 198).

In addition to Holden, many characters in Salinger's short stories, alienated also from the world, find themselves in the plight of loneliness. Sergeant X in "For Esme-- with Love and Squalor" suffers from a world without love. After reading the words in Goebbels' book, "'Dear God, life is hell'" he comments: "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love" (pp. 159-160). In "The Young Folks," Edna Phillips feels lonesome because, "[She] . . . since eight o'clock had been sitting in the big red chair, smoking cigarettes and yodeling hellos and wearing a very bright eye which young men were not bothering to catch" (p. 26).¹¹ In the same story, William Jameson, Jr., is lonely because of lack of companionship. For instance, though admiring Doris Liggett, a small blonde, he can merely put "the fingers of his left hand in or close to his mouth . . . sitting a few men away from the small blonde" (p. 30). A number of Salinger's characters, such as Seymour in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Eloise in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," the title character of "Teddy," Lionel in "Down at the Dinghy," and the

young husband in "Once a Week Won't Kill You," to mention only a few of them, all suffer in one way or another from being unable to communicate successfully with people around them. It seems proper to say that, as the young hero of "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" puts it, everything these characters, "touched turned to loneliness" (p. 201).

To help present effectively the loneliness of his alienated characters, Salinger utilizes recurrently in his fiction such activities as cigarette smoking, telephoning, movie-going, and listening to the radio. Smoking is the most pervasive of these activities. Very frequently we find a character smoking when he is frustrated and feels lonely.

In The Catcher in the Rye Holden, feeling bored and upset, smokes two cigarettes in succession in the hotel on Sunday morning. Later in his home, when Phoebe, his only confidante, puts her pillow over her head and refuses to talk to him, Holden just "got up and went out in the living room and got some cigarettes out of the box on the table" (p. 215). Other characters in Salinger's short stories also resort to cigarettes during their time of solitude and ennui. For example, bored with her nagging mother, Muriel, in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," interrupts her mother's telephone conversation to go for cigarettes. Finding their mutual communication impossible, Clay, in "For Esme-- with Love and Squalor," "took a cigarette from a pack on the table and lit it" (p. 158), and Sergeant X, likewise, "reached for his cigarettes" (p. 168). Lee, "the

gray-haired man" in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," smokes incessantly throughout his pointless and monotonous conversation with Arthur. In like manner, the lonely husband in "Once a Week Won't Kill You" and the friendless Edna in "The Young Folks" smoke. Hence, a cigarette becomes a sign of boredom and loneliness.

Similarly Salinger frequently uses the telephone to imply the impersonality of modern life and the isolation of his characters one from another. Salinger's characters always resort to the telephone to communicate with others. And to intensify their loneliness, he occasionally makes use of the device of uncompleted calls. In The Catcher in the Rye Holden over and over again thinks of "giving old Jane a buzz" so that he may speak his mind to her. He needs Jane's companionship to console his loneliness. However, he never gets his calls through to her. These uncompleted telephone calls, as Charles H. Kegel points out, may represent "Holden Caulfield's inability to communicate satisfactorily with others."¹²

In Salinger's other short stories the telephone also plays an important role in helping to convey the sense of loneliness of those characters alienated from society. By telephone, instead of talking face to face, Muriel in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" chats idly with her mother, Elcise in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" speaks coldly to her husband, and Arthur in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" tries in vain to communicate with Lee, a man who cuckolds him.

The other two recurring activities which serve as signs of characters' lonely plight are attending the movies and listening to the radio.

The reason why Salinger's people go to the movies is that they feel lonely and frustrated in their real life and because "there's nothing else to do" (p. 151), as Holden puts it. "The goddam movies," he calls them, "They can ruin you. I'm not kidding" (p. 136). Yet he himself goes to the movies many times because he "couldn't think of anything else [to do]" (p. 177).

Attending movies as an expression of the loneliness of the characters isolated from the real world can also be found in Salinger's short stories. For example, the lonely young hero in "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," finding himself unable to communicate successfully with people around him, every Tuesday evening "took a bus into Montreal proper and sat through a Cartoon Festival Week program at a third-rate movie house" (p. 240). In "Once a Week Won't Kill You," the departing soldier asks his wife to take his lonely, feeble-minded aunt out to the movies "once a week" (pp. 23-24, 27).

Similarly, listening to the radio is a consolation to Salinger's lonesome people. In The Catcher in the Rye, Jane's lonely stepfather does nothing but "booze all the time and listen to every single goddam mystery program on the radio" (p. 42). In "The Young Folks," Edna, divorced from the gleeful party, cries out: "Hey, Lu! Bobby! See if you can't get something

better on the radio! I mean who can dance to that stuff?" (p. 30).

Thus, listening to the radio, as well as the smoking of cigarettes, making or attempting phone calls, and attending the movies, is an activity of the lonely in Salinger's fictional world.

Salinger also employs his setting in such a way as to underscore his characters' alienation and inevitable loneliness. The time of the action of the stories is almost always pinpointed as during or right after World War II, when everything was in a turmoil, and the place of the action is frequently identified as the urban environment, impersonal and morally corrupt.

For example, in The Catcher in the Rye, the site of the most important action is New York City; the time must be some month in 1949, because Holden, sixteen at the time, mentions that when Allie "got leukemia and died . . . on July 18, 1946 . . ., I was only thirteen" (pp. 49-50). Holden's four-day wandering in New York City turns out to be an uncomfortable experience for him, because no matter where he goes, he meets either perverts or phonies. In "that hotel [which] was lousy with perverts" (p. 81), for instance, he sees a transvestite and "a man and a woman squirting water out of their mouths at each other" (p. 80). Wherever we find him, whether it is on the train, or in the theatre, New York's Penn Station, the club, the taxicab, Central Park, The American Museum of Natural History, Radio City Music Hall-- all symbolizing transient places, not home-- Holden is never able to identify with people around him. The

element of time here serves primarily to show the horrible aftermath of war. After a major war, not only is society fractured, but people's values are altered. A woman sheds tears for the actress and actor's plight, but remains nonchalant towards her own son's discomfort, to mention only one of the countless examples. The situation being thus at that time, Holden's ideal to be "the catcher in the rye," standing on the edge of the cliff to prevent young children from falling off it, seems utopian. Therefore, Holden, although he himself "lived in New York all my life" (p. 200), tells Sally, "I hate living in New York and all" (p. 169).

As in The Catcher in the Rye, the settings in the short stories are likewise utilized to account for the characters' alienation and loneliness. Explicitly or implicitly, the action of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," "For Esmé-- with Love and Squalor," "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," and "Once a Week Won't Kill You" takes place during or shortly after World War II. The settings of these stories are located, without exception, in the loveless, urban districts, in which all vices take root and the characters find themselves socially isolated.

As I mentioned above, Salinger singles out sensitive youths as the protagonists of most of his fiction, puts them in an impersonal, urban environment during or right after World War II, and spares no effort to reveal and emphasize their loneliness and alienation. All these elements constitute

Salinger's fictional world, a world which is conducive to his popularity to a certain degree, because it is so familiar to the readers, particularly the young readers, of the 40's and 50's, that they can easily identify with it. However, in my judgment, Salinger's success does not rest merely on the familiarity of his fictional world; rather, what makes Salinger able "to speak to the adolescent soul with urgent but reassuring intimacy,"¹³ and makes his hold on the readers of his time unique, is "his intense, his almost compulsive need to fill in each inch of his canvas, each moment of his scene . . . [and to keep] everything humming [with life],"¹⁴ through his well-handled style. The following discussion is an effort to demonstrate how Salinger manipulates his style to reflect and reinforce his fictional world.

As many students have discovered before me, the word "style" has long proved difficult of stringent definition. "A discussion of the word style," comments John Middleton Murry, "if it were pursued with only a fraction of the rigour of a scientific investigation, would inevitably cover the whole of literary aesthetics and the theory of criticism. Six books would not suffice for the attempt."¹⁵ David L. Allen and Jane C. Parks list the elements of style as "word choice (diction), sentence structure, and sentence rhythm."¹⁶ In Understanding Fiction, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren use style "merely to refer to the selection and ordering of language."¹⁷ Marlies K. Danziger and W. Stacy Johnson declare in An Introduction to Literary Criticism, "When we speak of style . . . we are concerned

specifically with what might be called the texture of writing, with such matters of verbal detail as diction, imagery, syntax, and sound."¹⁸ So, as the examples show, there is still general agreement that style resides in linguistic choices: choice of diction and choice of syntactic structures. My discussion of Salinger's fictional style is generally based on these similar definitions with only very few exceptions.

For all intents and purposes, there is no hard-and-fast rule to follow as to what style a writer should use. The choice of style can be right or wrong, solely depending upon what effect is to be sought. Salinger's style, to a remarkable extent, seems designed to achieve both aural and visual effects. Although Salinger has never become a playwright, one avowed goal of his youthful ambition,¹⁹ like a good dramatist he employs such stylistic elements as colloquialism (slang, "after-thought" tags, deletion of some elements in spoken language, reduced spoken forms, abusive language), hyperbole, repetitive expressions, clichés, "filler" expressions, and italics and dashes to help represent inflection and rhythm, and to capture the sound of speech. Moreover, he gives particular attention to the depiction of the characters' gestures. Thus, Salinger the stylist wants his reader not only to hear the recognizable "turn of (the characters') . . . speech,"²⁰ but also to see the gestures of the characters and further perceive their implications. Let me discuss one by one how these various elements of Salinger's style contribute to the portrayal of his fictional world and the creation of a bond of familiarity with his reader.

Salinger's use of colloquialism in his fiction constitutes the first of his stylistic features. It is to vitalize his characters, to show that they are not puppets, their speech not merely printed words, thus enabling his reader to easily recognize them as actual, contemporary types.

Throughout The Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield's speech is primarily slangy. Hence, instead of saying "He has a lot of money," "I was dismissed," "I talked idly for a while," he says "He's got a lot of dough" (p. 4), "I got the ax" (p. 6), "I shot the bull for a while" (p. 17). The other teenage characters in the book also speak the same language. For example, Stradlater, Holden's roommate, says "I'll be up the creek . . ." (p. 37) rather than "I'll be in trouble"

The short stories are also pervaded by the same slangy expressions. In "The Young Folks," to cite only some good specimens from Salinger's first published short story, we find that the young characters say "She's swell," "The shank of the evening," "You're in for it," "I hate to put my two cents in . . .," "Didn't you and Bill hit it off?" (pp. 26-27, 29-30) instead of "She's excellent," "It's still early in the evening," "You're in trouble," "I hate to express my opinion . . .," "Didn't you and Bill like each other?"

Besides slangy expressions, there are other devices which Salinger uses to mimic spoken speech. In The Catcher in the Rye, Holden says, "They give guys the ax quite frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic rating, Pencey" (pp. 6-7).

The last word "Fencey" is apparently the product of Holden's afterthought and would be considered a redundant one in written English. But here, spoken by Holden, it sounds not only natural, but also effective in ironically praising the school. The same is true of Holden's comment on his mother: "She's no good at buying ice skates or anything like that, but clothes, she's perfect" (p. 207). In written English, "when it comes to" would be inserted after "but" to make the whole sentence grammatically correct. However, in spoken English, this omission is allowable and even desirable, because it can vivify the sentence by spotlighting the key word "clothes."

The use of statement-like questions also appears not infrequently in Salinger's fictional dialogues. The following are typical ones: in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," Arthur says to Lee, "You know who I'm married to? You want to know who I'm married to?" (p. 182) and Lee says to Arthur, "You know who was on the bench?" (p. 184). This use of rising tone alone to change a statement into a question is common only in speech.

There are many striking examples in Salinger's fiction of transcribed speech, such as in The Catcher in the Rye, "And now we like to geeve you our impression of Vooly Voo Fransay. Let ees the story of a leetle Fransh girl who comes to a beeg ceety . . . and falls een love wees a leetle boy from Brock-leen. We hope you like eet" (p. 184); in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," "I got plentya room in my room, and he don't

have to be back in New York till tomorrow mornin', and it's so bad out" (p. 53); and in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," "We're gonna fight the Eskimos next. Know that?" (p. 72).

Instances of reduced spoken forms, also intended to imitate everyday language, are too numerous to be listed inclusively. Examples are: "What the hell ya reading?" (p. 28), "Ya got 'em handy?" (p. 30), "Say he had a tie on that you liked a helluva lot" (p. 33), "That sonuvabitch Hartzell . . ." (p. 37), "Innarested in a little tail t'night?" (p. 118), "C'mon, let's get outa here" (p. 173) in The Catcher in the Rye; "Wuddayacallit swore up and down it was blend" (p. 29), "Wuddaya think she's doing out there?" (p. 32) in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut"; "This time all the old guys're gonna go" (p. 72) in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos"; "a helluvan intelligent guy" (p. 183) in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes"; "Go t'college?" and "Aren'tcha coming?" (p. 29) in "The Young Folks."

Because Salinger represents the spoken language so very well and inclusively, his works, especially The Catcher in the Rye, have been considered "a significant historical linguistic record of a type of speech rarely made available in permanent form."²¹ They really can serve as good examples of teenage and ²² youngsters' vernacular of the 1940s and 1950s.

The second of Salinger's salient stylistic features is some characters' conscious or unconscious use of abusive language. This type of language serves primarily to show the socially alienated characters' aversion to or incommunicability

with people around them. It also implies the naiveté and helplessness of the characters, for, beyond vocal protest, they really can do nothing to improve their surroundings. These observations can be readily confirmed in Salinger's stories.

In The Catcher in the Rye, as I have noted when discussing Salinger's fictional world, Holden almost always finds himself standing against the phony, adult world. He, more often than not, gives vent to his protest and dissatisfaction in fierce, crude language. For example, he considers Ackley "one of these very, very tall, round-shouldered guys . . . with lousy teeth"; Mr. Haas, headmaster of Elkton Hills, "the phoniest bastard I ever met in my life" (p. 19); and Stradlater "a goddam stupid moron" (p. 57). Holden's naiveté and helplessness are attested to by his merely using the abusive language to vent his anger instead of counterattacking Stradlater and Maurice when he is beaten by them. He is, nevertheless, not unconscious of his crude language. For instance, after he says "You give me a royal pain in the ass" to Sally Hayes and she cries, Holden knows "I shouldn't've said it" (p. 173). The point is, the world around him is so very impersonal and phony that he is driven to use a "sometimes raucous and jarring [speech] . . . to rail and condemn."²³

Abusive terms also abound in Salinger's short stories. The unhappy Elcise in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," to cite only one of the numerous instances, tells her friend, Mary Jane, about "That dopey maid" (p. 29), refers to her daughter, Ramona,

as "lousy with secrets" (p. 56), and finally asks Mary Jane to "call up and say you were killed" (p. 40). Like Holden's in The Catcher in the Rye, Eloise's abusive words reflect both her loneliness and the degenerate world she inhabits.

The third of Salinger's stylistic characteristics noted here is the use of hyperbole. Traditionally, hyperbole is mainly used to heighten dramatic effect. Salinger's hyperbole achieves a dual effect: it gives his young characters an ironic, exaggerated way to attack and criticize the phony persons and impersonal world and, because of this, it evokes a sense of shared viewpoint and response on the part of his reader.

Instances of hyperbole in Holden's speech throughout The Catcher in the Rye are so skillfully manipulated that they seem to be typical expressions of his age group. When Holden says Stradlater "spent around half his goddam life in front of the mirror" (p. 43) and "thought he was the handsomest guy in the Western Hemisphere" (p. 36), he is finding fault with Stradlater's phoriness, because Stradlater the dude attends to his superficial appearance much more than his inner life. Other hyperbolic expressions used in the novel have to do with age: "It was about five hundred thousand years in the life of this one old couple" (p. 163), "They have this day . . . that all the jerks that graduated from Pencey around 1776 core back and walk all over the place . . ." (p. 218), and ". . . some old lady around a hundred years old was sitting

at a typewriter" (p. 216). Since, in Salinger's fictional world, adults, especially the old, are almost always related to the phoniness in the world, the quoted sentences convey a strong sense of sarcasm. Edward P. J. Corbett points out another reason for Holden's excessive use of hyperbole: "His very style of speech, with extraordinary propensity for hyperbole, is evidence of . . . [his] lack of a sense of proportion."²⁴ That is to say, Holden is too naive and unsophisticated to see the adult, sophisticated, phony world in perspective, so as to understand it as a whole. Thus, he suffers from being alienated and alone.

In Nine Stories, as in The Catcher in the Rye, Salinger utilizes hyperbolic expressions to show the young characters' dislike and distrust of the impersonal, phony world where adults dominate: for instance, "You never saw anybody nod as much in your life as old Spencer did" (p. 12) in The Catcher in the Rye and "We gave her all the room in the world [against our will]" (p. 95) in "The Laughing Man."

Repetition is the fourth stylistic feature found in Salinger's fiction. According to C. Hugh Holman, repetition is "a rhetorical device reiterating a word or phrase, or rewording the same idea, to secure emphasis."²⁵ In Salinger's fiction repetition usually emphasizes the characters' lonely plight or the inhumanity of the phony world.

In The Catcher in the Rye the instances of repetition are too many to be cited inclusively. For example, Holden's

sense of loneliness, resulting from his inability to communicate successfully with others, is epitomized in his repetition of "She wasn't listening to me" (pp. 92-93) and "People don't believe you" (pp. 48, 59, 73). The prostitute repeatedly says, "Ya got a watch on ya?" (pp. 123-124) to Holden, because, to her, time is money. Holden's repeated mention of the young child's song, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye," is juxtaposed with the repetition of ". . . his parents paid no attention to him" (p. 150) to make a striking contrast: the former shows a naive aspiration for human contact, while the latter points out the impersonality of the adult world.

Repetition pervades Salinger's short stories as well. For instance, the repetitive phrases of the nagging mother and those of the nonchalant daughter in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" serve to stress the breakdown of their communication and the lack of mutual feelings in the world. Typical examples are the mother's repeated "Are you all right, Muriel?" (pp. 5, 12) and "My word of honor" (pp. 8-9), and the daughter's impatient answer: "All right, all right" (pp. 7, 12).

The language in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" is also characterized by repetition. It is intended to contrast the naive Arthur and phony Lee, thus indicating their different characters and presenting the entire absence of communication between them. One of Arthur's repetitive expressions, "I wake you?" shows his consideration of the feelings of others in contrast to Lee's hypocritical and pretentious repetitions

such as "as a matter of fact," "You want some advice?" and "All right, relax." Similar examples can be found in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," "The Young Folks," "Once a Week Won't Kill You," etc.

Salinger's fifth stylistic feature is his use of clichés and "filler" expressions. In real life, clichés and "filler" expressions may not be taken seriously. But in Salinger's fiction they are carefully worked out to faithfully capture the speaking voice of the youngsters, and to convey special psychological overtones, which all reflect Salinger's fictional world.

The Catcher in the Rye alone suffices to illustrate Salinger's masterful use of clichés and "fillers." Instances of Holden's naiveté are supported by his hackneyed expressions such as "anyway," "in a way," "and all," "or something," and "or anything." These are all ambiguous terms, strictly speaking. They imply that in a complicated, adult world, which is often beyond his comprehension, Holden tends "to generalize, to find the all in the one."²⁶ This is further confirmed by the fact that Holden habitually calls everyone, from Jesus and Phoebe to Maurice the pimp, "old so and so." Thus, Arthur Heiserman and James Miller are only partially right when they claim that "old" serves as "a term of endearment."²⁷ The real point is, Holden is so young and unsophisticated that, in sifting through his memories, he reveals "his

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inability to discriminate."

In the story, Holden keeps saying that "I feel sorry," "I feel depressed," "all of a sudden," and "I'm not in the mood." In real life, these clichés may mean nothing; but here, Salinger seems to emphasize Holden's sensitivity and sentimentality.

Throughout The Catcher in the Rye Holden habitually says "I really am (was, did, etc.)," "no kidding," "I'm not kidding," "If you want to know the truth." These clichés and "filler" expressions indicate Holden's effort to confirm the sincerity and truth of what he says. They also imply that the adult world is full of phonies: Holden, for fear that he should be considered one of them, is in the habit of proclaiming his sincerity.

Holden's distrust of and protest against the phony, adult world is evidenced by his swearing clichés: "damn," "goddam," "as hell," "hell," "for Chrissake," to name only some of them.

In short, Salinger's clichés and "filler" expressions are skillfully manipulated to demonstrate the inability of the naive, sensitive young to understand and communicate in a complicated world, and their skepticism and defiance of that phony world. In this way, Salinger's young heroes employ private codes, clichés and "filler" expressions, to convey their dislike of phony, public codes.

The sixth stylistic feature found in Salinger's fiction is his dramatic use of the dash to help reveal his fictional world.

Traditionally, the dash is utilized to set off a parenthetical clause, to indicate a break in thought, to mark a summing up and to do the work of a colon. In addition to these, Salinger applies the dash to indicate the interruption of one speaker's words by the breaking in of another, thus achieving the dramatic effect.

In The Catcher in the Rye, for example, we find the following conversation between Holden and Ackley:

"He's got this superior attitude all the time," Ackley said. "I just can't stand the sonuvabitch. You'd think he--"
 "Do you mind cutting your nails over the table, hey?"
 I said. "I've asked you about fifty--"
 "He's got this goddam superior attitude all the time," Ackley said. "I don't even think the sonuvabitch is intelligent. He thinks he is. He thinks he's about the most--"
 "Ackley! For Chrissake. Willya please cut your crumby nails over the table? I've asked you fifty times." (p. 32)

In this passage Ackley's words are thrice interrupted by Holden. While Ackley is busy talking about his dislike of Stradlater, Holden's roommate, Holden's primary concern is where Ackley cuts his nails. They are speaking about two different things and do not pay attention to what each other is saying. The three dashes here help reinforce the lack of mutual understanding between the two characters, thus revealing their loneliness and isolation. The same situation can be found, for instance, in "The Young Folks" (p. 29) and "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" (p. 179).

Sometimes the dash, along with the context, helps to show the listener's impatience to understand his speaker, as seen in the following passage from "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes":

" . . . Christ, it's so funny I could cut my throat. Madame Bovary at Columbia Extension School. Madare--"

"Who?" asked the gray-haired man, sounding annoyed.

"Madame Bovary takes a course in Television Appreciation. God, if you knew how--"

"All right, all right. You realize this isn't getting us anyplace," the gray-haired man said. (pp. 182-183)

Here, unlike the first quotation, while one character is talking, the other is listening and his response is to the point. However, as the dashes and the context indicate, the listener's attitude is impatient and indifferent. Thus the speaker is unlikely to have the listener's sympathy-- he is still lonely.

The most typical, dramatic features of Salinger's style are the use of italics and gesture. These two stylistic elements contribute a great deal to Salinger's creating a sense of intimacy with his reader and to expressing his fictional world. The italics are utilized to make the reader hear more vividly what the character is speaking, to remind the reader that the character's speech is vocal instead of merely printed words. Unlike most novelists, Salinger, within limits, by using such dramatic devices as italics and gesture, ". . . is always consciously trying to destroy the proscenium. . . attempting to bring the audience completely into the action, to make them forget what is real and what is not."²⁹ Let me discuss these two elements one by one.

In his fiction Salinger italicizes a whole word, or just some part of a word, much more than any writer I have ever read. The italics are used, in my judgment, to achieve three types

of dramatic effect.

First, italicized words are used to show authenticity of speech, to imitate natural intonation. The following sentences serve as a typical case in point:

I practically sat down in her lap, as a matter of fact. Then she really started to cry, and the next thing I knew, I was kissing her all--anywhere-- her eyes, her nose, her forehead, her eyebrows and all, her ears-- her whole face except her mouth and all. (p. 102)

Here, Salinger is mimicking the natural rhythm of speech, and indeed, reading aloud, putting due stress on the italicized words, the reader can readily find that Salinger actually captures the vocal speech with good effect. There are countless examples like this. For instance, when Mr. Spencer asks what Dr. Thurmer has said, Holden replies that Dr. Thurmer has told him about life being a game. Then, Mr. Spencer assures Holden that "Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules" (p. 12). The twice italicized word, "is," is emphasized to convey Mr. Spencer's earnest tone. One more example: before Holden leaves the dormitory, he turns around and yells, "Sleep tight, ya rorons" (p. 68). All these words are justifiably italicized, because they show that Holden shouts at the top of his voice.

Similar examples also pervade Salinger's short stories. The conversation between Franklin and Ginnie in "Just Before the War with Eskimos" is a fairly typical instance:

"I know your sister," he said dispassionately. "Goddam snob."

Ginnie arched her back. "Who is?"

"You heard me."

"She is not a snob!"

"The hell she's not," said Selena's brother.

"She is not!" (p. 64)

The italics in the quotation help to convey vividly Ginnie's displeasure at Franklin's charge that her sister is a snob.

Second, italics are utilized in such a way as to show the affectation of some characters. The following quotation from "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" is especially revealing:

I'm the original Good Sararitan-- to take him into my apartment, this absolutely microscopic little apartment that I can hardly move around in myself. I introduce him to all my friends. Let him clutter up the whole apartment with his horrible manuscript papers, and cigarette butts, and radishes, and whatnot. Introduce him to every theatrical producer in New York. Haul his filthy shirts back and forth from the laundry. And on top of it all-- (pp. 76-77)

The words "original" and "introduce," whose primary accents fall on the second and third syllables respectively, seem unsuitably italicized. When reading aloud the entire quotation, the reader may find that the sentence-rhythm as a whole sounds queer and far-fetched and full of effeminate accents. Indeed, the speaker, Franklin's friend, turns out to be a homosexual. Another salient case in point is found in The Catcher in the Rye. In the Greenwich Village nightclub, Holden meets Lillian, a girl his brother D. B. once dated. She asks Holden how D. B. is. After Holden replies that "He's fine. He's in Hollywood,"

Lillian cries out: "In Hollywood! How marvelous! What's he doing?" (p. 113). Lillian's phony and affected manner is clearly conveyed by her unduly overemphasized words.

In "Once a Week Won't Kill You," Salinger refers to italics directly: "It had been three years and she had never stopped talking to him in italics" (pp. 23-24). Here, Salinger is criticizing the affectation of the young wife, who still wants to retain the tone of her overpampered adolescence.

Lastly, italics function as a medium to express the ironical, sarcastic sense. For instance, Holden says that, when they once double-dated, "What he'd [Stradlater'd] do was, he'd start snowing his date in this very quiet, sincere voice-- like as if he wasn't only a very handsome guy but a nice, sincere guy, too" (p. 64). Holden emphasizes the word "sincere" twice actually to criticize Stradlater's phoniness and insincerity. Again, Arthur, the betrayed husband in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," is seemingly praising his wife but in fact accusing her of being phony and pretentious when he says to Lee: "I'm married to the greatest living undeveloped, undiscovered actress, novelist, psychoanalyst, and all-around goddam unappreciated celebrity-genius in New York" (p. 182).

Besides the use of italics to indicate vocal intonation, another quite dramatic stylistic device is the depiction of gesture, as mentioned above. A serious reader can find that the gestures of Salinger's characters are frequently described

in detail. Alfred Kazin expounds on this, commenting that "the gesture itself is recognized by the reader not only as a compliment to himself but as a sign that Salinger is working all the time, not merely working to get the reader to see, but working to make his scene itself hum with life and creative observation."³⁰

The Zen koan inscribed in Nine Stories sheds some light on Salinger's interest in using gesture to reveal his fictional world:

We know the sound of two hands clapping.
But what is the sound of one hand clapping?

Most of the time, the character's gesture, conscious or unconscious, has some psychological overtones. For instance, in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Muriel, the daughter, "turned the receiver slightly away from her ear" when her mother started talking to her, and, after a little while of conversation, she again "increased the angle between the receiver and her ear" (p. 5). Her gesture is indicative of her uninterested and impatient response to what her mother says. What's more, during the conversation Muriel crossed her legs (p. 7) and then "uncrossed her legs" (p. 13), and then "stood up" (p. 14), and finally put her weight on her right leg (p. 14). These gestures express her inner restlessness and boredom.

Once in a while, we see some characters bite their nails. Esme in "For Esme-- with Love and Squalor," for instance,

repeatedly bites at the cuticle of her thumb (pp. 146-147). Like Esmé, Jareson in "The Young Folks" keeps on biting his fingernails (pp. 26-27, 30). According to Julius Fast, this kind of gesture may indicate the immaturity of the persons seeking "for security in a symbolic return to the comfort of the mother's breast."³¹ The lonely, fatherless Esmé is searching for Staff Sergeant X's love, and similarly Jareson turns his heart out for the "small blonde." Salinger utilizes gesture so successfully that "the gesture . . . [often becomes] the center from which meaning derives."³² In this sense, "gesture is language too."³³

As the examples given above show, Salinger's stylistic elements such as colloquialism, hyperbole, repetition, clichés, "filler" expressions, italics, dashes, and gesture, are so intimately connected with his fictional world that both are inseparable.

Salinger is, to be sure, one of the most outstanding prose stylists in our century. He not only "gives us a chance to catch quick, half-aroused, half-frightened glimpses of ourselves and our contemporaries"³⁴ through his well-knit fictional world, but also familiarizes us with that world largely through "versimilitude of dialogue, of bodily movement."³⁵ What Alfred Kazin said in 1961 about J. D. Salinger and his fiction can be used to summarize and conclude this paper:

He is a favorite with that audience of student, student intellectuals, instructors, and generally literary, sensitive . . . young people who respond to him with a consciousness that he speaks for them and virtually to them, in a language that is peculiarly honest and their own, with a vision of things that captures their most secret judgments of the world.³⁶

Footnotes

¹"The Careful Young Men," p. 200.

²Ibid., p. 210.

³For example, John Russell tried to trace the meaning of the characters' gestures; Pernice and Sanford Goldstein related the precepts of Zen to Salinger's fiction; John M. Howell compared in detail Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye with T. S. Eliot's "Waste Land." See "Salinger's Feat," "Zen and Salinger," and "Salinger in the Waste Land," Modern Fiction Studies, XII (Autumn 1966), 299-311, 313-324, 367-375.

⁴A fairly typical critique is James Bryan's "The Psychological Structure of The Catcher in the Rye," which "examines a structural pattern of aggression and withdrawal, largely sexual, in Holden's thoughts and actions." PMLA, XC VII (October 1974), 1065-1074. Even in 1977, ". . . an unsigned short story in this month's [February's] Esquire . . . still got some people guessing about who wrote it and college professors re-reading their J. D. Salinger." See "Even Esquire Can't Be Sure," The Kansas City Star, 30 January 1977, p. 2A.

⁵"The Invisible Man: A Biographical Collage," Salinger (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 4.

⁶Arthur Mizener, "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger," Harper's, CCXVIII (February 1959), 88.

⁷J. D. Salinger, Nine Stories (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), p. 7. Hereafter all references to this story and the other eight stories, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," "The Laughing Man," "Down at the Dinghy," "For Esmé-- with Love and Squalor," "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" and "Teddy," will follow the exact pagination of the afore-named work.

⁸Thornton Wilder, "The American Loneliness," The Atlantic, CXC (August 1952), 66.

⁹"The Loneliness of the Modern Man," Current Opinion, LXXII (May 1922), 671.

¹⁰"J. D. Salinger: The Mirror of Crisis," The Nation, CLXXXIV (March 9, 1957), 216.

¹¹This and the other quotations from the same story follow the exact pagination of Story, XVI (March-April, 1940).

¹²"Incommunicability in Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye," The Western Humanities Review, XI (Spring 1957), 189.

¹³Michael Walzer, "In Place of a Hero," Dissent, VII (Spring 1960), 156.

¹⁴Alfred Kazin, "J. D. Salinger: 'Everybody's Favorite,'" The Atlantic, CCVIII (August 1961), 28.

¹⁵The Problem of Style (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 3.

¹⁶Essential Rhetoric (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 69.

¹⁷2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1943), p. 605.

¹⁸(Washington D. C.: Heath and Company, 1961), p. 33.

¹⁹The editors of Story first introduced J. D. Salinger in 1940, saying that "he is particularly interested in playwriting." See XVI (March-April), 2.

²⁰Miziner, p. 90.

²¹Donald P. Costello, "The Language of The Catcher in the Rye," American Speech, XXXIV (October 1959), 172.

²²Ibid.

²³Edgar Branch, "Mark Twain and J. D. Salinger: A Study in Literary Continuity," American Quarterly, IX (Summer 1957), 146.

²⁴"Raise High the Barriers, Censors," America, CIV (January 7, 1961), 443.

²⁵A Handbook to Literature, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975), p. 446.

²⁶Costello, p. 174.

²⁷"J. D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff," Western Humanities Review, X (1956), 136.

²⁸Corbett, 443.

²⁹Grunwald, "Introduction," p. xxiv.

³⁰Kazin, pp. 28-29.

³¹Body Language (New York: Pocket Books, 1971), p. 145.

³²Ihab Hassan, Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 262-263.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Stevenson, p. 217.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Kazin, p. 27.

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SOME FEATURES OF J. D. SALINGER'S STYLE
IN RELATION TO HIS FICTIONAL WORLD

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

ABSTRACT

The impact, especially on young people, of J.D. Salinger's fiction is one of the interesting phenomena of recent American literary history. Though not the only post-war American writer to reflect the psychology of adolescence and youth, Salinger's hold on young readers of his time seems to have been unique.

Salinger's fictional world, in which youthful sensitivity typically opposes itself to adult and institutional phoniness, to be sure, contributes to his success. But, more interesting, his popularity seems to be due largely to the peculiarly effective style with which he evokes his fictional world and at the same time creates a bond of intimacy with his reader.

This paper first analyzes Salinger's fictional world, and then attempts to show how Salinger utilizes his stylistic elements, such as colloquialism, hyperbole, repetition, cliches and filler expressions, italics, dashes, and gestures, to enhance the depiction of that world.