

Living in a phony world: Character figuration in J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye"

Vivendo em um mundo falso: A figuração do personagem em "O Apanhador no campo de Centeio", de J. D. Salinger

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Abstract: "The Catcher in the Rye", a 1951 novel by J. D. Salinger, highlights the construction of the character as the leading role of the narrative. The fictional character has provoked closer looks on the part of the Literary Studies, mainly on Narrative Studies field, which analyses the fictional figure considering its ideological, social, and identity aspects. Therefore, in this article, I aim at discussing character figuration in the cited novel, focusing on the main character, Holden Caulfield, through the lens of his figuration dynamics. For the analysis, I consider the themes through which the constitutive material of the fictional figure is constituted, namely: his relation to time, childhood, innocence, and sexuality. The theoretical framework is shaped through authors such as Ian Watt, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Zérafra, E. M. Forster, Carlos Reis, and Maria da Glória Bordini.

Keywords: Character. Novel. American Literature. "The Catcher in the Rye".



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Resumo: “O Apanhador no Campo de Centeio”, romance de J. D. Salinger, de 1951, assinala a construção do personagem no primeiro plano da narrativa. A categoria da personagem tem provocado olhares apurados por parte dos Estudos Literários, principalmente no campo dos Estudos Narrativos, que analisa a figura ficcional considerando seus aspectos ideológicas, sociais e identitárias. Desse modo, objetivo, neste artigo, discutir a figuração do personagem do romance citado focalizando o protagonista, Holden Caulfield, nas suas dinâmicas figurativas. Para a análise, considero os temas que erigem a matéria pela qual a figura ficcional é constituída, a saber: sua relação com o tempo, infância, inocência e sexualidade. A base teórica é formulada a partir de autores como Ian Watt, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Zéaffa, E. M. Forster, Carlos Reis e Maria da Glória Bordini.

Palavras-chave: Personagem. Romance. Literatura Norte-Americana. “O Apanhador no Campo de Centeio”.

Introduction

Mark David Chapman, Robert John Bardo, and John Hinckley, all famous criminals who were with “The Catcher in the Rye” when committed their crimes. Coincidence or not, if there is a reasonable explanation, those questions are difficult to answer, but such events put an “aura” above this book. The novel by Salinger is taken as a cultural icon, and the main character, Holden Caulfield, became a symbol of rebelliousness and anguish in popular imaginary in the United States after the World War II.

“The Catcher in the Rye” appears in many cultural productions. Just to give some examples, on the "Chinese Democracy" album, by Guns N' Roses, there is a song named "Catcher in the Rye"; also, on the “Kerplunk album”, by Green Day, there is the song "Who Wrote Holden Caulfield?". However, the novel has never been adapted into a movie, because the author never allowed it. Indeed, Salinger fought hard for his copyrights and never authorized adaptations or spinoffs of his books. In fact, Salinger was a very reclusive writer; so, he hardly used to give interviews and make public appearances.

The author started writing “The Catcher in the Rye” during the World War II, when he acted as a soldier. He first published the story in a magazine between 1945 and 1946, and as a book in 1951. Besides this novel, he also wrote “Nine Stories” (1953), “Franny and Zooey” (1961), and “Raise High the Roof Beam”, “Carpenters, and Seymour: An Introduction” (1963). In addition, the book “Three Early Stories”, featuring original short stories, was published posthumously in 2014.

Before these considerations, I intend to analyze the dynamics of the main character, Holden Caulfield, focusing on the themes that underlie the constitutive material of the fictional figure: time, childhood, innocence, and sexuality. The theoretical framework is set on the Theory of the Novel (Ian Watt, Mikhail Bakhtin, E. M. Forster, and Michel Zérafra) and on Narrative and Cultural Studies (Carlos Reis and Maria da Glória Bordini). Moreover, I consider other theoretical voices according to the demands of the analytical practice.

Novel, character, person

In “The Rise of the Novel” (1957), Ian Watt draws the historical course of the novel in England in the 18th Century. According to his research, the author determines that the individual experience is the central point in this genre of literary composition. In addition, this literary form is erected by realism, not referring to the aesthetic movement started by Gustave Flaubert in France, but to a realistic way to represent the experience of the individual subject. The problem that emerges from this context achieves an epistemological level set by the duality between novel and reality. In this perspective, the realism of the novel seizes reality through the experience lived by the individual subject, since he/she interacts with the world through his/her senses.

In the words of Watt,

Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses: it has its origins in Descartes and Locke and received its first full formulation by Thomas Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century. But the view that the

external world is real, and that our senses give us a true report of it, obviously does not in itself throw much light on literary realism; since almost everyone, in all ages, has in one way or another been forced to some such conclusion about the external world by his own experience, literature has always been to some extent exposed to the same epistemological naïveté. Further, the distinctive tenets of realist epistemology, and the controversies associated with them, are for the most part much too specialized in nature to have much bearing on literature. What is important to the novel in philosophical realism is much less specific; it is rather the general temper of realist thought, the methods of investigation it has used, and the kinds of problems it has raised (WATT, 1957, p. 02).

This quotation expresses that truth is a result of interaction between the individual subject and the world experienced by him/her. Modern Philosophy, mainly by Rene Descartes, deals with these concerns: the Cartesian dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, reinforces the strength of the individualistic base of the novel.

However, a specific social, historical, and ideological scenario sets this movement toward the individual subject. Ian Watt (1957) highlights the rise of the bourgeoisie and the individualist philosophy, which operated the new economical dynamics, as the two main points that boost the advent of the new literary form founded on the individual subject and his/her experience.

The novel accomplishes an apprehension of the world through the specificity of three elements: person, time, and space. In other words, the structure of the novel is based on a specific person, in a specific time and space. However, it does not imply a

real person, but a fictional one. Watt explains this point by saying that,

To begin with, the actors in the plot and the scene of their actions had to be placed in a new literary perspective: the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances, rather than, as had been common in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention (WATT, 1957, p. 04).

The fictional character has another status in the novel, different from the literary tradition, as in Greek epics, in which characters transcend individuality and represent the community. For example, Ulysses, the character by Homer, is trying to go back home, and his journey represents Greece after the Trojan War. The “Odyssey” character is a representation of the nation trying to rebuild and find itself. In this perspective, his agency oversteps his individual experience and achieves a collectivity. Another theorist, Georg Lukács, points out the differences between the epic hero and the novelistic one, he says: "one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community" (LUKÁCS, 1971, p. 29). This arrangement is not present in the novel, because, in it, the individual experience is the main point.

Another philosophical concern that contributes to this discussion is the idea of personal identity, based on the thoughts of Locke, Bishop of Butler, Berkley, Hume, and Reid. This idea is centered on the understanding of the conjoining of identity and proper name, as Watt (1957) explains:

Logically the problem of individual identity is closely related to the epistemological status of proper names; for, in the words of Hobbes, 'Proper names bring to mind one thing only; universals recall any one of many'. Proper names have the same function in social life: they are the verbal expression of the particular identity of each person. In literature, however, this function of proper names was first fully established in the novel (WATT, 1957, p. 05).

The idea of an identity to each person reinforces the range of elements that underlie the novel, supporting the individualist perspective. Hence, the character related to time and space is the element in the novel that shapes the individual experience and, therefore, the world.

E. M. Forster, in the book "Aspects of the Novel" (1970), examines some elements of the novel: the story, the people, the plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm. This essay will focus on the second one, the people, which guides me toward the character. The author highlights that "the novelist [...] makes up a number of word-masses [...] gives them names and sex, assigns them plausible gestures [...]. These word-masses are his characters" (FORSTER, 1970, p. 52). Given this context, the fictional character is taken as a linguistic construction created by the writer. Furthermore, according to the philosophical base that sets the novel, as long as a character has a name, it has an identity.

Nevertheless, Forster brings up the following question: "what is the difference between people in a novel and people like the novelist or like you, or like me, or Queen Victoria?" (1970, p. 52). This questioning refers to the differences between real people, the ones who inhabit the world, made of flesh and bones, and

fictional ones, those who just live inside the books, made of language. In order to think about an answer to this concern, we must take into account the distinctions between people of history and the people of the novel. From the given example of Queen Victoria, the author explains that the historical character handles with actions, the public life, and the figure can be deduced by these elements. Therefore, in history, the exterior elements construct the image of the people regarding the public space. On the other hand, the interior perspective conduces the construction of the people in the novel, meaning, the individual experience.

Forster says that:

It is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source: to tell us more about Queen Victoria than could be known, and thus to produce a character who is not the Queen Victoria of history (FORSTER, 1970, p. 53).

These explanations reinforce the postulates presented by Ian Watt about the novel based on the individual experience. The Queen Victoria of history is the public figure, the external vision; however, the novelistic one is the individual, which is figurate from her private point of view. Therefore, Forster points out that "people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life is exposed" (FORSTER, 1970, p. 54). As long as the reader has the inner perspective, the internal view, he/she can go deep inside the experience and life of the character, regarding his/her thoughts, dreams, traumas, etc. But, in history, it is not possible, since the only aspect given is the public one.

Forster (1957) provides some analytical devices throughout his theory. He divided fictional characters into two groups: flat characters and round characters. The first is that character who stays the same from the start to the end of the novel, whereas the round character is that one who presents some complexity level and goes through identity changes throughout the narrative. The author presents a test to check if a character is round or flat: "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising convincingly. If it never surprises, it is flat" (FORSTER, 1957, p. 85).

These aspects of the novel put the character in the leading role of the critical exercise. Despite this definition of the character as a linguistic being, raised by his individual experience, this narrative element maintains some relation to the real world. Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, supports this idea throughout his theory. In "The Dialogic Imagination" (1981), the author deals with the discourse in the novel, as he says "the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 261). This quotation means that a body of social voices expressed through the speech of the character composes that novel. The author says:

We have seen that social heteroglossia, the heteroglot sense of the world and the society orchestrating a novelistic theme, either enters the novel as impersonal stylizations of generic, professional and other social languages - impersonal, but pregnant with the images of speaking persons - or it enters as the fully embodied image of a posited author, of narrators or, finally, the character (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 331-332).

In addition, Bakhtin also explains that the character, the speaking person in the novel, is a social actor who utters from a certain perspective and social position. Regarding this topic, he determines that:

The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 333).

According to this idea, the character opens up an ideological framework in the novel. The fictional figure uncovers a worldview in his/her speech. In other words, the Bakhtinian theory of the novel points out that this literary genre is constituted through maximum contact with reality.

It is known that different critical perspectives project closer examinations on this narrative element. In Structuralism, mainly in classical Narratology, the character is taken as a verbal person and its analysis is a linguistic one. However, through the resizing process in this field of study, the analysis became more focused on the construction of the character regarding social, historical, ideological, and psychological levels.

The Portuguese author Carlos Reis, in “Pessoas de Livros” (2018), explains such perspective according to the Post-Classical Narratology, or Narrative Studies, framing the fictional character beyond language construction. Moreover, he develops the concepts of “figuration” and “fictional figure”; “figuration” is a “renewed way to problematize the fictional character” (REIS, 2018,

p. 23)¹. It means a new theoretical perspective to analyze this narrative element, transcending a linguistic analysis and achieving the exteriority.

Figuration is the process from which the fictional figure raises. It means the compositional devices used to construct a character, considering the semiotization act, which is the conjunction of the discourse and the meaning-making that construct the image of the character. In this perspective, Reis (2018) determines that *figuration* is a dynamic process traversed by rhetorical, fictional, and acting devices. That is, the figure that emerges from the figuration process is erected by his/her speech, fictional arrangements, and actions in the diegesis.

At last, the French theorist Michel Zérafra (2010), dealing with novels from the 1920s to the 1950s, understands that under each novel underlies a conception of person. To support this idea, the author determines a relationship between the aesthetic material and the psychosocial elements that construct a character. Thus, the character is the element that constructs an image of the person in the novel, it is not based just on linguistic elements, it is also settled on subjectivity and identity constructions.

Considering all these theoretical concerns, an analysis of the main character of “The Catcher in the Rye”, Holden Caulfield, is proposed, pointing out the elements that construct this character. In this analytical course, I intent to determine the dynamics of the character based on the themes expressed by the fictional figure in a dialogue with the aesthetic construction.

1 “*um modo renovado de problematizar a personagem ficcional*” (translated by the author – E. H.).

The figuration dynamics of Holden Caulfield

The 1951 novel, “The Catcher in the Rye”, by J. D. Salinger, tells the story of Holden Caulfield, a 16-year-old boy who studies at Pencey, an expensive school in Pennsylvania. The story is told by an autodiegetic narrator, the main character, Holden. The action is performed a few days before Christmas at the end of the 1940s. The character was expelled from school and did not want to go back home. Hence, Holden decided to go to New York and stay there until the day he should go back to his parents’ house. In the city, he hung out with old friends and spent his time walking around.

Sidney Finkelstein, in “Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature” (1965), understands the main problem of the novel as an inner disquiet. This consideration means that the construction of the character is based on a disagreement between the *self* and the world. In addition, the dynamic of the character takes place in this axis formed by the duality *self/world*; it settles the journey undertaken by Holden to perform the recognition of himself before the world. This dissonance affects the way the character looks at himself, the world he is in, and the fabric of subjectivities formed by his contact with otherness.

Considering this scenario, the reader can notice themes throughout the book: the dichotomy of essence *versus* appearance; sexuality as a way to discover the world and himself; childhood; time; and past. All these themes arise from this friction between the inner (the *self*) and the exterior (the world).

Furthermore, “The Catcher in the Rye” is a narrative of subjectivity, which implies a narration shaping the *self*. In this perspective, the novel is the life story of the main character. However, it is not just an ordination of facts and causes, it expresses his subjectivity and identity. On the first page, Holden says that it is not a traditional life story:

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 (SALINGER, 2014, p. 03).

He says he is going to focus on the events that occurred after his expulsion from Pencey. At first sight, the impression is that the last thing the narrator wishes is to talk about himself. However, he utters a speech about what happened to him and it uncovers his past, his interaction with the world, and his subjectivity. In other words, at the same time he is trying to get away from a narrative about himself, he is projecting meanings on his existence through topics elicited by his memory. From this process, certain topics emerge in the narrative: the contrast between essence and appearance shaping his worldview; sexuality as a way to discover the world; the relation of the character to childhood and innocence; and the relation of the character to time, evoking the past as a way to signify his existence.

Holden uses an adjective to describe almost everything around him –school, teachers, classmates, etc: phony. According to “Collins Cobuild Dictionary” (1995), this word means something “false rather than genuine [...]”, or someone who is “insincere or pretentious” (1995, p. 588). Therefore, to be phony is the opposite

of being truthful, or to be one thing and pretend to be another. In the words of Finkelstein, this *adjectivation* achieves an ethical level, to be false or true is a moral standard in the worldview of Holden.

The worldview of the character promotes this adjective usage: the world is false because the people and social institutions are also false. Such discourse is founded on his impressions of his school and classmates. This movement means a view of the whole based on his microcosm. The character says that:

Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere *near* the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." Strictly for the birds. They don't do any damn more *molding* at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably *came* to Pencey that way (SALINGER, 2014, p. 04, original emphasis).

The way the character talks about Pencey opens up a contrast: how the school really is and how the school pretends to be. The institution creates an image of itself through ads of a magnificent academic place, which turns its students into splendid people. The tradition of the school and the symbols of greatness support such imagery. However, Holden says the school

is not so impressive, according to his view, it was nothing more than any other school.

The terms emphasized reinforce this idea brought in his speech: *near*, *molding*, and *came*. He had never seen a horse, the animal printed in the Pencey ads, even near the school. This observation means that the school was based on an imagery with no connection to reality. Moreover, the molding process they announce is not different from other schools, they do not turn anyone into a genius. Even so, the only two splendid students of the school came from another institution; it was not any merit of Pencey.

Another scene that corroborates this idea is the impressions Holden has about the speech by Ossenburguer. His classmate is talking about God and Jesus to the others, and Holden says:

Then, the next morning, in chapel, he made a speech that lasted about ten hours. 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 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 (SALINGER, 2014, p. 20).

Here is another contrast build by the view of Holden: his classmate was pretending to be a good and faithful boy, but he

was completely the opposite. This is a dichotomy: on one hand, appearance, and on the other essence. In the same way, the narrator describes Stradlater, his roommate. He seems always neat and tidy, with a very good appearance; also, he had dates with different girls, and everybody admired him. However, Holden sees him differently, as he describes:

Stradlater was more of a secret slob. He always *looked* all right, Stradlater, but for instance, you should've seen the razor he shaved himself with. It was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap. He never cleaned it or anything. He always *looked* good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway, if you knew him the way I did. The reason he fixed himself up to look good was because he was madly in love with himself (SALINGER, 2014, p. 31, original emphasis).

By describing Stradlater as a slob, the character deconstructed the image of a neat boy and built an image of a dirty one. The emphasized terms support this idea: he looked to be that way, but, in truth, he was the complete opposite. Besides, this scene lays an ethical prediction: he acted like that because he was fixed on his own image and just worried about how he looked.

Furthermore, Holden situates himself in this phony world, because he says he is a liar himself:

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 (SALINGER, 2014, p. 19).

Therefore, these elements, the school, his classmates, and himself, shape his microcosm, and from this point of view he comprehends the world. Seen in these terms, his comprehension is traversed by the opposite sides: appearance and essence; in the discourse, such meaning is achieved by the adjectivation phony. This contrast is also founded on the dichotomy of truth and lie: the essence is the true side and the appearance is the false side.

Another theme present in the text is sexuality. Holden is a teenager, he is starting his sexual life, and he is discovering the world. This context opens a perspective that points to the comprehension of sexuality as a way to discover the world. This statement means that through his body he is discovering the world.

Holden, in reality, never had a sexual relation, as he says: “If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am. I've had quite a few opportunities to lose my virginity and all, but I've never got around to it yet” (SALINGER, 2014, p. 103). What he really knows about sex were the reports he heard from his classmates:

Most guys at Pencey just *talked* about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time--like Ackley, for instance--but old Stradlater really did it. I was personally acquainted with at least two girls he gave the time to. That's the truth (SALINGER, 2014, p. 55, original emphasis).

He is one of these boys who just talk about sex, but have never really done it. In the novel, sexuality is a theme deeply linked to innocence. Holden is a 16-year-old boy, in the context of the 1940s this is the age of adolescence, meaning the transition from childhood to adulthood. Given this scenario, he still sees the

world through the lens of innocence. This is the reason why the non-truth issues bother him so much; he has an innocent conception of the world.

Two scenes support this analytical perspective. The first one is when Holden is at a bar, dancing with a girl, and tries to maintain a conversation with her:

[...] "I have a kid sister that's only in the goddam fourth grade. You're about as good as she is, and she can dance better than anybody living or dead."

"Watch your language, if you don't mind."

What a lady, boy. A queen, for Chrissake.

"Where you girls from?" I asked her.

She didn't answer me, though. She was busy looking around for old Peter Lorre to show up, I guess.

"Where you girls from?" I asked her again.

"What?" she said.

"Where you girls from? Don't answer if you don't feel like it. I don't want you to strain yourself."

"Seattle, Washington," she said. She was doing me a big favor to tell me.

"You're a very good conversationalist," I told her. "You know that?"

"What?" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 80-81).

This conversation points out he is trying to know her, where she comes from, to interact with her, but she is not interested in it. Such dialogue appoints that he is an innocent boy, because he does not even understand how to deal with this kind of situation.

The girl, whom he is dancing with, refers to him using the vocative "boy", marking his position and reinforcing his innocence before the world.

The other scene is when he is in a hotel and the host offers him a prostitute. At first, he accepts, but he does not know what to do and starts talking to her:

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jim Steele," I said.

"Ya got a watch on ya?" she said. She didn't care what the hell my name was, naturally. "Hey, how old are you, anyways?"

"Me? Twenty-two."

"Like fun you are."

It was a funny thing to say. It sounded like a real kid. You'd think a prostitute and all would say "Like hell you are" or "Cut the crap" instead of "Like fun you are."

"How old are you?" I asked her.

"Old enough to know better," she said. She was really witty. "Ya got a watch on ya?" she asked me again, and then she stood up and pulled her dress over her head (SALINGER, 2014, p. 105-106).

He starts introducing himself, even with a false name, but she is worried about finding a watch, probably to set her work time. He notices she does not care about his name or who he is. She observes he is a little childish for a boy looking for sex. In addition, when he asks her how old she is, she marks his position as less experienced than her. Considering these elements, we observe his fascination for the truth, refusing everything false,

because of his innocence he is in search of a pure world. Holden is at an age of passage, he is still innocent, reminds of childhood, but is starting to get into an adult world.

The theme of childhood is noticeable throughout the novel. Two scenes explain how the title of the novel is directly related to this motif. The first is when Holden sees a boy with his family, he is walking next to the curb and his parents are not paying attention to him. The little boy is singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 128). Holden notices the boy is in danger:

He had a pretty little voice, too. He was just singing for the hell of it, you could tell. The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more (SALINGER, 2014, p. 128-129).

In fact, his observations achieve a higher level, what he is noticing is that adults do not take care of children. That little boy is near the street, with cars passing speedily close to him, and his father and mother are just talking about some issue. Given this situation, Holden puts himself as a savior, someone who is going to save the children.

Such perspective leads to the other scene when he is talking to Phoebe and utters this image of himself as a children savior:

"You know what I'd like to be?" I said. "You know what I'd like to be? I mean if I had my goddam choice?"

"What? Stop swearing."

"You know that song 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye'? I'd like--"

"It's 'If a body meet a body coming through the rye!'" old Phoebe said. "It's a poem. By Robert Burns."

"I know it's a poem by Robert Burns."

She was right, though. It is "If a body meet a body coming through the rye." I didn't know it then, though.

"I thought it was 'If a body catch a body,'" I said. "Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy." (SALINGER, 2014, p. 190-191)

Holden is referring to the song sung by the little boy on the street. He fixes in his mind that image of a child in a dangerous situation. The children running towards the edge of a cliff symbolize the danger, and he is the only person who is able to save them. Such picture of childhood is at the center of his fabric of subjectivities. That is, the way he constitutes his *self* related to the others, because the only two people he maintains ties with are his siblings Phoebe, a 10-year-old girl, and Allie, who passed away when Holden was a kid. Phoebe is the only person alive he cares about. When he starts wondering about how it would be if he died, he thinks of Phoebe: "I started thinking how old Phoebe would feel if I got pneumonia and died" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 173).

He complements: "She likes me a lot" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 173). About Allie, when he is having a conversation with his sister, he says:

"I like Allie," I said. "And I like doing what I'm doing right now. Sitting here with you, and talking, and thinking about stuff, and--"

"Allie's dead--You always say that! If somebody's dead and everything, and in Heaven, then it isn't really--"

"I know he's dead! Don't you think I know that? I can still like him, though, can't I? Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake--especially if they were about a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're alive and all." (SALINGER, 2014, p. 189).

The otherness demanded to construct his subjectivity is found in his sister, a child, and his brother. The image of his brother is present in his life; it is brought to the narrative when he says he likes Allie because dead people could be better than the ones alive. These elements open up a perspective in which the things that support his subjective process are, one in the past, his dead brother, and the other represents childhood.

When Holden is crossing streets he gets a sort of paralysis, he is paralyzed on one side of the corner, to cross it, he projects the image of Allie on the other side:

Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me. You can't imagine. I started sweating like a bastard--my whole shirt and underwear and everything.

Then I started doing something else. Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 217-218).

The image of Allie is what allowed him to carry on. By the stream of consciousness, the reader can notice Holden is fixed on this imagery of the past: his brother is no longer alive, but he makes him present. This weft puts the character in a time related dilemma: the representative systems brought in order to shape his subjectivity are related to the past, the image of his brother. Moreover, Phoebe is growing up and soon she will no longer be a child. For this reason, he wishes everything to be kept as it is, stopped in time. This prospect is based, specifically, on a scene when Holden is at the Museum of Natural History waiting for Phoebe and says: "The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 135). Just as it happens when Phoebe is on the carousel and it plays a song: "it played that same song about fifty years ago when *I* was a kid. That's one niche thing about carrouseles, they always play the same song" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 231, original emphasis). That means, no passage of time, if time was stopped Allie would not have died, and Phoebe would always be a kid.

This relation to time is a trigger for some memories to come up. One of them is the time he was looking for shelter in the house of Mr. Antolini. When he is sleeping on the couch, he suddenly wakes up with his host stroking his head. Nevertheless, those are not good memories, he advises: "I don't even like to *talk* about it" (SALINGER, 2014, p. 211, original emphasis). He tried to

get a reasonable explanation, but he did not get any, Mr. Antolini just said that was a misunderstanding. Holden got away from that place. However, the main point of this scene is at its end when Holden says: “That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it” (SALINGER, 2014, p. 213). This speech opens a speculation of the possibility that he was sexually abused. In this case, the relative pronoun “that” refers to what had happened to him with Mr. Antolini, and he emphasizes that the same situation happened many times since he was a child. If this hypothesis is true, it reinforces the idea that he wants to save the children, he wants to be someone he did not have when he was a kid.

In the last chapter, the reader discovers Holden is in a psychotherapy exercise. According to Freud, when the subject turns his traumas into speech, he/she can understand it, organize it, and give it new meaning. Therefore, the psychoanalytical narrative was the way found to put the *self* in harmony with the world, in which he could signify his memories and his existence. Finkelstein (1965) links the psychoanalysis to the idea of transformation. The author understands that at the end of the book the character seems to be transformed, which means he handled those experiences that led him to a crisis.

Maria da Glória Bordini (2006) points out character construction from a cultural perspective. The author says the fictional character keeps an open dialogue with the reader. That is the reason why this book has fascinated a range of readers over the years. The reader sees in the image of Holden his own existential dilemmas. If we go back to the theory of the novel analyzed in the first part of this essay, the individual experience

structures the novelistic genre, and here, the crisis experienced by Holden is the structuring point of the narrative.

Through the lens of the ideas by Zérafra, the character in the novel is constituted by the conjoining of an aesthetical material and psychosocial elements. The figure of Holden Caulfield is shaped this way, his worldview, his fabric of subjectivities, and his existential problems are put together into the linguistic materiality through a dynamic process involving his speech, his action, and the fictional devices used in the text.

At last, Finkelstein (1965) analyzes children figures in the work by Salinger and concludes that the world always makes them afraid. The same happens to Holden, he is afraid of the world, he is losing his innocence, and in his journey in New York he, for the first time, is experiencing the world as it is. Thus, Holden is afraid of becoming part of this phony world he is living in.

Conclusion

According to the theories reviewed here, a novel is a picture of the individual experience. As a literary genre, the novel has as one of its most important elements the linguistic material. However, authors like Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Zérafra link the aesthetic aspect to the social and psychological ones. The first theorist points out the novel is a heteroglot discourse that evokes social voices and constructs an ideological perspective of the world. The second brings up the idea that each novel is structured in relation to a conception of person; so, the novel is the result of a combination of reality associated with an approach of human existence. In addition, Narrative Studies consider the character as

a process of semiotization traversed by his/her speech, actions, and the fictional devices brought to the text, without ignoring exterior elements such as identity, subjectivity, and ideology.

This theoretical framework is fundamental to understand the figuration dynamics of Holden Caulfield, the main character of “The Catcher in the Rye”. After his expulsion from school, he, a boy in crisis, went to New York and spent some time just walking around. Beneath this plot, underlies a complex character construction. The boy cannot recognize himself before the world he assumes is false and is described by the adjective “phony”. His worldview is innocent, his moral standard is based on the truth. Through this lens, he puts himself in the place of someone who is going to save children and their innocence. In the world of Holden, innocence should be kept to avoid a false world: just the innocence of children could ensure a true world.

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