



Holden in the Rye

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Rebuttal

HOLDEN IN THE RYE

The response to the December 1961 Salinger articles was large enough to necessitate editing before publication. Apologies go to the authors of the rebuttals, who had no opportunity to check the editing, and to the authors of the Salinger essays, who had no chance to answer their challengers.

MR. SENG, in "The Fallen Idol: Holden Caulfield," undermines his very persuasive argument about the morality of *The Catcher in the Rye* by his own performance. He insists that the novel embodies a complex reality, in which "there are no simple truths." But, having proffered this piece of wisdom, he withdraws it again when he concludes with the simple truth about Holden Caulfield; Holden is mentally sick. He will get better, Mr. Seng assures us, but not until he gives up his compulsion to criticize the phonies and learns instead to accept them as "fellow inhabitants of his world." . . .

Of course, Holden is sick, but he is not merely sick. To read the book exclusively as "the edited psychoanalysis of Holden Caulfield" is to ignore the fundamental ambivalence of Salinger's own attitude toward his young hero, to make the novel far more anti-romantic and conservative than it really is, and to overlook the sickness of Holden's environment. . . .

This ambiguity about the state of Holden's health parallels the far more basic ambiguity about the validity of Holden's judgments of the world, his judgments about the pure and the sordid, the sincere and the phony. Like so many American novels—*Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Great Gatsby*, to name but a few—*Catcher in the Rye* adopts a strategy of irresolution. It dramatizes, finally, ultimate issues rather than ultimate judgments. . . .

BARRY A. MARKS
Brown University

THAT PETER J. SENG'S concern with the way *The Catcher in the Rye* is taught in America's classrooms has some validity can be seen from Bernard S. Oldsey's romantic reading of the novel (in "The Mov-

ies in the Rye"), but Mr. Seng overstates Holden Caulfield's immaturity as much as Mr. Oldsey overstates his virtues. Holden is immature and unaware of his own limitations, especially in the early portions of the novel, for if idealized, he could not experience the growth of moral awareness so necessary to serious fiction. Salinger provides, however, numerous evidences of Holden's sensitivity and genuine concern for others. The visit to "Old Spencer," for example, which Mr. Seng uses to prove that "Holden is intolerant of sickness and the debility of old age," illustrates rather the boy's sensitivity to the problems of the sick and the aged; he is unable to accept with indifference the sordid and pathetic situation of a teacher whom he likes and wants to respect. . . .

At the end Holden, promising as much as an honest person can, *thinks* that he will apply himself when he returns to school. Even though Holden is unable to evaluate fully his own experience, he has obviously chosen as his model of human life his sister Phoebe—still living, learning, reaching, loving—rather than his dead brother Allie, doomed to eternal childhood.

DONALD H. REIMAN
Duke University

PETER J. SENG criticizes "most" articles about *The Catcher in the Rye*, suggests that "Perhaps the teacher should be banned and not the book," and then makes several mistakes himself. . . . For instance, Professor Seng asserts that in Chapter 24 Antolini "sees to the heart of the matter and gives saving advice" but that Holden's "impossibly absolute standards" reject it and thus "his mental breakdown commences."

Not true. Like everybody else in the book, Antolini fails to see that what ails Holden is the death of his brother, Allie

("All"), plus parental neglect. That is why the world seems full of phoniness to Holden. His breakdown begins with "All's" death; his parents consider psychoanalysis for Holden way back then, at 13. And he deteriorates in a series of prep schools. His parents don't realize that he needs to live at home, nor does Antolini (nor the analyst at the end). . . .

DEXTER MARTIN
State College, California, Pa.

BERNARD S. OLDSEY in "The Movies in the Rye" claimed that Holden Caulfield, as a child of his times, was automatically a child of the movies. His name, Mr. Oldsey suspects, was an amalgam of the last name

of movie stars William Holden and Joan Caulfield. . . .

I believe that Mr. Oldsey has stretched the plausibility of his argument, for the name "Caulfield" in Salinger's stories predates the 1947 movie "Dear Ruth" by several years. Vincent and Holden Caulfield appeared in a short story in the *Saturday Evening Post* on July 15, 1944 entitled "Last Day of the Last Furlough" and in a story in *Esquire* in October, 1945 entitled "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise."

The two stories of Holden Caulfield ("I'm Crazy" and "Slight Rebellion Off Madison") which hinted at his later novel appeared before the 1947 movie. . . .

ROBERT D. BHAERMAN
University of Delaware

RONDEAU THE PURIST TO HIS INCORRIGIBLE PUPIL

KARL W. DYKEMA

Your grammar's bad, and you ignore
All rules of syntax as a bore;
You treat our language's sacred laws
Like worn-out toys or worthless straws;
You should be damned for evermore.

But that which most I do deplore
(And that which makes me mighty sore)
Is that your themes are good—because
Your grammar's bad.

You write in ways I most abhor;
And yet your themes hold richest store—
But no, I'm here to find the flaws,
To mark each wrong dependent clause;
Your grade in English's "Failure" for
Your grammar's bad.

Professor of English and director of the Division of Languages and Literature, Youngstown University, Mr. Dykema is a specialist in linguistics. His "Where Our Grammar Came From" appeared in College English, April 1961.