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**The Worth and Curse of Fiction  
Reading in J. D. Salinger's The  
Catcher in the Rye**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English as a Partial Fulfilment of  
the Master Degree in Anglo Saxon Literature and Civilization*

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## Dedications

This dissertation would have probably never been concluded if I did not have the support and love of one of the greatest persons I know in my life, *Abd Nour Alili*.

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## Abstract

Fiction reading has been examined from a multitude of angles and approached from a variety of disciplines, each seeking to investigate one of their target inquiries. Disciplines such as Cognitive Psychology have discovered some interesting results about the affective and cognitive effects reading fictional literature evokes in readers' minds and behaviours. However, most of their investigations end up praising literature and encouraging people to read more. In contrast, this research attempts to expose a literary phenomenon that does not treat literature with similar positivity for it strives to reveal the extent of harm reading novels may cast at the level of readership. The consequences that were discovered initially range from propagating stereotypes and prejudices to inspiring violence and murder. It compares the media contagion effect of the copycat effect; trying to conclude the same for reading fiction. Based on the history of some novels and following New Historicism as an analytical methodology, *The Catcher in the Rye* is taken as an exemplary novel that has been linked to some crimes; the most important of which is the murder of one member of the Beatles, John Lennon, and the attempted assassination of the American President, Ronald Reagan. As this paper submits, future research may find new grounds of examining the edgy side of literature and its potential distorted influence; Criminology, legislation, and detective offices may locate new sources to relate the crimes they may encounter; and readers could be more cautious and aware in choosing and handling their reading materials. Authors, as well, will be more inclined to pay more attention while writing.

*Keywords:* literature, fiction reading influence, copycat effect. *The Catcher in the Rye.*

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## General Introduction

Literature as an artistic form of the human creativity has the power to express its writers' ideas and emotions to reflect their ages. It is not merely a combination of words glued together; it is a projection of life often written with an authorial subjective tone that pinpoints the imprints of each of its contributors. Reading, on the other hand, is the channel that links people to this Art. Inasmuch as reading is concerned, influence cannot be overlooked for literature represents a ground for both leisure and insight.

The influence of fictional literature has been a subject of inquiry since the classic period in which thinkers pondered on the value of Art to life like in Plato's *Republic* and the impact of tragedy on people like the ideas of Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The emergence of the novel as a new form of innovative writing in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century sparked lot of debates on both its artistic and social value and opinions about its impact on the mind and soul, body and attitude of its readers started circulating. However, most of these opinions looked with disgrace to this new affordable, democratic, and inclusive form of Art, while the rest of forms were still hailed. Still, it is until the twentieth and twenty-first Century that the influence of fiction grabbed the interest of cognitive sciences, namely, psychology which has been providing scientific evidence and systematic proofs on the positivity of fiction reading.

This positivity science has confirmed with numbers and groundbreaking theories contribute to the acclaimed appraisal literature receives by most people. Nevertheless, that does not mean that it has not faced some uninviting or

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opposing episodes in its history. Some people have considered literature as an influential medium that does not necessarily carry with it welfare. Some incidents must stop people to reflect on the potentiality of harm literary works may invoke on the individual and social scales. Harms such as spreading stereotypes in favour of given race or prejudices against another ethnicity; instructing immorality; fuelling low self-esteem against one's life; or providing sophisticated schemes to wage public anxiety . . . etc

*The Catcher in the Rye* as a highly acclaimed work of fiction in the postmodern era provokes much fuss, almost like no other book did until it became the most-loved, most-taught and most-banned book in the United States. It was written by Jerome David Salinger; the son of a half Jewish- half Christian wealthy parents and a World War II sergeant. The novel is narrated by a 16-year-old-boy, named Holden Caulfield from a California medical facility where he was healing from an emotional meltdown that afflicted him owing to a number of events and a set of nagging ideas that caused his depression and annihilation.

Albeit Holden's fictional identity, he owns an immortal position in world literature as a voice of teenage angst and adolescent rebelliousness. He is one of the literary figures that receives both admiration and repulsion of generations of readers since his celebration in 1951. This coming-of-age novel has been analyzed in hordes of essays since its first publication and interpreted by numbers of critics; by admirers who depict its greatness or adversaries who vilify its influence on young readers. To fulfil the aim of this research that attempts to demonstrate that literature cannot be an absolute innocent medium of effect and

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that fiction operates all along a continuum of positive-negative impact through which a copycat crime can be generated, the following research questions were formulated:

- To which extent does fiction reading influence the affective and cognitive abilities of readers?
- How can a novel like *The Catcher in the Rye* be a source of copycat criminality?

The ability to influence readers through a novel has been investigated by myriads of experiments that figured out how reading affects brain connectivity to enhance people's mental and emotional dynamics. Still, no publication of research, at least to my knowledge, has been directed to measure or expose the sum of negative outcomes fictional literature may cause. Thus, this dissertation suggests that literature can be a corruptive means of influence and a source for copycat criminals. It stimulates positive effects and negative effects likewise and can motivate deranged readers to murder, the same as a movie or a video game can.

To confirm the validity of these hypotheses, the imitative, expressive and affective theories of literature will be applied to answer the first question. In addition to New Historicism to explore the contextual layers of the novel besides some other works of art to see the influence they had in regard to society.

This extended essay is divided into two Chapters. The first one deals with the previous literature on fiction reading influence, including: some theories

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of literature, a set of psychological findings of the fiction effect, criminality, and examples of literature's both positive and negative effects.

Whereas, the second Chapter applies the first chapter's findings on *The Catcher in the Rye* in order to answer the research questions and reach the aim of this work. Inasmuch as negative influences are being exposed, this essay does not support any book censorship on its behalf since it just tries to draw attention to an exceptional phenomenon.

# **Chapter One: Fiction Reading**

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# Chapter One: Fiction Reading

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## 1.1. Introduction

The first element to guide the path of this research is an attempt to pin down a close definition to the word 'Literature' and how it intermingles with the human experience through a set of theories and how Psychology has explained its dynamics to create an influence on the outside world of its readers. Examples of its effects will be studied all along a continuum, starting with fiction reading assets until its association with criminal behaviour.

## 1.2. Literature Defined

Numerous attempts to settle down a concise definition to this word have not entirely succeeded in folding its boundaries (Rahmoun, 2013, p.8). In fact, there are books like Jean-Paul Sartre's *What Is Literature?* (1946), René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1948) and *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (1982) by Ann Jefferson and David Robey, all of which aimed at providing one sufficient definition to the art of *Litteratura* (Fowler, 1987, p.1).

Basically, literature encompasses two categories: oral and written productions; three groups: the rhythmic verses of Poetry, the flows of Prose and the performances of Drama. All of which possess a significant artistic merit, depth, and permanence because 'literary texts are the one we are likely to remember; ones that may, in fact, influence who we are, how we experience our world and what truth guide our lives' (Jago, Shea, Scanlon, & Aufses, 2011, p.1).

Texts are also divided as non-fiction (informative) or fiction (imaginative) based on their contents. The former offers knowledge about

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something, explains a phenomenon, or defines terms such as Encyclopaedias. Whereas, the latter constructs beauty, enhances feelings, provides pleasure and imagination, and compels its readers to 'slip, involuntarily, often helplessly into another's skin, another's voice, another's soul' (Oates, 1987).

Critics with their different adherence to different schools of thought acknowledge the elusive meaning literature has. Nevertheless, different approaches compete with each other to reach the sufficiency in meaning. For instance, Formalism focuses on textuality and ignores any other social considerations. The disruptive effect of forms and devices is enough in deciding the *literariness* of texts and grasping their meaning (Cohen, 2017). Literature for them is the product of Shklovsky's (1917) '*Defamiliarization*' that distinguishes a literary from a non-literary work through the ability to make familiar words of everyday speech, unfamiliar throughout the artistically well-arranged combinations of those familiar words (Cited in Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 35). Thus, their conclusion about literature can be narrowed down into Oscar Wilde's line: 'Art for Art sake' for they approach literature from an asocial point of view 'not pseudo-religion or psychology or sociology, but a particular organization of language'. They isolate literature from its social, political, emotional and psychological meanings and manifestations (Eagleton, 1996, p. 2).

In contrast, some other scholars view literature in reference to how it deals with reality, how it influences and gets influenced by the surrounding environment. Therefore, literature, for critics like Young (2000), becomes a



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social creation. It is a ‘mimesis’ (p. 9), a mimicry and portrayal of life. While other theorists go further to proclaim that:

Literature in a sense does not exist. It has no essence. It is not a case of X being a literary text, and Y being non-literary. Literariness is more spectral and elusive. Any text conventionally considered as literary (Geoffrey Chaucer’s ‘The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale’, say) can be read as non-literary (for example, as an account of female sexuality in the Middle Ages); and conversely, any text conventionally considered as non-literary (a political speech, say) can be read as literary. (Bennet & Royle, 2004, p. 86)

In such an understanding, the focus is on the reader to decide what to read as literature and what not to read as such. Thus, the idea about this Art becomes a matter of reading. Whatsoever, classifying what is literary from what is not, can be a subjective one, since the critics who are bound with the responsibility to decide, can be judgemental and excluding. Eagleton (2013) explains that what is considered literary was influenced by the ideological discrimination of the preferences of a given class that excluded what was ‘popular’ down ‘street’ (p. 15)

There are also different approaches, besides the schools of thought to categorize what is worth to be labelled as literature and what is not. According to Meyer (1997) most of the definitions concerned with literature have been constructed based on what is known as: The Criterial Approach that provides a

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set of elements that must be met to treat a given text as a literature. Therefore, if a given text misses one item of the checklist, it becomes disqualified as non-literary (p. 1).

Meyer's preference is The Prototype Approach that is mostly attributed to the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) whose idea is in favour of 'A Family Resemblance'(p. 31-32) which circulates around 'an established prototype, a particularly good example of the word, to which other examples of the word bear some resemblance'(p. 2). Thus, elements that the prototype comprises such as written, high quality language, openness to interpretation, and aesthetically read should be present in other text, and the absence of one or more of them does not necessarily discard that given text (p. 4).

After all being discussed above, Literature is an artistic 'performance in words' (Frost, 1999) with a multitude of perspectives to approach its loose essence for it deals with human beings that lead lives of unstable states and continuing change. However, it remains a significant human phenomenon whatever way people look at it. And as this research aspires for analyzing a single aspect of this broad concept, it is rational to limit its boundaries, precisely, to focus on written, fictional, English novels, with all literary theories that treat literature as a social manifestation.

### **1.3. New Historicism**

Different approaches have been birthed out of literary theory to guide the path towards extracting the meaning of what a given work of art tries to convey as a message. Those approaches, however, take different stances in drawing their

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conclusions. Sharp in point, a general text vs. context dance has been played by literary theorists in excavating those literary meanings, sometimes won by the textualism<sup>1</sup> and another time by contextualism<sup>2</sup>. To name few, Structuralism<sup>3</sup>, American New Criticism<sup>4</sup>, and Formalism<sup>5</sup> approach texts in isolation from any other considerations and reject any historical interpretation to them; separating history from fiction. In contrast, Marxism<sup>6</sup> and Feminism<sup>7</sup> concentrate their criticism of texts on their social implications, while Psychoanalysts treat them as psychological patients. Thus, they tend to focus more on history than fiction.

Starting from the 1970s, literary theorists developed a new way of criticism to bridge the text/context gap. The friction was no longer permitted because a new style in managing the conflict succeeded in blurring the lines between history and fiction. (Lai, 2006, p. 2) The result can be summed into one famous line: No work is an island for the inevitable crisscrossing of fiction with history and vice versa.

New Historicism has been fathered by Stephen Greenblatt's book *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance* (1982). As a

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<sup>1</sup> Textualism is the strong adherence to text. (*Collins Dictionary*, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Contextualism is a doctrine that focuses on the importance of context in answering a particular question. (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Structuralism is a method of interpreting literary texts by relying on their structure.

<sup>4</sup> American New Criticism is 'a post-World War I school of Anglo-American literary critical theory that insisted on the intrinsic value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual work alone as an independent unit of meaning. It was opposed to the critical practice of bringing historical or biographical data to bear on the interpretation of a work.' (*Britannica. Com*)

<sup>5</sup> Formalism is the methodologies invested in studying the form of a given text. For Cohen (2017) Formalists rejected aesthetics and other evaluative theories of beauty and value, as well as prescriptive theories of function, in favour of a descriptive study of the nature of the literary object itself—a science of literature.

<sup>6</sup> Marxism refers to the set of socialist principles used in literary criticism that has been developed by Karl Max and Frederick Engel. Marxists criticism approach literature as a social manifestation, affected by the political, economic, and cultural context it has been birthed in.

<sup>7</sup> Feminism: is a political, social movement and ideology that struggle for women's rights and gender equality. The same line of thinking has been applied to literary theory to criticize the language of a text and to depict the patriarchal dominance infiltrating into literature.

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modern literary paradigm, it emerged as a reaction to the previous literary approaches, mainly, Formalism, Structuralism, and Reader-Response Theory. Greenblatt's idea can be shortened into analyzing texts with cultural and historical consciousness (Bhat, 2014, p. 14-15).

Adherents of this approach base their literary criticism within the framework of the historical era in which a piece of fiction was produced. For Ukkari (2002), New Historicism is 'a reconstruction of the past from a present perspective, and highlights the role of the present in remaking the past and making it more usable to the present.'(p. 1). Nested in this definition, New Historicism not only builds conceptions using the historical relationships found in a literary work with a time period, it also clarifies the historical period itself.

Henceforth, literature becomes a representation of the history it has been written during. A History that loses its objectivity and impartiality in the postmodern age for it starts being handled as a discourse made of 'literary imagination and power relations', and open to a variety of interpretations and research (Lai, 2006, p. 2), instead of its former status as a bearer of facts. This idea is well supported by Edward Said's thesis *Orientalism* (1978) which proved how language (Fiction) has fortified a whole Western attitude towards the Orient that cannot be redeemed. Greenblatt, for example, historicized through some of Shakespeare's plays how the West violated the Orient, namely by analyzing the famous *Tempest* play (Stephens, 1992).

New Historicism as an innovative way of criticism has a mutual concern to analyze the historicity of text and textuality of history; handling fiction and

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weighing it against the history it was born into as a background, and questioning history and treating it as a narration of somebody similar to a work of fiction. Orderly, literature becomes richer of meaning for it is, above all, a product of a culture and a narration of a specific mind. History, too, is regarded more like a narration of a given direction and interested in specific objectives. Yet, the emphasis of this literary approach is more on literature than history.

For example, the Jane Austen collection of great novels can be handled as a historical document to pinpoint how women were being treated in the 18th and 19th century; depicting a true Victorian mannerism which Austin criticized, but adhered to as well. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) cannot be read as an amusing animal story nor can it be understood without referring to the context and history it orbits around. This novel is a satirical work par excellence; an irony to totalitarian regimes, The Bolshevik revolution (1917), and the USSR's Communist ideology.

In practice, Gregory, S. Jay (1990) provides a set of ideas on how to analyze a given work in a New Historical fashion; the way to apply this literary paradigm to interpret fiction and literature in general, stating that:

The analysis needs to describe: (1) the set of discursive possibilities offered to the writer by the cultural archive; (2)

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the assumption within the text of a contemporary audience whose knowledge must both be used and resisted; (3) the projection within the text of a future audience constituted by its decipherment of the text; (4) the social and institutional sites of the text's production and reception; (5) the figurations of subjectivity offered or deployed by the text; (6) the effects of reflexivity inscribed in the text; (7) and the possible contradictions between the text's cognitive, performative, didactic, aesthetic, psychological, and economic projects (In Belaid, 2016, p. 8).

Therefore, fiction is not merely an artistic textualization of certain events and ideas; it is also conditioned by the historicity of the author's age and character's time. Accordingly, the analysis of any fiction from a new historical lens must be conditioned by Jay's aforementioned factors. Emphasis is projected on the author's non-literary historical inspirations and readers' reception to those inspirations. Nevertheless, New Historicism is not a non-interpretive style than a collection of assumptions based on the historical or anthropological anecdotes that try to link history and literature (Petković, 2004, p. 140).

As far as this research is concerned, relating novels to the influences they create at the level of readership, is a matter of linking them to the kind of reception they had and how they have been conceived in their readers' affective and cognitive behaviour so as to understand what lead them to commit crimes in the name of a specific piece of fiction. For instance, understanding how a racist novel like *The Camp of Saint* (1973) presents itself whenever a refugee crisis hit the West, is part of understanding the way people concerned are becoming more

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and more supporters of nativism<sup>8</sup> and populism<sup>9</sup>, instead of multicultural coexistence.

In sum, New Historicism is inclined to historicize texts to extract their meaning and the role of the culture it produced it. All things are concerned in treating texts as factual discourses with a totality of socio-political and cultural resemblances that condition them to the time and space they were born into.

### 1.4. Theories of Literature

Basically, there are three major theories about literature. The Imitative Theory suggests that the whole idea of art is just a mere copying and /or representation of the existing reality. It is also known as The Mimetic Theory which implies that Art is a projection of life since originality does not exist and all variations of materials do exist in one form or another in nature or have been dealt with before.

Specifically, the idea of mimesis in Art has been pointed at by Jayasekera (2013) who follows the same line of thought provided by Plato's *The Republic* in which he assumed that reality resides in the Idea and any other form of Art is just a copy of that universal eternal Idea. Jayasekera extends this idea that the artist does not copy reality but the senses he meets, creating a 'copy of a copy' (p. 2). However, the imitation is manifested through the use of similar materials to 're-present' or 're-create' nature in a new light in order to make readers assimilate themselves with the image Art offers.

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<sup>8</sup> Nativism is a policy of favouring native inhabitants of a given nation as opposed to immigrants. (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> Populism is a belief in the rights, wisdom, or virtues of the common people. (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*, 2018)

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On the other hand, The Expressive Theory claims that writers are first and foremost interested in expressing themselves through their texts. It opposes the former theory and asserts that artists are not exclusively imitators or ‘photographers’ of reality, but rather genuine excavators of their profound depths to offer readers new angles to approach life. Thus, the final literary product is an embodiment to their feelings. Pope’s (1688) lines on the role of the artist may reinforce the expressiveness literature possesses:

To know the poet from the man of rhymes:

'Tis he, who gives my breast a thousand pains,

Can make me feel each passion that he feigns;

Enrage, compose, with more than magic art,

With pity and with terror tear my heart;

And snatch me o'er the earth or thro' the air,

To Thebes, to Athens, when he will, and where

(Imitation of Horace, 2002, verse, 342-348).

Whereas, The Affective Theory contends that a given text has to cast an effect at the level of readership and on society in general. It is an extension to the theory above; however, it maintains that literature inspires people to carry on deeds in the outside world. In fact, reading literature stimulates emotional release that consequently leads to action. Cohen (2017) provides another concept that



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could explain the Affective Theory best, which is Affective Functionalism<sup>10</sup>, He explains Aristotle's idea on the affectivity of tragedy in his *Poetics*, stating that:

The goal of tragedy, [Aristotle] explains, is the production of the tragic emotions, pity and fear; and its components character types, plot trajectories and specific elements like peripety and discovery—are discussed in terms of their efficacy in producing these effects in an audience. The overall aim is what Aristotle refers to as *catharsis*, a purification and/or purgation of the tragic emotions. What Aristotle intended by this is vexingly unclear, but it is often taken to point the way from a purely affective tragic function to a psychological, ethical, or social one—for example, the “pure” experience of pity in the safe and pleasurable confines of the theatre as a means of preparing us to experience and act upon it in the real world (Foundation, Para. 8).

Hitherto literature is an effective medium of stimulating several emotions and perspectives which have been viewed positively and deduced in psychological studies as such. But what most of these studies failed to capture is whether this positivity of influence is the only effect of fiction reading or not. Indeed, some documents have shown that some readers have undertaken actions that evoked a negative attitude towards society after getting motivation from a piece of fiction and engaged in immoral behaviour and copycat crimes.

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<sup>10</sup> Affective Functionalism is the sum of emotions literature enables its readers to experience. The influence it exerts on them to function in society, generally with a positive approximation.

### 1.5. Psychology and Fiction Reading

Fiction reading has become of paramount importance to psychologists in recent years. Their investigations on this mental procedure take various forms, relying on which method, population, and objectives they opted for like reading encouragement. Generally, their studies concluded that reading, by all means, and whatever effect it casts at the level of readership, adds to the personal and social development of readers. These investigations were conducted within the cognitive (mental) and affective (emotional) frameworks and have reached some interesting deductions among which, Theory Of Mind, Identification, Perspective-Taking, Experience-Taking, simulation, and Empathy.

#### 1.5.1. Theory of Mind

It is the word used by cognitive-psychologists to label the mind-reading processes. What sounds like a science-fictional word is, in fact, a real thing. Mind-reading is the ability to understand other people's perspectives and behaviours. It is the interpretation human beings associate with other's way of thinking and acting to formulate a general understanding of their actions. For example, being told that ' a friend is feeling both happy and sad', and someone responds with an affirmative 'yes', denoting his/her comprehension (Zunshine, 2006). However, the deficiency at the level of the processes that shape mind-reading marks psychopathic and difficult personal and social interaction.

Basically, there are two kinds of theory of mind: the affective one which is 'the ability to detect and understand others' emotions' and is associated positively with empathetic behaviour and negatively with 'antisocial'

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comportment; whereas, the cognitive other is ‘the inference and representation of others’ beliefs and intentions’ (Kidd & Castano, 2013, p. 1).

Concerning Fictional Literature, it makes use of some techniques to evoke mind-reading dynamics and develop brain connectivity. According to Berns, Blaine, Prietula, and Pie (2013) experiments on 21 participants, confirm that reading novels increases connectivity in the brain region in charge of perspective-taking and understanding textual meanings. Similarly, these dynamics that are stimulated by real-life observation happen to occur while reading about fictive characters. Note that these explanations can be incorrect but they represent an intuition or idea anyway (Zunshine, 2006).

Based on Kidd and Castano’s (2013) experimentation on the subject matter, fiction reading enhances readers’ theory of mind as opposed to non-fiction readers or non-readers at all, for they scored high levels in affective and cognitive experiments (p. 1-3).

### **1.5.2. Identification**

It is an offshoot of effective fiction in which readers identify with fictional characters and develop an understanding and sympathy towards them, by means of considering and taking on their ideas, aims, and causes (Djikiv, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013, p. 31; Oatley, 1999, 445-446). According to Cohen (2001), identification is ‘a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside as if the events were happening to them’(p. 245). Cohen’s analysis to identification with Media characters through discussing Freud (1940/1989), Wollheim (1974), and

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Bettelheim's (1943, 1976) psychological explanations to the subject matter, contends that:

Identification is an imaginative experience in which a person surrenders consciousness of his or her own identity and experiences the world through someone else's point of view. Identification leads to the (temporary,[repeated]) adoption of an external point of view and to viewing the world through an alternative social reality. The varying intensity of identification reflects the extent to which one exchanges his or her own perspective for that of another and is able to forget him or herself (2001, p. 284).

Nested in this argument, identification is an involuntary effect that prompts readers to be emotionally transported by an internal simulation to the experiences and perspectives of the characters they identify with the most.

### **1.5.3.Perspective-Taking**

The term has been referred to by the British philosopher, David Hume, who speculated that viewing other's life decisions and choices from their perspectives is imperative to understanding their lives. Behaviours such as helping, sharing, comforting are linked to the element being discussed (Goddman, 2011, p. 7). The same idea has been promoted by psychologists to denote 'the ability to represent the knowledge state of another person'(Ryskin, Schmidt, et al, 2014, p. 48); similar states occur while reading fiction through developing understanding to characters' thoughts, beliefs, and decisions.

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Perspective-Taking can be used interchangeably with identification. However, Kauffman and Libby (2012) prefer to use PT<sup>11</sup>, instead of identification to differ it from experience-taking and because identification suggests a binary opposition between the self (the reader) and the other (the character) which involves an external vision to the story. Perspective-taking is, thus, manifested throughout the consideration and sympathy readers allow becoming what they are reading. It is the first step toward empathetic and prosocial behaviour.

### 1.5.4. Experience-Taking

Conversely, *Experience-Taking* assumes reader's emotional engagement and transportation into the fictional experience with a reduction to their individuality (Djikiv et al, 2013, p. 30-31). To use Oatley's (2012) exact word experience-taking is a 'radical' influence, superior to perspective-taking and stimulator of high levels of empathy. When someone loses oneself into a novel, taking on not only the thoughts and beliefs of one of the characters, but fully immersing into his or her state of being, behaviour, and attitude; the result is identified as experience-taking (Gerrig, 1991, p. 336-340). For Kauffman and Libby (2012), experience-taking is a kind of simulation to which readers 'adopt' the state of being and perspectives of characters as if they were theirs (p. 2). The more readers simulate the subjective experience of a character, the more the ability of the story to alter some of reader's identity and 'self-concept' increases. (Mar, Oatley, Peterson, 2009, p. 407-428; Oatley, 2012)

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<sup>11</sup> Abs, Perspective-Taking

### 1.5.5. Simulation

When readers fully immerse into fictional narratives, they experience an internal *simulation*, an imagination that trains them to face reality with all what it entails. Indeed, Fiction itself is both an imagination and a written simulation to a diversity of life episodes, created by a human being, and deals with human being's motifs to create possible new worlds to be lived by the readers with the guidance of the author like a 'dream' (Oatley, Mar, Djikiv, 2009).

In a nutshell, simulation is an imaginative state of mind. It enables active readers to be emotionally transported into different worlds through the positive use of narrative persuasion, letting them absorb without assessment whatever information the text is sending. In the psychology of reading, simulation is a profound experience-taking phenomenon that permits readers to immerse into imaginative situations by engaging similar cognitive processes to those experienced while facing reality (Mar, Oatley, Peterson, 2009, p. 408; Oatley, 1992; Oatley, 1999, p. 101-117). Neuron imagings were captured in laboratory experiments to depict the brain zones activated while reading a novel (Clay & Lacoboni, 2011, p. 313-329). These kinds of tests support the previous findings of theory of mind, simulation, perspective and experience-taking, and Empathy.

### 1.5.6. Empathy

Empathy is among the first things fiction reading teaches readers. It is the mental capacity of treating the experiences of fictional characters as those of real people by inducing care towards their bliss and sorrow, their thought and deed, and their literary existential being at large. This kind of understanding towards

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fiction is dubbed: Empathy. In *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2018) Empathy is defined as ‘the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another, of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience.’ While Goodman (2011) defines empathy as ‘sharing emotional responses between one person and another [it is] the result of both the cognitive awareness and affective response to a situation’ (p. 4).

Nested in these two definitions, empathy develops affective understanding to other people’s situations and perspectives by making readers’ minds mentally flexible in recognising the circumstances they have read about and familiar with social experiences which they may encounter (Fiske & Taylor, 2013).

An abundance of works has been tackled to diagnose the morphology of this phenomenon like those done by Mar, Oatley, and others’ (2006) besides Djikiv, Oatley & Moldoveanu’s (2013) findings on the ‘Effects of Reading Literature on Empathy’, relate reading fiction to improving social and empathetic skills which have been demonstrated through a given piece of fiction. They, analogously, compare the empathetic effect of literature on readers’ minds to that of aviators who try to enhance their piloting skills through training inside ‘a flight stimulator’ (p. 33). Several other studies (e.g. Bal and Veltkamp, 2013) contend that empathetic effects cannot increase without active engagement into the reading material which does not have to be realistic to make an emotional transportation effect.

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Therefore, psychology as a scientific endeavour supports Literature's significance in enhancing the living experience of readers. It has the key to shape readers' minds, to influence their behaviours, and to push them beyond the mere process of reading. It endows them with benefits so as to be better versions of themselves.

### 1.6. The Significance of Literature

The importance of any piece of literature is undeniable and its first value resides in its label as literary. Similarly, reading fiction adds asset to its readers. 'As an art, literature is the organization of words to give pleasure; through them it elevates and transforms experience, through them it functions in society as a continuing symbolic criticism of value' (Rexroth, 1974). Simply put, literature captures life and enhances beauty; it is an artistic recording to existence. It has shaped many lives that are worth demonstrating and writing about.

For instance, the American writer, Richard Wright, stated in his *Black Boy* (1945) that he had to pretend to borrow books for his white co-worker, so that he could read them since Jim Crow Laws<sup>12</sup> (1877-1950) prohibited such an act. Wright found solace among books that he wrote: 'I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing. It was not a matter of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something new, of being affected by something that made

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<sup>12</sup> First, the name was derived from a bard actually called 'Jump Jim Crow' that represented a derogatory term for the Blacks. It refers to any of the laws that enforced the social segregation against the African-Americans in the Southern and Border States in the USA, starting from the reconstruction period (1877) to the emergence of civil rights movement (1950). Retrieved from <http://www.theacru.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ACRU-the-truth-about-jim-crow.pdf>



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the look of the world different... it was nothing less than a sense of life itself' (p. 211).

The editor, Walter Anderson's speech in IRAC<sup>13</sup> (1994) described how literature empowered his imagination to overcome the hardships life burdened him with, declaring that 'I could open a book, and I could be anything. I could be anywhere. I could be anyone... I read myself out of poverty, long before I worked myself out of poverty' (Cited in Gillespie, 1994, p. 17). In a nutshell, Murdoch's (1970) words may limit the debate on what extent literature is effective and how significant it is to human development:

The most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations. We are men and we are moral agents before we are scientists, and the place of science in human life must be discussed in words. This is why it is and always will be more important to know about Shakespeare than to know about any scientist (Cited in De Koninck, 2009, p. 27).

As a matter of fact, reading literature is accredited with a set of benefits that open up new horizons for readers and help them shaping their worldview. It allows them to learn from the achievements of others, transforms them into better versions of themselves to function effectively in different life situations, and enhances better social attitude towards others.

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<sup>13</sup> International Reading Association Conference.

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### 1.6.1. Cultural Transmission

Literature deals with shades and forms of the human experience. It concerns itself with variations of human activities. As a result, the final writing products of ages are cultural recordings. Indeed, Greenblatt (1995) observes that ‘Great writers [...] [are] specialists in cultural exchange. The works they create are structures for the accumulation, transformation, representation, and communication of social energies and practices.’ Interestingly, writers cannot possibly write with any resonance to the contexts they are involved in and books, on the other hand, enjoy a reputation of easy accessibility and transportation. Thus, the cultural content of a given zone can be transferred into another one, creating a social network of cultural exchange (Quoted in Pannewick, 2010, p. 245).

As a matter of fact, generations of people have been learning about the experiences of the generations that preceded them and, accordingly, the present generations operate and the future ones will replicate. A good example is how people come to know about writers or orators of the ancient times; if not through their literary remnants without which entire eras of human existence would have disappeared. There would be no existence to Hammurabi and Confucius, neither Plato nor Avicenna.

In fact, literature is one form of survival; to have a body of literature is to have a history. Hence, literature can be regarded as a time machine that transports its readers to different times and spaces, while their physical bodies remain in the here and now of the reading process. A process suchlike

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allows the intellectual, emotional, and behavioural progress for its active readers.

### **1.6.2. Personal Development**

The advantages literature bestows on its readers range from learning language to taking life-changing decisions; all of which add to readers' personal progress (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p. 9-28). Kramsh and Kramsh (2000) assert that 'literature has symbolic prestige, artistic and cultural meaning, entertainment and educational value' (p. 553). Through reading literature, people add new vocabularies and enlarge their language repertoires and learning abilities (Elkin, Train & Denham 2003, p. 1-29; Howard, 2011, p. 46-55; Garro, 2014, p. 6; Moyer, 2007, p. 66-79). It reduces stress and lifts one's spirit to escape the burden of too much reality (Frijda, 1989, p. 1546-1547; Nell, 1988, p. 33-34; Usherwood & Toyne, 2002, p. 26-35). It also develops tolerance towards others and sustains cultural relativism through prejudice reduction (Johnson, 2013; Koeller, 1996, p. 99-103; Guarisco & Freeman, 2015, p. 56-58; Meek, 1991).

People who read different kinds of fiction, know more about different life occurrences without any threat to oneself (Ross, 1999, p. 794-795; Van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1994, p. 247-260), and tend to have open-mindedness towards diversity as a whole. This open-mindedness produces a priceless quality that opens readers' horizons to treat life constructively; becoming critical thinkers (Kohzadi, Azizmohammadi & Samad, 2014, p. 68-69; Whiten, Labby & Sullivan, 2016, p. 58). Ultimately, the personal progress readers acquire from

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the exposure to fiction support their decision-making and problem-solving mechanism.

### 1.6.3. A Voice for Reform

The human history is jammed with revolutions by which people stood up against whatever kind of oppression they were subject, aiming at reforming their life conditions. They revolted by both hand and pen because resistance cannot necessarily be won in blood only. Thus, literature was their solid ground on which resistance was laid.

For Sartre (1988), literature is by nature ‘revolutionary’ (p. 111). The Christian Religious Reformation in the 16th-Century was ignited by the critical *Ninety-Nine Thesis* of Martin Luther who challenged the religious practices of the Catholic Church and paved the path for Protestantism. The American Revolution in the 17th-Century was encouraged by ideas such as liberty, democracy and the rule of law over the rule of man. Ideas that reached the continent carried inside literary texts from the Classic period until the Age of Reason; besides the influential writings of Thomas Paine that ‘turns the people into thoughtful participants in the affairs of the nation and transforms democracy from a political system into a more broadly conceived social and cultural phenomenon, involving the dissemination of ideas’ (Larkin, 2005, p. 4) and heroically succeeded in cutting the ties between Great Britain and the New World.

Additionally, the American Civil War (1861-65) demonstrated the effectiveness of literature in waging wars and changing public opinion. Harriet

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Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) underpinned the success of The Abolitionist Movement which fastened the end of turmoil over the issue of slavery. In addition, Sidney Kingsley's play, *Dead End* (1935) depicted the drastic unsanitary conditions in the slums of New York City owing to the Great Depression and pushed the American government to issue the Wagner Housing Bill to mend the situation (Sami, 2011, p. 174).

The revolutionary attitude of Third World countries was also carried away by the visionary pieces of literature that showed evidently how colonialism afflicted the identities, the progress, and the environment of indigenous peoples. Writings like Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) ignited a serious discussion in academia on the perception of the Occident regarding the Orient. Other texts like *Nedjma* (1956) by the Algerian author, Kateb Yacine, that exhibits what pain the Algerian population had to endure during the French colonization (1830-1962), precisely, discussing the massacre of Setif, (May 8, 1945, succeeded into voicing their people's struggle and carrying their national causes to universal theatres.

Based on what preceded, Sami's (2011) answer to Hanna's question on the opening pages of his book, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*(1994)affirms that literature is capable of starting wars, freeing serfs, breaking up marriages, driving readers to suicide, closing factories, bringing about law-change, swinging an election, or serving as a weapon in a national or international struggle(p. 136). The Argentine novelist Julio Cortázar, too, 'was

persuaded that a revolution in language would produce a revolution in the real world' (Taras, 2013, p. 198).

### **1.6.4. Imagination**

Literature offers inexpensively images on other people's lives, dreams, and hopes. It enhances people's imagination to consider what they are reading about. Practically, imagination is the basis of most of today's achievements. Technology that is the priceless product of modernity was just an imagination of some enthusiastic researcher. Similarly, most hypotheses and theories that shape are the genesis of the whole scientific body. Indeed, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, [and] giving birth to evolution' (Einstein, 1929).

Literature proffers insight into the existence; thus, it enlarges reader's senses to ponder about what other forms of lives look like, or what situations people might be bound to experience (Hakemulder, 2000, p. 17; Rosenbratt, 1970; Smaragdi & Jonsson, 2006, p. 519–540). Hodges (2010) affirms that reading fiction galvanizes readers' imagination to acknowledge the conditions of actual worlds and to create their own worlds (p. 65). On this ground, literature does not just provide readers with a variety of life possibilities but also helps them construct new ones.

Thereby, literature enriches individuals' personal experiences through the accumulation of imaginative experiences to 'read ourselves imaginatively into other lives and by this act expand the pages of our own' (Gillespie, 1994, p.

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17). Thus, this cognitive process results in growing awareness towards what fictional characters go through and, automatically, develops into social understanding.

### 1.6.5. Empathetic Skills

Empathy is another benefit fiction teaches readers to do. Through letting themselves to be transported into the fictional circumstances characters undergo, they start learning how to face these situations if ever they occur to them in reality settings. Stepping into another's shoe, mediates for avoiding and solving problems, fostering critical thinking and Social inference which enhance prosocial behaviour (Haslam, 2017).

These are the most cited advantages fiction readers can benefit from their reading materials as opposed to non-fiction readers or non-readers. However, the question that motivated this research is whether or not literature can inspire its readers to err, to harm their reasoning, and push them to commit deviant acts.

### 1.7. Literature's Edginess

The assumption that fiction reading may represent a threat to its undertakers has some awkwardness about it because of the stereotype literature has about itself. In fact, there was plenty of controversy about, and attacks on novel-reading. The controversy was fuelled by numerous reasons, all converging in one spot: *the fear of ideas* some pieces of literature demonstrated. Therefore, Censorship or attempt of suppression took several disguise: from trials, book-burning, to death penalty. (This extended essay is in total disagreement with book censorship. It is trying to spot how a piece of

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fiction can upset the public and what reception the public reflected on its regard)

In the 18th-Century England, a setting known for its rigid conservatism that was born out of the Puritan prospect that did not welcome artistic innovations, precisely those entertaining and amusing. Ironically, novels were written and treated for this exact objective. 18th-Century complaints ascribed novel-reading to endangering reader's psychology, imitating fictional episodes that life could not fulfil, wasting time, and 'damaging not only the mind and the morale of readers, but also their eyesight and posture.' Indeed, these arguments are still valid to some non-readers in the contemporary period (Vogrinčič, 2008, p. 109).

Questions on the corruptive effect of fiction reading are left unanswered by pedagogues and scientists alike because all energies are being concentrated on covering the benefits readers get from fiction, rather than the risks this dissertation is trying to shed light on. To start with, empathy that makes people more sensitive towards the experiences of others may turn to operate in the opposite way. Dali (2014) explains that a well-written novel might orient people to be obsessed with its events. She states that:



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You didn't worry about the faithfulness of [your spouse]. You also did not obsess over rare diseases, traffic accidents, bacteria-laced foods bringing on an epidemic, cunning identity theft, or an internet predator lunging at an opportunity to con you out of your life savings. The list goes on. Books deliver ideas vividly, viscerally: readers hear the criminals plot inside their minds, feel the destructive viruses penetrating a human body, and agonize over the betrayal of those whom we love and trust. And this is how reading an enthralling well-written book can result in a nagging worry or fear. (The Dangers of Reading, Para. 7)

Simply put, reading persuasive fiction provides ideas and experiences that are not exclusively positive in the core. The imaginary events fiction delivers project good and evil, just and deceit, and facts of life which manipulate readers' mind to actually start thinking about them and to an extent of acknowledging them. Some readers may just over think, stress out about, or await the occurrence of these events; they may even undertake action to investigate them or adopt them into their activities. Etymologically, this is known as Perspective-Taking which can develop to Experience-Taking that was discussed previously on Chapter One. The risks literature may engage its readers with vary from causing them low self-esteem, exposing them to stereotypes, filling their heads with brainwashing propaganda, or inspiring them to outrage on their society.

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### 1.7.2. Prejudice

Though literature is a cultural record of variations of settings, it is still a personal product, conditioned by its writers' opinion and imagination. These two elements, if not well-educated and measured can generate prejudices and increase the ratio of stereotypes, instead of encouraging tolerance and inspiring respect.

The cases in which fiction prejudices a given ethnicity, gender, social class, ideology and so on are legion. Examples of Anti-Semitism<sup>14</sup> prevail within literature. From Christopher Marlowe's *The Jews Of Malta* (1589-90), William Shakespeare's *The Merchant Of Venice* (1597-8), Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839), to Edith Wharton's *House Of Mirth* (1905) and Scot Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Rosenberg (1960) justifies the intolerance towards the Jews due to their:

Fabled attribution in the Christian texts and thus subconscious as a god-killer, and that image developed during the Victorian age to be the swarthy-faced old man who makes his living by tramping the streets of London and that matches a very convenient image of child-quelling bogeyman. The accumulation of stories of necromancy, greed, lust and killing solidifies the stereotypes about the Jews during two millenniums. (In Belaid, 2016, p. 16)

Thus, these artistic documents were responses to the time period, the socio-political and cultural components they were influenced by. They depicted the public stance regarding the Jews to satisfy their audiences and to propagate

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<sup>14</sup> Anti-Semitism refers to having or showing a strong dislike for the Jewish people, or treating them in a cruel and unfair way. (*Cambridge Dictionary*)

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ideas for diverse purposes; condemning fiction to contribute in the prevalence of discrimination and racism against a minority group by issuing them to anxiety, violence and persecution instead of mediating for co-existence (Wistrich, 2008).

Similarly, Orientalism as a literary ideology infuses hatred-based discourse to dehumanize the Oriental population for the sake of promoting excuses to silence the Imperial hunger of the Occident. The misinterpretation Orientalists implement in their art is part of a general attitude that considers anything different as a form of Otherness through which the West initiated missions in the name of ‘civilizing the unfortunate backward’.

Edward Said’s famous thesis which goes by the name, *Orientalism* (1978) diagnosed the western literary establishment to extract the perspectives it deployed. The result was pure prejudice; the East was perceived as the denegation of the developed, prosperous, intellectual, moral, and reasonable west. This essentialist excluding gaze reduced the Orient into a beautiful place inhabited by fanatics and old children that needed the Western whip to be tamed or removed so as to permit enjoying their lands and riches.

The stereotypical examples of marginalizing the East are uncountable. From Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604), the Black moor who was accused of witchcraft and that his wife Desdemona could have never loved him unless he enchanted her with magic. Weeping her marriage, her father states that: 'she is abused, stolen from me and corrupted by spells and medicines brought from mountebanks.' (Act I, Scene iii, p. 25) As a British, Shakespeare wrote to amuse

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his audience and to demonize the Turks and Arabs for they represented unwanted competition to the British Empire.

For Orientalism, though time flies and opinions change its spirit never faded. When most writers who had never set foot in the Orient enjoyed writing their Art, the 18th-Century industrial development made the idea of travelling a possible one. Adventurers of both genders succeeded in crossing their geographical borders to visit the Orient but never trespassing their Orientalist attitude. *Vathek*(1786) by William Beckford continues reproducing the same static image in which Muslims were people of extravagance, exoticism, eroticism and most appealingly to the Orientalist Beckford was, the demonic otherness they had possessed like Caliph *Vathek*had.

Evidence to Said's assumption that literature and history are not innocent, are in fact several (Said, 1978, p. 27). This innocency can be summed up in the overgeneralization of classifying the Oriental population in such a manner that became a *de facto* in most of the writings of great English writers like Richard Burton, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, The Bronte Sisters, Lord Byron, Samuel Coleridge, Rudyard Kipling, Washington Irving, Edith Wharton...etc. Snader (1997) explains this antagonistic stance in his article, 'The Oriental Captivity Narrative and Early English Fiction', stating that:

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Orientalism combines geography and ethnography in a totalizing description of various Islamic lands, under the broad rubric of the "Orient," based especially on negative and alienating images of local peoples, religion, government, social customs, and even climate all of which serve to create an impression of the cultural superiority and potential colonial mastery of the West (p. 273).

In this regard, Orientalism as a literary discourse is a record of Oriental ‘mischief’ which grew through time to be encompassed into three generic descriptions: exotic, fanatic, and more lately terroristic.

The influence of this literature contributes to the general western spirit regarding the Eastern lands and peoples besides activating an imperial mechanism towards them, Thomas Shaw’s travel account: *Travels or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant*(1837) provided hordes of valuable information to the French imperial administration to conquer Algeria for 130 years. Thomas Edward Lawrence’s autobiography, *Seven Pillars Of Wisdom* (1914) offered generously knowledge about the Arabian living and thinking which helped shaping schemes for manipulating them to defeat the Ottoman Empire and paved the way for the Sykes-Picot<sup>15</sup> (1916) dividing agreement. Or Edith Wharton’s *In Morocco* (1922) guide-book that was a response to a French invitation so as to record the uncivilized nature of

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<sup>15</sup> Sykes-Picot is a French-British agreement to divide the lands of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, mainly, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into French and British administered areas. The agreement took its name from its designers, Sykes of Britain and François Georges-Picot of France. (*Britannica.com*)

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the Arabs and the European effort in developing them (Crowley, 2017; Leask, 1992, p. 22; Said, 1978, p. 254).

Hence, the functionality of Orientalist literature is in the accumulation of hate-based and discriminatory positions the West took in regard to the East. It is ‘the textual attitude’ which prepared the ground for a guilt-free 19th and 20th-century colonization (Said, 1978, p. 83). Following this logic, literature was and is still associated with knowledge that is associated with power per se. Orientalism promoted knowledge about a given population and cleared multiple paths for imperial agendas and Western domination (Bongie, 1991, p. 16-17; Said, 1978, p. 197).

### 1.7.1. Dissatisfaction

The same idea of considering what is being read and comparing its aspects to what is being lived and experienced by real people compels readers to feel *dissatisfaction* about their own lives. The beauty and thrill fiction promotes leads some readers not only to compare their activities with those of fictional characters but they take them as templates to what their lives should be like and how they should start behaving.

For instance, women in the 18th-Century were confined indoor and their beloved source of entertainment to fill their empty lives was within the pages of a piece of fiction. Some women were accused of losing their senses and confusing the line between fiction and reality for they did take the fanciful ideas as life possibilities and went outside hunting them. There were some women who escaped with their lovers and others who cheated on their

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husbands all on the basis of a passionate piece of writing (Vogrinčič, 2008, p. 110-111).

The French author, Gustave Flaubert, seemed to know about the public anxiety of fiction reading. His 1856 famous novel, *Madame Bovary*, reflected the 19th-Century stance towards fiction reading and its influence on women. Flaubert's female protagonist, Emma, read fervently that she obsessed over what fictive people had,

Emma spent six months breathing the dust of old lending libraries. Later, with Walter Scott, she became enthralled by things historical and would dream of oaken chests, guardrooms, and minstrels. She would have liked to live in some old manor house, like those ladies in long-waisted gowns who, leaning chin in hand on the stone ledge of a window, spent their days gazing from beneath its trefoil arch at a white-plumed cavalier, mounted on a black steed, riding towards them from the distant horizon (p. 34).

Flaubert continued explaining that after marriage, Emma looked for the romance she often read about. However, the more she searched, the more disappointed she became:

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Again and again she told herself: ‘I’ve a lover! I’ve a lover!’ revelling in the idea as though she were beginning a second puberty. At last, she was to experience those joys of love, that delirium of happiness that she had despaired of ever knowing. She was entering a magical realm where life would be all passion, ecstasy, rapture; a bluish immensity surrounded her, lofty heights of emotion glittered brightly in her imagination, while ordinary existence still continued only far, far away, down below, in the shadowy emptiness between those peaks (p. 144).

Cohen (2014) argues that reading fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was ascribed to confusing fiction with reality, stimulating false ideas, and imprudent behaviour. Emma Bovary’s thirst for love and passion that romantic novels promoted encouraged her to look for them outside her wedlock, ending up betraying her loving husband, indebted, and eventually committing suicide.

In short, Flaubert’s novel raised a critical issue about the way reading fiction might influence society; based on which a year later, Flaubert faced ‘obscenity trial’ after the publication of his work as the prosecution thought that the way Emma’s rebellious and insolent conduct against the social and cultural conventions may prompt female readers to follow her steps. Yet, he was later acquitted since the court found out that readers might think thoroughly before emulating her misconduct as she eventually took her own life, which was enough of a punishment (Plemmons, 2007, p. 2-3).

Indeed, *Madame Bovary’s* trial is a sufficient acknowledgement to the concretized impact of fiction reading on both the individual and collective levels;



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an impact that disturbed the public reception. Likewise, the twentieth century case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929) by D. H. Lawrence holds the mirror up to Flaubert's immorality charges by the British court. Ladenson (2007) comments on the former novel, stating that:

The work in question merits severe blame, since the mission of literature should be to beautify and enhance the spirit by elevating the intelligence and purifying morals rather than to inspire disgust for vice by offering a portrait of disorder that may exist in society (Quoted in Šnircová, 2015, p. 7).

Thereby, writings that digressed from the didactic fashion of teaching morality were held as non-literary during the Victorian period for the same worry Flaubert discussed in *Madame Bovary*. Other reasons that waged an anti-novel campaign were its inclusivity, accessibility, and democratic form that spoke with a realistic tone to all folks of society, with a language that an average literate could understand, its inexpensiveness that allowed even low-income people to purchase it, and its all-should-be-instructiveness. These aspects all were thought threatening (Vogrinčič, 2008, p. 117).

Cohen (2014) observed that reading fictive stories was regarded as 'absorptive'. She continues explaining that absorption was the apparent danger of the previous centuries, while it has been substituted etymologically by the term 'Distraction' in this century. In fact, time changes and opinions change accordingly. Reading a lot is a distraction per se; be it fiction or not and people who lose themselves within books are either isolated from what goes around

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them or hypercritical to their surroundings. This issue of distraction can intrigue paradoxical responses itself; while some readers can be pleased with it, others cannot.

### 1.7.3. Propaganda

Propaganda is the potentiality to persuade through a brainwashing influence that generates ideas and shapes public opinion by means of rhetoric devices that are described by Tuve (1947) as the instruments that ‘move a reader’s affections [...] affect his judgment; they move him to feel intensely, to will, to act, to understand, to believe, to change his mind’ (Quoted in Hakemulder, 2000, p. 18-19). Besides, deception and symbolism, Propaganda as a strategy has some defining features. For Sproule (1994) ‘The first is manipulation through covertness; second is the overpowering of people with a massive and self-serving outpouring of symbols; third is distortion through tricky language; fourth is the pursuit of a special interest as opposed to pursuing objectives of wider public good’(p. 3).

The objectives of implying these elements are to justify an egoistic, self-oriented goal whether for the sake of national or individual interest. Smith (1989) contends that ‘Any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion.’ is a propaganda (Cited in Black, 2001, p. 127).

In this regard, writers’ intention to convey a certain idea, be it social, moral, emotional, political and so forth is a form of propaganda to serve

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strengthening a cause, be it benevolent or spiteful. However, it is mostly conventional that propaganda has a notorious connotation since it is applicable to fulfil selfish ends, uses deceit, and shapes opinions that can threaten the existing systems of state, politics, economy, culture, or religion.

As an art, literature is concerned with revealing a truth about the human experience; written from a personal mind and aimed at respective objectives, from making a living, generating beauty, or exposing a problem...etc. Thereby, its content might be impending or irritating to some directions. On the long run of history, books were incorporated in the general equipment of propaganda. According to Robert (1987) Fiction whether written by an 'explicit political commitment' or not is an arsenal of propaganda and serves different ideologies (p. 161).

*A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) is an adequate example of the propaganda the British established in the American Continent to justify their imperialistic intentions by dehumanizing the Native Indians. *The Monk* (1796) by Mathew Lewis is another form of propaganda for the Protestant Church, yet a derogatory account to Catholicism.

Anti-slavery novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe are propaganda for the Abolitionist Movement which threatened the Southern States. On the other hand, *Aunt Phillie's Cabin* (1852) by Marry Henderson Eastman is counter-propaganda against the North. Orientalist literature is another established form of Propaganda by the West to devalue the Orient for the sake of controlling its population and exploiting its land. Another

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example is The French novel, *The Camp of the Saint* (1973) by Max Valentin which deals with an apocalyptic Third World refugee invasion to Europe. The novel stands as an anti-immigration propaganda.

According to Kamenetsky's (1984) extensive analysis of The Third Reich literature, she reaches the conclusion that the Nazis piloted a policy aimed at cultural engineering. As a result, literature that supported their thoughts was hailed; otherwise, it had to be banned. The same procedure was done to children literature (In May, 2009).

During the Second World War, for instance, The Nazi government used to sift books so as to keep those that empower its ideology and prevalence, while destroying those considered as 'Un-German', keeping only literature that served as propaganda like Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*(1925). On May 10, 1933, Nazis fetched for books written by Jewish or foreign Authors like Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Albert Einstein, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, and Trotsky whose different ideas were not allowed to be read by Germans. The result was burning 25.000 books in an enormous bonfire (Trueman, 2012).

The Cold War, as well, represented a market for the Communist and Capitalist competition to propagandize for their systems of thought through Fiction. For example, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is an anti-Communist novel par excellence. In contrast, there are other writers who authored volumes in support of the opposing different ideology like *It's Me Eddie* (1976) by Eduard Limonov, *R. A. B.* (2009) and *Soulless* (2012) by Sergei Minaev, echo an Anti-Capitalist tone.

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To sum up this idea, Orwell (2004) openly stated that ‘every writer, especially every novelist, has a "message," whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it. All art is propaganda.’(p. 5). Indeed, what can be respected and supported by a given group can be disrespectful and harmful to another. For this reason, myriads of literary productions were attacked, banned, or burned in several corners of the Planet along time, like the burning of John Milton’s books in England and France in the 17th-century for their political and philosophical unconventional thoughts.

Indeed, history is jammed with book-burning activities which were believed to erase their less desired ideas. Books such as *Grapes Of Wrath* by John Steinbeck was burnt in 1939 in several places in the USA since it depicted some California landlords as they did not wish to (Neary, 2008; Wartzma, 2009). *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie is another example to have caused unprecedented turmoil in the modern era for it was conceived by some Muslims as provocative to their *Deen*<sup>16</sup> (Anthony, 2009; Bosmajian, 2006, p. 137).

However, like any other form of Art literature cannot satisfy all human beings who by nature are diverse, different, and in so many instances rivals. Yet, this does not necessarily explain both its neglect to other’s cultural and psychological sensitivities, and its censorship.

### 1.8. Literature and Criminality

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<sup>16</sup>The term *Deen* stands for the Arabic translation to the English word ‘religion’.

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Novels with their affective and cognitive abilities to influence readers to be their favourite characters, or at least, pick some of their traits to become ‘more human’ (Prior, 2013) and empathetic to their environment, ‘smarter and nicer’ to the folks they acquaint with (Paul, 2013), can be overrated yet undeniable. History registers some of the extraordinary incidents that associated reading novels and criminality.

Criminality is more a clinical and scientific term than a legal one. It has an umbrella definition that sums person’s quality to do harm to others and/or determination to commit a crime. As a matter of fact, crimes belong to the well-established legal checklists that define them respectively, yet criminality describes these crimes within a ‘continuum’ in a scientific method. Some deviant acts are minor that their committers cannot be called criminals, whereas, some other actions are extremely hurtful that people consider no time to negotiate if the actor is a criminal or not (Walsh, 2006, p. 9-10).

On the other hand, Novels have been both concerned with criminal behaviour in what comes to be labelled as the genre of crime fiction. On parallel, some novels were incriminated to have motivated wrongdoers to commit evil, inspiring readers to unveil their criminal characters to daylight. This state is referred to as Copycat effect (Doyle, 2003; Symon, 2017, p. 12).

### **1.8.1. Copycat Behaviour**

To begin with, Research about the *Copycat* phenomenon lacks a lot of examination, though it is of paramount utility to solve many problems and understand many crime motifs. Surette (2002) points out that the limitations the

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research finds are insurmountable and the adversities may include the complication of finding a population of copycat perpetrators willing to contribute, the exceptionality and scarcity of developing such behavioural oddity (p. 47-48), the difficulty of inferring who may adapt themselves to this trait and who might not, besides the hardship of measuring this effect (Surette,2016, p. 38-39). As for literature, the oddity rockets in figuring out who might be influenced, at first hand, by literary fiction and who might not.

The word Copycat has been first introduced by David Dressler a sociologist and former executive director of the New York State Division of Parole, in his 1961 article ‘The Case of the Copycat Criminal’ (In Ferrara, 2016).A copycat is an imitator to someone else. This necessitates the model (prior crime), an originator (a prior criminal), a channel (media contagion or in the case of this research a ‘literary accelerant’, or ‘literary trigger’) and a copycat (an enthusiastic imitator). In fact, life within a society urges an imperative kind of imitation for the development of the human species, thus all criminals are copying a pattern of somebody else consciously or unconsciously (Helfgot, 2008, p. 377; Surette, 2016, p. 50-70).

This effect generates, for instance, by the media coverage of some crimes and murders, focusing on the criminal more than the victims. Hence, the crimes and criminals become inspirational figures to some offenders who may be driven to duplicate what they have received mindfully or not. For example, the American society has witnessed a series of public shootings performed by persons who perhaps have been seeking fame or revenge or something else. The

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diffusion of this criminal act led many other persons to perform similar shootings, imitating the prior crimes in different places, especially around high schools (Dahmen, Abdenour, McIntyre & Noga-Styron, 2017; Johnson & Joy, 2016).

David Phillips is a noted sociologist who related the highly-covered media reporting on celebrity suicide events to the increasing number of ordinary people who took their own lives. The term he used to refer to the ‘copycat suicide’ is ‘Werther Effect’ after he noticed that following the release of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe’s 1774 novel, *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrow of Young Werther*), some people in Europe shot themselves while sitting on their desks with an open copy of the book (Fischer & Yom-Tov, 2017; Helfgot, 2008, p. 378). He later coined the concept ‘media contagion’ and used it to label the effect of TV wrestling shows on the diffusion of aggression on spectators and fans.

Over time, other researchers found similar effects in homicides which were reported by journalists and have motivated other perpetrators to follow in line. Therefore, media coverage of crimes was found contagious to the occurrence of other possible crimes (Johnson & Joy, 2016; Surette, 2016, p. 37-64). The reasons they have attributed to this contagion are traced to some criminogenic content like violence, aggression, immorality and so on. These kinds of content have been self-reported by some criminals to have inspired their choice of technique rather than their reasons why to commit such disgraceful deeds (See Surette, 2002). Accordingly, Fiction readers like gamers and TV



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watchers are liable to influence in an even keel and to develop some copycat criminal behaviour.

Here, one may wonder if a ‘Literary contagion effect’ does exist when vulnerable readers identify with the wrong character or the wrong message; and if it is high time scholars forwarded attention to sort things out.

### 1.8.2. Examples of the Literary Contagion Effect

Some novels have been linked to some copycat crimes that were incorporated by some felons to prepare their murders. To name few, *The Turner Diaries* is the number one example of insinuating suchlike violence in the USA. The novel was written in 1978 by William. L. Pierce, the neo-Nazi National Alliance founder<sup>17</sup>. It revolves around a racist idea through which the Blacks and Jews took over the American society and enslaved the White minority who eventually revolted to clean ‘the unwanted others’ out and to get back their lands and rights. The protagonist, Earl Turner, the leader of an underground White supremacist army directed his associates, White Americans, to plot a revolution to overthrow the System (The government), bomb both the FBI headquarters and the Pentagon, and lynch everybody different to them.

This dystopian novel with its White supremacy propaganda became the Bible of the Far-Right<sup>18</sup>, many inspired groups of ‘terrorists’ like The Aryan

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<sup>17</sup> The National Alliance is a White separatist and White supremacist political organization. It was founded by William Luther Pierce in 1974 and was based in West Virginia. It has been barely functioning since the death of Pierce in 2002. (Berger, 2016)

<sup>18</sup> Far-Right politics are the set of politics characterized by strong nationalism, a tendency toward authoritarianism and extreme support for nativist and conservative ideologies. (*Urban Dictionary*, 2018)

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Republican Army<sup>19</sup>, The Order<sup>20</sup>, and some criminals like David Copeland, a British citizen who bombed places and murdered people who belonged to some homosexual, Black, and Asian communities in 1999. All of these people and organizations adduced some of the novel's lines and acted out its detailed violent instructions.

White (2016) observes that the dangerous factor about this work is its 'how-to manual for low-level terrorism, using a narrative-storytelling-format' besides implementing 'methods for making bombs, constructing mortars, attacking targets and launching acts of terrorism.' White assumes that *The Turner Diaries*' potential danger is in its affective inspirational spirit to influence copycat crimes (p. 289).

Yet, the most terrible copycat crimes that followed the publication of this book is Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, through constructing a similar bomb to the one made by the fictional protagonist. The result was 168 people killed and 500 others wounded (ADL, 2017; Berger, 2016, p. 15; McAlear, 2009, p. 192).

*American Psycho* is another novel to spark controversy in the international sphere. Some countries banned it, while Australia had it displayed in libraries shrink-wrapped and sold in plastic covers to prevent minors to access its content. It was written by Bret Easton Ellis in 1991 to direct criticism to the

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<sup>19</sup> The Aryan Republican Army is a terroristic cell of White separatists who has to read *the Turner Diaries* before adherence to this group. Between 1992 and 1996, the army committed 22 bank robberies to fund extremist acts against the federal government. (<https://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/aryan-republican-army-united-states>)

<sup>20</sup> The Order is a White supremacist real-life terrorist cell that was directly inspired by the novel's underground army. They started their criminal spree starting from the 1983. The organization killed three people and stole millions of Dollars. They declared that the novel was their 'bible' (Berger, 2016, p.6-7).

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American Capitalism. It narrates the life of a narcissistic Wall Street businessman, named Patrick Bateman who happens to be a rapist and serial killer with a devilish thirst that can only be quenched by killing more humans.

The controversy about this novel is in its visionary description of graphic violence and necrophiliac torture of the minds and bodies of his victims. This work of fiction is believed to have inspired Paul Bernardo, a rapist serial killer who slaughtered a number of women in Canada and reported that *American Psycho* was his Bible (Brien, 2006; Macavoy, 2016; Valjak, 2017).

Another example is the 1977 Stephen King's novel, *Rage*. This novel is about a teenage student who believes in his intellectual superiority to people around him, takes his classmates and Algebra teacher hostages, urges them to reveal their darkest secrets, and finally kills three of them, including the teacher. It was soon related to several high school shootings that caused a number of casualties:

The 1988 attempted shooting of a student who held his classmates hostages in a California high school. He told the police after withdrawing his plan that the idea came to him after reading *Rage*. A year later, a Kentucky 17-year-old teenager captured his classmates for 9 hours in order to act *Rage* out. Another incident happened in 1996 in Washington where a 14-year-old boy named Barry Loukatis shot his Algebra teacher and two of his classmates, while he shouted a line from the novel (Symon, 2017, p. 7). The police related this shooting to *Rage*. Similarly, the 1997 Kentucky state incident involved a 14-year-old boy, Michael Carneal, who killed three students and wounded five

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others in a praying group at his school, was also identified with this novel (Adwar, 2014; Shaftoe, 2014).

After such incidents, King gave a keynote to the Vermont Library Association explaining his withdrawal of *Rage* out of print and acknowledging ‘the fact that a novel such as *Rage* may act as an accelerant on a troubled mind’(In Banned Book Week, 2012). King had to ban his own novel to cause, at least, some minimum change or to exempt himself from any responsibility.

Another work of fiction that was made into a movie and caused similar controversy to *Rage* is *Basketball Diaries* by Jim Carroll in 1995. The book inspired the Columbine shooting by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Like professional artists, the shooters acted the novel out (Helfgot, 2008, p. 379).

*The Collector* by John Fowles (1963) is another source for enumerable copycat crimes. The abduction of the Fine Arts student, Miranda Grey by Frederick Clegg, an asocial butterflies collector, after developing an obsession with making her fall in love with him. The end of the story was marked by an unpredictable turn when Miranda became severely sick and died and Frederick discovering that she had never loved him. He buried her body which was one of his collections of beautiful items and decided to abduct another person.

In real life, several criminal cases have tracked traces leading to this novel since its publication. Its most famous copycat crime was committed in 1985, California, by Leonard Lake and Charles Chi-Tat Ng. These two cold-blooded kidnappers were extremely hypnotized by the novel. Wanting to have

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their own ‘Operation Miranda’ caused the slaying of two entire families and the lives of at least 25 persons (Doyle, 2003; Ehrlich, 2014).

The list of books with registered copycat effect goes on to include works of art like, *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad (1907), *Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (1962), *Stranger In A Strange Land* by Robert Heinlen (1961), and *On The Path Of The Golden Owl* by Max Valentin (1993) and forth (Doyle, 2003).

Nonetheless, some cases indicate that the source the copycat utilizes to wrongdoing does not necessarily deal with a crime or any form of murder, but operates like a motivational message to guide the criminal. The best example of this case is J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), its reception, and its related copycat *modus operandi*<sup>21</sup> that will be diagnosed in the following chapter.

### 1.9. Conclusion

Regarding literature and its influence with an absolute positivity is an overstatement. Though much of the psychological studies that have been conducted on this record concentrate their efforts on this end, multiple literary cases suggest an opposing stance. Indeed, Literature as a form of the humanistic expressiveness and beauty generator affects the lives of its readers on two scales; either by sensitizing them to do well for themselves and for others or by triggering their evils. They can learn to put themselves in the shoes of others before judging them, or they can harshly segregate a group of people just because

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<sup>21</sup> Modus operandi is the usual way of doing something; especially for the particular way a criminal acts his/her crime. (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2014)

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they have once read some stereotypical short story. They can learn from a good novel how to mend their own lives, or they can feel discontented and depress over having not the same life their favourite character enjoys.

# **Chapter Two: The Case of Catcher**

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### 2.1. Introduction

The scope of this chapter is to solve the problematic which has initiated the mechanism of this work by analyzing *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) as an exemplary work of fiction. In this regard, aspects of the novel and degrees of influence are the components of scrutiny. This novel which was and is still recognized as a real work of Art in the Twentieth Century has been regarded as a major influence at the time of its publication and a suspect of inspiring a set of unwelcomed ideas which condemned it to censorship in a number of places.

### 2.2. *The Catcher in the Rye*

*The Catcher in the Rye* is a masterpiece classic that never went out of print. It was written in 1951 by Jerome David Salinger who gained world's recognition on its behalf. Arranged into Twenty-Seven chapters, the novel is an example of the coming-of-age (Bildungsroman<sup>22</sup>) genre, circular for it starts and ends almost in the same place (Manhattan) and time (Three days on row).

From its beginning, Holden narrates his three days time physical and emotional journey from Pencey Preparatory to Manhattan City, before his mental breakdown, addressing 'You' who is believed to be either a psychiatrist or another patient with him in the facility he is recovering in. Still, whoever might be addressed by Holden, readers feel personally involved with the feelings of this unstable teenage boy.

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<sup>22</sup> It stands for the German translation of 'Coming-Of-Age novel'. A genre of novels in which the protagonist undertakes his/her journey towards survival and self-identification.

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*The Catcher in the Rye* has been celebrated from the beginning of its publication for a set of traits. Its direct and colourful language which allows it to be enlisted among works of eminent authors like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) is an example. Its depiction of post Second World War culture and adolescent's instability exceed the literary boundaries of Salinger's writing significance. According to many critics and reviewers, the novel was given a thumbs-up and more positive remarks like Castronovo (2001) who writes in: 'Holden Caulfield's Legacy' that :

*The Catcher in the Rye* is, of course, more than a novel. A lightning rod for a new sensibility, a wisdom book for post-war students, a behaviour manual for the age of impulse, it has had a life apart from the literary world and cultural significance and staying power beyond its literary value (p. 105).

Clifton Fadiman too gave it a strong review in the Book-of-the-Month Club newsletter: 'that rare miracle of fiction has again come to pass: a human being has been created out of ink, paper, and the imagination' (Quoted in Graham, 2007, p. 37).

Nonetheless, controversy about some of its ideas forwarded harsh criticism and opposition towards its dissemination; frequently, outlawing it in several schools and banning it in several other states. Though it was not intended for young readers, the fear of influencing them ignites most of the fuss about it. Opponents like George Steiner's *The Salinger Industry*, (1959) that fervently opposes all previous reviews which have been praising Salinger's work and

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glorifying Holden's uniqueness; believes in the 'dangerous ' influence young readers may be bound to experience and turn into'(Graham, 2007, p. 38-48).

Albeit the general censorship and stricture, *The Catcher in the Rye* has been facing, it is worth stating that the more it gets persecuted, banned and attacked, the more curiosity readers feel to purchase it and examine it themselves, and the more Salinger's reputation as an eccentric writer strengthens.

### **2.2.1. Biographical Sketch**

Jerome David Salinger is an American short story writer whose only published novel is *The Catcher in the Rye*. He is the second child of a Manhattan rich family; born on January 1, 1919, to an Irish Catholic mother and a Jewish father. There are so many instances in the novel that resembles Salinger's life, including the loss of the team equipment of McBurney School when he was still a 13-year-old boy. This event found its way into Holden's memory when he lost the team equipment in a game scheduled between Pencey and McBurney preparatory schools. Salinger like Holden could not adjust easily in his schools for he found it hard to respond to restrictions and rules. Still, *The Catcher in the Rye* is not an autobiography to Salinger's life (Graham, 2007, p. 3).

Salinger had a passion for fiction-writing from an early age. However, his pursuit of literary fiction came into shape at Columbia University where he enrolled in a creative writing course, held by an important editor and writer, Whit Burnett (1899–1973). Burnett's influence in Salinger's life was major; throughout his guidance and attitude, Salinger could publish his first short story,

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*The Young Folks* (1940) in Burnett's magazine, *The Story*. Salinger's experience of WWII affected most of his stories (Slawenski, 2010).

Though Salinger has created a number of characters that have an endless aura about them in popular culture all around the globe, he as a celebrated author remains in the shadow of mystery. He preferred to lead a secluded life, reluctant to fame and passionate for solitude. Since the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger has avoided contact with the public and kept to himself in a rural area in New Hampshire, writing for his own pleasure without publishing. But one thing that is confirmed about him is as much as he enjoyed the company of teenagers he used to bring to his farmhouse in Cornish, to pass time, party and play; he enjoyed writing about them since the majority of his characters depict them in different life episodes.

In addition to not wanting to be famous, Salinger severely opposed having his biography written so that when he heard about the British poet, Ian Hamilton's publication of one, he sued him, Random House and the publisher (William Heinemann) for copyright infringement since Hamilton used private materials that he did not suppose to. The trial ended up with Salinger's victory and though Hamilton has revised his work multiple times, it could not satisfy Salinger until 1988, when the biography was released under the title *In Search Of J. D. Salinger* (Alexander, 2013).

Salinger too fought against the publication of a set of his short stories that were first published in Magazines and that he stopped the *New Yorker* from re-publishing them. Much to his anger, group of enthusiastic fans thought to

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gather the old stories into a book collection called: *The Complete Uncollected Short Stories of J.D. Salinger, volume I and volume II* (1974). When Salinger heard the news about this unauthorized version, he did his best to stop it for he not only stopped any publication of his old stories and stopped publishing, he even considered them his copyright, and felt like ‘Someone’s appropriated them. It’s an illicit act. It’s unfair. Suppose you had a coat you liked and somebody went into your closet and stole it. That’s how I feel’ (Slawenski, 2010).

As mentioned afore, Salinger was a loner who did not desire interaction with the public for it attracts unnecessary interference into his privacy, so there are little known about the person he was. Yet, his literary achievements won him a *de facto* place among the American and world literary figures. The famous things about Salinger, is the re-occurrence of Holden Caulfield in a number of literary pieces as in *The Last Day of the Last Furlough* (1944), *The Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise* (1945), *I’m Crazy* (1945) and *Slight Rebellion Off Madison* (1946) which is attributed to his belief that Holden could stand alone in a diversity of personalities. Here, Salinger is equipping Holden with the permanence he grew up to have. Besides, his love for Oona O’Neil who, eventually, left him to marry the famous comedian, Charlie Chaplin (Alexander, 2013).

Jerome David Salinger died in 2010 and left behind an everlasting legacy which Sarah Graham (2007) praises: ‘Holden Caulfield’s narrative now seemed more significant than ever and Salinger’s celebrity, far from fading, grew with every new group of readers who found in Holden a representation of their own

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feelings’ (p. 40). Much like its author, *The Catcher in the Rye* keeps puzzling its readers and examiners like a lizard that keeps changing colours whenever and however they approach it. It responds timelessly to the adolescence stage of life wherever readers are.

### 2.2.2. Plot Summary

*The Catcher in the Rye* details a 1946’s three days events of a 16-year-old teenager, Holden Caulfield; the protagonist who narrates his story from a California Sanctuary where Holden is remedying from mental collapse. He starts from his expulsion from his third preparatory school and decision to head West to live alone, but first, he intends to bid his younger sister Phoebe farewell in Manhattan City.

In broader terms, Holden’ short-lived journey makes him explore his home city, New York, and discover truths about the human existence among which madness, death, sexuality, alienation and the ‘phoniness<sup>23</sup>’ of adult life which compels him to hope for a Peter Pan’s Neverland where children can remain forever young and honest. Hence, his dream becomes to catch children, playing in a field of rye, from falling down the cliff into adulthood which he was about to enter. This dream occurs to him after the death of his beloved 10-year-old brother Allie. All these realizations push Holden into emotional meltdown and nervous collapse.

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<sup>23</sup> Adj. It is the quality of being Dishonest and deceitful. ‘Not true, real, or genuine: intended to make someone think something that is not true.’ (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*, 2018)

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### 2.2.3. **Characterization**(From Florman and Kestler. 1984)

As **Holden Caulfield** narrates *The Catcher in the Rye*, he gives readers slices of the lives of fictional characters who take part in the development of the plot; letting readers observe the conditions that govern the human beings. These conditions make them tragic, humorous, vivid, and contemptuous and so forth. Following the order of their appearances in Holden's account, here are the most important ones:

**D. B. Caulfield** is Holden's older brother. He works as a screenwriter in Hollywood; a profession which Holden resents since he believes that D. B. is corrupting his writing talent by selling it to the movies like a prostitute selling her body.

**Mr. Spencer** is Holden's History teacher. Holden pays him a visit to his house to bid him farewell after he got expelled from Pencey Preparatory. Holden finds him awkwardly old; a human trait associated with adulthood that Holden fears and hates. Mr. Spencer tries to advise Holden to be serious and respect the rules of the game which is a conventional reference to life

**Robert Ackley** or Ackley kid used to sleep in the room next to Holden's in Pencey Prep. Holden finds him dirty and ugly that everyone hates to hang out with, yet Holden empathizes with him anyway.

**Ward Stradlater** is Holden's roommate at Pencey. Holden neither likes nor hates him, but he is sure of the hypocrisy Stradlater manages to adjust in society. He is handsome and rich, but still, he is shallow and good at concealing

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his bad hygiene. Traits which reward him for his American masculinity, yet for Holden, vilify him with the biggest trophy of phoniness.

**Jane Gallagher** is Holden's childhood friend. She is never physically present in Holden's course of events, yet readers can feel the impact she has on him. For the narrator, Jane is the frozen image of perfection that he is so afraid to contact so as not to be shocked if ever she might have grown up to shallowness like everybody else he knows. She is his virtual source of comfort that he retreats to whenever he sensed alone or anxious.

**Allie Caulfield** is the third child of the Caulfield Family. He died only ten years of age from Leukaemia when Holden was thirteen. The presence of Allie haunts Holden's memory that he started dreaming of catching children before they fall and die like his dear deceased brother.

**Phoebe Caulfield** is Holden's younger sister. Throughout Phoebe's advice and insight into Holden's life, she is considered as the only voice of reason and compassion Holden responds to. She is depicted as a sensitive and careful human being that sounds rational and understanding to his issues. It is no surprise that the only intelligent and thoughtful character in the novel is a child since just like Salinger; Holden idealizes children's thoughts and values them.

**Sally Hayes** is Holden's old girlfriend and one of the phonies he knows. When Holden decides to retreat to nature in New England to find peace and escape the city of phonies, he arranges a date with Sally, during which he asks her to flee with him, but she refuses his invitation; making Holden furious that he starts calling her names which he regrets later.



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The list of characters is so long since during Holden's journey outside he meets a lot of folks and reminisces about others. These acquaintances contribute to Holden's self-image, psyche and emotional fall down.

### **2.2.4. Holden's Persona**

The success of *The Catcher in the Rye* is, indeed, accredited to the way Holden Caulfield was constructed. He is the centre of attention through which elucidations are provided from an adolescent vantage-point in a first-person narration. Holden's ideas on the persons, events, feelings and ideas he encounters on his three days journey back home provide insight into teenage angst, hopes, and fears. Through his narration, readers can be instantly overwhelmed by his stream of consciousness which transparently reflects his raw ideas and emotions.

Holden makes reference to his parents in a vague way, but satisfactorily enough to establish their distance from what he is going to narrate. His mother is 'nervous as hell' and his father a corporation lawyer (Salinger, p. 9). His parents' distance from Holden's course of events reflects their absence from his life-image. They are busy and emotionally cold persons. Their neglect weighs heavily on Holden's self-identification and severed his confusion because the people who must be the major players in his personal growth are already physically and emotionally far.

The persona of Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* has been analyzed since he came into existence in 1951; releasing a variety of interpretations in critical circles about his thoughts and behaviour up till now. In other words, Holden is the typical rebel who does not agree much with the conventional

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values of his society which he deems unauthentic. Holden becomes very real to readers due to his psychological depth and personal turmoil, intellectual introspection and satirical attitude. Salinger succeeded in creating a character that radiates the confusion and loss teenagers felt during the cold war in a materialistically oriented city like New York. Holden's frustration and alienation are results of the capricious social norms, lack of real connection with other human beings and the absence of guidance by experienced adults who appear to be as inconsistent as the narrator himself (Lawrence, 2001, p. 50).

Holden's ambivalence makes him viewed with similar ambivalence by readers who often look at him as a snob, saint or somehow in between. He is regarded as a dangerous role model to readers in his age; regardless of the fact that this novel as many other short stories written by Salinger, though relating stories of young men, they are not intended for young men or children.

Even so, parents have always been afraid of the influence of Holden on their adolescents owing to his catastrophic grades in school ; getting expelled from several preparatory schools; instead of going home, he goes wandering about Manhattan ; staying in a hotel room; swearing; smoking; drinking Alcohol and hiring a prostitute to do nothing with. These things about Holden make him the kind of rebel, parents often warn their children not to hang out with. He is an unreliable narrator since his potentials are usually invested in pessimistic remarks about how things go around him. Indeed, his focus is on death: fear of death, survival guilt, love of dead people, instead of learning about himself and making friendships (Duane, 2007, p. 65).

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However, Holden is portrayed not to be hated or fought against, but to be empathized with. Holden's attitude in the novel makes him sound like an old tempered man. Yet his curiosity about where the ducks of Central Park Pond go during snowy winters shows the youthful innocence about him (Salinger, p. 8). His identity struggle whilst approaching adulthood represents the major contempt and fear that frustrate him from growing into the phonies he mostly dislikes.

Much like the person Salinger is, Holden enjoys childhood and finds solace among children especially with his younger sister Phoebe whom he admires for her sound reasoning and affection. Holden's rejection of growing up that carries changes, complexity and phoniness haunts him, that he equates it with death. His dream to catch children playing in the field of rye from falling down the cliff to death symbolizes a fall into adulthood (Salinger, p. 101). His aspiration for 'stopping time' worsens his state of mind. He looks to the Museum of Natural History with an admiration because nothing ever changes in such a place (Salinger, p. 70), and how Carrouseles repeatedly play the same song over and over (Salinger, p. 123) are metaphors used to denote Holden's desire to remain forever young.

Holden's annihilation can be explained through his past. The death of his beloved brother Allie of Leukaemia (Salinger, p. 22) and the suicide of one of his schoolmates, James Castle (Salinger, p. 99), elucidate his desire to be a catcher of children from death and growing up. Suchlike memories left him always looking for potential deaths. While on his journey, Holden obsesses about his extinction. Once he thought of having a brain tumour (Salinger, p. 34), 'Pneumonia'

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(Salinger, p. 90) or ‘cancer’ (Salinger, p. 114). He also imagined being shot by a bullet in his belly, just because Maurice (The hotel elevator-operator and procurer) hit him there (Salinger, p. 61). Accordingly, Allie’s death affects Holden’s reasoning which affects his narration of *The Catcher in the Rye* that echoes sadness, mourning, deep hurt, injury, loneliness and ultimately depression and fragmentation which send him to the Psychiatrist’s Sofa (Wan Yahia & Babae, 2014).

Technically, his trauma is depicted through the use of certain words. The most frequently repeated ones after ‘*phony*’ are ‘*crazy*’, ‘*madman*’ and ‘*depressed*’ which trace Holden’s fall into psychosis<sup>24</sup> for he loses control and comprehension to cope with his age.

These events overwhelmed young Holden and captivated his imagination to narrate the incidents so visionary. They taught him how fragile life can be, which he comes to recognize as the novel approaches its end. Life for a lost child in the post-war era as Holden represents a painful crisis through which his reflections on things and people around him symbolize this existential and identity puzzlement as in his unusual concern with his own disappearance (Zekkour, 2016).

Bloom (2007) describes Holden as ‘an alienated saint’ who has too much love and freedom, yet he is very unstable to invest them in learning to save himself (p. 8). His instability portrays him with such ambivalence towards the life he leads and compels him into dilemma, except toward the innocence of

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<sup>24</sup> A mental illness that makes patients think and act strangely. (*Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2018*)

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children and the dead. His phoniness is excused since his intentions are to protect the people he meets. In his conversation with Ernest Morrow's mother, he lied to her about the cruelty of her son to save her from disappointment and forgives his history teacher for failing him (p. 73).

Holden's attitude towards his society is marked with rejection and cynicism. He is extremely judgemental to his society, and seems to hate everything and anything around him. Still, the one thing that annoys him the most is people's care about appearances and neglect of the essence and innocence of life, which he finds unauthentic and 'phony'. Pencey School is like his previous schools which try to mould young girls and boys into artificial sophisticated brides and grooms, to meet the expectations of their society. His unbearable concern with an ideal world, forces him to observe all the phoniness that goes around him (Králiková, 2013, p. 11-12).

Holden satirizes people whom he perceives as typical, stupid, artificial, and unable to encounter their shortcomings. For him, his older brother, D. B is a phony since he writes for Hollywood and not for the love of writing, similar to Ernie the nightclub pianist. Ossenburger is a phony because of his too religious that he comes to believe himself superior (Graham, 2007, p. 24).

Holden's constant conflict to keep the black and white template in regard to his life is destined to failure, this idea has been wisely explained by Mr. Antolini (Holden's former English teacher) who clarifies to Holden that the 'phoniness' he is very upset about is a human fact that does not make people

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hateful or evil though it can be hurtful. But wishing to erase it is inhuman (Florman & Kestler, 2018).

Holden has even been described as a ‘madman’ in so many reviews due to his rebellious state of mind that causes him to hate everything and behave in a way disliked by the people whom he encounters. In an article entitled *Resistance As madness in The Catcher in the Rye*, Dashti and Binti Bahar (2015) present different ideas on how Holden is perceived as a madman in his society that eventually sentenced him to a Psychiatric facility where he will supposedly get back to his senses. However, their idea is in defence of Holden; they believe that Holden is regarded as a madman due to his resistance against the social norms which he deems phony. Thus, his community condemns him as insane owing to his asocial behaviour, though he is just an outsider, a misfit and non-conformist (p. 457-462).

Ironically, Holden is blindly bothered with such artificialities that he cannot see how ambivalent and phony he is himself. He is haunted by virtue and simplicity which he believes can only exist through honesty and innocence. Yet, he is ambivalence per se since he is first given the physical appearances of a young man with an old man’s traits and second for his attitude that often fails him.

He is taller than his peers, with gray hair on both sides of his head, the physical strength of a girl and pacifism of a coward and, of course, with an old man’s weariness, existential fatigue, and resentment. Second, he says and does things which add to his hypocrisy. Though he often remarks on how much he

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disapproves with something, he ends up doing it like his dumbfounding hate for the media; still he uses many movie references in his speech and action like imitating actors for his schoolmate Stradlater (Howe, 2008, p. 12-13). His meeting with his old friend Sally Hayes though he does not like her is another evidence of Holden's pretentious conduct. Besides his conversation with Mrs. Morrow on the train to Manhattan which exhibits his cunning (Salinger, p. 65) and perfection of lying (Salinger, p. 9).

He is self-deceptive and guilty of hypocrisy as he responds to people with lies and does not acknowledge his own weaknesses. In chapter one, though Holden has lost the fencing team equipment for a scheduled match on the subway, he sounds good with it and does not feel guilty about it at all. He even describes it in a cool apathetic way, saying:

The reason I was standing way up on Thomsen Hill, instead of down at the game, was because I'd just got back from New York with the fencing team. I was the goddam manager of the fencing team. Very big deal. We'd gone into New York that morning for this fencing meet with McBurney School. Only, we didn't have the meet. I left all the foils and equipment and stuff on the goddam subway. It wasn't all my fault. I had to keep getting up to look at this map, so we'd know where to get off. So we got back to Pencey around two-thirty instead of around dinnertime. The whole team ostracized me the whole way back on the train. It was pretty funny, in a way (Salinger, p. 2).

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This passage explains well the irresponsibility and nonchalance with which Holden goes about explaining his action. The cynical tone of Holden's narration is part of his protectiveness.

The most interesting element about this story is its realistic and vivid tone that mirrors adolescent conflict to adapt to a place as decadent as New York and a time of uncertainty and selfishness as the Cold War era. Holden represents young people's confusion and misunderstanding by their families and society. These bad properties may lead them to feel alienated from the world around them.

Holden behaves erratically and appears to be in a constant loss that he fails to comprehend himself (Howe, 2008, p. 10-11). On his date with Sally Hayes, he asks her to run with him to New England's woods to live together (Salinger, p. 76). In his meeting with Mr. Spencer, Holden describes how he has been often told to act his age and how he detests it, stating that 'People always think something's all true. I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am--I really do--but people never notice it. People never notice anything' (Salinger, p. 87). These two examples depict Holden's problems. He is confused thus he cannot behave himself to adjust to society, but still, he is misunderstood.

On the course of events, Holden longs the most to have company, but he struggles in keeping up with it. He does not show any sense of belonging to the family he was born into, the school he left, or the schoolmates he had. He is lonely, cynical and he hates it, but he cannot undo it because it is his protective



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shield to his individuality and innocence. Therefore, Holden's innocence protectiveness becomes his main source of isolation, paralysis and weak communication with others.

The complex personality of a character like Holden Caulfield is difficult to explain in one part of a dissertation. It deserves an entire book devoted solely to discuss the psyche of such unreliable narrator. However, the previous discussion was needed to pave the way for the next ideas to come. To know how readers identify with a vivid fictional being as Holden Caulfield who struggles with the artificiality of adulthood in post-war America, alienation, fear of change and innocence, which quicken his fall into depression.

### **2.2.4. Setting**

The time and space in which the novel took place are of paramount utility to the general comprehension of a complex postmodern work like *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger wrote his best-seller after his return from WWII in 1946 over the course of ten years to narrate just two days account of the life of Holden Caulfield. The temporal and spatial limitations of this work allow the protagonist to confront his problems.

First, New York is an urban and money-centred city where people are conceived as self-oriented. This idea explains Holden's loneliness since he finds no one ready to listen to him wholeheartedly or guide him to reconcile with his environment which expects a lot of him. Even his parents are giving him what they think suits him, not the care nor the warmth he craves for. His father is the successful lawyer who is travelling away for not having time to attend

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Christmas with his family; whereas, his mother is 'nervous as hell' for she is still hopelessly mourning the death of her ten years boy Allie. Accordingly, Holden's parents are typical New Yorkers with the same shallowness as anybody else in the story. Edsforth and Bennett (1991) observe that:

In modern-middle class American parenting, as in expressive forms of culture such as the novel, adolescence has served as a complex symbol of cultural innocence and hope for the future...In the post-war period, however, recognition of the increasing dissonance between American ideals and the realities of social experience has become unavoidable, and it is precisely this cultural dissonance that is highlighted by Salinger's novel (In Neffinger, 2014, p. 6).

To add more complexity, this novel has been created after world's division into two ideologically-bent Poles. An experience which adds to Salinger's war-trauma and silently reverberates in the tone of Holden's voice.

As a matter of fact, the distrust of Holden's speech and behaviour is consequential to the general confusion and loss the American society witnessed during the 1940s and 1950s. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (1941) broke America's isolationism and forced it into war. As a military sergeant, Salinger witnessed the unheroic ugliness of war which was usually dramatized in books and movies as a noble quest in which heroes kick the bucket beautifully. Slawenski (2010) contends that Holden's memory of the death of his brother and suicide of his schoolmate stands for Salinger's own memories of his fallen

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friends in Europe. Therefore, the novel represents Salinger's catharsis and liberation from war-trauma.

To hold the mirror up to history, Holden's account is an artistic translation of the post-war American culture. Much like the rest of the planet, the American society faced another fear right after the end of the WWII, that is, the nuclear threat. The day the American air forces set Hiroshima and Nagasaki to their feet was the same day for a new era of anxiety to come. Holden's own distrust is radiated into his suicidal thoughts. At the end of Chapter 18, he declares 'I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will'(Salinger, p. 82). As a young boy, Holden's innocence is abused by an age of distrust and stress (Graham, 2007, p. 10).

Increasingly, The Cold War added more fuel to the already burning fire of the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, the American society witnessed countercultural youth movement <sup>25</sup> in which wars, hostility, political upheaval, technological advances in warfare and nuclear threat contributed to the general Zeitgeist of the time which represented a brutal setting for the honesty and innocence of children and teenagers to keep. A time characterized by the emergence of Rock-n-Roll, juvenile delinquency, and cultural rebelliousness,

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<sup>25</sup> It refers to the 1960-70s general rejection of the social norms of the 1950s, the cultural standards of parents, racial segregation, authorities, the Vietnam War, sexual mores, women's rights, and the materialistic interpretation of the American Dream. It was characterized by admiration for love, peace, music, spirituality, and liberation, yet psychedelic drugs and rebellion were also one of its traits which divided the USA between supporters for its democratic values and opponents who saw in it a unpatriotic cultural damage to the American values.

Source URL: <https://www.boundless.com/history/sixties-1960-1969/counterculture/>

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teens used to skip classes, disrespect authorities, commit crimes and do drugs (Dorri, 2018, p. 4). Henriksen (1997) observes that:

The one group of post-war Americans least able to deny reality and block out their fears were the young of America, those children and young adults, like David in *Invaders from Mars*<sup>26</sup> and Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, who were emotionally and psychologically susceptible to atomic nightmares and atomic insecurities. By focusing on the psychological troubles of America's young and by highlighting social deviance and rebelliousness of American youth, the culture of dissent illuminated the social and psychological disruption that characterized life in the age of anxiety (In Neffinger, 2014, p. 6).

A kind of pressure which *The Catcher in the Rye* realistically depicts through Holden's fragmented narration, language, and identity. Alan Nadel labels it 'the containment culture' (In Graham, 2007, p. 63) in which the general atmosphere witnessed a return to conservatism and protectivism towards the American values of Christianity and Capitalism with vehement abhorrence to Communism. Thereby, anything alien to the former rule was a suspicion and had to be banned. Through Nadel's examination of *The Catcher in the Rye*, a set of references to this stressful period are found, including Holden's red hunting hat whose colour indicates its McCarthyian HUAC<sup>27</sup> missions to catch communists.

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<sup>26</sup> It is a science-fictional novel written in 1986 by Ray Garton. It depicts David's struggle to save the Earth from a Martian threaten.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph McCarthy is an American senator who is popular for his anti-communist ideology which led him to claim that a large number of communists had infiltrated the USA and must be hunted down. His attacks and tactics to capture fascists and communists are known as McCarthyism which became the pseudo name of the 1950s. (Storrs, 2015) HUAC on the other hand, refers to The House of Un-American Activities Committee that was founded in 1938 for the same

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Homosexuality, for instance, was not yet accepted in the American culture in the 1950s; thus it was a taboo that McCarthy's special services were trying to detect and erase. Graham (2005) notes that Salinger was aware of the homosexuality taboo in the 1950s when he attributed fame to Carl Luce who 'knew who every flit and Lesbian in the United States was. All you had to do was mention somebody--anybody-- and old Luce'd tell you if he was a flit or not' (Salinger, p. 83). Luce believes himself to be a cool person since he knows about a risky thing that no one does.

The integrity of setting that highlighted the postmodern zeitgeist contributes to the success of its reception and antagonistic trial to ban it. Most importantly, Salinger's skilfulness in constructing a chronological flexibility that adapts to generations of readers with a realistic resonance adds to the timelessness and influential of Holden, Salinger, and his novel.

### 2.2.5. Language

One of the qualities that contribute to the success of *The Catcher in the Rye* is its language which is often compared to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*'s vivid and colourful discourse. Holden's language too fortifies the novel's effectiveness and readers' influence.

Salinger's use of language adds to the general ambiguity experienced by both the protagonist and readers alike. Certain things are left unsaid, Holden's comments are not contradicted or explained by the author; allowing readers to take the lead in interpreting the text as they wish, which is a hard thing to achieve

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purpose McCarthy was targeting. Thus, HUAC represented a blueprint for McCarthy's aggressive tactics. (<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/huac>)

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in first-person narration. For instance, Holden's description to how he found Mr. Antolini 'petting' or 'patting' his head, gives readers the freedom to understand Antolini's move as either a 'flitty pass' (Salinger, p. 114) or friendly touch since Holden himself does not seem to know the difference between Patting and Petting (Graham, 2007, p. 6).

Donald Costello (1959) explains how the 'language of *The Catcher in the Rye*' has been reviewed as 'an authentic rendering of informal speech of an intelligent, educated North-eastern American adolescent' (p. 11). Holden's speech is a reflection of the setting he occupies and in conformity with his young contemporaries and explains the novel's successful reception among readers.

Nevertheless, criticism was mostly ascribed to the novel's choice of register. Words like, 'hell', 'ass', 'goddam', 'bastard', 'fuck you', 'sonuvabitch', 'Christ's sake', and 'Jesus Christ' are seen as obscene and blasphemous; however, most critics and reviewers agree that the narrator applies them to denote his different emotional states, not necessarily to mean insult or echo vulgarity because he does not do it in a self-conscious or fake way to show that he is 'one of the clan'.

Holden's ability to mix high and low speech like in 'All I need's an audience. I'm an *exhibitionist*. "I'm the goddam Governor's son," I said.' And how he describes his schoolmate Stradlater as 'unscrupulous' (Salinger, p. 23), shows how Holden is an educated and sensitive young man. Holden's choice of words, structure, and grammar allow a memorable comic effect in the text similar

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to *Huckleberry's*. (Costello, 1959, p. 11-17) For example, in Chapter Four,

Holden notices:

That's something else that gives me a royal pain. I mean if you're good at writing compositions and somebody starts talking about commas. Stradlater was always doing that. He wanted you to think that the only reason he was lousy at writing compositions was because he stuck all the commas in the wrong place. He was a little bit like Ackley, that way (Salinger, p. 17).

Ward Stradlater justifies his failure in writing English compositions by his lack of putting the commas in the right place. For Holden, this excuse is unbelievably absurd since he thinks that Stradlater is a phony liar who does not admit his shortcomings. On the other hand, Green (2013) comments on Holden's remark that he himself ironically does the same mistake for not knowing where to put the Comma before '*that way*'.

Green also notes that the use of The Passive Voice in creative writing is a risk which can be disastrous, especially, if used with a first person narration. Yet in this novel, it serves as an artistic trick that Holden uses to create space in order to distance himself from the world. It adds to his annihilation and protectiveness from the phony environment that surrounds him. Indeed, Holden's confusion is clearly manifested through his language. For example, he is never sure about things; so there are 179 'sort ofs' repeated in the novel. He says: 'We sort of struck up a conversation' (Salinger, p. 2); 'I sort of closed one eye' (Salinger, p. 13); 'I sort of hated old Sally' (Salinger, p. 74)... etc.

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The mixture of formal language with vernacular is another form with which Holden expresses his *ambivalence*. Notably, Holden's use of slob language to appeal to his environment and secure his status shields his individuality. Besides the usage of a literate language in his private world to purge his feelings and converse with the people he respects like Phoebe, Allie, and Mr. Antolini is a linguistic device to reflect the narrator's ambivalent attitude through which two worlds are being separated: the world of 'phony and corrupt materialism' and the other private one of innocence (Strautch, 2007, p. 44-45).

The linguistic structure and vocabulary are one of the both highly acclaimed and vilified elements of the novel in point. All because some people find authenticity to identify with Holden's realness, while some others see obscenity and vulgarity which may corrupt young readers, the novel is an outstanding influential piece of the American literary canon.

### 2.3. The Catcher's Reception

*The Catcher in the Rye* is an outstanding novel with a very controversial status regarding its reception owing to the ambivalence of criticism it has been receiving since its first publication on the 16 July 1951. This ambivalence was divided between exalting celebration and fearsome denunciation.

#### 2.3.1. Celebration

Since its first appearance on library shelves, *The Catcher in the Rye* has been met with admiration and appraisal for a number of criteria among which its realistic depiction of vernacular teenage language, its comic light effect, its profound representation of adolescent issues in the post-war era, its sincere



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narration and concern with human integrity. The power of Holden's narration resides in its realistic depiction of ordinary people's lives with no life-changing events, neither super powers nor exceptional characters, just normal characters busy with normal human activities. With criteria like these, *The Catcher in the Rye* earns a permanent corner in world literature and crowns its narrator Holden Caulfield with a place among the unforgettable literary figures.

It has been selected Book-Of-The-Month, gone through seventy printings, made into millions of copies annually and spread into thirty languages. The novel sparks a lot of fuss with which it has been attracting attention in academia; in fact, there are seventy essays that were published in the American and British magazines in just the first four years of its production. Let alone being described as the only influential work after Hemingway's pieces as it became a must-have book for all adolescent wanderers in the mid-1950s. Salinger rejoiced from the fame and recognition of his masterpiece (though for a short time) and gained an international reputation for being the only American writer in the past half-century to grab the interest of young readers like he did (Whitfield, 1997, p. 597-98).

### **2.3.2. The Value of Catcher**

The value of a best-selling classic like *The Catcher in the Rye* is in its categorization next to some American great literary works of Hemingway, Morrison, Fitzgerald, and Twain. Its vivid depiction of teenage American vernacular, representation of adolescence issues, the popularity of its narrator with whom readers identify their experiences, and the influence it led people to

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empathize with Holden's circumstances, through taking on his perspectives and imagining themselves in his shoes add value to its status.

### 2.3.2.1. A Language Record

The significance of this masterpiece can be limited into its status as being the most celebrated and most banned book in the USA. As a work of language, readers are exposed to a concrete documentation of teenage vernacular and slang language; while linguists are lucky to study it as a vivid recording of the American post-war era. To strengthen this idea, Donald Costello (1959) contends that:

The language of *The Catcher in the Rye* is [...] an authentic artistic rendering of a type of informal, colloquial, teenage American spoken speech. It is strongly typical and trite, yet often somewhat individual; it is crude and slangy and imprecise, imitating yet occasionally imaginative, and effected toward standardization by the strong efforts of schools. But authentic and interesting as this language may be, it must be remembered that it exists, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, as only one part of an artistic achievement. The language was not written for itself, but as a part of a greater whole. Like the great Twain work with which it is often compared, a study of *The Catcher in the Rye* repays both the linguist and the literary critic; for as one critic has said 'in them, 1884 and 1951 speak to us in the idiom and accent of two youthful travellers who have carried their passports to literary immortality' (p. 20).

As Costello's conclusion points, *The Catcher in the Rye*'s first value resides in its linguistic wealth that benefits readers from learning both the

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language itself and about how people used to speak in the post-war period; besides representing a raw and fertile body of examination for linguistics. In addition to the general knowledge, the novel provides about teenage ideas, issues, and conduct.

### **2.3.2.2. Empathy with Holden**

Through Holden's direct address to 'You' and straightforward language, he has succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of all the readers whom he mirrored in every step of his journey into self-identification, The anxiety, confusion, ire, kindness, hope, and sincerity all suppress Holden's fictional individuality and make him more like a living personage with all psychic qualities of real men. A critic describes Holden's legacy, stating that the novel:

Has the power to distil states of mind, spark identification, and live beyond its covers. Like certain songs or movie characters, it has become a part of the shared experience of a vast number of people in the second half of the twentieth century (Castronove, 2001, p. 105).

In a state such this, readers find it inevitable not to identify themselves with Holden's struggle in the intersection between the innocence of childhood and phoniness of adulthood.

The way his parents do not care at all about his psychological well being and just satiate his physical needs is tormenting for Holden and represents a common issue among teenagers for they believe the world is against them and nobody gets them (Evertson, 2007, p. 96). The way his society does not provide

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him with the role modelling values and just keeps up with the selfish consumerism is a real problem for identity construction of young people.

As a matter of fact, the teenagers understand their peers and adults can never be the ultimate connoisseur of everything that goes around in young people's lives. Holden's confusion and failure in school owing to his non-belief its ability to develop great minds is a serious idea which led to his expulsion from several schools. This drastic life event not only makes teenage readers empathize with him, it makes them sympathize with the pain he feels (Lot & Latham, 1993, 26).

The trauma Holden suffers from the death of his beloved brother and the suicide of one of his mates, makes him vulnerable and fragile to his own death and extinction. The difficulties Holden witnesses push him towards cynical and hypercritical commentaries as defences to the killing loneliness he feels for not finding someone who would compassionately listen to him so that he has considered suicide so many times. Most readers are aware of the way Holden translates his alienation, fear, and confusion into cynicism and contempt towards very much everything. What empathy is if readers cannot empathize with someone who hires a prostitute just to talk to! Holden does.

Like Holden whose story is being told, every reader has an issue which he or she is trying to cope with; a trauma to erase hopelessly, but it is still working its way to his or her mind and spirit. Holden's values are reasonable to someone who has faced so much at a younger age. His dream to hold children and save them from adulthood is not childish at all since it represents a genuine

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and innocent thing only kind hearts consider. His visit to his History teacher, Mr. Spencer, to say goodbye, radiates Holden's indulgence to his teacher though he has flunked him. Besides his sympathy toward Ackley that nobody enjoys befriending with. Holden empathizes with him and takes him with him to the movies.

Hence, Holden's story makes readers empathize with his situation, identify with the person he is and take on the perspectives he is sending as a complex narrator. Throughout Holden's stream of consciousness, readers realize Holden's thirst for empathy in a busy phonies' world which make him suffer a great deal and pushes him to ponder about the times and places he crosses like an old man. This explains *The Catcher in the Rye's* timelessness that secures its status of never getting out of print since the 1950s. Aubry (2015) states that:

Its power to provoke identification and compassion among readers even now testifies to the persistence of social pressures and expectations that make adolescence an especially bewildering and painful time. For those who read his novel at the right moment, Salinger's not inconsequential gift is to render this difficult period of life at least slightly more bearable (p. 4).

By merit, *The Catcher in the Rye* is the voice of adolescents' struggle. Ian Hamilton notes that this artistic work of fiction has 'become the book all brooding adolescents had to buy, the indispensable manual from which cool styles of disaffection could be borrowed' (In Whitfield, 1979, p. 568).

The disaffection Hamilton points at is an income of social disillusionment young people usually display towards the conventions of their

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parents and communities. This disaffection is also the number one reason towards rebellious attitude generally experienced by adolescents.

### **2.3.2.3. Revolt through the Rye**

Besides entertaining readers through Holden's clever use of language which gives his narration a humorous tone and comic effect like in commenting on how Mr. Spencer took his paper, saying: 'He started handling my exam paper like it was a turd or something.' (Salinger, p. 6) or 'He put my goddam paper down then and looked at me like he'd just beaten hell out of me in ping-pong or something' (Salinger, p. 7). Readers can witness the teenage angst and revolt Holden has as a voice for the post-war generation. A generation that was fortunate to have time to study, travel, do fun and think about what happens around them, unlike the war generation that had only time to look for money to support their families. As a reaction, this second one did not desire living as their parents did for they felt boredom with their conventional lifestyle and looked for change (Ellis, 2012, p. 5).

The novel's popularity stems from Holden's ability to connect with the youth culture during and after the countercultural movement. Besides the horrors of the war Americans witnessed in the 1940s, the smell of death was still hovering over their heads owing to the prevailing menace the nuclear weapons represented to them. People were traumatized by the idea of waiting an atomic strike. The countercultural movement epitomized a form of letting go of what they can let go of, starting with changing their clothes and their way of speaking,

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until revolting against their traditional culture throughout being skeptical to their existence, purpose, and identity(p. 80).

Holden is so concerned with the human integrity which he no longer sees only in children, while he frequently resists against the products and institutions created by the phony culture of adults who try to mould youngsters to meet their expectations. His attitude and ideas reflect those of someone who struggles with identity crisis and who does not know where to locate himself in a brutal time like the mid-1940s (Aubry, 2015; Neffinger, 2014, p. 4).

The American society during the 1950s was a place of conformism, where houses were built in a similar shape of boxes, people were enforced to have uniforming appearances and attitudes and where the mass media played a major role in encouraging that hallow cultural homogeneity with no tolerance towards innovation and diverseness. Yet the arrival of Holden Caulfield was first noticed for his challenging spirit to the pointless affluence of the post-war society which generated more phoniness and cold souls (Rangno, 2006, p. 6).

Primarily, Holden represents a typical anti-hero of post-war America. He is angry, cynical, fails his studies, and does not respond to the general heroic traits of previous fictional figures. Holden rejects the educational establishments he has enrolled in one after the other, believing in their failure to shape great minds and success in making phonies. He contends that Pencey is a failure since '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' (Salinger, p. 1). Consequently, he flunks all his exams, not

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due to lack of intellectual abilities but as a total rejection towards these expensive institutions which rarely expel their wealthy students.

Simply, Holden is an idealistic person who does not want to share space with nonchalant establishments towards the individuality of their pupils. He believes that places like Pencey encourages people to have double-standards like Stradlater's explicitly handsome figure and politeness, while implicitly, he has bad hygiene and has engaged in sexual intercourses unlike what his parents know about him (Ellis, 2012, p. 5-4).

Holden criticizes the educational facilities because it is where parents used to leave their children (At least during the post-war times) to behave and learn to be what their society expect them to be. Educational places where children are exposed to walls full of foul language. In Holden's eyes, the adults managers at Pencey are phonies for they do things just to keep up appearances and popularity like serving Beef on Saturdays, knowing that parents would visit on Sundays and ask their children what they ate yesterday (Salinger, p. 10).

Corrupt behaviours like these fail to nurture Holden to find inspiration to do better. They distance him to actually consider going away for it sounds that he has only to choices either to stay and conform or leave. Holden is an outsider, a misfit who eventually breaks down due to his existential dilemma. In 'Case History Of All Of Us' (1951), Earnest Jones's idea on how Holden is trapped in a world which he believes has only two remedies either to love or die:



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His sense of alienation is almost complete from parents, from friends, from society in prep school from which he has been expelled and the night club and hotel world of New York in which he endures a weekend exile while hiding out from his family. With his alienation go assorted hatreds of the movies, of night clubs, of social and intellectual pretention, and soon. And physical disgust: pimples, sex, an old man picking his nose are all equally cause for nausea. It is of little importance that the alienation, the hatreds, and the disgust are those of a sixteen-year-old. Any reader, sharing or remembering something like them, will agree with the conclusion to be drawn from this unhappy odyssey: to borrow a line from Auden, “We must love one another or die.” (In Alexander, 2013).

*The Catcher in the Rye* depicts Holden’s disdainful opinion and disillusionment not just toward schools, but towards all institutions like adult authority, religious ideas, and public places where people gather. Holden believes that they were created by elder people to mould youngsters into a collective bowl where they can give them a ‘sense of purpose and guidance’ which would corrupt their individual identities and transform them into compatible phonies. For example, though Holden states that he likes Jesus, he still mocks the religious phoniness of Christians like Ossenburger<sup>28</sup> who claims to have faith in God so as one can have wealth as he does. ‘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

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<sup>28</sup> He is a wealthy man who arranges funerals as a profession. He came to visit Pencey Prep, on the occasion of naming a building there after him.

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shifting in to first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs' (Salinger, p. 10).

Readers are also chanced to examine how teenagers perceive their environment and act according to what they see as right regardless of what society impels on them. Indeed, Salinger's narrator is a token for teenage rebellion. A quality that generally shapes the minds and attitudes of people in the teenage phase which is frequently marked by resistance and rejection to what is conventional and instructive by adults, as a mechanism of identity construction of young people.

Holden is trying to create a world based on his own childish innocence and strives to preserve an honest worldview since he does not have the parental care and guidance to help him stand during the most difficult phases of his life. For instance, Holden wants to keep things real by detaching himself from the artificiality of following others. Thus, he distances himself from public gatherings which he conceives as pointless like his refusal to attend the big game at Pencey for he knows how attendants think proud of themselves just for being on the bunches of such a game. Therefore, Holden's annihilation from the conventions of his society meets his ideals (Rosen, 2007, p. 71).

*The Catcher in the Rye* represents an outraging cry in face of the materialistic competition that sprung out Capitalism. It is a profound criticism to the class-conscious American post-war society. The novel depicts so many instances where people value-judge others because of class *prejudices*. Holden, for example, resents Ossenburger's speech at Pencey for he cannot take him for

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an honest person; he also hangs out with people who have less money in spite of his wealthier schoolmates puzzlement; there is even a description of students' suitcases and how they tend to leave them at eye's sight or hide them in order to depict either their class notoriety or poverty (Evans, 2015). For Holden, the selfishness capitalism causes in society sounds absurd and his alienation is the only remedy he is aware of to reason things out; while for his censors the book becomes an anti-American propaganda, especially, during the anti-Marxist Cold war.

In short, Holden resists the American mainstream culture, his parents' choices and his society's norms of conduct though he knows them by heart. The profanity of his language, the criticism he showers people and things with, the cynicism he mocks life with and the isolation he retreats to, are signs of revolt against the environment he does not want to conform to. As for Holden's frequent description as a rebel without a cause; it is an overstatement since he has a noble one which is to save children from the injustice of conforming to the artificiality and social norms of growing up (Kaplan, 1956).

### **2.3.3. Denunciation**

As mentioned afore, *The Catcher in the Rye* is a controversial novel for its potentiality to generate as much appraisal as much disapproval within literary circles. The novel has been attacked on several occasions and faced censorship for several others. Generally when people or critics start a fuss to denounce a work of Art, they aim at stopping its dissemination from public access. This novel has been the most banned book in the American history and the most

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forbidden one for young readers in school libraries, curricula and public libraries (Whitfield, 1997, p. 68).

The novel faced its first official lament in 1955, and continues to spark such impressions until the recent time. In 1962 a California school teacher assigned the book to Eleventh graders. As a reaction, she was transferred and the book was dropped from the curriculum due to claims such as the foolish use of God's name for 259 times and being sacrilegious in 578 places. Even an uneducated attack on the book was released for mistaking Jerome David Salinger for Pierre Salinger who was J. F. Kennedy's press secretary. Thus the novel started provoking political stress. One more political attack suspected *The Catcher in the Rye* for being a Communist propaganda for complaints claimed that the novel was subversive and anti-American. In fact, the 1950s was a time that every step to criticize the American values was perceived as a Communist attempt and Holden was exactly going around value-judging everything. Parents too were major players in the strike on Salinger's masterpiece for its profane language and the rebellious attitude of its protagonist; causing teachers to lose their jobs as a forfeiture for assigning it to their students and mainly for teenagers and children though the novel was written for adults at first place (Graham, 2007, p. 18).

The causes which led to the denunciation of this work of Art are countable; however, the element that provokes most opponents is the vulgarity of Holden's speech through which his cynicism and rebellion against the American norms were voiced. T. Morris Longstreth, the reviewer for the Christian Science

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Monitor presented the most negative comments on *The Catcher in the Rye*, finding nothing worth appraisal. He believed Holden to be ‘alive, human, preposterous, profane and pathetic beyond belief. Fortunately, there cannot be many of him yet. But one fears that a book like this given wide circulation may multiply his kind.’ The comment’s tone sounds anxious about the authenticity of Holden’s existence which can expose readers to its effective impact and in persuading them into taking on his perspectives (p. 38).

These critical attacks are the result of people’s fear of personality identification which may prompt young readers to copy Holden’s *façon de parler* and rebellious attitude. Therefore, they have exposed *The Catcher in the Rye* to a series of censorship which banned its public access in states like Washington, Florida, Michigan and Ohio (Floeman & Kestler, 2018); though, it was frequently interrupted by instances of undoing those proscriptions.

### **2.3.3.1. Charges of Complaints**

The causes of provocation *The Catcher in the Rye* possesses range from its experimental literary situation, its obscenity in dealing with sexuality, to its cynical tone in judging the American culture. However, it is the *fear* of influencing the young readers’ mindset and attitude which represents the most provocative thing parents and critics have been fighting against. Holden’s voice is so realistically constructed that readers find themselves absorbed into his experience. As a teenager, his confusion and existential dilemma attract adolescents who have, on the ordinary basis, similar psychological instabilities to

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listen more and carefully to what he is so genuinely and painfully trying to convey since Holden echoes their confusion.

Holden's influence is signalled as a negative identification with a notorious model that not only flunks his lessons but smokes and acts irresponsibly as well. Green and Karolides (2005) summarizes a number of reviews that have been published in opposition to *The Catcher in the Rye*, finding that Holden is too idealistic but fails to meet his ideals; his obscenity is shocking and his language too vulgar for one adversary counted 785 curses including 222 'hells', 7 'hornys' and 27 'Christstakes'; the story comes across sexual immorality; homosexuality; perversion and lacks a plot. It has been accused of undermining Family values, being anti-American and anti-Christian. It has been also attacked for its pessimistic and depressing tone which may lead to revolt or low self-esteem, let alone being treated as a communist *propaganda* due to the previous accusations that many conservatives find the novel as unpatriotic (p. 94).

The challenging countercultural impression Holden leaves in the memory of his readers was and is still considered as an unwanted *revolt*. Unsurprisingly, the general masses enjoy the comfortable confines of the familiar and deem everything insinuating change as a possible threat. Henceforth, the youth culture finds in Holden's voice liberation and outlet to free speech and democratic values, while this view is regarded by parents and adult authorities as shameful and worth fighting against.

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Furthermore, though Holden belongs to a well-off household that can afford all expenses; he leads a sorrowful life which radiates *dissatisfaction* and hopelessness with almost everything owing to his lack of compassion and empathy from the people he is surrounded with. This dissatisfaction does not only stop at being a temporary state but it affects Holden's worldview to capture precisely all what add to his turmoil and loss. His discontent with the soiled ethical and emotional life pushes him to hate it and encourages him to escape for his own independence from the phony world of modernity.

In regard to influence, readers of all ages show a deep empathy with Holden's cause. Thus, readers are prone to perspective-taking as a consequence of identification with him. When Salinger wrote Holden's story, he could not possibly have written it without a linkage to his age. A time when the USA, right after getting out of the war, found itself entering straight into a strict Cold War.

People and especially youngsters forced to witness these hardships were discontented and desired for an outlet. As a matter of fact, people during the 1950s were more nationalistic, conformist and generally conservative. A decade later a countercultural youth culture dissatisfied with the old American way of their parents found in Holden's voice an assertive outcry to create a new identity (Dorri, 2018, p. 2; Neffinger, 2014). Therefore, Holden's authentic strike on the phony cultural maxims of his time makes him both a role model for the young generations that share a lot with his challenging ideas and an uninvited figure for the old one that spent efforts to prohibit him from their children's reading list until the present time. And his disillusionment with existence is translated

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through his rebelliousness that for admirers it reflects their spirits, while opponents find it irritating and threatening. Hence, *The Catcher in the Rye* becomes a blueprint for the rebellious new youth culture that drunk, skipped school, strived for sexual freedom, did drugs and so on.

In sum, from the vulgarity of language, bad role-modelling, to inspiring unpatriotic revolt censors' objectives are to prohibit it from affecting their children. Still, *The Catcher in the Rye's* censorships left it in the good company of great works like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), adding to its popularity for the curious masses.

### **2.3.3.2. Analysis of Negative Influence**

To explain people's fear of the influence Holden symbolizes, the previous theories discussed in the review of literature are needed. First literature is not just an artistic combination of words meant to de-familiarize the everyday language. It is a representation of life that responds to the context and setting it has been written into. Thus, *The Catcher in the Rye* is a mimesis to the American post-war era. The proof to this statement is in the discussion of the novel's setting and how Holden's rebellious attitude informs the countercultural movement that spread by the end of the 1950s. In sharp, a rebellious piece of Art insinuating change cannot be welcomed during an age of conformity and conservatism.

Literature is also an expressive medium through which authors take advantage of to lay bare their emotions and ponder about what they believe in. As a result, the works they produce are living proofs to their ideologies and



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feelings towards different topics. Here, *The Catcher in the Rye* not only narrates the struggles of the age of adolescence during America's coming-of-age<sup>29</sup> but realistically radiates their chaotic spirits. Holden's confusion and loss in finding a path to success in future are depicted through his ambivalence: he hates phoniness, but he himself is 'the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life.' (Salinger, p. 9) he is vulgar, but still he talks like an intellect with Phoebe and Mr. Antolini. Holden's voice and behaviour express the ideas that were circulating in his time. While parents wanted to keep their children safe and raise them to be successful as they expected, some young people did not want that moulding, just like Salinger did in refusing his father's profession and sought writing for a career.

Through Holden, Salinger found liberation to his own war trauma and as Wan Yahya and Babae (2014) explain:

The story is written from the advantage of an adult who wants to relive that earlier time through his following lifetime and criticizes himself for contentment and not knowing better. It seems to be wrong to see the fiction as solely an attempt to recapture a lost past. It seems also to be incorrect to discuss that the novel is simply about issues of generational differences. But, it seems to be more about what —adulthood regards cultural and political role in a traumatized society for which adults feel responsible (p. 1825).

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<sup>29</sup> The USA during the 1950s or generally after the end of WWII experienced prosperity and gained a lot in return to fighting in Europe. This time is described as America's coming-of-age since she first was under the great depression of the 1930s; second, due to her 1940s fear and possible threat of attacks from the Axis. As a result, the 1950s represented a sigh of relief to the American population.

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Based on this explanation, Salinger's work is a form of redemption to his own failure as an adult in rescuing children from the horrors the war made them witness and in protecting their innocence from the shallowness the post-war era exposed them to. To a larger extent, Holden bears some resemblance to Salinger's own personality. They both exhibit an unconditional love for children and innocence, while the former Holden wants to be a catcher in a field of rye, Salinger gave the leading roles in his fiction to young heroes; they both failed at school; they both lost the fencing equipment of their respective school teams and both display hatred towards the film industry. In fact, during a rare interview in 1954, Salinger declared that 'My boyhood was very much the same as that of the boy in the book [Catcher]' (Quoted in Wah Yahya & Babae, p. 2014, 1826).

Last but not least, Art has the power to shape its readers' points of view. Based on the affective theory, literature does not only entertain people, but it moulds their cognitive and affective abilities (See C.1, p. 17). It provides them with the persuasive assets to alter or reform their beliefs which characterize their way of conduct. In the case of *The Catcher in the Rye*, this is what opponents in general fear. As an influential classic, the novel gives an ambiguous, yet convincing and authentic portrayal of teenage angst. It is almost real in making Holden's voice a representation to all his peers. It captivates its readers' empathy and works its magic on letting them identify and take on Holden's perspectives which can drive them to behave like him. As explained before, the novel has become the must-have book of teenage wanderers in the mid-1950s and the

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countercultural youth movement is an embodiment of Holden's attitude. This last idea is what fuels all the fuss about its censorship from teenage accessibility.

Ultimately, reading *The Catcher in the Rye* enhances people's theory of mind to empathize with Holden's situation of facing mental breakdown as a consequence of growing up during an age of threat and materialism. They are prone to identify themselves with his ideas and situation which, regardless, of his setting reflects most of the adolescence troubles (i.e.) the novel is a timeless voice of teenage distress in spite of time and place. Nonetheless, the effect of identifying with Holden by a critical reader is different from that of a mentally vulnerable one.

Interestingly, *The Catcher in the Rye* has some dark spots in its history as a groundbreaking novel. It has been approached by some deranged people as a copycat material for their criminal agendas. The rebellious attitude of its hero and his dream to save innocence from the phony grabs of adulthood find their ways to the heads of some cruel felons who got motivated by Holden's messages and murdered other people.

### **2.4. Literary Contagion Effect: Copycat Crimes**

While still a highly praised canonical work, *The Catcher in the Rye* continues inspiring people long after its publication in a hardcover in 1953. The influence some parents and critics feared was and is still geared through association with copycat crimes which ascertain motivation in some of Holden's rebellious thoughts. Vulnerable readers or people with mental and sociopathic disorder seem to go wild after reading the story of Holden.

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Though there is little cognitive psychological evidence on the impact Holden stimulates on the theory of mind of his readers, still the previous works of psychologists on the way fiction reading touches the cords of the human mind-reading abilities can be elaborated to approach this situation. The theory of mind allows people to understand other people's ideas and behaviour (Of both real people and fictional characters), and identification permits them to be emotionally transported into the lives of their favourite characters, leading them to perspective-taking which eventually drives them to experience-taking in the outside world. Those proofs have been initiated to support reading in general and fiction in specific; nevertheless, they aimed at extracting all the positivity of such mental procedure, while its possible negativity is scarcely undertaken.

The major crimes that the police linked to Salinger's novel are Mark David Chapman's termination of John Lennon in 1980 and the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley in 1981 (Graham, 2007, p. 18; Helfgot, 2008, p. 378).

To begin with, Chapman was a former Hawaii security guard who had a wife and, like most of people, led a life of ups and downs. Yet, in his late days as a free man, he shot one of the Beatles members four times in the back outside his Dakota apartment on the west side of New York City. Then, he sat by the corpse reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. Chapman has been reported to have tried to legally change his name into Holden Caulfield and that he had finished Chapter 27 of Salinger's book after killing Lennon.

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According to a series of letters Chapman wrote in 1983 to the first police officer that came to the murder scene, Steve Spiro, the reasons behind his criminal act was his fixation with Holden. Chapman believed that ‘Lennon was a phony of the highest degree, but there were others who could – and would- have served the same purpose.’; and that he was sick of celebrity- fever, stating that ‘I’m surprised that they have not because this society is just geared toward celebrity like crazy.’ Detectives agreed that the killer desired instant notoriety because ‘to do something like that against another person, it’s something that would keep me alive and boost me’. Chapman’s letters depict his obsession with Holden, his total identification with his strike on phoniness and fascination with innocence. The killer did not kill Lennon for personal purposes, but just because he was the most famous one on his ‘list’ and his apartment was easily accessible (Stebner, 2013).

Relying on Alison Marie Behnke’s book, *Death Of A Dreamer* (2012), the fact that Chapman was re-introduced to *The Catcher in the Rye* in 1979 at the same time as he discovered the biography of John Lennon by Anthony Fawcett, *John Lennon: One Day at a Time* (1976), is a disturbing coincidence during which Chapman saw the affluent life Lennon was enjoying through the pictures taken of him. He started thinking that he was fooled and explained how he ‘told us to imagine no possessions,’ ‘and there he was, with millions of dollars... laughing at people like me who had believed the lies and bought the records’ (p. 51).

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Chapman's reaction to knowing the kind of life Lennon enjoyed was not normal at all. He then decided to send what he regarded as the biggest phony out of this world. So, he bought a .38 Caliber handgun, bought a one-way-ticket airplane to New York City to finish his bloody mission. Whilst arriving, he went to the same hotel Holden stayed in after his expulsion, Waldorf Astoria. Yet, hit with fear perhaps, Chapman decided to go back home to Honolulu. Few days later he went back to NY where he kept waiting for Lennon next to his apartment two days on a row. On the third day, Chapman bought a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* and wrote inside the book's front page: 'This is my statement' (p. 54-58).

After committing the horrid mission he has embarked on, he wrote in a confession statement that 'I'm sure the large part of me is Holden Caulfield who is the main person in the book. The small part of me must be the Devil'(p. 61). Judge Dennis Edwards wanted to hear what Chapman wanted to say before hearing his sentence for second degree murder which would cost him 20 years of his life in the Attica Correctional Facility (p. 71). In response, the assassin read passages from *The Catcher in the Rye*:

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 do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all (Salinger, p. 101).

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Based on these few lines, Stashower (2010) shares a different theory to Chapman's liquidation of Lennon. He believes that the idea of Chapman was to preserve the innocence of Lennon from the corrupted life rather than cleaning the world out of him. Like Holden, Chapman believed that the only way to preserve innocence can be obtained through Death. Whatever Chapman had in mind, what really matters is that his obsession with Holden has been signalled as a sort of justification to explain his inspiration of shooting John Lennon; indeed, he has been reported stating that:

The reason I killed John Lennon was to gain prominence to promote the reading of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. I'm not saying I'm a messiah [savior] or anything like that. If you read the book and if you understand my past... you will see that I am indeed 'The Catcher in the Rye' of this generation (Quoted in Behnke, 2012, p. 75).

Later, the novel much to Chapman's wish gained some extraordinary fame that unfortunately attracted more mentally and emotionally damaged people to get motivated; like a magnet that allures copycat influence. Indeed, the failed assassination of President Ronald Reagan in 1981 by John Hinckley, Jr and the murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer in 1989 by Robert John Bardo, trace back their possible linkage to Holden Caulfield's potential hunt of phonies with his red hunting hat (Alexander, 2013).

While Hinckley is a convicted copycat criminal who got his inspiration from the *Taxi Driver* film (1976) and Chapman's murder of Lennon. Surprisingly, the police officers found a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* among

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his possessions the day he shot the president to impress Jodie Foster<sup>30</sup>. Hinckley was described as a deranged alienated person who waited for the president outside the Hilton Hotel and when he came out, he shot at him six times. The shooting caused a massacre; James Brady, the President's press secretary; Thomas Delahanty, a District of Columbia policeman; Timothy McCarthy, a Secret service agent; and the president all were hit by Hinckley's bullets (Alexander, 2013).

While Bardo carried his copy of the novel with him to the house of the famous actress, Schaeffer, besides the gun he used in shooting her. He too identified himself with Holden who could not get the girl of his dream; however, unlike Holden he killed her. Bardo has been seriously reported as a psychopath who was a strong admirer to the actress and kept sending her letters. Unsurprisingly, he killed his beloved girl when he witnessed how her innocence was fading and how she rejected his love for her; these elements turned her into a phony likewise (Roche, 2014).

### **2.5. Discussion Of The literary Contagion Effect**

While diving deep into the examination of the degrees of influence literature as human creation is able of producing, almost every aspect of the human character is found within its general features. The genius of the human intellect, the warmth of the human heart and the instability of the human psyche all take part in constructing this Art and in influencing its seekers. Therefore, the

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<sup>30</sup> Jodie Foster is a 15-year-old prostitute from the Taxi Driver movie. Hinckley was obsessed with her and after wrote her letter among which he explained to her that he is going to kill the president to impress her and that the only way to save him is through loving him back (Helfgot, 2008, p. 393).



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same as positive influences have been scientifically proven to be outcomes of the reading process, the possibility of a copycat impact is undeniable.

If compared to the media contagion effect, there are similarities which baffle any doubts about the possibility of the existence of a literary contagion effect. The way people are prompt to imitation as a human adjusting mechanism can be fulfilled through media and writing materials as source of imitation. Actually, all that is being displayed or written can be nominated for behavioral adaptation, but the critical vigilance and awareness can sift through their contents to adopt the healthier ideas, unlike what happens for vulnerable readers.

The copycat influence which generates through the imitation of a crime which has got an excellent media coverage is, in fact, similar if not inferior to the copycat influence a vulnerable reader may get from reading about some fictional crime stories or just ideas that not necessarily depict violence or crimes, but represent a powerful motivation on his/ her mind. The illustration to this idea can be well explained through two novels, *The Turner Diaries* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Though they have, first, different plots, settings, and tones, they both have affected some readers to commit murder. While the former was described as a how-to explicit manual to unleash violence, the latter took a different stance that did not involve any of the former's straightforward aggressive preaching. It just spoke on behalf of the disaffected dwellers of the postmodern zeitgeist.

In the case of the identified novel, the voicing of social discontent through Holden's rebelliousness provided a kind of commiseration to the individuals who share the same views on the world's phoniness. While Holden

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wanders the City and comments on his disgust with the loss of innocence and integrity, he is speaking for those who found that loss suffocating and unbearable. *The Catcher in the Rye's* share of copycat effect can be explained through the total immersion into Holden's perspectives.

The absolute identification both Chapman and Hinckley felt for Holden, let them be emotionally transported into his worldview and blurred the lines between fiction and reality in their senses. As mental patients, the empathy they felt for Holden seems to be reciprocal, for they too claim to have received the same empathy from Holden with their disillusionment. However, the way they have translated their contempt on society is not identical to Holden. Whilst the latter shut the world off not to get corrupted, the formers brought their rage on the people they have chosen and let their asocial behavior lead their *modus operandi*

### 2.6. Conclusion

The fact that an artistic combination of words influenced people to empathize with Holden Caulfield and to voice the struggles of the most sensitive period in human development is genius. Yet, its ability to entice some deranged men to hunt down other humans due to their dissatisfaction with reality, alienation and rebellion is overwhelming. This controversial stature exposed *The Catcher in the Rye* to the flow of varieties of criticism, often antagonistic in their ends. While most critics approached the novel with positive admiration, the rest displayed resentment and fear towards its potentiality to affect the younger generations.

## Chapter Two: The Case of Catcher

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In spite of every word said in opposition to Salinger's provocative novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* is ranked among America's canonical classic literature and it is still a vivid source of interpretation in the academic circles more than a half-century after its publication.

### General Conclusion

Most of the scientific investigations conducted over the influence of reading fictional literature on the affective and cognitive abilities of readers have been circulating over the positivity of this activity. However, to regard the effect of fiction or any other medium of influence with absolute positivity is an overrated stance.

The universal body of literature has some novels that have an interesting record in gearing exceptional reception; not only do they have a place among world greatest literature, they have upset the public opinion and caused some heavy turmoil. Some novels are heavily loaded with prejudices; others operate like propaganda to gain supporters for a cause or against another, while most times dissatisfaction with reality and low self-esteem are accusations history registers as possible negative influences. Thus, literature cannot be an ultimate source of positive effect and its ability to cast influence operates on a continuum; on one end it teaches knowledge and promotes leisure and on the opposite end it can instruct immorality and serves as a copycat material. *The Catcher in the Rye* is among this category of novels.

As an American classic, *The Catcher in the Rye* still succeeds in attracting admirers from ordinary people to critics and literary experts. It has what it takes to remain in print for over more than a half-century. Its status as a highly controversial, influential and provocative piece of fiction earns it a place

## General Conclusion

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among the most banned and most taught novels in the USA. Still, its association with a number of crimes is dazzling.

The permanence of this novel is, in fact, consequential to the image and persona Holden Caulfield has been constructed with. He is not just a confused teenage boy in the post-war era but a living role-model to many. The charm about him and the ideas he shares with his readers own him a literary individuality and unique identity. As for the linkage Holden has with David Chapman's assassination of John Lennon and John Hinckley's shooting at President, Ronald Reagan, the identification these mentally unstable offenders developed towards him did not allow them to draw a line between fiction and reality. Holden's narrative served as an 'accelerant' element which unleashed their animalistic criminal reins to forward their hatred toward what they conceived to be phony and undo it through murder.

With its first-person narration and direct address to 'you', the novel appeals to most readers' curiosity when they read it at the right age. To these criminals, *The Catcher in the Rye* has emotionally transported them into Holden's situation, precisely, his attack on the artificiality of the world and hypocrisy of the materialistic life. Holden voiced their torment with life but he did not instruct them anyhow to wrong do. Unlike most normal people, these criminals with their mental disorders took on Holden's perspectives and underwent their respective *modus operandi* to be Holden Caulfield and to be the hunters in red hats, only, the red thing about what they caused was the blood of their victims.

## General Conclusion

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Once more, the aim of this extended essay is to expose an exceptional phenomenon about the process of fiction reading, to treat literature with critical lenses and to consider a literary contagion effect. However, it is just a minimum trial that needs further clinical and psychological examinations. Art is an influential medium of conveying messages which range from noble ones to derogatory others and similarly to the media or video games influence which have been associated with behavioural distortion, fictional literature can pose some similar effects.

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