Sophia Hayward

B Block English 10 H

12/20/16

Ellen/Holden Analysis

My artwork is a dioptric displaying many symbols from the two novels Ellen Foster and The Catcher in the Rye. The symbols found in each novel for weather, vanity, and the main character's’ past reflect the similarities and differences between Holden’s and Ellen’s view on the world.

The weather displayed in the Ellen composition is a storm. This storm occurs in the book multiple times, but in this instance, it is a bad omen. At the beginning of the novel, Ellen is laying in bed, comforting her mother. Ellen foreshadows “A storm is coming up. And I will lay here with my mama until I see her chest rise up and sink down regular” (7). Ellen references the storm as something bad is about to happen. At the same time, Ellen’s mother was about to commit suicide (through taking pills) because she couldn't take the abuse from her husband anymore. The storm continues to appear at her mother’s funeral, where she is “...looking at [her mother’s coffin] through the rain” (22). Ellen says she wishes her father would be struck by lightning. “And oh how I have my rage and desire for the lightning to come and strike a vengeance on him” (7). Ellen Foster’s pessimistic correlation to weather can be contrasted to The Catcher in the Rye’s opposite correlation with weather. The novel The Catcher in the Rye takes place in December, the wintertime. The main weather in the novel is snow. Snow is a universal symbol for purity. Holden demonstrates this as he leaves Pency, his former school. “While I waited, I saw some snow and washed my face with it” (p. 53). This is symbolic of Holden cleansing himself of Pency. Snow is also mentioned when he thinks about the ducks in a cab. After it snowed, the lake froze over and the ducks flew away. Ducks symbolize freedom because they have wings. Overall, snow represents purity and freedom. The two novels contrast their symbolism for weather, with a storm symbolizing a bad omen and death, and snow symbolising cleansing and freedom.

Ellen Foster and The Catcher in the Rye both contain symbols for vanity. In Ellen, she views vanity as something with no deeper meaning, like her cat painting. When living with Nadine and Dolly, Ellen celebrates Christmas. She doesn't want to spend her saved up money, so she decides to paint a portrait. (Quote) Ellen originally wanted to paint an ocean because it had symbolic meaning and each time you looked at it, you could come to a different conclusion. Finally, she decides to draw a cat painting because she doesn't think Nadine and Dolly are deep. “I like that picture fine expect once you look at it one time you have seen and felt everything you will ever see and feel about those cats” (p. 106). Ellen feels that the cats painting is simple and shallow, which suits Nadine and Dolly. Nadine, Ellen's aunt seems to be living in an alternate reality. She gets all these shallow, pretty presents to put under the tree and acts like she and Dolly are rich and superior, locking the doors when passing through the “colored section of town”. Ellen strongly dislikes Dolly and Nadine for whispering that her present needed a frame to actually look good; they only cared about the outside of the painting and how it looked, a belief Ellen resented. Similarly, Holden believes many people around him are vain, phony, and shallow. In particular, he hates the movies, “like poison”. He consistently reminds the reader that he hates actors and Hollywood writers, referring to his screenwriter brother, D.B., as a “prostitute” (2). He continues on to say “If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me” (2). Holden criticizes movies frequently, claiming they aren't human, they're too phony, and they are scripted. He also criticized the performances of actor Sir Laurence Olivier and another English actor. He thinks the performances are either too good or really phony and stupid, and that actors are vain and fake. Ellen and Holden share similar ideas that certain people are vain. Further, Holden considers movies to be fake, and Ellen considers the painting she chose, shallow.

Symbols, such as Allie and snakes, can symbolize a character's’ past. Ellen struggled from an abusive past of being pushed around, and consistently packing up and moving. She would “think of ways to kill [her] daddy” (1) and end up taking care of her parents - instead of them taking care of her. She had to take care of her suicidal mother, budget her father’s money so he wouldn't spend it all on alcohol, and nurse her dying grandmother. She experienced a lot of death in her past, but she somehow remained relatively optimistic throughout the process. When looking back on her past from her “new mama’s” farm, she claims that the burdens she carried before are all in the past. The “snakes” are not a problem anymore. “I do not have to worry about snakes anymore here...I am up high anyway so they cannot bite me” (22). Ellen claims that the snakes she once feared are no longer a problem and does not want to hold on to her past. On the other hand, Holden consistently reminisces about his past. In comparison to Ellen’s abusive past, Holden had not much to complain about. When referencing his past, he brings up the people from within it, such as Jane, Allie, and Phoebe. His brother, Allie, was particularly special to him. Since Holden obsesses over the preservation of childhood innocence, Allow is an ideal to Holden because he died still a child. Holden even claims to want to be a “catcher in the rye”, where he saves children from growing up, and searches to prevent his own coming of age. He compliments Allie “He was terrifically intelligent...he never got mad at anybody” (38). Instead of looking back on his past in agony, Holden wants to stay young forever. Ellen and Holden had very different pasts, symbolized though the snakes and Allie, respectively, and they have very different views of the past.

Holden and Ellen have very different views on the world at large. Holden is pessimistic and wants to go back to the past, while Ellen is optimistic and, for the majority of the novel, was in search of a brighter future. Symbols of their past, the weather present in the novels, and their ideas about phonies represent Holden and Ellen’s similarities and differences. Other symbols included in the painting compare and contrast the views of Holden and Ellen. (Note Holden and Ellen’s parents are shown- in Ellen’s as ghosts because they died. Their views on their parents remain the same; they are scared of their father and feel bad for their mother. Symbols of innocence are also shown; a baby rattle and the color green for Ellen, and the record and little kids for Holden. Other symbols that do not necessarily connect to each other but are still relevant to their novel are: the boxes, Scarletta’s glass, the magician, the three coffins, and winter for Ellen, and for Phoebe, the color red, the color green, the broken record, the ladder above Allie’s head, Sally and Jane - on Holden’s shoulders - and Holden’s red hunting hat for The Catcher in the Rye. The most important symbols included in the compositions consist of Ellen’s and Holden’s final conclusion which they arrive at by the end of each novel. Ellen realizes that even through everything she had to go through in her past, Scarletta always had it harder. Because they live in a prejudiced twentieth-century town, Scarletta cannot do a lot of the things Ellen can do, like date a white boy. In the end, Ellen concludes that Scarletta has had to suffer more than her, and she even offers to lick Scarletta’s glass (during Ellen’s prejudice, she would not drink from a “colored” cup). Holden, on the other hand, overcomes his idealistic views, and realizes, as he watches Phoebe grab the brass ring on the carousel and come of age, that there is no true way to preserve innocence. The lead characters’ final conclusions and views on life, exemplified through strong symbolism, are very different, but throughout the novel they learn an important lesson in maturity..