

The Bildungsroman



ESSENTIAL QUESTION: IS THE CATCHER IN THE RYE A FORM OF BILDUNGSROMAN?

Bildungsroman -- a novel of education/development

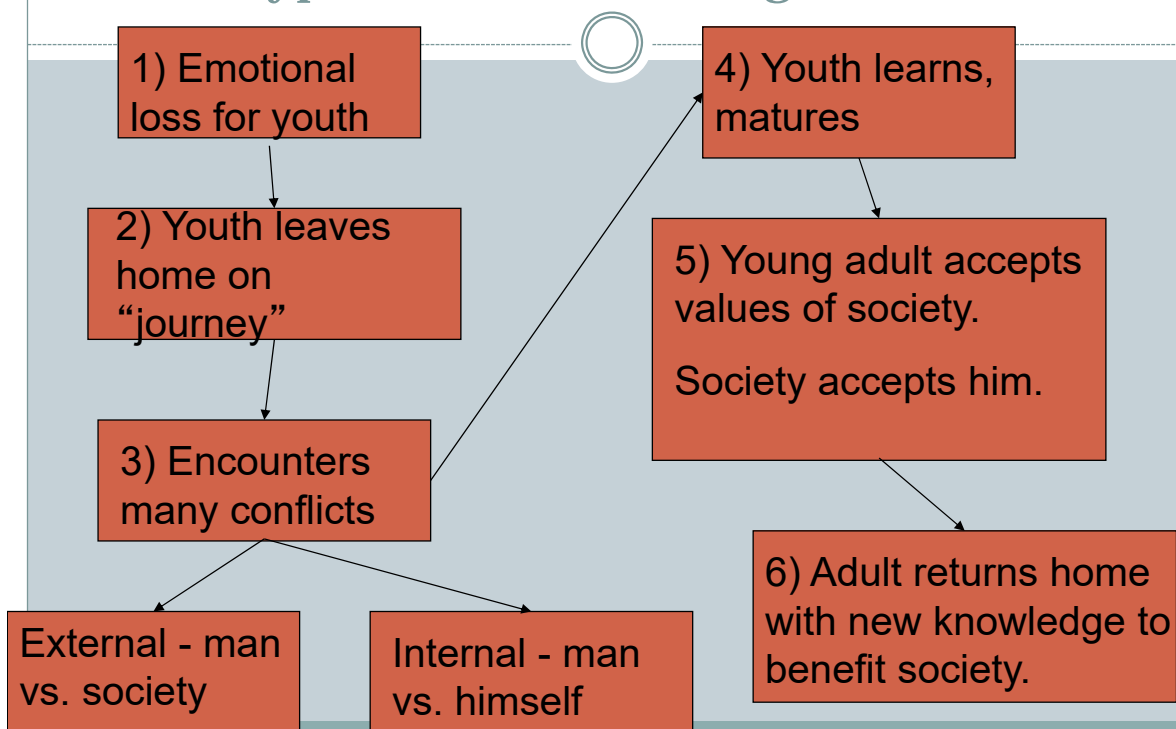


- A type of novel that treats the personal development of a single individual, usually in youth. It focuses on the psychological and moral growth of a character from youth to adulthood. It tells the story of a sensitive youth looking for answers and experience.

Features:

- It often begins with an emotional loss or some sort of discontent which causes the protagonist to go out into the world to seek his/her fortune.
- The goal is maturity; the protagonist gains it gradually and with difficulty.
- It often centers around a conflict between the protagonist and society – the protagonist's wants and needs versus the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order.

Typical Plot of Bildungsroman



Construction of the Bildungsroman

- ✗ The writer creates situations that allow the reader to see the young protagonist grow and experience struggles in this journey to adulthood through formal education, personal experience and various kinds of relationship.
- ✗ The writer often shows the protagonist struggling with the transition between the innocence of childhood and the responsibility that comes with adulthood.

Examples of the Bildungsroman

- Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*
- Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*
- James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
- J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*
- S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*
- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Examples of the Bildungsroman

- Why does Holden Caulfield mention “all that David Copperfield kind of crap” in the first chapter?

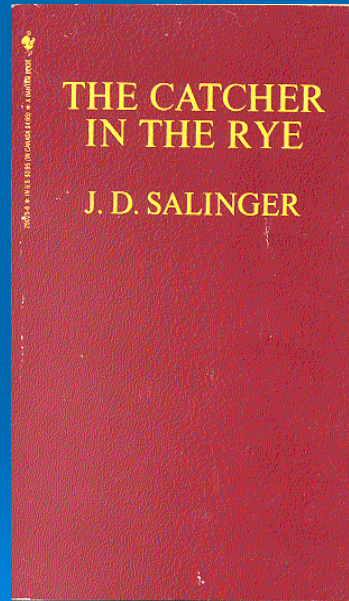
“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They’re quitee touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They’re nice and all - I’m not saying that - but they’re also touchy as hell. Besides, I’m not going to tell you my whole goodam autobiography or anything.” (Chapter 1, *The Catcher in the Rye*)

The Painfulness of Growing Up

- According to most analyses, *The Catcher in the Rye* is a bildungsroman, a novel about a young character’s growth into maturity. While it is appropriate to discuss the novel in such terms, Holden Caulfield is an unusual protagonist for a bildungsroman because his central goal is to resist the process of maturity itself.

Overview

- The Plot
- The Characters
- The Themes
- The Motifs
- The Symbols
- The Author



The Plot

- Holden Caulfield, the narrator, begins the novel with an authoritative statement claiming that “he does not intend for the novel to serve as his life story.” Currently in psychiatric care, this teenager recalls what happened to him last Christmas.

The Characters

- Holden Caulfield
- Phoebe Caulfield- Holden's younger sister (10 years old)
- Allie Caulfield- Holden's younger brother that died from leukemia
- Mr. Spencer- Holden's history teacher
- Mr. Antolini- Holden's former English teacher
- Ackley- Holden's next door neighbor at Pencey Prep School

The Symbols

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

In Chapter 22, when Phoebe asks Holden what he wants to do with his life, he replies with his image, from the song, of a “catcher in the rye.” Holden imagines a field of rye perched high on a cliff, full of children romping and playing. He says he would like to protect the children from falling off the edge of the cliff by “catching” them if they were on the verge of tumbling over.

(Not having to leave childhood and become an adult)

Symbols

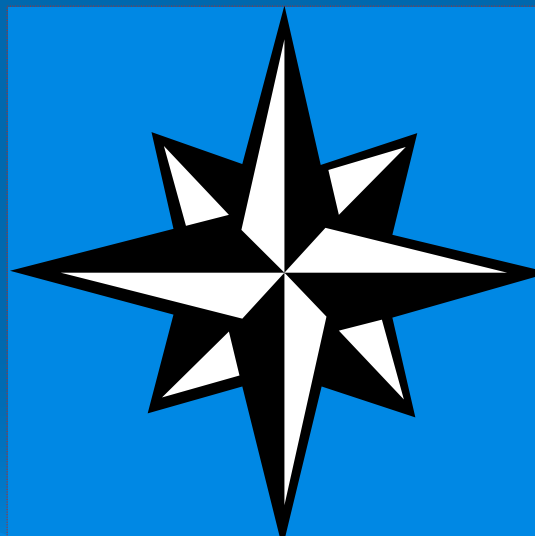
HOLDEN'S RED HUNTING HAT

The red hunting hat is inseparable from our image of Holden, with good reason: it is a symbol of his uniqueness and individuality.

The hat is outlandish, and it shows that Holden desires to be different from everyone around him.

The Themes

- Alienation as a Form of Self-Protection
- The Painfulness of Growing Up
- The Phoniness of the Adult World



Alienation as a Form of Self-Protection

- Throughout the novel, Holden seems to be excluded from and victimized by the world around him. As he says to Mr. Spencer, he feels trapped on “the other side” of life, and he continually attempts to find his way in a world in which he feels he doesn’t belong.

The Painfulness of Growing Up

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The Phoniness of the Adult World

- “Phoniness,” which is probably the most famous phrase from *The Catcher in the Rye*, is one of Holden’s favorite concepts. It is his catch-all for describing the superficiality, hypocrisy, pretension, and shallowness that he encounters in the world around him.
- Phoniness, for Holden, stands as an emblem of everything that’s wrong in the world around him and provides an excuse for him to withdraw into his cynical isolation.

Motifs (reoccurring theme)

- Loneliness
- Relationships, Intimacy, and Sexuality
- Lying and Deception



Loneliness

- Holden's loneliness, a more concrete manifestation of his alienation problem, is a driving force throughout the book. Most of the novel describes his almost manic quest for companionship as he flits from one meaningless encounter to another.

Relationships, Intimacy, and Sexuality

- Relationships, intimacy, and sexuality are also recurring motifs relating to the larger theme of alienation. Both physical and emotional relationships offer Holden opportunity to break out of his isolated shell. They also represent what he fears most about the adult world: complexity, unpredictability, and potential for conflict and change.