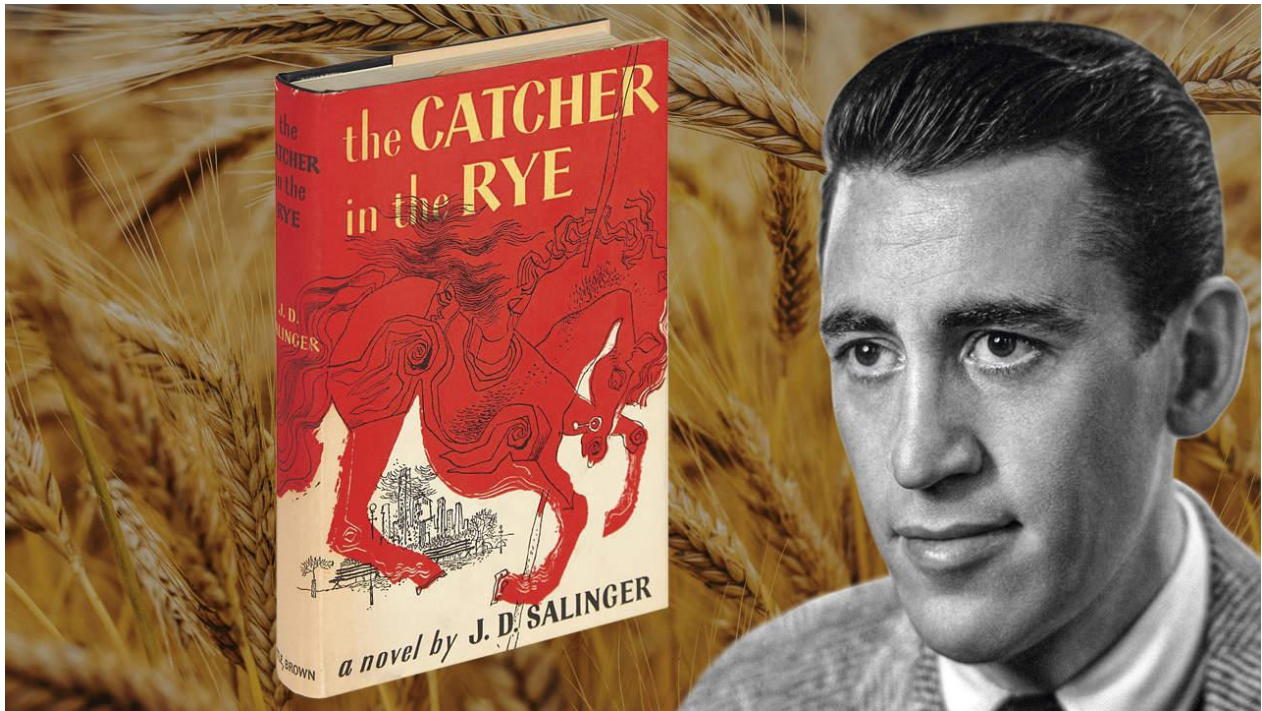


“The Catcher in the Rye” by J. D. Salinger [B2]

Considerato uno dei primi ritratti della ribellione adolescenziale, al successo di questo breve romanzo si unì una leggenda nera che provocò che il suo enigmatico autore decidesse isolarsi dal mondo e smettere di pubblicare.



Jerome David Salinger's debut novel is a classic of the [coming-of-age genre](#) and an elegy to teenage alienation. Its protagonist is sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield, the second of four children [belonging](#) to a wealthy New York family. Intelligent, cultured and attractive, there is, [nonetheless](#), something that makes young Holden feel [uneasy](#) about his life. The short novel [recounts](#) the few days he spends in the big city after being suspended from [boarding school](#).

NOTHINGNESS

Nothing much actually happens in the novel. However, it is precisely in this nothingness that the protagonist [wages an inner war](#) between the man he is to become, and the child he still is. On one hand, he can't stand the "[phonies](#)" around him of his own age, but neither can he stand the hypocrisy of adults. **"If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write**

it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life." "Se qualcuno voleva dirmi qualche cosa, doveva scrivermelo su un pezzo di carta e ficcarmelo sotto il naso. Dopo un po' ne avrebbero avuto piene le tasche, e per il resto della vita non avrei più sentito chiacchiere." A confused boy full of contradictions, in his interior monologue he reflects on themes such as violence, death and suicide, sex and the value of truth as currencies of common use in adult society. The *Catcher in the Rye* can be regarded as an existentialist novel, the result of the collapse of ideals after World War Two and the rise of fierce capitalism. **"Certain things they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway."** "Certe cose dovrebbero restare come sono. Dovreste poterle mettere in una di quelle grandi bacheche di vetro e lasciarcele. So che è impossibile ma è un gran peccato lo stesso."

THE TEEN IS BORN

In his protagonist, Salinger personifies an apparently new and difficult stage of life between childhood and maturity, which emerged in the second half of the 20th century in Western society. It introduces the archetype of the adolescent male in emotional transition, in search of his place in a world he may not want to belong to. A teacher at school tells the young man to play by the rules, but Holden knows the rules are rigged. **"«Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.» «Yes, sir. I know it is. I know it.» Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right — I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game."** "La vita è una partita, Figliolo. La vita è una partita che si gioca secondo le regole."

- Sì, professore. Lo so, Questo lo so. Partita un accidente. Una partita. È una partita se stai dalla parte dove ci sono i grossi calibri, tante grazie - e chi lo nega. Ma se stai dall'altra parte, dove di grossi calibri non ce n'è

nemmeno mezzo, allora che accidente di partita è? Niente, non si gioca.”

UNIVERSAL SYMBOL

Salinger's iconic character became a universal symbol of teenage discontent, inspiring movies of the 1950s, such as *East of Eden* starring James Dean. However, the book was also cited as an inspiration for degenerate, and even [murderous](#) behaviour. Mark David Chapman thought he read in the nihilism of the book a reason to kill John Lennon in 1980, and even [blamed](#) it for his actions. As such, even decades after its publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* remains a controversial book [allegedly loaded](#) with homicidal symbolism. Take this reflection, for example: **“If you’re supposed to sock somebody in the jaw, and you sort of feel like doing it, you should do it. I’m just not good at it, though. I’d rather push a guy out the window or chop his head off with an ax than sock him in the jaw. I hate fist fights. I don’t mind getting hit so much — although I’m not crazy about it, naturally — but what scares me most in a fist fight is the guy’s face. I can’t stand looking at the other guy’s face, is my trouble”**. “Se avete da dare un cazzotto sul grugno a uno ,e in un certo senso vi va di darglielo, dovrete darglielo. Io però ci sono negato. Preferirei scaraventare uno dalla finestra o mozzargli la testa con un’ascia, piuttosto che dargli un cazzotto sul grugno. Detesto di fare a pugni. Non è tanto che mi secchi di buscarle - anche se non è la mia passione, si capisce - ma quello che mi spaventa di più, quando si fa a pugni, è la faccia dell’altro. Non resisto a guardare la faccia dell’altro, ecco il mio guaio”. However, while the protagonist does state early in the novel that he puts on a red [deerstalker hat](#) to “[shoot](#) people”, violence is used in the book as a means to show the anger and [despair](#) of the character, and not suggest it as an effective solution. More recent interpretations have focused on Salinger's book as an expression of the trauma of the Second World War (in which the author fought), of a toxic masculine culture, and of male depression. Its greatest [achievement](#), however, remains that it is the first [nuanced](#) portrait of adolescence made in literature. **“In the first place, I’m sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don’t care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy**

the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. [...] If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times as much as the Disciples, that poor bastard.” “Tanto per cominciare, sono un po’ ateo. Mi piace Gesù e tutto quanto, ma la maggior parte di tutte quelle altre storie della Bibbia mi lasciano un po’ freddo. Prendete gli Apostoli, per esempio. Mi stanno proprio qui, se volete saperlo. [...] Se proprio volete saperlo, quello che mi piace più di tutti nella Bibbia, dopo Gesù, è quel matto eccetera eccetera che viveva nelle tombe e continuava a ferirsi coi sassi. Mi piace dieci volte più degli apostoli, quel povero bastardo”.

RECLUSE

In 1965 Salinger isolated himself in a [cabin](#) in Cornish (New Hampshire), building a halo of mystery around his work which [totalled](#) three short novels plus a collection of stories. [Rumour has it](#) that Salinger, before his death in 2010, amassed thousands of pages of writing [belonging](#) to manuscripts that never saw the light of day. It’s possible he believed, as one of his characters from his 1961 novel Franny and Zooey did, that, “an artist’s only concern is to [shoot](#) for some kind of perfection, and on his own terms, not anyone else’s”.

Glossary

- **recounts** = raccontare
- **Rye** = segale
- **rigged** = truccare
- **loaded** = caricare
- **shoot** = sparare
- **belonging** = appartenere
- **uneasy** = scomodo
- **currencies** = valute
- **stage** = fase
- **murderous** = omicida
- **allegedly** = presuntamente
- **to shoot for** = puntare
- **nonetheless** = ciò nonostante
- **phonies** = farsanti
- **deerstalker hat** = cappello da cacciatore
- **despair** = disperazione
- **nuanced** = sfumato
- **cabin** = capanna
- **totalled** = sommar
- **Rumour has it** = si mormora che
- **coming-of-age genre** = romanzo di formazione
- **boarding school** = collegio
- **wages an inner war** = lottare internamente
- **rise** = avvento
- **blamed** = incolpare
- **achievement** = conquista