

Between Self and Siblings: Relationally Reading *The Catcher in the Rye*

Jenn Dearden  
Advisor: Madhavi Menon  
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## Introduction

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* has been the subject of myriad critiques. It has been interpreted from a Zen-Buddhist perspective, read as a reflection of the mysterious Salinger's personal disdain for society, and dismissed as a mere case of adolescent rebellion. Although it has not often—nor recently—been done, one tempting reading might involve psychoanalysis. After all, toward the end of the novel, we are made aware that Holden Caulfield has been institutionalized and that he is telling his story not only to us, but to his analyst as well.

Over the course of the novel, Holden shows some resistance to psychoanalysis. In a conversation with one of his old friends, Luce, at a bar in New York City, Luce suggests that Holden may benefit from psychoanalysis:

“...I told you the last time I saw you what you need.”

“You mean to go to a psychoanalyst and all?” I said. That’s what he’d told me I ought to do. His father was a psychoanalyst and all... “Supposing I went to your father and had him psychoanalyze me and all,” I said. “What would he do to me? I mean what would he do to me?” (Salinger 148)

Holden does seem to be somewhat curious about what psychoanalysis could hold for him, as is clear from his hypothetical statement beginning with, “Supposing I went to your father.”

However, he seems simultaneously wary of what would result if he were psychoanalyzed.

Through repetition, Holden emphasizes the question, “what would he do to me,” making it sound as if being psychoanalyzed would cause him harm. Based on the novel’s end, we know that Holden does eventually get psychoanalyzed, that he has been telling his story to us as well as his psychoanalyst, but we do not know the outcome of his psychoanalysis, as we are not privy to his psychoanalyst’s opinion. It is hard not to wonder, then, what would happen if, as readers, we

were to psychoanalyze Holden based upon his narrative. What would we “do” to him? What kind of insight would we gain into his life?

It is interesting to note that Holden refuses to talk about his childhood and is only willing to share what happened to him in New York City, and it is possible that this may indicate some resistance to classical Freudian psychoanalysis. After all, Freudians tend to view a subject’s childhood as vital to gaining insight into his or her psyche. In the opening line, Holden seems to directly address his psychoanalyst, saying, “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... but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth... I’m not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything” (Salinger 1). Holden recognizes that the psychoanalyst—to whom his story is addressed—would want to know “what [his] lousy childhood was like,” but he does not want to go into it. Why would he resist telling about his childhood?

By leaving childhood out of the story, it is possible that this text is resisting classical, Freudian psychoanalysis, and this resistance could certainly be warranted, given what can happen when one conducts a Freudian reading of the novel. In his Freudian psychoanalytic reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*, James Bryan argues that Holden is repressing sexual desire for his sister, Phoebe, a desire “explicitly associating Phoebe with death,” since the two of them could die if he acts upon this repressed desire (Bryan 110). While Holden is certainly very close to Phoebe, I do not believe that he is repressing sexual desire for her. Bryan draws out possible double entendres as evidence, but is it really necessary to read for sexual meanings? True, Holden is very close to Phoebe, but is it necessary to read Holden’s relationship with his sister as sexually charged?

If this is the kind of reading that Freudian psychoanalysis is going to offer, then perhaps it is no wonder that Holden's narrative shows resistance by not sharing more details of his childhood. One can only imagine what other details or relationships could be read in a reductive manner. However, it seems unwise to completely dismiss the possibility of reading the novel psychoanalytically. In spite of its seeming resistance, Holden's narrative does lend itself to the possibility of psychoanalysis. As James M. Mellard, author of "The Disappearing Subject: A Lacanian Reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*," asserts:

Those novels that have an adolescent hero in the midst of an identity crisis, one who is critically without a strong parent of either sex during the crisis, who is suffering from the recent death of a younger brother, who worries about the innocence of a still younger sister, who carries the weight of all the innocent children in the world around on his frail shoulders, and who apparently recounts his story from a psychoanalytic ward somewhere out West—*such novels would seem to beg for a psychoanalytic reading.* (Mellard 197-98, italics mine)

As Mellard points out, there is quite a bit going on in the novel that "[begs] for a psychoanalytic reading." Given that Holden is telling his tale "from a psychoanalytic ward somewhere out West," one of the lingering questions we might have at the end of the novel is why does Holden have a breakdown? If repressed sexual desire is not the answer, then what is it, exactly, that drives him over the edge? Why does Holden end up in a psychoanalytic ward toward the end of the novel?

With such questions lingering at the close of the novel, it is hard not to return to Holden's narrative in order to search for answers, and psychoanalysis can certainly help illuminate some possible answers. But given the text's resistance to sharing details of Holden's childhood and the

results of the reductive Freudian reading—one of two major psychoanalytic readings on the novel that has been conducted—perhaps it is time to return to *The Catcher in the Rye* using a different kind of psychoanalysis. After all, classical psychoanalysis has not gone without criticism over the years, as theorists have continued to revise Freud’s original ideas and new schools of psychoanalytic thought have been developed.

This project seeks to offer a new psychoanalytic reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*, using relational psychoanalysis to further illuminate the text. In consideration of the fact that the two major psychoanalytic readings of the novel thus far have been Freudian and Lacanian, focusing primarily on intrapsychic processes, this project aims to add a relational, intersubjective component to the psychoanalytic reading of the novel. This relational investigation will first look more closely at Holden’s siblings and how they influence his sense of self and will conclude by providing a new, intersubjective reading of the novel’s close. This new reading will illuminate what it is that drives Holden’s breakdown, thereby giving an alternative to the explanations provided by the two psychoanalytic readings that have preceded this one. I will begin, though, with a brief theoretical overview of relational, as opposed to more classical, psychoanalysis, and the concept of intersubjectivity.

### **Theoretical Overview**

With its advent at the beginning of the twentieth century, Freudian psychoanalysis offered us an innovative look into our intrapsychic, or inner workings, exploring our drives, egos, and repressed desires, among other things. Whether contemporary psychoanalysts agree with his ideas or not, it is indisputable that Sigmund Freud was ultimately the father of psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan, who clarified, revised, and elaborated many of Freud’s ideas,

was still relatively in keeping with the psychoanalytic tradition, which focuses on mainly upon our intrapsychic experiences. Lacan's major contributions include his work on the mirror stage, the three orders, and his investigation of how the unconscious is structured like language. Although there may be some differences between Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, their psychoanalytic discourses are rather entangled. At least, this is what some scholarly groups, such as feminists, seem to find when writing their criticisms. After all, there could be no Lacan without Freud.

One of the major differences between classical, Freudian psychoanalysis and the relational school is the way in which the individual is conceived as a subject. As Nancy J. Chodorow, an object-relations theorist explains, "In the classical account, the inner world is conceived in terms of different aspects of the psychical personality, and the goal is reduction of conflict among these" (Chodorow 115). The inner, intrapsychic world is focused upon when psychoanalyzing from a Freudian perspective, and the main object of this psychoanalysis to resolve inner conflict. What is more, since conflict comes from the inner world, it does not come from the external world, per se. For example, in his account of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Stephen A. Mitchell, a relational psychoanalyst, notes:

The pivotal feature of the position Freud stakes out here is that the "object" has been granted too much importance in our understanding of human sexuality. It is not the charms of the object which evoke a sexual response, Freud argues; sexuality appears as a powerful collection of internal pressures... which can become attached to many different kinds of objects. (Mitchell 72)

Thus, according to Freud, the objects of the outside world are not responsible for our sexuality. Rather, it is our intrapsychic world, a “powerful collection of internal pressures,” that explain our sexuality.

This focus upon internal pressures, which minimizes the importance of the objects in the outside world, is reflective of Freud’s thinking about other concepts, such as fetishism, as well. According to Freud, “In every instance, the meaning and purpose of the fetish turned out, in analysis, to be the same. It revealed itself so naturally and seemed to me so compelling that I am prepared to expect the same solution in all cases of fetishism” (Freud 953). Freud continues to explain that a fetish is a substitute for a penis, specifically the mother’s “penis,” which boys eventually have to give up (Freud 953). As is fairly evident, Freud’s idea is very delimiting in claiming that in “every instance,” fetishism comes about the same way, from the same internal forces. What about any given individual’s experience in the outside world? Does that not have anything to do with an individual’s fetish? Mitchell criticizes Freud, asking, “What has happened to the role of experience, the ‘impressions’ derived from objects?... The entire field of interpersonal relations has been collapsed around spontaneously arising impulses with encoded, a priori meanings” (Mitchell 72). One has to wonder, too, if Freud did not notice that failing to look at the role of external experience was the reason he was unable to explain certain things, like when he writes in “Fetishism,” “Probably no male being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital. Why some people become homosexual as a consequence of that impression, while others fend it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority surmount it, we are frankly not able to explain” (Freud 954). If Freud had analyzed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account a subject’s experience of the outside world rather than just generalizing all internal worlds as essentially the same, would his results have been a bit different?

Lacan is somewhat more in keeping with the way that relational theorists conceive of the individual, since Lacan does take into account the fact that the outside world has a place in forming one's subjectivity. For instance, whereas Freud separates sexuality from the external world, attributing its origin solely to internal pressures, Lacan argues,

[The] ways of what one must do as man or as woman are entirely abandoned to the drama, to the scenario, which is placed in the field of the Other... I stressed this last time, when I told you that the human being has always to learn from scratch from the Other what he has to do, as man or woman... this is a sign that sexuality is represented in the psyche by a relation of the subject that is deduced from something other than sexuality itself. (Lacan 204)

With Lacan, we get a sense that sexuality comes from elsewhere, learned from the Other, which Lacan describes as “the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present in the subject”—in this case, it is sexuality that is being made present (Lacan 203). The Other is something beyond our consciousness, beyond our own subjectivities, and it is within the field of the Other that our subjectivities and their components, such as sexuality, are constituted. Lacan writes, “apprehended at his birth in the field of the Other, the characteristic of the subject of the unconscious is that of being, beneath the signifier that develops its networks, its chains and its history, at an indeterminate place” (Lacan 208). While the idea of our unconscious coming from the field of the Other, which is a relatively “indeterminate place,” is certainly more overwhelming than Freud's more simplistic view of our inner workings, Lacan's idea does give us a sense that our subjectivities are determined and influenced by something else, by an external force.

Thus, while Freudian psychoanalysis is undoubtedly a groundbreaking discourse, which even Freud had the foresight to realize, over the years, it has not gone without criticism and revision from his successors. Another criticism has to do with the place of the other (not to be confused with Lacan's Other) in psychoanalysis. Feminists get particularly outraged in the case of the mother, who is painted as an object of the child's desire, an other to the child's self. The mother is also othered in the sense that she is not even able to own her reproduction. Instead, the father is the one who is "responsible" for the child's birth. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway touches upon this when she contends, "a woman is not simply alienated from her product, but in a deep sense does not exist as a subject, or even potential subject, since she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation" (Haraway 2280). In traditional psychoanalytic thinking, the woman is alienated from her product, the child, and this takes away her subjectivity. The woman is appropriated, objectified—such are the implications of her position as an other.

What this is reflective of is the intrapsychic focus of traditional psychoanalysis, in which the self is the subject and objects constitute the subject's surroundings. While the intrapsychic setup certainly holds true in our inner world, in which there are only our selves and our images of other people are essentially objects of the mind, this is not meant to completely carry over into the external world. Is it not true that subjects will encounter other subjects? Freudian ideas about drives, defenses, and repression are certainly not to be dismissed, but it is important to note that his contributions deal predominantly with the intrapsychic. They focus on what goes on in our minds, in our psyches, but this gives us a rather insular view of the individual, since it does not take into account outside experiences. Conflict is meant to be resolved with the intrapsychic, but undoubtedly, there can be conflict with the external world as well. With such an insular view, it is no wonder that Freud assumes the origin of all fetishes is the same. On the other hand,

relational psychoanalysis “[challenges] the traditional notion of the pristine individual” (Chodorow 116). Relational psychoanalysts argue that while we should certainly recognize intrapsychic issues, it is important to recognize that the self is inherently social, and we should not take it out of that context.

It is in the relational sphere that we observe the interactions between a self and the world, and it is in this sphere that the idea of intersubjectivity comes into play. Relational psychoanalysis, Nancy Chodorow writes, “[reformulates] the psychoanalytic conception of self... This self is intrinsically social, and, because it is constructed in a relational matrix and includes aspects of the other, it can better recognize the other as a self and, ultimately, attain the intersubjectivity that creates society” (Chodorow 117). Intersubjectivity does not refer to the construction of an individual’s subjectivity; rather, it refers to the field of interaction between two separate selves, presuming each self’s separate existence as a subject. In particular, intersubjectivity refers to our ability, as a self, to recognize someone else as a separate self. This recognition is, whether we realize it or not, important to us. We have a need for others to see us, to hear our opinions, to understand us. As Jessica Benjamin, a prominent feminist scholar of intersubjectivity, explains:

Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other’s presence. This means, first, that we have a need for recognition and second, a capacity to recognize others in return—mutual recognition.

(Benjamin 186)

We can easily recognize our own selves as subjects, but it is a vital part of life that others recognize us as such and that we recognize them in return. This mutual recognition is the core idea behind intersubjectivity.

Mutual recognition, then, can refer to the space in which the other is no longer an object but has subjectivity. Feminists have demanded that the other, the feminine, be recognized, and when intersubjective recognition takes place, that other may no longer be othered. The other becomes an equally present subject, rather than an object of lack. Of course, this can be dangerous because in order to be viewed as a subject, the other needs recognition from those in a position of power. As Benjamin puts it, “This suffering Other requires recognition by the subject who does speak. But this recognition will be effective only if it incorporates a moment of identification, and so disrupts the enclosed identity of the subject” (Benjamin, *Shadow* 9). What this means is that the other can only attain speech by identifying with the speaking subject and vice versa, putting the other in danger of losing the identification as an “other.” Therefore, part of the problem that some might have with intersubjectivity is that it takes away the clear-cut difference between self and other. There is no longer a subject and an object but a subject and a subject, and getting that recognition as a subject, rather than an object, still happens within a phallogocentric system. Intersubjective recognition is a way of giving power to the other within the system, but it does not completely overthrow the system. Thus, intersubjectivity may not be radical enough for some, but it is, at least, a theory that is about mutual understanding and recognition rather than power and dominance.

Intersubjective recognition may seem simple enough, and to some degree, it is, at least in theory. It is in practice that it gets complicated. There are plenty of selves that will not recognize others as subjects with equivalent centers of self. It could even be said that this is essentially

what feminists have had problems with all along: a lack of recognition for women as subjects. With intersubjective theory, one individual's subjectivity is no longer privileged over another's, and this "theory in which the individual subject no longer reigns absolute must confront the difficulty that each subject has in recognizing the other as an equivalent center of experience" (Benjamin 184). And what difficulty might one have? Intrapsychically, as individual selves, we create our own images of people. In our minds, we can make them out to be however we like, as they are merely objects to us—intrapsychically. But once we are confronted with the actual person, the object we had in our mind may not be the subject that stands before us. We have a choice, whether we are conscious of it or not: we can recognize them as separate subjects, who, like us, have their own way of thinking, their own separate selves, or we can deny them recognition. This denial of recognition, which involves the self's desire to assert itself as absolute and to reject everything on the outside, is what intersubjective theorists term "destruction."

Thus, in the self's interactions with others, there are two options: destruction or recognition. But even when we recognize, intersubjective attunement can be fleeting. Every time we meet with a person, we are forced to re-recognize them—or to deny them that re-recognition. And whenever they are not present, we return to our internal fantasies, which may destroy or negate external reality. It is only the survival of external reality that forces us to continually return to recognition, to continue making a choice between recognition and destruction. So exactly what happens if we do not return to recognition? According to Benjamin,

When mutual recognition is not restored, when shared reality does not survive destruction, complementary structures and 'relating' to the inner object predominate. Because this occurs commonly enough, the intrapsychic, subject-object concept of the mind actually fits with the dominant mode of internal

experience. This is why—notwithstanding our intersubjective potential—the reversible complementarity of subject and object conceptualized by intrapsychic theory illuminates so much of the internal world. (Benjamin 195)

Complementary structures organize the power in relationships, who has it and who does not. They are much like binaries, in that there are always two sides, with one side having more power than the other. Benjamin is pointing out that mutual recognition, or our intersubjective potential, can allow us to move beyond these power structures. It should be duly noted that although intersubjectivity gives us an opportunity to transcend complementary structures, it does not pretend that complementary structures are absent. If we can transcend complementary structures, we can come to mutual understanding. This would be intersubjectivity at its best. But, as Benjamin notes, if we do not have mutual recognition, subjectivity dissipates, and we return to the intrapsychic object—the picture we have of someone in our mind. The success or failure of intersubjectivity can indeed depend on whether or not the intrapsychic object lines up with the person in front of us. It is really a matter of whether or not any given person is willing to give up the object, at least in the intersubjective moment.

There are undoubtedly cases in which a person predominantly relates to the world in a subject-object way, getting caught up in an intrapsychic perspective. For any given individual, there ideally needs to be a balance between his or her intersubjective and intrapsychic experiences, but not everyone is able to keep a balance all of the time. When balancing the intrapsychic and intersubjective in everyday life, there can be a “breakdown of tension between self and other in favor of relating as subject and object” and this is “a common fact of mental life. For that matter, breakdown is a common feature within intersubjective relatedness—what counts is the ability to restore or repair the relationship” (Benjamin 198). If what counts is the

ability to restore an intersubjective relationship, then what happens when that relationship is not restored? The balance is thrown off, and the individual retreats to the intrapsychic, running into many of the drive, defense, repression-related problems that Freud outlined. A reliance on subject-object way of relating is not at all ideal.

Up until this point, there has been much discussion of subjects and objects. The question may arise, do subjects need to be opposed to objects? The answer to this question may vary, depending on the theory, even within the broad discipline of relational psychoanalysis. Object-relations theory, for instance, is a form of relational psychoanalysis in which an “other” self can be referred to as an object without negative connotations. However, for the sake of this argument, intersubjective theory will be used, in which there is a difference between subjects and objects, and the difference matters in terms of power. The difference, as briefly aforementioned, is that an object remains in the domain of the intrapsychic, a figment within an individual self’s mind. When the self interacts with an other, the other can become a subject during a social interaction, so long as there is recognition. If all goes well, mutual recognition and real intersubjectivity will be achieved. Once the interaction is over and the individuals part ways, each will have an image, an object in his or her head of the person just encountered—that is until there is another interaction, another moment with intersubjective potential. Thus, there is a difference between subjects and objects, and depending on how the two compare, they may or may not be in complete opposition.

While there is a difference between subject and object, while there is a difference between intrapsychic and intersubjective, I want to emphasize that this project does not seek to pit these terms against one another. Stephen Mitchell, a well-respected proponent of relational psychoanalysis, emphasizes this as well:

I use the term “relational matrix” in an effort to transcend the unfortunate tendency to dichotomize concepts like interpersonal relations and “object” relations, or the interpersonal and the intrapsychic, as if a focus on either side necessarily implies a denial or deemphasis of the other... *The most useful way to view psychological reality is as operating within a relational matrix which encompasses both intrapsychic and interpersonal realms.* (Mitchell 9)

The point is that analyzing solely the intrapsychic would be a mistake, just as analyzing solely the intersubjective (which is essentially identical to “interpersonal”) would be a mistake. Neither offers a full picture, by itself.

Thus, intersubjectivity is not a full alternative to classical psychoanalysis. Any psychoanalysis without the intrapsychic would be incomplete. In the case of *The Catcher in the Rye*, psychoanalytic readings have been predominantly intrapsychic, and indeed, this reading will be revisiting the way that Holden’s mind works, which is important to understand before we move to look at intersubjective issues in the novel. An intersubjective psychoanalytic reading could offer a new perspective, one that we have not seen in traditional Freudian or Lacanian readings. By opening up to this perspective, by breaking away from traditional constraints, there may be any number of insights to be gained. This is certainly not to say that intrapsychic readings of *The Catcher in the Rye* are not valid, but rather that they are missing an important side of psychoanalytic reading. As pointed out in the introduction, *Catcher* may have some resistance to classical Freudian psychoanalysis, as well, so reading the text for intersubjectivity could be rather worthwhile. There are certainly many critiques of intersubjectivity, including feminist ones. As Julia Kristeva, a feminist psychoanalyst once wrote, “We can for a moment suspend our efforts to measure psychoanalysis against a philosophy of consciousness... lest we

reduce the psychoanalytical experience to an intersubjectivity, which it is not” (Kristeva 28).

However, rather than “reducing” the psychoanalytic experience of Holden Caulfield to strictly one of intersubjectivity, there may be a way for the two psychoanalytic readings to complement, not conflict with, one another. Thus, there is a possibility of constructing not only an alternative reading but also an extension, a further enlightening of the ones that have already occurred.

After all, to privilege either the intrapsychic or the intersubjective would be to take a side, to fall into binary thinking. I want to explore the gray, rather than the black or white. As much as I might agree with feminists about phallogocentric tendencies of psychoanalysis—if I didn’t, I would not be thinking about the intersubjective—I am still skeptical of the feminist claim of exclusion. Judith Butler, who is very critical of binary thinking, writes, “There are good reasons, however, to reject the notion that the feminine monopolizes the sphere of the excluded here. Indeed, to enforce such a monopoly redoubles the effect of foreclosure performed by the phallogocentric discourse itself” (Butler 48). I would have to agree with Butler—and with Stephen Mitchell, for that matter—that if we enforce, or take the side of, the excluded, then we are only redoubling the kind of foreclosure effect that phallogocentric discourse produced in the first place. If we take the side of the intersubjective, we exclude the intrapsychic, and if we take the side of the intrapsychic, we exclude the intersubjective. I will aim to include both, although I must begin by reading as we have not read *The Catcher in the Rye* before—intersubjectively—specifically by taking a closer look at Holden’s relationships with his siblings and how they have contributed to his sense of self.

And why read differently? After following the debate between feminism and psychoanalysis and reading critiques of classical psychoanalysis, I found myself asking, if I were going to read the way that a feminist might want me to read, how would I do it? Granted, not all

feminist psychoanalysts would agree with my choice to do an intersubjective reading—Julia Kristeva, for one, would disagree. And I am sure that not all feminists would agree with the fact that I am not going to completely stray from “phallogocentric” psychoanalysis. The point is, though, that it has got me thinking about alternative ways of reading.

### **Tracing the Debate: What Psychoanalysis has already offered *Catcher***

For a novel with such clear connections to psychoanalysis, it is surprising that *The Catcher in the Rye* has not often been read psychoanalytically. Thus far, there have only been two comprehensive psychoanalytic readings of the novel, which have been specifically Freudian or Lacanian. In the seventies, James Bryan was the first to offer a thorough psychoanalytic reading of the novel in his essay, “The Psychological Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye*.” Bryan supposes that perhaps previous scholars have not psychoanalyzed Holden because vital pieces are missing: “One problem is that Holden tells us very little about ‘what my lousy childhood was like’ or the event that may have brought on the trauma behind all his problems: the death of a younger brother when Holden was thirteen” (Bryan 102). In spite of this, Bryan recognizes that there is still a lot in the novel that makes it worth analyzing.

As many other scholars have done, Bryan initially renders Holden as an adolescent struggling to come to terms with his imminent adulthood, forcing him to leave the innocence of childhood behind. What makes his reading different is that he links Holden’s anxiety over this transition to a fear of “the biological imperatives of adulthood—sex, senescence, and death” (Bryan 102). According to Bryan’s analysis, Holden is repressing sexual desires not only because they conflict with his desire for childlike innocence but also because he links sex to

death. There are quite a few instances in which Holden clearly mentions both sex and death in the same context, but what exactly is Holden's reason for doing this?

In his Freud-tinged explanation, Bryan suggests that Holden is repressing sexual desire for his sister, Phoebe. Bryan's suggestion is very much linked to the Oedipus complex, as he points out that logically, the desire for one's mother could easily be transferred to the second-closest female, one's sister. Holden, of course, is aware that it is inappropriate to sexually desire his sister, and this is why he represses his desire and has a strong sense of guilt. Therefore, Holden's association of sex with death likely comes from "the fear that he or Phoebe [his sister] or both may 'die' if repressed desires are acted out" (Bryan 107). With such trouble plaguing him, then, Holden becomes neurotic and is forced to commit himself to a mental institution. However, Bryan does conclude that because Holden has been able to tell us his story, he has conquered his troubled past.

Considering that his argument is centered around Holden's sexual desire for his little sister, it should hardly come as a surprise that Bryan's psychoanalytic reading of *The Catcher in the Rye* has been criticized. Dennis Vail, for one, defends Holden's behavior with his sister, arguing, "such contact need *not* be corrupt", and "[if] anything, Salinger is setting a trap and Bryan has taken the bait" (Vail 117). Vail does admit that there is a preoccupation with death, but he sees more validity in the possibility that Holden's problem has to do with "a lack of the psychological staying power that he will have to have to survive in the adult world" (Vail 117). While Vail is certainly critical of Bryan's psychoanalytic reading, he does not offer a full counterargument, making his defense of Holden's behavior with his sister only somewhat useful.

Offering a full alternative psychoanalytic reading to Bryan's is James M. Mellard, with his essay, "The Disappearing Subject: A Lacanian Reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*," written

about a decade after Bryan first published his essay. In recounting the psychoanalytic work previously written, Mellard remarks on the lack thereof and openly criticizes Bryan:

[It] is left to James Bryan to offer the only sustained psychoanalytic interpretation of any rigor. And that is a shame, for Bryan's reading of *Catcher*, in that it turns Holden Caulfield into a virtually psychotic, would-be violator of little sister Phoebe, is almost a parody of all the worst offenses of Freudianism. (Mellard 198)

As may be obvious from his title, Mellard makes use of Lacanian psychoanalysis for his reading. Mellard argues that Holden is in the process of becoming a fully realized subject—"a mature post-Oedipal subject" (Mellard 200). While the mirror phase marks the advent of a subject-as-subject, it lacks "the mediation of Law, the awareness of meaning's being determined elsewhere... the recognition that one's meaning, if not one's being, comes from the Other" (Mellard 199). Thus, there must be a stage in development when the subject recognizes what it could not in the mirror stage, in which the subject is incorporated into the Symbolic, and Mellard argues that it is this phase of development against which Holden is struggling.

Because Holden is grappling with this change in subject-as-subject perception, Holden feels like he is disappearing. There are a plethora of hints throughout the novel, including Holden's recurring thoughts on death and suicide, that Holden feels himself disappearing. This disappearing makes sense, since he must shed the "self" of his childhood and enter adulthood. Mellard also suggests that Holden's feelings often recall the fragmented body that Lacan describes in his essay on the mirror phase. Overall, it becomes clear through Mellard's Lacanian analysis that Holden is dealing with a psychoanalytic stage is experienced by many, and this makes Holden seem much less psychotic than he appears to be in Bryan's reading.

In addition, Mellard has some interesting metonymic associations to offer, which may illuminate Holden's obsession with the ducks in Central Park and his love of Allie's baseball mitt. Throughout the novel, Holden wonders where the ducks go when the pond in Central Park freezes over. While some scholars dismiss or ignore the repetition of Holden's wonderment, Mellard supposes a metonymic link: "the ducks' disappearance is related to those nagging questions Holden has about death... The metonymical associations are clear, for when he speaks of the ducks again, he moves from their disappearance directly into thoughts of his death, and from there to thoughts about his dead brother, Allie" (Mellard 202). Mellard argues that Allie is quite critical to Holden's sense of self, and it seems to make a lot of sense that Allie's death would have had a profound effect on Holden. In fact, one has to wonder why Bryan, who noted a severe lack of information about Holden's childhood, chose not to address Allie's death, which Holden often mentions.

Whereas Bryan fails to address Allie's death, Mellard deems it to be a substantial problem for Holden and argues that Allie's baseball mitt, which Holden adores, is metonymically related to not only Allie but also to the hand that Holden broke at the time of Allie's death. Holden's broken hand landed him in the hospital and kept him from being with his dying brother. Mellard argues, "The hand becomes identified with the loss of the brother, and so becomes related to the lost object of mourning. It is clear that one of Holden's psychological problems, of the type that Lacan addresses in his essay 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,' is incomplete mourning" (Mellard 205). Thus, rather than a psychotic adolescent with repressed sexual desire for his little sister, in Mellard's reading Holden is a adolescent dealing his brother's death and his changing subjectivity.

While other scholars have certainly made mention of psychological issues in their analyses of *Catcher*, Mellard and Bryan are the only two scholars to have written notable, comprehensive psychoanalytic readings. For a novel that has had so much written about it, more could undoubtedly be said as far as psychoanalysis is concerned. Mellard presents a strong argument that Holden's feelings of disappearance are directly related to his incorporation into the Symbolic and that Holden is still dealing with the death of Allie, but what about Phoebe? Where does she fit into Holden's current issues? Granted, Bryan's idea about Holden having repressed sexual desire for Phoebe never seemed right to me, considering it ignores Holden's other issues, including incomplete mourning, but he may have a point about Phoebe having a significant impact on Holden's psyche. In essence, one reading links Allie to Holden's breakdown, while another links Phoebe to the breakdown. Both his siblings have had significant impact upon Holden, so could the answer not be that both of them have caused his breakdown?

If we psychoanalyze Holden's story from a different standpoint, if we read *The Catcher in the Rye* from an intersubjective standpoint, what prompts Holden's breakdown is related both to Allie's death and Phoebe as a subject, in the present. I want to begin this reading by both rebutting James Bryan's argument and taking a closer look at the way that Holden's mind works, and this will demonstrate the way that Phoebe and Allie are very much connected. I will then take a closer look at Holden's relationship with Phoebe, and this will help, in turn, to better illustrate what is going on at the very end of the novel when Holden falls apart.

### **Rebutting James Bryan and the Metonymical Chain of Holden's Mind**

Part of what makes rebutting James Bryan's "The Psychological Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye*" somewhat difficult is the fact that he draws upon passages that can be read as sexual

innuendoes. For instance, when Holden is about to leave after having a conversation with Phoebe in her bedroom, Bryan italicizes certain phrases within the passage to demonstrate that “their parting is filled with suggestions of a sort one might expect after a casual, normal sexual encounter”: “then I *finished buttoning* my coat and all. I told her I’d *keep in touch with her*. She told me *I could sleep with her* if I wanted to” (Bryan 113). Unfortunately, there is really no way to say that reading these passages for their sexual undertones is incorrect, since the art of interpreting literature allows us to discover multiple meanings. We can only agree with Dennis Vail, who says, ““such contact need *not* be corrupt,” but that does not do much to counter Bryan’s argument (Vail 117).

Thus, while I cannot build a strong argument against Bryan’s reading of sexual innuendoes, I will seek to take a different route, analyzing Bryan’s argument and what it ignores in terms of the Holden-Phoebe relationship. At the crux of Bryan’s argument is the following suggestion:

I am suggesting that the urgency of Holden’s compulsions, his messianic desire to guard innocence against adult corruption, for example, comes of a frantic need to save his sister from himself... And it may be Phoebe who **provokes his longing for stasis because he fears that she may be changed—perhaps at his own hand.**

(Bryan 107)

What Holden is saving Phoebe from is his repressed sexual desire for her. He unconsciously recognizes this desire, and because he knows that it would be wrong to act upon such desire, he is driven by a “frantic need to save his sister from himself.” Supposedly, Holden’s compulsions, including his “messianic desire” to guard childhood innocence as a catcher in the rye, are related to his relationship with Phoebe. However, this interpretation ignores a crucial issue: Allie’s

death. While Phoebe certainly is a significant part of Holden's life, his brother, Allie, has a role that is just as important.

In constructing his psychoanalytic reading of *Catcher*, Allie's death is an issue that Bryan completely glosses over. Bryan mentions Allie's death but once: "We know little more than that the family has been generally disrupted since [Allie's death] and that Holden has not come to grips with life as he should have" (Bryan 102). Bryan's only mention of Allie acts essentially as a quick dismissal, since as readers, we "know little." Clearly, Allie has had a profound effect on Holden, if it is part of the reason he "has not come to grips with life" properly.

Given that Allie is frequently mentioned in Holden's narrative, it seems odd that Bryan does not make more of Allie's death. It is especially strange considering that Allie's death is what first prompted Holden's parents to suggest that he be psychoanalyzed. Much of the time, when psychoanalysis is mentioned in the novel, it is mentioned in the literary present, as Holden is telling his story to a psychoanalyst and some of the characters to whom he speaks mention that he might need psychoanalysis. However, it is Holden's reaction to Allie's death—at least three years prior to the literary present—that first warrants the suggestion:

...they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage... I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it... It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie. (Salinger 39)

For one reason or another, "they," or Holden's parents, chose not to have him psychoanalyzed after his aggressive outburst, but it is interesting to note that Holden was almost psychoanalyzed in a time that precedes the New York City adventure, of which a majority of the novel is

comprised. If Allie's passing could have nearly prompted psychoanalysis once, could it prompt it a second time? Would it not make sense that Allie's death has something to do with Holden's current condition?

As I will aim to demonstrate, part of the reason that Bryan may be ignoring Holden's mentions of Allie is that these mentions undermine Bryan's argument about Holden having repressed sexual desire for Phoebe. Even Holden's desire to be "catcher in the rye," which Bryan connects to repressed sexual desire, can be linked back to Allie's death.

In setting up his argument that Holden is repressing sexual desire for Phoebe, Bryan cites Holden's purchase and breaking of the "Little Shirley Beans" record, which Bryan contends is representative of Holden's repressed desire. During his time in New York, Holden buys the record with the intention of giving it to Phoebe, but he accidentally breaks it before he can do so. Citing the passage in which Holden describes and purchases the "Little Shirley Beans" record, Bryan argues, "If the Shirley Beans affair were a subject of dream analysis, the missing teeth, the shame, and the translation through 'whorehouse' jazz by a singer who 'knew what the hell she was doing' would conventionally suggest the loss of virginity" (Bryan 109). Therefore, given that this is what Holden's description of the record suggests and the Holden wants to give this record to Phoebe, Bryan asserts, "Holden's unconscious forces would dictate the destruction of this 'record' as well as its purchase," since he has a repressed sexual desire for Phoebe—hence the purchase—and knows he cannot act on it—hence the destruction (Bryan 109). When reading the passage in which Holden breaks the record, however, it is strange to note that even though Holden breaks the record, he continues to hold onto it: "Then something terrible happened just as I got into the park. I dropped old Phoebe's record... I damn near cried, it made me feel so

terrible, but all I did was, I took the pieces out of the envelope and put them in my coat pocket... I didn't feel like throwing them away" (Salinger 154). One would think that complete destruction would necessitate getting rid of all evidence, but Holden holds onto the record, which is undoubtedly linked to Phoebe. He holds onto the record pieces as a way to continue holding onto her. While this idea may not necessarily disprove the possibility that Holden has repressed sexual desire for Phoebe, this Phoebe-to-record linkage is part of what sparks the chain of thoughts that unfolds after the record breaks.

Bryan uses the implications of the "Little Shirley Beans" record and its necessary brokenness to argue that Holden has a repressed sexual desire for Phoebe, but in focusing only on the implications of the record, he misses the important details that immediately follow the breaking of the record. The broken record sets off a metonymic chain that offers significant insight into the workings of Holden's mind. After breaking the record, Holden drunkenly wanders in Central Park: "Then I went in the park... I've lived in New York all my life, and I know Central Park like the back of my hand, because I used to roller-skate there all the time and ride my bike when I was a kid, but I had the most terrific trouble finding that lagoon that night" (Salinger 154). Holden returns to a place he knows well, "like the back of [his] hand," which doubles as a place that he spent significant time in as a kid. Holden may be driven there for comfort, given how "terrible" he feels after breaking the record and given that he and siblings spent a lot of time in the park as kids—a fact mentioned when he and Phoebe later go to the park. Thus, the fact that Holden is returning to such a place is important to note because it is in keeping with Holden's desire for stasis, for things that he still knows to be the same as "when [he] was a kid." Holden's movement from Phoebe to the park, which is symbolic of his desire for stasis, would in turn link Phoebe to a desire for stasis, as well.

It is also significant that Holden is going to the lagoon in the park, where the ducks live, since, throughout the novel, Holden repeatedly questions where the ducks go in the winter. As James Mellard argues in his Lacanian reading of the novel, “Plainly, the ducks’ disappearance is related to those nagging questions Holden has about death” (Mellard 202). The connection that Mellard makes becomes quite clear as after Holden arrives at the lagoon and says: “Boy, I was still shivering like a bastard, and the back of my hair... was sort of full of little hunks of ice... I thought I’d probably get pneumonia and die.” (Salinger 154). The lagoon and the absence of ducks in it trigger Holden to think about the possibility of his own death. And as Holden continues on, it becomes clear that his thoughts about his own mortality are directly linked to thoughts about his brother’s death: “I started picturing millions of jerks coming to my funeral and all. They all came when Allie died, the whole goddam stupid bunch of them. I have this one stupid aunt with halitosis that kept saying how *peaceful* he looked there... I wasn’t there. I was still in the hospital” (Salinger 155). Given Holden’s still-present anger, as he calls his relatives “jerks” and a “goddam stupid bunch,” and his hostile tone toward the idea that Allie looked “peaceful,” it is apparent that Holden is not done mourning Allie’s death. His statement, “I wasn’t there,” shows how troubled he is, for as Mellard points out, “Holden was never able to complete the process of mourning his dead brother because he was not present with his family” (Mellard 205). Therefore, while Holden initially questions his own mortality, his thoughts about death are clearly spurred on by his thoughts about Allie. Thus far, the metonymic chain has moved from Phoebe to a longing for stasis, to thoughts about death and Allie.

While he sits at the lagoon, Holden’s incomplete mourning is made further evident as he continues talking about Allie. He begins to talk about how his parents go to visit Allie’s grave, but he does not go with them: “I went with them a couple times, but I cut it out... I certainly

don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery. Surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all" (Salinger 155). Since seeing Allie in the cemetery is something that Holden does not "enjoy," he has coped with this by "[cutting] it out." This further proves Mellard's point about Holden's mourning being incomplete in part because he has not been "present with his family." By avoiding the cemetery, he not only avoids mourning with his family but, more broadly speaking, also avoids being confronted with Allie's death. Even in speaking of the cemetery, Holden avoids directly stating that Allie is dead—he is just "surrounded by dead guys and tombstones." As Holden continues, he further reveals how upset he is by Allie's death:

It wasn't too bad when the sun was out but twice—*twice*—we were there when it started to rain. It was awful. All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and the go someplace nice for dinner—everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it... I just wish he wasn't there. You didn't know him. If you'd known him, you'd know what I mean. (Salinger 155-156)

Going to the cemetery was "awful" and "nearly drove [him] crazy," and it is evident that the contrast between the living, "running" visitors and Allie, dead and motionless, was too much for him: "[he] couldn't stand it." Holden's continued avoidance of the cemetery is certainly not helping him complete the mourning process, and as this statement makes clear, he still cannot stand that Allie is dead: "I just wish he wasn't there."

After Holden's thoughts about death, both his own and Allie's, he brings us full circle, coming back to thinking about Phoebe, with whom Holden started this significant chain of thoughts. He recounts:

Anyway, I kept worrying... that I was going to die. I felt sorry as hell for my mother and father. Especially my mother, because she still isn't over my brother Allie yet... The only good thing, I knew she wouldn't let old Phoebe come to my goddam funeral because she was only a little kid. That was the only good part.

(Salinger 155)

This statement is loaded with meaning. In his Lacanian reading of the first half of this statement, Mellard explains that the fantasy of one's own death is "manipulated by the child in love relations with his parents" (Mellard 203). According to his explanation, which draws heavily on Lacan, "this move by the subject [i.e. the child] is absolutely fundamental to the constitution of the subject as a consciousness, for without the move into a relation to the Other... the subject can never become aware of signification, the translation of being into meaning [which is at] the heart of the normally constituted subject" (Mellard 203). Thus, by imagining his death and the way that his parents would feel about it, Holden is moving toward his incorporation into the Symbolic.

While this certainly rings true, the aforementioned statement concerns Holden's death not only in relation to his parents but also in relation to Phoebe. Rather than wanting Phoebe to be part of his death fantasy, Holden wants to keep her out of it, since the "only good thing" Holden sees associated with his possible death is the fact that Phoebe would not be allowed to come to his funeral. This translates into a desire to protect Phoebe from death, and such a desire certainly plays into the "catcher" image of Holden protecting children. Therefore, as much as Holden's statement might be about him moving toward incorporation into the Symbolic, it is also about something simple: shielding his sister from death. Given the fact that Holden is still so overwhelmed by Allie's death, it really is not much of a surprise that he would want to shield

Phoebe from his own death, should it occur. Even though he worries that he might die, he shows concern for the way she would feel: “I started thinking about how old Phoebe would feel if I got pneumonia and died... Anyway, I couldn’t get that off my mind, so finally what I figured I’d do, I figured I’d better sneak home and see her, in case I died and all” (Salinger 156). Holden sympathizes, “thinking about how old Phoebe would feel,” as he undoubtedly would not want Phoebe to feel the pain that he feels, still mourning the death of Allie. Rather, he would prefer to protect Phoebe from such pain.

Up until this point in the novel, Holden has thought about Phoebe and calling her quite often, but it is only now, thinking about death, that Holden is driven to go see her, perhaps because he would feel guilty if he left her without doing so. Of the previous quote, Bryan writes, “Finally, he decides to see Phoebe, ‘in case I died and all,’ more explicitly associating Phoebe with death” (Bryan 110). This may be true, but Holden has linked together much more than just Phoebe and death. As we can see from the preceding investigation, Holden’s mind moves from Phoebe, to desire for sameness, to concerns about death, to mourning Allie, and finally to concerns about protecting Phoebe. All of these thoughts and concerns are wrapped up together in a metonymical chain, and they cannot necessarily be separated from one another. These are the links that Holden’s mind has put together, and we cannot ignore their relationships to one another. When Bryan argues that Holden’s association of Phoebe with death is directly related to his repressed sexual desire for her, it ignores the rest of the chain. Phoebe is indeed related to death, but she is also related to Holden’s concerns for sameness, for protecting her. Most importantly, she is related to Allie. To suppose that Holden’s problems are rooted only in Phoebe and death is to ignore Allie’s significance.

While Bryan ignores Allie's significance throughout the entirety of his essay, perhaps the most striking occasion is in his discussion of Holden's desire to be a "catcher in the rye." The phrase comes from a poem Holden heard, but he has misremembered it as "if a body catch a body," whereas in the actual poem, it is "if a body meet a body" (Salinger 173). Phoebe corrects his mistake, which he admits, but it does not change his "catcher" fantasy. Bryan calls this "the loveliest—and most sinister—fantasy in the novel": "Holden proceeds to conjure up the daydream of himself as catcher in the rye, the protector of childhood innocence. As Phoebe implies, however, the song is about romance, not romanticism. Because he has to, Holden has substituted a messianic motive for the true, erotic one" (Bryan 112). However, given the way that the metonymic chain of Holden's mind is built up, it seems that Holden's desire to be a catcher does not have to do with sex, but rather it has much more to do with the greater issue plaguing him: death. Although Bryan uses the fact that Phoebe corrects Holden's interpretation of the poem as reason to say that Holden has sexual desire for his sister, Holden is interpreting the rhyme in a different way for a reason. His interpretation does not have to do with only his sister; rather, it is very much linked to Allie. And, of course, this linkage is something that Bryan again ignores.

Allie's death explains the reason why Holden wants to be a "catcher in the rye." In the midst of his Lacanian psychoanalytic reading, Mellard briefly suggests that Allie's baseball mitt is metonymically linked to the hand that Holden broke around the time of Allie's death, which makes sense. This idea could be taken a step further, however: Holden's attachment to Allie's baseball mitt may be metonymically linked to Holden's desire to be a "catcher in the rye." The metonymic link becomes apparent during the conversation Holden has with Phoebe upon sneaking into his parents' apartment, the very same conversation that Bryan cites in his

interpretation of Holden wanting to be a “catcher.” When Phoebe accuses Holden of not liking anything and asks him to name something he likes, he immediately mentions Allie: “‘I like Allie,’ I said. ‘And I like doing what I’m doing right now. Sitting here with you, and talking, and thinking about stuff...’” (Salinger 171). Apparently, Allie and talking with Phoebe are the only things that Holden really likes, and this further demonstrates that there is a connection between the two. What is perhaps even more interesting, though, is that a bit later in the conversation, the “catcher” topic comes up:

“You know what I’d like to be... 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.” (Salinger 173)

Is it a coincidence that Holden talks about how he would like to be a “catcher,” saving little kids, shortly after mentioning how he likes Allie? Allie, as Holden’s younger brother, was a little kid that he could not save, could not “catch.” If Holden’s broken hand can be metonymically linked to Allie’s baseball mitt, could we not link the baseball mitt to the act of catching? If we draw upon this link, it seems fairly obvious that Allie’s death is what triggers Holden’s desire to be a “catcher in the rye.”

The first time that the “catcher in the rye” image appears, it comforts Holden. He sees a little boy walking by, “singing ‘If a body catch a body coming through the rye’”—this would be the origin of the first misquote—and remarks, “It made me feel better. It made me not feel so depressed any more” (Salinger 115). Thus, Holden’s desire to be a “catcher” appears to be a

coping mechanism. If Holden can catch children before they fall, then he will be able to prevent further sadness. It may even help him move on from his current sadness, or incomplete mourning. By being a catcher, Holden will prevent further separation from loved ones, and this is what is at the crux of Holden's desire to be a "catcher"—not repressed sexual desire.

The last point that I wish to explore with regard to Bryan's argument is his attempt to prove that Holden is driven by sexual desire and to show that this is linked to his desire for stasis. In setting up this part of his argument, Bryan primarily cites the instance in which Holden is hanging out in a hotel room, watching a transvestite and couple squirting water at each other through windows across the way. Bryan writes, "Holden confesses at this point that 'In my *mind*, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw' and that he might enjoy such 'crumby stuff' as squirting water in a girl's face" (Bryan 105). Holden's admission of being the "biggest sex maniac you ever saw" indicts him as being driven by sex, of course, and because Holden qualifies this admission with "in my *mind*," Bryan asserts that there is repression going on. Even though Holden "might enjoy" participating in a sexual act, he will not actually allow himself to do so; he is repressing this sexual desire. However, Bryan does not draw on the full passage, and by only pulling certain quotes from it, he neglects part of what Holden is actually saying. If we turn to the actual passage in question, we can see something else at work:

In my *mind*, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw. Sometimes I can think of *very* crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up. I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each

other's face. The thing is, though, I don't *like* the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it.

(Salinger 62)

One of the first things to notice is that even though Holden admits that there is “*very* crumby stuff” he “wouldn’t mind doing,” he is not necessarily repressing the desire to do these things. After all, he “wouldn’t mind doing” the crumby stuff—the sexual acts—“if the opportunity came up.” Is someone really repressed if they have not had the opportunity to act out the kind of “crumby stuff” he has fantasized about in their minds? The other part to notice is that although Bryan writes that Holden “might enjoy such ‘crumby stuff’ as squirting water in a girl’s face”, Holden does not like the idea of squirting water at a girl’s face (Bryan 105). He might enjoy other crumby stuff not squirting water at a girl’s face. He says, “It stinks, if you analyze it.”

Why might it stink, if we analyze it? According to Holden, “I think if you don’t really like a girl, you shouldn’t horse around with her at all, and if you *do* like her, then you’re supposed to like her face, and if you like her face, you ought to be careful about doing crumby stuff to it, like squirting water all over it” (Salinger 62). As even Bryan points out, Holden has a longing for stasis, and this is certainly something we can see in this passage. In this case, Holden’s concern for stasis is translated into a preservation of a girl’s face. If “you like her face,” as you might like anything, then “you should be careful about doing crumby stuff to it.” He does not like the idea of ruining, or changing, something that he likes. While Bryan focuses upon the potential sexual desire in this passage, it is undoubtedly also about Holden’s desire for stasis.

Holden’s desire for stasis, or resistance to change, becomes apparent again at a later point in the novel, when he is talking about the natural history museum. This time, it is specifically linked to Phoebe:

...I kept thinking about old Phoebe going to that museum on Saturdays the way I used to. I thought how she'd see the same stuff I used to see, and how *she'd* be different every time she saw it. It didn't exactly depress me to think about it, but it didn't exactly make me feel gay as hell, either. Certain things 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. (Salinger 122)

While Holden will not fully admit that it depresses him, he evidently does not like thinking about his sister changing, about how she'll be "different" every time she goes to the museum. He wishes that she could stay the same, that things between them could "stay the way they are." It is as if he wishes he could stick Phoebe into "one of those big glass cases." In his essay, Bryan argues, "it may be Phoebe who provokes his longing for stasis because he fears that she may be changed—perhaps at his own hand," a suggestion that refers to Holden's fear of acting upon his repressed sexual desire for his sister (Bryan 107). However, given all that has been discussed, particularly the fact that Holden fears further separation from his loved ones, his longing for Phoebe to stay the same might not be linked to sexual desire. Bryan's statement implies that Holden has some kind of control over whether or not Phoebe may be changed, since it would happen "at his own hand." But as I will begin to argue, Holden sees Phoebe as an object of understanding, which is why he does not want her to change. As he comes to recognize her as a separate subject, out of his control and with the potential to change, it is this, not sexual desire that concerns Holden most.

### **Between Self and Siblings: Re-reading the Holden and Phoebe Relationship**

Given the connections, Holden's desire to interact with Phoebe is clearly linked to Holden's thoughts about his dead brother, Allie. Holden frequently mentions Allie, and as we can see from the preceding investigation, Holden is still trying to deal with his brother's death. Because Holden is still in the process of mourning, it would be logical for him to turn to his family for support. However, his parents are relatively absent, and his older brother, D.B., is three thousand miles away in California, and as Mellard points out, part of the reason Holden is not finished mourning is because he was not present with his family. Does it not make sense, then, that now he might turn to Phoebe, who, as a sibling, would be his next available option for support?

Both during his time by the lagoon and elsewhere in the novel, Holden draws connections between Phoebe and Allie, and he makes it quite clear that the three spent a fair amount of time together when Allie was alive. When wandering through Central Park, Holden remarks on how the three of them used to go to the park all the time: "And when Allie and I were having some conversation about things in general, old Phoebe'd be listening. Sometimes you'd forget she was around, because she was such a little kid, but *she'd* let you know... he liked her, too" (Salinger 68). Holden's reminiscing demonstrates not only that he misses Allie, which we already know, but also that he and Allie had a mutual affection for Phoebe. Thus, Phoebe is undoubtedly a reminder of Allie for Holden, which may explain why she is currently so important in his life. And Phoebe has been there for Holden all along, as this statement makes it clear that even as a little kid, Phoebe was engaged and "listening," which is important at present for Holden.

Taking her importance into consideration, I would like to revisit Holden's relationship with his little sister, Phoebe, because throughout the novel, it is evident that Holden has a stronger relationship with Phoebe than with any of the other characters. Bryan clearly recognizes

that Phoebe is significant in terms of Holden's psyche, but is Holden's relationship with her truly marred by repressed sexual desire? By reading *Catcher* through a reductive Freudian lens and ignoring the metonymical links in Holden's mind, one may produce such a reading, but in returning with an awareness of how Holden's mind works and a more relational lens, the same result is not produced. As Bryan supposes, Phoebe is vital to Holden's sense of self and is part of what causes Holden to breakdown, but from a relational standpoint, it is Phoebe's subjectivity and separateness, not repressed sexual desire, that upsets Holden.

Over the course of the novel, Holden is generally dismissive of most people, many of whom he terms "phonies." However, he never attributes phony behavior to Phoebe; rather, he finds her to be quite the opposite of a phony. In the midst of his New York adventure, Holden continually has a desire to call Phoebe, even when he knows he cannot: "...I damn near gave my kid sister Phoebe a buzz, though. I certainly felt like talking to her on the phone. Somebody with sense and all" (Salinger 66). As Holden implies, Phoebe has sense, while the people around him—the phonies—do not, and this is why he has such a strong desire to talk to her. His desire is not only strong but also recurrent—he mentions wanting to call her several other times aside from the one mentioned—making it rather significant.

What does it mean for Holden that Phoebe has "sense"? Why does Phoebe have sense while others do not? The "sense" that Holden refers to can be equated with an ability to understand. In his interactions with Phoebe, Holden feels like he is understood: "I mean if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you're talking about. I mean you can even take her anywhere with you. If you take her to a lousy movie, for instance, she knows it's a lousy movie" (Salinger 67). Holden attributes Phoebe with an ability understand "exactly" what he is talking to her about, and clearly, he values this.

He especially values Phoebe because Holden believes that many other characters in the novel do not understand “exactly what the hell” he is talking about. In determining whether or not Holden feels understood, it is helpful to be privy to his perspective. In particular, Holden has trouble with adults, as we see from his interactions with them throughout the novel. For example, Holden goes to speak with and say good-bye to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, who has flunked Holden due to poor performance. The conversation essentially turns into a lecture, and Holden becomes eager to leave: “I just couldn’t hang around there any longer, the way we were on opposite sides of the pole...” (Salinger 15). Holden’s choice of words is very telling. He does not feel like there is a mutual understanding between him and Mr. Spencer. They are on “opposite sides,” rather than the same one, which would ideally be, for Holden, his side.

In Holden’s mind, Mr. Spencer cannot see, or recognize, where he is coming from, and Holden grows tired of this lack of understanding. Mr. Spencer is trying to impose his opinions on Holden, telling him that he ought to apply himself in school. In an attempt to lecture him, Mr. Spencer even reads Holden’s paper aloud to him, which bothers Holden more than anything else: “I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him for reading me that crap out loud. I wouldn’t’ve read it out loud to *him* if *he’d* written it—I really wouldn’t. In the first place, I’d only *written* that damn note so he wouldn’t feel too bad about flunking me” (Salinger 12). Holden imagines that if he were Mr. Spencer, he would not have done the same, and because this demonstrates that they are not on the same page, Holden’s page, it bothers Holden tremendously: “I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him.” Although Mr. Spencer is just trying to help Holden, which Holden may recognize to some extent, since he is visiting him, Holden becomes blinded by annoyance, thinking that Mr. Spencer is not as understanding toward him as he would be toward Mr. Spencer, since Holden “wouldn’t’ve read it out loud to *him* if *he’d* written it.” Holden concludes that he and Mr.

Spencer will remain on “opposite sides,” and he feels the only solution is to end the interaction—to leave.

In light of this example, it may perhaps be clearer why Holden values his interactions with Phoebe. He imagines that Phoebe offers him a kind of understanding, or recognition, that is unable to get from characters like Mr. Spencer. The kind of understanding that he gets from Phoebe is perhaps much like the intersubjective attunement described by Jessica Benjamin: “[the] joy of intersubjective attunement is: The *Other* can share my feeling” (Benjamin, *Like Subjects* 35). After all, if Phoebe can know “exactly what the hell you’re talking about,” if she can recognize that a movie is “lousy” when Holden does, then is she not sharing his feeling? This idea would certainly help explain why Holden has a desire to keep interacting with his sister. The problem is, though, that Phoebe is not yet a subject to Holden; rather, she is an object. Holden is convinced that she understands him, but this does not necessarily mean that he is experiencing intersubjective attunement is, as intersubjectivity must exist before one can experience true attunement. As much as Holden cares for and values Phoebe, he still looks at her as an object, for as we will see, encountering Phoebe’s subjectivity is what distresses him toward the end of the novel.

### **The Paradox of Recognition: Relationally Reading *Catcher in the Rye***

In addition to connecting Phoebe to Allie, who he keenly misses, Holden has projected his need to be understood upon Phoebe, giving Phoebe an even more important role in his life. Her importance is far greater than Holden can consciously realize, however, as she becomes a driving force behind both his maturation and breakdown. As part of his argument, Bryan notes that Phoebe may be standing in the place of the mother: “The psychoanalytical axiom may here

apply that a sister is often the first replacement of the mother as love object, and that normal maturation guides the boy from sister to other women” (Bryan 107). Putting aside the fact that this is part of his argument about sexual desire, rooted in the Oedipus complex, Bryan may have a point. A recurring idea in many readings of *Catcher* is that Holden is still maturing. For instance, Mellard argues that Holden is experiencing his incorporation into the Symbolic, which is a vital step in a subject’s maturation. From an intersubjective standpoint, coming to recognize the other as an equivalent center of experience is also an important step in maturation, and this is typically experienced in a child’s interactions with its mother. The child must move away from thinking of its mother as an object, away from “a retaliatory world of control to a world of mutual understanding” (Benjamin, “Outline” 193). Caught up in a process of maturing, Holden is having an experience with Phoebe that is not unlike an experience a child would have with its mother in learning to recognize her as a subject.

What Holden is experiencing is the paradox of recognition, which is paramount if one is going to attain intersubjective understanding. By intersubjective understanding, I mean the ability to understand that the other is an equivalent center of experience, which is vital if one is ever going to be able to experience intersubjectivity. The paradox of recognition typically first occurs in infancy between a mother and child. Jessica Benjamin describes the paradox of recognition, derived from Winnicott, in the following way:

The paradox is that only by asserting omnipotence may we discover the other as an outside center of experience. By destroying the other, not literally but in fantasy, by absolutely asserting the self and negating the other’s separateness in our minds, we discover that the other is outside our mental powers. (Benjamin, *Like Subjects* 90)

Thus, there is a necessary act of destruction involved in being able to recognize the other as a separate subject. This act of destruction is defined as “the mental act of negating or obliterating the object, which may be expressed in the real effort to attack the other,” and through this attack, “we find out whether the real other survives. If she survives without retaliating or withdrawing under the attack, then we know her to exist outside ourselves, not just as our mental product” (Benjamin, “Outline” 192). If the other does not survive this attack, then, his or her subjectivity will not be recognized. Before moving on, it should be noted that the paradox of recognition, which oscillates “between omnipotence and recognition,” occurs “throughout life” and thus does not have to refer only to a stage in infancy (Benjamin, *Like Subjects* 91). Therefore, Holden does not need to be an infant to experience the paradox of recognition, which he is experiencing with Phoebe.

An act of destructiveness, necessitated by the paradox in order to recognize the other as subject, is exactly what is occurring before Holden and Phoebe go to the carousel. When the two meet up beforehand, Holden is still talking about running away, and Phoebe insists that she wants to run away with him. When Phoebe says this, Holden becomes very angry at her, continually telling her to “shut up” (Salinger 206). As she continues to insist that she come with him, he finally blows up:

“You’re not *going*. Now, shut up! Gimme that bag.” I said. I took the bag off her. I was almost all set to hit her. I thought I was going to smack her for a second. I really did... “I thought you were supposed to be in a play at school and all...” I said it very nasty... That made her cry even harder. I was glad. All of a sudden I wanted her to cry until her eyes practically dropped out. I almost hated her. (Salinger 206-207)

Holden's sudden outburst is in stark contrast to the way that he typically behaves with and thinks of Phoebe, which is part of the reason it sticks out as a destructive act. All of a sudden he wants to "hit her," "smack her," make her "cry until her eyes practically [drop] out," and "almost [hates] her." Benjamin explains that destroying the object can be "expressed in the real effort to attack the other," and Holden's outburst certainly reads as a "real effort to attack" Phoebe (Benjamin, "Outline" 192). After all, he is "glad" that she is crying, that his attack is succeeding.

After the attack, it is important for Phoebe to survive, in order for Holden to recognize her subjectivity. Because Holden's attack has clearly upset Phoebe, she leaves Holden by crossing the street. He does not mind it, though, just so long as he can see her: "The only thing that bothered me was when a double-decker bus came along because then I couldn't see across the street and I couldn't see where the hell she was" (Salinger 209). After an act of destructiveness, "we find out whether the real other survives," and Holden is watching to see if Phoebe has survived. It is paramount that Phoebe should survive, if Holden is going to recognize her as a subject. Holden is only "bothered" when a bus keeps him from seeing "where the hell she [is]" because it indicates that she may not have survived the attack. Holden needs to recognize Phoebe as a subject if he is ever going to attain the full sense of intersubjective attunement, of real understanding that he needs from her.

Eventually, their paths reconvene, and they go together to the carousel. It is in this last scene that we get a real sense of Holden falling apart, as well as a kind of resolution to his relationship with Phoebe. It is important to note that Holden does not go with Phoebe to some random carousel; rather, he takes her to one of past significance. According to Holden, "When she was a tiny little kid, and Allie and D.B. and I used to go to the park with her, she was mad about the carousel. You couldn't get her off the goddam thing" (Salinger 210). In the past, when

Allie was still alive, this was the carousel to which Holden and his brothers would bring Phoebe. Therefore, it may be supposed that for Holden, watching Phoebe on the carousel would conjure up memories of Allie. But is it enough to drive him over the edge?

What we do know is that as Holden watches Phoebe go around on the carousel, he becomes overwhelmed with emotion. He recounts, “I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don’t know why. It was just that she looked so damn *nice*, the way she kept going around...” (Salinger 213). The reason why he is “so damned happy” is likely twofold. For one, Phoebe has survived Holden’s destructive act. Holden can now recognize Phoebe as a separate subject. As Benjamin describes it: “When the destructiveness damages neither the parent nor the self, external reality comes into view as a sharp, distinct contrast to the inner fantasy world. The outcome of this process is not simply reparation or restoration of the good object, but love, the sense of discovering the other” (Benjamin, “Outline” 190). The happiness that Holden feels is that “love, the sense of discovering the other” as a separate subject.

The other part of the reason he is so happy may also be that seeing Phoebe happily riding around on the carousel could remind him of happier times when Allie was still alive, when they all went to ride the carousel together. There is a similarity, a parallel between the time when Allie was alive and the current moment, in which Phoebe is riding around on the carousel. As Phoebe and Holden approach the carousel, Holden notices that the carousel in question has not changed since Allie’s death: “Anyway, we kept getting closer and closer to the carrousel and you could start to hear that nutty music it always plays... It played that same song about fifty years ago when *I* was a little kid. That’s one nice thing about carrouseles, they always play the same

songs” (Salinger 210). Holden appreciates the fact that not everything has changed since Allie’s death. He and Phoebe can still visit the same carousel, and it will still play the “same songs.” For Holden, there is something “nice” and comforting in “always.”

However, there is also a difference, a change: Allie is dead, and Phoebe is growing up. Holden has been extremely resistant to change, which is apparent in the aforementioned passage. He has also revealed this resistance at other points in the novel, which were mentioned in the section rebutting Bryan’s argument. In the example of the natural history museum, Holden expresses concern for Phoebe changing, saying, “Certain things 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” (Salinger 122). But Phoebe cannot be placed in a big glass case like a fossil in the natural history museum. She is not an object, but, as Holden has finally realized, she is a separate subject. She will grow up and things will change; Holden will not always be able to be her “catcher.” This is a part of what Holden finally recognizes while watching her go around on the carousel:

All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she’d fall off the goddam horse, but I didn’t say or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it’s bad if you say anything to them. (Salinger 211)

This is a vital moment for Holden. In watching Phoebe go around on the carousel, Holden recognizes that even though Phoebe is his little sister, he is not going to be able to protect her forever, just as he was unable to protect Allie. He will not be able to “catch” her if she begins to fall off some “crazy cliff.”

Thus, Holden falls apart because he recognizes their separation. As a subject coming into his own, Holden “must confront the difficulty that each subject has in recognizing the other as an equivalent center of experience” (Benjamin, “Outline” 184). Phoebe has an “equivalent center of experience,” and even though Holden knows this, it is not easy for him to accept. He can finally see that she is a subject, but this recognition brings with it an “increased awareness of separateness and, consequently, of vulnerability” (Benjamin, *Like Subjects* 37). Even though recognition from others is what we often crave and think will bring us closer, it can also show us how separate and vulnerable we are with them, and Holden can see how vulnerable he is. Holden has an image of Phoebe in his mind as his little sister, an object, but as a subject, she is inevitably going to grow up and have her own experiences, maybe even develop different opinions. She may no longer understand “exactly what the hell” Holden is “talking about;” he may no longer be able to rely on her for support. A sense of understanding is very important for Holden, especially since he feels that phonies, who undoubtedly cannot offer him understanding, continually surround him. Holden has already had to deal with the loss of his brother, and the possibility of losing his sister—in the sense of understanding—is too much for him to handle.

Perhaps if Allie had not died, or perhaps if he did not lean on Phoebe for support, Holden would not feel so vulnerable when it comes to Phoebe, but Holden’s brother and sister are part of what define him as a person. His brother defines his past, his sister defines his present, but what defines Holden’s future? In the midst of the uncertainty that faces him, an uncertainty he is faced to recognize along with Phoebe’s separate subjectivity, Holden falls apart. Having returned to a place with past significance that is both the same and different, he realizes that change is inevitable. He will not be able to rely on Phoebe forever, that he will have to set out on his own.

The fact of the matter is that Holden is growing up, and he cannot be lost in fantasies of being a “catcher” for the rest of his life.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Thus, Holden does not fall apart because of a desire to have sex with Phoebe, as proposed by Bryan’s Freudian reading. He does not even fall apart because of his necessary entry into the Symbolic, as explained by Mellard’s Lacanian reading. Phoebe and Allie are part of what defines Holden’s sense of self. Allie is dead, and the possibility of losing Phoebe, who “understands” him, is too much. He knows that he needs to accept that Phoebe is a separate subject, and he feels vulnerable. He needs to let go, and even though he knows this, it upsets him—it is too much for him to handle.

Although this reading suggests an intersubjective explanation for Holden’s breakdown, I would like to note that Mellard could also be right in supposing that Holden is struggling with his incorporation into the Symbolic. While Mellard’s reading is by no means the focus of this project, it certainly is not the subject of sustained criticism. My intersubjective reading does not need to be an alternative to Mellard’s intrapsychic reading. As far as I am concerned, Holden could be experiencing an incorporation into the Symbolic throughout the novel, although I do have a different take on what causes Holden’s breakdown. The point is, though, that the readings do not need to be mutually exclusive, alternatives to one another, much as relational psychoanalysis is not a full alternative to classical psychoanalysis. In fact, the exploration of the metonymical chain of Holden’s thought while he was sitting by the lagoon in Central Park was meant to highlight some of the inner workings of his mind, or rather, its intrapsychic processes. What is going on in Holden’s mind undoubtedly plays into what happens when he comes to recognize Phoebe as a subject, specifically during the carousel scene. And undoubtedly, if he did

not have the kind of intrapsychic problems he has, such incomplete mourning, he might not feel so vulnerable in acknowledging Phoebe's subjectivity, and I would not be able to derive an intersubjective reading from the novel.

If there is one thing that Mellard, Bryan, and I can all agree upon, though, it is that the ending of the novel is a relatively optimistic one. As Bryan puts it, "Through the telling of his story, Holden has given shape to, and thus achieved control of, his troubled past" (Bryan 116). In passage that alludes to the fact that he is still in a psychoanalytic ward, Holden says:

A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I'm going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. It's such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you *do* it? The answer is, you don't. I *think* I am, but how do I know? (Salinger 213)

While Holden is still in the ward, there is an end in sight: he is going "back to school next September." And even though he maintains that you cannot "know what you're going to do till you *do* it," he does admit that he thinks he will apply himself. Holden is not particularly fond of admitting things, so this slight admission is certainly of some value.

More than anything, Holden's closing words indicate that he is ready to return to the real world. He might not know for certain how school will go in the fall, but he does know that he misses the outside world: "About all I know is, I sort of *miss* everybody I told about... Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (Salinger 214). Through the telling of his narrative, it would appear that Holden has not only achieved some control over his "troubled past" but that he also has motivation to get back to the world he has left behind, since telling his narrative has reminded him of "everybody [he] told about." We do not know exactly

what happens to Holden afterward, but we can hope that his future is better than his past. Given that the last pieces of his narrative, in which he is finally able to recognize Phoebe as a separate subject, I like to think that when Holden returns to the people he misses, including his sister, he will better be able to recognize their subjectivities, and in turn, find understanding others in place of the phonies that used to populate his world.

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