Holden’s Inability To Come Of Age

The bildungsroman tradition began discussing the central character, in this case Holden Caulfield, transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition is typically marked by a significant moment of realization that provides the protagonist a clearer understanding of the world around him. In Salinger's novel, Catcher in the Rye, Holden explains the narration of his traumatic weekend when he was sixteen. However, by looking at the narrative structure and Holden's character development throughout the novel, Holden does not adhere to the coming of age tradition because he does not encounter a significant moral or psychological reconciliation by the novel’s conclusion.

Majority of this the evidence for Holden’s lack of change shows at the end of the the novel. Beginning during chapter 25 where Holden watches his little sister Phoebe on the carousel is where a lot of people claim they see his change. During this scene he almost cries because of the intense joy he feels as he watches his sister, embracing her innocence. Many people see this as him grasping adulthood by taking in the moment and protecting his sister. Claims arise that the carousel moment shows Phoebe at his youth and him maturing, however, I see otherwise. The intensity of his joy does not fully mean he is “cured” from his ongoing issues. I see the carousel moment as Holden viewing how “life goes in circle” and he chooses when he wants to get on and off he is ready. This also connects with Holden’s inability to cross into adulthood due to his infatuation with the idea of innocence. On pages 155-156, Holden explains his answer to Phoebe’s question of “what would he like to be?”. He answers in an unusual way of explaining how he’d like to be a “catcher in the rye” saving children from running off a cliff/ into adulthood. This is an issue because it shows Holden’s inability to escape fantasy and fail to become the idealized man of American culture. He does not comply with the requirements of masculinity and fails to pass successfully the barriers from childhood into young manhood (None of that David Copperfield Crap: Clive Baldwin explores musculity in Catcher in the Rye). Throughout the book Holden changes because of the fact that we all change everyday, but his changes are never significant enough to fit a bildungsroman.

In chapter 26, Holden also refuses to say what happened after the carousel, “I could probably tell you about what happened I went home… but I don't feel like it. I really don’t. That stuff doesn't interest me too much right now”. He is again refusing to apply himself as he has done at the beginning when he starts the novel with an attitude, “If you really want to know about it”, and throughout the whole book. However, he has inserted some flexibility with us about what he’s going to do hinting he is maturing and his adolescence range is lessing. He opens up some conversation after he mentions that he seen another psychoanalyst and when he asked him if he’ll apply himself when he returns back to school and Holden responds saying he thinks so, but but adds that he won't know what he’ll do until he does it. He is at least allowing some progression and opportunity to grow, even by taking the time to see a psychoanalyst he shows that he wants to get better. Nevertheless, Holden still finds a way to hold himself back due to his immaturity of not wanting to tell us what happened.

Lastly, Holden shows more ambiguity when wishes he didn't talk about this story because it causes him to miss people. Him not wanting to miss people can show him giving up his hatred of others. He is being very contradicting nonetheless he overall wants to avoid his feelings by

continuing to escape others and his problems. He strangely inserts how he even misses Stradlater and Ackley now, which were two people he made it clear he hated the most. Holden still does not know how to deal with or understand his emotions as he did in the beginning chapters of the book. Holden even advises the readers to never tell their own stories after he finishes his own due to him being afraid of his emotions.

By these reasons this novel is not considered a bildungsroman. Holden is unable to significantly change throughout the text from beginning to end enough to fit its definition. He continuously contradicted himself and never took away the important lessons offered through his eventful weekend. He instead stayed ignorant hindering thee opportunities to learn and work on himself and held onto his immunity, enabling himself to come of age.

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1. Baldwin, Clive. 'None of that David Copperfield crap: Clive Baldwin explores masculinity in The Catcher in the Rye.' The English Review, vol. 19, no. 2, 2008, p. 21+. General OneFile, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A195069189/GPS?u=tel_s_tsla&sid=GPS&xid=8e870478. Accessed 21 Feb. 2019.
2. Salinger, J. D. The Catcher in the Rye. American Printing House for the Blind, 1985.