

Isolation in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *A Woman on the Turret*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This paper is about Isolation in The Catcher in the Rye and A Woman on the Turret. The concept of Isolation in The Catcher in the Rye has been mentioned in many studies, but it is scarcely compared with another novel and hardly with a Kurdish novel. The paper is a comparative study of two novels The Catcher in the Rye which is written by an American Novelist David Salinger who had isolated himself from society since then. A Woman on the Turret is written by a Kurdish novelist, Sherzad Hassan, who is a great defender of women rights.

The study focuses on the theme Isolation in both novels and the reasons which lead the main characters in these novels to be isolated from society; moreover it sheds light on their reactions toward the community. The aim of this study is that to illustrate the factors of isolating an American Juvenile in his society and a Kurdish young woman from her community.

Keywords: The Catcher in the Rye, a Woman on the Turret, Isolation, Psychological approach

Introduction

Isolation is a state of being in a place or situation that is separate from others. (Merriam-Webster Diction) The condition of being isolated requires that one be detached from others through reasons not in one's control. One can say that isolation is not only physically but also it can be spiritually, for instance Shady in *A Woman on the Turret* said that "my soul is isolated from this world" it means that physically she has a communication with other people but her soul was upset from that society. She feels alone since she cannot tell her secret to others.

This study shows that , how J. D. Salinger and Sherzad Hassan interpret the theme of isolation to construct such characters as Holder Caulfield in the *Catcher in the Rye* and Shady in *A Woman on the Turret* . In these two novels the idea of isolation are presented as a direct result of maltreatment of other characters, so the writers apply both to social and inner isolation. The reality in which these people live is so harsh that they isolate themselves from the rest of the world. Isolation results in the expelling of a person from all social affairs and interactions, depriving him/her to become a full member of society. Actually the identity of a person is created through certain social and cultural interactions with people, but isolation prevents him/her of acquiring the completeness of identity.

Isolation in *The Catcher in the Rye*

Since its publication *The Catcher in the Rye* has been one of the most widely read novels written in American literature. It has also been one of the most analyzed novels by scores of literary critics, due to its effect on the society in general and the youth in particular. Ever since its publication in 1951, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* had served as a firestorm for controversy and debate. Critics had argued the moral issues raised by the book and the context in which it was presented. Some had argued that Salinger's tale of the human condition was fascinating and enlightening, yet incredibly depressing. The psychological battles of the novel's main character, Holden Caulfield, served as the basis for critical argument. Caulfield's self-destruction over a period of days forced reader of contemplate society's attitude toward the human condition. *The Catcher in the Rye* had been banned continually from schools, libraries, and bookstores due to its profanity, sexual subject matter, and rejection of some traditional American ideals.

Salinger's portrayal of Holden, which included incidents of depression, nervous breakdown, impulsive spending, sexual exploration, vulgarity, and other erratic behavior, had all attributed to the controversial nature of the novel. Yet the novel was not without its sharp advocates, who argued that it was a critical look at the problems facing American youth during the 1950s. When developing a comprehensive opinion of the novel, it was important to consider the praises and criticisms of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Holden was probably too sensitive for his own good nature and he suffered from an almost uncontrollable urge to protect people he saw as susceptible. He was attracted to the weak

and the frail, and he feels sorry for losers of all kinds, even those who caused him pain, discomfort, or trouble. But the main focus of Holden's protective instinct was children, whom he saw as symbols of goodness and innocence, and whom he would like to shield against corruption. One sign of corruption in Holden's worldview was the process of growing up, since it removed reader from the perfect innocence of childhood. He had a daydream about children who never grew up, who remained in that perfect world forever and his own problems of facing the real world were linked to that daydream.

Holden envisioned thousands of children playing and dancing in a field of rye and he saw himself standing at the edge of a cliff to catch any children who came too close. He said he did not want to be a scientist or a lawyer; he just wanted to be the catcher in the rye. Holden was continually confronted with the absence of good on his arrival in the city, he was disturbed because his cabdriver was corrupt and unsociable and, worst of all unable to answer Holden's obsessive question: where do the central park ducks go when the lake freezes over. What Holden really wanted to know was whether there was a benevolent authority that took care of ducks. One might say that here he compares the ducks to the children; he means that if there is one that cares about the ducks, there will be also one who cares about the children (Bloom, 2000: 7)

Holden was essentially alone, but not because he disliked people. His loneliness arose from the fact that no one seemed to share his view of the world; no one understood what was going on in his head. His poor academic record was one indication of his failure to deal with this problem, a problem that built to a climax in the course of the novel. (Bloom, 2000: 60)

Holden's reaction to his awareness of the world's imperfection and mutability was the formulation of the dream to be the "catcher" of small children, saving them from the knowledge and the dangers of what he was slowly coming to realize the "given" of life. He decided he would never go home again but would hitchhike his way out west, got a job as a gas-station attendant, and pretended he is deaf-mute so he would not have to listen to people's talk. He is so isolated from society even he does not want to speak because he was bored from people even if he gets married, he will marry a deaf-mute girl and he was disturbed from school that was why, he will not send his children to school.

Holden decided to stay in a hotel, the elevator guy who was called Maurice told him, "how old are you chief? The elevator guy said. why I said. Twenty-two. Okay I will send a girl up in about fifteen minutes. He opened the doors and I got out. it was against his principles, but he was feeling so depressed, he did not even think. That was the whole problem when people feeling very depressed, they could not even think." (Salinger: 82)

In fact Holden did not want to have sex with this prostitute, because he was virgin, he would not lose his innocence and purity, he was more oppressed than sexy. "do not you feel like talking for a while he asked her. She looked at me like I was a madman. what the heck you want to talk about? She said. I do not know. Nothing special. I just thought perhaps you might care to chat for a while." (Salinger: 86) He wanted to remain in the childhood world. Holden needed

someone to talk with, no one listened to him that was why, he agreed to pay the prostitute just to listen to him, since he is isolated from society. He wanted to talk about his dead brother to everyone and talk about his aim to become the catcher in the rye, but nobody was ready to listen to him. He was often alone, seeking for a partner and calling many friends, however; he could not find an appropriate one to understand him.

Holden refused to have sexual relationship with the prostitute, not because of moral principle, but because the condition of her existence. He would save her if he could, but she was far too fallen from any catcher in the rye. Yet as a child-saint, Holden is quixotic. In not sleeping with her, he meant to protect her innocence, not his own; he was spiritually, hence physically, unable to be a party to her further degradation. The consequences were ironic. Holden as saint refused to victimize the prostitute, but he was victimized by the girl and her accomplice, Maurice. Though Holden had paid the girl without using her, Maurice beat him and extorted an additional five dollars from him. He was punished for his innocence. (Bloom, 1990: 69)

It can be noticed that Holden was alone, he needed a friend. When he saw Sally, he wanted to be with her forever, that was why, the idea of marriage came into his mind. He was in love with her. Surely it was only for a short time he felt like that. That is the nature of teenager, they are not stable, and hundreds of ideas come into their minds and go out in a moment.

“The funny part is, I felt like marrying her the minute I saw her. I am crazy. I did not even like her much, and yet all of a sudden I felt like I was in love with her and wanted to marry her. I swear to God I am crazy. I admit that.” (Salinger: 112)

He could not control himself, and at that moment when he said it, he meant it, but he regretted soon, because at this age, he could not take decision. He admitted that what he did was not right.

You are probably the only reason I am in New York right now, or anywhere. If you were not around, I would probably be some place way the hell off. In the woods or some god dam place look I said. Here is my idea. How you like would to get the hell out of here, what we could do is, tomorrow morning we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont, and all around there, see. It's beautiful as hell up there. it really is. (Salinger: 118)

It is worth mentioning that Holden revealed his childish plan to her, because he wanted to find a partner. He asked her hand to marry him and go to Massachusetts together, living far away from society. In fact he was bored to live in New York, the Society did not accept him and he could not accept society this led him be isolated. He preferred to live in woods rather than stay among people. (Bloom, 1990: 69)

He believes that all adults are corrupt and consequently destructive, since growing up in the real world is tragic, in Salinger's ideal world time must be stopped to prevent the loss of childhood, to salvage the remnants of innocence. Holden wishes that life were unchangeable and

pure as the exhibitions under glass cases in the museum of the natural history. “The best thing though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was.” (Salinger: 109)

Isolation in *The Woman on the Turret*

When Shady was a teenager, she felt in love with her cousin Bahram. One day she had sexual relationship with him. This intercourse caused of losing her virginity. In Middle East culture or Islamic society losing the virginity of a girl before the marriage is a great disaster. In addition to this Bahram left her and went to abroad. This event led her to be isolated from society forever. Thus she had to keep this secret for many years. Revealing this secret was equal to losing her life, furthermore it would cause the embarrassment for her family. The novelist talked about the isolation of a lady in Kurdish society, and criticized the whole community who see all the moral principles in losing the virginity of a girl. After the accident had occurred to her, she took the responsibility alone whereas Bahram enjoyed her life in Europe. The novelist’s message was that, it was not fair to call those people immoral who make a mistake in her life, probably they might be good people in society, and for instance, one can see that this lady had a good personality and many good behaviors as she is against the killing of human being, she is anti war and she is a great supporter of protecting historical place such as a turret.

As a matter of fact after remaining with this secret for many years, unexpectedly Homer, an old Peshmarga asked her hand. He proposed to Shady to get married with her. Actually it was a good proposal and she did agree to get married with him but on one condition that to keep her secret and never tell anyone about her virginity. It is worth mentioning that Shady was agree to get married with the old Peshmarga to get rid of the gossips and rumors of society, whom always said that she is an old maid and she had not got married yet. Actually this marriage also solved her problem which was losing her virginity, however; her soul remained in isolation forever. She believed that life is ended for her since her beloved had sexual relationship with her in spite of that he left her alone.

One might remark that after her marriage she lived in an old house and there was an old turret in the yard of the house. She thought that the old turret is a part of national heritage. In fact a group of rich people whom she called them Mafia wanted to destroy the old turret and build a large mall in place of it. The turret meant a lot to her, every day she looked at it. She compared herself to the turret because it was alone, pale and isolated like her, therefore; she loved it and sometimes she said that I got married with it. She believed that the turret was part of her that was why she always fought with those rich people who wanted to destroy it. In this battle she was alone, at first Homer supported her but after his death, she was lonely defended the turret. Due to her goodness and her love to the turret, she was isolated from society too. One can notice that the cruelty and harshness of the people led her to be isolated, and sometimes her behavior caused her isolation since it was not accepted by society. The novelist wanted to tell that good people were not welcomed in society and they would be isolated if they defended the heritage, innocence or if they were on the right path.

When the reader read this novel, would realized that the novelist focused on the important problem in society and opened the door upon many issues of women. The novelist thought that Kurdish women had been persecuted and isolated under the name of morality. One might say that it is a great mistake to see the concept of morality only in a small part of woman's body. In fact morality is not only human's physical body. "could you tell me where are the moralities of those men who sold people and soil together" (Hassan: 158)

Here the novelist wanted to lead the reader to make a review about the concept of morality and gave a wide meaning to it, moreover to appreciate the holy mission and the adventure of Shady and considered it as morality. "to me my battle is a moral thing" (Hassan:143)

One may notice that in this novel shady was an adventurous lady, she was against society and culture. She was a type character and represented thousands of Kurdish women. The novelist had a message for women and advised them. On one hand they must challenge the society and culture and never surrendered to their conservative idea. On the other hand they should depend on themselves for making their life better. "I see this battle as a nice thing because it is against your awful friends and genders" (Hassan: 174)

Shady believed that man was responsible for her isolation since the maltreatment of man caused her to lose her virginity. She wanted to destroy that costume and tradition which always said "yes" to man; she wanted to say "no" to them. She could live with Homer because he thought differently and as she said "he respected all my no" (Hassan:167) and "he supported me in this battle" (Hassan: 176)

It is worth mentioning that the name of the main character (Shady) is absolutely against her life. Her name is irony; it means happiness while her entire life was full of trouble, suffering and isolation. Here the novelist criticized all the women's names which had positive meaning whereas in reality their live were just like hell.

Shady identified herself with the birds; she thought that she had many common points with them, such as preying, hunting and shedding their blood. She believed that man hunt and shed the blood of the birds and women at the same time. She looked at men as hunters no more and no less. "Do you know that from that day you had killed the bird my tableaus were full of the murdered birds and deer."(Hassan: 74)

Conclusion

Throughout this study one can realize that isolation is the most important issue of modern and post modern age. The isolation of the main characters Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and Shady in *The Woman on the Turret* are so impressive they do not feel that having real mother and father. This paper clarifies that both main characters are looking for alternative

father, mother, and relatives to talk with. Holden talked with two nuns, Sally and the prostitute as alternatives while Shady talked with the Turret every time even she said I got married with it.

In This study one can notice the victims of isolation, and how he sees his society. The reader can understand the psychological state of isolated people, how the isolated people treat with their surrounding and what their point of view about society is. It also reveals the factors that lead the characters to be isolated and the failure of the characters to find alternatives.

Shady is isolated because for a long time she preserved her true love to Bahram who was faithless. She was also isolated since she protected the turret from the rich people's hand. Houlden Caulfield was isolated because he wanted to protect the children to grow up. Since he believes that children are innocent, pure and sinless while the world of adults is guilty, impure, and sinful and it is full of corruption.

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