

A 6-Foot-2 Child's Case History

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Real Feeling for Adolescence

A 6-Foot-2 Child's Case History

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE. By J. D. Salinger.
Little, Brown. 277 pp. \$3.

HOLDEN CAULFIELD, the hero of J. D. Salinger's gentle novel, is a likable, 16-year-old boy who, when the story opens, is being bounced from a Pennsylvania prep school for failures in the classroom.

Holden has been requested to leave other schools in the past because of a lack of application, and is reluctant to face his parents again. Since it is only three days to Christmas vacation, he decides to leave school immediately and hide out in New York City, his home town, until his parents would normally be expecting him.

The boy, who does not lack for money, takes a room in a sleazy Manhattan hotel and has a series of pathetically dreary adventures before establishing contact with his parents.

HOLDEN, who does not go much for the "David Copperfield" stuff, as he says, tells his own story. Underneath the casually tough, dispassionate attitude for which he strives, it becomes apparent that he is a very lonely, worried child despite his height of 6 feet 2 inches.

His narrative reveals a lack of communication with his parents but a deep tie of affectionate admiration for his older brother, younger sister and a second brother who has died of leukemia. His inability to communicate extends to others; he seeks them out to talk to and then avoids the opportunity to unburden himself.

Gifted as a writer, he believes himself stupid.

Sensitive, he affects the reverse. Courageous, he thinks he is a coward.

When pressed by his 10-year-old sister to name one thing he likes, one thing he would like to be, all he is able to stumble upon is a fantasy in which he is the catcher in a field of rye, catching children before they fall over a cliff.

He is erratic, directionless. Sex confuses him.

Through all his narrative runs his resentment against what he considers artificial and insincere—and that includes almost everyone and everything. Eventually it becomes apparent that the boy is losing all contact with reality.

Schizophrenia, like a caul, is covering Holden.

UNLIKE MANY stories these days, this one offers an intangible hope for Holden at the end. Salinger leaves the reader feeling that there will be another sunrise of sanity for Holden.

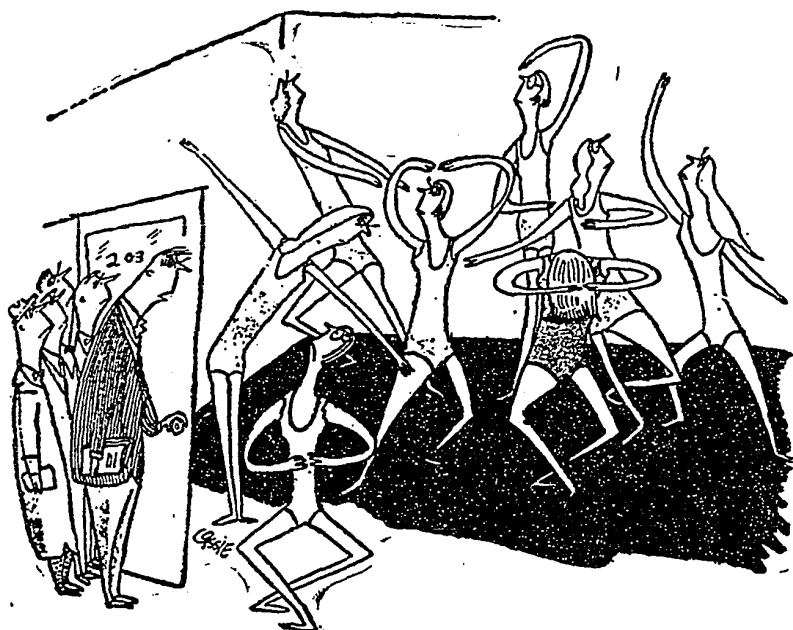
Salinger's case history is written with tenderness and with genuine feeling for his material. His vehicle also allows him opportunity for occasional touches of irony and satire—as, for instance, at the expense of Pencey, the school whose advertisements in a thousand magazines were featured by the announcement that it had been in the character building business since 1888 and by a picture of a handsome youth jumping his hunter over a fence. The students never saw even a plow-horse around the place.

Books about the difficulties of growing up tend to be monotonously alike, are sometimes afflicted with preciousness. The central figures are apt to be more the subject of curiosity than sympathy. Salinger's book is a happy exception.

—LEE GROVE.



Arthur Lidov's jacket design for "The Island in Time" (Doubleday), a first novel by German-born Ernst Pawel. "The Island" of the title is a camp for displaced Jewish persons awaiting transportation to Palestine, a miniature world which mirrors the dreams and conflicts and confusions of Europe in the late 1940s



"There must be some mistake—the catalogue says this room is now occupied by Dr. Karl Shuppman's class in the fundamentals of business law"