

Intertextuality in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

- Coming-of-Age Novels in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

Youth and adolescents have been eagerly portrayed in literature – from Hamlet to Huckleberry Finn and Heathcliff, Jay Gatsby, Peter Pan, Scout Finch and Harry Potter – characters who readers have engaged with and been touched by through centuries. From showing how one should behave to how one should not, adolescent worlds have frequently been presented. This thesis will focus on intertextuality in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1970-): published by MTV Books in 1999, it is a realistic, young-adult coming-of-age novel of the 1990s. In the novel the protagonist, Charlie, reads and comments on many coming-of-age novels. This serves to invoke the converging genres of the coming-of-age novel and the Bildungsroman, and it is this feature of the novel that provides the main focus of the thesis. Since *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an epistolary novel and a young adult novel, central features of those genres will also be discussed.

The themes in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are typical for a coming-of-age story: love, sex, family, friends, death and loss, school, and most importantly; how to survive the transition period from childhood to adulthood, something which Charlie does in a great part by learning from the novels that he reads. This introduction will show how intertextuality functions in general terms, and the literary tradition that Chbosky presents to his readers. The remaining chapters will provide comparative analyses of two of the works that Charlie reads: *This Side of Paradise* (1920) by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Catcher in The Rye* (1951) by J. D. Salinger, to show how Chbosky's novel engages with them and how the coming-of-age novel has developed in the twentieth century.

Charlie is both the protagonist and narrator of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and readers follow him through his freshman year in high school (from August 25, 1991 – to August 23, 1992) in his letters to an unknown stranger. 'Charlie' is his alias, and it is important to him that the recipient of the letters does not know who he is so that he can speak freely. Epistolary novels consist of letters, "by one or more characters," which gives the reader a sense of intimacy, accessing the narrator's voice on a personal and confessional level (Goring, Hawthorne, and Mitchell 2001, 241). The epistolary form is essential to the novel's ability to explore Charlie's mind and thoughts, as well as a device to help the story move forward.

Emily Wasserman (2003) argues that the epistolary genre “as a form, the personal thinking and private worlds of letter writing are well-suited to the reflection and construction of identity which takes place in young adult literature” (para. 1). As the “interior monologue” in such literature leads to understanding and transformation for the protagonist, it can serve the same function for the reader (ibid.). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a young-adult epistolary novel realistically portraying the life of a teenager, the thoughts and maturation into adulthood.

Intertextuality

What makes *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* particularly interesting is how Chbosky has used other coming-of-age novels and Bildungsromans inside the novel itself. This invokes a centuries old tradition – the distress of growing up and finding one’s place in society, and how this has been portrayed in literature. Introducing Charlie’s English teacher Bill, who introduces literature to Charlie, does this. Reading the novels he suggests is presented as a way for Charlie to escape his harsh reality and learn about life:

Incidentally, I have not told you about Bill in a while. But I guess there’s not a lot to tell because he just keeps giving me books that he doesn’t give his other students, and I keep reading them, and he keeps asking me to write papers, and I do. In the last month or so, I have read *The Great Gatsby* and *A Separate Peace*. I am starting to see a real trend in the kind of books Bill gives me to read. (Chbosky 67).

Charlie reads the following texts, which are listed in the order that they appear:

To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee (1960);
This Side of Paradise, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1920);
Peter Pan, J. M. Barrie (1911);
The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925);
A Separate Peace, John Knowles (1959);
The Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger, (1951);
On the Road, Jack Kerouac (1957);
Naked Lunch, William S. Burroughs (1959);
Walden; Or, Life in the Woods, Henry David Thoreau (1854);
Hamlet, William Shakespeare (1599-1601);
The Stranger, Albert Camus (1942);
The Fountainhead, Ayn Rand (1943).

The focus of this thesis is American Bildungsromans and coming-of-age novels, and how they have developed. The starting point for doing this is by looking at the works that are mentioned in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*; they are (nearly) all classic coming-of-age stories, and most of them are generally renowned. Chbosky has by referring explicitly to these novels made them part of his story: he has used them to show the tradition of coming-of-age novels, the importance of literature, and how the readers learn about history, development and life itself.

The first novel Charlie reads in Bill's class is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and this is the start of Charlie and Bill's special friendship: "My advanced English teacher asked me to call him 'Bill' when we're not in class, and he gave me another book to read. He says that I have a great skill at reading and understanding language, and he wanted me to write an essay about *To Kill a Mockingbird*" (Chbosky 11). *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a true coming-of-age novel, but it does incorporate elements of maturation and how the world is a harsh place growing up in that is in line with that tradition. This is also the main theme in *Peter Pan* – a children's book about the struggle of growing up and coming to terms with the society.

The more typical Bildungsromans/coming-of-age novels that Charlie reads are: *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Separate Peace*, *Hamlet*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *On the Road* – all about young men growing up, finding their place in society and a need to come to terms with their pasts to be able to move forward. These stories are in line with the maturation that also Charlie goes through. Even though *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods* is not exactly a coming-of-age story, it does fit in with this group as it is about independence, spiritual discovery, how to live self-reliantly, and understanding your place in the world (Challmann 2008).

The novels that seem to differ regarding the coming-of-age theme are: *Naked Lunch*, where we follow the drug-addict protagonist on his runs for the next 'fix' and sex; *The Stranger*, an existentialist novel about a man who just let life drift along and ends up dead, and lastly; *The Fountainhead*, not a young-adult coming-of-age novel, but it is about the power of human beings, individualism, and figuring out how the world works; themes that easily can be seen in line with the coming-of-age tradition. All the novels have the capability to help shape and broaden a young boy's mind.

Written in a timespan of about four hundred years, they are examples of how youth has been thoroughly portrayed in literature, and how the challenges of adolescence continue to be an inspiration for literature, its writers and readers. As mentioned above, for this thesis *This Side of Paradise* and *The Catcher in the Rye* has been chosen alongside *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to show how the coming-of-age story/novel has developed and also how it has developed along with history.

The effect of this is *intertextuality* – termed as “a relation between two or more texts which has an effect upon the way in which the intertext (that is, the text within which other texts reside or echo their presence) is read” (Goring et al. 257). And as Stephen Bax (2013) argues, intertextuality relates “to the ways in which one text refers to another text or texts as part of its effect [...]” (1). It is interesting to see how all these traditional coming-of-age stories are used in the protagonist’s healing and maturation. And, by using and invoking these in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Chbosky places it firmly in this literary tradition.

The term intertextuality is often used to indicate “a more diffuse penetration of the individual text by memories, echoes, transformations, of other texts,” which is obvious inside *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Goring et al. 257). However, the fact that they are mentioned by name makes them go beyond this. One of the most significant relations between Chbosky’s novel and the others is to show the theme of the struggle of growing up throughout history, and how it puts Charlie and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in line with them. All the novels are representations of their time, of its social milieu, history and circumstance – as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is for the 1990s.

Furthermore, as Bax also argues, intertextuality as a concept is also vital in terms of genre, and in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* almost all the works mentioned are either Bildungsromans or coming-of-age novels: “The very idea of genre – that texts can be divided into different groups according to certain characteristics – necessarily involves a degree of interaction between texts” (Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, and Mills 1992, 162, qtd. in Bax, 7). Bax calls this *intergenerity*. So, in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, we have two types of intertextuality: “reference to a specific other texts which can be identified,” and “reference not to another specific text but to a genre” (Bax, 16). But, one should keep in mind

when looking at and analyzing *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in terms of intertextuality, that the line between intertextuality and *influence* can be blurred.

Julie Kristeva was the first to coin the term intertextuality in the 1960s, and according to Warton and Still (1990), Kristeva said that a text can never exist “as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and does not function as a closed system” (1). There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the writer is also a reader “before s/he is a creator of text,” which make the works “inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind” (ibid.). Secondly, “a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it” (1-2). These are both acts of influence that guides our reading by offering connotations. Michael Riffaterre (1990) believes that one must know the intertext “in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance” (56). John Frow (1990) says that identifying the intertext is a case of interpretation, and that is important for the reconstruction of the cultural codes “which are realized (and contested) in texts” (46). All the works mentioned in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* do have an influence on the novel itself, but mainly within the novel: on the protagonist. They act as guides, friends and instructors, and function as something real to hold on to for Charlie, especially since they are provided to him by his teacher and mentor, Bill, who is the only grown-up in the novel who is there for Charlie.

Gérard Genette is another theorist who writes about intertextuality, and he coined the term *transcendence*; “all that sets a text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts” (1982/1997, 1). This is also called *transtextuality*. One of the terms that helps to distinguish and explain transtextuality is *intertextuality*, and Genette sees this as a “relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another,” by mechanisms as “quoting”, “plagiarisms,” and “allusions” (1-2). This means that, also according to Genette’s theory, there *is* intertextuality inside *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, since the novels are mentioned by name, in how it discusses how the characters experiences from the other novels coincide with Charlie’s or not, and the novels’ impact on Charlie’s emotions and thoughts:

Incidentally, the book Bill gave me was *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie. I know what you're thinking. The cartoon Peter Pan with the lost boys. The actual book is so much better than that. It's just about this boy who refuses to grow up, and when Wendy grows up, he feels very betrayed. At least that's what I got out of it. I think Bill gave me the book to teach me a lesson of some kind. (Chbosky 31)

Another element of intertextuality is how society and history should also be a part of the analysis and interpretation, since they are, as William Irwin (2004) argues, “not elements external to textuality,” but themselves ‘texts’ and “unavoidable inside the textual system” (229). No text is free from the influence of society and history, and especially regarding coming-of-age novels, which are often pictures of the time in they are written and/or portraying, as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is. Chbosky's novel is filled with references from the late 1980s/early 1990s; movies, TV-shows and music: “The first present is going to be a mix tape. [...] The first side has a lot of songs by the Village People and Blondie because Patrick likes that type of music a lot. It also has *Smells like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana, which Sam and Patrick love” (Chbosky 65).

Many things can influence texts, and theories of intertextuality are helpful in this respect. It is clear that all these other authors, and the time that he is portraying has influenced Chbosky, but at the same time he has made his own original story. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is most definitely ‘criss-crossed’ with other texts, both in terms of the different texts being mentioned and talked about inside the novel, and that it is a typical coming-of-age novel with a young protagonist trying to make sense of the world. Chbosky writes himself into a tradition and a genre, and highlights the popular coming-of-age literature that has come before, which seem to serve as both an inspiration and as a retrieval of past glories.

The Bildungsroman and the Coming-of-Age Novel

So far, the terms *Bildungsroman* and *coming-of-age novel* have been mentioned a few times, as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a coming-of-age novel and most of the other works are seen to be either Bildungsromans or coming-of-age novels. The two terms are genre conventions: categories to which literature is divided, and behaves as a contract between the writer/novel and the reader; it is important for the act of interpretation and to identify the novels' meaning (Millard 2007, 1). Both genres depict youths growing up, the struggle that

comes with being an adolescent, and the road to becoming adults. Adolescent protagonists and characters have often been seen to have an important place in literature; according to Millard they are the characters that are at the “forefront of social change” in many societies (1).

The Bildungsroman as a genre is a German term from the early nineteenth century, and has been a “widely adopted [] term in literary criticism to characterize the generic conventions of any novel of youthful development” (2). Jeremy Hawthorne (2005) argues that its emergence is related to “the growing interest in the theme that ‘the child is father to the man’ which accompanies the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interest in the young” (184). A more modern term, and an extension of this, is the coming-of-age novel; they overlap and will be discussed together.

The Bildungsroman is a novel of education, “that narrates the journey of a young person from adolescence and inexperience to a state of greater self-knowledge. It is a journey of discovery which leads to a more fully formed or mature identity” (Goring et al. 209). The definition of the coming-of-age novel is basically the same, they overlap, but it is a term coined in the late twentieth century – adapted for more modern literature. The protagonist in a coming-of-age novel also progresses from a state of a naïve youth towards a more mature and adult consciousness, “fulfilling social integration,” as they are working their way “through the challenges of adolescence,” a process that can have many layers (Millard 154).

Since the Bildungsroman is a much older term, critics disagree whether its importance and value is diminished in the twenty-first century, because what value can a nineteenth century genre have “for the study of recent American texts that are removed both historically and culturally from the term’s origin?” (Millard 3). The expression ‘coming-of-age’ is also discussed, but is usually taken to mean; “to reach full legal adult status,” so these two terms have recently been studied and seen together (4). To come of age is often both historically and socially a relative event and can occur at any age, but most often used of adolescence, and Barbara White (1985) argues this to be between the ages twelve and nineteen (xii, qtd. in Millard 4). In a modern coming-of-age novel, many protagonists do not attain full adult status during the course of the novel, for instance Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* or Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye*, which shows that “the genre might be said to give an

account of a process that is necessarily incomplete,” and that age is a relative part of the coming-of-age story (Millard 5).

Jack Hendriksen (1993) says that the Bildungsroman arose as a genre from the desire to depict and record the “growth of the individual personality – to capture formation, or *Bildung*, that occurs in youth” (133). Hawthorne also argues that it is a novel “which concentrates upon one character’s development from early youth to some sort of maturity” (184). The *hero of choice* was often an intelligent “self-conscious seeker,” aware of life and a need to master it, a hero that needed to break away from parents, leave home, and through experiences “ultimately accept himself and/or his place in society” (Hendriksen 133). The Bildungsroman has certain original style conventions that differentiates it from other genres, and the lack of plot is what separates it most distinctly: the real story is the inner development of the hero, and the events/experiences and characters are used to help the hero achieve this, *not* to fulfill a plot line. The story is held together by “the personality of the central figure” (Hawthorne 116). The events and characters only have to be causally connected to move the story forward, and to link the “reactions to those events in terms of the formation of the character’s personality” (Hendriksen 135). The end goal of the novel is self-fulfillment for the hero, an end to the search and a closure of the past, which is only possible if the hero himself is aware of his inner search (27). Another purpose of the Bildungsroman is that as long as the hero learns, “so does the reader” (26).

The hero’s conflicts in a Bildungsroman usually stem from his younger years, and he needs to come to terms with them to be able to mature and develop his individuality and personality. Hendriksen argues that these conflicts have typically consisted of an absent and/or weak father and a domineering mother, who are seen to give “strong psychological motivations for the hero’s actions” (31). Other aspects of this genre is how the hero is usually a representation of his generation, historically and socially; typically from a “middle or upper-middle class” background; negative towards formal education; embarks alone on a journey to a city where he is introduced to ‘real life’ and must there confront “good and evil, sex and love” (32). One thing that seems particularly important for the hero’s development, because of the absent father, is the introduction of a guide/mentor, who is not related to the hero: the mentor is the main character who helps the hero through his struggles. True love is also difficult for the hero to find, because the hero must find himself and his place in society before such

endeavors can be possible (ibid.). Finally, the end is also an essential part of the Bildungsroman, as the novel should leave the hero “on the verge of adulthood through a revelation or insight,” which follows from all of the above (31-32). The end is where the rest of the protagonists’ life starts.

In the coming-of-age novel some of the elements of the Bildungsroman is left out, for instance the strict structure and the protagonist will not necessarily achieve the same state of adulthood. But, the use of characters, events, the mentor, and many themes have been continued, as we will see in the analyses’. Being a more modern term, Millard has argued that the American, contemporary coming-of-age novel is a picture of America; a “rebellious teenager, impatient with the authority of its European parents and eager to create its own character founded on a different set of values and priorities” (5). There is a confluence of the genre and the American national identity; “a drive towards new forms of independence,” and this applies to the hero/protagonist of the American contemporary ‘Bildungsroman’ (6).

Furthermore, the novels are often situated, and depict, a specific historical time and experience. It follows then, that the novels and characters can be seen as social critique as the protagonists comes of age, as Millard argues, “specifically by understanding his or her place in history” (10-11): “Adolescence, youth, innocence: they become an idealized fictional category which literary writers can use to give a particular urgency to presentations of subjectivity and socialization that highlight their own social and political anxieties” (13).

Both coming-of-age novels and Bildungsromans depict how the protagonist can come to understand himself and his place in society, in which maturation is a central component. The hero of the Bildungsroman is traditionally male, but in more modern/contemporary coming-of-age novels these characteristics are also portrayed by the use of female protagonists. Another difference is how the coming-of-age novel is steadily moving towards the young-adult literature genre, in terms of style, content and language.

Young-Adult Literature and the Epistolary Style

The Perks of Being a Wallflower can also be characterized as a young adult novel. Wasserman argues that this type of literature has since the 1970s gained a new interest as “highly intelligent and demanding,” as it speaks directly to the maturing young adult mind (para. 2):

It’s literature for teenagers; it’s literature about teenagers; it’s stylistic and simplified literature; it’s overly didactic and, of course, shorter than a real novel. It is a rite of passage. But it is much more. It is about life, its histories and potentialities, transformations and choices; it is about conflicts between the claim of the individual and the claims of culture; [...] (Proukou 2005, 62).

Young adult literature usually incorporates concepts and thoughts that young readers find familiar and can identify with, and functions as a “constructive tool for allowing readers to read, think about, and discuss experiences” (Wasserman, para. 2). The epistolary style has often been used as a method for bringing out and expressing themes and facets of the young adult novel, since the epistolary style allows for deep personal investigation; by the use of interior monologue which can lead to “constructive change,” understanding and transformation both for the protagonist and the reader (para. 5). This is also why Chbosky chose to write his story about Charlie in an epistolary style, as he explains in an interview with Script Magazine (2012):

I chose the letters because I felt it was the most intimate way I could talk to a reader. When you write a letter to somebody, it’s direct communication. And I was very interested in direct communication because I wanted the story to feel intimate.

Beyond that, letters provided me with a real freedom to convey the highs and lows of being young. We all remember being a teenager. One day, you’re on top of the world and you’ve had the greatest of times. Then, three weeks later, you’re terribly depressed. So, by having letters, I could do all of that and still make it one, cohesive story.

An important part of any literary analysis is narrative technique. This includes choice of narrator and narrative situation, how the plot is created and selection of perspective and voice (Hawthorne 82). In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, which is an epistolary novel, we have a *first-person, personified narrator* that is *recollective*; we only read Charlie’s letters, where he talks about his thoughts and feelings, what has happened lately, his memories and his thoughts about that. Both *who* tells the story and *why* can make a big difference; “Source and medium affect the *selection*, the *authority* and the *attitude towards what is recounted* of the narrative – and thus, of course, the effect on the reader or listener” (88). Young adult

literature is most often written in the first person, which gives it an authentic voice, and the epistolary novel is also told from a first-person perspective, being conveyed through letters (Cadden 2000, 314). This brings the readers closer to the protagonist. In terms of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, it is interesting that we only have one voice; we never learn who Charlie's pen pal is, the narratee ("the person to whom the narrative is addressed" (Hawthorne, 90)) is unknown:

I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn't try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have. Please don't try to figure out who she is because then you might figure out who I am, and I really don't want you to do that. [...] I didn't enclose a return address for the same reason. (Chbosky 3).

Charlie does not have any friends. He is a classic outsider; feeling separated from the rest of the world and having a hard time understanding how to fit in. He is afraid of himself and his thoughts. The novel portrays the feeling of confusion and solitude. But the story has an interesting turn; the reason that Charlie feels that his mind is 'dangerous' is because of his suppressed memories of being molested by his aunt. It is stated multiple times during the narrative that his aunt Helen is his favorite person in the world, and that after she died he has not been himself. As Charlie grows through the narrative he learns to make friends and participate in life and is therefore doing better. But, even all the positive experiences do not fully compensate for all the thoughts, feelings and memories he keeps locked inside his mind. Wasserman argues that "[b]ecause of these conflicting issues and emotions, Charlie uses letter writing to reflect on his own and others' lives, as well as to recognize and come to terms with his past and its implications for his future" (para. 15). Wasserman continues to argue that the epistolary form is essential to the novel; it provides a space for Charlie in which he can "reflect and construct his own way of thinking, a space necessary for human development," and a space to face his demons (ibid.): "Also, when I write letters, I spend the next two days thinking about what I figured out in my letters. I do not know if this is good or bad" (Chbosky 31).

Another function of letters is that they are typically sent to someone, which means that someone is reading them and that the sender is heard. That is at least the function Charlie hopes to achieve: in the letters he is able to reflect and gain a new "perspective on life" since he is sharing himself with someone (Wassermann, para. 20). As he starts trusting other people

he also starts trusting himself and is able to ‘participate’, and this eventually lets the suppressed memories come to light.

The epistolary style function as a way to bring out the coming-of-age story in Chbosky’s novel. It captures the anxiety of growing up, and it is a realistic 1990s novel. The themes and events in it are something that teenagers can identify with, and that is also probably why it has become such a huge success: it is currently (11.05.2014) ranked as number four on amazon.com Classic American Literature list (based on sales) (“Amazons Best Sellers.” amazon.com), and has been adapted into a movie (2012).

Thesis Outline

This Side of Paradise, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* were written at three completely different times in history, but all in the rapidly changing twentieth century. They are all about young boys trying to fit into and understand society, make friends, cope with school and family, and figure out who they are. They are classic coming-of-age stories that make them interesting to compare, especially in terms of the themes, which are nearly the same; family, death and loss, friendship, love, school and maturation. Both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Catcher in the Rye* have been read, studied and analyzed since their publication, but analyzing their relationship with *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* will allow for new insights into the development coming-of-age literature has seen during the twentieth century.

In what follows, I will use *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as a basis for analyzing how the coming-of-age novel has developed through the twentieth century, by looking at the overlapping themes and structures, and at how the genre conventions have been modified and evolved. Chbosky has put his novel and his protagonist in connection with the works that are mentioned, which bring out associations and connotations for many of its readers. They also function to give *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* legitimacy as a coming-of-age novel, in addition to their function inside the novel; on Charlie’s story.

Chapter 1 is a comparative analysis of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, where the 1910s-1920s and the 1990s are compared in terms of narrative technique and the different experiences the two protagonists have growing up. *This Side of Paradise* is a classic Bildungsroman that portrays the adolescent years of its protagonist Amory Blaine. It is also a realistic depiction of the transition from the First World War into the 1920s; a world that is moving faster than ever before, where the youth of the day had new and different circumstances than their parents' generation had. The two novels are both good examples of their historical time and their protagonists can be seen as 'heroes' of their respective generations. I will look at its place in the history of coming-of-age novels, its function in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and the similarities and differences between the two protagonists in relation to the themes in the novels.

Chapter 2 will provide a comparative analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The novel functions as fuel for Charlie's memories and the horrible feelings he has about his birthday and Christmas. *The Catcher in the Rye* is also a dark representation of a young boy's mind during Christmas, and it brings Charlie deeper into his dark thoughts. *The Catcher in the Rye* will be analyzed in terms of the progression of the coming-of-age story and its potential influence on *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. In 1951 we are approaching the modern era, but are still far away from Charlie and the 1990s.

Chapter 1: Coming of Age in the Roaring Twenties and Grunge Nineties: A Comparative Analysis of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

This Side of Paradise by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) is one of the oldest novels mentioned in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Published in 1920 it is from a time situated far away from Charlie but it is still used as one of the important lessons in his maturation. These two novels are both about young, troubled boys with similar challenges, but situated in very different contexts. The 1910s was a time that it is argued that America ‘came of age’, growing to be a leader in the world, becoming industrialized and one of the first modern countries in the world (Whitley 1999). Amory Blaine, the protagonist in *This Side of Paradise*, is a young man on the verge of adulthood at the start of the twentieth century, finding himself in a time and place that was changing rapidly without knowing where he is heading or how to get there. Amory is a lonely, self-preoccupied boy, who has a hard time fitting in and making friends. With the help of Monsignor Darcy – Amory’s mentor and a Catholic Priest, the experience of the deaths of his parents, the people he meets and befriends, and all the other situations he gets himself into, he is finally able to leave his troubling childhood years behind him and move on into adulthood.

All the novels that Charlie reads in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* have the power to challenge his young mind and teach him about adolescence and maturation. As previously mentioned, they are also nearly all coming-of-age novels or Bildungsromans, and *This Side of Paradise* might be the early twentieth-century’s most prominent Bildungsroman: it is written by a young male author, about a young adolescent man, realistically portraying adolescent life on the brink of a new and modern time. Even though they are separated in terms of time and space, the connection between Charlie’s and Amory’s adolescence is evident, and also made explicit in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*:

I couldn’t remember where I heard it or read it. I said maybe it was in *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. There’s a place near the end of the book where the main kid is picked up by some older gentleman. They are both going to an Ivy League football game, and they have this debate. The older gentleman is established. The kid is “jaded”.

Anyway, they have this discussion, and the kid is an idealist in a temporary way. He talks about his “restless generation” and things like that. And he says something like, “This is not a time for heroes because nobody will let that happen.” The book takes place in the 1920s, which I thought was great because I supposed the same kind of conversation could happen in

Big Boy. It probably already did with our parents and grandparents. It was probably happening with us right now. (Chbosky 112)

The 70-80 years that separate the narrative time of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are some of the fastest moving the world has ever seen in terms of technology and lifestyle. As both novels are about young adults on the verge of adulthood, there are many things these two novels and protagonists have in common: it appears that the difficulties of growing up have not changed, just the circumstances.

This Side of Paradise begins by laying out the contours of Amory's childhood years: he is from a wealthy family in Midwest America, with emotionally distanced parents, and a boy who is, as Hendriksen (1993) argues, very much "preoccupied with himself, his popularity, and the opposite sex" (101). As an arrogant boy, whom all his life has been "overprotected by a doting mother," his rescue comes when he leaves for Minneapolis to live with his aunt and uncle and to go to school for the first time, at the age of thirteen (ibid.). But, he has a lot of catching up to do, and for Amory the most important thing is to become the most popular kid in school, to fit in with his chosen crowd, which is not easy. When he leaves to start prep school in the east he has even more trouble fitting in with the boys there:

He went all wrong at the start, was generally considered both conceited and arrogant, and universally detested. He played football intensely, alternating a reckless brilliancy with a tendency to keep himself as safe from hazard as decency would permit. In a wild panic he backed out of a fight with a boy his own size, to a chorus of scorn, and a week later in desperation picked a battle with another boy very much bigger, from which he emerged badly beaten but rather proud of himself. (Fitzgerald 33)

Amory eventually manages to adapt to his new environment, with the other boys, and decides to complete his education at Princeton University. Even though he is a "self-confessed self-preoccupied" boy, he manages to gain some friends, and in his "quest for self-knowledge" he is introduced to one of the most important one: Monsignor Darcy, who will guide him through the rest of his adolescent years (Hendriksen 101).

During the course of the narrative, Amory is deprived of his parents, his money, and the love of his life. These are hard blows for a young man who is obsessed with social position, money, and being the 'big man'. Hendriksen sees this as an important part of the *Bildung* theme of the novel: "The American Dream becomes distorted by the hero's search for success through money and popularity, so that Amory must be stripped of these in order to focus on

his more important inner struggles,” which is the real story in this narrative (105). As mentioned in the Introduction, the story’s true adventure occurs in the inner development of the hero, and for Amory this involves a search for balance in a “personality that is at first excessively arrogant and conceited,” and this “seemingly archetypal self-centeredness is an essential trait in Amory who at the age of thirteen arrives at his philosophy of ‘aristocratic egotism’” (Fitzgerald 24) (Hendriksen 101). This is the main theme of the novel: to transform Amory from ‘Egotist’ to ‘Personage’ (102) – Amory’s quest is to find out what kind of man he wants to be, and to become this man. And this is the purpose of a Bildungsroman; the story of maturation, fulfilling one’s inner quest and overcoming the struggle of childhood to be able to live in society as a whole, adult human being, where the inner development of the hero is the true story and ‘plot’ of the novel (Hawthorne).

In some ways, this is also the main theme in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: we follow Charlie during his freshman year in high school where he has trouble finding his place and making friends. He has always been on the outside, having had very few friends, the outsider who was institutionalized as a child because of his aunt Helen’s death. Charlie is struggling to become the man that he thinks that he can be. Part of the journey is getting past his childhood struggles, understand why he is so afraid of his own thoughts, and so be able to become part of the adult world. He, too, needs to find out who he is, his ‘personage,’ and the confidence to live this out:

I’m sorry I haven’t written to you in a couple of weeks, but I have been trying to “participate” like Bill said. It’s strange because sometimes, I read a book, and I think I am the people in the book. Also, when I write letters, I spend the next two days thinking about what I figured out in my letters. I do not know if this is good or bad. Nevertheless, I am trying to participate. (Chbosky 30-31)

The authors, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Stephen Chbosky, were both young men writing these novels, and their writing feeds off the experiences from their own youth. As Stephen Chbosky states in an interview: “I included countless details from growing up in Pittsburg” (Script Magazine 2012). Fitzgerald was also inspired by the time he was living in: “Two years ago, when I was a very young man indeed, I had an unmistakable urge to write a book. It was to be a picaresque novel, original in form and alternating a melancholy, naturalistic egotism with a picture of the generation then hastening to war” (West III 1996, 393). Fitzgerald has said that

part of the novel is autobiography; he grew up in Minnesota, he went to Princeton, and was also enrolled in the army during the First World War (West III 1996). Both novels clearly portray the youth culture of the time of their authors' youth, and the main themes are about the two boys who are struggling to keep up with the time and adapt themselves to what they think society expects from them as adolescent men. The two different periods in American history constitutes one significant difference between the novels, but the two protagonists are also from different social classes, which makes their experiences even more diverse.

Mentors

An important element in both narratives, and for coming-of-age stories generally speaking, is the theme of the mentor. Both Amory and Charlie have somewhat distanced fathers and are 'saved' by two men that become their mentors: Bill, Charlie's English teacher, and Monsignor Darcy, a Catholic priest and friend of Amory's mother Beatrice. These two men have a big impact on the boy's life and maturation. They are the only ones that the boys feel understand them and that they can trust. The mentors provide direction, support, male role models, understanding and advice. Both boys become very attached to their mentors:

He and Amory took to each other at first sight – the jovial, impressive prelate who could dazzle an embassy ball and the green-eyed, intent youth, in his first long trousers, accepted in their own minds a relation of father and son within a half-hour's conversation. (Fitzgerald 30)

“Charlie, we accept the love we think we deserve.”

I just stood there, quiet. Bill patted my shoulder and gave me a new book to read. He told me everything was going to be okay. (Chbosky 27)

In his early life Amory has no guides except his mother, but as soon as Monsignor Darcy enters his life he has found the father figure he “searches for and the ethical code he needs,” and by that he is able to transform and become a ‘personage’ (Hendriksen 108). Monsignor Darcy supports Amory through long conversations and letter writing, where he gives advice and listens to what he has to say to steer him in the right direction when necessary. Monsignor Darcy dies towards the end, which is surprising in a Bildungsroman; Fitzgerald is depriving his hero of a father substitute (ibid.). Monsignor Darcy is important for Amory's maturation,

but when he is taken away Amory has to fulfill his journey alone, which seems essential for him to be able to grow up.

This loss of a mentor does also happen in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: Bill has been there for Charlie, mentoring him and standing by his side through the whole year, but at the end he will not be his teacher anymore and ‘leaves’ Charlie to stand on his own two feet. Bill’s main role in Charlie’s life is to be there as a grown-up who listens to him and gives advice, and by giving him extra reading- and writing assignments that help him broaden his mind and teach him about life. Charlie develops his ‘personage’ through the help of Bill. Bill becomes one of the most important characters in the novel, as he is the source of Charlie reading and also the only one who gives Charlie grown-up life-lessons, advice and support: “‘Charlie, you’re one of the most gifted people I’ve ever known. And I don’t mean in terms of my other students. I mean in terms of anyone I’ve ever met. That’s why I have you the extra work. I was wondering if you were aware of that?’” (Chbosky 194).

In the end, when things from the past are resolved, Charlie does not need him anymore, at least not as much as he did. What Bill did for him, and the works he made him read is an essential part of Charlie’s healing, as Monsignor Darcy’s support was for Amory. Charlie learned a lot through Bill’s teaching, and is strong enough at the end to be able to move on, as Amory *had* to do. Both in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* the mentor character is an essential part of the story. It is a Bildungsroman-characteristic necessary for the protagonists’ maturation.

Death

One of the most well-established themes that has a big influence in both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is that of death and loss. Both protagonists find life difficult to deal with because of death. Many people in Amory’s life die; his father Stephen, his mother Beatrice, his friend Dick Humbird, a couple of friends in the war and last but not least his mentor Monsignor Darcy. This leaves Amory all alone. Two times during the novel ghosts come to visit him: first when he is at a party in an apartment in New York in Book One; the ‘devil’ follows him through the streets, who turns out to be his old friend:

Then something clanged like a low gong struck at a distance, and before his eyes a face flashed over the two feet, a face pale and distorted with a sort of infinite evil that twisted it like flame in the wind; *but he knew, for the half-instant that the gong tanged and hummed, that it was the face of Dick Humbird.* (Fitzgerald 111-112)

Amory also meets a ghost later in a hotel room in Atlanta, where he is certain that it is Monsignor Darcy's spirit protecting him: "Last of all, on a dazed Sunday night a telegram told him of Monsignor Darcy's sudden death in Philadelphia five days before. He knew then what it was that he had perceived among the curtains of the room in Atlantic City" (Fitzgerald 234). Hendriksen argues that Humbird as the devil is a representation of the personality/egotist in Amory's early life, and that the spirit of Monsignor Darcy is the protective spirit representing the 'personage' in Book Two (108). This element helps to establish the novels' two parts and the process of Amory becoming a man. The two-part structure is crucial for the novels' development: the recurrent themes and similar events connects its two parts, and its progression.

Death and loss is also making life difficult for Charlie. His (only) friend Michael took his own life that spring, and his aunt died when he was a young boy. Both deaths make absolutely no sense to him and this hinders him from understanding the world: "Michael never left a note or at least his parents didn't let anyone see it. Maybe it was 'problems at home.' I wish I knew. It might make me miss him more clearly. It might have made sad sense" (Chbosky 6). Charlie is also certain that if it were not for him being born on exactly the day he was, his aunt would be alive today, and this is too much for a young boy to handle. She was out buying his birthday present when she was killed in a car accident: "Despite everything my mom and doctor and dad have said to me about blame, I can't stop thinking what I know. And I know that my aunt Helen would still be alive today if she just bought me one present like everybody else" (Chbosky 98). Charlie is a very sensitive boy and the emotions and thoughts he experiences in relation to these deaths are breaking him apart. Helen's death is difficult to handle in terms of two things; it is sad that his favorite aunt died, but she was also molesting him: her death did also come with a sense of relief, which adds to his confusion. Until Charlie is able to sort this out, he will not be able to get some closure and be able to move on with his life.

The psychological impact death has on Charlie, how it is impossible for him to understand, is holding him back. In *This Side of Paradise* death has a very different function, it is the necessary ingredient for Amory to be able to stand on his own two feet and grow up since he has no one to lean on anymore. Amory's struggle is also about the issue of moving forward, but he is able to do this *because* people close to him have died. For Charlie, before he has acknowledged these deaths, and understood that he is not responsible for them, he will not be able to move on. Compared to *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, death in *This Side of Paradise* does not seem personal; its function is philosophical instead of psychological. Death and loss becomes crucial elements in the process of becoming a man in both novels, but in two different ways.

Women and Love

As for any maturing young adult, love is complicated also for Amory and Charlie. The underlying difference between the two protagonists and the novels has to do with the historical time in which they were written. The society that Amory and Charlie encounter when it comes to love, romance and sex are two completely different worlds. A lot has happened in terms of sexuality, relationships, marriage, sex, the view on homosexuality, etc. during the course of the twentieth century. The 1990s are more liberated than what Fitzgerald must have been used to. For Charlie, going on dates and falling in love is what is important for him. For Amory, the whole purpose of dating is to get married, and especially to marry into the right social class. Charlie even engages in a sort of relationship with his best friend Patrick, talks openly about masturbation, and tells the details from almost having sex with both Mary Elizabeth and Sam. Such issues are never addressed in relation to Amory.

In *This Side of Paradise* Amory has many relationships, and the girls are important characters as part of his journey toward adulthood, but love is not easy and can be confusing. His biggest love was for Rosalind, and the breakup made him go on a drinking spree for weeks and quit his job. He lost her to a wealthy rival, Dawson Ryder, who could provide for her, something he was not able to anymore. Moreover, the most interesting thing about women in *This Side of Paradise* is the many different types present, along with how Fitzgerald presented them. Rena Sanderson (2002) proposes that as a chronicler of the 1920s, Fitzgerald was one of the

first writer's who offered "the public an image of a modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centered, fun-loving, and magnetic," also known as the flapper (143). Fitzgerald portrayed many different types of women, from his 'doting' mother to the 'popular daughters' Rosalind and Isabelle, and Amory's fascination for girls is apparent through the whole novel: "The same girl ... deep in an atmosphere of jungle music and the questioning of moral codes. Amory found it rather fascinating to feel that any popular girl he met before eight he might quite possibly kiss before twelve" (Fitzgerald 62).

The women Amory meets on his journey from childhood through college are important characters for "Amory's initiation into adulthood" (Sanderson 149). This is also true for Charlie. His first sexual experience was with Mary Elizabeth and it taught him to stand up for himself and express what he actually thinks, not only to follow her lead and be miserable. Sam, that he is deeply in love with, teaches him how to love and how to be a friend:

"So, tomorrow, I'm leaving. And I'm not going to let that happen again with anyone else. I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to be who I really am. And I'm going to figure out what that is. But right now I'm here with you. And I want to know where you are, what you need, and what you want to do." (Chbosky 216)

All the female characters in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are confident, intellectual, strong and with a clear thought in mind where life is headed for them. In comparison, Rosalind and Isabelle's adolescence is only about finding a proper and wealthy husband that can support them for the rest of their lives.

The first romantic experiences for Charlie, with Mary Elizabeth and Sam, are important lessons for a young man: they teach him about the ordinary life of an ordinary boy, which he has felt distanced from. These experiences make him feel like he is part of the real world; that he is 'participating'. They are also important parts of the story in terms of Charlie discovering that he was molested as a young boy. Towards the end of the novel, when he almost has sex with Sam, he finally has a breakthrough: "When I fell asleep, I had this dream. My brother and my sister and I were watching television with my Aunt Helen. Everything was in slow motion. The sound was thick. And she was doing what Sam was doing. That's when I woke up" (Chbosky 218). Both the readers and Charlie finally understands what is wrong, why he has not understood why his doctor wanted him to talk about his childhood, and why he has been afraid of his own mind.

Narrative Technique and Language

This Side of Paradise was praised by reviewers for its youthful freshness and energy, but also criticized, because, as James L. W. West III (1996) argues: “Its structure is haphazard, its writing uneven, and its characters inconsistent. Most of these shortcomings originate in the composition of the book – a headlong rush of fresh inscription and cut-and-paste improvisation” (xiii). The main problem of the novel lies in its composition, where the many, many different elements make it rather confusing and complex. Fitzgerald took a lot of writing he had done earlier – “short stories, poems, sketches, a one-act play, and parts of a previous attempt at a novel” and turned all this into a single novel; *This Side of Paradise*, a “*Bildungsroman* about the journey from youth to early maturity of his hero, Amory Blaine” (xiii). As West III (2002) argues, it was daring in terms of its style and the mixing of genres made it unconventional, “shifting from fiction narrative to rhymed or free verse, then moving to drama dialogue and slipping toward the end into interior monologue” (48). It divides the novel into many different parts that seem to not correspond with each other, and without a traditional plot it can seem incomprehensible.

However, the element that unifies *This Side of Paradise* is its two-part structure: the novel consists of two books that are connected by an Interlude. As previously mentioned, this divides and portrays Amory’s progression “from egotist to personage,” where he in Book Two, more grown up, loses much of his egotistical traits from the first part (Hendriksen 114). Both parts present this development in the use of events and characters; how Amory grows with their influence – a classic *Bildungsroman* element. The Interlude is a historical section: “INTERLUDE May 1917 – February 1919,” which is the period when Amory is away at war (Fitzgerald 147). It consists of a letter from Monsignor Darcy, a poem by Amory and a letter from Amory to his friend Tom D’Invilliers. It becomes a transition stage in Amory’s development, from child to adult, from ‘egotist to personage’, and it also places the novel in a historical setting.

Fitzgerald became a representative of a new generation of writers and a new modern time. West III (1996) says that the novel is a picture of the time that it is written, of Fitzgerald’s youth: “It captured the rhythm and feel of its era and explores quite searchingly several classic American themes – the quest for success, the power of money, the place of idealism in a materialistic society, and the failure of that society to develop its most promising minds”

(xiii). As Kirk Curnutt (2007) argues, he represented a modernist generation that “dismissed the early nineteenth-century Romantics’ dreamy, pastoral idealism as irrelevant to a twentieth century rife with war and change” (97). But Fitzgerald did not separate completely from the Romantic era, he used one element in particular: its coming-of-age story – the Bildungsroman (ibid.). Nevertheless, there is some disagreement whether *This Side of Paradise* can be labeled a true Bildungsroman, since it does not fully apply the ‘standards’ of the “novel of development”; it ends before its hero has become a mature adult (99). At the same time, Amory’s ups and downs in his romantic life, the financial problems and his relationship with his parents are “typical of the coming-of-age dilemmas with which romantic protagonists struggle” (ibid.).

Some elements and themes of the novel are taken from the Romantic era, but Fitzgerald also looks forward into the future. *This Side of Paradise* is a modernist work; “art which sought to break with what had become the dominant and dominating conventions of nineteenth-century art and culture,” where realism is reinvented to make the reader “conscious that we are reading a novel,” self-reflexive (Goring et al. 269). And this world is often a “fragmented and decayed place,” where the thought processes that are brought forth are more realistic (ibid.). Fitzgerald was writing in a time when the First World War was still very much fresh in memory, and he took the reality of this into his writing. This breaks with the Romantic verisimilitude; “a sense of accuracy and credibility evoked by the inclusion of convincing details in the description of people and places” (310). Fitzgerald’s ‘fragmented and decayed place’ was real. In addition, Hawthorne argues that Realism is associated with the “birth and growth of the modern novel” (56).

Another feature of modernism is the protagonists “alienated state of social – and even existential – fragmentation, while earning to escape from this situation,” which we can easily see in Amory’s moodiness and in that he seems to not have any direction in his life (Goring et al. 269). Fitzgerald also employed the modernist technique of stream of consciousness:

127th Street – or 137th Street ... Two and three look alike – no, not much. Seat damp ... were clothes absorbing wetness from seat, or seat absorbing dryness from clothes? ... Sitting on a wet substance gave appendicitis, so Froggy Parker’s mother said. Well, he’d had it – I’ll sue the steamship company, Beatrice said, and my uncle has a quarter interest – did Beatrice go to heaven? ... probably not ---- (Fitzgerald 239)

As previously stated, the structure of the novel is confusing, but as soon as one thinks of the novel in terms of the Bildungsroman, it does adhere to the formal requirements mentioned in the Introduction. A young man trying to figure out who he is in the world, presented through a series of events and characters, which are not necessarily “causally connected” (Hendriksen 3): in a Bildungsroman the protagonist changes and grows with his experiences and the characters he meets, as Amory does. Also, the thematic and structural coherence are without a traditional plot. It does not have a plot, *because* it is in tradition with the Romantic Bildungsroman: all the formal problems “dissolve when it is seen how well it fits the *Bildungsroman* genre” (4). The lack of a plot is a representation of the hero’s inner growth:

There were days when Amory resented that life had changed from an even progress along a road stretching ever in sight, with the scenery merging and blending, into a succession of quick, unrelated scenes. [...] He felt that it would take all time, more than he could ever spare, to glue these strange cumbersome pictures into the scrap-book of his life.” (Fitzgerald 215-216).

Another aspect of the novel is how the narrator portrays Amory; it is (most of the time) a third-person omniscient ‘all-knowing’ narrator, which Hawthorn argues is “often applied to the narrators of classical realist novels for whom there are no secrets within the created world of the novel” (193). This is an important aspect of the novel to be able to reach Amory’s true feelings and to understand the changes he goes through as part of his maturation in a Bildungsroman. Also, the use of characters applies to one other narrative technique from the Bildungsroman tradition, namely how they are significant elements of the journey and the maturation; from Amory’s ‘doting’ mother, the absent father, his prep school friends, the many girlfriends, his friends from Princeton, and last but not least, his mentor; Monsignor Darcy. But, since Amory does not seem to become a mature adult during the course of the novel, it is slowly moving away from the classic, traditional Bildungsroman genre.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower has a much more straightforward narrative since it is an epistolary novel, written in the first person by one narrator. Charlie tells his story through letters, which is a clever way to show the ‘Bildung’ of a young protagonists’ mind; we get to read the progress he experiences first-hand. This gives the reader a close perspective on the protagonist, an intimacy and immediacy that is hard to do anywhere else, “as well as an illusion of linguistic transparency or sincerity” (Goring et al. 241). In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the letter-writing functions as a diary, since it is one-way communication. It is a

place for Charlie to experiment with his thoughts, that works like therapy for him. The language is also realistic to that of a sixteen-year old boy in the early 1990s, in terms of how Charlie speaks and what he talks about; what he does and which music he listens to.

Interestingly, Chbosky uses language to show how Charlie grows during this year. His sentences become more structured and organized and he learns many new words that he constantly tries to implement in his letters. Every time Charlie is not certain about the meaning of a word he puts them in brackets, but he still learns the confidence to use them: “It seems like a rather ‘auspicious’ beginning” (Chbosky 91). Our focus is often moved onto how Charlie writes, since he talks about it multiple times during the novel: “I should stick to the subject, though. That is what my teacher Bill tells me to do because I write kind of the way I talk” (Chbosky 12). The language is also a sign of how Charlie is doing. In a letter at the end, where he is realizing what his aunt Helen did to him, his writing is in disarray in terms of structure and language. The last letter, on the other hand, when he is out of the hospital again knowing why he was so afraid of himself and his own thoughts, Charlie is feeling confident and strong and that letter is the best one regarding language and structure: “Tomorrow, I start my sophomore year of high school, and believe it or not, I’m really not that afraid of going. I’m not sure if I will have the time to write any more letters because I might be too busy trying to ‘participate’” (Chbosky 231).

The epistolary narrative gives very close and personal knowledge of the protagonist. We learn his inner most thoughts from an honest and close perspective. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is about growing up and everything that comes with that, situated and presented with Charlie and his troubles over the course of exactly one year. This separates it from a Bildungsroman; it ends before he is a grown man, but, the trouble of his childhood is dealt with so that he can continue to mature. Another element that separates it from *This Side of Paradise* is that it is clearly written for a younger audience. It is a young adult novel, compared to Fitzgerald who seems to have written for a more adult audience, in terms of style, language and structure, considering the definition of a young adult novel in the Introduction.

Intertextuality

We can also see traces of intertextuality in *This Side of Paradise*. Amory reads novels through the whole story, especially when he is at Princeton. One way for Amory to fit in with his chosen crowd is to read, since these are boys who are well-read, and the kind of young men Amory wants to be with and be like. Hendriksen thinks that this reading “supplies him with the ‘education’ best suited for self-discovery,” which is also the purpose Bill has for Charlie’s reading (106). There are about 70 works listed in *This Side of Paradise*; “including novels, non-fiction, plays and poems” (ibid.). The works Amory reads are listed frequently throughout the novel, and here is one from his time at Princeton:

So he found “Dorian Gray” and the “Mystic and Sombre Dolores” and the “Belle Dame sans Merci”; for a month was keen on naught else. [...] He read enormously every night: Shaw, Chesterton, Barrie, Pinero, Yeats, Synge, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Keats, Suderman, Robert Hugh Benson, the Savoy Operas – just a heterogeneous mixture, for he suddenly discovered that he had read nothing for years. (Fitzgerald 55)

We can trace progression in the novel and in Amory by looking at the works he reads; many of the books cited early in the novel are young-adult novels or children’s books, and towards the end there are more mature books. Hendriksen argues that this is a “small but effective device that reinforces the sense of progression in the ‘educational’ aspect of the hero’s Bildung” (107). But literature in *This Side of Paradise*, compared to what it does with Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, is only used as part of Amory’s superficial education: he gets his real-life education through his encounters with women, love, his experiences and friendships (ibid.). In addition, it can be argued that the works listed throughout the novel has also had some intertextual influence on Fitzgerald’s writing, but that is a topic that will not be addressed here.

The novels, poems and the other works Amory reads are listed for the reader as some sort of an achievement and to show us how intellectual and literary he is. Charlie never brags, just tells the reader how they make him feel and what he thinks about after having read them. So literature has two different purposes in the two novels: Fitzgerald lists the novels and poems as part of what kind of man Amory is, to show off and boast about his intellect. For Charlie, on the other hand, the novels he reads teach him valuable and necessary life lessons.

Epiphany

The title of the last chapter in *This Side of Paradise* is ‘The Egotist Becomes a Personage’ which completes the story and the themes of the novel as it refers back to the first chapter: ‘The Romantic Egotist’, and provides closure and balance of the two parts of the novel. Another thing that helps with this is that Monsignor Darcy is introduced in the first chapter, and dies in the last. That way he is part of this whole process. The last chapter is a conclusion of his adolescent years, but it is not a conclusion of his life. He now has a chance to move on with his adult life, and it starts with a journey to Princeton.

In Book Two of *This Side of Paradise* Amory is more mature, mostly due to his circumstances; he has lost his family, the money, girlfriends, friends and apparently himself. But Amory has no regrets, and he wants to look forward. These losses are part of him and part of him growing up: “I don’t want to repeat my innocence,” Amory says, “I want the pleasure of losing it again” (Fitzgerald 239). The novel has reached both an understanding and an ending: “He felt that he was leaving behind him his chance of being a certain type of artist. It seemed so much more important to be a certain sort of man” (Fitzgerald 259). Back at Princeton he realizes who he is. Here, the lack of a traditional plot is resolved into an understanding.

According to West III (1996) Fitzgerald had a hard time writing an end to his story, and he believes this had something to do with the fact that both Amory and Fitzgerald was just at the beginning of their lives (xxix). So Fitzgerald made Amory go back to Princeton, a place where both Fitzgerald’s and Amory’s life gave a sense of meaning (ibid.). When Amory at the end was walking in the night towards his old school, he delivered his last line: “I know myself,’ he cried, ‘but that is all – ‘” (Fitzgerald 260) (West III xxix-xxx). West thinks that the final dash is of big importance; “it leaves the narrative open-ended and reverberates back through the entire novel” (xxx). In some sense it marks that this is not the end of Amory’s history all together, but it is the end of this story.

The underlying plot line of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is what happened to Charlie, that surfaces when he almost ends up having sex with Sam. The experiences he has, his relationship with Sam, school, his friendship with Bill and everything that happens that year

leads to Charlie's epiphany: it made him strong enough to let his suppressed memories about his aunt molesting him finally surface:

I don't know what is wrong with me. It's like all I can do is keep writing this gibberish to keep from breaking apart. Sam's gone. And Patrick won't be home for a few days. And I just couldn't talk with Mary Elizabeth or anybody or my brother or anybody in my family. Except maybe my aunt Helen. But she's gone. And even if she was here, I don't think I could talk to her either. Because I'm starting to feel like what I dreamt about her last night was true. And my psychiatrist's questions' weren't weird after all. (Chbosky, 220)

They told me I didn't speak or acknowledge anyone for a week. [...] The next thing I knew, I was sitting in a doctor's office. And remembering my aunt Helen. And I started to cry. And the doctor, who turned out to be a very nice woman, started asking me questions. Which I answered. (Chbosky 225)

Charlie's story is now resolved, he can finally move on. He has also learned to 'participate'. The underlying plot line is revealed, something that separates *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* further from the traditional Bildungsroman tradition than *This Side of Paradise*.

So, if this does end up being my last letter, please believe that things are good with me, and even when they're not, they will be soon enough.
And I will believe that same about you.

Love always,
Charlie
(Chbosky 231)

These two novels are similar in terms of themes, genre and the protagonists' inner journey. *This Side of Paradise* starts the end of the old Bildungsroman genre by incorporating some modernist techniques and literary features but at the same time keeps many of the traditional characteristics. Next chapter will look at *The Catcher in the Rye*, which was written between *This Side of Paradise* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, where the genre has changed even more. In all three novels we can find original Bildungsroman elements that separate them from other genres, they have just evolved and been adjusted to their individual periods.

Chapter 2: *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: a Comparative Analysis

J. D. Salinger (1919-2010) published the *Catcher in the Rye* in 1951, and it has become an important part of American young-adult fiction, read by several generations since its publication and seen to “mark a moment in American cultural history” (Kelly 2011, 7-8). In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie receives the novel as a reading assignment from Bill right before Christmas, and the novel fuels his dark thoughts, as previously mentioned; Christmas is a bad time for Charlie because that is when his aunt Helen died on his birthday. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a first person narrative where Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, tells the story of his lonely adventure in New York a weekend right before Christmas. During these days he is reminiscing about his dead little brother, Allie, which eventually gets him admitted to a sanatorium where he tells his story: “I could probably tell you what I did after I went home, and how I got sick and all, and what school I’m supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here, but I don’t feel like it. I really don’t” (Salinger 192). Separated by time and space, these two protagonists are nonetheless connected in terms of their experiences, age, thoughts, feelings, loss and death, and by the fact that growing up is a bigger challenge for some than others.

The Catcher in the Rye is the story of Holden’s “chauffeured odyssey,” a journey of a privileged young boy over the course of a weekend: from Pencey, an expensive prep school, to his stay at a sanatorium in California (Silverberg 2002, 21). On this journey he has many experiences and make stops at “nightclubs, hotels, theatres, museums, skating rinks, and his family’s distinctly upper-middle-class apartment” (ibid.):

The best break I had in years, when I got home the regular night elevator boy, Pete, wasn’t on the car. Some new guy I’d never seen was on the car, so I figured that if I didn’t bump smack into my parents and all I’d be able to say hello to old Phoebe and then beat it and nobody’d even know I’d been around. It was really a terrific break. (Salinger, 142)

These experiences, his memories, the people he meets and the things he thinks about and learns places the novel in the Bildungsroman tradition. It also has no particular plot; it is Holden’s inner development that is the real story. Since its publication it has received both negative and positive reviews, and there are often quarrels about the young narrator: he might

not be the best role model (Silverberg). Nevertheless, as Pinsker (qtd. in Steed 2002) argues, Holden continues to be the “(anti-)hero of choice for one generation of adolescents after another,” (2) as he inhabits characterizations that identify the American teenager (Steed 3). Also, as Silverberg argues, it is the journey, the “safety and ease of Holden’s rebellion,” that has made it so “attractive, and so identifiable, to many young (and not so young) readers” throughout the last five decades (21). The novel is, has been, and probably will continue to be a “permanent component” in American literary culture, as it seems like the novel will not be removed from school libraries any time soon (12).

Both Charlie and Holden are characters that have trouble fitting in and making friends; they have lost someone close to them and do not fully comprehend how the world can go on without them in it. Especially now, when they are about to enter adulthood, it becomes even harder to comprehend and find their place in the world. However, there is one major difference between the two boys: Holden is afraid of the world in general, but Charlie is afraid of himself. Holden does not want to become a part of the ‘phony’ adult world, whilst Charlie understands that there is something going on inside his head that needs to be resolved: “So, this is my life. And I want you to know that I am both happy and sad and I’m still trying to figure out how that could be” (Chbosky 3).

These two protagonists also have very different personalities, but they are both having problems handling growing up, and this is making them miserable. Holden is an outspoken rebel, and Charlie a careful outsider. Holden is told to “apply” himself by his psychoanalyst at the end of the story (Salinger 192), whilst Charlie is told to learn to “participate” by both his psychologist and Bill:

“Do you always think this much, Charlie?”
“Is that bad?” I just wanted someone to tell me the truth.
“Not necessarily. It’s just that sometimes people use thought to not participate in life.”
“Is that bad?”
“Yes.” (Chbosky, 26)

Both stories end with the protagonists’ having a psychological breakdown because of what happened in the past – death and loss in the childhood, and the ramifications of that – and how this surfaces when they are expected to grow up and become functional adults. Neither can move on before the past is dealt with. Charlie needs to figure out why his emotions for his dead aunt are conflicting even though he loves her, and Holden needs to come to terms with

the death of his brother and the fact that childhood is a phase that eventually *will* pass, whether you want it to or not.

It can be argued that the anxiety of growing up has not changed for generations, just the circumstances, considering what both these young-adult stories portray. Looking at *The Catcher in the Rye* the readers can identify the feelings Holden is unable to express but that can be read between the lines: “Identifiers treat Holden not so much as a literary construct but as a person with ‘a life of his own’ and, more importantly, as a ‘person worthy of emulation’” (Silverberg 19). Charlie and Holden are characters that portray adolescent culture from the time they were written, but continue to stand as hallmarks in youth culture since their experiences and thoughts are general and universal, and last but not least; relatable.

Death and Loss

As stated above, the shared, underlying cause for both protagonists’ misery is death and loss. Joseph S. Walker (2002) argues that Holden’s anxiety over the “inexorable press of change” is made “worse by the death of his idealized younger brother, Allie” (87). It can also be argued that death of the brother is *the* reason he is having trouble living his life: Holden does not want to live in a world that Allie is not in, or in a world where things like that happen. Charlie’s maturation is also hindered by death; namely that of his aunt Helen, which he is convinced that he caused. The sexual abuse to which he was subjected adds to the stress of the trauma of her death. Also, Charlie’s best friend Michael killed himself that spring, so now he has to start high school without any friends, which makes things even harder. Charlie needs to accept death as part of life and move on, which it seems like he does – but this process is hindered because of his confusing feelings about his aunt.

In *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden has not come to terms with his brother’s death. He is jealous of Allie; the only way to escape growing up into ‘phoniness’ is by dying, as Allie did. This is a thought that keeps resurfacing throughout the novel, but Holden never seems able to embrace it; he is too afraid of being left alone, like Allie:

It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place. 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 then go someplace nice for dinner – everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it. (Salinger, 140)

He does not like the feeling of being alone, even if he tries to convince the narratee otherwise, for instance when he fantasizes about running away and live in the woods. Even so, does Holden's recollection help him deal with his loss, and forgive the world for taking Allie away? By letting go of Allie, he will also be able to let go of his idealization of childhood. To do so Holden needs someone to talk to, and by telling his story to someone who actually listens, Holden finally achieves this.

It can be argued that death and loss is the theme where Charlie sees *The Catcher in the Rye* to be “appropriate for this time” (Chbosky, 80) – the connection between him and Holden, the pain of Christmas and having lost someone close to them. Both novels' are built around the theme of loss and death and learning how to move on from that.

Mentors

Central to Holden's journey is his strong wish to be given some instruction and guidance from a person who would just listen and help. He tries to turn to his older brother D.B., his former teacher Mr Antolini, his little sister Phoebe, and his former student advisor Carl Luce; but they are all unavailable, “or, when contacted, has other agendas... “ (Milner 2002, 33): ““All right, all right,’ I said. ‘Relax.’ You could tell he didn't feel like discussing anything serious with me. That's the trouble with these intellectual guys. They never want to discuss anything serious unless *they* feel like it” (Salinger, 130).

Holden does not have anyone he can model himself after, “adrift at a sea of peers every bit as adrift as he is” (Milner 34). Holden alienates his prep school friends and teachers, since he never stays in one school for very long, often leaving him with no one to talk to, or to get support from. It is essential to the Bildungsroman that the protagonist has a mentor. That Holden is deprived of this, and that this is highlighted in the novel, is an interesting feature. Holden is constantly searching for someone to talk to, and it seems like at the end that Holden

may finally have found one. At the sanatorium in California he tells his story to someone, as well as he is closer to his brother D. B, who live there. The mentor is cleverly hidden, since the reader never learn anything about this person, but finding one means that the story can be told and that the coming-of-age story can unfold.

Charlie comes from a completely different world than Holden in this regard; he has two older friends who take care of him and talk to him; Sam and Patrick, who would do anything to be of help, teaching him about real friendship and how to survive high school. Charlie's mentor is his English teacher Bill – who wants to be Charlie's friend and gives him books to help him mature. This is the biggest difference between Charlie and Holden: Holden is alone in a confusing world, whilst Charlie has a big and varied support system which is necessary for his maturation, as Holden telling his story eventually is for him.

Narrative Technique and Language

In both novels the protagonists tell their story to a stranger we do not know anything about. One difference is that *The Catcher in the Rye* has a first-person, personified narrator (Hawthorne 82), while *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a first-person epistolary novel. In the stories Charlie is the instigator of his narrative, trying to figure out things for himself; whilst Holden is told to tell his story. Charlie's letters function as a diary, doing his telling as events are unfolding; a present tense narrative, where he talks about what he has done 'today' and memories that surface as he does. Since *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an epistolary novel, it makes for an intimate story, and it has at the same time a very narrow viewpoint since we only have one narrator. This is also true for Holden's narrative.

There are three narrative times presented in *The Catcher in the Rye*: Holden's narration, "the act or process whereby a narrative is produced," (Goring et al. 272) consists of the main story; "the present of the narrating itself", stories of his present past (New York) and his past which he remembers when in New York (Cowan 43). The novel consists much of Holden's recounting of the memories of his childhood he had during his days alone in New York: "memories of his brother Allie, Jane Gallagher, former prep schools he had attended, the Central Park lagoon and carrousel, the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan

Museum of Art, and so forth” (Cowan 44). Cowan argues that Holden’s stories are “communicative, tactical [and] therapeutic” (38). He needs to keep thinking and talking and remember so as not to fall apart, and also, by telling the story he achieves some closure.

Moreover, Cowan argues that by agreeing to tell his story Holden is trying to arrive at some “catharsis or control from the simple fact of having a listener, no matter what is said or how poor the listener, or how finally unsuccessful his attempt to communicate” (40). It is by the act of telling that Holden gains perspective and control over his life and thoughts: “If somebody at least listens, it’s not too bad” (Salinger 155). This is, also, Charlie’s goal by writing his letters; it puts his thoughts into order, and he hopes to gain some control over them. Both these things are classic young-adult-novel characteristics; how the realistic first-person narrative and its interior monologues function to bring forth thoughts and emotions that young adult readers can identify with.

The narratives are written to seem authentic to young adults, regarding content and language style. The language in *The Catcher in the Rye* is sloppy with bad spelling – but still easy to read – in a youthful style; a “written document”, but presented as a “spoken narrative” (Cowan 27). We can see this in terms of its “diction and syntax,” and how it offers the “‘sound’ and flavor of Holden talking”; he is telling us *his* story, the language is very oral, portraying how Holden would actually talk (ibid.). At the same time, Salinger made Holden into an original character by the employment of “personal idiosyncrasies,” and it is a novel that represents nineteen-fifties teenage vernacular (Costello 1959, 172-3). Holden is a well-educated upper-middle-class teenager, his favorite subject in school is English and he would surely know when he makes grammatical or spelling mistakes. On one page it is spelled “Ninedieth Street” at the top, and “Ninetieth Street” further down (Salinger 54). The use of immature language represents Holden’s fear of growing up; it keeps him young and less intellectual. He ‘hates’ everything, and everything is ‘stupid’, especially adults, who are “phonies”: “One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies. That’s all. They were coming in the goddam window. For instance, they had this headmaster, Mr Haas, that was the phoniest bastard I ever met in my life” (Salinger 12). Furthermore, there are especially two language habits which Holden repeats throughout the novel – one is that he ends his thoughts with “a loosely dangling; ‘and all,’ ‘just as ..,’” and, how he constantly reinforce his statements (Costello 173):

He had a pretty heavy beard. He really did. (Salinger, 22)

I don't blame them. I really don't. (34)

I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours*. (51)

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the readers get a first-hand view of Charlie's personal letters to an unknown pen pal, and his language is like his personality; safe, careful and neat, and he is afraid of using words he is not completely sure what means. Bill also corrects Charlie's language, which is mentioned frequently throughout the novel: he tells him to have more "consistent punctuation," (Chbosky 8) that he needs to "stick to the subject," (12) because he "writes like he talks," (12) and he needs to stop running his "sentences together" (16). It is a realistic portrayal of the writing of a sixteen-year-old confused boy: "Kind of like my Aunt Helen and me. I'm sorry. 'My Aunt Helen and I.' That's one thing I learned this week. That and more consistent punctuation" (Chbosky, 8). Throughout the novel, as mentioned in the previous chapter, his sentences become more structured, his punctuation more precise and he incorporates more 'difficult' words, which is a sign of Charlie's maturation – his confidence grows as well as he learns new things.

Furthermore, the 'you' in *The Catcher in the Rye*, its implied reader, is what Cowan calls "nominal audience", which is not the reader of the novel but the "'you' inscribed by Holden himself ... the listener(s) of his narrative" (40). It is also clear that he is not talking directly to the reader, but to this nominal audience, since it seems like the person who he is telling his story to know about his troubles and is interested in learning more: "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, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, [...]" (Salinger 1). We do not know who 'you' is, as we do not know whom Charlie is writing to either. We can assume that Holden is speaking face-to-face to someone in the same room, and to someone he trusts, probably his psychoanalyst.

Coming of Age

Both *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are stories about growing up, where the past influences how the future unfolds: they are both coming-of-age novels. We can find many Bildungsroman traits in *The Catcher in the Rye*, both in terms of how the characters and events are used to help Holden's maturation, and the lack of plot: the real story is Holden's inner development and journey. This is not a complete coming-of-age story, since the protagonist does not reach adulthood in the course of the novel. Nor does Holden, as Walker argues, come to terms with society, or assume "an acceptable identity within a pre-existing social realm," during the course of the narrative, which is a necessary ingredient in a classic Bildungsroman (81). Both novels actually end with an epiphany instead of 'achieved adulthood', which puts them more on the modern, coming-of-age novel side of the scale than the traditional Bildungsroman genre end.

Matt Evertson (2002) sees *The Catcher in the Rye* to offer a "dead-aim analysis of the universal condition of growing up, concentrated on the very threshold between the child and adult" (102). Holden is trying to make his own path into adulthood, but he sees it as a 'corrupt' place, and also a place that so far has failed him and that he actually does not want to take part in. Evertson argues that *The Catcher in the Rye* is an exploration of "innocence and youth and the ability or inability to control the processes of time and maturation," and as a story that brings up the fear of growing up, something which appeals to young readers (102-3). Coming-of-age novels speak of the transition from a familiar childhood to the "uncertainty of adulthood and social responsibility that awaits" (104). Also, by using themes like love, death and loss, faith, friendship, school and sex make the coming-of-age novels especially appealing to readers, because these are eternal and universal, that many can identify with. And this is exactly what coming-of-age novels and young adult novels do; they represent a time in life many people identify with – adolescence – and the experiences, emotions and thoughts that come with it, generation after generation. Both Holden and Charlie are characters that are embedded in this tradition, and are characters readers can identify with and learn something from.

The Titles

“He’s a wallflower.” [...] “You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand.”

I didn’t know that other people thought things about me. I didn’t know they looked. [...] Bob raised his drink and asked everyone to do the same. “To Charlie.” (Chbosky, 40-41).

The Perks of Being a Wallflower often addresses friendship. Charlie gets invited to join a group of others who see themselves as outsiders and who take him serious and rely on him as a true friend: Patrick, Sam, Mary Elizabeth, Bob and the others in the group consider him one of their own. Charlie has never experienced friendship in that way before. He is trying to ‘participate’, and his friends let him be part of their group as he is. But until he can make sense out of his strange thoughts, he will be an outsider looking in, not able to fully participate, a “wallflower”: one that always keeps his distance and observes, there, but not participating. A Wallflower is defined as “a person who from shyness or unpopularity remains on the sidelines of a social activity” (“Wallflower.” merriam-webster.com, n.d.). The title is explanatory in terms of Charlie’s personality, his characteristics and the story that is about to be told. Charlie learns by observing, he analyzes, seeing how these ‘normal’ people behave, and finally understanding that he is not that different and eventually starts participating himself.

The Catcher in the Rye is also a title that is telling for Holden’s characteristics, and his idealism. Holden ‘idolizes’ childhood, represented by Phoebe and Allie, but especially Allie, who “remains frozen at the threshold of adolescence” (Milner 33). Milner argues that the image that Holden holds most closely, the boy “who fears stepping off the curb in fear of disappearing,” is the image of the “‘swell’ kid who walks in the street next to the curb singing ‘If a body catch a body coming through the rye’” (33):

He was walking in the street, instead of on the sidewalk, but right next to the curb. He was making out like he was walking a very straight line, the way kids do, and the whole time he kept singing and humming. I got up closer so I could hear what he was singing. He was singing that song, “If a body catch a body coming through the rye.” [...] It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more. (Salinger, 104).

In Holden’s mind, the happy, carefree, singing child represents everything that is true about the world. Later Holden gets sick, delirious, and he talks to Allie about the fear of disappearing when he gets to the curb at the end of each block:

Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, 'Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie.' And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him. Then it would start all over again as soon as I got to the next corner. (Salinger 178).

As Cutchins argues, Holden seeks a tremendous and extraordinary thing; to be a savior for children, and to find some idealism in the strange and chaotic world that he lives in (58). Holden is afraid of 'falling' into adulthood. When Phoebe asks what he would like to be, he imagines himself saving children from falling over a cliff:

'Anyway', 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 - ... (Salinger 156).

Holden's dream is to save childhood, but in the world he lives that is an impossible dream; you will grow older and society expects you to fulfill the responsibilities that come with that. As he is terribly afraid of falling off the curb into adulthood, a catcher seems like a very good idea.

Epiphany

When Holden has to go to the sanatorium, Walker proposes that it is because he has "succumbed to the exhaustion rather than coming to a new understanding of life" (90). But does he need a new understanding? It seems like Holden does know that to "protect innocence is doomed," but at the same time he is unable to abandon it completely (ibid.). Throughout the novel Holden is trying to escape the phony world of adulthood, and be like Allie, or at least be able to save the eternal childhood that Allie represents. His strongest wish is to be the catcher in the rye, to "preserve everything that is pure," but the novel demonstrates that this is impossible, even unhealthy (ibid.). Holden's epiphany, when he finally gets an idea that clarifies things about his idealism and childhood, comes when he sees Phoebe 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 goddamn horse, but I didn't say anything 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" (Salinger, 190).

He knows he cannot save the children from growing up, but does that make life any easier to live or makes it any easier to grow up? For Holden it does not. At the end it seems like he has come to terms with it, but he does not like it. He tells his brother D.B when he visits him at the sanatorium that he does “not know” what to think about all that he has told us, but he does miss everyone he has told us about (Salinger 192). This suggests that he does want to ‘apply’ himself, like his psychoanalyst tells him to. He does not want to be left alone, like Allie, and it seems like that feeling is stronger at the end when he has finished telling us his story. His epiphany comes in narrating his story: the process of narrating itself is the “transformative agent, serving him as therapy and catharsis” (Cowan 45). Narrating the story made him remember, and probably enabled him to get some understanding of both himself and his past. And seeing Phoebe reach for the gold ring, and understanding that he had to let her, makes it easier for him to accept that things will move on, and that he can move on with it.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* a moment of clarity comes when Charlie almost has sex with Sam, which brings forth memories of what Helen did to him when he was a young child. The underlying plot line is revealed, and Charlie has found resolution of his past. The thing that makes us sure that Charlie is fine is because of the way he tells us about his summer in his last letter to the unknown pen pal. He writes about what happened and analyses the experiences from the hospital in a mature and responsible way:

I’m not the way I am because of what I dreamt and remembered about my aunt Helen. That’s what I figured out when things got quiet. And I think that’s very important to know. It made things feel clear and together. Don’t get me wrong. I know what happened was important. And I needed to remember it. [...] But even if we don’t have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. (Chbosky 228)

The letters were written to be able to talk to someone who “listens and understands” (Chbosky 3). And by being honest in the letters he was also honest to himself, which led to the maturing he needed to be able to remember.

The writing enabled Charlie to get a sense of who he was, as Holden by telling his story to someone enabled him to get a new understanding of life. Both novels are first-person narratives and young adult coming-of-age novels, with identifiable heroes where the reader

can think and learn as the protagonists' do. *The Catcher in the Rye* was chosen for a closer analysis because Charlie has so much in common with Holden; sixteen-year-old schoolboys that are lonely without much support from either friends or family, feeling lost and confused in a scary world that expects them to grow up. Death and loss connects them in terms of time and space, and make their adolescent period an experience that are similar in many ways – how do you move on when you are not sure if you understand or accept what life has thrown your way? Both novels are removed further from the traditional Bildungsroman genre than *This Side of Paradise* was, for instance by letting their heroes' internal psychological development be at the forefront of the stories in a greater way than what we saw in Amory's.

The Catcher in the Rye has for the last 60 years stood the test of time as a classic, American coming-of-age novel, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* stands definitely in tradition with a story that can do just that.

Conclusion

The twentieth century saw more changes and developments in terms of technology, science, culture, economy, politics, ideology and society than ever seen before. Adolescents have been at the forefront of this, separated from the generation of their parents and forced to look forward and find their own way. Amory, Holden and Charlie are representatives of their time, each seeing the challenges and the modernization process through the century, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* shows us how literature has been key in representing such issues. These novels demonstrate how coming-of-age literature has survived and developed, and how, along with young adult novels, they are portraits of the times in which they were written.

By looking at the similarities and differences in *This Side of Paradise*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, in terms of structure and themes, we can see how the Bildungsroman genre has developed through the twentieth century: from the Romantic nineteenth-century characteristics to the realist young-adult coming-of-age novel. The genre has moved towards the young-adult-novel genre, with regard to language, structure and content. The coming-of-age story has become more directed towards its main audience: the young adolescent reader. This progression can easily be seen looking at *This Side of Paradise*, via *The Catcher in the Rye*, to *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, considering the language, structure, themes and content. During these eighty years (1920 – 1999) the world has changed enormously, and literature has needed to keep up as well. As people and societies change, so does literature. The way Chbosky has used *all* the other works inside his novel mirrors this development, as well as supplying connotations and raising awareness of the other works and the genre.

It has been necessary to look at intertextuality and intergenerativity to be able to compare and contrast the themes and structures of the novels to see how the genre has developed. All three novels have much in common, not just the themes and genre, but also how they were written by three young men portraying their youth culture and the historical period they were a part of, and also how the protagonists' experiences were much alike even though the effect of them differed in different historical periods and societies.

One elemental difference was their journeys. Both Amory and Holden embark on literal journeys, to find themselves, their place in the world, to make sense of their surroundings and see the road ahead more clearly. Charlie's journey, in comparison, is more internal and psychological. However, all of them needed to make internal journeys. Amory's story is much more directed by his external experiences than Holden's and Charlie's, and Holden's more than Charlie's – a development towards the internal, psychological element that is strongest in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

The novels' endings connect them as well. But, the epiphanies these protagonists' experience do not make readers sure that everything will be all right and that they are able to continue to mature without any more complications. But, the difficulties from their pasts' have come to an understanding; the stories have come to an ending where the heroes should now be able to fulfill their maturation process. They are eventually set free. It was stated in the Introduction that the goal of the Bildungsroman was self-fulfillment for the hero, to get past childhood struggles, and that permeates all three novels. However, since they do not achieve adulthood during the stories that is one thing that separates them most clearly from the classic Bildungsroman.

Another progression regarding society and history is how Amory represents the classic early-twentieth-century bourgeois home; Holden the post-Second-World-War teenage resistance to social authority; whilst Charlie searches for *more* adult guidance with no particular resistance to anything. This emphasizes the fact that literature is representative of its society and history, and that we can spot the development of the modernizing world. The experience of growing up has not changed, just the circumstances. This also supports the argument that literature has been key in representing such issues.

All three novels are representatives of their time; their social milieu, history and circumstance. As previously stated, Chbosky has brought into light the coming-of-age literature that has come before and this serves as inspiration and as a retrieval of past glories. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an intertextual text regarding themes and genre, and a classic coming-of-age story that has fulfilled its genre's movement towards also being a classic young adult novel. It is a novel that will stand as a hallmark for the early twenty-first century's literary and youth culture.

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