Roaming the streets

A comparative study of the theme of the flâneur in the novels *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Ghost World*

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abstract

The coming-of-age genre is focused on the protagonist’s journey from childhood to adulthood, also known as adolescence. The term Bildungsroman is a subgenre of the coming-of-age story, and typically portrays the protagonist’s formation in terms of education and understanding of the world. This essay will compare the two coming-of-age novels *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D Salinger and *Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes.

Another literary character who is associated with discovery is the flâneur, who appears in the works of Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe and Honoré de Balzac among others. The historical flâneur is a man who is wandering the streets of the modern city, observing his surroundings and the people who pass him by. The protagonists of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, and *Ghost World*, Enid Coleslaw, are both similar in the way that they observe their surroundings. Another similarity is that their narratives both ultimately fail at becoming true Bildungsromane. The flâneur is not previously related strictly to the genre of the Bildungsroman; however, the aim of this essay is to show how the relation between Enid and Holden's positions as modern flâneur's prevents them from growing up.

keywords: Bildungsroman, flâneur, Ghost World, Clowes, The Catcher in the Rye, Salinger, graphic novel, adolescence
Table of contents

Introduction .......................................................... 3
Theoretical background ............................................. 6
Analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* ......................... 13
Analysis of *Ghost World* .......................................... 19
Conclusion .......................................................... 25
Works Cited .......................................................... 27
Introduction

The aim of this essay is to compare one of the most beloved coming of age novels, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, with the graphic coming of age novel and classic in its own right, *Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes. The two novels share similar themes of melancholy and emotional distress, and first and foremost the need to belong to a society that appears both meaningless and intimidating. Enid and Holden both adopt the role of the flâneur to set out on the journey to adulthood. As flâneurs they observe both peers and adults and scrutinize their every move to find some truth as to what life should be about. However, their desire to find a true and honest way of living life as adults, cannot be obtained by simply watching other people fail and succeed. The historical flâneur may have found meaning in investigating the city, not being phased by the passing of time. Enid and Holden's unwillingness to grow up is reflected in their positions as flâneurs, signifying their failure to belong or find meaningful relationships.

*The Catcher in the Rye* and *Ghost World* both follow the pattern of what a coming of age novel should portray, but both of them ultimately fail at becoming true Bildungsromane. The coming-of-age genre is a broad genre covering the literary works that deals with the protagonist journey from childhood to adulthood. The term Bildungsroman is a subgenre of the coming-of-age-story, and the term originated from 18th-century Germany. The works that can be categorized as Bildungsromane not only portray a young person and his or her struggles, but also depicts criteria on how to do it. The Bildungsroman typically portrays a journey towards something seen as ideal. The genre describes a discomfort of both interior and exterior form, the resentment of one's own inabilities, or the rules and conventions of society. In other words, the character in a Bildungsroman is not simply a young person who during the timespan of the novel physically grows up, but also shows how growing up means
to be in conflict with one’s conception of the world. Enid and Holden are both in conflict with the outside world, and also show signs of doubting their principles and attitudes towards the adult world, making both of the novels fit into the category of the Bildungsroman. But in Enid and Holden’s case, at the end they are both stuck in the same perspective as where we found them.

Enid and Holden both become modern flâneurs because of their ability to observe. They both come from privileged backgrounds in terms of class, and they also have the luxury of time. They are intrigued by observing their surroundings, and a majority of the two novels is built around their thoughts and ideas about their environment and the people who are coming and going. The original flâneur was a male observer drifting around the city, enjoying and investigating modern city life. The flâneur was in many ways a man standing outside of society. He was a bohemian who did not have to bother about his time or his income. The theory of the flâneur has also been used to describe men and women’s conditions in the public space, as there are places in the city that are more or less accessible to women, which raises the question about the possibility of a female flâneur. Whereas Holden is able to roam the streets of New York late at night, Enid is more controlled in her movements, despite the fact that she lives in a much smaller and quieter town. That the two of them make such different risk assessments is probably due to their own apprehension on what they are able to do, and also their knowledge of how other people perceive them. A woman could argue that she has just the same right as a man to go where she wants, but will also have to let her estimation of what other people might think of that choice a part of her assessment. Arguably, both of them are free to go wherever they please, but be that as it may, their choice have different consequences.
Just as the flâneur is aimlessly wandering the streets, Enid and Holden are navigating their way through life to find answers on how to become adults without losing touch with themselves. Enid and Holden are both stuck in the age between childhood and adulthood, which creates their emotional distress. They long to find a way of becoming adults without losing touch with who they are, but they also cling to their childhood. The duality of youth versus maturity is brought up by Franco Moretti, who connects these terms with the concept of form. As Moretti has described, the idea of youth is associated with modernity, and for youth not to become dated, it has to be in a constant formless state to adapt to every new epoch (5). But youth also has a very fixed form, as it is the predecessor of maturity. This is the paradox of youth that both Enid and Holden struggle with. Although they are both young and able to make choices regarding their future, by making such choices, their youthful nature would already begin to disappear.

The coming-of-age novel revolves around the idea of maturing, and that the individual comes to some conclusion towards the end. The conclusion means in this case the end of youth, as youthfulness in itself is defined as immature and underdeveloped. Moretti argues that in order for youth to maintain its own meaning, a reluctance towards adulthood is expected, as accepting adulthood as the final answer would mean a betrayal of the value of youth (8). The state of youth as timeless and unbound causes stress for Holden and Enid. The notion that they will eventually have to grow up, despite that life as they know it has no expiration date, makes it easier for them to procrastinate.

The concept of the flâneur as a critic on society is already established, and arguably the flâneur has come to mean something else than the male bohemian wandering the city streets. However, there are few reports on the flâneur in coming-of-age novels. *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most famous in the genre, still being read and still causing reactions to
this day. However, *Ghost World*, in many ways relates to *The Catcher in the Rye* in terms of genre and themes, is in comparison vastly overlooked. The fact that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a traditional novel and *Ghost World* is a graphic novel pose the issue of comparing them. Although they are thematically related, they belong in two different literary genres and also because of the visual quality of the graphic novel, become two different art forms. This essay will however compare them because of their similar themes of alienation and that both protagonists show lack of motivation to become adults.

Theoretical Background

The term Bildungsroman is German and means formation novel or novel of education. It was originally a term to describe a young man’s journey to find his spiritual truth. The Bildungsroman include three categories: the Entwicklungsroman, the novel of general development, not exclusively focused on self-growth, the Erziehungsroman, the novel of educational development, and the Künstlerroman, the novel of creative development (Britannica Academic). The common description of the Bildungsroman, as found in *The Literary Encyclopaedia* is “reconciliation between the desire for individuation (self-fulfillment) and the demands of socialisation”. Franco Moretti develops the categorisation of the Bildungsroman to be about the narrative and plot difference. In his chapter, “The Bildungsroman as Symbolic Form,” he states that novels make use of two principles called the classification principle and the transformation principle, which he then relates to two different ways for the novel to express meaning. In a novel where challenges lead the protagonist to one fixed and distinct ending, it is in that ending that the novel find its meaning. This is the classification principle, and it is the transformation within the character that leads to this fixed ending. In other words, without that precise transformation, that
preferred ending would have no chance of being. On the other hand, works that have no closure classify the ending itself to be insignificant. Moretti claims that the “a story is more meaningful the more truly it manages to suppress itself as story” (7). The story’s unwillingness to obey to a regime of dramaturgy classifies it as more true and more realistic, than a story where the only path possible is the one leading to catharsis.

Moretti further relates these principles to the concept of modernity. The classification principle affirms that youth in itself is futile, and that the ultimate goal for youth is enough maturity for it to eventually end. The transformation principle offers a more realistic approach of an ending that is not fixed, i.e. change is not static and the ending also offers the possibility of the protagonist relapsing into youth. Moretti argues that the Bildungsroman always has to deal with these two clashing ideas of youth and maturity, and that the sole survival of the Bildungsroman as a genre is that it has not chosen either youth or maturity, but rather the conclusion that you cannot have one without the other (9). The choice of one principle over the other, the hanging on to youth or giving in to maturity, provides for different choices and the idea of what is valuable in life. Moretti categorize the novels dealing with the topic of marriage as a result of following the classification principle, whereas the ones dealing with adultery are following the transformation principle (7). Since marriage is viewed as a fundamental ritual in Western society, it becomes a powerful coming-of-age ritual. It is a sign of youth giving up on itself and coming to agreement with society as a whole. Adultery on the other hand, is in our society either not spoken about, or seen as a “destructive force” (8), which makes the act of adultery a rebellion not only against the spouse, but also society’s firm idea of marriage as the one true way.

Furthermore, Moretti relates the idea of meaning to the concept of youth. Youth as it was known before the Industrial Revolution had no specific meaning, as there was no clear
distinction between childhood and adulthood. Without having a clear distinction between the lifestyles of children and adults, youth had no culture of its own. Moretti claims that meaning was not specifically directed to youth as a concept, but to the concept of modernity. During the Industrial Revolution, modernity was crucial since society as a whole kept evolving at a fast pace. Modernity is associated with futuristic dreams and progressiveness, and youth is always striving towards a future. With the time’s enchantment of modernity, the characteristics of youth then became mobility and restlessness (4-5). Youth was seen as a reflection of modernity and progress, and therefore it became natural to associate youth with change. The theme of modernity has roots in Modernist literature, a genre which portrays the new urban society and how it impacts the protagonist and his or her understanding of one’s self. By getting to know the character, the reader also get to know the society in which he or she functions. Enid and Holden are most definitely products of their society, which makes their environment, the city, part of their story. The city with its cultural diversity needs to be interpreted by the protagonist, and by doing so, new discoveries of one’s self are made.

The Bildungsroman is always about change in the sense that it is always related to formation, that the protagonist is maturing by educating him or herself by exploring the world and learning through experience. The theme of education is present in both male and female Bildungsroman, but Elaine Hoffman Baruch argues in her article “The Feminine Bildungsroman: Education Through Marriage” that although the female Bildungsroman is centered around the theme of education, it is also closely related to the theme of marriage (335). Marriage is viewed in the Bildungsroman as the woman’s opportunity to gain knowledge of the world (336). Baruch use Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë as an example, claiming that Jane’s marriage to Mr. Rochester is more about Jane’s chance of widening her experiences, and less about class mobility (339). Jane’s liberty may lie in her notion of her
potential and of her ambition to live an intellectually stimulating life instead of a life of homebound leisure (Brontë 96).

Even in later female coming-of-age novels, such as *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, marriage and education are closely related. The protagonist Esther Greenwood is just like Jane Eyre occupied with finding a way to live an intellectual life where her creativity can blossom. To Esther, marriage is threatening because of its educational value, and she fears that by letting a man shape her view of the world, her creativity and independence would cease to exist (89). Her boyfriend Buddy teaches her about everything, from human anatomy to skiing, and his mother is a firm believer of marriage as a relationship in which the wife’s role is to support her husband (74). Although the theme of education is relevant both in the male and Female Bildungsroman, Baruch claims that the main difference is how men and women attain that education. For men their development and education is shaped by their own experiences, while for women that formation is closely related to marriage (335).

The protagonist in a Bildungsroman must educate him or herself in order to come to terms with society and oneself. The journey is strongly related to the idea of education in the Bildungsroman. Whether it be Odysseus’s adventurous expedition in Homer’s *Odyssey*, or Sophie’s investigative philosophical journey through time and space in Jostein Gaarder’s *Sophie’s World*, the journey portrayed in the Bildungsroman represents the development of the character. Another character who is connected with the theme of the journey, and emerged in the literary world of the 19th century, although not previously related strictly to the genre of the Bildungsroman, is the flâneur; the observing gentleman of the street who has a watchful eye of his city’s inhabitants and milieu. The premise for the flâneur is that he is educated, and his occupation is that of researching. Walter Benjamin wrote the first studies on the flâneur, inspired by the works of Charles Baudelaire, Honoré de Balzac, and Edgar
Allan Poe amongst others. The flâneur has one privilege that separates him from the working man, and that is time. Without having to rush to appointments he is free to investigate the city, where as the working man is limited by his everyday routine. In his chapter “The Flâneur,” Benjamin views the static movement of the common man as imitating the machines in the industries (53), and in the packed masses of people, strolling was impossible (53). Therefore, the working man is simply not fit to observe the city, as his path is already predetermined. He can never explore something new in his old streets, and as his journey is only occurring because he has to be somewhere, his mind is not focused on discovering. The crowd becomes “dehumanized” in its inability to move independently (53), which makes the flâneur the only one with a clear vision.

Benjamin explains how the swarms of people from different classes colliding in the streets is part of the appeal for the flâneur but also tends to make him feel uncomfortable. “The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellant and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space” (58). The constant run-ins with strangers tend to remind the flâneur of how lonely he in fact is. Benjamin also refers to Poe’s vision of the flâneur in “The Man of the Crowd,” as a person who is not comfortable being around himself, and therefore seeks out the company of the crowd (48). Elizabeth Wilson refers to Benjamin’s thoughts on the lonely flâneur in her article “The Invisible Flâneur,” and claims that these erratic run-ins are “fragmentary and incomplete”, and that they create feelings of loss and sadness, as there is no way of the flâneur to get to know the people he run into, which leaves him feeling left out (p. 8).

Wilson further compares men and women accessing the streets of the urban cities in the 19th century. During industrialization, people moved into the cities and people from
different social groups were suddenly merged together on the streets. The clashing of the sexes and the classes caused great distress as it was feared it would encourage immoral actions. Women in public challenged society's norms by wandering the streets uncontrolled by husband or family. Prostitution was at the time a common thing in urban areas, and Wilson argues that every “public woman” in this case could be seen as a potential prostitute (74). Women of today are more free to wander the streets than their sisters in the 19th century, but the fear of sexual harassment is still a major concern to every woman walking alone well into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall states in their article “Imagining the flâneur as a woman” that women’s right to the urban environment is a topic as relevant today as when women in the 19th century were not free to walk the streets at night, and that this has led us to believe that private areas are more aimed at women, and that public areas are for men (5). Dreyer and McDowall further argue that women have to claim their presence on the streets in a way that men do not. Women in public spaces then become a symbol of them owning the right of being public women, of being flâneurs. This action, according to Dreyer and McDowall, instantly distinguishes their idea from the original notion of the flâneur as somebody who is indifferent of where he is going (12). He is there to investigate, not demonstrate. The presence of women out at night then becomes activism, whether or not it was the point.

The flâneur is a character connected to the theme of modernity. Although the character is more than 100 years old, the theme of the flâneur is still used as a way of defining people observing their ever-changing surroundings. Wilson claims that the modern flâneurs could very well be the tourists at Disney World, or the consumer in the shopping mall (90-91). Similarly, the medium of comics is also associated with visual culture and
modernity. Although the graphic novel as a genre dates back to the 1970’s (Martin 170), it is only recently that the genre has come to mean something else than simply belonging to teenage culture. Dale Jacobs writes in his article “More Than Words: Comics as a Means of Teaching Multiple Literacies” that “comics were often viewed, at best, as popular entertainment and, at worst, as a dangerous influence on youth“ (19). Jacobs argue that graphic novels have been viewed as something other or less than literature, and that its only purpose was to ease the reader into more complex literature (20). Even if now graphic novels are viewed as literature in their own right, it is not to say that they are read in the same way. Despite *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Ghost World* having a lot of similarities, the fact that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a novel and *Ghost World* a graphic novel changes how we read and interpret them. How we identify Enid is both from the way she talks, but also with the images that comes along with her story. We can view her appearance and her facial expressions when she is reacting to something, and in return how other people react to her. Scott McCloud explains the depth of the graphic novel in terms of its capacity in storytelling. With the graphic novels opportunity to not only tell but also show, it gives the author multiple ways of portraying a story. The author can put weight on either the words in the frame, or how he or she chooses to visualize the scenery, or make use of both media to tell a story (153-155). This is effectively used in *Ghost World*; the theme of alienation runs along in the visuals. The coloring is white with a blue and green tone, which was the author Daniel Clowes's choice because it reminded him of his teenage years when he used to walk outside of people’s apartments in the evenings, where the television would be on, its light shining out on the streets, and he wanted the novel “to feel like it was bathed in that light” in order for it to remind him of his youth (Clowes and Guilbert). The visuals of *Ghost World* resonate with the
author’s feeling of disconnection, and it paints a picture of someone who is not part of the crowd, strictly observing from the outside.

Analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye*

*The Catcher in the Rye* is about the teenage boy Holden Caulfield, who is expelled from the private school Pencey Prep two weeks before Christmas for failing four out of five classes. It is the third time that he has been expelled from private schools, and for the same reasons. He receives the news of his expulsion the week before his Christmas break is coming up, and decides not to go home in the meantime as a way of not having to explain his expulsion to his parents. Instead he travels to New York City, where he spends a couple days roaming around the city, meeting new people and seeing old acquaintances. Holden views the world of adults as corrupt, and describes them as being “phony”. Everybody who is not genuine is phoney. The only people he finds sincere are children, and especially his younger siblings Allie and Phoebe. Allie died from leukemia at a young age, and becomes Holden’s hero because of the fact that he never lost his innocence. The novel is told from the perspective of Holden himself, a year afterwards and from the institution where he is resting.

Holden Caulfield is a reflection of the flâneur described by Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire. He is the man who is standing outside of society because he is not burdened with labor, and thus has the privilege of observing. Holden also has the luxury of time, both in the sense of his unsupervised weekend in New York, but also the time that constitutes the age of adolescence. Franco Moretti argues that the Bildungsroman with its many versions of coming of age has come to associate youth, the age of adolescence, with the “meaning of life” (4). Holden fears that this meaning will eventually become lost, and he wish that it was possible to freeze time and people, in order for them not to change (p. 132),
since he considers maturity to be the reason people lose their innocence. Holden is known for his cynical approach, and he receives advice from a former English teacher, Mr. Antolini, who tells him that “Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You’ll learn from them - if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn from you” (204). Holden is however not responsive to advice regarding his future, as he is unable to move on from his youth.

He is concerned about the fact that he eventually has to grow up, but because he is not sure when that transition is actually about to happen, he has the possibility like the flâneur to procrastinate. In “Holden as a Flâneur,” Parvin Ghasemi and Masoud Ghafoori claim that Holden “seems to belong to a world almost entirely composed of leisure activities” (86) and that the flâneur should not have to occupy his mind “with trivial issues like money, possessions and work” (86). Holden does not have to worry about his income, but money as a concept and as a class barrier nevertheless occupies his mind. He is bothered by the fact that money can come in between people and make them behave a certain way. But the fact that he does not have to work for his money is also the reason that he is able to show resentment towards it. Because he has never been in a position without money, he is unable to value it: “One of my troubles is, I never care too much when I lose something - it used to drive my mother crazy when I was a kid. Some guys spend days looking for something they lost. I never seem to have anything that if I lost it I’d care too much” (p. 97). Despite this blasé attitude, Holden is constantly concerned with loss. One of his major fears is people or time changing, and transformation is essentially about loss. One of the reason that he is unfazed by losing objects, could very well be because he has already experienced severe loss, in losing his little brother.
Despite his own supposed indifference, Holden is always occupied with analyzing possessions, and what they mean to other people. He is aware of his privileged lifestyle, and in most situations where the class barrier between him and other people becomes obvious, he is uncomfortable. He often feels depressed when people cannot afford certain things, or when money corrupts people. There are many parts in the novel where Holden describes how class gets in the way between him and other people. For example when he reminisces about an old roommate at Pencey, Dick Slagle, who always used to hide his suitcases under the bed. Holden assumes that it was because Dick’s suitcases were much cheaper than his. Dick always joked about Holden’s expensive suitcases, calling them bourgeois. “Everything I had was bourgeois as hell. Even my fountain pen was bourgeois. He borrowed it off me all the time, but it was bourgeois anyway” (118). Holden feels sorry for the fact that Dick felt ashamed. He also thinks that Dick should have been able to overlook the fact that Holden has better suitcases, because Dick is “intelligent” and has “a good sense of humour” (118). But Holden is as guilty as Dick of not being able to overlook their class positions. It becomes evident that the two boys different backgrounds make it hard for them to get along, and eventually they both ask to change rooms. Holden may have the same economic privilege as the typical flâneur, but unlike the flâneur he is forced to face the consequences of his privilege. If the typical flâneur was concerned about the modern city’s sudden clash of classes on the streets, his only connection to the lower classes was his observations of them. Holden lives in a society where his class belonging does not shelter him from meeting people from different backgrounds.

One of the differences between the interpretations of the flâneur in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Ghost World*, is the difference in how their main characters, Holden and Enid, are able to explore areas, both physical and mental, that concern their sexuality. Holden is able as
a man to enter parts of the city that Enid cannot. Even though she is not prohibited from entering certain areas, she cannot do it on the same conditions as Holden. This is a factor that Holden can disregard, as he is not running the risk of being judged because he is exploring his sexuality. When Holden checks into a motel he is confronted by a pimp who wants him to buy a sexual service. Holden is perhaps not the sort of person who would deliberately seek out a prostitute, but when confronted with the possibility, he finds himself unable to resist. He is a virgin, who despite having many opportunities to lose his virginity, has never felt comfortable enough with a girl to do so. He argues that the reason he cannot have sex with a girl is that he does not understand the unwritten rules of foreplay, what constitutes an invitation and what is a rejection. He also cannot take girls seriously, as “most girls are dumb and all” (100) and “when she gets really passionate, she just hasn’t any brains” (101). Contradictory, he claims that buying a sexual service is one way for him to practice for when or if he is getting married (101). Marriage is seen as the natural order of things, even for Holden. This is one of the occasions where Holden is considering what Moretti would describe as his “fixed ending” (7), that he eventually will grow up, and that marriage would be part of his transformation. However, Holden may view marriage as a rite of passage, but is himself not expressing whether he wants it or not. A potential marriage could be a way for him to justify buying a sexual service. As a flâneur, the act of investigating the encounter with a prostitute itself is justified, but Holden nonetheless use the idea of marriage as a pretence to buy sex. This also indicates that Holden may view himself as able to conform to society, but the way he is supposedly conforming may not be a sign that he is maturing.

Another example of how Holden’s interpretation of the flâneur prevents him from growing up, is in the way he treats other people as objects. He is separating himself from the crowd, and the crowd becomes something foreign. This act marks him as an individual and
other people as being part of a faceless entity. He therefore views himself as a complex character, but the people around him are static. The way Holden views himself in relation to the crowd is typical for the Modernist anti hero. To live in the city with its many and ever-changing cultural expressions, and to continuously face new people, means that we constantly have to define ourselves against the strangers that we meet. For the protagonist it means that his or her role in the world is not entirely clear. For Holden this means that he views everybody as phoney, until proven otherwise. Susan K. Mitchell investigates the idea of Holden as a narrator in her article “To tell you the Truth,” and argues that to understand art, or even people, there is a need to reread them. Mitchell refers to Roland Barthes's idea of texts as either readerly or writerly. She explains it in the terms of reading and re-reading. Those who simply read a text cannot evolve their thinking, and cannot grasp the full potential of the story. By re-reading a text, the reader views the work as a writer, giving the story the chance to unfold and for the text to bring new dimensions (145). Holden fails to read the world from a writerly perspective, as he as a flâneur simply lets people and experiences pass him by. One could say that he simply cannot observe them more closely, as they are literally just passing him by. But Holden shows the same unwillingness to reread the stories of his family members. His older brother is a “prostitute” (2) for moving to Hollywood and for writing movies instead of writing novels. His father is a phoney because he is a lawyer. Lawyers have the ability to actually help people, but their intentions for helping people may be selfish, which make them phonies (185). He does not talk badly about his mother, but describes a detached relationship towards her, as she is a very sensitive and possibly depressed individual. The only ones who are not phonies are children, because they are not corrupted by the adult world. Holden views his two younger siblings, Allie and Phoebe as pure souls. But these two also become static characters: Allie because he died at a very young
age, and therefore never run the risk of becoming corrupt, and Phoebe, because he seldom visits her and his fond memories of her stay preserved. Walter Benjamin describes the flâneur “as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls (37). And the same goes for Holden, but paraphrased: Holden is as much a flâneur at home as he is on the streets.

The idea of time as static is comforting to Holden. He describes a visit to the museum: “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole (…). Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you” (131). Time moving and people changing is intimidating to Holden. This could be one of the reason that he rejects movies. In “Holden as a novelist,” Eugene McNamara reflects upon the idea that Holden might enjoy novels more than movies because of their fixed setting in time and place. A novel is an object which appears to be static. A movie moves with the same pace as life itself, and McNamara argues that the audience tend to confuse the experiences seen in the movies as ideal, and consequently more true than their own authentic experiences. This would explain Holden’s notion of movies and movie stars as false idols, labelling his brother as a prostitute for writing them. Time changing equates to changing, and as Holden views the children as the only innocent people in the world, people changing can only be viewed as negative. But as a flâneur, Holden should not be occupied with time. Having the time to wander the streets is part of what makes him a flâneur. But the difference between him and the original flâneur is that Holden is still young, still not transformed, and that time itself has meaning.
**Analysis of *Ghost World***

Enid Coleslaw and Rebecca Doppelmeyer are two best friends that have just graduated high school. The story of *Ghost World* revolves around their summer together where they have to make several decisions about their near future in terms of finding work, getting into college and finding apartments. The two girls both enjoy observing the outcast members of their small town, and alternate between despising and respecting them in their inability to conform to society. The girl’s friendship starts out strong in the beginning of the novel, but slowly and almost unrecognisably starts to deteriorate as Rebecca gets on the route to becoming an adult woman and Enid does not. Rebecca starts to work at a service-job and Enid applies to a university on the other side of the country without Rebecca knowing. Enid does not have any hope of being accepted and when she is rejected, she runs away. In the last frame of the novel, she is leaving on a bus without a destination.

Just as the flâneur is wandering the streets and trying to capture the atmosphere of the era, Enid Coleslaw and Rebecca Doppelmeyer are investigating and analysing their city and its inhabitants. At the beginning of the novel, the two girls are equally fascinated by observing and judging the people they encounter, but as summer turns into fall, Enid finds herself alone in her wanderings. In a similar style to Holden, following the Modernist tradition, she disconnects herself from the crowd by viewing the people she encounters as a faceless entity. In relation to them, she is still an original. She prides herself on being an original, and her inability to conform to society is what hinders her from her path to maturity. Rebecca on the other hand follow a set path to adulthood, one which Moretti would describe as the classification principle (7). While Enid fails to do so, the character of Rebecca follows the criteria for a Bildungsroman. Rebecca starts out feeling unable to conform to society, and is as lost in her wanderings as Enid. But by the end of the novel, she is the character that ends
up having integrated herself in the adult world, by finding a job (114), and dating somebody (106). Enid on the other hand is stuck in her development of maturity, as she is constantly occupied with investigating her options.

The discovery of just how limited their options are becomes central in their journey to maturity. What Enid finds out, and what eventually makes her get on a bus going nowhere, is that there is just one road available for her to travel. To exist in her environment, not as an outcast but as a well-established member of society, she needs to conform. Enid is fascinated by those who do not conform. For example, the allegedly satanist couple she come across at a restaurant (51), whose appearance is not so different from any other middle-aged couple, but Enid spots the subtle signs of satanism (the husband’s goatee, the need to use an umbrella on sunny days) and believes that in them she has found some allies. In her first encounter with them it is unclear at first whether she finds them admirable or laughable. But as they eventually stop visiting the restaurant -that has gotten more popular during the course of the summer- Enid expresses her disappointment: “They’ll never come back here now, with all these fucking assholes…” (102), a sign of her empathy towards those who cannot or will not conform.

The limited ways in which one is able to conform as a teenage girl is what causes Enid to feel alienated. If she chooses to stay in her hometown, she can only aspire to work at one of multiple service-jobs that are available, and without Rebecca knowing, she applies to college in order to create a different life for herself. When she finds out that she is rejected she shuts down. Pamela Thurschwell describe in her article “The Ghost Worlds of Modern Adolescence” how the format of the graphic novel helps to portray Enid’s depression: “the panels contain fewer and fewer words. Though she has spent most of the story talking over the quieter Becky, Enid seems to be fading into a ghostly silence” (156). For Enid, college
was her means of escaping or at least postponing her conforming. That she hid her application plans to Rebecca could be interpreted as her way of feeling ashamed for leaving her friend behind.

Enid finds out that the road to adulthood looks the same for everybody. One of her former acquaintances, John Crowley, a former anarchist and non-conformer, sees Enid going through a punk rock phase and tells her that:

I can’t listen to that shit anymore! I’ve been going to business school. I’m gonna be a big-ass corporate fuck!

I’m gonna work for ten years, fuck things up from the inside as much as I can, and then retire when I’m thirty-five! That’s the way to be subversive!(62)

However rebellious John seems to appear, the fact that he needs to graduate business school and spend 10 years working for a company in order to be subversive, or to find freedom, is a sign of how limited everybody is.

As a flâneur, she is depressed by the fact that her joyous inspections of town and its people are simply a passing of time before she has to adapt to an adult way of living her life. Just as Holden Caulfield enjoys exploring what he would describe as the perverse side of adulthood, the prostitute, Enid also enjoys exploring the city’s shadier parts. She and Rebecca have long wanted to visit the town’s adult store “Adams II”. She run across their friend Josh and begs him: “Please Josh… Becky and I are dying to go in there, but we can’t get any boys to take us… Please… think of it as a science experiment…” (71). Holden feels free to investigate the city by himself, Enid cannot. To be able to enter the adult store she feels the need to be assisted by a man, and this would be to ensure her safety from the “creeps” at the store (p. 72). Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall argue in their article “Imagining the woman as flâneur” that women are victims of being objectified by men as they enter the
public domain (12). Women can however adapt the role of flâneurs, and therefore have access to public space, just as long as they enter it with the intent of acting independent (13). Enid ends up lending money from Josh to buy a leather mask that she wears in public, both to impress and shock Rebecca. This shows that although she has access to a space with explicit sexual content, she manages to re-interpret the sexual part of that experience and turns it into a rebellious act. Laura Canis and Paul Canis argue in their text “Jean Paul Sartre meets Enid Coleslaw” that the buying and wearing of the leather mask is a sign of Enid’s unique way of viewing the mask not just as pornographic, but as art or an accessory like any other (147). In other words, Canis and Canis view the way Enid is treating her bought item as an act of empowerment. However, it needs to be taken into consideration that Enid may not feel comfortable exploring a form of aggressive, masculine sexuality in this manner, and that is why she uses it like a child who is dressing up as something scary.

In the female Bildungsroman, women are supposed to get their education and their knowledge of the world with the guidance from men. In *Jane Eyre* and *The Bell Jar*, that assistance is supposed to come from husbands. Enid is not married, but still has to have Josh guide her. Josh has no experience, as he supposedly has no interest in the adult store (71), but his presence is making sure that Enid gets to explore this particular area. The adult store is coded as male territory, and Enid is an intruder. Therefore she cannot enter this area without a male ally. In relation to the man, she is still a child. The wearing of the mask becomes a sign of a child using a prop, not an adult exploring her sexuality.

The flâneur has the privilege of time and money, and it would be equally truthful to state that Enid does too, as it would be to say that she has neither. Enid comes from a privileged background in the sense that she is from a middleclass family and that she has been able to graduate high school. Arguably, the only one standing in the way of her
becoming an adult is herself. She and Rebecca have time as well, and they are always spending their time together drifting around. One example of this is the restaurant Hubba Hubba, which they frequently visit. Hubba Hubba markets itself as The Original 1950’s Diner, and it becomes their favorite place to hang out. The reason that they like the restaurant is because the restaurant is selling the customer the concept of what a kitsch 50’s diner would look like, but nothing in it resonates with that era. They bring their mutual friend Josh with them and he cannot understand their enthusiasm, asking: “Aren’t there hundreds of places like this?” to which Enid replies “Not hardly! This is the Mona Lisa of the bad, fake diners!” (81). To Enid, the diner that appears to be unoriginal becomes authentic because it fails to conform. The menu for example is a mix of traditional fast food and Italian cuisine (78), which does not resonate with what is associated with fast food culture of the 1950's. Enid states: “Could they possibly be more clueless? I’m so happy we’re here!” (77). It is possible that Enid finds pleasure in knowing that authenticity can be achieved without having to live in what she perceives as a more authentic time than her own.

The amount of time is seemingly endless, which makes it easy for Enid to indulge in her research of the town and its people. Simultaneously, Rebecca is internally investigating a different path. She is not considering a higher education, which would prolong her journey together with Enid. At the beginning of summer, the two girls view themselves as a team, and they are both flâneurs observing the others in the town. But the truth is that Enid is the true flâneur, as she is not on a destined path. The realization that they have been walking in different directions all along is a major reason why they drift apart as friends. One example of this is when Rebecca finds out that Enid is serious in her attempt of getting into Strathmore University. At first she is upset that Enid has not been honest towards her, and they start to argue (95), but some days afterwards she suggests that she could move with Enid (109). Enid
is not overly enthusiastic and Rebecca can tell, so they drop the subject. The topic comes up again and Enid reassures her that she wants her to come with her, but Rebecca replies: “Well, maybe I don’t! I don’t want to go anywhere or do anything… I just want it to be like it was in high school!” and Enid replies “I guess that’s the problem… I feel like I want to become a totally different person” (112). At the end of the novel Enid sees Rebecca working at a bagel shop, one of the many service-jobs available for young people, and outside the windows of the store Enid leaves her with the words: “You’ve grown into a very beautiful young woman” (118). This statement expresses Enid own failure at becoming something other than a lost teenager, and in the following last three panels of the novel we see her boarding a bus travelling an out-of-service route. The meaning of this ending has been interpreted in many different ways, one theory being that Enid commits suicide (Clowes and Zwigoff). Regardless, the ending opens up for the possibility that her journey continues, which also symbolizes the flâneur in Enid who refuses to cease wandering.

Both Enid and Holden's stories fail to become true Bildungsromane because as they occupy themselves with flâneuring, they are incapable of growing up. Both characters struggle with the paradox of youth: that youth is connected to modernity which means that it is ever-changing, but that it also has a fixed form because it is the opposite of maturity. For them it means that they are stuck in their youth, making it possible for them to procrastinate, and impossible for them to grow up. The concept of modernity is strongly related to the Modernist genre and its style of portraying characters in an urban environment, and depicts how the protagonist develop and view his or herself in contrast to the city and its people. The cities portrayed in both novels tells the reader about how Enid and Holden view not only themselves but also the world.
Holden is stuck in time, unable to change because he fears that his maturation will destroy his innocence. Enid is unable to make a move because she is not certain of which route she must choose. Her choice become that of the runaway. The reader is not certain of where she will end up, and therefore her flâneuring is endless. Holden on the other hand is stuck in one place. He enters an institution where he is resting and receiving therapy, and he is also planning, although vaguely, to go back to school. But he still keeps his distance. He is not interested in discussing his future with the reader, or his therapist (230). At first glance, Enid’s future seems less optimistic, as the reader is left with the open ending in which she simply disappears. However, her route is unknown, and in that uncertainty there still lies the potential possibility for her to find her way. Holden who appears to have a set path towards adulthood is still not showing any signs of devotion towards maturing.

Conclusion

Enid and Holden are two very similar literary characters, despite the obvious differences between them. Holden is a teenage boy coming from a wealthy background living in the metropolis of New York. He is constantly finding himself in conflict with other people and questioning their intentions. Holden is traumatized by his little brother’s death, and equate adulthood with corruption and the loss of innocence. Enid is a teenage girl living in a small unnamed town somewhere in America. She is actively distancing herself from other people whom she views as boring, and she equates adulthood with conforming to society’s view of how she should live. What they have in common is their fascination with observing other people and their actions. Both novels could be blamed for “lacking plot”, as the stories are mainly based on these observations, and the reader gets to know Holden and Enid by viewing them reviewing other people.
Both novels deal with the topic of maturation, and shows how both Enid and Holden fail to mature. Their failure to mature is also a sign of them failing to conform to society.

Youth is without a doubt a time meant for questioning norms set by the adult world, a time to withhold maturation and for experimenting. But what causes Enid and Holden to fail to mature is that they refuse to give up on that youth. By adopting the role of modern flâneurs they simply become bystanders while the rest of their peers progress and find their way into adulthood.
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