

76 QUOTATIONS



J. D. Salinger

(1919-2010)

J.D. Salinger wrote *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), one of the most popular young adult novels in history, in the idiom of an adolescent like *Huckleberry Finn* but simple, sheltered and sentimental--not transcending the adolescent perspective as Twain does. Salinger was unable to meet expectations after his initial great success. His spirituality and his limited talent drove him into seclusion as one of the legendary recluses in American literary history, along with Emily Dickinson, Robinson Jeffers, and Thomas Pynchon. *Catcher* prefigured the countercultural revolution to come in the 1960s and will always appeal to the rebellious sensibilities of teenagers. Salinger also wrote several distinguished minor short stories, in particular "Uncle Wiggley in Connecticut." These quotations reflect the preppy upper-class background of Salinger and make evident why he was so successful at rendering the perspective of an adolescent.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, parents, God, spirituality, logic and intellect, education, *Catcher in the Rye*, being an artist, poets, androgyny, bohemian conformity, truth, passivity, disgust, lying, alienation, loneliness, money, girl cities, good looks, girls, sex, anxiety and cowardice, maturation, advice, death:

YOUTH

The Great Gatsby... was my *Tom Sawyer* when I was twelve.

PARENTS

You can hit my father over the head with a chair and he won't wake up, but my mother, all you have to do to my mother is cough somewhere in Siberia and she'll hear you.

Mothers are all slightly insane.

GOD

I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up, and all, Teddy said. It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was a tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I

saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean.

He had a theory, Walt did, that the religious life, and all the agony that goes with it, is just something God sics on people who have the gall to accuse him of having created an ugly world.

If I were God, I certainly wouldn't want people to love me sentimentally. It's too unreliable.

Sally said I was a sacrilegious atheist. I probably am.

I'm sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible.

SPIRITUALITY

It's very hard to meditate and live a spiritual life in America. People think you're a freak if you try to.

LOGIC AND INTELLECT

You know that apple Adam ate in the Garden of Eden, referred to in the Bible? You know what was in that apple? Logic. Logic and intellectual stuff. That was all that was in it. So—this is my point—what you have to do is vomit it up if you want to see things as they really are.

You asked me how I get out of the finite dimensions when I feel like it. I certainly don't use logic when I do it. Logic's the first thing you have to get rid of.

It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it.

How do you know you're going to do something, until you do it?

All morons hate it when you call them a moron.

Get your dirty stinking moron knees off my chest.

EDUCATION

I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot.

In every school I've been to, all the athletic bastards stick together.

You never even hear any hints dropped on a campus that wisdom is supposed to be the goal of knowledge.

All you have to do is say something nobody understands and they'll do practically anything you want.

I don't know what good it is to know so much and be smart as whips and all if it doesn't make you happy.

I know more damn perverts, at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they're always being pervery when I'm around.

But I do say that educated and scholarly men, if they're brilliant and creative to begin with—which, unfortunately, is rarely the case—tend to leave infinitely more valuable records behind them than men do who are merely brilliant and creative. They tend to express themselves more clearly, and they usually have a passion for following their thoughts through to the end.

Something else an academic education will do for you. If you go along with it any considerable distance, it will begin to give you an idea of what size mind you have.

Catcher in the Rye (1951)

I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all... 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—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye.

BEING AN ARTIST

I'm known as a strange, aloof kind of man. But all I'm doing is trying to protect myself and my work.

If I were a piano player, I'd play it in the goddam closet.

I write just for myself and my own pleasure.

When was writing ever your profession? It's never been anything but your religion.

An artist's only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and on his own terms, not anyone else's.

I say that the true artist-seer, the heavenly fool who can and does produce beauty, is mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples, the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred human conscience.

If you do something too good, then, after awhile, if you don't watch it, you start showing off and then you're not as good any more.

The worst thing that being an artist could do to you would be that it would make you slightly unhappy constantly.

POETS

Poets are always taking the weather so personally. They're always sticking their emotions in things that have no emotions.

ANDROGYNY

I do very emphatically believe there is an enormous amount of the androgynous in any all-or-nothing prose writer, or even a would-be one.

BOHEMIAN CONFORMITY

And the worst part is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way.

A community of seriously hip observers is a scary and depressing thing.

I'm sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody.

TRUTH

It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true.

The goddamn movies. They can ruin you. I'm not kidding.

If I ever sat behind myself in a movie...I'd probably lean over and tell myself to please shut up.

PASSIVITY

I thought what I'd do was I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes.

Why the hell don'tcha, instead of keep saying it?

DISGUST

I have scars on my hands from touching certain people.

That guy Morrow was about as sensitive as a goddamn toilet seat.

I hate actors. They never act like people. They just think they do.

You'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior.

You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any.... When you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write "Fuck you" right under your nose.

He was one of those guys that think they're being a pansy if they don't break around forty of your fingers when they shake hands with you. God I hate that stuff.

He once told Allie and I that if he's had to shoot anybody, he wouldn't have known which direction to shoot in. He said the Army was practically as full of bastards as the Nazis were.

LYING

I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life.

I'm always saying "Glad to've met you" to somebody I'm not at all glad I met.

People never believe you.

ALIENATION

Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.

Almost every time somebody gives me a present, it ends up making me sad.

I am kind of paranoid in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy.

LONELINESS

I'm sick of just liking people. I wish to God I could meet somebody I could respect.

MONEY

It's really hard to be roommates with people if your suitcases are much better than theirs.

Goddamn money. It always ends up making you blue as hell.

GIRL CITIES

Probably for every man there is at least one city that sooner or later turns into a girl.

GOOD LOOKS

If a girl looks swell when she meets you, who gives a damn if she's late?

I wouldn't exactly describe her as strictly beautiful. She knocked me out, though.

GIRLS

That's the thing about girls. Every time they do something pretty...you fall half in love with them, and then you never know where the hell you are.

I mean they don't seem able to love us just the way we are. They don't seem able to love us unless they can keep changing us a little bit. They love their reasons for loving us almost as much as they love us, and most of the time more.

She worries over the way her love for me comes and goes, appears and disappears. She doubts its reality simply because it isn't as steadily pleasurable as a kitten.

Most girls if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand dies on you, or else they think they have to keep moving their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they'd bore you or something.

I used to think she was quite intelligent, in my stupidity. The reason I did was because she knew quite a lot about the theater and plays and literature and all that stuff. If somebody knows quite a lot about all those things, it takes you quite a while to find out whether they're really stupid or not.

She wrote to him fairly regularly, from a paradise of triple exclamation points and inaccurate observations.

SEX

I mean most girls are so dumb and all. After you neck them for a while, you can really watch them losing their brains. You take a girl when she really gets passionate, she just hasn't any brains.

Sex is something I really don't understand too hot. You never know where you are. I keep making up these sex rules for myself, and then I break them right away.

In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw.

ANXIETY AND COWARDICE

When I really worry about something, I don't just fool around. I even have to go to the bathroom when I worry about something. Only, I don't go. I'm too worried to go.

It's no fun to be yellow.

MATURATION

In the first place, you're way off when you start railing at things and people instead of at yourself.

ADVICE

Know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly.

DEATH

I hope to hell that when I do die somebody has the sense to just dump me in the river or something. Anything except sticking me in a goddamn cemetery. People coming and putting a bunch of flowers on your stomach on Sunday, and all that crap. Who wants flowers when you're dead?

People always clap for the wrong reasons.

