

Title: F. M. Dostoevsky and J. D. Salinger
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J. D. Salinger is best known for his first and only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). It was an immediate popular success and has been translated into most of the world's major languages. The work was translated into Russian by Rita Rait-Kovaleva in 1960 as *Nad propast'iu vo rzhi*; it was retranslated by Maksim Nemtsov in 2008 under the new title *Lovets na khlebnom pole*. It has clearly achieved classic status and has even been described as “a fact in Russian literature.”

In the summer of 1951 at the time of its publication, in reply to an interviewer's question about his literary influences, Salinger declared:

A writer, when he's asked to discuss his craft, ought to get up and call out in a loud voice just the names of the writers he loves. I love ... **Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky**....

Of these three, Dostoevsky certainly exerted the major influence. Not only does Salinger quote directly from *The Brothers Karamazov* in two of his short stories, but also Dostoevsky's presence is apparent in Salinger's novel. Critics have argued as to which of Dostoevsky's major works exerted the greatest influence.

In 1978 Lilian Furst made a strong case for *Notes from Underground*. She highlighted the narrative structure; the ambivalence between communication and non-communication; the constant search for certainty and recurrent preoccupation with the attainment of truth; and the tendency to escape into fantasies.

In 1983 Horst-Jürgen Gerigk argued that *Podrostok* anticipated *Catcher* in both content and form, based on numerous similarities between the works including the heroes' innocence regarding sexuality, their strained relationship with their parents, their affection for their younger sisters, and the realistic, adolescent diction and tone.

Lastly in 1987 Donald Fiene wrote a response in which he characterized Gerigk's contribution as “both brilliant and mistaken,” brilliant because it pointed to the impact of Dostoevsky's novels, and mistaken because he insisted on *The Adolescent* as the primary source. Fiene argues that it was Dostoevsky's final novel that exerted the greatest influence on Salinger's novel.

My paper will review all the evidence and make the case that each of the three Russian novels cited above could well have served as Salinger's source, but ultimately that question cannot be resolved. What is far more important to scholarship is the nature of Dostoevsky's overall impact on Salinger's novel, in particular, on the hero's quest for meaning in the face of a false, hypocritical, “phony” world. In addition, Dostoevsky's focus on the theme of children as innocent sufferers and victims, his emphasis on faith as the agent of salvation, and his use of religious symbols and motifs, are all combined in *Catcher* as he portrays his American adolescent physically and spiritually adrift in New York. Finally, I will discuss the image of the *yurodivy* or “holy fool” and the theme of “death and resurrection” as these motifs are exploited first in Dostoevsky's fiction and then in *Catcher*. I conclude that of the long list of European writers cited by Salinger, F. M. Dostoevsky's impact was by far the most significant and long lasting.