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Replaying Adolescence: Temporality and Recurrence in *Life is Strange* and *The Catcher in the Rye*

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Abstract
This article examines how J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Dontnod Entertainment's *Life is Strange* (2015) represent adolescence as a struggle with time – its repetitions, trepidations, and limits. Both works figure youth as recursive rather than linear, where efforts to preserve or repair what is lost generate further entanglement. Through close reading and formal analysis, the essay argues that *Catcher* renders adolescence as narrative recursion – Holden Caulfield's circling voice and guarded address – while *Life is Strange* translates that structure into a playable system of rewinds, revisions, and consequences. In each, interiority is bound to care: attempts to protect others expose the costs of intervention. Tracing how repetition shifts from symptom to structure, the article shows how postwar preoccupations with memory and mastery re-emerge in digital storytelling, making adolescence a site of temporal pressure whose rehearsals of agency cannot secure stability.

Keywords: Adolescence, Temporality, Repetition, Interiority, Narrative Games, J D. Salinger, *Life is Strange*

Introduction

J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and developer Dontnod Entertainment's *Life is Strange* (Square Enix, 2015) are separated by more than half a century, yet both render adolescence as a struggle against time itself. Each transforms the wish to preserve, rewind, or repair into a formal principle: the novel through a narration that circles without closure,

the game through loops of choice and consequence. In each case, the fantasy of guardianship falters; the effort to protect others becomes the very mechanism by which harm repeats. This article argues that the two works converge in their treatment of adolescence as a state of recurrence rather than progression, and that the formal grammar of repetition, whether verbal or procedural, constitutes the key to understanding how both imagine care, guilt, and responsibility.

Recent work in game and literary studies suggests that these media are not opposites but extensions of a shared cultural logic. From the postmodern novels of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and Gilbert Sorrentino to the choice-driven narratives of contemporary adventure games, American storytelling has long been shaped by play, chance, and recursive design (Kuehl; Detweiler; Hayot; Jenkins; Aarseth; Juul).[1] Scholars such as Eric Hayot and Laura St-Martin have shown that the novel and the video game participate in the same historical continuum of narrative experiment: both deploy loops, branches, and constraints to stage moral and emotional dilemmas.[2] What distinguishes the video-game form is not its opposition to literature but its materialisation of literary structures in procedural terms. *Life is Strange* inherits this ludic lineage, translating the recursive voice of the twentieth-century novel into a system that the player must inhabit. Where Holden Caulfield's narration replays loss without closure, Max Caulfield's rewinds simulate control while multiplying the outcomes they mean to contain. In each case, adolescence becomes a site of temporal pressure: a rehearsal of agency whose repetitions cannot secure stability.

At the heart of this comparison lies the question of temporality. In Salinger's post-war fiction, repetition gives shape to loss: Holden's halting idiom, with its "and all"s and self-corrections, holds grief in motion rather than letting it end. In *Life is Strange*, repetition becomes mechanical, as well as emotional. The player's ability to rewind and replay appears to offer the upper hand, yet each return unsettles what has already been repaired and reshapes the world around it. Both works, therefore, dramatize the tension between preservation and change, between the desire to hold time still and the recognition that interference itself inflicts loss. By foregrounding this shared structure from the outset,

the present study reads *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Life is Strange* not as an instance of literary adaptation but as parallel responses to the same paradox of care; namely, that the effort to protect others inevitably exposes their vulnerability and one's own limits.

Methodologically, this study combines literary close reading with formal analysis of interactive systems. It first examines Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* to show how grief, narration, and the desire to preserve the past generate a pattern of return that renders adolescence a suspended, recursive state. It then turns to *Life is Strange* as a procedural analogue, analysing how the capacity to rewind satisfies the adolescent wish to undo harm while confronting players with the consequences of intervention. Read together, both works depict adolescence as the moment when care meets its limits, when the wish to protect others gives way to the recognition that loss and change cannot be undone. The continuity between Salinger's post-war novel and a twenty-first-century video game suggests not only that adolescence remains the lens through which American culture rehearses its anxieties about time and responsibility, but also that new media inherit literature's unresolved desire to master them. In tracing how that desire endures, these works reveal that to grow up – in art as in life – is to learn that preservation and change are inseparable.

The Catcher in the Rye

Sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates from a California sanatorium, recovering from "this madman stuff that happened . . . just before [he] got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy" (Salinger 1). From the first lines, the voice reads less as confession than containment, talk used to keep pain at bay. The few days he recounts in New York after his expulsion from Pencey (bars, hotel corridors, the Museum of Natural History, and a final meeting with his sister, Phoebe) are slight as events yet heavy in the telling. His sentences loop and qualify, filling silence with detours that defer what is never said outright: his younger brother Allie is dead. Every hesitation and self-correction emphasises that absence. As Peter J. Seng observes, the frame makes the monologue read "like an edited psychoanalysis," the rambling voice both symptom and treatment

(205). John Seelye nuances the point: without turning Holden into a sociological type, he hears in the idiom a mid-century urban register, a hard-boiled, movie-taught first person and the posture of the loner, that lends the evasions their conspicuousness (26).[3] The historical tint sharpens the tone without explaining it away; the book's adolescence is neither timeless nor simply a transcript of its decade, but a voice pitched between private grief and the city's language.

Holden speaks as someone hedging against exposure. His narration advances through qualifications and retreats, "and all," "or something," "if you want to know the truth," phrases that loosen meaning even as they simulate candour. As Donald Costello notes, these habitual turns produce "ease and informality" as well as "looseness and lack of precision" (173). They make him sound open while keeping him guarded, fluent in the rhetoric of avoidance. Each sentence feels provisional, as though finishing a thought might fix it in a way he cannot bear. That roundaboutness shapes both his grief and his storytelling: he moves continually around what hurts, measuring the boundary of feeling without naming it. When he remembers the night Allie died, breaking "all the windows in the garage" (Salinger 40) and sleeping there, the gesture reads as an early version of the same impulse: grief displaced into action so that feeling need not be pronounced. The novel scales that pattern up: encounter after encounter begins as outreach and ends in retreat, a conversation cut short before it can become confession.

This caution extends to how Holden addresses readers. The novel's opening line, "If you really want to hear about it," is less an invitation than a pre-emptive shrug: it imagines an indifferent listener and lowers the stakes before anything risky is said. The same pattern plays out in his encounters: polite evasions with Mr Spencer, practised warmth with the nuns, an impulsive escape fantasy with Sally that collapses into embarrassment. Fred H. Marcus usefully describes the novel as trying to "build bridges" out of isolation, and Holden's second-person tics ("You should've been there," "You would've liked it") look like such bridges (4). But they are one-way crossings. The phrases manufacture a safe intimacy: they recruit the reader as a sympathetic confidant on terms Holden controls, offering the comfort of being understood without the exposure

that real dialogue would require. Joyce Rowe's reading clarifies how the book's language works. In a culture where sincerity is often a style to be worn, Holden's address functions like proof of authenticity (i.e., it sounds direct, even confessional), yet it also keeps him insulated (Rowe 82-3). We are brought close enough to nod along, not close enough to answer back. The result is a paradoxically self-protective bond: the talk relieves loneliness by staging connection, even as its form ensures that nothing reciprocal can happen.

Place and memory are caught in the same defensive impulse. The Museum of Natural History embodies the order Holden longs for (e.g., "everything always stay[ing] right where it was" [Salinger 131]), a world where time can be studied without being suffered. Yet when he reaches the steps, he balks: "all of a sudden I wouldn't have gone inside for a million bucks" (132). The refusal preserves the illusion of stasis while avoiding the proof of change. Hence the significance of the recurring 'Fuck you' graffiti. At first, the words appear as schoolyard scrawl; later, they surface on a wall inside the museum and, most piercingly, in the hush of the Egyptian tomb. Holden tries to rub one out with his hand, but the marks keep returning, and he finally imagines the phrase engraved on his own gravestone (219). Rowe's reading clarifies their significance: the profane intrusion into sanctuaries (e.g., classroom, museum, tomb) signals a public world that cannot be kept outside the places he wants to seal (79). The phrase is not merely vulgar; it announces the impossibility of cordoning off innocence from sexuality, time, and other people. Sanctuaries can be admired from the threshold and idealised but not kept pure.

"Phoniness" emerges from the same defensive logic. Holden's denunciations of actors, teachers, and shallow talk register a wish to preserve authenticity against what he perceives as the corrosion of performance and time. Yet the more he protests, the more his voice becomes part of the performance he condemns. Seng writes that Holden's world is defined by immaturity, an inability to accept that innocence cannot survive unchanged within adult life (206). David Galloway places the contradiction in a modernist frame: values appear "fragmentary, distorted, and absurd" (204), frustrating any search for unity. Rowe's

account of the postwar climate clarifies the point: institutional adulthood speaks in the idiom of adjustment, tailoring sincerity to fit (90). Mr Antolini's counsel makes that logic explicit. He urges Holden that "once you have a fair idea where you want to go, your first move will be to apply yourself in school. You'll have to. You're a student – whether the idea appeals to you or not" (Salinger 203), and he extends the point with a sartorial figure: education will reveal "what size mind you have. What it'll fit and, maybe, what it won't. . . . You'll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly" (205). The metaphor imagines thought as clothing cut to a prescribed pattern, so that maturity looks less like growth than like learning to wear what is ready-made. Holden recognises the constraint and recoils. His resistance, accordingly, remains stylistic: a posture and a voice that refuse the fitting, even as that refusal deepens his isolation.

Peter Shaw's psychological emphasis complements these social and stylistic accounts. He argues that the novel stages a familiar adolescent bind: mourning (for Allie, and for childhood itself) alongside a stalled capacity for being-in-love. The book's rituals of postponement are not only evasions; they are the strategies of a young person who needs time he cannot find. Hence the appeal of the museum's dioramas and the hush of the tomb (i.e., architectures of suspension that let Holden contemplate time without becoming subject to it). When the profanity appears even there, the effect is chastening: the world will not stay sealed. Its intrusion breaks the spell of suspension and forces him back into time. Seen in this light, the novel's swing between keen moral perception (the weeping moviegoer who neglects her child) and petty irritability (in cabs, at Brooks, in elevators) is not a defect of construction but a feature of adolescence under strain.[4]

The catcher fantasy typifies these pressures. Misremembering Robert Burns's lyric as "If a body *catch* a body . . .," Holden converts a scene of meeting ("meet . . . kiss") into a scene of rescue.[5] As Duane Edwards and Peter Shaw both suggest, the slip fuses an impossible wish to undo Allie's death with a defence against sexual knowledge that feels threatening (Edwards 555-56; Shaw 103-05). Care becomes control: to protect the innocent, one must stop time at the brink. The fantasy's allure

also explains Holden's fondness for his crush Jane Gallagher's habit of keeping her "kings in the back row" in checkers: a tiny tableau of delay he can admire without risking movement.[6] The book's many pratfalls manifest what the fantasy fears: "falling" into love, into time, into a life where risk cannot be written out of the rules.

The ending offers the novel's most persuasive correction to that dream. After quarrelling with Phoebe and refusing to let her run away with him, Holden takes her to the park and stands in the rain as she rides the carousel. "All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring," he notes, "and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab the gold ring, you have to let them do it. . . . If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (Salinger 227). Where the rye-field imagined protection as prevention, this scene reconceives care as permission, allowing for risk because growth requires it. As he sits "soaking wet," his red hunting hat providing "quite a lot of protection," the happiness he describes is fragile but real: "I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy" (228-29). The rain that earlier seemed punitive (his hand "always hurts when it rains," a relic of the night he smashed the garage windows) now feels cleansing. The same weather that exposed his wound now eases it.

The carousel clarifies how *Catcher* figures adolescence against the pressure of inevitability. Throughout, Holden's strategies for holding time back (i.e., verbal deferral, vitrine spaces, moral policing) aim at preventive arrest; they insulate the present rather than change it. The closing scene reframes that mission. Protection becomes non-preventive vigilance: to care is to accept exposure, to allow the risky reach for the ring, and to acknowledge irreversibility as the condition of relation. In this light, the novel locates maturation at the limit of control. Adolescence is not the mastery of outcomes but the recalibration of agency to what cannot be undone, a shift from insulating the present to bearing it.

The analysis that follows turns to a work in which the attempt to resist inevitability is specified differently: not as rhetorical or spatial insulation, but as an operative manipulation of sequence. Where Holden's means are buffers, the next *interactive* text furnishes a technology for

temporal resistance. The question, then, is how the adolescent project of holding time back changes when the means shift from delaying the present to revising it.

Life is Strange

Released in five episodic instalments, *Life is Strange* participates in the recent wave of narrative adventure games where dialogue choices and player decisions steer events. Set in the fictional Oregon town of Arcadia Bay, it renders guardianship, memory, and loss in playable form. The story opens when eighteen-year-old Max Caulfield, a photography student newly returned to Blackwell Academy, discovers she can rewind time after witnessing her childhood friend Chloe Price being shot in a school bathroom (Fig. 1). By reversing time, Max prevents Chloe's death, and the two renew their bond while investigating the disappearance of their classmate Rachel Amber. From the outset, the power to reverse time and undo mistakes is keyed to protection: Max deploys it to keep Chloe from harm, to repair a friendship that had drifted, and to resist the prospect of losing her again.

Fig. 1: *Life is Strange* (Square Enix, 2015): Max Caulfield rewinds time on the Blackwell campus. The spiral HUD (top left) and smeared doubles visualise the short-range return that preserves her knowledge while resetting the scene.

This determination to safeguard Chloe propels the narrative into escalating crises. Each intervention produces unanticipated effects, from strained relations with friends and teachers to premonitions that threaten Arcadia Bay itself. The storm that grows over the town is gradually revealed as the residue of repeated attempts to hold a single life in place, a pattern that, as Luis de Miranda argues, turns time manipulation into a running meditation on the impossibility of escaping consequence (830). Alternate timelines intensify the dilemma. Most striking is the branch in which Max saves Chloe's father William from a fatal car accident, a well-intentioned change that produces a present in which Chloe is catastrophically injured and ultimately begs for release. The finale condenses these pressures into a decision with no painless answer: rewind to the bathroom and allow Chloe to die, preventing devastation, or keep her alive and accept the town's destruction. The design refuses the dream of a perfect rescue; preservation at one point of the web entails rupture elsewhere.

Repetition is gaming's grammar; however, here it is redeployed. As Christopher Hanson notes, video games have long relied on failure, restart, and replay as engines of learning and progress, an economy of return that Bruce Kawin long ago described in narrative terms as repetition that never quite repeats (Hanson 197).[7] *Life is Strange* inverts that expectation. The short-range rewind replays the last few minutes while preserving what the player has learned; more rarely, Max can 'focus' on a photograph to travel back to the instant it was taken, a set-piece ability used only a handful of times (for example, to revisit her childhood and avert William's accident, and later to return to her classroom selfie before the climax) in order to rewrite longer stretches of the timeline. These affordances resemble the familiar loop of trial and error, yet the loop does not accumulate mastery. Information carries over, but bodies and relationships must be re-lived, and each revision leaves residue. Armin Lippitz describes the effect as a kind of "elasticity": agency is stretched by revision and then snaps back as consequence (64). James Walters's account of repetition helps clarify why this feels different from simple do-overs: returns are "near-repetitions," patterned recurrences coupled to modulation, so that each pass arrives altered by context and

memory (12). Max's resets behave less like loops than variations on a theme; meaning intensifies because recurrence is sutured to change, not despite it.

Interface cues make this logic explicit. When a decision is locked in, a small butterfly icon appears with the message "This action will have consequences." Holger Pötzsch and Agata Waszkiewicz read this prompt as more than a flourish: it disciplines choice by converting the butterfly into a record of obligation, ensuring that even minor gestures (watering a plant, signing a petition) are marked for possible return (Pötzsch and Waszkiewicz). Walters's broader claim about repetition as a compositional resource rather than mere redundancy aligns with this architecture: the game archives choices so that later passes on the material can "work them through," binding recurrence to reflection rather than erasure (37). End-of-episode statistics extend the pressure into a social register. A summary screen presents each major decision alongside a global percentage, situating private choices within a collective archive (Fig. 2). Walters's account of repetition's social valence (i.e., how returns externalise private viewing into shared comparison) helps explain the effect: the replay becomes legible not just as personal correction but as one path within a population of returns (65).

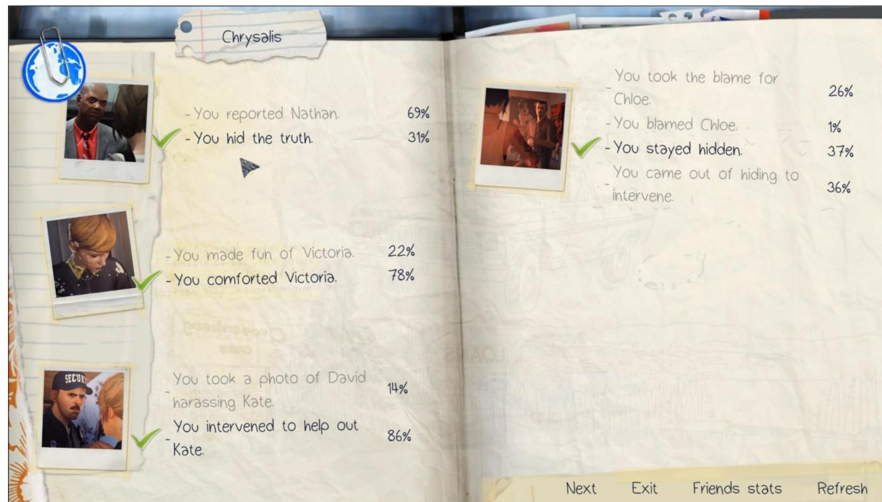

Fig. 2: End-of-episode statistics screen from *Life is Strange*: Episode 1 – Chrysalis (Square Enix, 2015). Player choices are displayed alongside global percentages, situating individual actions within a collective field of comparison.

The system also tempts a managed form of concern. An early dorm-room sequence illustrates this succinctly: in Dana Ward's room, a discarded pregnancy test can be found; if Max snoops and comments, Dana reacts with anger and shuts down. A quick rewind erases the intrusion while preserving the knowledge, letting Max steer the ensuing conversation toward seemingly tactful support (Dana later acknowledges the situation and the likely father). As Markus Schulzke argues, scenes of this kind cultivate moral exploration: players test alternative courses of action (sometimes within a single scene, sometimes across replays) and evaluate their implications, treating the scenario as a thought experiment rather than a quest for one optimal outcome (90). Yet the scene also intimates another path: attentive reading of the room (pamphlets and other cues in plain view) could have led to the same understanding without violating trust. The mechanic thereby stages the risk of instrumental care, showing how the effort to protect can turn into control, and how the attempt to perfect concern by revision is itself a kind of trespass.

The rooftop sequence in Episode 2 removes the safety net of revision altogether. After sustained bullying, a classmate stands on a campus roof, ready to jump. This is the moment when temporal manipulation seems most necessary; instead, the power fails. No rewind is possible. The exchange that follows depends entirely on earlier attentiveness; for example, whether Max visited her beforehand, respected her convictions, and listened carefully (Fig. 3). Prior actions unlock dialogue that can register real understanding, while neglect leaves only brittle appeals. Mechanically, it is a dialogue tree without retries; thematically, it asserts that responsibility accrues over time and cannot be manufactured at the brink. In Kawin's terms, the work briefly suspends the "near-repetition" (7) resource it has taught the player to expect, forcing the scene to resolve without compositional return; consequence is relocated from the spectacular to the habitual, from a last-second rescue to the slow work of attention.

Rachel Amber is the absent centre that organises the game's search. For most of the story she is an image before a person (a missing-poster, photographs in other people's rooms, rumours in texts) and that absence gives shape to everyone else: Chloe's grief and bravado, campus

gossip, and the influence of the Prescott family (Blackwell's principal benefactors, whose wealth and protection surround antagonist Nathan and help a culture of impunity take root), as well as Max's belated attachments. Photography ties these threads together. In ordinary use, a photograph presents itself as witness: a mechanical imprint of a moment already past, keeping a face visible precisely because the moment is gone. *Life is Strange* unsettles that assumption. Photographs also become tools; by "focusing" on an image, Max can step back into the instant it was taken. The past is treated not as a sealed record but as a scene that can be re-entered. Each return alters what the image means: the picture looks the same, but it carries different knowledge, different risks, and different obligations. The result is a present thick with earlier frames; that is, not nostalgia, but a system that continually drags past images forward, so that every new attempt at correction is shadowed by the prior versions of the moment it tries to fix.

Fig. 3: *Life is Strange* (Square Enix, 2015), Episode 2 "Out of Time": Kate Marsh on the Blackwell rooftop. With rewind disabled, the dialogue UI tests accumulated care – earlier attentiveness unlocks persuasive lines and determines whether Kate steps down.

Knowledge in *Life is Strange*, moreover, is asymmetrical. When Max rewinds, only she retains her memory; everyone else returns to their pre-rewind state. That epistemic surplus makes second passes smoother (kinder phrasing, cannier choices) but it cannot be shared, because the

very condition of that tact is an exemption from the time others lived. The result is a paradox: the power that enables care also isolates its user from those cared for. Rewind further changes what "protection" means. To keep someone safe by undoing the last minutes is to cancel the time they have just experienced – their risk, their small decisions, their chance to respond. The design thus reframes protection as a redistribution of temporal agency: extra attempts accrue to Max alone while others live one-shot versions of events. What reads as control on the interface registers, socially, as solitude and as a quiet deprivation of other people's experience.

By the end, the game funnels its branching architecture into a single decision: whether to preserve Chloe or Arcadia Bay. The scale is expansive, but the formal gesture is exacting. Some readers take this contraction as a negation of prior labour; yet, as Patrick Goritschnig argues, it stages a rule-consequentialist test (a digital analogue of the trolley problem) in which one life is weighed against many (71). At the level of design, the move completes the work's own pedagogy. Across five episodes, revision has operated as modulation rather than erasure, each return carrying residue and redistributing costs. The finale withdraws the possibility of further return and requires an irreversible selection. It is therefore not a breach of the established pattern but its limit: a final insistence that certain losses cannot be revised away and that any act of preservation must allocate harm.

Later entries retain the same pressure while altering how adolescents try to manage risk and time. *Life is Strange: Before the Storm* (Square Enix, 2017) removes the supernatural and replaces rewind with Chloe's timed "backtalk," converting temporal control into rhetorical brinkmanship. The mechanic promises immediate leverage (e.g., say the right thing fast and the scene changes), but it also reveals how quick victories in the present can compromise trust that extends beyond the moment. *Life is Strange 2* (Square Enix, 2018-19) relocates the problem to a longer horizon: Sean travels with his younger brother Daniel, whose telekinesis magnifies whatever model of conduct Sean supplies. Protection becomes pedagogy. Decisions are not undone but propagated, accumulating across miles and months until the pattern, rather than any

single crisis, determines the relationship. *Life is Strange: True Colors* (Square Enix, 2021) renders the stakes intimate and instantaneous. Alex Chen's empathic powers grant privileged access to others' feelings and the capacity to influence them; connection is made tangible, but the very closeness that enables care risks overrunning boundaries and compromising autonomy.

Across these variations, the series tests how different instruments (retort, example, empathic access) reallocate responsibility without eliminating loss. Each entry pursues the same adolescent project of keeping harm at bay, yet each illustrates that the chosen means carry a distinct temporal logic: the quick, performative present of argument; the cumulative time of mentoring; the saturated now of shared affect. What changes, in other words, is not the desire to protect but the form that desire takes, whether it seeks to manage a moment, to steer a trajectory, or to absorb another's feeling into one's own. That shift in form prepares the ground for the comparison to follow, where strategies of holding open, revising, or enduring time will be set alongside one another.

Voice vs. System – Adolescent Interiorities

Work at the boundary of literary and game studies now treats novels and video games as parallel instruments for organising time, attention, and choice. Markku Eskelinen's polemic helped secure games' specificity as rule-bound systems, but later accounts foreground continuity rather than opposition.[8] St-Martin shows that games adapt and transform literary modes (especially in fantasy) rather than abandon them (104); Hayot argues that novel and game share a history of formal experiment (e.g., recursion, branching, interruption) used to stage ethical and emotional dilemmas (179). Espen Aarseth's notion of ergodic traversal (from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning "work" and "path") (2) and Jesper Juul's "half-real" model explain how rules and fiction interlock to shape action (1). Alexander Galloway reframes the difference between forms by locating it in how action is rendered: novels stage conditions and consequences through discourse and focalisation, whereas games express action as executable procedure (14). Henry Jenkins, shifting from

sequence to space, casts games as "narrative architectures" assembled through exploration (120). Read against this field, and with the acknowledged ludic strain in postwar American fiction (Coover, Barthelme, Sorrentino); *Life is Strange* sits inside, not outside, a longer tradition. It converts the page's loops, branches, and withheld closures into playable procedures, using interface, voice-over, journal, and rewind to make adolescent interiority and temporal pressure something the audience enacts rather than merely reads.

Against that backdrop, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Life is Strange* turn on a shared question: how does a work give access to an adolescent interior under temporal pressure? Salinger's answer is a monologue sealed inside a reflective frame; the novel's form is a voice. Dontnod's answer is a system that makes interiority audible and actionable; the game's form is a voice-over fused to rewind, journal, text feed, and interface prompt. Both protagonists, Holden Caulfield and Max Caulfield, are rendered from the inside out, but the route to that interior differs: one addresses a listener to keep time at bay; the other narrates to herself and, crucially, to the player while attempting to refashion time.

Salinger's monologue is a form of containment. Holden's diction (its hedges, recursions, and second-person tics) keeps the world at arm's length while revealing what he fears to confront. The novel grants interior access by delaying disclosure; the voice circles grief, and the reader suffers that prevarication. *Life is Strange* relocates interior access from rhetoric to procedure. Max's inner commentary is nearly continuous: every *Look* prompt elicits a thought, every corridor is annotated by worry or aside, journals and text threads accrue time-stamped reflections, and major scenes are underscored by voice-over that renders hesitation audible. The attached still (Fig. 4) is typical: the player hovers over a scrap of paper and hears Max's unguarded response. Interiority, in other words, is not occasional confession but an ambient layer of the interface. The design thereby turns what a novel delivers in paragraphs into a navigable soundtrack of thought, always available and always at risk of becoming instruction as much as introspection.

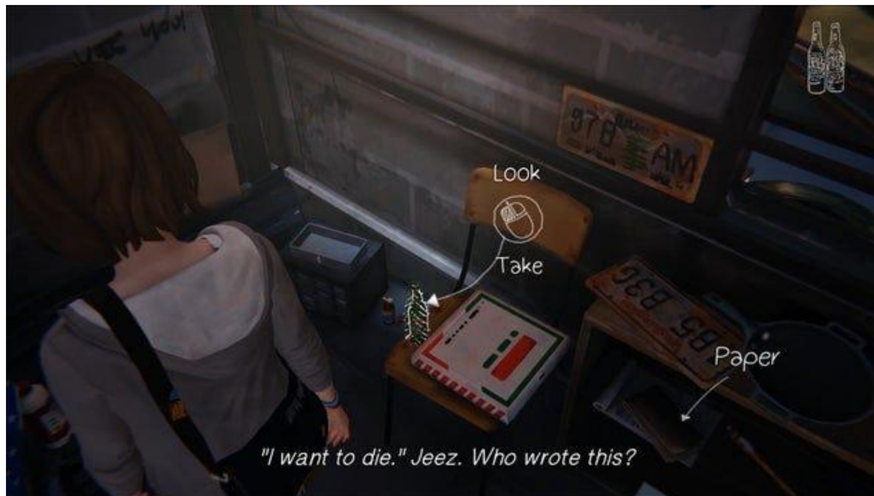

Fig. 4: *Life is Strange* (Square Enix, 2015): Environmental inspection ("Look/Take") triggers Max's voiced interior commentary – here reacting to a note. The UI folds her thoughts into navigation, making inner monologue an ambient layer of play.

How that availability is staged matters for adolescent time. Holden's speech keeps events from settling; narration buffers the irreversibility of experience. Max's speech, by contrast, is braided to tools for intervention *and* to designed pauses. Beyond the short-range rewind, the game regularly offers optional "sit-and-think" sequences (i.e., on campus benches and fountains, on beds, swings, rooftops, gallery couches) in which the camera settles, music swells, and the voice-over lengthens. Nothing "advances" in ludic terms; the scene dilates so that recent events, secrets, and worries can be articulated at leisure ("This day has been so insane . . .," "If these alternate lives exist . . ."). These moments are not mere ambience. They modulate pacing, convert interior commentary into a temporal practice, and let thought catch up with action. Interiority becomes an environmental state the system can enter and hold, a controllable suspension that clarifies how *Life is Strange* figures adolescence as a rhythm of intervening and pausing, revising and reflecting, rather than as uninterrupted forward motion.

These works present two ways of showing an adolescent inner life under strain. In *Catcher*, the inner voice acts as a buffer: it lets Holden keep talking without changing what happened; telling buys time. In *Life is*

Strange, inner speech shares a channel with action: thoughts appear in the same space that offers choices, so reflection can be turned into intervention. Rewind then creates an uneven field of knowledge (Max remembers what she learned while others are reset) allowing a "second try" that sounds more considerate because it was prepared outside the time others lived. Interiority becomes a tool for managing encounters rather than just a space for confession. The dorm-room scene with Dana makes this plain: snooping, rewinding, and then offering tactful support turns private knowledge into leverage. The game presents this not as clever optimization but as a choice with costs: to trust, to authenticity, and to the shared time of the scene.

The costs are temporal and relational. Rewind cancels swathes of lived time for others, turning their risk and responses into non-events. Conversations that seem smoother are purchased by removing the other person's chance to answer and to build a shared history. On-screen mastery thus registers interpersonally as distance: Max's knowledge becomes singular and isolating, hard to share because it depends on a timeline no one else inhabited.

Life is Strange nods to Salinger (Max's surname, a red hunting cap in the principal's office, posters that echo mid-century covers) but those nods also underline a difference (Fig. 5). Holden's inner talk is confessional and largely powerless: it keeps events at a distance, and, at the carousel, he accepts that risk cannot be eliminated. Max's inner talk comes with means to act: her thoughts sit alongside tools that let her alter what has happened. That shift changes what guardianship looks like. Holden's wish to "catch" children remains a spoken wish and is finally let go; Max's wish to keep Chloe safe becomes a series of interventions, and the world responds, most visibly in the storm her rewinds help set in motion. The contrast also appears in their respective refuges. In the novel, places that seem safe (the museum, the tomb) fail when ordinary public life intrudes. In the game, spaces that seem safe (bathroom, dorm, darkroom, lighthouse) fail because action follows thought: each attempt to fix things draws wider consequences into the scene.

Fig. 5: Allusions to *The Catcher in the Rye* in *Life is Strange* (Square Enix, 2015): Max's dorm-room poster "The Winger and the Cow" (top), the principal's red hunting cap labelled "phony" (middle), and Daniel Diaz's red beanie in *Life is Strange 2* (Square Enix, 2018-19) (bottom).

This pairing of voice with system also changes how repetition is experienced. In *Catcher*, repetition is a matter of telling: the story returns to the same feelings until it concedes that some falls cannot be stopped. In *Life is Strange*, repetition is a tool for intervention: for a time, it seems to offer better outcomes through careful revision, before revealing that each fix carries a cost. The game makes this explicit by recording choices and displaying summaries of what followed, so that inner commentary is tied to a visible history of attempts and effects. Max's inner life is therefore not only expression but also record-keeping: a running account that continually weighs the wish to hold a moment open against the losses that such holding creates.

The handling of endings renders the contrast stark. *Catcher* closes within the voice that framed it, an open circuit of telling in which the limited victory is a shift from prevention to permission; for instance, letting Phoebe reach for the gold ring. *Life is Strange* withdraws the privilege of return and forces an irreversible selection (Chloe or Arcadia Bay) so that interior commentary can no longer curate outcomes. The adolescent interior meets a boundary: the last move is not to speak better, nor to revise again, but to accept which loss will stand. In both works, interiority is inseparable from time; the difference lies in how access to thought is coupled to action. The novel finds a practice of staying with what cannot be altered; the game tests how far alteration can proceed before it deforms the very relations it means to preserve.

Conclusion

It is telling that *The Catcher in the Rye* has never had, and almost certainly never will have, a cinematic adaptation. The Salinger estate's long-standing refusal to allow one has made the novel something of a limit case for adaptation studies: a work so dependent on the texture of its voice and the timing of its hesitation that any attempt to visualise it would break the spell. Yet this absence does not mean that *Catcher* has no afterlife in other media. Its preoccupation with repetition, deferral, and the impossible wish to preserve what is lost continues to reappear across forms, especially in narrative games that turn these same pressures into

systems to be played rather than passages to be read. In this sense, *Life is Strange* occupies a peculiar position – not as a retelling of Salinger's novel, but as an inheritor of its structure of feeling. It translates Holden Caulfield's circling monologue into a design language of rewinds, retries, and consequence tracking. Both works are concerned with the adolescent desire to arrest time: Holden through narration that refuses to end, Max through mechanics that let her undo and replay. What Salinger rendered as the rhythm of speech, Dontnod renders as an interface of return. The effect, in both cases, is to make adolescence into an experience of repetition under pressure – an ongoing negotiation between the wish to protect others and the recognition that such protection always carries a cost.

Where *Catcher* builds its world through voice, *Life is Strange* builds it through procedure, yet the emotional grammar remains strikingly close. Holden's talk is a form of containment: language stretched to postpone the moment when grief and maturity must be faced. Max's voice-over performs a similar function but in a different register – it accompanies the player while doubling as a means of action. Every "look" command produces commentary; every rewind overlays memory with choice. In both, introspection is inseparable from control. The difference lies in how far that control reaches. Holden's language creates a buffer between self and world, sustaining him in the gaps between action; Max's rewinds let her intervene directly, creating a sense of mastery that soon proves hollow. The more she tries to fix, the more the world fractures. Salinger's novel ends when Holden accepts that prevention cannot define care: Phoebe must be allowed to reach for the gold ring and risk falling. *Life is Strange* reaches the same moral conclusion by opposite means: the game grants Max every power to prevent loss, then strips it away at the end, forcing her to accept that one loss must remain. In each medium, care becomes inseparable from limitation. The adolescent project (i.e., to hold, to protect, to make right) ends not in triumph but in the recognition that mastery over time is incompatible with genuine relation.

The comparison also reveals how literary and digital forms sustain different but related kinds of interiority under temporal stress. Holden's interior life is textual and recursive, built from speech that

circles the unsaid and draws the reader into complicity without true exchange. Max's interiority is procedural and interactive, her thoughts spilling constantly into the same space where decisions occur, binding reflection to consequence. Both figures are defined by isolation within access: Holden by a voice that keeps company only with itself, Max by a consciousness that others cannot share because it depends on timelines they never lived. Across media, adolescence becomes a site of temporal pressure; that is, a rehearsal of agency whose repetitions cannot secure stability. What begins as a fantasy of preservation, whether through talk or through time manipulation, reveals itself as a lesson in loss and acceptance. These works, taken together, show that the adolescent interior is not a stable sanctuary but a laboratory for feeling the limits of agency in time. Future research that places narrative games in conversation with American fiction could illuminate how forms of play, voice, and repetition continue to shape cultural understandings of growth, responsibility, and the stubborn wish to make the past hold still.

Notes:

[1] Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968) imagines a dice-based baseball league whose expanding rulebook and statistics take over the life of its creator, turning randomness itself into the story's driving force. Barthelme's "Game" (1965) and "The Balloon" (1968) explore repetition and constraint: two officers trapped in endless protocol loops with nuclear codes, and a city-spanning balloon that turns interpretation into a series of readerly moves. Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1979) is a metafictional collage of forged manuscripts, intrusive notes, and self-cancelling episodes that forces the reader to navigate a maze of paratexts and pastiche. Together these works exemplify an American turn toward play and rulemaking in post-war fiction.

[2] Hayot argues that the novel and the video game share a single aesthetic lineage, each testing how narrative form can model systems of choice and consequence rather than oppose story to play. St-Martin likewise reads twenty-first-century fantasy games as literary heirs to modern narrative experimentation, showing how they transform the conventions of fiction through interactivity, recursion, and world-building.

[3] Seelye argues that although Holden sneers at "the goddamn movies," his idiom borrows the hard-boiled first person popularised by Chandler and Hammett and a Bogart-style stance – "if *Catcher* is art, then it is Bog-art" (25) – so the evasions read against a Forties, movie-taught urban register (26, 28–29).

[4] "Weeping moviegoer": the Radio City Music Hall sequence (ch. 18), where a woman cries at the film while ignoring her child's need to use the bathroom; Holden takes this as emblematic of public sentimentality masking private indifference. "Cabs": his testy rides with New York taxi drivers, especially the exchange with Horwitz about the Central Park ducks (ch. 12), moments of contact that never become connection. "At Brooks": references to Brooks Brothers as shorthand for fitted, respectable adulthood – ready-made propriety that irritates Holden and figures "growing up" as wearing the correct outfit rather than changing inwardly. "In elevators": the encounters with Maurice, the Edmont Hotel's elevator operator (chs. 13–14), where everyday friction slides into coercion and violence.

[5] Burns's lyric reads "Gin a body meet a body, comin' thro' the rye" (1784), with some versions substituting "kiss a body" for "meet a body." Holden reports hearing a child sing "If a body catch a body," and on that mishearing builds his fantasy in which encounter becomes interception (ch. 22). Critics read the substitution as symptomatic: it deflects sexual knowledge into a rescue scenario and transposes unresolvable grief into a role of preventive care, turning meeting into saving and desire into hazard (Edwards 555-56; Shaw 103-05).

[6] Jane's checkers habit – keeping her kings in the back row – figures what Shaw reads as the attraction of arrest: an aestheticized pause that merges mourning into sexual avoidance. The tactic preserves potential while suspending risk, making "winning" secondary to holding position; it resonates with the catcher fantasy and the novel's recurrent fear of falling, each converting desire and grief into a wish to halt movement at the brink (Shaw 102-05).

[7] Kawin distinguishes "repetitiousness" (mere iteration that exhausts energy and interest) from aesthetically "constructive" repetition, which builds and develops a work through patterned return (4). Across case studies – from Griffith and Resnais to Hemingway, Proust, Shakespeare, Yeats, Genet, Stein, and Beckett – he shows how repetition can interpenetrate past and present, or sustain a sense of continuing time, so that a reprise never reproduces an identical moment but recontextualises it. Framed in psycho-aesthetic terms (with an acknowledged Freudian inheritance), this account helps clarify why replay in games is not simply redundancy. In *Life is Strange*, rewinds operate as constructive returns: each pass carries prior knowledge forward while altering relations and consequences, exemplifying Kawin's claim that repetition never quite repeats but composes meaning through variation.

[8] Eskelinen advances a programmatic "ludological" stance: games should be analysed as rule-bound, configurative systems – defined by goals, states, and player manipulation – rather than subsumed under narrative models. See "The Gaming Situation," *Game Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001); and *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of Ergodic Literature* (Continuum, 2012), which elaborates a poetics centred on configurative action, procedural structure, and the distinctive temporalities of play.

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