



## In Search of J.D. Salinger

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## **In Search of J.D. Salinger** Ian Hamilton

In trying to research the details of J.D. Salinger's life for this book, Ian Hamilton forced the writer out of his reclusive hideaway to challenge his discoveries in an American court of law. When Ian Hamilton set out in 1983 to write a biography of Salinger, he knew that there would be difficulties. Just how great those difficulties would be, what implacable hostility he would meet from Salinger and what astonishing finds he would stumble on, he could not have guessed.

## **In Search of J.D. Salinger Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2000 by Bloomsbury Publishing PLC (first published May 12th 1988)

ISBN : 9780747536406

Author : Ian Hamilton

Format : Paperback 228 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Literature, Biography Memoir

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## From Reader Review In Search of J.D. Salinger for online ebook

### Texx Norman says

Sadly Mr. Salinger is dead, but during life he was crazy about his privacy. When an unauthorized biography was in the works the author and THE AUTHOR had exchanges. When the courts ruled against him, the guy wrote a book about his efforts to write the book, and, as you can guess, a lot of the illegal manuscript ended up in this alternate version.

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### Howard says

Gonzo style Hamilton chases around the famously reclusive (so no doubt neurotic, paranoid and grumpy) Salinger. Hamilton is more thoughtful than HST, Plimpton or the hilarious nutter who stalked Graham Greene so this is an independent work of great writing skill as well as a companion piece to Salinger's great pieces

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### Mervyn S Whyte says

Intermittently interesting. Not sure about the alter ego format.

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### Jodi Kasten says

I think that Hamilton's shame almost drowns out any useful or interesting information that may have been gained from reading this book. Salinger doesn't want to be found and there's nothing wrong with that.

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### Larry Bassett says

I have a thing for J.D. Salinger and even I am not quite sure what that means. I wrote a paper about him in college that has little to recommend itself. I did append to the paper several short stories by Salinger that were published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in the 1940s. I painstakingly typed them out on my manual portable Hermes typewriter, probably on corrasable paper so I wouldn't have to use white-out. The professor was not impressed. It did not jumpstart my writing or literary career.

I was also one of the millions of teenage boys who read *The Catcher in the Rye*. Let's be clear, I was one of the boys wondering what it meant anyway. I have 65 GR friends and 40 of them have rated *The Catcher in the Rye*. Most everybody knows Holden Caulfield and many would like to know more about the author. But Salinger is not having any of it. *In Search of J.D. Salinger* is one of the many efforts to fill that information gap.

Hamilton wedged himself into Salinger's private world by finding five years worth of letters that Salinger

wrote to Whit Burnett, the editor of *Story* magazine, a well respected publication that first published one of Salinger's early short stories. The letters were in the Whit Burnett/Story magazine files. Salinger took Hamilton to court to prevent him from using those and other similar unpublished letters in the biography. Salinger had a lot of money and had the best lawyers. The result of the court trial was that the book was substantially revised, removing any of Salinger's own words found in private documents from the text. The chapter at the end of the book on the legal process is interesting and readable without much legalize. The author's successful search for letters that Salinger had sent to others is impressive. He used them as best he could given his court-ordered silence on the exact wording of Salinger.

One interesting thing about the legal matter is that it was well publicized and Salinger got more presumably unwanted publicity than he had in the previous twenty years. He had to give an in person deposition, his first public appearance in some time.

With very limited direct Salinger material, Hamilton resorts to the common technique of reading the author's work as autobiographical, trying to make connections between Salinger's life and his stories. At times the analysis of Salinger's famous families, first the Caulfields and then the Glasses, takes over, overwhelming any potential biographic value. However, as someone who has not yet comprehended much of Salinger's work, I find the plot summaries and analyses to be quite interesting. And personally, I do believe that all writing is autobiographical to some extent. But there is a lot of assuming and conjecturing and inferring that must happen to turn books into biographies.

This is a relatively short book of just over two hundred pages. Although it seems to cover every observed incident of Salinger leaving his rural home to go to the grocery store or the post office, our picture of the author remains fuzzy. Salinger married twice. The first lasted only briefly and the second produced a son and a daughter. The daughter Margaret Salinger wrote a book in 2000 that is rated 3.27 on GR.

Other books about Salinger that I have on my bookshelf:

Salinger, A Biography

J.D. Salinger, A Life

Dream Catcher, A Memoir

At Home in the World: A Memoir

I found this book readable both in writing style and in interesting content. It talked about the process of researching and writing the book since it was prohibited by a court decision from being published in its original form with excerpts from unpublished letters from Salinger to various people. The letters allowed the author to reach some conclusions about Salinger's life and work but the supporting material could not be included. There are footnotes.

With some regret I am giving *In Search of J.D. Salinger* three stars. It might deserve better but when I compare it with *J.D. Salinger, A Life*, it does not come close. I would have to read other biographies of Salinger to know better where this one fits in the pack.

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## J says

having read Salinger's published collection, this curious biography and critique sheds much light on the writing and the author.

the detective and controversial side of this book proved underwhelming despite coming to a head (I felt a little sorry for the JDS under interrogation)  
that said, does the man's almost unrivalled talent excuse his early arrogance? in his case (as in many) grandeur often follows irrational expectations...

his myth partly exposed, although some remains, I'll likely re-read more Salinger separating the author from the writing... it's what he would have wanted

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### **Aveugle Vogel says**

"her boyfriend Barry from Princeton"

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### **Le Paginestrappate says**

<http://lepaginestrappate.wordpress.co...>

[...] Sono tanti i motivi per cui leggere *In cerca di Salinger* è stata un'esperienza... interessante. Sia per il fremito di sporcarsi le mani frugando nella vita di un "mito", sia per l'emozione di riscoprire dettagli di opere amate. Ma soprattutto per le riflessioni che la lettura stimola. E il diritto al silenzio.

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### **Evan says**

In addition to writing one of the most popular and beloved novels of all time (*The Catcher in the Rye*) along with a few more high-profile books, J.D. Salinger had written stories for widely read pubs including the *New Yorker* and *Esquire* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Notice in all of that I did not say that J.D. Salinger wrote these things and then lock them away in a vault unseen, or allow them to be published only in the most obscure high school newspapers where they would be guaranteed to remain unread.

In other words, Salinger might have denied wanting fame and attention, but as Ian Hamilton shows in this biography time and again, his writing for high-profile publications was part of a conscious campaign by Salinger to have his work disseminated as far and wide as possible; to, in essence, be seen by as many as possible; to, in essence, become famous.

Salinger rather naively and unreasonably, in my opinion, wanted renown without the hassle of fame. And, for the most part, he negotiated that state of being very successfully. *Time*, the *New York Post* and hundreds of other fans, reporters and organizations tried over the decades to penetrate the elusive author's secretive world and score the scoop interview only to be decisively rebuffed at every turn. During his lifetime, Salinger was as much a master of deception, disinformation and secrecy as he was an author, so much so that his network of friends and acquaintances became a stone wall of silence whenever "outsiders" dared to ask anything about him. Knowing that reprisals would follow (Salinger would cut them off from what must have seemed the most exclusive friendship club in the world) the friends remained mum. This networked barrier

was a masterstroke and a great example of psychological manipulation. Ironically, this was an author who withdrew from the world to get away from its "phonies"--to quote his partial alter ego and hero of ...*Rye*, Holden Caulfield--and yet he maintained relations with people who were not free to say what they wanted in order to remain one of his lapdog hangers-on. He obviously failed to see their phoniness, or the irony in his acceptance of that.

It is thus probably no surprise to learn that Salinger very likely had worked for the American intelligence corps in World War II, as Hamilton reveals persuasively from the evidence. We learn a lot, in fact, about the late Mr. S. from Ian Hamilton's dogged investigation into a life that, if not particularly earthshaking, was at least more than interesting enough to warrant a biography, and not just a life-story but one that authoritatively shows the links between the characters in Salinger's fiction and their likely real-life sources, inspirations and counterparts. Hamilton *knows* his Salinger inside and out, and his readings of the texts and speculations on the likely parallels between what's in the stories and how they related to Salinger's real life are provocative and insightful.

Given how little information existed in the public record about Salinger, it's quite remarkable just how much information Hamilton was able to glean from letters and other previously untapped sources. This is a good biography by any standard, and doubly remarkable in view of what a tough nut to crack was this subject.

I don't know what, if anything, has been rattled loose from the cobwebs or the zip-lipped compadres of Salinger since his death in January 2010 to give us any more insight about him apropos his decades of privacy and what was going on therein. Hamilton wrote and published this in the 1980s, well before Salinger's death but long after the author had disappeared from public view in the 1950s and after his last published work in 1965, and I know of nothing since that has as successfully managed to render corporeal someone as wispy and elusive as this phantom.

The effort reminded me a lot of a 1980s documentary about Marlene Dietrich called *Marlene* in which the actor-director Maximillian Schell attempted to interview the reclusive star on camera for the first time in decades but was rebuffed by her after an agreement to make the film, necessitating Schell's brilliant lemonade-from-lemons strategy of reconstructing her apartment from memory as the film's set, then superimposing tempestuous tape-recorded phone interviews with Dietrich over images of the reconstructed abode, thus giving the viewer as much or more insight into the combative star as would have been achieved in a conventional talking-head documentary.

Hamilton's book is not perfect. He adopts a somewhat disconcerting narrative framing device in which he debates with his alter-ego or "companion" or conscience about the significance of each fact or pseudo fact he encounters in the investigation. Instead of invoking conversations with this alter-ego character, Hamilton could just as easily have simply said, "I debated with myself about...(whatever)," which would have been just as effective and less gimmicky.

Nonetheless, given the dearth of information about Salinger, this is a spectacularly impressive job. Whenever Hamilton is forced to speculate--which is often--his speculations are well-informed and plausible and arrived at logically and in context.

Most of my rating is for Ian Hamilton's doggedness and reasonableness. Yes, reasonableness and fairness toward his subject. Hamilton laid down ground rules at the beginning of this quest that nobody else in the media would have granted Salinger, partly out of respect and partly out of a sense of responsibility to do a fair and balanced job. I think Hamilton succeeded.

Not surprisingly, Salinger and his lawyers did not agree, and they fought through several layers of courts to keep the book off the market. Unfortunately, this version of the book reflects some of the damaging influences of those censorious efforts. Although Hamilton was free to report the facts he gleaned from Salinger's previously unpublished letters (from various collections and archives), the courts ruled rather absurdly that he could not quote directly from them--despite the fact that Salinger did not even own the letters or would not likely realize any commercial gain from them; not to mention that anyone could walk off the street and read them themselves. Thus Hamilton was robbed of a legitimate tool of the biographer to show the *style* of his subject's letter writing in addition to the contents of the letters. The case shows the patent bullshit attendant to a good deal of copyright law and its inconsistent interpretation.

One is left satisfied by this book, partly because even by its end, Salinger remains enigmatic and mysterious. And, it's breezily written and easily read.

So, to those of you who say Salinger should have been left alone, I say, fuck that. He asked for every bit of this...if you want to know the truth.

(KevinR@Ky, slightly amended in 2016)

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### **Carl Rollyson says**

This is the book that made life difficult for biographers. Not that Ian Hamilton intended to do so. But his use of Salinger's letters became the tipping point for the reclusive author, who sued the biographer. In an unfortunate ruling Harold Baer virtually destroyed the idea of fair use for unpublished writing. Congress has since rectified the judge's decision but not before that decision had a chilling impact on the publishing industry. Hamilton turns his thwarted book into a kind of *Search for Corvo*, which is a clever biography but also an example of a desperate biographer who discovers he does not have enough reliable data. Hamilton's book is not in the same league as *Search for Corvo*, but you learn a good deal about the nature of biography and something as well about J. D. Salinger. Harold Baer, by the way, is at it again--this time making it difficult for authors who are scanned by Google. Is someone out there writing a book about Harold Baer's worst decisions?

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### **Joel says**

I used to own this but have lost it somewhere during 6 or 7 times I've moved in the last decade. This is really the only good biography of Salinger -- Paul Alexander's is all rumors and gossip, and the ones by literary critics are too hoity-toity. The final chapter is perhaps the most interesting.

A few choice quotes from the dust-jackets of the first editions of Salinger's books made me realize / reminded me just how much he actually did reveal about the autobiographical nature of his work. He actually referred to Buddy Glass as "my alter ego!"

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### **Longfellow says**

I picked this up because of Nick Hornby's *Housekeeping* vs. the *Dirt*, which I was browsing one evening,

procrastinating more important responsibilities. "Housekeeping" is Hornby's journal of a year of book buying and reading. He spoke highly of Ian Hamilton, and I had recently gone through a Salinger phase, so I was ready to enjoy this for a couple of reasons.

Hamilton's detective style writing is fun and I suppose he covers pretty much what there is to know about Jerome David Salinger, the best news being that the recluse HAS been writing for the past few decades. Cool. The glimpses we get of Salinger's personality are, however, somewhat less than endearing, and I find myself having to appreciate his books for my enjoyment of them rather than the impression I have of Salinger as a person. I can do that.

I also discovered I can muster the stamina a 200 page biography requires; I have numerous literary biographies on my shelves which have rarely been opened past page 10 or so. Plan to seek out the other two books I know of that may have additional information on JDS: Dreamcatcher, by his daughter, Margaret Salinger, and another biography from 1999 by Paul Alexander.

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### **Alinola says**

Ho comprato questo libro per capire perché Salinger si è ritirato a vita privata.

Ora l'ho capito. Ma, nonostante questo, non sono riuscita ad apprezzare il libro per le troppe parti in cui i due biografi hanno supposto delle cose dell'autore e perché troppo spesso si è cercato di capire chi dei personaggi narrati fosse Salinger.

Insomma mi stato utile capire il contesto storico e sociale in cui Salinger ha scritto, mi ha aiutato a capire come sono nati racconti e romanzi splendidi ma no, non mi è piaciuto.

E fossi stata in Salinger sarei fuggito molto prima e avrei citato in giudizio chiunque.

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### **Sheldon Compton says**

I just love a good mystery. And even though it was another low moment for our judicial system, the section where they ask Salinger all those questions under oath about what he's been working on was just kind of amazing. Amazing and also sick-making at the same time. A fun book for Salinger fans, probably. I dug it anyways.

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### **Henry Withers says**

this is a very interesting, if slightly frustrating biography of JD Salinger. I had tried to read one before which was very trite and boring - while it described Salinger's reclusiveness, it did not explore it or try to solve the mystery. That mystery solving what I liked about this book, however there is no Da Vinci Code-like Holy Grail lying in wait at the end, only some disappointing legal wranglings.

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