

20th Century American Novel II

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) by J. D. Salinger

What about the cemetery?

I went with them a couple of times, but I cut it out. In the first place, I certainly don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery. Surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all. It wasn't too bad when the sun was out, but twice—twice—we were there when it started to rain. It was awful. It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place. All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could go get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and then go someplace nice for dinner—everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it. I know it's only his body and all that's in the cemetery, and his soul's in Heaven and all that crap, but I couldn't stand it anyway. I just wish he wasn't there. (Ch. 19)

What about the...



What about the museum?

What about his visit to Phoebe?

What about the title of the book? (Ch. 22)

“I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And 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’d do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be. I know it’s crazy.”

“Coming Through the Rye” (1782) by Robert Burns

O Jenny is all wet, poor body,
Jenny is seldom dry:
She draggled all her petticoats,
Coming through the rye!

Coming through the rye, poor body,
Coming through the rye,
She draggled all her petticoats,
Coming through the rye!

Should a body meet a body
Coming through the rye,
Should a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?

Should a body meet a body
Coming through the glen,
Should a body kiss a body,
Need the world know?

Mr. Antolini and digression (Ch. 24)

“Oh, I don’t know. That digression business got on my nerves. I don’t know. The trouble with me is, I like it when somebody digresses. It’s more interesting and all [...] Oh, sure! I like somebody to stick to the point and all. But I don’t like them to stick too much to the point. I don’t know. I guess I don’t like it when somebody sticks to the point all the time.”

What about Mr. Antolini? (Ch. 24)

"I have a feeling that you're riding for some kind of a terrible, terrible fall. But I don't honestly know what kind . . . Are you listening to me?"

"Yes." You could tell he was trying to concentrate and all.

"It may be the kind where, at the age of thirty, you sit in some bar hating everybody who comes in looking as if he might have played football in college. Then again, you may pick up just enough education to hate people who say, 'It's a secret between he and I.' Or you may end up in some business office, throwing paper clips at the nearest stenographer. I just don't know. But do you know what I'm driving at, at all?"

What about Mr. Antolini? (Ch. 24)

“I don’t want to scare you,” he said, “but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause. [...]

‘The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.’”

Before the weird incident with Mr. Antolini (Ch. 19)

He (Luce) knew quite a bit about sex, especially perverts and all. He was always telling us about a lot of creepy guys that go around having affairs with sheep, and guys that go around with girls' pants sewed in the lining of their hats and all. And flits and Lesbians. Old Luce knew who every flit and Lesbian in the United States was [...] He said half the married guys in the world were flits and didn't even know it. He said you could turn into one practically overnight, if you had all the traits and all. He used to scare the hell out of us.

What about Mr. Antolini and the weird incident? (Ch. 24)

Then something happened. I don't even like to talk about it. I woke up all of a sudden. I don't know what time it was or anything, but I woke up. I felt something on my head, some guy's hand. Boy, it really scared hell out of me. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini's hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I'll bet I jumped about a thousand feet.

"What the hell ya doing?" I said.

"Nothing! I'm simply sitting here, admiring—"

"What're ya doing, anyway?" I said over again.

Reflecting on Mr. Antolini (Ch. 25)

But what did worry me was the part about how I'd woke up and found him patting me on the head and all. I mean I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe he just liked to pat guys on the head when they're asleep. I mean how can you tell about that stuff for sure? You can't. I even started wondering if maybe I should've got my bags and gone back to his house, the way I'd said I would. I mean I started thinking that even if he was a flit he certainly'd been very nice to me.

What about Holden's physical condition?

Fantasy of running away

I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life. Everybody'd think I was just a poor deaf-mute bastard and they'd leave me alone. They'd let me put gas and oil in their stupid cars, and they'd pay me a salary and all for it, and I'd build me a little cabin somewhere with the dough I made and live there for the rest of my life. I'd build it right near the woods, but not right in them, because I'd want it to be sunny as hell all the time. I'd cook all my own food, and later on, if I wanted to get married or something, I'd meet this beautiful girl that was also a deaf-mute and we'd get this beautiful girl that was also a deaf-mute and we'd get married. She'd come and live in my cabin with me, and if she wanted to say anything to me, she'd have to write it on a goddam piece of paper, like everybody else. If we had any children, we'd hide them somewhere. We could buy them a lot of books and teach them how to read and write by ourselves.

Why does he change his mind about leaving?

What about the carousel?

All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, 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, and not say anything. If they fall off they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them.



Read Ch. 26

Has Holden evolved in the story?

Is the novel still relevant?