

Catcher in the Rye - a student review

Karenza Blewett introduces the books she loves.

'If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it.'

So begins J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. I loved the book instantly and finished it in a day. In the last nine months I've re-read it four times. It is quite unlike any other book I've read; it's like listening to someone you've known for years. To start with it's not written by a member of the upper classes - and all the better for it.

It's written in such an open and frank way that you can't help getting really get involved with the story. Like when Holden Caulfield, the protagonist and narrator says: 'What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him on the phone whenever you felt like it'. I really wanted to phone Salinger, or since we're speaking hypothetically, even Holden himself. Being so close to this character made reading it a very emotional experience, my mood swinging from elation to depression.

The language is not the same as you find in other good books. It's just everyday sort of stuff and it made the book seem more real to me. Holden describes things the way he sees them rather than imagining them as something more. For instance he says: 'I sat down on this vomity looking chair...' What about this description of an old associate, Carl Luce? 'Old Luce. He was strictly a pain in the ass, but he certainly had a good vocabulary.' Apart from the honesty of his diction, it's difficult to say why Holden's language is so appealing. But I just love phrases like: '...it certainly didn't make me feel too gorgeous and I was still shivering like a bastard.'

From a teenager's point-of-view, the plot is an adventure - running away from boarding school, staying in crummy hotels, drinking too much alcohol, socialising with a prostitute - just the sorts of thing I fantasise about. I was going to save up loads of money and disappear for while, blowing the whole lot on something stupid. In a way, reading this book realised my fantasy - a wonderful feeling.

Holden's story begins when he's 16 and he's just been thrown out of school for doing badly. Rather than wait until the end of term he leaves there and then. Despite his misanthropic attitude, I think he's a lovely boy and he does have morals, he cares for his family and he's a bit vain, just like everybody. But he doesn't let social convention get in the way of what he sees as sense. Holden is quirky. He's staying with an old teacher friend, Mr Antolini, who pats him on the head while he's asleep. He's so freaked out by it that he chooses to spend the night at a railway station, an experience he says wasn't too nice. 'Don't ever try it. I mean it. It'll depress you.'

Lots of things Holden describes conjure up ghastly memories for me. For example, he's out with a girl called Sally and she sees and speaks to an old friend, Holden says. 'It was the phoniest conversation you ever heard in your life. They both kept thinking of places as fast as they could, then they'd think of

somebody that lived there and mention their name. This image of nostalgia is so vivid, it's scary;

So what is the hidden message of The Catcher in the Rye? It's difficult for me to say because I enjoyed it so much - each of the five times I've read it.

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