

Teen Angst Writing

Teen angst writing or, perhaps more officially, coming of age literature often features young characters as narrators protagonists who are rebelling against the adult world which they are about to inherit. It is often informally written and linguistically different from 'classic literature' as if to point out that the author / character does not accept previous values, systems or ways of doing things. Attacks on conservative institutions such as parents, families, governments, schools and the church are often commonplace as these are symbolic of the older generation and their attempt to control youth.

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, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all - I'm not saying that - but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything.

I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my brother and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crummy place, and he comes over and visits me practically every weekend. He's going to drive me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those little English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't use to. He used to be just a regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It was about this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.

Where I want to start telling is the day I left Pencey Prep. Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." Strictly for the birds. They don't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all.

Comment [K1]: Immediate direct to the reader establishes an informal, conversational style

Comment [K2]: Use of slang words, obscenity or vulgarity is a key way in which youth challenges the rules of acceptable behaviour laid down by the older generation

Comment [K3]: Explicit attack on the older value system; here the object attacked is Dickens' 'David Copperfield', an example of classic literature. Not only is it called 'crap' but that method of starting a novel by explaining the past history of the main character is also avoided here as we don't even know the main character's name yet

Comment [K4]: The aggressive, antagonistic tone effectively mirrors that of the 'sulky' teenager

Comment [K5]: Something that many teenagers can relate to

Comment [K6]: The use of the dashes to indicate an aside enhances the informal, conversational air

Comment [K7]: Continuing aggressive, bristly narrative tone – almost as if he is being interviewed against his will

Comment [K8]: This and the reference to 'run down' suggests the character is in some kind of institution

Comment [K9]: Slang used throughout continually reiterating the youth of the narrator and the fact that he is rebelling against the accepted style of novel writing

Comment [K10]: Presumably he's not really a prostitute but this is just a metaphor for the fact that D.B. has 'sold out' and has stopped writing his own stories and now works for some big Hollywood company. The idea of 'selling out' and sacrificing your own individuality to get a job, get a wife, fit in with society, etc is a major theme in teen angst writing. It is important to be true to yourself

Comment [K11]: The informal style continues to the extent that sentences are even grammatically incorrect (it should read 'probably have heard of it') in an attempt to make them sound more like spoken language

Comment [K12]: The exaggeration shows his disdain

Comment [K13]: Again, clear disdain

Comment [K14]: Another explicit attack on an established institution

Comment [K15]: Conversational phrases that are not usually written down are used here. If Salinger were writing today this story would be full of 'I mean, like, whatever'