ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY CRITICISM

A Reader's Companion to J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye
Peter Beidler
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"That is so last century!" Today's readers and teachers may exclaim as they begin *The Catcher in the Rye*, the 1951 classic by J. D. Salinger. Fortunately, Peter G. Beidler has decoded the cultural information that packs the novel.

The second edition of *A Reader's Companion to J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* is more than a glossary. It includes information about Salinger's life, connections between his life and his work, and reactions to Salinger's death. Readers who are interested in studying the continuing appeal of *Catcher* and its importance in American culture will especially appreciate the chapters devoted to *Catcher* in the movies, song, and other fiction. Although casual readers may be overwhelmed by the amount and depth of information in some chapters, the "Questions for Readers … " can focus their thinking as they work through the novel and this *Companion*. A "Glossary for ESL and EFL Readers" includes explanations of American expressions like "toleja" (told you) and "up the creek" that might hinder the pleasure of the novel for non-native speakers.

The substance of *A Reader's Companion* is the "Explanatory Notes." Mr. Beidler divides *Catcher* into four sections, defined by Holden's actions. For instance, the section focused on chapters one to seven of the novel is titled "Holden says good-bye to Pencey." A summary of the action opens the section of notes for each chapter. By doing this and by quoting the passage from the novel containing the entry, Mr. Beidler provides context for the information he offers. In addition, Mr. Beidler often includes a summary of critical comments and biographical connections. For instance, the entry on "that lunatic" presents the Biblical text that is the source of the term as well as explanation and commentary (pp 140-142). When the critical commentary includes the editorial comments of Peter G. Beidler, the "explanatory note" does not so much open the text as it directs the reader's thinking about *Catcher*.

A Reader's Companion to J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye can be a valuable tool for twenty-first century readers. Although now retired from Lehigh University's department of English, Peter G. Beidler continues to serve the reading community.

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