

# Movie Review – ‘Coming Through the Rye’



RACHEL LUTACK

OCTOBER 13TH, 2016 - 12:25 PM

1  
SHARES

Twitter

Facebook

Reddit

Tumblr



*Buy movies on this topic at iTunes | Amazon*

The idea behind *Coming Through the Rye* and the book it draws inspiration from, J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, seem to be ideologically at odds. Being a coming-of-age story, the film’s plot follows a journey that the novel’s infamous protagonist, Holden Caulfield, fought vehemently against; that is, adulthood (in all its phoniness). The film does, however, hone in on the public worship surrounding the book, the character, and the reclusive author, as well as every boy and social outsider’s deep connection and projection onto the material. In his feature debut, filmmaker James Steven Sadwith’s passion for his subject is crystal clear, and

through the film, he creates his own thoughtful musings on growing up outside of the social norm. Likewise, star **Alex Wolff** (one half of “Nat and Alex Wolff”) has a sparkling leading debut as the film’s wayward schoolboy.

*Coming Through the Rye* tells the story of Jamie Schwartz, a boarding school teen during the late 1960s, when the Holden Caulfield obsession was reaching its first peak. As his senior project, Jamie writes an adaptation of Salinger’s book for the stage, and in an effort to obtain the author’s stamp of approval (a near impossible feat), runs away from school to search for the notorious misanthrope. Along the way, Jamie comes to learn lessons of identity, love, sexuality, and loss – following closely to the themes of *The Catcher in the Rye*.



Despite taking place in the 1960s, Sadwith’s film feels as though it could represent any era – one in which people still used typewriters, landlines, and classic cars. *Coming Through the Rye* establishes the same timeless effect that Salinger’s novel has accomplished for many generations. A contemporary indie soundtrack plays a large part in this blending of generations along with focus on character, story, and a majority of scenes set in nature.

With the film being based on a true story, Jamie’s character is directly related to both Sadwith and Holden, – he is becoming disenchanted with the world around him, feels far more intelligent than and misunderstood by his peers, has a growing interest in sexuality, and has built emotional and developmental walls for himself – but Jamie is unique in one distinctive quality: his admirable optimism. Sadwith is smart in distancing his protagonist somewhat from Holden, paying tribute to Salinger’s work, while avoiding direct comparison, and forging his own narrative path. Jamie’s optimism is also the driving force behind his character growth, serving as an impetus to understand and persevere in his nearly impossible pursuit, finding Salinger.

Jamie's eventual interactions with Salinger both adds complication to the author's ideologies while raising fascinating questions. The fact that Jamie does meet Salinger goes against the author's ideals – i.e. being opposed to creative interpretation. In the film, actor **Chris Cooper** interprets the "role" of Salinger as a curmudgeonly philosophizing woodsman with a secretly soft interior. Salinger is a known dissenter to media, Hollywood, and art for profit, a fact that the movie addresses fully, but also conveniently ignores at several points along the way. The presence of Salinger is a take-it-or-leave-it component to the film (cutting down on his mystique), but manages to work in the sense that it adds to the ongoing conversation that is and will continue to be had about the author, his legacy, and his novel whether he likes it or not.



These scenes also smartly question the complex ideas surrounding adaptation and its creative validity. In a conversation between Salinger and Jamie, the author tells him that *Catcher in the Rye* was never meant to be interpreted in any other medium, to which Jamie suggests that if you take a picture of a painting, that is not an interpretation of the painting. In other words, does a work of art that purely mirrors the sentiments of its origins merit value, and can there be a true adaptation? The real question, then, is whether or not Sadwith's interpretation of Salinger's themes and ideas holds true.

For the film's star, Alex Wolff, the spirit of Salinger, Holden Caulfield, and Sadwith's vision is quite alive. Wolff dutifully portrays the distinct qualities of wide-eyed youthful optimism with a wandering and lost spirit. Jamie is determined, yet adrift; intelligent, yet still ignorant in the ways of the world, and Wolff plays these dualities off with uninhibited poise. Wolff and Sadwith together bountifully capture both the purity and awkwardness of youth while navigating the adult world. Even in his frequent romantic scenes with DeeDee (**Stefania Owen**, *Krampus*) – his real world alternative to *Catcher's* Sally Hayes, or a parallel to Jane – Jamie comes off with the same curiosity, passion, and fumbling sincerity.



**Verdict: 4 out of 5**

Sadwith's *Coming Through the Rye* delicately explores the world beyond Salinger's novel and legendary character Holden Caulfield, and the real impact the work continues to have on readers, regardless of age or gender. Although "coming-of-age" and the character Holden Caulfield have become synonymous somewhat to a fault, sometimes clichés are true and deserve further exploration. The fact that this story is based on Sadwith's actual experience of meeting Salinger is icing on the cake. The story does raise more questions than it answers about Salinger's artistic sensibilities, but it is nevertheless an honest take on the author's legacy and views about social and emotional development.