

# EXHIBIT C

December 23, 2008

## Young Muslims Build a Subculture on an Underground Book

By CHRISTOPHER MAAG

CLEVELAND — Five years ago, young Muslims across the United States began reading and passing along a blurry, photocopied novel called “The Taqwacores,” about imaginary punk rock Muslims in Buffalo.

“This book helped me create my identity,” said Naina Syed, 14, a high school freshman in Coventry, Conn.

A Muslim born in Pakistan, Naina said she spent hours on the phone listening to her older sister read the novel to her. “When I finally read the book for myself,” she said, “it was an amazing experience.”

The novel is “The Catcher in the Rye” for young Muslims, said Carl W. Ernst, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Springing from the imagination of Michael Muhammad Knight, it inspired disaffected young Muslims in the United States to form real Muslim punk bands and build their own subculture.

Now the underground success of Muslim punk has resulted in a low-budget independent film based on the book.

A group of punk artists living in a communal house in Cleveland called the Tower of Treason offered the house as the set for the movie. The crumbling streets and boarded-up storefronts of their neighborhood resemble parts of Buffalo. Filming took place in October, and the movie will be released next year, said Eyad Zahra, the director.

“To see these characters that used to live only inside my head out here walking around, and to think of all these kids living out parts of the book, it’s totally surreal,” Mr. Muhammad Knight, 31, said as he roamed the movie set.

As part of the set, a Muslim punk rock musician, Marwan Kamel, 23, painted “Osama McDonald,” a figure with Osama bin Laden’s face atop Ronald McDonald’s body. Mr. Kamel said the painting was a protest against imperialism by American corporations and against Wahhabism, the strictest form of Islam.

Noureen DeWulf, 24, an actress who plays a rocker in the movie, defended the film’s message.

“I’m a Muslim and I’m 100-percent American,” Ms. DeWulf said, “so I can criticize my faith and my country. Rebellion? Punk? This is totally American.”

The novel’s title combines “taqwa,” the Arabic word for “piety,” with “hardcore,” used to describe many genres of angry Western music.

For many young American Muslims, stigmatized by their peers after the Sept. 11 attacks but repelled by both the Bush administration's reaction to the attacks and the rigid conservatism of many Muslim leaders, the novel became a blueprint for their lives.

"Reading the book was totally liberating for me," said Areej Zufari, 34, a Muslim and a humanities professor at Valencia Community College in Orlando, Fla.

Ms. Zufari said she had listened to punk music growing up in Arkansas and found "The Taqwacores" four years ago.

"Here was someone as frustrated with Islam as me," she said, "and he expressed it using bands I love, like the Dead Kennedys. It all came together."

The novel's Muslim characters include Rabeya, a riot girl who plays guitar onstage wearing a burqa and leads a group of men and women in prayer. There is also Fasiq, a pot-smoking skater, and Jehangir, a drunk.

Such acts — playing Western music, women leading prayer, men and women praying together, drinking, smoking — are considered haram, or forbidden, by millions of Muslims.

Mr. Muhammad Knight was born an Irish Catholic in upstate New York and converted to Islam as a teenager. He studied at a mosque in Pakistan but became disillusioned with Islam after learning about the sectarian battles after the death of Muhammad.

He said he wrote "The Taqwacores" to mend the rift between his being an observant Muslim and an angry American youth. He found validation in the life of Muhammad, who instructed people to ignore their leaders, destroy their petty deities and follow only Allah.

After reading the novel, many Muslims e-mailed Mr. Muhammad Knight, asking for directions to the next Muslim punk show. Told that no such bands existed, some of them created their own, with names like Vote Hezbollah and Secret Trial Five.

One band, the Kominas, wrote a song called "Suicide Bomb the Gap," which became Muslim punk rock's first anthem.

"As Muslims, we're not being honest if we criticize the United States without first criticizing ourselves," said Mr. Kamel, 23, who grew up in a Syrian family in Chicago. He is lead singer of the band al-Thawra, "the Revolution" in Arabic.

For many young American Muslims, the merger of Islam and rebellion resonated.

Hanan Arzay, 15, is a daughter of Muslim immigrants from Morocco who lives in East Islip, N.Y. In the months after the Sept. 11 attacks, pedestrians threw eggs and coffee cups at the van that transported her to a Muslim school, she said, and one person threw a wine bottle, shattering the van's window.

At school, her Koran teacher threw chalk at her for requesting literal translations of the holy book, Ms. Arzay said. After she was expelled from two Muslim schools, her uncle gave her “The Taqwacores.”

“This book is my lifeline,” Ms. Arzay said. “It saved my faith.”

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August 7, 2002

## FILM REVIEW; The Catcher In the Texas Chain Store

By ELVIS MITCHELL

Even the title of the new Miguel Arteta crooked comedy of manners, "The Good Girl," is contrary and mocking. Like "Chuck and Buck," this director's previous collaboration with the writer Mike White, "Girl" is about a perverse need to create romance. Here it's like a Bette Davis melodrama directed by Luis Buñuel: ambition and heartache with a poisonous undercurrent of anti-bourgeois absurdity. And it's a winner, helped along by a no-frills performance by Jennifer Aniston as the soul-sick cashier Justine.

Justine spends her dreary days at Retail Rodeo, a down-at-the-heels Texas version of stores like Target and Wal-Mart. Her co-workers include a thoughtless, proud manager (John Carroll Lynch), a bullying born-again security guard (Mr. White) and Cheryl (Zoëy Deschanel), who makes sour, deadpan attacks on the inane day-to-day routine of the store's public address system.

When Justine stares into the big, droopy eyes of Holden (Jake Gyllenhaal), a new employee who wears his voluble, depressive air like the Red Badge of Courage, she's enchanted. In his early 20's and still living at home, Holden is smitten by Justine's worldliness, even though when he tells her he was named after the protagonist of "The Catcher in the Rye," she asks if his name is Catcher. (It's one in a series of running riffs on the character's name that "The Good Girl" supplies.)

Despite this episode, "The Good Girl," which opens today in Manhattan and Los Angeles, doesn't condescend. Justine's own life is treated like that of a J. D. Salinger character -- or maybe more like Emma Bovary's. Now 30, she's mired in her job and in a marriage to Phil (John C. Reilly), an amiable stoner and house painter whose initiative was long ago suffocated in clouds of weed smoke. (Apparently, so was his ability to father children.) Most of the time he sits and blazes joints with his pal Bubba (Tim Blake Nelson). So when Justine begins an affair with Holden, whose pliable lower lip fills her ears with his literary pretensions to suffering, she's at first fulfilled. But eventually she becomes as much Holden's mom as she is Phil's, even though she embarked on the relationship with Holden to give her life a new charge.

It's Ms. Aniston who surprises in "The Good Girl." In some ways she may feel as trapped as Justine by playing Rachel Green, the poor little rich daddy's girl of television's "Friends." She comes up with an inventively morose physicality for Justine: her arms hang at her sides as though shackled; they're not limp appendages but weighed down with unhappiness. The plucky dream girls she's played in movies like the underseen 1999 classic "Office Space" are expressive and given to anxious displays of hand waving. But here she articulates Justine's sad tales through a narration that's as affected and misery laden as Holden's ragged, ripped-off fiction.

This tone extends to her voice-over, which is sodden and exhausted, as if she is unable to rouse herself from the torpor within her head. Ms. Aniston provides a gentle, thoughtful performance, just as last season in "Friends" she gave Rachel a thorny, hard-won maturity and did her best work on the show; it's been a very good year for her.

And for Mr. Arteta, Ms. Aniston's comic authority is a sure laugh-getter. The persuasive results are a ripe, daffy comedy about the turbulent mixture of depression and jealousy. The director and writer don't judge their characters; rather they show how difficult it is to maintain morality, and that the actions of needy people set in motion a capricious fate that damages everyone.

Mr. Arteta is more than lucky in assembling an able-bodied cast, and his comfort with actors has grown. With "Chuck" and his previous "Star Maps," he focused more on the ideas behind the scripts; in "The Good Girl," he works out the emotional life of

the material. The sum total is far more satisfying and tougher to shake off.

Ms. Deschanel, who alone is one of the best reasons to go to the movies these days, takes her few lines and sprinkles them through her scenes like fairy dust. This makes sense, because she's intensely pixilated -- a devil doll with a hunger for mischief. She's like a stand-in for Mr. Arteta and Mr. White.

There's great support, too, from the always solid Mr. Reilly and Mr. Gyllenhaal, who's become a specialist in sending up infantile narcissism. He satirizes the spaniel-eyed sensitivity that other actors would exploit. And Mr. Nelson is both sprightly and rueful; he gets a lot out of his honeyed yokel's voice.

There's more to everyone here than we're initially led to think. "The Good Girl" is like a neurotically charged post-millennial take on the trailer-park comedies that Jonathan Demme once claimed for himself. Mr. Arteta has shown the American ability to create a family from the most unlikely material and in the oddest of situations. These makeshift cocoons -- the Retail Rodeo, despite its crushing banality, is probably the only thing that gets Justine up in the morning -- don't buy his protagonists peace. They're still outsiders.

"The Good Girl" flirts with a happy ending, but it's only a tease. There's still blood dripping from the smiley face.

"The Good Girl" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for strong language, sexuality and an acre of weed jokes.

## THE GOOD GIRL

Directed by Miguel Arteta; written by Mike White; director of photography, Enrique Chediak; edited by Jeff Betancourt; music by Joey Waronker, Tony Maxwell, James O'Brien and Mark Orton; production designer, Daniel Bradford; produced by Matthew Greenfield; released by Fox Searchlight Pictures. Running time: 93 minutes. This film is rated R.

WITH: Jennifer Aniston (Justine Last), Zooey Deschanel (Cheryl), Jake Gyllenhaal (Holden Worther), John Carroll Lynch (Jack Field), Tim Blake Nelson (Bubba), John C. Reilly (Phil Last), Deborah Rush (Gwen Jackson) and Mike White (Corny).

Photos: Jake Gyllenhaal and Jennifer Aniston as lovers in "The Good Girl." (Dale Robinette/Fox Searchlight)(pg. E6); Jennifer Aniston as a cashier in Miguel Arteta's comedy "The Good Girl." (Dale Robinette/Fox Searchlight Pictures)(pg. E1)

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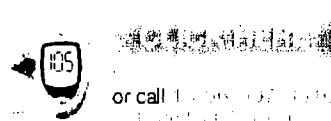
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MOVIE REVIEW

## The Graduate (1967) NYT

Critics' Pick

### THE GRADUATE

By Bosley Crowther  
Published: December 22, 1967

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through get progressively more dim, there sweeps ahead a film that is not only one of the best of the year, but also one of the best seriocomic social satires we've had from Hollywood since Preston Sturges was making them.

It is Mike Nichols's and Lawrence Turman's devastating and uproarious The Graduate, which came yesterday to the Lincoln Art and the Coronet.

Mark it right down in your datebook as a picture you'll have to see—and maybe see twice to savor all its sharp satiric wit and cinematic treats. For in telling a pungent story of the sudden confusions and dismays of a bland young man fresh out of college who is plunged headlong into the intellectual vacuum of his affluent parents' circle of friends, it fashions a scariying picture of the raw vulgarity of the swimming-pool rich, and it does so with a lively and exciting expressiveness through vivid cinema.

Further, it offers an image of silver-spooned, bewildered youth, standing expectantly out with misgiving where the brook and the swimming-pool meet, that is developed so wistfully and winningly by Dustin Hoffman, an amazing new young star, that it makes you feel a little tearful and choked-up while it is making you laugh yourself raw.

In outline, it may sound skimpy and perhaps a little crude—possibly even salacious in a manner now common in films. For all it is, in essence, is the story of this bright but reticent young man who returns from an Eastern college to his parent's swanky home in

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Beverly Hills, gets seduced rather quickly by the restless wife of his father's law partner, then falls in love with the lady's daughter and finds himself helplessly trapped in a rather sticky dilemma until he is able to dislodge himself through a familiar romantic ploy.

That's all. And yet in pursuing this simple story line, which has been adorned with delicious incidents and crackling dialogue in the screenplay by Calder Willingham and Buck Henry, based on a novel by Charles Webb, the still exploring Mr. Nichols has done such sly and surprising things with his actors and with his camera—or, rather, Robert Surtees's camera—that the overall picture has the quality of a very extensive and revealing social scan.

With Mr. Hoffman's stolid, deadpanned performance, he gets a wonderfully compassionate sense of the ironic and pathetic immaturity of a mere baccalaureate scholar turned loose in an immature society. He is a character very much reminiscent of Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.

And with Anne Bancroft's sullenly contemptuous and voracious performance as the older woman who yearns for youth, Mr. Nichols has twined in the netting the casual crudeness and yet the pathos of this type.

Katharine Ross, another comparative newcomer, is beautifully fluid and true as the typical college-senior daughter whose sensitivities are helplessly exposed for brutal abrasion by her parents and by the permissive society in which she lives. Murray Hamilton is piercing as her father—a seemingly self-indulgent type who is sharply revealed as bewildered and wounded in one fine, funny scene. And William Daniels and Elizabeth Wilson fairly set your teeth on edge as the hotcha, insensitive parents of the lonely young man.

Enhancing the veracity of the picture is first-rate staging in true locations and on well-dressed sets, all looking right in excellent color. And a rich, poignant musical score that features dandy modern folk music, sung (offscreen, of course) by the team of Simon and Garfunkel, has the sound of today's moody youngsters—"The Sounds of Silence," as one lyric says.

Funny, outrageous, and touching, *The Graduate* is a sophisticated film that puts Mr. Nichols and his associates on a level with any of the best satirists working abroad today.

#### **(MOVIE)**

Directed by Mike Nichols; written by Calder Willingham and Buck Henry, based on the novel by Charles Webb; cinematographer, Robert Surtees; edited by Sam O'Steen; music by Dave Grusin; production designer, Richard Sylbert; produced by Lawrence Turman; released by Embassy Pictures. Running time: 105 minutes.

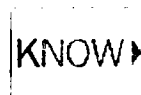
With: Anne Bancroft (Mrs. Robinson), Dustin Hoffman (Ben Braddock), Katharine Ross (Elaine Robinson), William Daniels (Mr. Braddock), Murray Hamilton (Mr. Robinson), Elizabeth Wilson (Mrs. Braddock), Brian Avery (Carl Smith), and Walter Brooke (Mr. Maguire).

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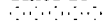
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3. May 29th, 2009 12:16 am

Rating:

**Needs to Repeat a Class or Two**

This is among the more overrated films of our time.

— [tonymarie, Staten Island, NY](#)

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2. May 29th, 2009 12:16 am

Rating:

**TOP GRADUATE**

THIS IS A MILESTONE as its a sex satire on the 60s but when you observe it ,the truth is TIMELESS as a bored bourgeois dysfunctional family is torn apart by a incestuous crisis,the greek DRAMA tones of the movie are set with its drama and subtle humour but this is totally modern in approach as it sets both men and women free from their convrentional suburban lives,hoffman was good but anne was great in her supercilious,seductive sex siren as was the simon garfunkel score which remains unequalled in cinema,this is mike nicol at his cerebral best and he has set a trend with breaking not just casting rules but ingeniously framing his visuals,yet it is artistic and entraining in the most balanced cinematic achievement from america in the sixties,hoffman could never give another subtle comic performance again and who can when MRS.ROBINSON IS NOT AROUND.

— [usman khawaja, havering,london,england](#)

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1. May 29th, 2009 12:16 am

Rating:

**Some acting as the art of the nothing.**

Number of reader's reviews : 0 .

What, nobody interested ?

This film was the beginning of the end of the Hollywood that everyone had taken for granted for decades. Me mostly included. There was something about this film that wasn't only breaking a mould of style but was killing something stone dead. It was acting. Could you see it? It was in the interests of the industry that no-one could.

The New York Times review of 1967 that I've just read is just about as good as it could be in presenting Mr. Hoffman's performance but doesn't mention that his trick was to leave acting out! For eleven years we'd had to put up with the method that Brando introduced us to as definitive in 'On the Waterfront' and the mannerisms had driven us crazy ever since but at least we could see what he and everyone under his subsequent influence were doing: they were acting! Here in "The Graduate" we had Mr. Hoffman , Mr.Hoffman and Mr Hoffman doing nothing: "I'm a little worried about my future", is one of the lines from "The Graduate".

The performance led to other actors who were without tradition to work with and thus the erosion of the Hollywood mystique.

(edited)...and where there weren't stylistic devices there was to show off the sheer pleasure of film-making which is not unknown to the many millions who like to show off the sheer pleasure of cinema-going.

The late Miss Bancroft delivered one of the century's most memorable lines,

"...sort of."

— [laurencebeck, Australia](#)

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The New York Times



This movie has been designated a Critic's Pick by the film reviewers of The Times.

September 13, 2002

## FILM REVIEW; On the Outs With Almost Everything

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

"Igby Goes Down," a corrosively sarcastic comedy that lifts the lid off the gleaming casserole of post-yuppie American culture, establishes Kieran Culkin as the movies' Boy Brat of the Moment. Or should I say Alternative Boy Brat, since his character, 17-year-old Igby Slocumb, is in full rebellion against the values embodied by the typical Hollywood teenage sports hero.

As Igby, a runaway from military school, thrashes up and down the East Coast with a side trip to Chicago, the actor, who will turn 20 at the end of this month, gyrates wildly between a smart-aleck know-it-all given to snidely witty asides and a lost little boy. Not a false note is sounded. The role of Igby is even richer than Tim Sullivan, the Catholic school rebel whom Mr. Culkin played in "The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys." Together they certify a new type: the smart, cheeky nerd who recklessly pushes limits without going bad.

"Igby Goes Down," which opens today in New York and Los Angeles, is the second film in recent months (after "Tadpole") to take its cue from "The Catcher in the Rye" by giving us a fresh-scrubbed, upscale teenage rebel with a brain to match his attitude. Igby may not be as charmingly exotic as Oscar Grubman, the 15-year-old protagonist of "Tadpole," an intellectually precocious, French-spouting preppy, romantically obsessed with his beautiful, much older stepmother, but he's just as intelligent.

Like Oscar, Igby is an earnest seeker of truth, beauty and the authentic. Both characters are also available for intergenerational sex with older women. Igby, however, is much more self-destructive, and the East Village bohemian milieu in which he flails for a good part of the film is far more treacherous than the comfy mid-Manhattan nest that coddles Oscar's fantasies.

What is it with "The Catcher in the Rye" these days? Is it just a coincidence that in a matter of months, the J. D. Salinger classic has rung two cinematic bells? (Three if you count "The Good Girl," in which Jennifer Aniston's character has an affair with a clinically depressed self-styled Holden Caulfield.) Nor should we forget the plaintively whimsical films of Wes Anderson, which flaunt a Salingeresque sense of their own rarefied sensibility.

Through Igby's eyes, the privileged world he was born into is as corrupt, hypocritical and stiflingly conformist as the one that Salinger's alter ego reacted against more than 50 years ago. There are differences, of course. The most conspicuous ingredients in the movie's social mix that weren't there in the 1940's are drugs. They're omnipresent in "Igby Goes Down," and although they're supposed to ease the characters' pain, all they do is leave them more confused and desperate.

"Igby Goes Down" is the remarkably assured directorial and screenwriting debut of Burr Steers, a Washington-born actor and stage director who made his most recent film appearance in Whit Stillman's "Last Days of Disco." Although "Igby" has its share of glitches and tonal inconsistencies, it packs an emotional wallop similar to that of another cultural golden oldie as beloved in its way as "The Catcher in the Rye": "The Graduate." But because it refuses to tie up its plot strands into prettily romantic bows, "Igby" isn't likely to be a "Graduate"-size hit.

Its sense of humor is also much darker. The opening scene is a grotesquely comic matricide, in which Igby and his older brother Oliver (Ryan Phillippe) put their snoring, heavily sedated mother, Mimi (Susan Sarandon), out of her misery by fitting a plastic bag over her head. Whether or not it's a fantasy is revealed only at the end.

At the same time, the movie's nastily funny portrait of post-yuppie American affluence and its disappointments recalls the shallow California dream as satirized in "The Graduate" and summed up by the word "plastics." A scene of Igby prowling uneasily through a lavish party in the Hamptons is a direct homage to the creepily cheery poolside fest in "The Graduate" celebrating Benjamin Braddock's return from college.

Unlike Benjamin, Igby has fallen off the fast track to an A-list college and professional success before the movie begins. He has flunked out of so many prep schools that Mimi has decided on military school as a last resort. But Igby soon flees and ends up camping out in a New York loft. The place doubles as a dance studio occupied by Rachel (Amanda Peet), a heroin-addicted choreographer and trophy girlfriend of Igby's wealthy godfather and benefactor, D. H. Banes (Jeff Goldblum).

Some of the film's least convincing scenes involve a cursory tour of downtown bohemia overseen by Rachel's best friend, Russel (Jared Harris), a stridently pretentious performance artist of indeterminate sexuality. At his lowest point, Igby earns money as a drug courier, distributing powdered goodies to Russel's circle of friends.

But it is Igby's ambivalent relationship with his dysfunctional family that animates the movie's soul. Igby's father, Jason (Bill Pullman), is in a mental hospital after a schizophrenic breakdown that is shown midmovie in a harrowing flashback. Angry, pill-popping Mimi is a highly connected social climber, snob and vocal anti-Semite. In a bracing turnabout from the wide-eyed saints with whom she is identified, Ms. Sarandon gives this monster a gleefully comic edge.

As Oliver, Igby's handsome older brother and part-time watchdog, Mr. Phillippe finds a hint of vulnerability in this cold, condescending smoothie who is studying economics at Columbia and to whom Igby refers as "the Fascist." Some of the movie's most touching moments involve the brothers' sexual competition for Sookie Sapperstein (Claire Danes), a Bennington dropout adrift in New York, who meets Oliver after establishing a soulful romantic connection with Igby.

Even though the movie drifts uneasily between satire and realism, and its visions of military school and bohemia feel secondhand, it maintains a ruthless emotional honesty. Ultimately, it gets at something that no other recent American movie has captured quite so acutely: a resentful, lurking disappointment in the good life.

Instead of bringing them happiness, prosperity has left most of the grown-up characters with only a frustrated

sense of entitlement floundering in a spiritual void. Jason is literally driven crazy by the pressures of his life, while Mimi fights off emptiness with prescription medications. D. J., the only major adult character to flourish in this atmosphere, is a shark. As much as the chill of today's Darwinian social climate filters down the ladder, "Igby Goes Down" suggests that it just as surely seeps upward.

"Igby Goes Down" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). It includes nudity, sexual situations, and some profanity.

## IGBY GOES DOWN

Written and directed by Burr Steers; director of photography, Wedigo von Schultendorff; edited by William Anderson; music by Uwe Fahrenkrog-Peterson; production designer, Kevin Thompson; produced by Marco Weber and Lisa Tornell; released by United Artists. Running time: 98 minutes. This film is rated R.

**WITH:** Kieran Culkin (Igby), Claire Danes (Sookie), Jeff Goldblum (D. H.), Jared Harris (Russel), Amanda Peet (Rachel), Ryan Phillippe (Oliver), Bill Pullman (Jason) and Susan Sarandon (Mimi).

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## Clinton in the Rye

**Did he get his inspiration from Holden Caulfield?**

**By Jeff Greenfield**

(TIME, July 22) -- Ever since Bill Clinton strode onto the national stage, armchair shrinks have had a field day labeling him an adolescent, a man defined by all-night bull sessions, fast-food orgies, raging hormones and peripatetic curiosity.

Now, as the President's re-election strategy becomes clear, we are finally realizing just which adolescent Bill Clinton really wants to be: it turns out he is Holden Caulfield. Near the end of J.D. Salinger's classic novel of teenage angst, which Hillary Clinton bought a copy of during the Clintons' 1993 summer vacation on Martha's Vineyard, Caulfield explains what the "catcher in the rye" means:

"I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye, and all," he says. "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."

Now consider what Mr. Clinton has most visibly been doing all year: meeting with parents to deplore gratuitous sex and violence on television; pressuring Big Media into accepting a ratings system and a V-chip technology to let parents control what their kids can see on the tube; embracing school uniforms and curfews; plunging into tobacco row with a machete to stop cigarette companies from luring the young with Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man.

What all these moves have in common--and there will be a parade of such initiatives from now until November--is that they are designed to cast the President in effect as the energetic young man standing in the rye, protecting our children from running over the cliff. It is a strategy designed to recast the image of government: instead of the supercilious bureaucrat with mountains of paper and regulations, government now becomes

the safety-patrol volunteer, the lifeguard, the friendly cop on the beat buying a lost child an ice cream cone before calling his worried parents.

Ann Lewis, the Clinton-Gore campaign official who has perfect pitch on presidential spin, puts it this way: "Parents think it is a good idea that government helps them do this important work. To be on the side of parents, especially in households where everybody is squeezed for time and money, this is the right place to be."

This is exactly why Mr. Clinton finds himself in the right place on the smoking issue. In years past taking on tobacco might have been seen as a classic case of Big Government regulators trying to get their mitts on a legal product. For parents today, however, cigarettes are simply another powerful danger tempting their kids--like drugs, gangs, dirty rap lyrics and steamy soaps on afternoon TV. With Mom and Pop working longer hours--assuming Mom and Pop live under the same roof--it's not hard to see why they might welcome the idea of the government stepping in to help. Conservatives have for years effectively derided liberals as champions of the "nanny state," but when it comes to unsupervised children, government-as-nanny doesn't sound all that bad.

Ironically, it was Bob Dole who suggested last April that voters ask themselves which candidate they would most trust to care for their children. It was his attempt to cast himself as the responsible adult in the race. He never dreamed that the Clinton campaign had already decided to offer up a young, energetic President standing between their children and the abyss beyond the rye.

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# Why 'Harry Potter' did a Harry Houdini

from: **TIME**

July 21, 2000  
Web posted at: 6:44 PM EDT (2244 GMT)

By *Richard Corliss*

(TIME.com) -- We might expect it of Draco Malfoy, the sneakiest, snottiest student at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. Something would go the slightest bit wrong -- a rat performing black magic, Dementors haunting the castle -- and Malfoy would point a finger at his innocent rival with the glasses and the lightning bolt on his forehead. But when the New York Times overhauls its best-seller list for the first time in 16 years, we'd hope for an excuse a bit more solid than "Harry Potter did it."

J. K. Rowling's "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" -- fourth in the phenomenally popular series of novels about the education of a young wizard -- hit bookstores and web sites two weeks ago with an unprecedented blast. The first printing of 3.8 million copies (the largest in publishing history) was quickly exhausted, compelling Scholastic Books, Inc., to rush a huge second printing, which will raise the number of "Goblet" books in print in the U.S. to nearly 7 million. Surely this installment would be joining the three earlier Harry Potters (whose sales totaled 21 million here) in that familiar Valhalla, the top of the fiction list in the Times' Book Review section.

This Sunday, though, the nation's No. 1 best-seller won't be at the top of the nation's No. 1 best-seller list. Neither will the second, third and fourth. Americans young, and not so young, may be in the grip of Potterphilia, but "Goblet of Fire" and the others will not be in their rightful slots. In the first revamping of its lists in 16 years -- a change that casts a cool light on the hot war of competing best-seller estimates, both in print and online -- the Book Review has created a new children's list and consigned the Harry books to it. Instead, this week's list has a truly mature book at the top: "The House on Hope Street," the latest potboiler by Danielle Steel.

"I think books have got to be on one list or the other," says Charles (Chip) McGrath, editor of the Book Review. "It's somewhat arbitrary but nonetheless necessary that we have to decide. And it is not coincidental that the timing corresponds to the fourth Harry Potter book. It occurred to us that if we were ever going to do this step, this would be the time."

The Times' decision was a response to complaints from many publishers -- not Scholastic, of course -- that Harry Potter was hogging and clogging the

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top of the best-seller list, depriving the public of access to other popular fiction. "By expanding the number of books that are trumpeted in the pages of the New York Times," says Bill Thomas, the editor in chief of Doubleday, "it increases the variety of books and the choices for different kinds of readers." It also increases the chance that a publisher other than Scholastic will be able to slap the phrase "The New York Times #1 Best-Seller" on a book jacket.

Not everyone is thrilled with the change. Barbara Marcus, Scholastic's president, has a severe case of annoyance. "Best-seller lists are supposed to represent what America is reading," says Marcus. "But the Times has chosen this moment in time to remove the phenomenon of our lives. Nothing has ever been as popular with families, adults, children, in the history of publishing, and it should be a giant celebration. Instead, the argument is being made that they are taking up too much room on the list."

Marcus gets support from one of her competitors: Craig Virden, the president and publisher of Random House Children's Books. "If a children's book is moving in the numbers that the New York Times editors deem appropriate for their best-seller list, then it should be there," Virden says, adding drolly, "I think that 3.8 million is an adult number."

The Times' new policy implicitly raises the question: What is a children's book? Is it by definition second-class literature? ("If an adult horror writer had been on the list for a year," says Marcus, naming no names, "would they have created a horror best-seller list?") McGrath speaks with the weary voice of an indulgent parent who has let his kids stay up late all summer: "Surely Scholastic and Harry Potter have had their moment in the sun." But Rowling's oeuvre -- in its charm and precocity the Shirley Temple, maybe the Mozart of pre-teen literature -- had earned its place at the grownups' table. Now it must go to a subsidiary list -- where, McGrath suggests, it always belonged.

Is a children's book a work written for kids? Or read mostly by them? If it's the second, then Harry Potter should be on both lists, adult and fiction. According to the NPD Group, a leading market research firm that tracks book-buying in 12,000 households, nearly 30 percent of Harry Potter purchases were made for a reader 35 or older. And we know one middle-aged, childless movie critic (all right, we that critic) who last summer read the first three books aloud to his enthralled wife, also an adult. The Potter series is one of those cultural events that spills out of narrow categories and into the Zeitgeist. Reading the books, kids feel more mature, adults feel younger. And all become part of a community where age doesn't matter.

Beyond the value of the books, the Times decision stokes another debate: whether value judgments should be applied to the raw data of popular preference -- and whether the compilers of lists can evict a work of popular art because it's just too darned popular. Back in 1964, five Beatles songs were in the top five slots on Billboard magazine's list; maybe the editors should have put the Beatles songs in a separate "moptop" category, to make room for Louis Armstrong and the Beach Boys. The talliers of weekend box office returns might get bored with all those popular gross-out teen slasher comedies ("Cut!") The Nielsen folks must have wanted to create a game-show niche once "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" started monopolizing five of the top 10 weekly slots. Instead, the calibrators of the people's favorites let the lists speak for themselves. In these snapshot moments, the mass audience couldn't get enough of the Beatles, scary movies, Regis Philbin -- and Harry Potter.



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Perhaps the change does damage to nothing but Scholastic's pride. Says McGrath: "I really do not think that moving Harry Potter onto the children's list is going to affect Harry Potter one way or the other." That's true. But it has already singed the reputation of the Times list. "The plan is a jumble of loose ends that is continuing proof to some that the Times ain't what it used to be," observed Publishing Trends, an industry newsletter, "and that this latest project is only hastening the decline in its importance to the book industry."

In one sense, there is something delightfully old-world about the Times list. Its rankings are compiled from the unverified reports of nearly 4,000 bookstores, plus wholesalers. This process allows for some creative bookmaking. "People believe there are prejudices built into the Times list," says one publishing executive. "They think it's heavily slanted toward the independent stores, that it's not a fair representation of either the chain stores or the Wal-marts of the world -- and that perhaps stores have reported books they 'wished' were selling. They were more likely to report a literary book than a romance novel."

Thus the increasing influence of other book lists: from Publisher's Weekly, The Wall Street Journal and especially USA Today, which each Thursday publishes the raw data of actual sales from independent stores, chains and the dot-com dealerships. "A lot of people are looking at that list," says Liz Perl, executive director of publicity for the Berkley Publishing Group. "It gets stronger and stronger."

And what can threaten a Gutenberg-era giant like the Times more than a new-media kid on the block. The Amazon.com Hot 100 list, a reflection of sales over the web site, is updated hourly. (The Times Book Review, because of its long lead time, can publish only the very latest estimate of the books people were buying two weeks ago.) "The beauty of Amazon is the instant gratification," Perl says. "If you have an author who appears on, say, 'Rosie O'Donnell,' you can find out right away whether or not there's a bump in the Amazon numbers."

The Amazon sample can be misleading, since the taste of its buyers doesn't always match that of bookstore browsers. Self-improvement texts do better on Amazon, romance novels far worse. Nora Roberts' "Tears of the Moon," the Times' paperback No.1 and USA Today's sixth top seller, is No. 19 on Amazon. Roberts' "Irish Hearts," 17 in USA Today, is 313 on Amazon. One of USA Today's best-selling romances, "Wild Child," doesn't even crack Amazon's top 1,000. So is the list important? "In terms of actual sales, somewhat," says Bill Thomas, the editor in chief of Doubleday. "In terms of author psychology, very important. Authors check it like daytraders keeping track of the NASDAQ." (In fact, the list is so fickle and fast-moving that the numbers we've quoted here are already out of date.)

From new media and old, the Times list will continue to be challenged. That's fine with McGrath. "If there has been a proliferation of best-sellers lists," he says, "in a way it's a compliment to our list. It's people wanting a piece of the action." And even the carpers in the book biz can't do without it. "We get annoyed with the list," says one insider, "then we put it on the cover of our books and build it into our contracts." (Many author-publisher deals have escalator clauses if the book hits the Times list.) As McGrath notes: "The list has become something it was never intended to be: a vast marketing engine."

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The engine is likely to keep on chugging, even in the jet age. But it has coughed a little steam in its decision to throw Harry Potter off the train. McGrath wants to be seen as open to input from the people who buy ads in his Book Review. "I think what we're going to do is to take our cue from the publishers," he says. "If you publish a book as a children's book, we will treat it as that. If you publish a book as an adult book, we will treat it as that. We'll take our cue from you. And Harry Potter was published as a children's book."

Note to Barbara Marcus of Scholastic: Next summer, when the fifth Harry Potter book is due, simply designate it as adult fiction. The boy will be 15 by then; he could be the Holden Caulfield of wizards.

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## Holden Caulfield from the East Bay

# Jack the Bear

By Don McCall.  
191 pp. New York:  
Doubleday & Co.  
\$5.95.

By LARRY McMURTRY

"Jack the Bear" is a vigorous, engaging and effective novel, one which may, in a few years, call many of its readers back for a second look. It is a novel of adolescence, told in the first person, which means that, first of all, it has to triumph over the not-inconsiderable weight of its own tradition — meaning, obviously, those twin fountain-heads and All-American literary sibilings, "Freckle-berry Finn" and "The Catcher in the Rye."

That tradition does pinch Dan McCall from time to time in his second novel, and "The Catcher in the Rye," particularly, leaves some bruises on his style, but he triumphs in the end and gives us a book that is authentically his own. "Jack the Bear" is carried by that strength of feeling that

Larry McMurry's most recent novel is, "All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers."

sometimes occurs when a writer locates, for the first time, either his true subject or the region or place from which he will derive all the true subjects he turns out to need.

Mr. McCall has an excellent feel for place, or, in this case for Oakland, Calif. Jack the Bear, who is 13, has just returned there with his widowed father and his little brother Dylan, from Syracuse, N. Y. In Syracuse his mother died, and it is a measure of Mr. McCall's skill that, though she dies off-stage, she becomes — through the medium of Jack's dreams and memories — a considerable presence in the story. Jack's harassed, at times desperate father is Monster of Ceramontes on an East Bay TV horror show. For from saving his telecasts for air-time, he uses them endlessly and inventively at home, to sustain his son's spirits and hold the family together. Sometimes he is Caesar Asparagus, sometimes Marcus Superfluous, but he is always in there pitching.

The threats to the family are both internal and external. John, the father, sometimes runs dry of spirit, and Jack the Bear is often too busy with his own growing up to help him out. More serious, however, are the threats from outside — from the freak-ridden, violent human environment of northern California. The

East Bay, of course, has no monopoly on either freaks or violence, but freakishness, like anything else, has tones and accents that differ from

region to region, and Mr. McCall has a fine eye for hometown variations.

Ultimately it is the neighborhood psychopath who tips the balance against Jack's father. His name is Norman and he wears a jacket that reads KILLER BY DAY, LOVER BY NIGHT. Believing, mistakenly, that the father has poisoned his faithful dog Cheyenne, he kidnaps little Dylan and abandons him in the woods. The child is found just in time to keep him from dying of exposure, but the strain of the ordeal destroys the intricate, day-to-day texture of family life which the father had so far preserved at such colossal cost, and the last movement of the book dramatizes Jack's growing awareness that the center of his personal universe is simply not going to hold.

The book differs from its famous predecessors in being essentially a novel about family — its riches, its tenacity and also its fragility, the strains it can and cannot bear. Jack the Bear sees that it's getting to be too much, and plans to light out for Europe when he's 16, but he is not an exile yet, not yet isolated. He watches his father losing his grip and does everything he can to help him keep it; far from concluding, like Holden Caulfield, that his family

The New York Times

Published April 25, 1974

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unit can be of little help to him, Jacky draws on his constantly, on his father, his little brother, and the memories of his dead mother.

The book is rich in character, and in place. Mr. McCall has a good eye for domestic minutiae, and a good ear for how children talk. It is in the stream of narration itself that he sometimes gets into trouble. Jacky, for the most part, is believably adolescent, and movingly vulnerable, but there are points at which the first-person locutions become so strongly Salingeresque that they threaten the reader's conviction. A Holden Caulfield from the East Bay in the seventies would not have quite the same speech rhythms as his Eastern counterpart from the forties, yet Jacky as protagonist sometimes echoes Holden quite precisely.

An equally troubling difficulty is the monotony of tone toward which first-person narration tends unless it is managed with the utmost skill. Mr. McCall's touch is not yet completely sure, and Jacky is usually more affecting in the parts of the book when he is being casual than in the more dramatic parts, when he is being urgent. However, these are minor blemishes on a book that is an original and substantial success. Mr. McCall is a talent to watch. ■

**The New York Times**

Published: April 28, 1974

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**Dan McCall.**

**The New York Times**  
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November 9, 2003

## Holden Caulfield on Ritalin

By Sam Sifton

VERNON GOD LITTLE

By DBC Pierre.

279 pp. New York:

Canongate. \$23.

Save for former quarterbacks, homecoming queens, lacrosse players and a few popular others, are there any American high school graduates who cannot admit a small understanding of the awkward teenage rage that led to the Columbine massacre in 1999? Are there any who cannot say that those poor, murderous, self-loathing children might at one point have been their friends?

And what would that have been like, to have been friends with killers? More to the point, what would it have been like, in the wake of the murders, to face the police -- authority figures, hard-faced lawmen -- and find them suddenly addressing you as suspect, calling you nerd-lover, defender of freaks? To be accused first of friendship with evil, then of complicity with evil and finally, amazingly, of evil itself?

What would a teenager say in the face of that? It is adolescent law, right up there with rebellion and first-date acne: Never speak the truth, for no words could be more destructive. Lie, always and forever, unto the end. Such is the premise upon which stands "Vernon God Little," a dangerous, smart, ridiculous and very funny first novel by the pseudonymous DBC Pierre, which recently won Britain's Man Booker Prize for contemporary fiction. Contemporary it surely is, though the form is ancient: dark, satirical prose, suffused with the language of youth culture, a first novel through and through, though one with a taste for vengeance.

And of course there is an antihero at its center. Remember antiheroes? Vernon Gregory Little is the genuine article: a 15-year-old high school student in small-town Texas, whose best friend, Jesus Navarro, came to school one day and murdered 16 of his classmates with a rifle, then turned the gun on himself. The novel begins three days after the killings. Vernon, a deceptively simple boy who narrates this tale in the manner of a character created by Mark Twain and remixed by Dr. Dre, is in a room at the sheriff's office waiting to be interviewed. "Looks like I'm the first one they rounded up so far," he says. "I ain't in trouble, don't get me wrong. I didn't have anything to do with Tuesday. Still, you wouldn't want to be here today."

And we're off. "Vernon God Little" rockets along for five acts of tragicomedy, as Vernon finds himself at the center of his town's lust for retribution, the center of attention for the first time in his short life. He was not in class when the shooting started. He is as innocent as the day is long, but has a few things he wouldn't like to say in public about his whereabouts. This will become his crime, or at any rate the proof of his inchoate guilt.

And so his life unravels, according to the American arc: on television and on the run. "Only underdogs and psychos in this world," says a fellow who appears for a moment to be a good guy, early in Vernon's travails. He's right, of course: most of the characters in this book are both. And what results from their actions is awful. Harassed by dumb cops, victimized by venal media types, abused by mental health professionals, weighted down by his bovine mother and her awful, stupid friends, Vernon moves through these pages as if in a fever dream, uncomprehending, always losing, always wrong. It is not giving away too much, I think, to say that he ends up in jail, facing execution. He need only speak the whole truth to set himself free, but he cannot. As an actual teenager might put it, "too embarrassing."

The writing is simply terrific. In much the same way that noir novelists like James Ellroy seem steeped in the rhythms and textures of jazz, there is a jagged, punk-rock sensibility to Pierre's prose, absolutely his own. Plot aside -- and there is much in this novel to keep the reader turning pages -- "Vernon God Little" is just plain fun to read.

There's a great deal of profanity, of course, wonderfully ribald, coarse stuff. But there are also sparkling gems amid the verbal slag heaps, like little hits of true poetry in a gangsta rap: "I ride down empty roads of frosted silver, trees overhead swish cool

hints of warm panties in bedclothes," he writes, happily, of a nighttime bike ride. Or, observing an old man in a bus terminal: "The skin of his face hangs down in pockets, like he has lead implants. Character, they call it. It ain't character, though; you know it's feelings. Erosion from waves of disappointment and sadness."

Of course, "Vernon God Little" isn't a perfect novel. It doesn't aspire to be. It is a howl of satirical protest against much that helps define American culture to the rest of the world: reality television, fast food, religion, the death penalty. The youthful exuberance of that moralizing wears a little. It is, in fact, the only part of the novel that makes one think of the author's nationality, or lack of one: Born in Australia to English parents, Pierre (his real name is Peter Finlay) has lived in both the United States and Mexico, and now resides in Ireland. He appears to know America well, but does not fully understand it. Texas barbecue, for instance, which comes in for a drubbing throughout the book, is not an emblem of what is wrong with this nation; quite the opposite.

But what is much more important and praiseworthy, Pierre renders adolescence brilliantly, capturing with seeming effortlessness the bright, contradictory hormone rush of teenage life. Here's Vernon on what it's like to approach a girl he's supposed to meet at a mall: "I slouch low, hoping she doesn't see me yet. I hate it when you go to meet somebody, and they spot you." They stare at you, he continues, though it's not true -- the girl is just looking at him kindly. "You feel like your steps bounce too much, or your shoulders are too dangly or something. You hold the same dumb smile." Holden Caulfield would have liked Vernon Little, especially if he'd had access to a stash of Ritalin.

And here Vernon is on the interrelationship of music and unrequited love -- a boy on a bus, thinking about a girl named Taylor, as power lines and fence posts shoot past on the side of the road. "This is the scenario when I get the day's clincher," he says, "the one I forgot to expect. A song gets attached to Taylor . . . 'Better Man' is the tune, by Pearl Jam. I don't even know the words to the song, but you can bet I'll spend the next 80 years in hell making every line fit my situation."

It was like that, adolescence. There is and always will be something delightfully awful about seeing it etched out so well.

Drawing (Drawing by Christoph Abbrederis)



The New York Times

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August 23, 2005

## BOOKS OF THE TIMES; Who's Afraid Of Holden Caulfield?

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Indecision

By Benjamin Kunkel

241 pages. Random House. \$21.95.

If you really want to hear what I think about this guy Dwight Wilmerding, the first thing I should tell you is that he kind of reminds me of me.

In "Indecision," Dwight -- or this ghostwriter he got, Benjamin Kunkel -- goes into a lot more of all that David Copperfield kind of stuff than I ever would, and he's a helluva lot older than I was when I went through my madman phase, but still, you've gotta admit we're coming from the same sort of place.

We both live in New York City. We're both really close to our sisters. We're both hung up on our prep schools, even though Dwight graduated like a whole 10 years ago. We're both used to getting the ax -- me from a bunch of schools, Dwight from his crummy job as a tech support guy at Pfizer.

We both have trouble applying ourselves, or like one of my old teachers said, we've got trouble finding the size of our minds. And we both act a lot younger than we really are. When I was 17, I acted like I was 13, and Dwight, who's 28, acts like he's still 17: he and his slacker friends live in a dormlike apartment, spend a lot of time listening to the Dead, ingest tons of drugs and hold lots of zeitgeisty conversations about Truth and Love and Meaning.

Dwight says "dude" an awful lot, but boy, the guy is a real talker: he's got this voice that just grabs your attention and won't let go, even when you think you're not particularly interested in all the philosophy stuff he's always prattling away about like he's some sort of Walker Percy character or something. That was never my bag, metaphysics and all -- I was always more partial to meat-and-potatoes writers like Ring Lardner -- but old Dwight, I admit, is pretty great at soliloquizing, maybe not as great as people say I, Holden, was in my heyday, but pretty damn good all the same.

This is a guy who went into therapy with his own sister, who'd apparently read all these psychoanalysis books and wanted to encourage him to examine his inner life. And you get the feeling that he's the sort of guy who, when you first meet him and say, "How's it going?" he's going to give you his emotional temperature down to the last decimal point, and tell you how hard it is being 28 and how he's worried he's somehow mediocre and typical, and how he's got issues with his parents and being a privileged child of the privileged class.

As I've said before, I was never into talking about where I was born and what my lousy childhood was like -- certainly not to someone I've just met that very moment -- and I usually think of blabbermouths like Dwight as a royal pain in the you-know-what. Still, he's funny, Dwight is, and kind of earnest and definitely a lost soul, which in the end, I admit, really sort of gets to you. I mean, at one point the guy compares himself to a dog or thinks his father thinks of him as a dog -- as a big, friendly hound, waiting, head cocked, for an emotional biscuit.

Like the title of this memoir (or what Mr. Kunkel, a founding editor of *n + 1* magazine, is calling his first novel) suggests, Dwight makes a very big deal out of his problems making decisions. He doesn't know what he wants to do with his life. He doesn't know if he should commit to the girl he's dating. He doesn't know if he should look for a new job. The poor guy is so paralyzed by the maybes, he doesn't even know what to order in a restaurant. It just kills me that he makes all his decisions by tossing a coin.

So when this girl Natasha he knew back in school -- there we are on prep school again! -- e-mails him from Ecuador, sort of but not really inviting him down, Dwight does his coin-toss thing. A couple times. And right before he sets off on his trip, this friend of his, who's got connections at this drug company, offers him this trial drug called Abulinix, which is supposed to cure indecisiveness.

Boy, I wouldn't take some untested pill for all the dough in the world -- I really wouldn't. And you'd think that old Dwight might have second thoughts about it too, given that he and his friends took Ecstasy in the early hours of 9/11 -- a very ironical act that made him feel way optimistic, before those buildings came crashing down and made him feel like a moron for having felt so happy just a few hours before.

But hey, Dwight and his friends have spent the better part of their lives getting these chemical assists, and I've gotta say that Dwight (or this Mr. Kunkel, who turns out to be pretty great at channeling old Dwight's thoughts) does a swell job of describing what it's like to be high -- on weed or Ecstasy or this South American hallucinogen that makes everyone puke their guts out before transporting them to nirvana or whatever you want to call Drug Heaven. This drug Dwight takes in Ecuador gives a new meaning to stream-of-consciousness narration that old James Joyce certainly never, ever envisioned.

Anyway, Dwight is hoping this trip to Ecuador will change his life, and in a way it does. Natasha bails on him, but this friend of hers, a nice-looking chick named Brigid, is happy to become his traveling companion, and of course, as things go in stories of this sort, the two of them get into some serious "romantic-sexual" action while tripping their brains out in the heart of the Ecuadorian jungle.

I'm not sure that I entirely buy the ending of Dwight's trip, which I won't give away here, in case you want to read the book yourself. I actually think Dwight or Mr. Kunkel might have taken a few artistic liberties with it, seeing that it reads more like something my brother might have written for the movies than a real-life experience.

Old Dwight's book really knocked me out, and if there's one thing I hate, it's Hollywood. But then Dwight -- who doesn't have as big a thing about phonies as I do -- might not mind selling his story to some producer. He might not even mind being played by Jake Gyllenhaal or Josh Hartnett or Topher Grace.

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## A Female Holden Caulfield for the 1990's

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

CLAIRE DANES IS CROUCHING in the entrance to the kitchen when the director calls "Action!" Sliding her back up the door frame, she stands, fixes the camera with a look of ineffable disgust and stalks off. Behind her, her fictional mother is rattling on about trust. In front of her, her real mother is worrying about what this maneuver, performed for the umpteenth time, is doing to Claire's knees.

A 15-year-old who is actually playing 15, Claire is an anomaly in Los Angeles, where women of 30 routinely dress up like high school juniors. As the protagonist of "My So-Called Life," a new ABC series that begins this month, she is Angela Chase, a confused, sometimes soulful Everyteen.

Critics who have previewed the show, an hourlong drama from the team that created "Thirtysomething," have already heralded Angela as one of the most provocative characters to emerge on television in years. Neither the good girl, a la Blossom, nor the bad girl, a la Kelly Bundy, she is probably the closest prime time has dared come to the heart of puberty.

In the first episode of the show, to be broadcast Aug. 25, Angela dyes her hair screaming red, ditches her best friend for a faster set and lies to her parents in order to go to a party. In an occasional voice-over narration, she recounts her feelings in a disconcertingly disengaged tone. After she tries to get into a dance club one night and ends up being driven home in a police car, she crawls into her mother's bed, apologizing tearfully.

Claire Danes herself projects something of the unsettled mixture that is adolescence. She has a knowing air at odds with the hard-to-conceal pimple, and a husky, almost sexy voice that seems to be emanating from a much more mature chest. When she talks about herself, she can at times sound vulnerable ("I watched one special on this cable channel on child actors and it freaked me out"). At other times, though, she sounds as if she were looking back on her youth from a great distance, like the narrator of "The Wonder Years."

"I've always been mature," she said at one point, then added, as if correcting herself, "I've always taken myself very seriously."

As far as the State of California is concerned, Claire's emotional maturity isn't an issue. She is still unambiguously a minor and therefore must have a parent on the set with her every day. "My relationship with my parents is very different from Angela's relationship with hers," Claire said in an interview on the set. "I have a fairly good relationship with my parents. I feel very lucky to have them. But it's very strange. I shouldn't be spending this much time with them. You know, this is not normal."

Her mother, Carla, agrees. "If you had asked me two years ago if I'd be doing this, I'd have said, 'No way.'"

The saga of "My So-Called Life" actually began two years ago, when Claire, then just 13 years old and with very little professional experience, flew from New York to Los Angeles to audition for the role of Angela. She was the second actress the executive producers, Edward Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz, saw for the part.

"When she walked out of the room, Ed said, 'That was totally upsetting,'" Mr. Herskovitz recalled. "'We can't do it with someone that young.' I prophetically said, 'We may have no choice.'"

Originally expected to have its debut in September 1993, "My So-Called Life" didn't make it onto the air last year because, ABC said, the network could not come up with an appropriate time slot. The programmers decided to wait until another show flopped before putting "My So-Called Life" on the schedule. That wait lasted the entire 1993-94 season.

In the spring, ABC indicated that it would give the show a trial run over the summer. At the last minute, however, it switched signals and scheduled the show for the fall, Thursdays at 8 P.M.

THE TIME SLOT IS SOMEWHAT troubling to the producers for two reasons. The first is that it pits them against NBC's "Mad About You," a program that appeals to the same educated young women "My So-Called Life" should attract. The

second is that network standards and practices departments -- i.e., the censors -- are skittish about tackling sensitive issues at 8 P.M.

"In the best of all possible worlds, we would be on at 9 o'clock," Mr. Herskovitz said. That, he said, would give the show more latitude while still keeping it well before the bedtime of most teen-agers. But so far at least, with nine episodes already filmed, there have been no major run-ins over the content of the show. "We did the show our way," he said.

"Our way" for Mr. Zwick, Mr. Herskovitz and their co-executive producer, Winnie Holzman, means that "My So-Called Life" has a high-strung, temperamental quality that sometimes edges uncomfortably close to real life. Just like the main characters in "Thirtysomething," Angela, her mother and father are brooding, self-absorbed and sometimes whiny. In the struggles of these characters, teen-age girls and their parents -- especially those who live in relatively affluent suburbs -- are bound to see something of themselves.

"There will be some of the same criticisms leveled at the show" that were leveled at 'Thirtysomething,' " Mr. Herskovitz said, "about darkness and angst -- which I, by the way, don't believe. But I have never been around a show that has such a strong internal engine, and it is our job to serve that engine."

Angela's parents, played by Bess Armstrong and Tom Irwin, seem (at least in the pilot episode) almost as confused as she is. Both convey the sense that they can't believe they are old enough to be dealing with a difficult adolescent daughter. (At one point, in the blunt language typical of the show, Angela notes that she and her father used to be close but that her breasts "have come between us.")

One of ABC's concerns about the pilot was that it did not give enough attention to the parents; that concern, according to Ms. Holzman, the show's creator, has been addressed in subsequent episodes, which devote more time to the Chases' marriage and their various mid-life crises. In fact, she said, the show could not, for production reasons, remain so tightly focused on Claire, who, as a minor, can work only nine hours a day.

"There's only so much filming we can do with Claire," Ms. Holzman said. "At the same time, it became obvious that the rest of the cast is this really incredible ensemble and it would be a waste not to use them."

A native Manhattanite, Claire says she knew from an early age that she wanted to be a performer. "When I was 5, I remember my parents got a video camera and that weekend I just exploded," she said. In sixth grade, she enrolled in the Professional Performing Arts School, a magnet school on West 48th Street, where she studied drama two hours a day. That year, she was cast in a low-budget, independent film about child abuse. "I was 11," she said, "and I got hooked."

Claire's big break came when her parents, who own a loft in SoHo, rented out studio space to a photographer. One month, the photographer didn't have enough money to cover the rent and, in lieu of payment, offered to produce some 8-by-10 head shots of Claire. "We didn't even know what a head shot was," Carla Danes said. Still, they agreed on the exchange, and sent out the photos to 35 agencies. Five expressed an interest in signing Claire, who chose Writers & Artists.

In relatively short order, Claire found herself in demand. She filmed a pilot with Dudley Moore for a series that was never picked up -- "I played the angry teen-ager, of course," she said -- and appeared in an episode of "Law and Order."

Claire's parents gave up their jobs to move temporarily to California; her mother ran a school for toddlers, and her father had a computer consulting business. (She has one brother, who recently graduated from Oberlin College.) "It's a little strange," Claire said of the arrangement, "but everyone was clear when we started this that no one was going to feel guilty about anything." This summer, the Daneses relocated once again, to Vancouver, British Columbia, where Claire filmed "Little Women" with Winona Ryder and Susan Sarandon.

Playing second string to a 15-year-old may be tough on an adult, but even Claire's fictional parents treat her with what seems like genuine respect. Mr. Irwin called her "extraordinary."

"She's living proof that reincarnation exists," he said. "She's such an old soul."

Photo: Claire Danes, left, with A.J. Langer in the new show "My So-Called Life." (Mark Seliger/ABC)