



American Adolescence: J.D. Salinger's the Catcher in the Rye and Bret Easton Ellis' Less Than Zero

Christopher G. Hn, Christopher Gohn

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Bachelor Thesis from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1, University of Paderborn, language: English, abstract: American Literature thematizing youth, adolescence and initiation draws on a long tradition reaching back to the 18th century, including writers like Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Henry James and William Faulkner. After the Second World War, the American novel of adolescence flourished again in a period that also gave birth to the genre's arguably most prominent representative: When J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* first entered the American book market in 1951, its critical reception could not have diverged more. Salinger's first novel, after publishing a number of short stories in the *New Yorker*, was mostly attacked for its extensive use of colloquial language. Initial reviews ranged from "an unusual brilliant first novel" to "wholly repellent in its mingled vulgarity [...] and sly perversion". In 1985, thirty-four years later, *Less Than Zero*, the first novel of Bennington College student Bret Easton Ellis, was published and also received widely mixed criticism. While *Interview Magazine* called his debut "startling and hypnotic", Paul Gray wrote in an article for *Time Magazine* that the novel "offers little more than its title promises", referring to its lack of depth and fully developed characters. The first part of this work will lay the theoretical foundations and discuss the genre of the novel of adolescence in respect to the two novels under investigation. After covering the theoretical basics, the second part of this paper intends to concentrate on detecting parallels in the themes and presentations of adolescence and initiation in both works. Since social criticism is always a central genre-specific characteristic of the novel of adolescence, the next part will briefly discuss this issue in respect to *The Catcher in the Rye* as well as *Less Than Zero* and point to a pos

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