

“Coming Thro’ the Rye”

The title of the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* comes from Robert Burns’s poem and song “Coming Thro’ the Rye.” The original text is as follows, with a modern English translation in italics:

O Jenny’s a’ weet, poor body,
Jenny’s seldom dry:
She draigl’t a’ her petticoatie,
Comin thro’ the rye!

*Oh Jenny’s wet, poor body,
Jenny’s seldom dry:
She dragged all her petticoat
Coming through the rye!*

Comin thro’ the rye, poor body,
Comin thro’ the rye,
She draigl’t a’ her petticoatie,
Comin thro’ the rye!

*Coming through the rye, poor body
Coming through the rye,
She dragged all her petticoat
Coming through the rye!*

Gin a body meet a body
Comin thro’ the rye,
Gin a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?

*If a body meet a body
Coming through the rye,
If a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?*

Gin a body meet a body
Comin thro’ the glen,
Gin a body kiss a body,
Need the warld ken?

*If a body meet a body
Coming through the glen,
If a body kiss a body
Need the world know?*

This poem is referenced in two parts of the novel. In Chapter 16, Holden watches a mother, father, and young boy walking down the street, and the child hums and sings “Coming Thru the Rye.” However, the line the boy sings is different from the original: Instead of singing “If a body meet a body, coming through the rye,” he sings, “If a body *catch* a body coming through the rye.” The child’s version of the song inspires Holden’s “catcher in the rye” fantasy in Chapter 22. Holden reinterprets the song: Instead of being about two lovers meeting in the rye, the song is about one person trying to catch running children before they run off a cliff.

What themes of the novel are highlighted through this song (and the young boy’s corruption of it) and how does it act as an extended metaphor throughout the novel?