



## Quite Contrary

*Richard Roberts*

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The secret of having an adventure is getting lost. Who ever visited an enchanted kingdom or fell into a fairy tale without wandering into the woods first?

Well, Mary is lost. Mary is lost in the story of Little Red Riding Hood, and that is a cruel and murderous story. She's put on the red hood and met the Wolf. When she gives in to her Wolf's temptations, she will die. That's how the story goes, after all.

Unfortunately for the story and unfortunately for the Wolf, this Little Red Riding Hood is Mary Stuart, and she is the most stubborn and contrary twelve year old the world has ever known.

Forget the Wolf's temptations, forget the advice of the talking rat trying to save her - she will kick her way through every myth and fairy tale ever told until she finds a way to get out of this alive. Her own way, and no one else's.

## Quite Contrary Details

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Author : Richard Roberts

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## From Reader Review Quite Contrary for online ebook

### SR says

Mary is the best under-15 non-YA girl protagonist by a dude author I've ever read and that's all I got.

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### Bob says

Wow. Another good book! This one was a surprise more than others in that it's definitely out of my normal realm of interests. This was pure fantasy. It begins with a 12 year old non-conformist, cynical geek of a girl heading to a party. She somehow ends up wearing a Red Riding Hood adult costume, which neither fits her person or personality. Then, by taking a series of wrong turns and making some less than wise decisions, she ends up in a series of fantasy lands, being pursued by a (no. THE) big bad wolf. Along the way, she saves princesses, learns to HATE fairies, meets witches, mermaids, and befriends Rat-in-Boots and a wooden clone of herself who is terminally cheery. In spite of the themes i've mentioned, this is not a children's book. There is profanity, though not an overabundance, because rats don't care for it. There is some sexual content, but nothing too extreme. And there is a lot of otherwise disturbing stuff. Violence and some not-so-happily-ever-after things that were pretty intense. But, i enjoyed the trip. I can't say that all of it made sense. I can't say all of it had me totally involved. What i will say that it was a lot of fun and well worth the time spent reading it.

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### Carrie says

**\*Warning the following review contains spoilers, proceed with caution\***

**Mary, Mary, quite contrary,  
How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells, and cockle shells,  
And pretty maids all in a row.**

*Once upon a time, there was a little girl who was not sweet....*

Mary Stuart, is twelve years old, she is quite contrary, she is not a very likable child, her attitude is horrid.

*Quite Contrary* starts out with Mary going to a Halloween party in an old abandoned house. It is there that the hostess shows her party goers a crawl space she had discovered. And it is Mary's venture into said crawl space that we get to journey into this bizarrely dark and twisted tale.

On her way through the crawl space she meets a rat, a rat who can speak. His name is Rat-in-boots even though he doesn't own any boots. At the end of the crawl space they end up in some kind of industrial part of town, Mary gets covered in some kind of liquid/goop and is in need of water to clean up. Rat offering to help they go off into "The Woods" and Mary discovers clothing hanging on a line, a Red Riding costume. The moment she changes, out steps a wolf, the wolf.

He tells her of the two paths she could take, the happy sunshiny path with flowers that took her to

"Grandmas" and her end. The other was a darker one, the one with the wolf at her side. The wolf then going off to let her decide which path to chose. Mary picks none and goes off the beaten path leading her farther into the woods and on to many adventures in different story worlds. There she meets fairies, a princess, lost children, a talking flower, a wooden talking doll who wants to be alive and many many more interesting and disturbing people. From fairy-tales to horror stories. Each step and turn brings a new a tale but no matter what, the wolf always finds her.

Rat had warned her, she could have had a happy ending, but she had to put on those Red Ridding Hood clothes. Her story has now started it has to be played out until the end. The wolf will find her.

*"Will he follow me?"*

*"Yes" Rat in boots answered....*

*"It might be awhile, but the story has started. It has to find its end, and that means he will find you."*

There were times that I actually thought about not finishing, and it had nothing to do with the story. Why then? Mary! She's a brat. a twelve year old brat with a mouth on her that sailor would be shocked at. But despite my dislike for Mary I still journeyed on, because I was hooked at this point, I wanted to know how this story, her tale of Red Riding hood ended.

***The rat is right, there've been a thousand years of Red Riding Hoods, but not like you.***

This book was like a dream, a very strange strange little dream. At the end I kind of thought that's what was going to happen. I thought I would read the lines: "And then Mary woke up with her little wooden doll and her stuffed rat next to her pillow. The End."

Pro: *Quite Contrary* is written well. The author has done a great job of making me visualize each place/story Mary wound up in.

Con: Besides Mary's attitude, the last chapter felt to recapish for me. I liked how the chapter started but I think rather then tell it all again, it should have been shortened, a fade to black until the present moment in time.

Overall:

A very dark dark tale, and underneath all the bizarre story jumping we have a tale about little girl who feels all alone and afraid, acting mean even to those she knew were being nice to her, knowing she shouldn't. The wolf representing all the things she is afraid of. As I read on I kept on thinking, "there is nothing redeeming about her, she is a such a brat." When I finished I didn't dislike her quite so much.

A very unique and twisted retelling of Red Riding Hood.

***"You're telling the story differently, but it still fits. Instead of being a victim or an easy seduction, you're making the Wolf purse you. He has to preserver and chase after a prize he wants badly, but the end is the same. However you tell the story, it ends with giving into temptation, and death."***

I will be looking out for more works by Richard Roberts.

**\*Copy provided by Curiosity Quills Press via NetGalley for honest review\***

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## **Dannica Zulestin says**

Read this partly bc of the interesting plot-girl with Red Riding Hood cloak weaving her way in and out of different legends and stories, anyone?-and also partly bc it was published by Curiosity Quills, a publisher with a lot of interesting books, none of which I'd ever read until now. Also bc it was briefly free.

Anyways, the setup was interesting, wandering through various story worlds. Some belong to fairy tales (the land of the Fae, an underwater world, the saga tradition of the Vikings) but many to more modern mythologies (a steampunk city falling into rust and pollution, a Midwestern horror story). Mary, the main character, weaves her way through them, not attempting to find her way home (her home life is as grim as any fable) but only trying to escape the Wolf who claims to love her and only wants to consummate that love in the worst ways possible.

The concept plays out like a multiverse in some ways, a genre I recently explored in the book *Dissonance*. But each universe, although not limited temporally to the story and often inhabited by all too real figures, exists for the sake of the story it hosts. It's like a romp through a library or a bookshelf. Who could resist? More than the concept, though, I actually loved the characters.

Mary starts out as something of a frustrating brat, convinced that she's a bad girl and resisting her sidekick Rat-in-boots' attempts to make her more of an innocent hero or to protect her. But at the end of the day she still tries to help people and struggles, despite her lack of innocence, to be good. Watching her develop and learning more about the kind of person she is was half the fun of reading.

A lot of people here say Mary being twelve broke their suspension of disbelief. In some ways, I agree. Not that no twelve year old could be so corrupted-twelve year olds are always less innocent than people think in one way or another, and Mary's been dealt a rough hand. But she does seem a bit mature and independent for a twelve year old. Still, this book is full of archetypes, and in fairy tales the resourceful child is always the equal of the adult, and very rarely as innocent as they seem. So Mary feels in tune with the genre, even if she isn't the typical preteen.

Mary's consistent companions, Rat-in-boots and Scarecrow, are also fun. They're pretty much the only characters in the novel you can trust, although that doesn't mean they're one dimensional. Rat-in-boots has a dark side of his own, no matter how much he'd like to deny it. And Scarecrow, who could easily be left at the level of comedic, instead becomes the innocence that Mary lacks-innocence Mary wants to protect.

The side characters vary in interest. Some, like the Vikings, are quite fun to watch. I find I'm actually kind of invested in Valdis and Eric's relationship-fingers crossed that it works out and they don't get screwed by the continuing of their stories. With a Scandinavian saga it could swing either way. Others were more one dimensional, especially the villains and princesses that would crop up. But all of them, despite their essentially being archetypes, still feel human and real. Mary doesn't treat them like stock characters either, which adds to the novel's strength.

And then there's the Wolf. I would love to say I hated him, but I can't. I don't pity him, certainly-the story may rule him but unlike Mary, he chose it and he chooses his violence. He deserves worse than he gets. But there is a sort of attraction to his wild, wicked love. You're glad whenever Mary refuses to fall to his temptation, but you can understand his temptation, and his scenes are always intense, full of frightening passion. And you always know, even in the most peaceful moments of the book (though there aren't many of those) that he's coming. A marvelous villain.

Overall, an excellent book. I might reread at some point, and if I get a chance to read anything else by Richard Roberts I will.

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## **Melissa Reyneveld says**

I liked this story and think it is probably more like 3.5 stars. It was entertaining and towards the end it got suspenseful, as well. I do think some aspects could have felt more appropriate or even genuine had the MC been at least a couple years older. Also, there were some spots in the book that didn't make sense and some that seemed unnecessary to the story. For me, it was one of those books that had 5 star potential but just didn't quite hit the mark in everything. Still a fun, interesting read.

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### **Paige Bookdragon says**

Ahhh. I kinda lost interest on you. RTC.

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### **Jenny says**

When will I ever learn me lesson on free ebooks? I finished this, but found it tedious.

The concept of wandering through tales (from fairy tales to modernize zombie horror) was kind of cool, but by the 30% mark I was ready for it to be done.

The wolf is established as a sexual predator, and the protagonist is a child who knows too much (it's revealed that she has been abused by one of her alcoholic mother's boyfriends). Other reviewers have criticized the characterization of Mary (Red Riding Hood) in this way, but the swearing, defiance, and knowing too much can be true of children who have lived through trauma. I don't consider this a problem, but I didn't believe in Mary as a character the way this I believed in Baby from *Lullabies for Little Criminals*.

The problem as I see it is one of heavy-handedness through the storytelling. The characterization of Mary is this telling makes it a book for adults, but the internal journey Mary experiences (as she learns to self-regulate and accept help from people around her) feels more like a YA book.

It might have been helped with a faster pace; either fewer tales, or less time in the tales included.

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### **Jamie says**

This book has left me with very different opinions on various parts and aspects. One thing I will say up front. **THIS IS NOT A KIDS BOOK.** Older teen-adult is appropriate. It focuses on a 12 year old girl named Mary. The combination of the name with the title brought an amused smirk to my lips. She goes off to a party and tries to spite the host by going into the tunneled crawl space of the spooky mansion it is hosted at. She finds herself locked in and so she ventures around, making various turns through the tunnels. She comes across a talking rat (Rat-In-Boots) who helps her begin her journey.

When she puts on the white and red outfit, her fate is sealed to the story of Red Riding Hood. She journeys through various fairy-tales and lands of legends.

One thing that really bothered me in this story is that she never questions why. Why her, How did the rat get her, etc. She just accepts everything. While her character gained depth throughout the book (she started off

bratty, then we learn she has a chip on her shoulder to learning she actually cares for others), I never once felt she was 12. More like 16-19. And the language, sexual references, etc (going to a brothel, virginity references etc) did not seem right.

Yet, to contrast her character I liked Rat-in-boots, even though he doesn't have his boots. The perfect little hero. Cunning, swift, caring and stubborn. I also really liked some of the places we see. One of them is the Viking Lands and the Norse. She meets a boy named Eric who is the son of Thor. This amused me because in the 'Thor' and 'Thunderstrike' comic books, Eric is the name of the man who becomes the New Thor.

Another place I enjoyed reading was purgatory, which was set up as a huge ship (and I mean HUGE) that can take years to escape (if you can at all). This part reminded me of the Goonies a bit (children working together, following a code) and Silent Hill with the creatures in the dark and the way things lock and checking various rooms for items.

Through all these stories and more, the Wolf is after her. Apparently Red Riding Hood is the strongest story ever. Rat-in-Boots tells her that no one knows of a world outside their story yet everyone knows hers and keeps telling her to take off the hood. The only way to escape the Wolf is to go home. Which is the one place she doesn't want to be.

So while there were enjoyable parts, I just could not get into the book itself. Too much unanswered. And her characters personality did not fit any middle schooler I have ever met. Also the ending was a let down. The last 50 pages were rushed, worlds not explained, etc. And the last chapter was a recap of the book. Pfft. Not needed. So while it was kind of interesting to read and started out with some creative thought, it didn't hold the same appeal that I had before I started.

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## **David says**

I'm a fan of Richard Roberts's "Please Don't Tell My Parents I'm a Supervillain" series. So this ebook was available cheap, and I tried it out, but it took me a long time to get through it.

That's not entirely the fault of the book - a lot of it is the fact that I was reading it on my phone, and whenever I am on my phone I am more likely to get distracted by Facebook or Reddit.

Anyway. *Quite Contrary* starts with our protagonist, a misanthropic twelve-year-old with the mouth and attitude of a sailor twice her age, going to a party she wasn't invited to, being mocked by all the older cool kids, and crawling under the house on a dare. This is a pattern for her - she does things she knows are stupid and dangerous but does them anyway because letting someone laugh at her or force her to be reasonable is worse.

Under the house, she meets a talking rat. Who leads her to a fairytale realm. As Mary will find out repeatedly, fairies are jerks.

*Quite Contrary* is a portal fantasy with a twist. Mary's Rat explains to her that she is now in a Story - and that whatever Story she is part of has a tendency to force all the characters in it to play their role, whether they like it or not. So when Mary comes across a little red riding hood, and Rat warns her not to put it on, of course she puts the damn thing on.

For the rest of the book, she is pursued by a Wolf, who is genuinely a terrifying and creepy villain. He *loves* his Little Red Riding Hood, loves her the way you love a juicy steak dinner, loves her the way a baby loves candy, loves her the way a pedophile loves...

If it's not clear that the Wolf is a metaphor for something very dark (as were most fairy tales to begin with), we eventually learn more about Mary and just *why* she's such an unsympathetic little bitch. *Quite Contrary* is an interesting story stuffed full of metaphors and allegories and every allusion Roberts could fit into its rather bloated length. Which was part of the problem - Mary goes from Story to Story, adventure to adventure, finding herself in one land after another on her quest to get home (where she really doesn't want to go) and escape the Wolf. She acquires and loses friends along the way, but at times the story was almost episodic, and many of the transitions didn't entirely make sense. And Mary's volatile behavior manifests itself in volatile actions that make her seem like an inscrutable manic-depressive at times - "Wait, she did *what*? Why???"

Richard Roberts has a great imagination and a gift for storytelling, but I think he needs a lot more discipline in his writing. This story wasn't as much fun as the "Supervillain" series, but it had the same merits and flaws. I'd read more by him, and hope he continues to polish his craft.

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### **Christina Torretta says**

This is an interesting, yet disturbing book. I really enjoyed the idea behind the book, but it did not totally work for me.

Mary is twelve and finds herself lost and stuck in fairyland. She's quite contrary and does not do what she is told to do. This is explained a little later on in the book, but I do not think the explanation was enough. It does explain some things but I still do not really understand her character.

First, she does not really fit into any groups at home, but she does not really want to either. She knows she is different and she is fine with that. Mainly because many people are stupid and follow paths that are laid out before them without thinking about it. She is determined not to do that. This part of Mary I really like. I love that she thinks for herself.

Where it gets weird is that she is constantly cursing. Her favorite word starts with an F (I'm sure you can fill in the blanks) and she uses this as much and as often as she possibly can. While I know most kids want to say or do things that are contrary to what their parents want, this seemed a little much. A smart girl does not have to curse to show her inner strength.

Another issue is that there is no rhyme or reason for how she falls into different stories. The second she is lost she can find herself in another story. This means the characters she met prior are gone. This means most of the characters, whether the reader likes them or hates them really do not mean anything to the reader. It makes me not want to invest any of my time in the story.

I did like her way of going about the stories. She does use her mind but at the expense of others. She is actually really selfish. What is really ironic about this is that she makes sure to do her own thing but normally winds up following the story that was originally in place! Then she has to fight to get out of it. She does have a lot of spunk but I would have been more comfortable if she was a bit older.

The audio and narration were done well. Every once in a while Amy Rubinita would miss a mark and would say something in another character's voice but that was only a few times. And I instantly knew what was happening. That might be something that editing probably needs to catch? I enjoyed her Mary voice the most. She really does sound contrary which just gave her more spark.

Overall, fun story but I needed a little more reasoning behind not only the way Mary is but the plot. Makes me curious about the author's other work though!

Received by author, through audiobookreviewer.com, in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Shelly says**

I really enjoyed this fresh, dark and slyly humorous take on Little Red Riding Hood, it reminded me a bit of Brom's The Child Thief (which you should definitely check out if you like Quite Contrary). My only complaint is that it seemed a tad too long, but I'm sure I'll be adding more books by the author to my TBR list.

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### **Shanelle says**

I enjoyed this book very much... The ending was a little bit of a let-down though.. :(

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### **A. Sines says**

Two things about me you should know: I collect free and cheap books like birds pecking for worms the morning after it rains. (*Quite Contrary* was free for a few days. If you have Kindle Unlimited, you can borrow it for free!) And I (shamefully) judge books by their covers. (At least initially.) Covers can tell you many things. Almost nude bodies embracing tell you it's a romance. Spaceships and planets tell you it's scifi. *Quite Contrary* lends itself to a younger crowd. The font, the spotlight on the cloaked almost comical figure in the center screams middle grade adventure. Then you read the blurb. (Another tidbit you didn't ask for: I've done research papers and a thesis on origins and mutations of fairy tales.) I had to read this book.

Sometimes I find in myself the deep-seated desire to do exactly the opposite of what everyone else is doing. It's something like taking the road less traveled. It appeals to me. Skimming through the reviews for this book, there are those who love it and those who hate it. There's a good mix. (I tend to read more of the ones who hate it, though.) The reviews added just the right touch to put *Quite Contrary* at the head of my Kindle carousel.

I also have a tendency to pick up and put down tons of books before I finish one. This one, while not being a page turning glorious time suck, is the one that drew me every time I picked up my Kindle. Even while collecting more books, I still made sure that I could easily find this one. No, it didn't call to me while living mundanely. No, I wasn't riveted and fanatically attached until the very end. But I guarantee you that every spare moment I had, I managed to read a page or two.

The reviews say that Mary does not act like a 12 year old. The reviews say she's more crass than contrary.

(Of course, being a crass 12 year old is contrary to our expectations, so she remains in character perfectly.) Having three kids and being around this age group rather frequently, there is nothing shocking here, even with the language. By the time they get into middle school, kids cuss more than those of us in the military. They've heard these words from media and friends and even parents. The opportunity here, when my daughter reads this, is to show that cussing really doesn't do anything for you. It doesn't help you think things through. It offends more than it impresses. And more importantly: a promise is a promise. (You'll see when you get there.) Guess what: those are two life lessons we should definitely expose to our kiddos.

Not even 35% into the book, I can see character growth. I can see that this little 12 year old recognizes bits of herself that many adults never admit to. So yes, in that way, she does act a little older. Aside from doing the exact opposite of what is expected, her redeeming qualities really begin to shine blindingly bright halfway through.

Right about at this point, I started realizing that this is more than just a story. It is a road less travelled. We don't want to admit what some young kids are going through these days. We tend to put a Happily Ever After spin on every tortured news story, if only in our heads. I've said this before in only a couple of a reviews, but *truth* is what a good writer strives to give us. Truth is what I see here. Truth sometimes offends. Truth sometimes shows us what we don't want to see.

The Grimms simply put on paper the stories commonly told to children at the time. Even their sensibilities were put to the test as they edited several times before letting it go. Most people would be surprised at what the Grimms took out of their stories. But the stories told to kids were supposed to teach. They learned to stay out of the Black Forest. They learned to be kind to siblings. They learned that strange old women weren't always nice.

The one thing Mary is consistent about is doing the exact opposite of the expected. Drop another fairy tale character into this book and the story would be over at first meeting the Wolf. Hell, drop a sensitive sheltered kid in the story and they wouldn't make it through hearing Rat-in-Boots speak the first time. We'd find them in the crawl space crying and sucking their thumb. Even though Mary is scared and at times terrified, she still uses her brain and sometimes her heart.

I think that by sugar-coating everything we are doing a great disservice to children. They are smarter than we think. They are stronger than we think. And if we don't properly teach them and warn them about how the world works, they will end up entitled and gullible. I would rather my kiddos kick someone that gave them the creeps and got too close than to smile and get to know them. We keep saying, "You never know it this day and age, who's the pedophile and who's the kind stranger." But our day really isn't any different than when the Grimms wrote down those tales. We just have the advantage of instantaneous news.

I think the short-lived gore factor is more concerning than the strong language. Mr. Roberts description of the gore certainly gave Mary nightmares. It may be too gruesome for those with delicate sensibilities. Of course, those people would have put the book down long before they got to that part.

*Quite Contrary* is one of the few well written, more than entertaining, retellings of old stories I have seen. Mary is a deeper character than you may think if you stop when she goes off on a swearing stream early in the story. I've seen her vulnerable like a little girl and self-sacrificing on many occasions where not every adult would be. The conclusion is a self-realization, the climax of her growth.

While I described it to my husband as *Alice in Wonderland* on crack instead of opium, the story itself is a wild, enjoyable ride. You really don't know what's coming next.

Check out other reviews at <https://trippingthepagefantastic.wordpress.com>...

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## **Cassandra Page says**

"Quite Contrary" was a very enjoyable read. It originally caught my eye because of the clever title and cover, so I started reading the preview chapters on Amazon, and then I ordered the paperback so I could finish it (sorry about that, Amazon).

The main character is Mary Stuart and she is, indeed, quite contrary. (It tickled me that she was named after the same queen that the nursery rhyme "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" was written about.) She is twelve, and even from the start it's clear she doesn't come from a good home.

At the start of the story she is bitter, spiteful and deliberately defiant in pretty much every situation - but, to me at least, her perceptive and clever mind redeemed her for me. (I did wince every time she kicked someone in the nuts, though; she does that a LOT in the first third of the book, but I guess when you're twelve and things keep trying to hurt you there aren't many other physical options.)

At the start of the book Mary gets herself lost and falls into a world of fairy tales and urban myths. She's quickly adopted by Rat-in-Boots, who offers to help her. Unfortunately when he tells her not to put on the red dress and cloak she doesn't listen (because, well, she's contrary) and so she inadvertently signs up for the role of Little Red Riding Hood, to be eaten by the Wolf. Or become his mate - he's not particularly fussy on that score. (And ew, because he's an actual wolf.)

And so begins Mary's boot-stomping dash through world after world, story after story, pursued by her Wolf and dodging other Grimm-style bad guys. She makes friends, almost despite herself, and gradually her personality softens.

I really enjoyed this book. It was a clever twist on Red Riding Hood. But despite Mary's age it's NOT a story for children - there's definite adult themes here, boys and girls.

I'm wondering now whether there's a sequel. :)

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## **Karolina Kat says**

### **2.5 star rounded down**

It's really hard for me to rate this book. On the one hand I really enjoyed the idea of travelling through the fairy tales/stories worlds as if through dreams. Each world starts suddenly and the more lost you are the further into story you get.

However I had big issues with the heroine of the novel. Mary Sue Stuart is 12 years old, but apparently the author forgot that tiny little fact. She acts as a typical 16-17 years old, who is rebellious, stuck up, thinks that he/she knows everything best and is hooked on this one serious novel/movie that only proves how much better this generic teenager is than other. Exactly such a person is Mary.

And to make things worst there attempts, sometimes she's sexualised by certain events or other characters - here 'relationship' with the Wolf is particularly disturbing on this level.

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