

Holden at 50

“Holden Caulfield’s Legacy” by David Castronovo, in *New England Review* (Spring 2001), Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt. 05753.

Holden Caulfield, that young despiser of “phonies,” turns 50 this year but shows every sign of remaining America’s perpetual adolescent. Immensely popular when first published in 1951, J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* has had “cultural significance and staying power beyond its literary value,” observes Castronovo, the author of *Edmund Wilson* (1985).

Like Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Ernest Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories, Salinger’s novel is “about a lonely young boy who thinks there is something wrong with the world, something essentially dead and phony and disgusting about the arrangement of things,” notes Castronovo. But unlike the earlier protagonists, Holden has “no unfolding destiny, no mission,” and not even much in the way of dramatic moments.

Turning against what Holden calls the “David Copperfield crap,” Salinger made his book antiliterary in a new way, filling it with babbling and “impressions that are overtaken by afterthoughts, comic contradictions, half-recognitions, and canceled insights,” Castronovo writes. The familiar subject of lonely youth is

conveyed with “a managed incoherence, an attractive breakdown of logic that appeals to the confused adolescent in all of us. Sweeping denunciations are followed by abject apologies—only to be followed by other ridiculous pronouncements.” Among the many Holdenisms: “I’m quite illiterate, but I read a lot,” and “I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them.”

Throughout the novel, Holden offers advice for “cant-free living,” notes Castronovo. Be “casual as hell,” for instance, and never use the word *grand*. *Catcher* is, in a sense, “one of the first manuals of cool, a how-to guide for those who would detach themselves from the all-American postwar pursuit of prosperity and bliss,” Castronovo writes. And after a half-century, the teachings still have cultural force. “Young people and their fearful elders know that coolness is the only way. Formal discourse, sequential thinking, reverence for the dignified and the heroic: these acts closed by the 1960s. The voice of Holden played a part in shutting them down. Its tone—directed against prestige and knowingness—is as cutting today as it was in 1951.”

OTHER NATIONS

The EU’s Religious Factor

“Does Religion Matter? Christianity and Public Support for the European Union” by Brent F. Nelsen, James L. Guth, and Cleveland R. Fraser, in *European Union Politics* (June 2001), Sage Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91359.

Scholars seeking to explain public attitudes toward European integration usually stress economics: More affluent (and better educated) Europeans, they note, tend to be more supportive of the European Union (EU). The authors, who are all political scientists at Furman University in South Carolina, contend that another important factor, religion, is overlooked.

While the EU may be chiefly an economic community, European integration and religion, particularly Catholicism, “were explicitly linked, theoretically and politically,” when the

dream of unity took shape in the early years after World War II, Nelsen and his colleagues observe. “European integration in the 1950s was largely a Christian Democratic project, led by devout Catholics such as Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Alcide de Gasperi.”

Moreover, write the authors, “the great divide over integration has always run between Catholic nations, which envisioned a single European federation, and Protestant latecomers, such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway (which never did join), with their pragmatic preference for clos-