

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-

er cooperation among sovereign states. The Protestant countries are reluctant to abandon sovereignty for historical and political reasons,” while the Catholic Church “has consistently supported both the European Union and its expansion.”

But social scientists, convinced that religion is fast becoming a spent social force in Europe, have paid little heed to religion’s role in recent European politics. The authors’ analysis of Eurobarometer survey data from 10 countries over recent decades suggests that this neglect is a mistake. They find that Catholics, especially devout ones, “are warmest toward the Union, while Protestants tend to be slightly less supportive than secular citizens are.” Strong religious

commitment may also encourage support for European integration among some Protestants in established state churches (Lutheran and Anglican) who take their cues from their clerical leaders. But the most devout sectarian Protestants, such as Calvinists in the Netherlands and Northern Ireland, “are the least fond of the European Union.”

“If, indeed, religious tides are slowly ebbing in Europe—especially Catholic commitment—a prime source of Europeanist sentiment may be eroding,” Nelsen and his co-authors conclude. As a result, the EU “will be ever more dependent on its economic performance” for continued public support.

A Brighter View of Russia

“Russia” by Anders Åslund, in *Foreign Policy* (July–Aug. 2001), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Mention Russia today, and an image of catastrophic decline may well come to mind. Shock therapy failed, the economy has collapsed, the infrastructure is crumbling, corruption is widespread, the population is shrinking. Russia, in this view, seems headed for Milton’s “reign of Chaos and old Night.” Get a grip, urges Åslund, author of *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (1995). The country’s plight has been vastly exaggerated.

True, official data show that gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 44 percent between 1989 and 1998. But that’s a statistical mirage. “Under communism,” Åslund notes, “everybody padded output to reach targets in the planned economy, while nobody cared about the quality (or even the usefulness) of the items produced.” The subsequent decline in production of shoddy or useless goods should be welcomed, he says. And the statistics miss the substantial output of the postcommunist underground economy.

A more accurate picture of Russia’s economic development to 1998 would show stagnation, says Åslund. The problem is not excessive “shock therapy,” but “too little shock and too much corrupt state therapy in the form of subsidies to the country’s elite.” And don’t blame the plague of bribery on

privatization, he says. It “is overwhelmingly connected with law enforcement, tax collection, and state intervention.” Despite all its problems, Åslund points out, Russia since 1998 has achieved continued economic growth: The GDP increased 5.4 percent in 1999, and 8.3 percent last year.

Another important and largely unrecognized achievement, says Åslund, is the “extraordinary improvement” that privatization and market pricing have made in Russia’s infrastructure. He cites an impressive expansion in the telecommunications industry, improvements in airports and airlines, increased road construction, and new ports that have been built around St. Petersburg. Russia is in the midst of a “building boom.” Maintenance problems, however, persist “where state monopolies linger,” he observes.

As for Russia’s population meltdown, Åslund says the shocking statistics are misleading. Yes, the country is “losing” more than 500,000 people a year—but population decline is “an issue across Europe.” Yes, male life expectancy decreased from 64 years in 1989 to 57 years in 1994—but the 1989 figure was an aberration caused by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev’s anti-alcohol campaign. The 1994 figure fit long-term trends. “Nothing suggests that