

Periodicals

too. And Nabokov, who was a political as well as a spiritual fugitive, and who, like Beckett, gave up his native language to write in another, found America a source of great interest and amusement. He made the abundance of his English a compensation for the loss of his beloved Russian. “In the splendid artificiality of his language, in its surface virtuosity,” Dickstein observes, “Nabokov shows us the shock of alienation as effectively as his

more downhearted predecessors.”

No matter how fully these writers embraced new countries and new languages, or settled into “that other homeland, the kingdom of art,” they were displaced persons, homeless in their native lands, strangers abroad. We remember them for having used the dislocation to their advantage by “turning exile and alienation into a unique vantage point, an angle of vision for interpreting the world.”

The Sound of Salinger’s Silence

“Reading Salinger’s Silence” by Myles Weber, in *New England Review*, (Vol. 26, No. 2), Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt. 05753.

Often when people say they write only for themselves, everyone else silently thanks them. In the case of J. D. Salinger, who has published not a word in 40 years, critics, scholars, and journalists have done little but badger and condemn him, writes Weber, a literary critic and the author of *Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don’t Publish* (2005).

Salinger became an American icon with the publication of his first book, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). He went on to publish *Nine Stories* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (1961), and *Raise High the Roof-Beam, Carpenters; and Seymour: An Introduction* (1963). In 1965 a final short story, “Hapworth 16, 1924,” appeared in *The New Yorker*. And then began a silence all the more tantalizing because Salinger, 86, is alive and well and—by his own admission—still

writing. He refuses to talk to the press and lives in seclusion in Cornish, New Hampshire.

“The critical establishment, denied access for decades to whatever pages Salinger is actually accumulating in his desk drawer, simply will not permit Salinger to depart the active literary scene,” writes Weber. “Rather than disappear, he is reconfigured as a prolific, nearly conventional author inundating the marketplace with silence.”

And so Salinger has left himself—and, on occasion, his pet and his mailbox—open to interpretation. In 1975, C. David Heymann chronicled in *The Village Voice* his trip to Salinger’s home; he left with little to describe but a dog’s bark answering his knock: “It was a miserable whine, empty-sounding and hollow.” In 1977, *Esquire* ran an unsigned Salin-

EXCERPT

Crazy Fame

“Every time I think I am famous,” Virgil Thomson said, “I have only to go out into the world.” So it is, and so ought it probably to remain for writers, musicians, and visual artists who prefer to consider themselves, to put it as pretentiously as possible, sérieux The comedian Richard Pryor once said that he would consider himself famous when people recognized him, as they recognized Bob Hope and Muhammed Ali, by his captionless caricature. That is certainly one clear criterion for celebrity. But the best criterion I’ve yet come across holds that you are celebrated, indeed famous, only when a crazy person imagines he is you. I especially like the fact that the penetrating and prolific author of this remark happens to go by the name of Anonymous.

—Joseph Epstein, former editor of *The American Scholar*, in *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring 2005)

geresque story that turned out to be penned by the magazine's fiction editor, Gordon Lish, who said that if Salinger was not going to write stories, "someone had to write them for him." In 1982, Steven Kunes offered *People* magazine a faked transcript of an interview with Salinger, who sued and kept it from running. In 2002 came the publication of a collection of letters addressed to Salinger, including an e-mail from one Don Paton, who wrote, "You can't make yourself unfamous. Cough it up. Either publish everything you've got left in you or hurry up and die."

Would-be biographer Ian Hamilton—whom Salinger prevented, in 1987, from excerpting unpublished letters—has accused the reclusive author of pecuniary motives. "He said he wanted neither fame nor money and by this means he'd contrived to get extra supplies of both," Hamilton wrote. Others have theorized that Salinger withdrew because he knew he'd run out of talent or he couldn't stand criticism. Perhaps, as Ron Rosenbaum opined in *Esquire* in



J. D. Salinger in 1951, when he published *The Catcher in the Rye*.

1997 after a fruitless trek to Salinger's driveway, his silence "represents some kind of spiritual renunciation." (Salinger's few known contacts with the wider world haven't helped his cause; a college girl he wooed in 1972 after reading an essay she wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* later published a memoir about their affair.)

Weber dismisses such speculations as worthless, declaring that Salinger's published work is probably

"the only reliable source material" on him. In the story "Zooey," he writes of a clear imperative for the artist to keep performing—it's owed "to the Fat Lady, to the public, to Christ, to the God who dispenses talent." But noting Salinger's increasingly disjointed, difficult writing style, Weber also suggests that silence may be a still more extreme form of artistic expression. In any case, he concludes that Salinger's silence, whether broken by the publication of another story or punctuated only with an obituary, will go on speaking volumes to ears cocked to listen.

The Shakespeare Code

"The Catholic Bard: Shakespeare and the 'Old Religion'" by Clare Asquith, in *Commonweal* (June 17, 2005), 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 405, New York, N.Y. 10115.

Though a 17th-century Protestant clergyman stated that "William Shakespeare dyed a papist," Protestant England for centuries deemed it unthinkable that the national poet had adhered to the "old religion." But historians now acknowledge that England in Shakespeare's day was not so wholeheartedly Protestant as previously portrayed. Like dissident Soviet-era dramatists expressing the cause of freedom, the Bard in his great works stealthily made a case for Catholicism, contends Asquith, author of *Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare* (2005).

Protestant historians long maintained that Henry VIII's break with the pope in 1534 in-

augurated a new era of enlightenment. But "fresh evidence . . . indicates that Shakespeare lived in an age of silent, sullen resistance to the imposed new order. In spite of penal legislation and horrific executions, Catholics remained in the majority through 1600, conforming under duress, not out of conviction."

Scholars today agree that Shakespeare's "childhood was deeply imbued with the 'old religion,'" though he probably did not retain his Catholic beliefs throughout his working life. Asquith thinks that a familiarity with "Catholic idiom, history, and liturgy" reveals a hidden political message in Shakespeare's plays.

The Merchant of Venice's final act, for example, "almost completely extraneous to the