

Genuine in a World of Phonies:
Dance in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

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The soft sounds of the radio drift through a dark, Manhattan apartment. Holden Caulfield dances with his little sister Phoebe in her bedroom. It is late, and their parents are out at a party. Holden isn't supposed to be there. The protagonist of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* has returned home from boarding school early – because he's been expelled. Over the next few days, as his mental state deteriorates, Holden hides out in a hotel and throws himself into New York nightlife. He goes to nightclubs, and watches pretentious, young, beautiful people work to impress each other while listening to the most sensational bands. He talks to people who annoy him and watches tourists hunt for celebrities. Holden never seems to enjoy his outings. He is still in high school, and he either drinks too much or is refused alcohol because of his age. Yet Holden keeps seeking company, calling up old girlfriends and even hiring a prostitute just for companionship.

Holden does know how to please people. He can be quite charming when he chooses to be, but most of his interactions with others fail. An outsider, Holden doesn't quite fit in although he is generally well liked, especially by girls. Usually, Holden's communications fail because he is unable to look past the pretensions and self-importance of his peers. He despises their strict social codes, and chooses to speak and act inappropriately rather than participate. However, Holden loves to dance. Though he can hardly stand to speak to most people, he enjoys dancing with them. And while he rails against the movie musicals so popular in the 1930s and 1940s,

Holden imitates them and uses them as a point of reference with his peers. He hates the people who go to jazz clubs only to listen to the music, but when he wants to dance he will put aside his distaste to find a partner.

As a young man, J.D. Salinger also frequented nightclubs and watched popular movie musicals. He grew up in the 1930s and 1940s, and many parallels can be seen between his life and that of his most famous character, Holden Caulfield. Both grew up on Manhattan's affluent Upper East Side, had a history of failing grades in school, and were educated in private boarding schools. Salinger took dance lessons growing up, as did most children of wealthy families. As a young man, he became a member of café society, New York's exclusive nightlife scene. Music, dancing, and general extravagance were the main attractions of café society. Swing music and dance were the height of fashion. These styles were also seen onscreen in resplendent Hollywood productions, along with tap, the favorite show-stopping dance of Broadway and the movies. Both café society and movie musicals represented sumptuous indulgence, elegant enjoyment, and a glamorous lifestyle.

Holden's experiences with dance in these public venues cheer him, but always leave something to be desired. Generally, Holden feels far too alienated from other people to establish any kind of connection with them. He often tells elaborate lies to the people he meets, just to avoid talking about himself. Therefore, it is significant that Holden actively wants to connect with others through dance, and that he experiences at least some level of pleasure and belonging in each of the novel's dance scenes. He sees dance as a pure form of expression, something that ought not to be marred by self-consciousness and pretension. Holden despises the highly codified social behavior of his peers, because it interferes with genuine interpersonal interaction. In the same vein, he dislikes choreographed and contrived dances. For Holden, in order to be

completely genuine, dance must be a direct, natural form of expression. His ideal dance is an improvisatory one, much like jazz music itself.

Given J.D. Salinger's public persona, it is difficult to image that he was once a member of New York's high society. He remains, to a great extent, an enigma, known as a stubborn and solitary man. Early in his career, Salinger struggled with the discrepancy between his desire for fame and notoriety and his hate of all things pretentious and inauthentic. Indeed, when he finally gained the recognition he sought after the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger began a gradual retreat into reclusiveness. He withdrew from the public eye, refusing interviews and furiously rejecting any attempts to delve into his life or the lives of his family members. However, Salinger's own experiences with the world, especially his experiences with dance, are the basis for many of Holden's encounters. The dances that J.D. Salinger was exposed to growing up in the 1930s and 1940s constitute a strong presence in *The Catcher in the Rye*. For Holden Caulfield, who constantly feels alienated and lonely, dance represents a free and genuine means of expression. However, this expression is complicated and often muddled by issues of class, race, and social codes. The book presents a series of promising but ultimately unsatisfying dance scenes, until Holden is finally able to experience uninhibited expression by dancing with his sister Phoebe.

This investigation relies first on close reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The novel's dance scenes are presented in chronological order here, and generally quoted in block format to preserve the unique voice and tone of the narrator Holden Caulfield. *Catcher* is a work of fiction, and therefore cannot be seen as a Salinger autobiography. However, the author himself did acknowledge that the novel has a connection to his own life. In a 1953 interview, he explained

that he was “much relieved” upon finishing the novel, because his “boyhood was very much the same as that of the boy in the book, and it was a great relief telling people about it.”¹ While it would be inappropriate to see Holden as a direct representation of Salinger, there is undoubtedly a connection between Salinger and the character he created. Many of Holden’s experiences mirror Salinger’s own, and he occupies a place in the same social milieu as his real-life creator. Therefore, Salinger’s biography and his experiences provide tools with which to understand the development of Holden’s point of view.

This analysis makes use of several Salinger biographies, and a detailed comparison of the facts found therein. Biography is a complicated matter when it comes to Salinger, due to his reclusive nature and refusal of interviews later in life. Early biographies, such as Warren French’s *J.D. Salinger*, provide very little detail about Salinger’s early life and present facts that have little basis in truth. Later biographies, such as Ian Hamilton’s *In Search of J.D. Salinger* and Kenneth Slawenski’s *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, provide more reliable and complete information – including citations of concrete sources – but must be considered in light of their own motives. Hamilton openly proclaims that he set out to create a dramatic narrative emphasizing Salinger’s elusiveness. Slawenski’s book, on the other hand, is the most recently published Salinger biography. This is an advantage to the work, as Slawenski has compared and analyzed past Salinger biographies, and performed the most comprehensive research yet. His book is the most detailed of all, although it is clearly steered by a desire to memorialize and praise Salinger. Therefore, the biographical details of Salinger’s life presented herein are the result of a careful comparison of various biographies, and an analysis of their relative factual validity.

¹ Shirlye Blaney, “Interview with J.D. Salinger,” *If You Really Want to Hear About It: Writers on J.D. Salinger and His Work*, ed. Catherine Crawford (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006), 4.

Articles from *Life* and *Vogue* magazines from the 1930s and 1940s have been the primary source of information about dance, nightclubs, movies, and fashions. While these articles are informative and revealing in their own right, the accompanying pictures are invaluable documents of dance and society. Ralph Blumenthal's *Stork Club: America's Most Famous Nightspot and the Lost World of Café Society* has provided background information about the Stork Club and café society in general. For the history of tap dance, Constance Valis Hill's *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* has been the chief account consulted. Viewings of movie musicals such as *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945) have informed analysis of the book's dance scenes. These various sources serve to illuminate and expand the close study of *The Catcher in the Rye* and its author J.D. Salinger, which form the basis of this project.

Jerome David Salinger was born on New Year's Day in 1919, in a hospital on New York City's Upper West Side.² Salinger's father, Solomon, held a lucrative position in the meat and cheese import business. His prosperity resulted in three moves for the family between 1919 and 1928, each time to a more affluent neighborhood.³ In 1932, they made their most ambitious move yet. While most of America struggled through the Great Depression, the Salingers prospered and moved into an apartment on Park Avenue, on Manhattan's fashionable, grand Upper East Side.⁴ They took such pride in this new symbol of status that for years the family used a letterhead that omitted the Salinger name but featured their Park Avenue address.⁵

When the Salingers moved to Park Avenue, they also enrolled their son in the McBurney School, a private school on the Upper West Side. He was expelled for poor performance after

² Paul Alexander, *Salinger: A Biography* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999), 31.

³ Kenneth Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life* (New York: Random House, 2010), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

only a year, so his parents decided to enroll him in the Valley Forge Military Academy.⁶ Valley Forge, located in rural Pennsylvania, offered a strict boarding school environment in which cadets followed a rigid schedule; girls were forbidden, and uniforms were worn at all times.⁷ Salinger graduated from the school, and then did brief stints at New York University, Ursinus College, and Columbia University.⁸ He never earned a degree. Salinger's father Solomon also made an unsuccessful attempt to entice his son into the meat and cheese import business by sending him on a trip to Poland and Austria, ostensibly to serve as a translator for a ham exporter.⁹ Salinger had studied French and German at Valley Forge.¹⁰

Salinger left school permanently to pursue a career as a professional writer in 1940, and in 1942 he was drafted into the Army.¹¹ After spending time at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then in Bainbridge, Georgia, Salinger was sent to Europe. He fought on D-Day, and served a tour of duty that lasted eleven months. He returned home to New York in 1946.¹² Salinger had been writing and publishing short stories all the while, and had hinted to friends about a novel in development. Finally, his first novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, was published on July 16, 1951.¹³

The Catcher in the Rye holds the distinction of being one of the most frequently banned books in the United States, a response to its casual use of profanity and discussions of sexuality. The book became an instant favorite among legions of readers, but reviewers lamented its “immorality,” “perversion,” and “obscene language.”¹⁴ *Catcher's* Holden Caulfield is known for his acerbic wit and biting social criticisms. “Phony” is Holden's most frequently used insult; he

⁶ Ibid., 12-14.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Ibid., 20, 23-24, 26-31.

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ian Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1998), 40.

¹¹ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 31, 48.

¹² Ibid., 52-135.

¹³ Ibid., 203.

¹⁴ Quoted in Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 117.

levels the term at classmates and adults alike, expressing disdain for their calculated niceties and obsession with luxury. However, despite his professed hate for this world, he sometimes plays along with its social rituals. Most of this participation occurs in bars and nightclubs, where he continues to seek out entertainment and especially dance.

Salinger himself was a frequenter of New York City's most fashionable nightclubs. He was a member of New York's elite café society, the domain of the wealthy collegiate and celebrity sets. In Salinger's youth, café society's most renowned venue was the Stork Club, a nightclub located on East 51st Street in Manhattan. The club was known for its exclusive celebrity clientele, and fans and tourists would often gather around the entrance to gawk at the club's famous patrons.¹⁵ As the Great Depression loomed over America, bringing years of economic hardship, the club was a symbol of excess and wealth.¹⁶

The Stork Club had a live band, and was known for its "continuous dancing."¹⁷ The band played rumbas, fox trots, and other ballroom numbers, but the most popular and sensational dance of the day was swing dance, or the Lindy Hop. The Lindy Hop is "a kicking-and-hopping, open-partnered jazz dance with pre-swing roots in the Texas Tommy, the Hop, and the Charleston, and whose basic step consisted of a syncopated two-step, or box step, that accented the offbeat. In contrast to the bouncy vertical steps of earlier jazz dances, swing flowed horizontally, with a smooth rhythmic continuity."¹⁸ Likely named for Charles Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight in May of 1927,¹⁹ the Lindy Hop became so ubiquitous that in 1943, *Life*

¹⁵ Ralph Blumenthal, *Stork Club: America's Most Famous Nightspot and the Lost World of Café Society* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷ "People and Ideas: Saturday Nights in New York," *Vogue*, 1 July 1942, 42.

¹⁸ Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 134.

¹⁹ Cynthia R. Millman, "Lindy Hop," *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

magazine declared it “America’s national dance.”²⁰ Swing dance and the energetic tap dance numbers of movie musicals formed the majority of the popular dance lexicon in Salinger’s youth. Holden Caulfield’s experiences with dance are built upon Salinger’s exposure to these forms; he uses the common ground of popular dance to connect with others despite his difficulty with social interaction.

Holden Caulfield has frequently been written off as a whiny adolescent with an attitude. However, Holden’s feelings of disaffection and anger have deeper roots that run as a quiet but strong current throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*. The novel’s narrative is framed by Holden’s mental instability. On the first page, Holden explains that he is writing from a rest home in Southern California, where he had to go after “this madman stuff” that happened to him.²¹ From the first moments of the novel, Holden establishes the fact that his story is the chronicle of a mental breakdown. He also discloses early on that his mental health has been called into question before. The Caulfield family is still reeling from the sudden death of Holden’s younger brother, Allie, who died of leukemia a few years before the start of the narrative. Holden recalls that he acted out violently following this family tragedy. He explains that he broke all the windows in the garage with his fist, which was a “very stupid thing to do,” and his family was going to have him “psychoanalyzed and all.”²² Holden never describes happy childhood memories involving his parents. His only happy reminiscences center on his siblings – his older brother D.B., a writer, Allie, and his younger sister Phoebe. They are the primary source of friendship and affection in Holden’s childhood. The loss of one of that group, therefore, has left Holden with an irreparable wound. He mentions Allie often, especially when he is feeling particularly isolated.

²⁰ “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.,” *Life*, 23 August 1943.

²¹ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951), 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 39.

Lingering feelings of loss and confusion surrounding Allie's death compound Holden's nagging feelings of loneliness. As his condition deteriorates, Holden is able to find connection with fewer and fewer individuals.

Holden also finds his social world to be highly oppressive. At the start of the novel, he frankly reveals that he's just been expelled from Pencey Prep, a highly regarded boarding school in Pennsylvania, like the real Valley Forge Military Academy from Salinger's life. This is the third time that Holden has been kicked out of a private boarding school. Much like Salinger, he is a talented writer, but repeatedly fails to apply himself in school. Holden explains that this inability to engage is no fault of his own; rather, he feels oppressed by his environment. He details these complaints in a conversation with his sometime date Sally Hayes. Holden can't stand Sally – he calls her “queen of the phonies” – but he takes her on a date during his search for a kind of companionship that no one can quite give him.²³ He says:

“You ought to go to a boys' school sometime. Try it sometime,” I said. “It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac some day, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques. The guys that are on the baseball team stick together, the Catholics stick together, the guys that play bridge stick together. Even the guys that belong to the goddam Book-of-the-*Month* Club stick together...”²⁴

Holden inhabits a privileged, private school, Upper East Side world. He criticizes the social rituals of his peers: their cliques, their obsession with sports, and their single-minded conversations. He also condemns the institution of private education, recognizing that he and his classmates are being groomed for affluence and wealth, not intellectual growth. However, Holden directs most of his ire at the “dirty” cliques he has encountered at boys' schools. Everyone “sticks together” except for Holden. He sneers at this system, but his separation from it

²³ Ibid., 116.

²⁴ Ibid., 131.

also highlights his own isolation. Over the course of this rant, Holden lists nearly every type of social group extant at Pencey Prep. However, he says nothing about where he fits in, because he does not. Holden always hovers around the borders of these social circles. He is never actively ostracized; in fact, many of the other boys seem to like him. Nevertheless, Holden makes it clear he does not have a place in any of these cliques. His constant feelings of alienation amount to more than teenage whining; Holden's desperate loneliness becomes pathology, leading to an eventual breakdown.

Other teenagers in Holden's world love going to the movies; therefore, Holden necessarily despises them. "If there's one thing I hate," he says, "it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me."²⁵ He calls his brother, D.B., a "prostitute" for taking his writing talents to Hollywood.²⁶ J.D. Salinger also had a history of poking fun at Hollywood, though early in his career he did try to sell a few of his stories to movie studios.²⁷ His first love, in fact, was acting; he was named "Favorite Camp Actor" at summer camp as a child, and he continued to perform at the McBurney School.²⁸ He also began to write there and became involved with the school newspaper. Salinger continued these pursuits during his time at Valley Forge, acting in campus productions and serving as literary editor of the academy's yearbook, *Crossed Sabres*.²⁹ Once Salinger arrived at Ursinus, he continued his literary pursuits by starting a column in the *Ursinus Weekly*, first called "Musings of a Social Soph: The Skipped Diploma," and soon renamed "J.D.S.'s The Skipped Diploma."³⁰ J.D.S. wrote satirical stories about college life and sarcastic reviews of theater, movies, and novels. He frequently criticized books for being "phony," taking

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 58.

²⁸ Ibid., 11, 13.

²⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

³⁰ Ibid., 24.

aim at writers such as Margaret Mitchell and Ernest Hemingway.³¹ Salinger also expressed disdain for romantic Hollywood male leads and had a particular aversion for the child star Shirley Temple. He once wrote, “I throw tomatoes at all small children resembling Shirley Temple.”³² On the other hand, he did love some movie stars – “Mickey Rooney, the Marx Brothers, and the Lunts.”³³ It is also important to note that although Salinger professed hate for many movies, he still went to see them. So, too, does Holden Caulfield.

During Salinger’s youth and Holden’s fictional life, the movies were full of tap dancing. The dramatic, exhilarating numbers in films like *Top Hat* (1935), *Shall We Dance* (1937), *Forty-second Street* (1933), and *Stormy Weather* (1943) had captured the public imagination and offered an egalitarian glamour, available to anyone sitting in the theater. According to *Life* magazine, dancer and movie star Fred Astaire was the “no. 1 exponent” of tap dance, which the magazine designated “this country’s only native and original dance form.”³⁴ However, though these films presented a vision of ambition and good cheer, the racial politics of tap dance and Hollywood were complicated. Tap dance developed through a series of “complex intercultural fusions” among Irish indentured servants and West African slaves in the Caribbean, and later Irish American and African American groups, from the 1600s through the 1800s.³⁵ By the 1930s, tap had become an integral component of Broadway shows and movie musicals. Paradoxically, “the decade that saw more tap dancers and more tap dance acts than any other in the twentieth century was also the most segregated and the most segregating of white and black dance artists.”³⁶ Jim Crow laws were in effect, and racial separation was a fact onscreen as well as in

³¹ Ibid.

³² Quoted in Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 48.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lincoln Barnett, “Fred Astaire,” *Life*, 25 August 1941, 73-74.

³⁵ Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 98.

real life. The role of hero was always reserved for a white performer; black actors played domestic characters, usually either eager to please or openly lustful.³⁷ In fact, some of Shirley Temple's movies serve as a pointed example of this phenomenon. In *The Little Colonel* (1935), Temple's first of several films with tap dancing great Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, he played a "loyal, self-effacing 'Uncle Tom' who dutifully served his masters."³⁸ This was the first of many films to cast Robinson in nearly the same role. Temple, on the other hand, played the granddaughter of *The Little Colonel's* family patriarch. Forever helpful, when Temple refuses to go upstairs to bed, Robinson convinces her to come along by teaching her his stair dance. The scene became iconic, boosted Temple's status as cinematic gold, and turned Robinson into a major box office commodity. Temple and Robinson were, in fact, film's "first interracial tap dancing couple, albeit a seven-year-old white girl and a fifty-seven-year-old black man." However, Robinson always played Temple's servant and her inferior.³⁹

Dance is one of the few activities that allow Holden to find happiness and connection with others. For all his bitterness and anger, and as someone who often reiterates his hatred of actors and the movies, Holden Caulfield loves to dance. However, dancing isn't only about expression for Holden; he also uses dance as a means of entertaining and pleasing others. The first dance scene in *Catcher* occurs when Holden is talking to his roommate, Stradlater, in the communal bathroom. Stradlater is shaving in preparation for a date. Holden's relationship with his roommate is complicated; he calls Stradlater a "pretty friendly guy," but also says that his kindness is "partly a phony kind of friendly" when really analyzed.⁴⁰ Stradlater is handsome and he knows it, and Holden is both fascinated and disgusted by his womanizing ways. Sometimes,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 122.

³⁹ Ibid., 121-123.

⁴⁰ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 26.

Holden feels a kind of affection for his roommate, but ultimately, Stradlater is just another “phony” he cannot relate to. While watching Stradlater dress for his date, Holden starts to tap dance:

I got bored sitting on that washbowl after a while, so I backed up a few feet and started doing this tap dance, just for the hell of it. I was just amusing myself. I can't really tap-dance or anything, but it was a stone floor in the can, and it was good for tap-dancing. I started imitating one of those guys in the movies. In the *musicals*. I hate the movies like *Poison*, but I get a bang imitating them. Old Stradlater watched me in the mirror while he was shaving. All I need's an audience. I'm an exhibitionist. "I'm the goddam Governor's son," I said. I was knocking myself out. Tap-dancing all over the place. "He doesn't want me to be a tap dancer. He wants me to go to Oxford. But it's in my goddam blood, tap-dancing." Old Stradlater laughed. He didn't have too bad a sense of humor. "It's the opening night of the *Ziegfeld Follies*." I was getting out of breath. I have hardly any wind at all. "The leading man can't go on. He's drunk as a bastard. So who do they get to take his place? Me, that's who. The little ole goddam Governor's son."⁴¹

Holden begins to dance, in part, as a joke. As he says, he is amusing himself, and putting on a spectacle for his roommate. His description of the moment begins casually, as he insists he “can't really tap-dance.” However, Holden's dance is not mindless. He evaluates the conditions of his makeshift stage, explaining that the bathroom floor is a good surface for tap dancing because it is stone. That level of detail indicates that Holden's disinterest in the act is not so great as he would lead his reader to believe. Before he knows it, Holden has consumed the “poison” of those movies he hates so much, and he is “knocking [himself] out” making up his very own dramatic tale.

The Ziegfeld Follies have a long history. They began as a series of famous revues mounted by impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, whose mission was “Glorifying the American Girl.”⁴² The first was entitled simply *Follies of 1907*, and the song and dance shows continued on a yearly basis through 1925, with editions in 1927 and 1931 as well. The productions were known

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴² “Ziegfeld, Florenz,” *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009).

for their lavish costumes and sets, which were exotic, brightly colored, and meticulously coordinated. The series revolutionized Broadway productions, and catapulted many young talents to stardom.⁴³ A movie based on Ziegfeld's life, *The Great Ziegfeld*, was released in 1936. The film begins with a young Ziegfeld defying his father, who wants him to continue the family tradition of studying classical music. Instead, Ziegfeld follows his dream to create a new type of revue.⁴⁴ This may be the film that Holden refers to during his tap dance, as he describes a similar story of rebellion against his imaginary father.

At the time of *Catcher's* release, the most recent interpretation of the Ziegfeld legacy was the 1945 MGM film *Ziegfeld Follies*. This interpretation shows Ziegfeld himself looking down from heaven at extravagant productions just like the ones he had once put on. *Ziegfeld Follies* has no plot; it consists of a string of unrelated musical numbers. The film was billed as the "Greatest Production Since The Birth Of Motion Pictures!" because it featured an impressive lineup of stars: Fred Astaire, Lucille Ball, Judy Garland, Lena Horne, Gene Kelly, Cyd Charisse, Fanny Brice, Lucille Bremer, and more.⁴⁵ A notable number is "The Babbit and the Bromide," a song-and-dance scene starring Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. The young, athletic Kelly was often seen as a rival of older, more graceful Astaire, and their appearance together elicited much excitement.⁴⁶ The two men poke fun at their supposed rivalry in the number, kicking and tripping each other but tap dancing in perfect time.⁴⁷ However, the more striking aspect of the film is its racial bias. The star-studded cast of the film is nearly all white, except for African American dancer and singer Lena Horne. "Love," Horne's number, is markedly different from the rest of

⁴³ Gerald Bordman and Thomas S. Hischak, ed., "Ziegfeld Follies," *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ "The Great Ziegfeld (1936)," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed 4 December 2012.

⁴⁵ "Ziegfeld Follies (1945)," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed 4 December 2012.

⁴⁶ Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, 154-155.

⁴⁷ Vincente Minnelli, dir., *Ziegfeld Follies*, MGM, 1945.

the vignettes. She appears in a dark, dingy club, in stark contrast to the bright and colorful spaces depicted in the movie's other scenes. All the performers in this scene are black, whereas the rest of the film features an all-white cast. The number begins with two women physically fighting over a man, a conspicuous divergence from the movie's otherwise uniformly graceful and glamorous depiction of women. Horne, the clear focus of the scene, is the only person who sings or dances. She is dressed more colorfully than those who surround her, and her skin appears significantly lighter. This scene epitomizes the racial disparities of 1940s Hollywood. The black performers are visually and thematically segregated from their white counterparts, relegated to a dingy scene that appears unsophisticated when compared with the remainder of *Ziegfeld Follies*.

These various versions of the Ziegfeld story contain the type of glamour and perpetual good cheer that Holden loves to hate; however, he puts these conventions to use in his dance for Stradlater. Holden's tap dance is an expression of his awkward position in relation to Stradlater's social ritual. It is the weekend of the biggest football game of the year, and Stradlater, like most of the other boys, is going out on a date. Holden has no date, and therefore sits aside while Stradlater prepares. He watches, and even scrutinizes, remarking that Stradlater keeps his shaving kit in terrible condition.⁴⁸ Holden is stuck in between; he does not participate in Stradlater's going-out preparations, but he is also unable to turn away from them entirely. He does not know what to do, so he dances. In this scene, Holden occupies the position of a black performer, dancing to please, making a spectacle of himself in the name of entertainment. Movement and his self-proclaimed exhibitionism allow him to change the focus of his awkward interaction with Stradlater. By referencing movie musicals they are both familiar with, and putting himself in a non-threatening, comic role, Holden is able to forge a connection with Stradlater and make him laugh.

⁴⁸ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 27.

Many of Holden's issues with his classmates can be attributed to his complicated relationship with class and wealth, a tension also present throughout Salinger's life and work. Salinger's social uneasiness and his reclusive nature can be explained, in part, by his parents' secretive tendencies. When Salinger's parents were married, his mother, originally named Marie, changed her first name to Miriam in order to better fit in with the Jewish family of her new husband Solomon.⁴⁹ By the time Jerome – her second child – was born, both of her parents had died, leaving her with little family aside from the Salingers.⁵⁰ Miriam and Solomon rarely ever spoke of past events in the presence of their children, and as a result, Salinger and his older sister Doris grew up knowing very little about their family history.⁵¹ This sense of secrecy was intensified by the family's ambiguous religious situation. Solomon was Jewish; however, he had great business aspirations, and in the 1920s, his Jewish heritage placed him at odds with the world of Protestant New York businessmen. Thus, the Salingers raised their children with a blend of tentative religious customs, celebrating Christmas and Passover and rarely attending church or synagogue.⁵² By the 1930s, the family had cast off virtually all signs of religious participation.⁵³ Salinger grew up in an environment of increasing comfort and wealth as his parents climbed the social scale, although they remained outsiders to an extent, holding a tenuous position within their privileged social world. Even though Salinger could be a "straight-faced joiner," he remained somewhat of an outsider everywhere he went.⁵⁴ This resulted in a dual consciousness: Salinger could view life from the perspective of his peers, indulging in privilege and excess, but he could also step away and deliver biting critiques of their frivolity. Holden

⁴⁹ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 25.

shares this dual nature. He seeks out anonymity and escape in crowded nightclubs, even though he is “surrounded by jerks.”⁵⁵

Though Holden takes part in the life of a well-to-do New York City teenager, gallivanting around the city, taking cabs and buying drinks at nightclubs, he also expresses uneasiness in relation to his own privilege. For example, he feels so uncomfortable around people with less money that he sometimes starts to resent them. He says:

It isn't important, I know, but I hate it when somebody has cheap suitcases. It sounds terrible to say it, but I can even get to hate somebody, just *looking* at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them. Something happened once. For a while when I was at Elkton Hills, I roomed with this boy, Dick Slagle, that had these very inexpensive suitcases. He used to keep them under the bed, instead of on the rack, so that nobody'd see them standing next to mine. It depressed the holy hell out of me, and I kept wanting to throw mine out or something, or even *trade* with him. Mine came from Mark Cross, and they were genuine cowhide and all that crap, and I guess they cost quite a pretty penny.⁵⁶

Holden dismisses the fancy brand name and high quality of his suitcases as “all that crap,” but he knows that those symbols of wealth are important, especially in an exclusive prep school environment. However, rather than feeling pleased at showing off his family's affluence, Holden feels guilty that his roommate cannot do the same. On the other hand, there is something else that makes Holden really dislike his roommate. He explains:

But it was a funny thing. Here's what happened. What I did, I finally put *my* suitcases under *my* bed, instead of on the rack, so that old Slagle wouldn't get a goddam inferiority complex about it. But here's what he did. The day after I put mine under my bed, he took them out and put them back on the rack. The reason he did it, it took me a while to find out, was because he wanted people to think my bags were his. He really did.⁵⁷

Holden is saddened and angered by Slagle's pretension. He feels guilty about his own privilege and status, but what upsets him more is the fact that his roommate would like to project the same

⁵⁵ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 85.

⁵⁶ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951), 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

wealth and status. These contradictory feelings about class appear throughout *Catcher*; Holden plays the role of cultural critic, but he also takes advantage of his own position of privilege, sometimes appearing hypocritical.

Holden's complaints about his comfortable lifestyle are easily brushed off as adolescent angst; however, they acquire greater weight when the experiences of their author are considered. During Salinger's trip to Europe in 1938, he witnessed firsthand the Nazi rise to power in Austria.⁵⁸ Half-Jewish, he saw "Nazi street mobs on the rampage... moving around by the thousands."⁵⁹ Six years later, Salinger returned to Europe, this time as a soldier. He fought on D-Day and in the battle of "Bloody Mortain," serving in a unit that sustained thousands of casualties per month.⁶⁰ He spent some time in a hospital in Nuremberg, where he was treated for a deep depression,⁶¹ and married a French girl, whom he had just met and would divorce eight months later.⁶² Returning home in 1946, Salinger attempted to throw himself into fashionable New York life to little avail.⁶³ In 1947, he moved to Stamford, Connecticut.⁶⁴ Salinger had continued to publish stories throughout his military service, creating narratives that became increasingly gruesome.⁶⁵ After his return to the United States, however, he fell nearly silent in terms of published works.⁶⁶ If Salinger felt disenfranchised with his social milieu before the war, there is no doubt it would have seemed extremely petty once he returned home having witnessed some of the most violent battles of World War II. *Catcher* contains no specific references to the

⁵⁸ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 20, 22.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 41.

⁶⁰ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 98-101.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶² Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 90, 98.

⁶³ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 153.

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 106.

⁶⁵ Alexander, *Salinger: A Biography*, 94-95, 104.

⁶⁶ Hamilton, *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, 99.

horrors of war; however, Holden's anger and bitterness take on a new, disturbing dimension when viewed in light of his creator's experiences.

Holden is a highly sheltered character. However much he may claim to hate his vapid, vain peers, Holden only socializes within his own affluent class. There are very few characters in the novel who do not share Holden's wealth. His world is also very segregated. There is only one African American character in *The Catcher in the Rye* – Ernie, “a big fat colored guy that plays the piano.”⁶⁷ Ernie is a talented musician who has his own club, but he only appears for a few pages, entertaining an entirely white crowd of admirers. According to Holden, they are mostly “prep school jerks and college jerks.”⁶⁸ New York's fashionable nightclubs were largely segregated. The Cotton Club, a Harlem venue especially important in the development of tap dance, featured black performers but had a “whites-only seating policy” until 1936.⁶⁹ In a 1937 installment of its series “Life Goes to a Party,” *Life* magazine visits a similarly segregated club. The venue is the Manhattan Room of the Hotel Pennsylvania, a bar full of college students “fresh from the Columbia-Pennsylvania football game that afternoon.”⁷⁰ The students are “crowded into a small dance room”; however, the dancing is only “intermittent” because the main attraction is the white bandleader Benny Goodman and his band. The article features a picture of black pianist Teddy Wilson, explaining that he “has many a white admirer. Because mixed bands are not the rule in New York, Wilson is not the regular pianist but steps up twice during each evening to play in a mixed quartet.”⁷¹ This scene recalls Holden's experience in Ernie's, where a crowd of wealthy, young white people gathers around to listen to a musician they probably would not acknowledge outside the club. The novelty of a black musician highlights the

⁶⁷ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 80.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁹ Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, 110.

⁷⁰ “Life Goes to a Party: To Listen to Benny Goodman and His Swing Band,” *Life*, 1 November 1937, 120.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

exclusionary and racially segregated nature of café society. For this group of New York socialites, dancing was only done in proper company.

Like tap dancing, the Lindy Hop was bred in an environment of class and race-based tension. The Lindy originated with African American dancers in Harlem. However, the popularity of the dance was infectious, and it quickly spread beyond its roots. This was partly due to the fact that dance halls like Harlem's Savoy Ballroom, often cited as the birthplace of the Lindy and one of its most prominent venues, served a mixed-race clientele. The prominence of radio facilitated the spread of swing music across the country, and dance moved along with it. The Lindy also appeared in Broadway musicals and movies, helping to establish it as a must-know dance.⁷² However, even as people of various races embraced the Lindy Hop, racial tensions influenced public perception of the dance form. A 1943 *Life* article in which the magazine declares the Lindy Hop America's "true national folk dance" places these issues front and center. The magazine's cover features a photo of a couple doing the Lindy, and the article features a how-to photo spread with pictures by Gjon Mili. Two couples demonstrate Lindy steps in the photos. The first is an African American couple, Leon James and Willa Mae Ricker, dancers renowned for their acrobatic talents. Stanley Catron and Kaye Popp, the white couple featured on the cover and in the other photos, are stars of the Broadway show *Something for the Boys*. Next to pictures of Ricker and James demonstrating the Lindy's "air steps," acrobatic lifts and jumps, the magazine explains the Lindy's "primitive" origins:

[...] it is following the evolutionary cycle of all dances since the beginning of recorded time: first the rhythmic, primitive folk dance, sprung from spontaneous responses of humble people to musical inspiration; then the social dance, popular with all classes and defined by fixed and basic patterns; and finally the classic

⁷² Millman, "Lindy Hop," *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*.

form, far removed from the proletarian origins and ornamented with complex flowery figures attainable only by those who spend years in practice.⁷³

This blatantly racist language continues in the text next to the pictures of the white couple. *Life* explains that “in its early days the Lindy flourished only in the lower strata of society. Negroes were its creators and its principal exponents, and Arthur Murray would no more have taught the Lindy Hop than Rachmaninoff would have given lessons in the boogie-woogie. But with the renaissance of swing the Lindy climbed the social scale.”⁷⁴ Despite the fact that the Lindy had truly become a national dance, the *Life* writers felt the need to legitimize the dance and separate it from what they saw as its base origins. Though “all classes” had adopted the dance, an uneasiness regarding the style persisted.

During Salinger’s youth, it was common for the children of privileged households to take dance lessons. For young girls, to dance well was to be beautiful, and a strong dance repertoire was an important possession for any debonair young man. A 1941 *Vogue* article declares, “Dance well – and beauty will steal up on your footsteps... a course of dancing lessons is practically a beauty course.”⁷⁵ Since Salinger’s parents always sought to fit in, it comes as no surprise that they enrolled him in dance lessons. According to Joyce Maynard, a former lover of Salinger’s, he was a talented dancer. She writes:

Jerry is an expert ballroom dancer. As little as he’s told me about his own teenage years, I know he attended dancing classes in his Upper West Side and (later) Park Avenue adolescence. There was a time when he was a young man about town in Manhattan, taking Eugene O’Neill’s beautiful daughter, Oona, to places like the Stork Club, smoking cigarettes... he’s the kind of dancer who can make even an inexperienced partner like me feel graceful. He teaches me to fox-trot in the blue glow of the television set.⁷⁶

⁷³ “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.,” *Life*, 23 August 1943. See appendix for photos, figures 1-6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Beauty: Dancing Lessons... Beauty Lessons,” *Vogue*, 15 May 1941, 44.

⁷⁶ Joyce Maynard, *At Home in the World*, (New York: Picador, 1998), 172.

In order to fit in at venues such as the Stork Club, Salinger would have needed to know how to dance. Maynard encountered Salinger many years later, when he was in his fifties. Though far removed from New York's café society, Salinger still loved to dance as if he were listening to the live band at the long shuttered club.

Salinger became involved in the world of café society because he was chasing a girl. That girl was Oona O'Neill, the daughter of playwright Eugene O'Neill. Those who knew Oona uniformly described her as incredibly beautiful, but most people who encountered her agreed that she was vain and shallow.⁷⁷ Even Salinger acknowledged that "Little Oona was hopelessly in love with little Oona."⁷⁸ However, he fell deeply in love with her and tried to keep up with her "flamboyant tastes," squiring her to restaurants above his means and socializing with her at the Stork Club.⁷⁹ Salinger's involvement with the Stork Club took place after he had left college and before he entered the Army. At the time, his achievements were few, and he was a nobody compared to the high society and movie star regulars of the Stork Club. However, Oona was making a name for herself as a beauty. She had been coming to the Stork Club since she was just fifteen years old, infuriating her famous father. To fill the club with beautiful girls, each year the owner and his friends selected the season's most exquisite debutantes to receive food and drink free in the club. From this group, the men voted one woman their "Glamour Girl" of the year. In the 1942-1943 season, that title went to Oona O'Neill.⁸⁰ Oona was a fixture at the Stork Club. In fact, she is pictured there alongside a "Navy man" in a *Vogue* article about New York City nightlife (soldiers became quite fashionable during World War II).⁸¹ Salinger threw himself into Oona's world, despite the fact that he probably felt some degree of aversion toward it. These

⁷⁷ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 39.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸⁰ Blumenthal, *Stork Club*, 20.

⁸¹ "People and Ideas: Saturday Nights in New York," *Vogue*, 1 July, 1942, 42.

were the same glamorous movie stars, Broadway performers, and literati that he had criticized in his college writings, and suddenly he was socializing with them.

The Stork Club was owned by former bootlegger Sherman Billingsley and began as a Prohibition-era speakeasy. It became so famous that a movie was made about the club in 1945.⁸² The Stork Club name was so recognizable and carried such clout that its guests stole about \$25,000 worth of the club's property each year. A 1946 *Life* magazine article explains that the "insignia worn by Stork Club personnel, for example, fascinates college girls, who like to pin them to their pajamas and will go to great lengths, bribery included, to obtain one." Water pitchers decorated with storks were another popular souvenir.⁸³ The Stork was a place to see and be seen, to eat and drink, but it was also a place to dance. In 1942, *Vogue* magazine praised the club for its "continuous dancing" and "reliable treadmill of celebrities."⁸⁴ A 1944 *Life* feature on the club features photos of its lavish dining room, expansive bar, and ornate powder rooms. Movie stars and politicians dine, while the dance floor is full of well-dressed couples.⁸⁵ The Stork Club was all about showing off. As swing became "the musical fashion of the hour," it made its way into the club alongside more traditional ballroom styles.⁸⁶

Holden Caulfield mentions several jazz clubs and bars over the course of his narrative and visits a few, most of them fictional but closely related to reality. Once Holden leaves Pencey, he returns to his hometown of New York. However, he doesn't want his parents to know that he's been kicked out of school, so he stays at the fictional Edmont Hotel. The hotel has a nightclub called the Lavender Room, likely modeled after bars such as the Manhattan Room of the Hotel Pennsylvania, as featured in *Life*. After Holden checks in, he goes down to the club. He

⁸² Blumenthal, *Stork Club*, 41.

⁸³ "Souvenir Stealers: Honest citizens pilfer huge amounts of booty," *Life*, 4 November 1946, 8.

⁸⁴ "People and Ideas: Saturday Nights in New York," *Vogue*, 1 July, 1942, 42.

⁸⁵ "Life Visits the Stork Club," *Life*, 6 November 1944, 119-125. See appendix for photos, figures 7-10.

⁸⁶ Wilder Hobson, "Swing High," *Vogue*, 15 March 1936, 90.

remarks that there are very few people around his age, but he sets his eye on three women he estimates to be around thirty.

Holden can tell that the women are tourists putting on airs of class and sophistication, and he feels sorry for them. He explains that they must think they're at a high profile club full of celebrities, like the Stork Club or El Morocco, another glamorous nightspot. Instead, they're in a rundown hotel bar with a mediocre band. Feeling sorry for people makes Holden angry, and he begins to hate the women just from looking at them. However, there is a blonde who Holden says "wasn't too bad," so he starts trying to get their attention. The women laugh at him, and Holden bristles. "That annoyed the hell out of me," he says, "you'd've thought I wanted to *marry* them or something. I should've given them the freeze, after they did that, but the trouble was, I really felt like dancing. I'm very fond of dancing, sometimes, and that was one of the times."⁸⁷ Holden's sudden and powerful desire to dance pushes him to overcome his distaste and approach the women. Finally, he convinces the blonde to take a turn with him on the dance floor. He can hardly stand her personality, but he loves dancing with her:

The blonde was some dancer. She was one of the best dancers I ever danced with. I'm not kidding, some of these very stupid girls can really knock you out on a dance floor... God, could that dopey girl dance. Buddy Singer and his stupid band was playing "Just One of Those Things" and even *they* couldn't ruin it entirely. It's a swell song. I didn't do any trick stuff while we danced – I hate a guy that does a lot of show-off tricky stuff on the dance floor – but I was moving her around plenty, and she stayed with me. The funny thing is, I thought she was enjoying it, too, till all of a sudden she came out with this very dumb remark.⁸⁸

Holden hasn't lost his cynicism – the band is still awful, the girl is still dumb, and he hates show-offs. However, while Holden is dancing, none of this matters to him. Holden's uses of positive descriptors like "swell" are few and far between. He's genuinely enjoying himself, and is especially happy to dance with a partner who is able to stay right with him as he moves on the

⁸⁷ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 70.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

dance floor. The act of moving together gives Holden a sensation he rarely experiences – interpersonal connectedness. He enjoys the moment so purely that he even imagines his partner might be feeling the same way. Unfortunately, Holden’s partner disappoints him; he is enjoying the moment, but she has simply been scanning the room for celebrities and socialites. The blonde craves the glamour and pretension of café society. Holden, on the other hand, detests that type of “look at me” attitude. This detestation is evident in his dislike of flashy dancing; it is symptomatic of his revulsion toward “phonies,” but it is also an indicator of something more personal. Dancing creates an honest state of pleasure for Holden, and he does not wish to mar it with pretension. Holden feels joy when he is moving, a rare occurrence in his lonely, angry narrative. He even takes turns with the blonde’s friends, just to keep dancing. Nevertheless, he leaves disappointed, because the blonde and her friends are too distracted by their own posturing.

The next day, after ruining a date with Sally Hayes, Holden goes to Radio City to take in a movie – despite the fact that he hates them – and walks in while the Rockettes are still on stage. Their calculated, highly polished choreography leaves Holden dissatisfied. He makes fun of how the “Rockettes were kicking their heads off, the way they do when they’re all in line with their arms around each other’s waist. The audience applauded like mad, and some guy behind me kept saying to his wife, ‘You know what that is? That’s precision.’ He killed me.”⁸⁹ Holden does not value precision and entertainment in dance; he appreciates improvisation and natural expression. It is no surprise, then, that he enjoys tap dance and swing. Both of those forms grew out of jazz music, a style defined by its improvisatory quality. He is less interested in the neatly packaged dances presented by groups like the Rockettes. Holden’s dislike of deliberate choreography also provides insight into his professed distaste for movie musicals, as those numbers were generally very structured and meticulously orchestrated.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 137.

For Holden, to be a great dancer is something very significant. This belief shines through in his comments about Jane Gallagher, a character mentioned constantly throughout the novel but never seen. Holden is in love with Jane; her family lived in the summer home next to his, and they spent countless hours together. Holden informs his reader early on that Jane is a ballet dancer, and boasts about how she practiced two hours every day during the summer even in the hottest weather.⁹⁰ She also lives in New York, and before Holden goes to Radio City he thinks he might give her a “buzz and, if she was home yet, take her dancing or something somewhere.”⁹¹ He laments that he “never danced with her or anything the whole time I knew her. I saw her dancing once, though,” he says. “She looked like a very good dancer.”⁹² This sighting took place at a country club Fourth of July dance, but Jane was dancing with someone else and Holden didn’t want to “cut in” on her “terrible” partner.⁹³ Holden never even kissed Jane; however, even though the other boys constantly trade stories of their sexual exploits, Holden doesn’t regret that he has no such stories to tell about Jane. He simply regrets that he never danced with her. Nevertheless, he assures his reader that she dances well. Ballet isn’t the type of dance that Holden personally enjoys. As demonstrated in his encounter with the Rockettes, Holden values spontaneity over the kind of meticulous choreography exhibited in a ballet. However, Holden does value technique. When describing his dance with the blonde, he continually praises her talent and ability to follow his lead exactly. Unlike the blonde, who is looking for celebrities over Holden’s shoulder, Jane is innocent and genuine. Holden often uses her as an example of a sincere person, who truly cares about others, and is not preoccupied with the material. Ballet may not be Holden’s ideal dance form, but for Jane, it is an authentic form of expression and she

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁹¹ Ibid., 135.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

takes it very seriously. Therefore, Holden trusts that Jane would make a good dance partner for him and wants to take her out dancing, because she understands the concept of dance as a pure medium of expression. Jane is one of few people that Holden speaks highly of, and her ability to dance fascinates him.

Holden's appreciation of good dancing is especially evident in one of the novel's most poignant scenes, when he dances with his younger sister. It is only when Holden dances with Phoebe that he is able to experience a genuine feeling of connection through dance. Phoebe is the only person in the novel that Holden really trusts and feels completely at ease with. There is nothing phony about Phoebe; she is wise in her innocence, and in Holden's opinion, understands the world better than people many years her senior. Holden sneaks into his family's apartment when his parents are out for the evening, and talks to Phoebe about problems he has been unable to articulate to anyone else. He discusses their brother Allie, why he hates Pencey, and why he cannot ever seem to last at any of the schools he is sent to. In the midst of their discussion, Holden asks Phoebe to dance. He had "taught her how to dance and all when she was a tiny little kid," he says. "She's a very good dancer. I mean I just taught her a few things. You can't teach somebody how to *really* dance."⁹⁴ Holden sees dancing as a form of authentic communication. It is impossible to teach, and it is not verbal, so it has to be completely genuine. He continues:

I don't like people that dance with little kids, because most of the time it looks horrible. I mean if you're out at a restaurant somewhere and you see some old guy take his little kid out on the dance floor. Usually they keep yanking the kid's dress up in the back by mistake, and the kid can't dance worth a damn *anyway*, and it looks terrible, but I don't do it out in public with Phoebe or anything. It's different with her anyway, because she can *dance*. She can follow anything you do. I mean if you hold her in close as hell so that it doesn't matter that your legs are so much longer. She stays right with you. You can cross over, or do some corny dips, or even jitterbug a little, and she stays right with you. You can even *tango*, for God's sake.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., 175.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

As when Holden dances with the blonde, it is of the utmost importance that Phoebe is able to stay with him as he moves. However, Phoebe has something that the blonde does not. Phoebe is not just a good dancer; she is capable of anything. Holden feels completely free, because they are perfectly in sync. Phoebe takes her dancing seriously as well. Holden explains that “in between numbers she’s funny as hell. She stays right in position. She won’t even talk or anything. You both have to stay right in position and wait for the orchestra to start playing again.”⁹⁶ No explanation or directions are needed, only movement. No one is watching; there are no tourists putting on airs, no hotshots showing off, and no social rules to follow. Thus, Phoebe and Holden are at liberty to do as they please. This scene occurs hours before Holden’s breakdown. He is unraveling, and his internal conflicts will reach a fever pitch the very next day. However, in this moment, he finds happiness with Phoebe. She is the most natural person Holden knows, and when they dance together, he experiences a joy uninterrupted by his usually troubled thoughts. Phoebe is still a child, and her trusting innocence breaks down Holden’s defensive wall. She sees the world more clearly, because she has not yet had the chance to be disappointed by it. For Phoebe, the kind of natural, unchoreographed movement that Holden loves is automatic. As they dance, she understands exactly what he wants to do without a single cue, because all her energy is focused on the dance. In this last dance scene of the novel, Holden finds his ideal partner.

During his brief college days, J.D. Salinger bragged to his classmates at Ursinus that one day he would write the “Great American novel.”⁹⁷ Many readers would certainly bestow this title upon *The Catcher in the Rye*. For millions, Salinger’s first novel represents the quintessential story of modern adolescence, detailing the narrator’s growing struggle to relate to his world as he

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 27.

learns more about it. However, to a legion of other readers and critics, *The Catcher in the Rye* signifies nothing more than trash. Since its publication, *Catcher* has been vilified for its use of profanity and allusions to sex. The book's sixtieth anniversary in 2011 sparked a new debate about the novel's relevance to today's teens. Now, it seems, students struggle to relate to the book's outdated language and cultural references. Changing attitudes toward mental health also make Holden a puzzling figure – as one high school student put it, now one might tell Holden to “Shut up and take your Prozac.”⁹⁸ However, *The Catcher in the Rye* still frequently makes its way onto the American Library Association's list of most banned books, and it almost always appears on lists of excellent or must-read novels. Clearly, *The Catcher in the Rye* possesses the same enigmatic quality that made its author famous.

The Catcher in the Rye may not have the resonance it once had with teenagers, but its contents are still so thought provoking (and to some, subversive) that it remains an object of debate and scrutiny. This is the case because, while he is known for his bad attitude, Holden Caulfield is a complex character. He has many flaws and a long list of complaints, but the critical focus on this aspect of his personality has led to the marginalization of many of the novel's richer, subtler threads. Chief among these is the role of dance as a medium of free expression and escape from the oppression of rigid social structures. Holden struggles to communicate with others, especially through speech. When there is something he really wants to say, Holden often ends up tongue tied and frustrated. Most of the time, he is so disgusted by the stupidity and self-obsession of the people he meets that he either ruins the conversation by saying something rude or resorts to telling elaborate lies. However, Holden loves to dance so much that he is willing to look past these glaring flaws if it means he is able to take a turn on the dance floor. Holden's happy moments are few and far between, yet he is always happy when he is dancing.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Jennifer Schuessler, “Get a Life, Holden Caulfield,” *The New York Times*, 20 June 2009.

The dances depicted in *The Catcher in the Rye* – the Lindy Hop and tap dance in the style of *Ziegfeld Follies* – are a direct product of J.D. Salinger’s exposure to dance in his youth. Through a period of economic hardship and then war, movie musicals represented happier times. With their beautiful, larger than life stars and elaborate sets and costumes, these films created a fantastical form of escape that was widely accessible. They were major attractions, and everyone – including those who claimed to hate them – went to see the latest pictures. However, not every aspect of these Hollywood productions was idyllic. Though movie studios made significant strides throughout the 1930s and 1940s by finally putting black actors, singers, and dancers in their films, clear onscreen segregation remained. This separation of black and white performers and relegation of black performers to supporting roles reflected the harsh realities of segregation in real life America. This segregated societal structure is obvious in *The Catcher in the Rye*. The novel’s only black character is Ernie the jazz pianist, whose job is to play his music for wealthy white patrons.

Meanwhile, the Lindy Hop was a national dance sensation with its own complicated racial history. The dance originated with black dancers in Harlem; however, the new trends in dance and music were spreading like wildfire, and the Lindy Hop quickly expanded beyond the social circles of its originators. By the 1940s, the dance was a bona fide craze, practiced by black and white dancers, and people of all classes. Nevertheless, as the dance made its way into the glamorous nightclubs of café society and became part of the repertoire for wealthy teenagers’ dance lessons, these privileged, white practitioners felt the need to separate the dance from its African American roots. Café society clubs were strictly whites-only, even though black dancers and musicians often provided the entertainment. Café society was extremely exclusionary in general, not only to non-whites. One had to be rich, beautiful, or both in order to fit in at a place

like the Stork Club. The Stork and similar venues were dedicated to crafting a reputation of excellence and exclusivity. Dancing at these nightclubs was an opportunity for celebrities and socialites to demonstrate that they were on top of the latest trends. The whole affair was about showing off and keeping up appearances, and the dance was no exception.

Although Salinger left behind the café society scene and left New York for a very solitary life soon after the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, he never gave up dancing. As Joyce Maynard's account of dancing with Salinger reveals, he still enjoyed dancing long after his days as a man of society were over. When his first child, Margaret, was young, he "reveled in playing jazz records for his daughter and teaching her how to dance."⁹⁹ Something attracted Salinger to dancing, even when there was no pressure on him to impress Oona O'Neill at the Stork Club.

Salinger imbued his character Holden Caulfield with this same passion for dance. Even as he hurtles toward an emotional breakdown, Holden is able to find pleasure through dance. However, he is unable to find total freedom until he dances with his sister Phoebe. Her youth and innocence mean that she is free from pretension and oppressive social codes. Phoebe is the only person Holden encounters who is able to dance as he wants to dance. Holden craves a natural, spontaneous form of movement. He takes this quite seriously. Dancing is fun for Holden, but it is not a joke. Whether he is alone with Phoebe or out at one of his jazz clubs, dance is a medium that allows Holden to express and enjoy himself within his highly codified social world. In a realm where appearances are everything, dance is an acceptable (and even encouraged) form of expression. Dance, therefore, plays a powerful role in Holden's world. Dance means freedom from oppression by phonies. Most importantly, dance means happiness. This speaks to a larger truth for Salinger's generation: in a period where the country was ravaged by depression and then shocked by war, and when social codes and rules for behavior were strong, dance was a

⁹⁹ Slawenski, *J.D. Salinger: A Life*, 304.

highly personal form of freedom and enjoyment accessible to all. Perhaps, if Holden's particular brand of angst is no longer relatable to readers today, his experience of total happiness and release through dance remains a familiar pleasure.

Appendix

Figure 1: Cover image from *Life* magazine, 23 August 1943. *Life* photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/009b71075ca12dfa.html>>.



Figure 2: Image from “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.”
Life photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/01b3941235a01455.html>>.



Figure 3: Image from “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.”
Life photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/b044c82ae8cd0dd1.html>>.



Figure 4: Image from “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.”
Life photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/df70c4b1310fa3ed.html>>.



Figure 5: Image from “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.”
Life photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/434047af03cd1337.html>>.



Figure 6: Image from “The Lindy Hop: A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in U.S.A.”
Life photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Gjon Mili. Accessed 12 December 2012.
<<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/8919a05e0c295868.html>>.



Figure 7: Image from “Life Visits the Stork Club.” *Life* photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt. Accessed 12 December 2012. <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/f222a3cf0ee0e68c.html>>.



Figure 8: Image from “Life Visits the Stork Club.” *Life* photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt. Accessed 12 December 2012. <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/f9d5597037344386.html>>.



Figure 9: Image from “Life Visits the Stork Club.” *Life* photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt. Accessed 12 December 2012. <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/6283ce99b4d6b725.html>>.

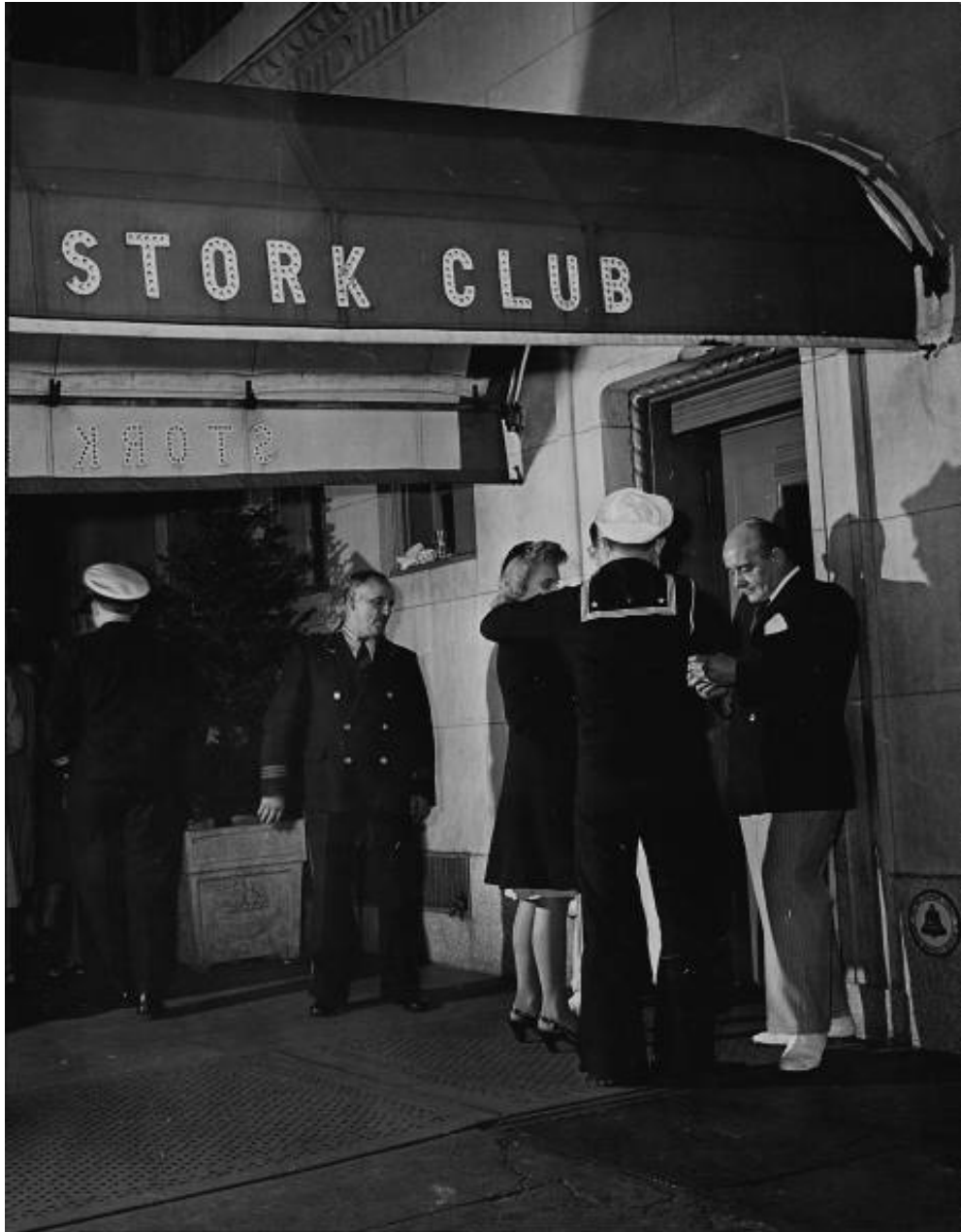


Figure 10: Image from “Life Visits the Stork Club.” *Life* photo archive hosted by Google. Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt. Accessed 12 December 2012. <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/ac996bde5dadd02a.html>>.



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