

## **SALINGER'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN CONVEYING THE THEMES OF ALIENATION, LONELINESS AND DESPAIR IN THE SHORT STORY "FOR ESMÉ WITH LOVE AND SQUALOR"**

This article considers peculiarities of the unique style of Salinger's short stories, several aspects of the language usage and narrative patterns aimed at speech portrayals of the characters. The paper explores the use of stylistic means and narrative strategies to convey the main themes of alienation, loneliness and despair in J. D. Salinger's short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". The authors dwell upon several aspects of the language usage and Salinger's narrative strategies in developing these themes. The emphasis is laid on narratology as a method for analysis and interpretation of the short story themes. It has been proved that the most significant feature in Salinger's works is the way in which his frequent use of tactile imagery leads to the development of character. This article is an attempt to analyze the accuracy of J. D. Salinger's usage of major narrative strategies in developing the themes of alienation and loneliness. For this regard some of the most important aspects of narratology from Gerald Genette's "A Narrative Discourse" are considered. In the focus of attention is Salinger's uniqueness in using stylistic means of different levels and the original composition of the story which help to decode author's message. It has been concluded that Salinger's stories are completely founded on style.

**Key words:** narratology, narrative strategies, J. D. Salinger, composition of short story, stylistic means, themes of alienation and loneliness.

**Formulation of a research problem and its significance.** J. D. Salinger is still a very important and much discussed figure in American literature. Though there is no shortage of criticism on Salinger's writings, careful and in-depth studies of the methods through which author's individual vision and perception of the language, originality in using language elements to encode his messages are worth considering as it can contribute to better understanding and appreciation of his creations and which can help the reader to decode the author's messages.

**The goal and the specific tasks of the article.** The main aim of this article is to outline the most important themes and patterns that recur in the short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor", dwell upon several aspects of the language usage and Salinger's narrative strategies in developing these themes.

**Statement regarding the basic material of the research and the justification of the results obtained.** J. D. Salinger was a prolific author and the writer of many short stories including the well-known collection "Nine Stories" and the famous novel "Catcher in the Rye". He has always been an outstanding writer and a prominent figure for the matters of researches, studies and theses. Although he has been the center of attraction for many years, the vast ocean of his works decrees the possibility of repetition. In addition, such themes as desperate search for love and spirituality, innocence and alienation are everlasting.

We can always find three major traits in Salinger's fiction: a deep understanding of those things in the world or between people that seem small and yet have profound impacts, a deep sadness toward people and the world and the ability to create a convincing sense in the reader that the world contains more than is perceived on a day to day basis. For Salinger one can particularly notice these traits while reading "For Esmé with Love and Squalor".

The great thing about Salinger's creations is that there is no need to explain these traits to another person. It is like listening to music or watching a piece of art – you just feel it. In fact you feel pretty strongly that any attempt to describe Salinger's transcendent traits will be futile. It is almost like the more you try to describe why you like this music, or painting, or a piece of poetry, the further away from the truth you get.

Among the huge bulk of material written by Salinger the most relevant to the topic under consideration is the short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" as a vivid illustration of his unique style of writing

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and the creative choice of materials, and it is going to be the main reference in this article. As it has been defined in the introduction, this article is an attempt to analyze the accuracy of J. D. Salinger's usage of major narrative strategies in developing his main themes. For this regard some of the most important aspects of narratology from Gerald Genette's "A Narrative Discourse" are to be considered. G. Genette said narrative mode is dependent on the "distance" and "perspective" of the narrator, and like music, narrative mode has predominant patterns:

- distance of the narrator changes with narrative proper, entrusted speech and reported speech;
- perspective of the narrator is called focalization. Narratives can be non-focalized, internally focalized or externally focalized [1].

A rhetoric of narrative can be either a study of the techniques of using language effectively (in this case literary narrative is seen as a kind of rhetoric) or it can be a study of tropes and figures of speech. In this study we lay emphasis on narratology as a method for analysis and interpretation of the short story main themes, that is of alienation and loneliness. Information which would be very helpful for solving the goals of this article and also for most of the preestablished themes in Salinger's works was taken from Miller's book "J. D. Salinger".

Many critics lay emphasis on "Nine Stories," which came out in 1953 and helped to shape such writers as John Updike and Harold Brodkey. The stories were remarkable for their sharp social observation, their pitch-perfect dialogue. Salinger used italics almost as a form of musical notation and was a master of both a literary speech and of speech as people actually spoke it. What attracted the critics most was the way those short stories demolished whatever remained of the traditional structure of the short story (the beginning, middle, end) for an architecture of emotion, in which a story could turn on a tiny alteration of mood or irony. Salinger invents and develops a personal, intimate style of narration. The narrator is always in the mind of the reader in the person of the clever, self-conscious, idiosyncratic, even cute protagonist.

Along with the self-conscious and involved style the structure under Salinger's intent becomes not the conventional form of a short story, where we are aware of that a story is being unfolded chronologically, but it is a carefully constructed symbolic pattern. In this paper to analyze thoroughly the role of language in Salinger's works and the challenges of communication faced by the sensitive individuals we suggest exploring one of the few occasions in which characters effectively convey empathy through a tangible object of language.

The sixth work in Salinger's "Nine Stories", "For Esmé with Love and Squalor", provides the most recognized, if not the only, definitively positive example of this method of communicating. In Salinger's "Nine Stories" themes are landed somewhere between hope and despair, between what Salinger termed "love and squalor". We suggest that "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" should be identified as "the flagship story" for this contrast. In this story, as in many of Salinger's other works, elements of squalor are counteracted by some loving gesture. The loving gesture often appears as a verbal expression of empathy, an offering of wisdom, or some other manifestation of language. In this story, the protagonist-narrator, identified only as Sergeant X, desperately needs to express feelings of loneliness, alienation and despair in order to recover from the psychological trauma he experiences in war. Recognizing the need to communicate, he turns instinctively to books, letters, and other physical pieces of language, but these objects fail to provide any relief or stop his "trigger finger itching"[6].

The short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" is described by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner as Salinger's "major fictional victory" [2]. It provides wholly positive example of language that is successfully transferred from one character to another through a tangible object. The protagonist of this story, a World War II soldier, experiences many failures of language before eventually receiving an unexpected gesture of love: a letter and a broken wristwatch from a young acquaintance named Esmé. These things help the Sergeant X overcome feelings of loneliness and combat the psychological trauma of his wartime experience.

In order to examine thoroughly these failures of communication and Sergeant X's eventual recovery, Gwynn and Blotner divide the story into four narrative movements: 1) the opening scene which takes

place on a certain day of 1950s, when the protagonist, Sergeant X, receives an invitation to Esmé's wedding; 2) X's accidental meeting with the young girl Esmé in 1944 while training in the army; 3) the wartime itself, when X finds a book written by Joseph Goebbels in which he inscribes a quote from Dostoevski; and, finally, 4) May of 1945, when the traumatized X receives a letter from Esmé containing her father's broken wristwatch [6].

Gwynn and Blotner argue that within each of these sections, an element of squalor is counteracted by a gesture of love. Most critics generally find the fourth and final symbol of love ("Esmé's her father's watch" and "formal, precise, infinitely moving letter") to be the most significant because they appear to enable his recovery [4, p. 125]. (After reading this letter and examining the fractured face of the wristwatch, Sergeant X falls asleep and that is the end of the story).

Most critics believe, that it is Esmé's "unexpected act of unadulterated affection" which "redeems the Sergeant from his private hell and enables him to go to sleep; he feels he may yet come through the war with his 'faculties intact'" [6]. Throughout the story there are numerous examples of Sergeant X's attempts to use tangible pieces of language to occupy idle time, to calm his nerves, to distract him from the hostility of wartime, or to comfort him when his loneliness becomes unbearable.

J. D. Salinger describes the sixty or so American soldiers in the group as "essentially letter-writing types" [6], who read and write obsessively to family or friends at home, but rarely are engaged in any real dialogue with one another. As the protagonist explains, "when we spoke to each other out of the line of duty, it was usually to ask somebody if he had any ink he wasn't using. When we weren't writing letters or attending classes, each of us pretty much went his own way" [6]. Wenke claims that "These letter-writing types, living in a self-imposed limbo, pen their letters in order to avoid human contact" [8]. Salinger's short stories nearly always portray alienated characters struggling to connect in some way with their fellow human beings.

William Purcell notes: "The questions that come through most clearly in Salinger's early stories are those concerning the qualities that define a good and moral person, the nature of human relationships, and the need for feeling and sympathetic concern between people. In turn, among the problems that continually crop up are the difficulties of open and honest interpersonal communication, and the gradual deepening of the sense of disillusionment, alienation and loss that the war situation precipitated" [5]. Purcell is certainly not the only critic to draw the attention to alienated characters and the struggle of Salinger's characters, especially his protagonists, for communicating effectively in post-World War II America.

James E. Miller, Jr. concurs with Purcell's observation about Salinger's characters, adding that the "dominant theme which recurs is alienation" [3]. Miller further describes this alienation in the following way: an alienation which may conclude in some kind of reconciliation or accommodation, but which may also result in distortion of the soul, bitterness, nausea, and the ultimate withdrawal into death. The causes of the alienation are frequently obscure but always complex. Sometimes society seems at fault, in the horrors of racial prejudice or the horrors of war. But sometimes the fault seems to lie in a failure of personal relationships [8, 136]. What should be noted as most significant about Salinger's works is the way in which his frequent use of tactile imagery leads to the development of character, specifically the development of a "good and moral character".

Leaving the choir practice, X enters a teahouse and as he speaks to the waitress, he realizes, "It was the first time all day that I'd spoken to anyone" [6]. When he recognizes the loneliness he feels, how isolated he has become from the people around him, he instinctively turns to his letters, physical objects of language, for comfort. As he tells us, "I then looked through all my pockets, including my raincoat, and finally found a couple of stale letters to reread" [6].

James E. Miller, Jr. emphasizes the material properties of the letters and the emotional significance that X mistakenly attributes to tangible pieces of language. The letters are physically "stale" or worn from age and constant handling, and have likely deteriorated from being stored in a wet raincoat. "Stale" also suggests that X has been constantly reading and rereading his letters, which reminds us of his "addiction" to bulletin boards and desire to hear a "dozen or more verses" [3].

The assertion that hell is the inability to love also implies the opposite: that if one is capable of love, life does not need to be hellish. This action illustrates one of the primary goals of this story and of language in Salinger's fiction, which is to balance squalor with love, despair with hope. Salinger invents and develops a personal, intimate style. The narrator is always completely present in the mind of the reader in the person of the clever, self-conscious, idiosyncratic, even cute protagonist.

J. D. Salinger displays many tones in his short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". In the beginning the tone is quite scornful and sarcastic towards his mother-in-law and his wife. Next, we see a sensitive and youthful tone, when the narrator, Sergeant X, interacts with children. There is also an angry tone that appears closer to the end of the story that refers to his brother. These tones are shown on several different occasions throughout the story but in each instance the tone describes the narrator's attitude toward the character.

Many times throughout the story the tone of the narrator, Sergeant X, is scornful and sarcastic. For example, in the beginning, he wants to attend Esmé's wedding in England; unfortunately he is convinced by his wife not to go. Although he calls his wife "breathtaking and level headed" we learn later when asked if he was "deeply in love" with his wife, he does not answer. Furthermore, Sergeant X receives letters from his wife during the war and she only complains about her trivial problems in America. She does not ask about his well being at war. The sarcastic tone set by the narrator helps the reader to see this character as selfish and very apathetic.

When Sergeant X interacts with children, a very sensitive, caring and youthful tone is set. For instance, while he listened to choir of children sing he described the experience as "melodious and unsentimental", and stated that maybe if he was a more religious man, he could have experienced levitation. Esmé and Charles were the only people in the story where a positive tone was set. This tone depicts not only the innocence of the children seen by Sergeant X, but also shows his yearning to love. Lately, the tone dramatically changes to angry and hurtful tone. This begins with Sergeant X writing a promised "squalor" story for Esmé. This anger is displayed when the narrator tries to conceal his identity by calling the main character of the story Sergeant X. He continues to tell his story of the traumatic experience of war, which impacted his physical and mental state: "he felt his mind dislodge itself and teeter, like insecure luggage on an overhead rack". Another example of his fury and rage is displayed when he opens a letter from his brother in Albany. The latter asked him to send some "bayonets or swastika" for his kids, as "the g. d. war is over" and he probably has a lot of time on his hands. Sergeant X tore up the letter. This depicts the frustration and anger the narrator feels towards his brother.

One can see different tones of sarcasm, sensitivity and anger created by the writer and these dramatic tones not only disclose J. D. Salinger's attitudes, they create a clever and meaningful story. Distance of the narrator changes from narrative proper to entrusted speech and reported speech in various situations and, like music, narrative mode has predominant patterns in each of them [1]. Due to the narrative strategies activated by Salinger in the short story "For Esmé with Love and Squalor" the tragedy of war and the tragedy of loneliness produces deep and lasting emotional impact on the reader. Esmé has been known to make grown readers cry.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** Analysis of stylistic aspects of language in "For Esmé – with Love and Squalor" provides necessary insight into the challenges of communicating in the squalid world and may also enable readers to better understanding of Salinger's use of language. To transcend the squalor around them, these characters often seek spiritual or emotional solace in written words and utilize tangible objects of language, such as books and letters that can be held in one's pocket or packed into a suitcase, as tools to express their intellectual concerns, resolve feelings of loneliness, and convey love and empathy to those around them. Salinger has a very specific message, but it is far from obvious. His stories are so completely founded on style that they cry for some attributed meaning. To interpret Salinger demands a singular sensitivity to the way in which style dominates content and a very direct perception of an unusual writer.



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**Воробйова Тетяна, Смалько Людмила.** Наративні стратегії Дж. Д. Селінджера для розкриття теми відчуження, самотності та відчаю в оповіданні "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". У центрі уваги дослідження – особливості унікального стилю коротких оповідань Дж. Д. Селінджера, певні аспекти використання мовленнєвих засобів і наративних моделей, спрямованих на творення образів у його творах. Зокрема, розглядаються наративні стратегії як особливий стилістичний засіб Дж. Д. Селінджера, що використовується для розкриття теми відчуження, самотності й відчаю у творі "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". Особливий акцент зроблено на унікальності й майстерності автора у використанні стилістичних засобів різних рівнів та оригінальності побудови оповідання, що полегшує процес декодування авторського задуму. Проаналізовано базові положення наратології як методологічного підґрунтя інтерпретації основних тем творів цього автора. Доведено, що найвидатнішою рисою стилю Селінджера є те, що він досить часто використовує тактильні образи для зображення своїх героїв. Зроблено спробу описати майстерність, із якою автор використовує наративні стратегії для розкриття теми відчуження, самотності та відчаю в оповіданні "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". Проаналізовано уміння автора використовувати стилістичні засоби різних рівнів та оригінальність композиційної побудови оповідання, що допомагає читачеві декодувати послання автора.

**Ключові слова:** наратологія, наративні стратегії, Дж. Д. Селінджер, структура побудови оповідання, стилістичні засоби, тема відчуження й самотності.

**Воробьева Татьяна, Смалько Людмила.** Нарративные стратегии Дж. Д. Сэлинджера для раскрытия темы отчуждения, одиночества и отчаяния в рассказе "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". В центре внимания исследования – особенности уникального стиля коротких рассказов Дж. Д. Сэлинджера, некоторые аспекты использования речевых средств и нарративных моделей, направленных на создание образов в его произведениях. В частности, рассматриваются нарративные стратегии как особенное стилистическое средство Дж. Д. Сэлинджера, которое автор применяет для раскрытия темы отчуждения, одиночества и отчаяния в произведении "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". Особый акцент сделан на уникальности и мастерстве автора в использовании стилистических средств различных уровней оригинальности построения повествования, что облегчает процесс декодирования авторского замысла. Проанализированы базовые положения нарратологии как

методологической основы интерпретации основных тем произведений этого автора. Доказано, что выдающейся чертой стиля Сэлинджера является то, что он достаточно часто использует тактильные образы для изображения своих героев. Сделана попытка описать мастерство, с которым автор использует нарративные стратегии для раскрытия темы отчуждения, одиночества и отчаяния в рассказе "For Esmé with Love and Squalor". Проанализировано умение автора использовать стилистические приемы разных уровней и оригинальность композиционного построения повествования. Это помогает читателю декодировать посыл автора.

**Ключевые слова:** нарратология, нарративные стратегии, Дж. Д. Сэлинджер, структура построения рассказа, стилистические средства, тема отчуждения и одиночества.