



**Salinger's Panoramic Narration:  
A Narratological Reading of Salinger's *Nine Stories***

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2013

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to analyze the accuracy of J.D. Salinger's usage of major narratological strategies in developing his main themes. For this regard some of the most important aspects of Narratology from Gerald Genette's *A Narrative Discourse*, will be applied to a handful of Salinger's stories from *Nine Stories*. Genette, the point of reference of this essay proposes five main narratological notions of Order, Duration, Frequency, Mood and voice. The researcher's hypothesis is that Salinger has consciously or unconsciously employed some of these techniques in order to underline some of his recurrent themes in his works. Among Salinger's dominant themes, Miller points to children as little prophets of the world, depicting the Second World War atmosphere in America and lives of middle class Americans and portraying the essence and reality of life and death. (Miller 20-46) Hence some of Salinger's stories would be dealt with based on these themes and the stories also will be analyzed narratologically according to Genette's narratological strategies and, at the end, the fact that either the chosen themes and the chosen narratological strategies are in line or not would be established; the hypothesis, as it was mentioned earlier, is that the two are in fact hand in hand in order to heighten the impact of Salinger's stories.

## **Acknowledgement**

I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and deep regards to my guide Dr. Kamran Ahmadgoli for his exemplary guidance, monitoring and constant encouragement throughout the course of this thesis. The blessing, help and guidance given by him time to time shall carry me a long way in the journey of life on which I am about to embark. I also take this opportunity to express a deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Fazel Asadi Anjad, for his cordial support, valuable information and guidance, which helped me in completing this task through various stages. Lastly, I thank almighty, my parents, sister and friends for their constant encouragement without which this assignment would not be possible.

**We know the sound of two hands clapping.**

**But what is the sound of one hand clapping?**

**A ZEN KOAN**

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## I.1 General Overview

Since the dawn of man storytelling has been considered a cultural event and stories or narratives have been shared in different cultures as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation and in order to impart moral values (Jürgen 52). Every story is a narrative and narratology is a formalist way of analyzing these narratives. Narratology deals with a common denominator of various types of narrative (Jürgen 37). This common denominator is found to be the ‘story’—a non-verbal construct which narratology abstracts from the verbal text as well as from other sign systems (Kenan135). Narratology is the study of the narration – or in other words the way a narration is narrated – in the story and in the case of this research; the study of narration in the *Nine Stories* by J.D.Salinger.

Gérard Genette is a French literary theorist, associated in particular with structuralism and narratology. This research would concentrate on the analysis of Gérard Genette’s five notions – introduced by him in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* i.e. Order, Frequency, Duration, Voice and mood – in the narrative of the *Nine Stories*. For this matter the short stories of the collection would be dealt with separately and the five notions and also the concept of focalization also would be analyzed in every one of these. This research intends to suggest the existence of an established link between the usage of the narrative techniques and the pre-



established recurrent themes in Salinger's *Nine Stories*. For doing so some selected works of the collection would be analyzed based on both the main aspects of Salinger's writing and his usage of narratological strategies; According to the hypothesis of this thesis there is a perfect symmetry between the two.

He was born as Jerome David Salinger in New York City on January 1, 1919, and is one of the most substantial and influential authors of second half of the twentieth century. No other writer since World War II has achieved the heights of popularity of J. D. Salinger. And his popularity has rested primarily on one hero, Holden Caulfield, and on one book, *The Catcher in the Rye* (James 5), which reflects masterfully the post-World War II America. The young Salinger dedicated himself to writing and published his first stories in 1940; although his career as a writer was interrupted by the Second World War, Salinger returned from service in 1946 and resumed his career, writing primarily for *The New Yorker* (Crawford 56). Like other young men of his generation, Salinger's perspective on life was molded by his experience in the Second World War. The spiritual crisis in which every Salinger hero finds himself was probably shaped, at least embryonically, in the boredom, frustrations, agonies, and horrors of the world at righteous war with itself (James 6).

By the late 1940s, Salinger had become an avid follower of Zen Buddhism, to the point that he "gave reading lists on the subject to his dates "and arranged a meeting with Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki (Skow 27). He drew increasingly from these Buddhist traditions for his own work. Traces of Buddhism can be found throughout *Nine Stories*, for example, particularly in the book's closing story, "Teddy." Salinger also was a devoted student of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, an important work of Hindu mysticism, translated by Joseph Campbell and Swami Nikhilananda (Skow 28-29).

Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is considered to be one of the 100 best English novels of the twentieth century (Bloom 4). It has been translated to almost all the prominent languages of the world and its protagonist, Holden Caulfield has become a symbol for teenage rebellion. The *Catcher in the Rye* is frequently compared to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a dangerous comparison for Salinger's book, since Twain's work stands with Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and Emily Dickinson's poetry as one of the handful of essential American books. Yet the link between Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield is palpable; Holden is necessarily one of the modern American descendants of Huck, for Huck there is still the frontier (Bloom 7); he always can light out for the territory. Salinger has continually enjoyed major critical and popular acclaim with *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), the story of Holden Caulfield, a rebellious boarding-school student who attempts to run away from the adult world that he finds "phony." In many ways reminiscent of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Salinger's only novel finds great sympathy for its wayward child protagonist (Bloom 9).

The chasteness of the title *Nine Stories* (1953) is in line with the severity of the selection. The stories Salinger chose are late stories, published between 1948 and 1953 —all, with two exceptions, in the *New Yorker*. Although the tales in *Nine Stories* are arranged in the order of their publication, it is illuminating to look at them in a series of thematic groupings. It is useful to note that the opening and closing stories of the volume portray violent deaths, the first (Seymour Glass's) a certain suicide, the second (Teddy's) a foreseen "accident." It is possible that the nature of the one death may help in understanding the other. Indeed, there are thematic echoes and reverberations throughout *Nine Stories* which give the volume a singleness of impact which belies its multiplicity (James 19).

In 1948, he submitted a short story entitled "*A Perfect Day for Bananafish*" to *The New Yorker* which later becomes the opening tale of *Nine Stories*. "Bananafish" was also the first of Salinger's published stories to feature the Glasses, a fictional family consisting of two retired vaudeville performers and their seven precocious children: Seymour, Buddy, Boo Boo, Walt, Waker, Zooey, and Franny. (Crawford 97–99) Moreover, as it presents a crucial episode in the saga of Seymour Glass, discussion of it may well stand as a prologue to treatment of Salinger's longer and later stories devoted to the Glass family. Of the seven children of Bessie and Les Glass, three appear in *Nine Stories* — Boo Boo, the third of the children, is the mother in *Down at the Dinghy*, Walt, one of the twins who came fourth, is the remembered dead soldier and lover in *Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut*, and Seymour, the first of them all and the family guru, is the central character of "*A Perfect Day for Bananafish*" (James 27). There are two major scenes in the story, the first in which Muriel Glass talks long distance from Florida with her mother in New York about the peculiar behavior of Muriel's husband Seymour, and the second in which Seymour out on the beach takes little Sybil Carpenter on her float into the water and talks with her about any number of things including bananafish. At the end of the story, Seymour walks into the hotel room where Muriel lies sleeping and puts a bullet in his temple (Fiene 67).

## **I.2 Statement of the Problem**

Narratology can be defined as the study of narrative and narrative structure and the way the two affect our perception of the text. Among the practitioners of Narratology we can point out Roland Barthes, Claude Brémond, Gerald Genette, Algirdas Julien Greimas and Tzvetan Todorov. Nonetheless the main concern in this thesis would be Gérard Genette's notions and perceptions and the role of the five main concepts used by him in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay*

*in Method i.e.* Order, Frequency, Duration, Voice and Mood in revealing relevant facts regarding the intention of the text according to James Miller; the perspective of the narrative (which is referred to as focalization) would also be dealt with. In other words this research tries to suggest that the narrative strategies used by the author are in line with the intention of the text as has been analyzed in Miller's introductory book to Salinger entitled *J.D.Salinger*.

To this end the form and structure of a handful of Salinger's works would be analyzed according to Genette's notions, and the intention of the text, established by Miller, would act as a point of reference. The hypothesis of this thesis is that there is an established logical link between the form of the texts and the intention of them.

1. What does the choice of focalization reveal about the goal of the *Nine Stories*?
2. How does the objective correlative lead us to the text's objectives?
3. Does the author employ the technique of ellipses and if so to what end?
4. How can we analyze the collection in the light of Genette's five notions?
5. How does the writer highlight the importance of role of children by using narratological strategies?

### **I.3 Significance of the Study**

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 was 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, the impact of movements, other writers, different schools such as Buddhism on him, have been worked on so far. For instance Michael Chung Kwok-wai in *Zen Buddhism in selected works of J.D. Salinger* analyzes Salinger's sense of appreciation for Buddhism and the effects of it in his works; or Virginia Lee Bornholdt in *Alienation in the fiction of J.D. Salinger* diagnoses the alienation of the young in the diegetic universe of Salinger's works. Nevertheless the form and the unique style of his narration have partially remained intact. Thus the main concern of this thesis seems to be new, because the relation of form and content is discussed here by taking into account Gérard Genette's narratology and his five significant notions.

### **I.4 Methodology**

The tendency to analyze and evaluate almost every branch of study with a scientific approach was spreading throughout Europe. The subjective evaluation of poetics was no longer acceptable for literature in order to be able to survive and compete in such a scientific-oriented atmosphere. Although the Russian Formalists (The practitioners of an earlier movement which moved literary criticism toward establishing a scientific method of criticism) were suppressed by

the Stalinist government in Russia in the 1920s, news of their work was borne West by East European emigres such as Rene Wellek, Julia Kristeva, and Tzvetan Todorov, where it helped shape French Structuralism as well as such literary critical schools as poetics, stylistics, and narratology (Rivkin 5). Among all the narratologists, that were mentioned before, Genette is one of the most rule-based and form-conscious theorists and somehow tries to treat the literary texts with a scientific approach (Rivkin 12).

The study of narrative is one of the most abiding strands of Structuralist thinking (Rivkin 54). Now the question rises; what is a narrative fiction and how is it different from other sorts of narrative? As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues in *Narrative Fiction* (2011) “By ‘narrative fiction’ I mean the narration of a succession of fictional events” (Kenan 2). Narratology is the “scientific” study of narrative; and the practitioners of this whole new literary science have been the Lithuanian A. J. Greimas, the Bulgarian Tzvetan Todorov, and the French critics Gerard Genette, Claude Bremond and Roland Barthes (Eagleton 90).

The modern structuralist analysis of narrative began with the pioneering work on myth of the French structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who viewed apparently different myths as variations on a number of basic themes (Eagleton 90). Different practitioners of narratology introduced numerous novel concepts and notions into this “scientific” field among which one can point to Vladimir Propp, whom in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), boldly reduced all folk tales to seven 'spheres of action' and thirty-one fixed elements or 'functions'. Tzvetan Todorov goes even further by attempting a similar 'grammatical' analysis of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which characters are seen as nouns, their attributes as adjectives and their actions as verbs. Each story of *The Decameron* can thus be read as a kind of extended sentence, combining these units in different ways (Eagleton 89-92).

Although there are going to be some references to the theorists and works that were mentioned so far, Gerard Genette would be the main figure whose ideas and narratological concepts would be the framework by which the *Nine Stories* would be analyzed; and that's because J.D.Salinger puts a lot of stress on "showing" rather than "telling" which means he tries to convey a lot about what he has in mind using symbolism and "objective correlative" (Eliot 6) rather than merely using words; and Genette's notions deal with these subtleties in a profound way.

G rard Genette (born 1930 in Paris) the French literary theorist in his *Narrative Discourse* (1972), draws on a distinction in narrative between "recit", by which he means the actual order of events in the text; "histoire", which is the sequence in which those events 'actually' occurred, as we can infer this from the text; and narration, which concerns the act of narrating itself (Eagleton 106). The first two categories are equivalent to a classic Russian Formalist distinction between 'plot' and 'story' or the "fabula" as opposed to the "juzet"(Rivkin).

Genette discerns five central categories of narrative analysis. 'Order' refers to the time-order of the narrative, how it may operate by prolepsis (anticipation), analepsis (flashback) or anachrony, which refers to discordances between 'story' and 'plot'. 'Duration' signifies how the narrative may elide episodes, expand them, summarize, and pause a little and so on. 'Frequency' involves questions of whether an event happened once in the 'story' and is narrated once, happened once but is narrated several times, happened several times and is narrated several times or happened several times and is narrated only once. The category of 'mood' can be subdivided into 'distance' and 'perspective'. 'Distance' concerns the relation of the narration to its own materials: is it a matter of recounting the story ('diagnosis') or representing it ('mimesis'), is the narrative told in direct, indirect or 'free indirect' speech? 'Perspective' is what might traditionally

be called 'point of view', and can also be variously subdivided: the narrator may know more than the characters, less than them, or move on the same level; the narrative may be 'non-focalized', delivered by an omniscient narrator outside the action, or 'internally focalized', recounted by one character from a fixed position, from variable positions, or from several character-viewpoints. A form of 'external focalization' is possible, in which the narrator knows less than the characters do. Finally there is the category of 'voice', which concerns the act of narrating itself, what kind of narrator and narrate are implied. Various combinations are possible here between the-time of the narrative' and the 'narrated time', between the action of recounting the story and the events which you recount: you may tell of the events before, after or (as in the epistolary novel) while they happen. A narrator may be 'heterodiegetic' (i.e. absent from his own narrative), 'homodiegetic' (inside his narrative as in first-person stories), or 'autodiegetic' (where he is not only inside the narrative but figures as its principal character). These are only some of Genette's classifications; but one important aspect of discourse to which they alert us is the difference between narration - the act and process of telling a story - and narrative- what it is you actually recount (Eagleton 95-110). When I tell a story about myself, as in autobiography, the 'I' who does the telling seems in one sense identical with the 'I' whom I describe, and in another sense different from it.

## **I.5 Review of Literature**

Among the huge bulk of material written on Salinger (because of his influence on other writers as well as his unique style of writing and the creative choice of materials for his stories) some which are more relevant to the topic at hand, are going to be the main references of this thesis.



*J. D. Salinger* by James, E. Miller, Jr. is one of the main books the researcher would work on. James E. Miller. Miller in this work gives a comprehensive biography of writer and reflects also the atmosphere in which Salinger lived which affected his style of writing; these information would be very helpful for the progress of the intention of this thesis and also most of the pre-established themes in Salinger's works were taken from Miller's book on Salinger.

*Blackwell Anthology of Literary Theory* Edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan is a great anthology of literary criticism and renders a survey on it from Formalism to Cultural Studies which has been referred to in this thesis several times.

Another book the researcher would refer to is *Bloom's Guide to The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger had an accurate plot line in mind while writing. The stories of the *Nine Stories* are related to one another and even to his other writings like his only novel i.e. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Hence analyzing and referring to the *Catcher in the Rye* is a must for a researcher of Salinger. Among the most important factors for proving this claim is "The Glass"; the family which appears in *the Catcher in the Rye* and also in some of the stories of *Nine Stories* like *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*.

*An Introduction to Literary Theory* by Terry Eagleton is a comprehensive book on the systematic study of the nature of literature and of the methods for analyzing literature. Eagleton, in this book renders a very informative and comprehensive account of literary criticism from "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Reception theory" to the most recent theories of his time i.e. "Psychoanalysis". In the third chapter of the book i.e. "Structuralism and Semiotics" he generates a full account of formal, scientific approach of literary criticism which includes also narratology, which would be one of the sources on the methodology of this thesis.

*What is Narratology* by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller is also a comprehensive book on narratology that deals with some of the most important aspects of narratology proposed by some of the most well-known figures in the approach. This book also has a lot to offer and has been referred to a lot in the chapter of methodology.

And last but not least is Genette's *Narrative Discourse* which embraces most of the crucial narratological factors that were talked about in the section of methodology and would be thoroughly analyzed in the second chapter of this book.

## **I.6 Limitation and Delimitation**

Miller believes that Salinger is one least known writers of America (Miller 23) who did not appear in public a lot which limits our knowledge about his philosophy and intentions. One main problem that the researcher had was the lack of sufficient sources on Salinger and the fact that he is a contemporary writer adds up to the problem.

Another problem that the researcher would face is the lack of sufficient sources on Narratology. Since narratology is considered to be a branch of Structuralism and almost a recent literary approach, the books available for this matter usually talk about it as a branch of Structuralism and because the researcher is planning on using, almost exclusively, Gerard Genette's viewpoints, the number of available sources for this matter are so limited; nevertheless there are some companions and anthologies that can compensate for this matter.

## I.7 Definition of Key Terms

**Autodiegetic:** Where the narrator is not only inside the narrative but figures as its principal character who highly influences the development of the narrative.

**Focalization:** A term coined by the French narrative theorist Gerard Genette. It deals with the perspective through which a narrative is presented. For example, a narrative where all information presented reflects the subjective perception of that information by a certain character is said to be internally focalized (Deleyto 12).

**Heterodiegetic:** A narrative which while narrating the sequence of events is absent from his own narrative and views and narrates just like a camera from outside the world of story(Genette 185).

**Homodiegetic:** A narrative that while narrating the story is inside the narrative as in first-person stories. These narrators are involved in the story and affect the outcome of the work (Genette 182).

**Objective correlative:** is a term coined by T.S.Eliot in his essay *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919). It is a literary term referred to a symbolic article used to provide explicit, rather than implicit, access to such traditionally inexplicable concepts as emotion or color. For instance cold coffee may represent the coldness and boredom of the character (Eliot 8).

**Zen Buddhism:** The origin of the word Zen goes back to the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Chán (禪), which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word dhyāna, which can be approximately translated as "absorption" or "meditative state". Zen highlights experiential

wisdom in the attainment of enlightenment. As such, it de-emphasizes theoretical knowledge in favor of direct self-realization through meditation and dharma practice (Heinrich 26).