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DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/64-2-37>**Alyona TYCHININA,**

orcid.org/0000-0001-7798-0930

PhD,

Associate Professor at the Department of World Literature and Literary Theory  
Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University  
(Chernivtsi, Ukraine) a.tychinina@chnu.edu.ua**Dan PARANYUK,**

orcid.org/0000-0002-7274-5576

PhD,

Assistant Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages for Humanities  
Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University  
(Chernivtsi, Ukraine) d.paranyuk@chnu.edu.ua**POST-TRAUMATIC EXISTENTIELS IN A LITERARY TEXT:  
THE EXAMPLE OF ONE SHORT STORY BY J. D. SALINGER**

*In terms of the topical issues of poetics, the article under studies outlines the specifics of post-traumatic existentiels of war in a literary text. A convincing example is the collection of short stories by the classic American prose writer Jerome David Salinger (1919–2010) “Nine Stories” (1953). In the methodological context of existential and literary anthropology, the author’s biographical traumatic experience is used to actualize the topic of post-traumatic existentiels of war. The article emphasizes the connection between literature and war through the prism of existentiels of the writer’s experience, as well as highlights the impact of J. Salinger’s war experience on his creative method. In addition, particular accent has been laid on the so-called symptoms of (post) traumatic writing typical for the authors of the “Lost Generation” (depiction of traumatized characters who constitute the core of the personosphere, mostly centered on children; the presence of a plot containing several narrative plans of the story (autology, metaphor, symbol, myth); retrospective narratives of recollection, memorization of past traumatic experiences, fragmentary memories; deviation (ignoring) from the canons of genre and style; dialogicity; internal and external conflict; intertextuality and intermediality; playing with the reader). What is more, the article draws attention to the phenomenon of trauma in the field of literary anthropology, as well as defines the concept of post-traumatic existentiels and analyzes the post-traumatic existentiels of war in the collection “Nine Stories” (fear, loneliness, alienation, compassion; disappointment, love, and squalor). The short story “For Esmé – with Love and Squalor” (1950) has been interpreted in this very respect. The leading existentiels of the short story (stated in its title) affect the main formal and substantive aspects of the work: theme, idea, genre, narrative, personosphere, conflict. Besides, the author’s designed mental state of the protagonist reflects the history of post-traumatic stress disorder. In conclusion, the article states that a literary text is able to accumulate the author’s post-traumatic war experience and activate its consonance with the current emotional state of the reader, who in such conditions is increasingly subject to empathy and catharsis.*

**Key words:** poetics, prose, genre, existentiell, personosphere, conflict, symbol, mental state.

**Альона ТИЧІНІНА,**

orcid.org/0000-0001-7798-0930

кандидатка філологічних наук,

доцентка кафедри зарубіжної літератури та теорії літератури  
Чернівецького національного університету імені Юрія Федьковича  
(Чернівці, Україна) a.tychinina@chnu.edu.ua**Дан ПАРАНИЮК,**

orcid.org/0000-0002-7274-5576

кандидат філологічних наук,

асистент кафедри англійської мови для гуманітарних факультетів  
Чернівецького національного університету імені Юрія Федьковича  
(Чернівці, Україна) d.paranyuk@chnu.edu.ua

## ПОСТТРАВМАТИЧНІ ЕКЗИСТЕНЦІАЛИ У ЛІТЕРАТУРОМУ ТЕКСТІ: ПРИКЛАД ОДНІЄЇ НОВЕЛИ ДЖ. Д. СЕЛІНДЖЕРА

*Запропонована стаття у контекстуальному полі актуальних питань поетики окреслює специфіку посттравматичних екзистенціалів війни у літературному тексті. Переконливим прикладом постає збірка новел класика американської прози Джерома Девіда Селінджера (1919–2010) «Дев'ять оповідань» (1953). У методологічному зрізі екзистенційної та літературознавчої антропології з опертям на біографічний травматичний досвід автора актуалізується тема посттравматичних екзистенціалів війни. У розвідці підкреслено зв'язок літератури й війни крізь призму екзистенціалів письменницького досвіду, наголошено на впливі військового досвіду Дж. Д. Селінджера на його творчий метод. Окрім того, зауважено так звані симптоми (пост) травматичного письма, що притаманні авторам «втрачених війною поколінь» (зображення травмованих персонажів, що становлять осердя персоносфери, у центрі якої здебільшого – діти; наявність фабула містить кількох наративних планів історії (автологія, метафора, символ, міф); ретроспективні наративи пригадування, меморіація минулого травматичного досвіду, фрагментарні спогади; відхід (ігнорування) від канонів жанру і стилю; діалогічність; внутрішній та зовнішній конфлікт; інтертекстуальність та інтермедіальність; гра з читачем). Окрім того, апелюється увага до феномену травми у площині літературознавчої антропології, означено поняття й проаналізовано посттравматичні екзистенціали війни у збірці «Дев'ять оповідань» (страх, самотність, відчуження, співчуття; розчарування, любов і відраз). У цьому аспекті проінтерпретовано новелу «For Estmé – with Love and Squalor» (1950). Заявлені у назві провідні екзистенціали новели впливають на провідні формально-змістові аспекти твору: тему, ідею, жанр, наратив, персоносферу, конфлікт. Щобільше, сконструйований автором психічний стан героя відображає історію посттравматичного стресового розладу. Висновується, що літературний текст здатен акумулювати посттравматичний військовий досвід автора й активізувати суголосся із нинішнім емоційним станом читача, який у таких умовах все більше підвладний емпатії та катарсису.*

**Ключові слова:** *поетика, проза, жанр, екзистенціал, персоносфера, конфлікт, символ, психічний стан.*

**Introduction.** Unfortunately, present-day reality persuades that it is impossible to “stay out of context”. The war cannot but affect the mental, psychological, and emotional state of both participants in hostilities and observers. The collective experience of war, which leaves an imprint on many generations, becomes the core of reflection for writers and artists in general, and fiction may be regarded as an important part of this process. The Austrian researcher M. Pollack has noted that modern “Europe is dotted with battlefields, theaters of exhausting combat operations, bloody offensives and counter-offensives, entire regions have become metaphors for senseless killing and death. In the collective memory, these areas have become landscapes of war, and the black shadow of death seems to be still hovering over them” (Поллак, 2015: 15). The current historical situation in Ukraine actualizes the research interest in topics that have long been on the margins of literary studies. Of course, the theme of war was vividly interpreted in ancient literature, in the works of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment, by realists and modernists. In this case, a convincing example is the work of the American classic Jerome David Salinger (1919–2010), who survived the identity crisis and the traumatic experience of the Second World War, who was a combatant and later managed to covertly extrapolate his post-traumatic feelings, impressions, and existential experiences in literary narratives.

**Research review.** Among the numerous foreign researchers of J. Salinger’s creative method, it is

worth mentioning in particular those scholars who emphasized his traumatic experience: R. Babae, M. Bidney, H. Bloom, S. Graham, F.L. Gwynn, J.L. Blotner, N.M. Madore, T. Medicus, N. Rodenhurst, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya. There are only a few Ukrainian studies related to Salinger’s work – A. Borysenko, T. Denysova, A. Zverev, H. Zinziver, L. Mitina, V. Oleneva, Y. Pokalchuk, M. Tarnavska. Psychological traumas and shocks are an inevitable part of human life. However, only the artists, from Homer to S. Zhadan, are able to successfully “convert” their traumas into art: “Trauma is a memory, at the same time a memory of the moment of trauma” (Романенко, 2021: 47). In this way, trauma is considered as a catalyst for writing and, simultaneously, a consequence that is reflected in it.

This point of view is confirmed by M. Ryabchenko’s research thesis: “War is not only pain, horror, destruction, and death, but also a powerful catalyst for the development of this literature. Therefore, in its time, the First World War was the reason why the so-called “Lost Generation” writers emerged. Their works are the priceless heritage of world literature. The Second World War also had a huge impact on the formation of a new cohort of young authors. The novels by Kurt Vonnegut, Irwin Shaw, Heinrich Böll, Graham Greene, Oleksandr Dovzhenko...” (Рябченко, 2019: 277). Undoubtedly, the name of Jerome Salinger should be added to this list. It is generally believed that if trauma “escapes consciousness through impulse” and manifests itself as an

"epistemological crisis" that destroys the concept of time and space and instead repeatedly returns in the form of obsessive images and compulsive behavior, it is constantly reproduced (Rodi-Risberg, 2010: 14). Although Salinger wrote that he would "beware" of the novel, which would be his "trembling melody" (Rodenhurst, 2012: 64), yet Salinger's writing became his own form of everyday psychological therapy, which is manifested not only in the iconic text "The Catcher in the Rye", but also in the author's short fiction. It is no coincidence that his researchers emphasize that Salinger's work mostly reflects the author's personal neuroses: "Salinger's world contains nothing but Salinger" (Rodenhurst, 2012: 53).

Post-traumatic studies theorist J. C. Alexander believes that cultural trauma manifests itself when "members of a particular group feel that they have been victims of a horrific event that leaves indelible marks in their collective consciousness, forever marking their memory and changing their future individuality in a fundamental and irreversible way" (Alexander, 2006: 5).

The phenomenon of (post) traumatic writing has been studied in various methodologies: narratology, Freudianism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism. Ukrainian literary critic T. Hundorova considers post-traumatic writing as a way of artists' intertextual response. Referring to Kathy Caruth (who, in turn, relies on S. Freud's research), T. Hundorova interprets trauma as a "place/mechanism of historical memory" that testifies to "individual and collective catastrophic experiences" (Гундорова, 2018: 108). In another research, T. Hundorova even distinguishes the genre of the trauma novel, emphasizing that "contemporary trauma studies highlight that trauma means not so much a painful event as its transmission – echoing, transmission through generations, to other places and other times" (Гундорова, 2014: 31).

Comprehending the phenomenon of "voice in traumatic writing", O. Romanenko (with reference to K. Caruth) points out that such a voice "awakens the Other in the narrator, as well as is an appeal to the Other from the narrator, the latter telling about what the Other saw/experienced as a community that did not experience trauma" (Романенко, 2021: 43). The scholar proposes to distinguish the following "discourses of traumatic experience": life before the trauma; the traumatic event itself; comprehension, ironic attitude to the trauma; traumatic existence in the process of recovery and after recovery; childhood, the time when a person knows nothing about possible traumatic experience; writing as a way of liberation from trauma (Романенко, 2021: 43). Currently, this topic is being worked on by professors (A. Tychinina,

Yu. Tsivinska) and some students (M. Horbatiuk) of Yuriy Fedkoych Chernivtsi National University, as well as by students of the Bukovyna Minor Academy of Sciences (D. Weber), with relevant sociological surveys on the therapeutic function of literature during and after the war.

**The purpose of the article** under studies is to outline the specifics of the post-traumatic existentiels of war through the prism of Jerome David Salinger's war and writing experience in the collection "Nine Stories", in particular, in the short story "*For Esmé – with Love and Squalor*" (1950).

**Methodology.** Since anthropology (as a branch of modern humanities) allows considering a literary text as a document that reveals problems, themes, motives (and in our case, existentiels) of memory, fear, loneliness, as well as manifestations of subconscious processes, this methodology is the basis of this article. For example, the founder of the German school of anthropology, W. Iser, (who sought to define a person as a holistic individual through the prism of various humanitarian fields) raised the question of the historical aim of literary anthropology: "Due to the fact that literature as a means of communication has accompanied humanity in one way or another since the very beginning of its historical memory, it had to be caused by certain anthropological needs" (Iser, 1993). This, in turn, makes it possible to regard a certain historical event (for example, the Second World War) as a motivation for drawing attention to the existentiels of decay, death, and the uncertainty of the future. Thus, developing literary anthropology as a separate research paradigm and at the same time describing the creative possibilities of the creative imagination, W. Iser writes about historical situations that are capable of constantly activating human potential, the latter being able to "fill subsequent history with various modes of self-realization" (Iser, 1993). According to the German scientist, historical situations "cannot be reduced to human characters or circumstances, but are the product of their unique interaction and always go beyond the conditions from which they arise" (Iser, 1993). M. Heidegger also speaks of the so-called existential anthropology, the tasks of which include identifying the main features, interrelationships, and specifics of interpreting the "documentary" existential possibilities of existential structures (Heidegger, 1993).

**Main body of the article.** J. D. Salinger's short fiction is an under-researched segment of Ukrainian genre studies, whereas the theme of post-traumatic existentiels of war in his activities has not been articulated at all, so this vector of research is completely new.

Foreign scholars often refer to Salinger as "the great poet of post-traumatic stress, mental illness caused by war" (Metcalf, 2010). The German journalist T. Medicus gave a fairly clear description of the causes of Salinger's psychological trauma, which is related, among other things, to the topos of Gunzenhausen, a small provincial "river" town in southern Germany, not far from Nuremberg: "It was here that a young American soldier named Jerome D. Salinger lived right after the end of World War II, in 1945. <...> Gunzenhausen was not just another defeated outpost in war-weary Germany: it was the scene of the first anti-Jewish massacre in Germany, which took place in the 1930s. Even before that, the town residents had provided great support to the Nazi Party and Hitler himself. <...> During his stay in Gunzenhausen, the war ended in a psychological catastrophe for Salinger" (Medicus). In a letter to Hemingway, whom he met in the Ritz bar shortly after the liberation of Paris, Salinger wrote that he was "in an almost constant state of disappointment" (J.D. Salinger and PTSD).

Some researchers are convinced that the American classic considered himself a "victim" and a "perpetrator", as well as perceived himself as "subjugated by an ideological system that is involved in the creation of unimaginable horrors and traumas (Wan Roselezam, 2014: 1828). In this regard, it seems even possible to deal with a mental disorder caused by a specific life moment – the experience of war, rape, violence, which forever changes a person's reactions. In accordance with the Mayo clinic, there exist three different groups of symptoms: recollections, numbness, and over-arousal. Within these three groups, there are other specific symptoms, including reminiscences, systematic insomnia, hopelessness, and irritability (Myers). Thus, trauma becomes a part of the victim's identity "at a critical moment of psychological stress. Previously forgotten traces of memory return and are processed or reinterpreted in accordance with subsequent events, desires, and mental development" (Rodi-Risberg, 2010: 13).

The experience of the Second World War is the most traumatic situation comprehended in the works of the XX and XXI centuries. It does not lose its significance over time and even acquires new interpretations. Problems that, unfortunately, have remained relevant for centuries, still generate new interpretations and become material for research. When entering into a dialogue with trauma, art functions in compliance with the same principle as any product of memorization of the past. It turns into an articulated intellectual statement or, on the contrary, denies the trauma.

Existential situations and states in liminal circumstances expose the existential core of the personality

and reveal the prevalent emotional stems. The term "existentiell" (1927) was introduced by M. Heidegger and refers to the fundamental being, meaningful life grounds, value nodes, quintessential meanings that can outline human existence: loneliness, anxiety, freedom, longing, death, fear, faith, hope, care, love. Positive and negative existentiells can form specific dichotomous pairs. The creative method of the famous American novelist David Jerome Salinger is a rather representative model for identifying post-traumatic existentiells of war in a literary text. It results from the fact that in addition to the crisis of identity (mental and religious), he survived more than one military campaign, subsequently reflecting autobiographical post-traumatic states in the narratives of fiction. Salinger is frequently called the "great poet of post-traumatic stress, a mental illness caused by war".

Salinger's writing has ultimately become his own form of everyday psychological therapy, which is manifested not only in the iconic text "The Catcher in the Rye", but also in his short fiction, in particular in the collection of short stories "Nine Stories" (1953). In this way, trauma appears as a catalyst for writing and at the same time as a consequence that is reflected in it.

The epigraph of the collection implies that these stories contain not only the "clapping of two palms", that is, a realistic content, but also something hidden, something that goes beyond the limits of everyday consciousness. Salinger's stories have very simple external plots. The external event is not viewed as the main way of organizing all the structural elements of the works.

Among the stylistic features of Salinger's creative method, there have been identified the following dominants ("symptoms"): the depiction of "traumatized" characters who become the core of the personosphere; children are in the center of the personosphere; the plot contains several narrative plans of the story – specific (autological) and metaphorical (allegorical, mythological) ones; recollection and memorization of past traumatic experiences; alienation from reality; deviation (ignoring) from genre and stylistic canons; dialogicity; internal and external conflict; "fragmentary integrity"; intertextuality, intermediality; specific vocabulary and wordplay; playing with the reader in the final scenes.

To a large extent, the writer's traumatic war experience is revealed through the artistic form of his texts, which transmit a number of post-traumatic existentiells: *fear* ("The Laughing Man"); *hatred* ("Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut"); *anxiety* ("Down at the Dinghy", "Teddy"); *loneliness* ("Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes"); *alienation, sympathy* ("Just Before the War with the Eskimos"); *disappointment* ("A Per-



fect Day for Bananafish”, “De Daumier-Smith’s Blue Period”); *love and squalor* (“For Esme: with Love and Squalor”).

**Love and squalor through the prism of traumatic experience** (“*For Esme – with Love and Squalor*”, 1950). The leading existentiells of the short story “For Esme – with Love and Squalor” are already declared in its title. Love and squalor are dichotomous feelings that permeate the post-traumatic experience. It is in this story that Salinger narrates about post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as presents a vivid picture of what it means to suffer from “battle fatigue” (the author’s official diagnosis received during World War II): trembling, vomiting, hallucinations, and insomnia. This, in particular, is discussed in a number of interdisciplinary foreign studies by Y. Kim, J. Hartzell, W. Dawson, and E. Fuhrman (Kim, 2017).

A former American soldier receives a wedding invitation from England from a girl he met 6 years ago, before the Normandy landings. Esme was 13 at the time, her brother was 5, and they met by chance in a cafe where they talked for about an hour. Having learned that the soldier was going to become a writer, the girl asked him to write a story about poverty and dedicate it to her. In addition, she wished him to return safe from the war, took the soldier’s field mail address and promised to send him a letter. In the second episode, the protagonist is in Germany shortly after the war. He is depressed after being seriously wounded and has sudden attacks of fear. He opens a parcel that has been following him around various military units for a long time. The box contains a letter from the girl and her dead father’s watch, which brings him back to life. Both episodes make up a story with a promised title, which the hero is going to send to his bride as a wedding gift.

The post-traumatic existentiells of fear, despair, and anxiety are fully revealed in the image of the protagonist of the short story “For Esme – with Love and Squalor”. The author conceals the main character’s name, thereby generalizing the image. In fact, the quasi-biographical figure of Sergeant X symbolizes all American soldiers who are afraid of war and feel confused because of the long expectation of the landing, uncertainty, and most importantly, disbelief in victory, fear of life itself, and the vicissitudes that await veterans upon their return home.

Salinger’s (autobiographical) first-person narrative also intensifies the feeling of fear. Staff Sergeant X of the American Service is temporarily stationed in Devon (1944), England, for training. At church, Sergeant X is struck by the voice of a 13-year-old girl, Esme. After the church choir rehearsals (as a matter of fact, it is known

that Salinger attended the Methodist Church in Tiverton while in England), when he is having lunch alone in a nearby tea shop, she comes up to his table because, as she tells him, “I thought you looked extremely lonely” (Salinger: 29). When Esme finds out that Sergeant X writes short stories, she asks him to write a short story for her: “Make it extremely squalid and moving,” she suggested. “Are you at all acquainted with squalor?” (Salinger: 31).

The “squalid” story is narrated in the third person. The protagonist is experiencing a nervous breakdown and is in a difficult mental state. Salinger does not hide his strange behavior (he washes his hair several times in the hospital, smokes a cigarette one after another for weeks, sits alone in his room without unsealing dozens of letters). Having survived the war, the protagonist does not find a place in life. He is still going through all the squalor and hell that Esme asked him to write about: “He ached from head to toe, all zones of pain seemingly interdependent. He was rather like a Christmas tree whose lights, wired in series, must all go out if even one bulb is defective” (Salinger: 32).

Sergeant X and Esme, soon joined by her 5-year-old brother Charles, are engaged in a simultaneously serious and light-hearted conversation. It turns out that Esme is the one who needs to be comforted by Sergeant X. Both of her parents are dead. Her father was killed in the battle against the British army in North Africa. The letter from Esme and her father’s watch inside the box became a real rescue for the main character. They gave him the strength to live on, to get rid of all the “squalors” that oppressed his soul. Esme’s naivety, sincerity, simplicity, and, most importantly, childlike spontaneity and selflessness of actions made the sergeant overcome his fears and regain his mental balance.

The girl helps not only the soldier, but also her brother Charles. Children are generally the protagonists of almost all of Jerome Salinger’s short stories (7 out of 9). The author implies the idea that children are the only salvation from the horrors of human existence. When Esme finds out that he is a writer, she asks him to write a story just for her. She adds that she is extremely interested in poverty. In exchange for this story, Esme promises to send Sergeant X a letter. He gives her his name, rank, serial number, and army mailing number, and when they part, Esme solemnly tells him that she hopes he comes back from the war with all his “abilities”. The scene suddenly shifts to 1945, a few weeks after Victory Day, and here the “squalid” part of the story begins. Sergeant X is stationed in Bavaria, where he has a nervous breakdown. He cannot control his facial movements. He finds himself at the point of no return, and while sit-

ting in his room, he absent-mindedly begins to open a package on his desk. It's from Esme. She sent her father's watch as a "good luck talisman". The crystal of the watch was broken during transportation. However, it hardly matters to Sergeant X. Esme gave him the most tangible connection to her deceased father. Suddenly, Sergeant X's depression no longer seems so unbearable.

By portraying Sergeant X's breakdown as a condition that he cannot overcome on his own, Salinger reminds us of the obligations we have as a nation to the veterans returning from today's wars. Men and women with post-traumatic stress disorder, like Sergeant X, need help to recover as soon as possible.

**Conclusions.** The trauma caused by the war is a part of the victim's identity; in critical psychological moments of stress, epistemological crisis, previously forgotten traces of memory return, transform

and convert into certain markers of the artist's idiosyncrasy. Accordingly, the literary text transmits a number of post-traumatic existentiells. In Salinger's short stories, we observe the existentiells of fear, hatred, anxiety, loneliness, alienation, compassion, and disappointment. The short story under analysis "For Esme – with Love and Squalor" conveys the fundamental feelings provoked by the trauma of war experience: love and squalor. Besides, reading literary texts that deal with military (militaristic) issues requires a special type of "inclusion" from the recipient, especially when it comes to the receptive coincidence of a typical historical situation, namely war. Thus, a literary text, as well as art in general, is able to accumulate the author's post-traumatic war experience and activate its consonance with the current emotional state of the reader, who in such conditions is increasingly subject to empathy and catharsis.

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