

## Literary Analysis of the Story “Pretty Mouth and Green Eyes” by Jerome D. Salinger

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**Abstract:** In this article given literary analysis of theme, idea, character and plot summary in the story by J.D.Salinger. The description of the story are theme of conflict, honesty, deception, betrayal and paralysis. Salinger appears to be exploring the theme of honesty and deception.

**Key words:** Modern literature, communicative approach, learner centeredness, collaborative learning, theme of conflict, honesty, deception, betrayal and paralysis, narrator

### Introduction

The Modern literature is characterized by great differences from the past in both form and content. The literary changes that took place early in the XX century were more extreme than at any other time in literary history. Writers and other artists were creating a new way of seeing the world, of listening to it, of expressing feelings about it. Spurred by Ezra Pound’s outcry, “Make it new!” poets in England and America broke out of established forms and meters. New rhythms were invented, especially in free verse, an approach that emphasized matching rhythm to meaning rather than remaining confident to arbitrary meters.

The development of psychology brought psychological realism into literature: Writers attempted to show not only what their characters thought but how they thought. The stream - of - consciousness technique, and various modifications of it, created a new attitude toward writing and reading.

The subject matter of literature changed too. With the shocks of the wars, technological advances, and greater social freedom, writers realized that they could and should write about anything. No subject was too dignified or undignified, too familiar or remote, to appear in a modern poem or novel.

**Discussion and results.** The materials developer may also seek to reflect a particular philosophy or teaching and learning in the materials, one based on a specific educational approach such as “collaborative learning” “communicative approach” or “learner centeredness,” as we see in these statements of principles underlying a secondary school English course:

- There is a consistent focus throughout on learning English in order to develop practical and functional skills, rather than as an end in itself.
- Students are engaged in practical tasks that relate to real-world uses of English.
- Realistic and communicative uses of English are given priority.
- Maximum use is made

In this article we want to share artistic analysis of idea, characters and plot summary in the story “Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes” by J.D. Salinger. Born on January 1, 1919, in New York, J.D. Salinger was a literary giant despite his slim body of work and reclusive lifestyle. His landmark novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, set a new course for literature in post-XXII America and vaulted

Salinger to the heights of literary fame. In 1953, Salinger moved from New York City and led a secluded life, only publishing one new story before his death.

**Literary analysis of idea, characters and plot summary in the story “Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes” by J.D. Salinger.** While reading of this book: In *Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes* by Jerome .D. Salinger we have the theme of conflict, honesty, deception, betrayal and paralysis. Taken from his *Nine Stories* collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader suspects that Salinger is exploring the theme of conflict. Throughout Arthur’s conversation with Lee, Arthur seems to be unsure of what to do about Joanie and if anything this uncertainty causes a conflict within Arthur. Salinger also tells the reader that Arthur is unsure as to whether he loves Joanie – ‘I don’t know. I do and I don’t.’ This line is important as it further suggests that Arthur remains unsure or is in conflict with himself when it comes to his relationship with Joanie. Despite it being clear to Arthur that he can’t trust Joanie, he is unable to completely let her go (something that is also noticeable at the end of the story). Joanie too appears to be in conflict within herself (over her cheating on Arthur). This is noticeable when Joanie tells Lee that ‘I feel like an absolute dog!’ However the reader does not get a sense that Joanie wishes to end her affair with Lee or at least Salinger does not explore the possibility of Joanie ending the affair.

In his story, Salinger also appears to be exploring the theme of honesty and deception. The fact that Joanie is sleeping with Lee, who is after all supposed to be Arthur’s friend, suggests not only a level of dishonesty within Joanie (and Lee) but also serves to highlight to the reader the degree of deception that Joanie and Lee are undertaking. It may also be important that at no stage in the story does Lee appear to feel any guilt about the fact that he is deceiving and betraying Arthur. If anything Lee appears to be allowing his ego to come into play. By having Lee tell Arthur that Joanie has ‘good taste’ it is possible that Salinger is highlighting to the reader not only the lack of guilt that Lee feels over the affair but it is also possible that Salinger is suggesting that Lee has an overly high opinion of himself and the ‘good taste’ that he suggests Joanie has may be the fact that she has chosen to sleep with him.

In the story, the fact that Arthur lies to Lee when he rings Lee for a second time may also be important. It is possible that Arthur, having previously revealed his vulnerability to Lee (about Joanie cheating on him) may now feel even more vulnerable and in order to protect himself (and not display any further weakness) has lied to Lee, assuring him that Joanie has returned home. It may be a case that Arthur wishes to maintain or portray an image of happiness (to Lee) rather than having Lee know the truth. By allowing Arthur lie, Salinger may also be suggesting that image, rather than the truth is more important to Arthur. How he is perceived by others (and society) dictating how he is to live his life, rather than base his life on any sort of truth (and in turn leave Joanie).

We know that there is also some symbolism in the story which may be significant. Salinger may be using light to put or place the focus on both Joanie and Lee (who many critics suggest are the guilty party in the story). Though it is unclear at the beginning of the story as to who the girl in Lee’s bed is, it does become clearer to the reader that the girl is in fact Joanie. By having Joanie face Lee with ‘one eye – on the side of the light closed tight’ it is possible that Salinger is placing the spot light or focus on Joanie, though the fact she has her eye shut suggests that she is unaware that the spot light is now on her (she does remain unsure of what Arthur has said on the phone). Also as Lee is reaching for the phone Salinger tells the reader that the light from the lampshade ‘was particularly, if rather vividly, flattering to his (Lee’s) mostly white hair.’ This line may be important as by using light for a second time Salinger appears to be putting the focus on Lee, just as he did with Joanie.

While reading his story we met, Salinger may also be using Joanie's eyes as symbolism. Throughout the story the reader never knows for sure what colour Joanie's eyes actually are. Their colour appears to change on several occasions. They are first described by Salinger as blue, then violet and later in the story Arthur describes them as being like seashells (grey). Eyes would commonly be perceived to be the window to an individual's soul and by leaving it unclear as to the true colour of Joanie's eyes Salinger may be suggesting that just as Joanie's eye colour is unknown, likewise Joanie herself remains somewhat of a mystery, particularly when the reader is left unsure as to why Joanie would actually cheat on Arthur.

We can see in the context of the story other symbolism that may be important is the ash from the cigarettes that Joanie and Lee are smoking. On several occasions, Salinger makes reference to cigarette ash. It is possible that by having Joanie spill the ash from the ashtray onto Lee's bed (and dirty or soil the bed), Salinger is also suggesting that Joanie likewise has soiled her relationship with Arthur. Also the fact that Lee drops Joanie's cigarette onto the bed after hanging up on Arthur may also be important. It is possible that by doing so, Salinger is symbolically suggesting that Lee has burnt (just like the bed sheets) his relationship with Arthur (by conducting an affair with Joanie).

It is wonderful that the ending of the story is also interesting as it is ambiguous. The reader never knows for sure whether Lee will discontinue his affair with Joanie or if Joanie herself, having expressed some guilt over what she is doing, will end the affair. However it may be significant that Lee does tell Joanie to 'just sit still' after the cigarette falls onto the bed. By doing so it is possible that Salinger is suggesting there will be no movement from Joanie that she will continue her affair with Lee and things will not change. Just as the reader suspects that things will not change for Arthur (he is to remain paralysed). Rather than leave Joanie, he will continue to accept her infidelities.

You know that this is a story with a twist, the twist being that although we have been misled to believe that Lee is the liar and the betraying friend and Arthur is a pitiful victim, it appears in the end that he is not less of a liar than Lee, when he invents the story of his wife's return to the nest, while trying to take some advantage of his friend relations at the law office in order to straighten up somehow his loss in court.

Moreover, the story is about a world based on lies, betrayal of trust and friendship, adultery and making a profit of every situation (like getting some free legal advice from a lawyer-friend at a party), policemen who might be hiding in your closet after sleeping with your wife, a judge who doesn't really care about justice and lawyers who are cheaters and liars in real life. This is a fallen world in which there is no true love (the relationship between "the girl" and the "grey-haired man" is so discrepant to be one of love or even true lust), no trust, no sincerity, no honesty, no justice, no innocence. The cover story is only a symbolic chatter hinting between the lines what the true perspective of the writer is. Connecticut, as mentioned in the story, is an abode where once can find refuge from the corruption of the modern world, a place where one can find some serenity and truth in a natural environment. No wonder Salinger himself sought refuge there in real life and left everything behind him.

**Conclusion:** As with many of his stories, Salinger keeps a certain amount of distance from the events of "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes." His omniscient narrator is not exactly all-knowing; the narrator only has what at his disposal what he can "see" and "hear." This is to say, there is little in the way of background explanation, off-hand context, or digression in the tale. Its telling proceeds in the way a play or film would, depending solely on physical and concrete indices to impart information to the reader or audience.

As Salinger created efficiently of his other stories, the limits of the narrator's authority prove especially important in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," because the story hinges on a secret and a lie. It is possible to read the tale without deducing that the girl in Lee's room is in fact Joanie. The story without that information is simply the story of a conversation between two colleagues, in which one tries to console the other about his flirtatious, possibly unfaithful wife. It is a story in which the paranoid husband does not earn much empathy, and his friend does a good deed by comforting him and even defending his wife when necessary.

Stick in the twist, however, and the entire thematic shifts. Arthur emerges, at the story's end, as an almost heroic individual. His lie to Lee is a near-sacrificial way of paying the man back, ensuring that Lee can spend his night without worrying about Arthur's wife. He knows that by doing so, he is giving up whatever further help Arthur might be able to offer to him – whatever additional consolations, or a physical search for Joanie. He goes ahead nonetheless because he does not want to leave his friend hanging, because he feels responsible for having burdened Lee with his own domestic troubles.

Thus, Arthur's lie in effect turns the tables. He becomes the consoler, Lee the consoled. And just as Lee lied to Arthur, so does Arthur lie to Lee. That said, the story's ending remains open. It seems likely that Joanie will eventually return to Arthur, but whether Lee will immediately force her out of his place is uncertain. We can assume that he knew all along the girl with whom he was spending the evening was married to his colleague. The knowledge didn't do much to deter him from his actions, and his Lee's first worried phone call does not prompt him to immediately eject Joanie either.

Intriguingly, Joanie herself remains mostly silent for the length of the story. We learn more about her from Arthur's accounts and recollections than from her own words. She is a quiet spectator to the action, assuming much the same position as the reader – only without the benefit of clearly hearing her husband's voice.

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