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## Malady of the Mind: Mapping Dimensions of Mental Disorder through Narratological Lens in Jonathan Rosen's The Best Minds

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### Abstract

This paper proffers mapping Mental Disorders by employing a narratological lens in Jonathan Rosen's *The Best Minds: A Story of Friendship, Madness, and the Tragedy of Good Intentions* focusing on the volatility of emotions, malady of mental disorder through the spectrum of narratology and positing conundrum to the mind. It emphasizes how the mechanism of storytelling mirrors the intricacies of mental disorders in myriad ways. The study involves interdisciplinary techniques combining the psychological theories of Marsha Linehan and Otto Kernberg with relation to literary analysis embodying narratological elements. A narratology is an imperative tool in Literature for shaping psychological representations. It analyzes how the mental disorder is intertwined into the narrative depicting the thematic undertones, structure of plot development, and shaping the identities of the characters. The research encompasses a broader discourse to bridge the gap between the psychological underpinnings of mental disorders and their literary insights.

**Keywords:** Narratology, Mental Disorders, Storytelling, Paranoia, Narrative Techniques

### Authors:

**Nida Amjad Chuhan:**(Corresponding Author)

MPhil, English Literature, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, GIFT (Gujranwala Institute of Future Technologies) University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: [nidachuhan@gmail.com](mailto:nidachuhan@gmail.com))

**Sidra Nasir Qureshi:** Lecturer, Faculty of Psychology, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

**Abdul Bari Khan:** Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, University Malaysia Sarawak.

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### Title

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### Authors:

**Nida Amjad Chuhan:** (Corresponding Author)

MPhil, English Literature, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, GIFT (Gujranwala Institute of Future Technologies) University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: [nidachuhan@gmail.com](mailto:nidachuhan@gmail.com))

**Sidra Nasir Qureshi:** Lecturer, Faculty of Psychology, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

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### Abstract

*This paper proffers mapping Mental Disorders by employing a narratological lens in Jonathan Rosen's The Best Minds: A Story of Friendship, Madness, and the Tragedy of Good Intentions focusing on the volatility of emotions, the malady of mental disorder through the spectrum of narratology and posing conundrum to the mind. It emphasizes how the mechanism of storytelling mirrors the intricacies of mental disorders in myriad ways. The study involves interdisciplinary techniques combining the psychological theories of Marsha Linehan and Otto Kernberg with relation to literary analysis embodying narratological elements. A narratology is an imperative tool in Literature for shaping psychological representations. It analyzes how the mental disorder is intertwined into the narrative depicting the thematic undertones, structure of plot development, and shaping the identities of the characters. The research encompasses a broader discourse to bridge the gap between the psychological underpinnings of mental disorders and their literary insights.*

### Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Research Objectives](#)
- [Research Questions](#)
- [Significance of the Study](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Narrative Voice](#)
- [The Malady of Madness](#)
- [Time and Order](#)
- [Characterization](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

**Keywords:** [Narratology](#), [Mental Disorders](#), [Storytelling](#), [Paranoia](#), [Narrative Techniques](#)

### Introduction

This paper is going to analyze Jonathan Rosen's novel *The Best Minds* through the narratological lens which is pivotal in the development of characterization, thematic concern, and elements involved in storytelling. Brooks (1992) explained that "plot in its primordial form, is a pivotal element of narrative, for forging the meaning and

representation of storytelling" (p. 23). The novel's intricate structure, the process in which the story is depicted from the narrator's point of view is a supreme case in how the narrative unfolds while mapping the mental disorder. This research aims to employ the narratological lens for mapping the mental health deterioration of the protagonist, to bridge the widening gap between complexities of



psychological tendencies and literary analysis. Our thoughts and perceptions are crafted through the narratological representations, through which we describe the happenings around us. The tirade of psychological realism, literary interpretations, and cognitive theory in narratology provides a deeper understanding of how events and realities, stories, and facts showcase the human condition.

To understand the mysteries of the human mind, narratives are important to decipher human emotions and their experiences. Booth (1983) explained that in storytelling "One of the major techniques used by the narrator is the trick is to delve beneath the surface to have a formative understanding of the character" (Booth, 1983, p. 25). This notion is relatable to the perceptions created in our minds and thus, creating the narratives through which individuals share their perceptions and realities. Fludernik (2009) discussed:

A story is a medium of channeling the representation of a semiotic and visual mode in temporal and spatial sense. Whatever, the reader goes through while experiencing the whole new world is the true presentation of the narrative employed by the author" (p. 17). One of the basic principles of narratology is how the events are crafted in the story through the discourse and in what way these narratives are conveyed to the reader, in order to be intercepted by him. Onega (1996) is of the view:

A narrative is a representation through signs and symbols connected meaningfully to grasp the attention of the reader. It focuses on the structure of the plot, and how the character formation is done in a temporal process" (Onega, 1996, p. 17).

This important bifurcation emphasizes the plethora of narrative techniques, such as rhythm and pacing of the story, different forms of focalization, the angle from which the story is described or narrated by the author, and the voice of the narrator all acting as a microscopic lens in order to view the broader spectrum of the discourse. These characteristics of narratology are pivotal in shaping the reader's sense of understanding of the story; its forms and elements. Exploring deeper narratology peels off the insights and thoughts of the author, his role, and his

efficacy in engaging the reader, by exploring myriad forms of narratological techniques and approaches. Bal (1978) is of the opinion that "to what extent the readers form the identity of narrator foreshadowed in story-telling and what narrative choices he has implied" (p. 12).

Profound explorations into narratology also showcase important emotional states and how they are uncovered by the authorial voice, as well as how the intense state of mind and its various dynamics are correlated with the disorder. Alber (2016) stated, "The division between emotive and logical responses, indicates cognitive representations of the narrative" (p. 124). These insights synchronize with the core principles of narratology, mapping a pathway into a deeper comprehension of the human psyche and its experiences. Through the narratological lens, the universality of psychological realism comes to terms with the idea posited by the intricacies of human psychology. Hogan (2011) explained, "It is through the various empathetic interactions, that memories are formed in a broader spectrum in the mind of the individual" (p. 244).

The narrator of the story is important in the craft of the story and its biases, it is through his design and craft, that we comprehend the textual undertones and its deeper connotations. It is important to note how the narrator sheds light on the reader's mingling with the text and his interaction further enhancing the narrative for a better understanding by the reader. Hogan (2011) stated, "emotion eliciting memories do not make us think of the event attached to it, rather, we feel the emotional attachment as a response towards the event" (p. 5). There is an important tirade of the author, reader, and the text, and how the reader deciphers the text for his understanding. In this complex process of grasping the storyline, the narrator involves the human mind and its experiences.

This observation gives us a clear understanding that it is narrative that evokes human emotion and the attitude of empathy. Bal (2009) postulated "memories resist towards the binary concept of the narrative, either, a text implying a story or storytelling serving as a plot" (p. 7). The narrator is crucial in lending a voice to the text, and how the dialogues are important in shaping the discourse,

the narrator is embedded deeply in the manifestations posited by the narrator, and intercepted by the reader. In literary analysis, the core principle of narratology empowers the readers to understand different narrative techniques which are crucial in postulating the thematic concerns, development of the characters, and how a piece of literature impacts the mind of the reader. Genette (1990) stated, "Narrative theory has three principles of narratives: narration, discourse and story" (p. 109).

While deciphering the narratological structure, the narrator is a central force, how its authority is exercised over the text, and how it brings a comprehensive understanding to the reader. It is through the narrator that the sublime message is delivered to the reader by the narrator. The reader then engrosses deeply into the text through the human emotions and experiences, and for all this, the craft of the narrator must glide through the literary text. Fludernik (2009) explained that "The basic kinds of mental actions are: perception, emotion, cognitive approach, and self-reflecting elements" (p. 72). The narratives are not merely the stories crafted by the narrator, rather they are tools through which the reader traverses on the psychological roadmap imprinted on the mind of the reader. The reader becomes the cartographer, who tries to understand the underlying meaning and its message conveyed to the reader. Lamberts (2005) stated, "One cannot bifurcate the body from the external being to internal responses for forming responses pivotal to consciousness" (p. 95).

It allows the reader to roam on the psychological and emotional terrains of the reader's mind and takes him to different interpretations. And these interpretations, are made complex, and embedded deeply into the text so that the message of the narrator is not that clearly evident. The reader has to be invoked mentally, using his different perspectives to understand the author's tone. The analytical approach is important to understand how authors like Jonathan Rosen use narrative techniques to explore complex human interactions and intense emotional disturbances. Olsen (2011) stated "The foremost important thing for a narrator is the understanding the complex thought pattern of the mind, its intricacies and efficacies. Narratologists focused on to what extent subjectivity, emotive response, and perception play

an important role in framing the representation of the author" (p. 16).

The author festoons the narrative with emotional complexes, identity crises, bursting up of pent-up emotions, the turmoil of tribulations and trauma, and mercurial fluctuations in interpersonal relationships. For a cognitive psychologist, the heart of the intriguing claim is an 'attentive reader'. This type of investigation helps not only to understand the literary piece of literature but also to understand the gamut of mental health and its effects. Albeit, there is mammoth interest in deciphering mental health issues through various theories, the use of a narratological lens is in its nascent state. The studies available are from temporal, narrative analysis, and unreliability of temporal reasoning, but there is a paucity of methods intersected through the lens of narratological dimensions. Olsen (2011) explained, "the working of the human mind (mental functioning) is one of the main subjects of literary narrative, in which narrative is regarded as semiotic representation of human experientially" (p. 69).

In narratology, the study of non-linear narratives involves analyzing how the manipulation of time and sequence affects the reader's understanding of the story, the characters, and the themes. Schmid (2010) stated, "mediated narrative text in a mild way, the story told by the author" (p. 41).

Further, he illustrates:

It also examines how non-linear structures challenge conventional storytelling and contribute to the narrative's overall meaning. Non-linear narratives are often seen as more complex and sophisticated, requiring active engagement from the reader to piece together the story's timeline and underlying messages. In Jonathan Rosen's novel, from the narratological perspective, there is a non-linear timeline presented by the author, it creates a deeper understanding of the realm of the protagonist's mind and how he is reacting to certain situations, what kind of narrative is used to determine his emotional turbulence, all these strategies are clearly elucidating the embodiment of mental health disorder. Herman (2012) explained that "the role of narrative in understanding psychological states constitutes a resource for interpretation of emotional distress to emancipate the intentions, goals, emotions of the protagonist"

(p. 46). The unreliability of the narrator and non-linear framework is important as a basis for cognitive devices, which helps in joining the broken pieces of a shattered mind and therefore, bridging the chasm of complexity through the narratological prism. Rimmon-Kenan (2003) concluded "There are two extreme positions that can be related to narrative fiction. In the text, characters are nodes in the verbal design; in the story, they are – by definition – nonverbal abstractions, constructs" (p. 48).

Through the coalescence of clinical dimensions, the connections stir a pivotal link between literary criticism and psychological awareness pertaining to mental health issues. Furthermore, the analytical approach proffers insights into the minds of characters and the world around them, forming a fine representation of literature. The narratological perspectives are embedded deep into the human psyche and clinical observations, how the mechanics of narratological elements work in a comprehensible way for mental health disorders. Chatman (1980) explained that "character has unique paradigm of pattern, which symbolically helps in the composition of the plot in a syntagmatic way" (p. 127).

Individuals with mental health disorders develop a kind of certain defense mechanism into two polarized extremes; either they are extremely good or in a worse situation. They have a tendency towards a fluctuating and mercurial mood tendency. The style of thinking in terms of cognitive approach becomes very judgmental, they have a very skeptical image of themselves and others. They are prone to have their own opinions regarding people as well, they keep doubting their loyalty and have a very shattered kind of self-image as well. The intense emotional turbulence is closely linked to the cognitive process, there are emotions striking like a pendulum to and forth, and giving violent reactions towards any action. The mood shifts make it difficult for the individual to cope with the melancholic feelings. Bosch (2013) stated, "Sadness can be pleasantly indulgent when you have a way to justify it" (p. 179).

There is constant gloom looming over their mind, and sometimes they wear the mask of unprecedented realism, which in fact has no connection with reality, they simply behave

normally thus curtailing the healing process. These individuals also have certain problems while interacting socially and handling their own plethora of problems. Understanding mental health is a complex procedure, we can't mediate over the experiments and one has to immerse oneself in the role of the individual in order to grasp his psyche. They have strange behavior towards the caregiver as well because a sense of belonging is missing, a void is there, and depression and desolation have swarmed their minds. Jamison (1996) stated "Depression is exhausting and unable to be endured by the sufferer. The people around us seem not to understand our irritable behavior, paranoia, and chaos which makes life further devoid of hope, and sometimes constant validation is never enough (Jamison, 1996, p. 106).

Hence, they are in need of relentless attention and emotional empathy. Individuals with mental disorders are posted with different emotional distress and dilemmas; which puts their identity in limbo. They have chequered relationships with people around them and they are often doubtful about them. The emotional turmoil creates disturbances and triggers the onset of disorder, once the individual finds himself incapable of resolving trivial issues. They are constantly striking like a pendulum in their thought patterns; one moment there is a strong sense of ideation, and the other moment he dooms into rapid mood shifts and develops a sheer sense of abandonment. There is an oscillation of thoughts as if thoughts running riot and shifting from one extreme to another. They want people or caregivers an absolute unwavering kind of support in order to curtail their psychological needs, they want an embodiment of empathy, compassion, and loyalty which often takes a huge toll on the caregiver.

These abrupt changes in the human mind tilt the personality towards anger and impulsive behavior. These representations of bouts of anger and depression worsen the personal relationships and workspace environment. They have a fragmented view of their lives; unable to handle, organize, systematize priorities, and set goals in life. They battle with the horrors of identity crises and they want applause and validation from others, which may bring transient change or a sense of freedom. These individuals also have a knack for destructive behavior, reckless anger, using drugs to



alleviate their pain, and self-harm. All the coping strategies are used as defense mechanisms, and the gamut of self-harm is also involved, which takes a huge toll on them. The employed strategies are based on attention-seeking behavior and gaining empathy, which is a rare scene when the person is in the highest state of self-destruction. Such individuals try to exert their power, by constantly doing something which keeps hovering the fear in mind.

### Research Objectives

1. To analyze how Jonathan Rosen employs a narrative structure in *The Best Minds* to represent the intricate nature of mental disorders.
2. To investigate the impact of narrative perspective and voice on the portrayal of the protagonist's descent into psychosis.
3. To examine how themes of identity crisis, insanity, control, and chaos are intertwined with the narrative techniques in *The Best Minds* and their connection to the representation of mental illness.

### Research Questions

1. How does Jonathan Rosen utilize narrative structure to depict the complexities of mental disorders in *The Best Minds*?
2. What role do narrative perspective and voice play in conveying the subjective experience of the protagonist; Michael Lauder's plunging into psychosis?
3. How are the themes of identity crisis, insanity, control, and chaos explored through the narrative techniques in *The Best Minds*, and how do they relate to the experience of mental illness?

OR

1. How does the interplay between reality and fiction in the novel's narrative structure contribute to the portrayal of psychosis?
2. Does the narrative offer a critique of the stigmatization of mental disorders, and if so, how is this achieved through narratological techniques?
3. In what ways does the non-linear narrative contribute to the reader's understanding of the protagonist's mental state?

### Significance of the Study

*The Best Minds* by Jonathan Rosen will be contesting for a valuable discourse to map mental disorders from the perspective of a narratological lens. The study is expected to pave the way for scholars to understand the labyrinth of mental illness mapped through narrative techniques employed by the researcher.

### Literature Review

Mason & Kreger (1998) explained "You're at the moment, their hero or once neglecting their needs, you become a zombie-like character" (p. 47). They need someone who can fill the deep void of emptiness in their soul, in search of a transformation. Kriseman (2021) discussed that "people having mental health disorders are ones like having third-degree burns all over their bodies, devoid of any empathetic skin, feeling bruised at the minor contact with the skin" (p. 10). This healing process can turn into a disaster at times as well when coping strategies are not employed properly. There is so much despondency and gloom, that it is hard to ward it off from their mind, the despicable desperation sometimes makes them suicidal as well. Suicidal ideation is prevalent in individuals with mental disorders. Styron (1992) explained about sadness "People who are experiencing depression become a representation of negativity around, the menace and disturbance around, the nuisance of illogical reasoning and lack of coping mechanism paves way for impending suicidal tendencies" (p. 77).

Ovaska (2020) discussed "the aim of the novelist is to share such glimpses that he is alive on the paper, narrating the events and conscious enough to portray the unconventional in a sublime manner". Sirois (2014) postulated "Mental illness is a fine line between those who witness the horrors and those who experience it. They have to deal with negative emotions like having a rigid personality and illogical reasoning, for them, there is no escape" (p. 8). Anderson (2003) sheds light in his journal that McMurphy takes the responsibility of rehabilitating the patients residing in the hospital, lest he knows that he would be given electroconvulsive shock therapy and his quest for freedom ends. It's how's a pathetic state of affairs, where a nurse has the capacity to harass the patient and eventually kill him off through the process of lobotomy so that his mental faculties never cease to



work again. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* depicts the horrifying aspects of mental disorders and their maltreatment as well. It is an abysmal pit, once you fall into it, there is no coming back. Baker & Crawford (2010) elaborated:

Fiction portrays the important elements of endurance, tenacity, aspects of magical realism, and creativity sparking positive representations as rebellious entities. Literature festoons the mind of the reader with clarity of mapping the madness, through the mechanism of storytelling in the representation of events in a subtle way. The events form a chain of experiences through which we generate irrefutable emotions" (Baker & Crawford, 2010, p. 2).

Pedlar (2006) articulated "Madness is often used in a literary context, rather than in a medical phraseology, but deadly consequences of madness are not as simple as the literary concoctions" (p. 62). Juliana (2015) in her article talks about female madness "Patients are considered no more than animals, and the mad were, by and larger, treated inhumanly" (p. 8). It shows the attitude of the people, and how this sort of attitude made them more prone to indignity and despondency. Madness was looked down on as hysteria and people were abandoned as if they had committed some big crime; albeit they had no clue of the disease themselves. Kiasat (2023) defines "Repression takes the form of isolation and alienation, the paper explores different forms of tyrannies one has to face at the hands of men and the culture. The domestic type is into just domestic duties and household.

Lessing's (2002) short story *To Room Nineteen* also shares the same sublime message as to how a woman is just confined to four walls of the room, and there is no room of one's own which Woolf, 1925 also calls to attention. The short story deals with the same subject of subjugation; in depth with great care. Another example can be cited as Chopin, 1894 *The Story of an Hour*, which ends with the heart-wrenching sentence "Sometimes it is the joy that kills" (p.3). Mrs. Mallard couldn't feel the sense of freedom and it was her plight in forthcoming years, which finally took her back from the world. It also talks about the depression and frustration, faced by a middle-class woman in her household. Society is crediting and setting

strange standards for women and they are deprived of their basic rights. *The Bell Jar* also talks about social repression causing depression, and mental health heightening towards electric shock therapy that yields more complicated results. Mental illness comes with the distress of handling the society, and further complications cause instability in the personality of the character. *Jane Eyre* also struggles with themes of depression and mental illness, abuse, and misconduct. The pressure of social standards inculcates strange gloom and fear in the mind of the protagonist.

Westover (2018) explained "The important thing about a mental breakdown is that no matter how obvious it is that you're having one, it is somehow not obvious to you. A chasm had appeared, and it was growing endlessly" (p 483). Frame (1984) stated "I was not yet eight and depression was at heights. There were beginning endings, gains, losses with a large share of misery where there was no place to lay the blame" (p.149). Sylvia Plath discusses her paranoia in *The Bell Jar* "Mother's absence was like death and black frost in the sunless house. I was officially suffering from schizophrenia and I had woven myself into a trap, remembering that a trap is also a refuge. Separated from time as a silkworm from the silk" (p. 590). Brosch (2013) explained "sadness can be pleasantly indulgent when you have a way to justify it"(p. 179). Styron (1992) discusses that:

Depression has been induced with negative connotations like a slug, leaving no trace of its spitefulness, forming like a volcanic eruption. Through the discourse of literature, we come to a crossroads with depression and its malevolence. Many literary giants have suffered through depressive episodes, it is suffering that often tinges the music of Beethoven, of Schumann and Mahler, and permeates the dark cantatas of Bach" (Styron, 1992, p. 75).

Holmes (2014) articulated that in the contemporary world, children are prone to bullying easily and that prompts the individual to commit suicide. In the United States, there is a remarkable high in suicides as these children see perpetrators in mass shootings, write-ups are written on suicidal tendencies in adults; once their goals are not achieved, they give up easily and ultimately, they meet catastrophic ends. And now they are trying to

sack up their libraries with reading material that can help them in coping mechanisms against mental illness.

Hashmi (2016) discussed the state of lunatics and their mannerisms. Many authors have succumbed to this deadly disease such as Anne Sexton, Emily Dickinson, Keats, and Sylvia Plath, 2005. The story *The Black Monk* talks about the mental state of the protagonist. He has a mercurial temperament and argues that people with such intense emotions have a tendency to be severe sensitivities. Readers absorb the despondency of Krovin and try to sympathize with him. The dreariness of life, the fret and fever posit the dealing with extreme polarities; happy in one moment and fluctuating emotions in the other phase. The rancor of the protagonist is shown with great delicacy by Chekhov. *The Black Monk* shows that trials and tribulations of life, gloom, and bloom, ennui, and rancor run side by side in life. All we can do is look at life with a positive approach rather than a grimmer side.

Smeds (2023) highlights the myriad forms of mental health disorders and Kesey, 1962 work in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a poignant tale of a person battling schizophrenia. It is a popular disorder in fiction, the landscape of hallucinations creates an eerie ambiance and we feel sympathy with the protagonist. Schizophrenia includes lack of activity, showing negative interest in everything, and having delusions that someone is watching you over and over. What is normal for them is abnormal for others. A state of melancholy prevails in the text, also showing deep insights into the solipsism of maltreatment at the hands of a morally corrupt hospital and its administration.

That's not in their control, not every mentally ill person is a perpetrator. People always conflate mental illness with violence and irrationality, which is not the case always. Mental disorders like PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), can appear in any form; be it after war, rape incidents, domestic violence, racism, or whatever grave issue that can trigger your feelings of anger and fear simultaneously.

Flashbacks are upsetting, war trauma can induce more irrational thoughts, and nightmares are common symptoms among people fighting mental disorders. Flashbacks are important to delve deeper into the process of characterization;

emotional shutdowns are common among people seeking psychotherapy for their treatment. Negative, irrational, and acrimonious exchanges of words are common symptoms among mentally ill people. Tyler (2020) discusses in her article the short stories of Hemingway and Wharton. It talks about the issue of bipolar disorder where in the story a parent worries that their child has a tendency towards plagiarizing with an offense in developing countries and it disturbs them. The guilt tilts them towards the thoughts of immorality, here the author discusses whether, such mental propensities can be cured by proper education, being a loving parent, and providing a better environment to groom their child. However, both authors have deep concern over the magnitude of the psychological crisis faced by people having bipolar disorder or any other mental illness.

### Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Otto Kernberg (1995) is one of the prominent voices celebrated for his contributions to object-related theories. His insights prove to be a valuable asset for psychologists in terms of delving deep into the minds of people battling mental health disorders. He determines the undertones of the psychological state of the individual with a mental disorder. He is of the view that individuals with mental issues fail to develop a coherent image of themselves, as well as they have mercurial judgments about the people around them. The fault in maintaining the mental equilibrium; at one point they are into idealism and suddenly, their temperament hinges on the subjugation of others. These behavioral tendencies are deeply rooted in the early stages of life, which shape up the gamut of intense emotions and rational thought patterns later in life. Kernberg argues that the individual's pathology of object relationships and its internalized patterns are to be deciphered in order to see the person in a normal capacity. Kernberg is an eminent figure in the field of psychoanalytical studies, he helped in deciding many personality and bipolar disorders. He emphasized our internal relationships with others (objects), which become a representation of our psyche and thought process. He also contributed significantly to madness and hysteria. He postulated that 'psychosis is a shutdown of ego's representation to conciliate

between internal mechanism drives and the external realm of reality. It's a kind of pendulum striking in the mind, failing to differentiate the patterns of reality and image projection in the mind of the individual.

Hallucinations, delusional episodes, nervous breakdowns, a scattered thought patterns with rationality are primordial phenomena in psychosis. In psychosis, the drives and impulses between the Id's confrontation with reality are compromised, hence, it is the first step toward insanity. People with such tendencies have severe emotional problems with intense outbursts as a reaction to their inner fragmented self. The person is unable to handle his identity issues and ultimately fails to form a coherent pattern between internal and external reality. The regression takes a huge toll on the individual, and he starts having hallucinations. They are unable to comprehend the fragile nature of the structure of their Ego. So, the breakdown in primary ego responses paves the way for the state of regression. Kernberg made a significant approach to understanding the complex intricacies of psychosis.

The research uses a multidisciplinary approach here by using another theorist, Marsha Linehan (2014), and her theory of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), it involves a two-way approach, the cognitive ability, and the behavioral aspects are taken into consideration; evaluating the response given by highly volatile individuals. Marsha argues that these people have the tendency to harm others as well as themselves; being in a state of denial and eliciting intense emotional outbursts. Linehan proffers the Biosocial Model in which an individual's mental representations have innate biological responses, where one's emotional outbursts are being subjugated and alienated for not handling the emotions. They are unable to regulate their dysfunctional emotions and their maladaptive behavior. Linehan focuses on the cognitive aspects of the problem, the fine balance of accepting things rather than being in denial mode. She is of the view that mindfulness can be of immense help to reduce self-harming tendencies. In psychosis, the dysfunctional aspects of emotion are important. She articulates that people with psychosis have mercurial temperaments, and encounter problems in navigating long-lasting relationships. Emotion regulation is important in

bipolar personality disorder, extreme mood swings become a nuisance at times. This emotional turbulence can bring the maniac episodes into a recurring pattern. Psychosis and dysfunction of emotion make them plunge into an exacerbating state of mind. The vicious cycle of emotions creates further emotional mayhem for the individual. Her contribution to grasping the emotional aspects of bipolar disorder and psychosis is of great significance.

Gérard Genette's (1990) structural model of narrative, outlined in his seminal work *Narrative Discourse*, provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complexities of narrative structure in literary texts. Genette's theory focuses on the intricate relationships between story narrative (the text's presentation of those events), and narration (the act of telling the story). The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. Narrative techniques are employed to map mental disorders and their catastrophic consequences.

## **Mapping the Mental Illness through Narrative Techniques:**

### **Narrative Voice**

Narrative voice is very important while discussing the aspects of narratology, there are two types of narrative voices; Extradiegetic and Intradiegetic ones. The primary one focuses on where the narrator is totally out of the story and doesn't know much, latter focuses, on where the narrator is inside the story but the technique used by Rosen is Metadiegetic, where the narration takes place from the perspective of narration within a narrative, and events are foretold by another character, who reveals the inner channeling of the mind of the protagonist. Rosen has discussed the character of Michael Lauder and his psychosis in a very distinctive way. The method of retrospection into a character's mind is something mind-boggling when it comes to perspicacity about mental illness. Rosen proffers a deep analysis into the mind of his character; "Lauder" along with his mental illness. The narrator reminisces the past shared with the protagonist; childhood, landing into their respective career, and becoming the voice of Micheal Lauder through the portrayal of his mental illness. Micheal Lauder, whom he called, the best

mind in the town, had an endless camaraderie with him suffering at the hands of psychosis.

### The Malady of Madness

Psychosis is a manifestation of a disorder where one has having fragmented and disconnected form of reality. It includes hallucinations, depression, angst, and irrational thought patterns including schizophrenia, severe emotional depression, and bipolar personality disorder. The intensity of emotion varies from person to person, but having no treatment further aggravates the problem. Delusions are part of schizophrenic representations which are false notions held accountable by the mentally ill person. Rosen (2023) further adds, "Michael was riding high on a certain presentation of himself. It was all what Michael called a roller coaster ride. Life wasn't a writing seminar. Maybe cliches were more valuable than original formulations" (Rosen, 2023, p. 369-370). The bizarre and disorganized behavioral pattern further leads towards lacking the power to speak anything, expressing the exact viewpoint, focusing upon trivial matters, and paucity of emotional response. It is genetic and neurotic factors are also responsible, for chemical imbalances in neurotransmitters that are associated with psychotic symptoms. Psychological factors can be taken as any bad experiences or trauma in childhood, sheer neglect by the parents, and emotional and physical abuse can also pave the way for such disorders. Mood disturbances and mercurial tendencies of emotions are prevalent in mentally ill persons. The stressor can trigger episodes of depression and schizophrenia which need extreme care and pathological treatment.

The narrator starts with the Analepsis technique (Flashbacks) which is the pivotal part of the structural element of narratology. We hear the story from the external source (narrator) through which the protagonist (narratee) is introduced to us:

I am going back fifty years. Before the hurried headlines, The New York Times profiled of role model genius who finished Yale Law School against all odds. Before delusions were mistaken for stories, and stories were mistaken for life. I'm going back in time graduating from Yale summa cum Laude, which I always thought of as summa cum Lauder, since you achieved, I'm three years which I failed to

accomplish in four. I'm on a road racing backward out of tragic sorrow whose circles radiate in all directions" (Rosen, 2023, p. 14-15).

It also takes us back to the opening lines of *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini, another poignant tale of friendship "Whatever, I am witnessing today is what I became at a certain point in my life during the crucial phase of 1975. That's now a thing forgotten, but somewhere deep inside me it tolls me back to the primordial times, I can't bury my past, it keeps peeping out" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 12).

The writer tolls us back into time which is an important element of the narratological aspect as presented by Gerard Genette's model of *Structural Narratology*." According to Rosen "the protagonist kept showing bouts of depression, fluctuating like a pendulum" (p. 17). The narrator is describing the time he met the author and he mentioned madness which was lurking somewhere in the mind of Michael, with whom the narrator had a long camaraderie of twenty-five long years. "Michael had the belief that your brain is your rocket ship and simply as a matter of course you're going to climb inside and blast off" (p. 20)

### Time and Order

Narratology primarily studies the relationship between the narration of events and how the characters reveal themselves through the discourse of narrating events in a systematic manner. Time is an important element for the narration of the chronological order of the events happening. Focalization is the angle through which the storytelling is done, how the story is postulated from a certain angle to engage the reader. It can be classified into three different categories: perceptual, psychological, and ideological. This research article focuses on the psychological dynamics in Jonathan Rosen's *The Best Minds*, and through the nonlinear time frame. The author has used various narrative techniques for the readers to 'tread on a different mental path through the concept of time and space, psychological aspect of narration is discussed in detail, by delving deep into the mind and emotions of the protagonist; Michael Lauder. As researchers have already pointed out, the narrative time deals with Analepsis and prolepsis. Analepsis is something where you use flashbacks or go back into the past, to have a better understanding of the character. It is also called



stream of consciousness which has been widely used in the Victorian era. The other is prolepsis which means you're going to foreshadow the narrative. Rosen has also adopted the same technique and his novel opening sentence showcases the narrative technique of 'Analepsis'. Getzfeld (2010) stated "For many people, flashbacks are associated with bad acid trips. They will have a recurrence of bad trips even months after the effects have dissipated. Bipolar disorders are characterized by mood swings, mania, and depression. They have a common tendency of suicidal behavior" (p. 67).

We come to terms with one of the basic techniques of narratology through the flashbacks. Rosen's complete novel is dealt with in a nonlinear narrative and flashbacks are of immense help to have clarity towards understanding the emotional and psychological aspects of the characters. The first line shows that the novel opens with a flashback technique. The writer is taking us somewhere back in the past to reveal a certain aspect of the characterization of the protagonist. The complete novel is written through the medium of flashbacks. Fludernik (2009) stated, "Some novels begin with flashbacks called Analepsis, providing a swift summary of events leading up to the story, a highly attentive attention-getter" (p. 45). So, the narrative technique of flashback is used by Rosen in painting the picture of Micheal Lauder; permanently etched on the mind of the reader. Through the flashback mode, the writer tells us about the Protagonist, Rosen uses this technique effectively throughout the novel, to create the mental landscape of Micheal Lauder.

### **Focalization and Facets of Narrative Voice**

There are two types of focalizations; internal and external. Internal focalization focuses on revealing the mind map of the character by deciphering the emotions, while external focuses on actions are represented by an outside perspective with less insight into the mind of the character. This phenomenon can be best explained by citing the example of *Mrs. Dalloway*, where the reader can feel the emotions lying at the core of the heart of the character. He goes into the deep recesses of the character to fully understand his mindset. "Madness was in the air when Michael and I were

growing up, and though it was hard to know whether it was a colloquial or clinical condition, the confusion itself shaped our world" (p. 103). The internal focalizer has its own thought pattern about the character, whereas, the external focalized has less access to the insights. In external Focalization, the narrator tells the story but in a detached manner, where only events are observed and less internal representations are manifested in a storyline." Rosen further explained the turbulent state of Michael's mind. "I had never seen Michael in full throes of psychosis, but it wasn't hard to see how anosognosia had made his illness an artfully knotted rope binding him tighter the more he struggles against it" (p. 437). Rosen artistically engages the reader so they form their own representations of mental insights. An example can be seen in Ernest Hemingway, 1927 "*Hills Like White Elephants*", the narrator doesn't reveal much about the character's internal struggles. Another aspect of focalization is narrator versus focalizer, where the narrator is telling the story and he is the prime focaliser, through the characters we come to know about the events happening around us. It can also be grasped in an able manner by citing the example of *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, where he himself is the focaliser and narrator, he is telling the story and simultaneously brooding over the events happening:

Michael's stories were strange, violent, and surreal. One was set in the Mexican border and where the girl was brutally raped. I didn't like the story but the anticipation of violence gave it expectant energy. My judgment about his stories was like a magnet near a magnet. Were they terrible? Were they great? Michael thought his parents were nazis I, and they had been patrolling his house with a kitchen knife (Conrad, 2016, p. 324).

Rosen has an impeccable way of using the narrative technique focalization, he has a sublime angle of portraying events as if imprinting something on the canvas of the reader's mind. The psychological aspect (mind and emotion) is probed in a quintessential approach. Where it connects the inner channeling of the protagonist, it also coalesces; mental landscapes and emotional outbursts. "I felt sick that my adolescent indictment had stayed in his head all these years,

feeding his guilt and playing a role, in his unraveling” (p. 372).

### Characterization

Rosen has skillfully used the narrative technique of "characterization" in a very subtle way. Characters are anchors which connect the dots in a sublime manner. "The rejection letters Micheal accumulated were also a pressure, adding a flash of old boastfulness that Michael has gotten personalized letters from editors. Still, they depressed Michael, who increasingly became paranoid. His delusions 'included the family" (p. 365). Characters are anchors which connect the dots in a sublime manner. It is through the development of characters over the span of the novel, we undergo myriad mental pictures being formed of any character. Flat and round characters have been of interest to many researchers. Rosen mastered the craft of characterization by becoming the voice of round characters. Throughout the development of Micheal Lauder, from childhood till his death, he wiggles with many facets of transformation. He portrays a sane Micheal to an insane Micheal; his character is shaped skillfully as a round character by Rosen. He has gone at length, by revealing all aspects of Micheal Lauder's life; childhood, spending time in libraries, preparing for high schools and universities, gearing up for careers, madness lurking behind the corner waiting for Micheal: Michael's madness, woven out of fragments of sanity, had weird vitality; his recovery, on the other hand, seemed full of pain and sickness. Sometimes I felt his medicated lucidity was just a guest in his schizophrenia. He became

sadder, lonelier and angrier. Someone was always watching (Rosen, [2023](#), p. 438).

### Conclusion

Through mapping the emotional outburst of mercurial moods, the narrative explores the underpinnings of the psychological realms of the narrator's craftsmanship while portraying Lauder's case. Rosen's narrative techniques, make us understand how literature paints a picture of mental illness and its complexities. The conditions like bipolar disorder and Schizophrenia have taken a huge toll on the protagonist. Rosen skillfully depicted the psychological aspects of Micheal and his intricacies are interwoven through his narrative techniques. The interdisciplinary approach further strengthens the notion, of how mental illnesses can be understood through the microcosm of literature.

The coalescence of theories and evidence of analysis gives us a feeling of empathy towards people bearing mental illness. The significant impact this research makes is, that narratology is an essential tool to decipher the psychological weaving of thoughts and gives a deeper meaning to the narrative itself. Rosen's narrative technique is a hallmark of the fact, that storytelling is an art, shaping the mysteries of the mind, mapped through the narratological lens. Rosen's *The Best Minds* is a testimony to the incredible force of literature, in understanding the mental representations of its characters. The forging of literature and psychology, explores deeper recesses of the human psyche, mapped through narratological studies. This research shows how literary discourse can be instrumental to the discourse of mental health.

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