Analyzing Guy De Maupassant's *The Piece of String* through the Lens of Roland Barthes' Five Codes

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Abstract

The present study aims at to apply Roland Barthes structural theory of five codes on the short story The piece of sting. The present study provides qualitative analysis of the selected short story in the light of five codes. This study includes critical analysis of The Piece of String by Guy De Maupassant then apply five codes in such a beautiful way, as propounded by Barthes on the structure of the story. The present short story is rummaged by all the five codes i.e., the hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes, when it goes on textual analysis. The theoretical framework of the short story is a process of deconstruction. The start of the story is attractive and full of suspense where several elements emerge with connotative meaning. It is pregnant with connotative meanings and symbolic code related to binary opposition. The cultural code plays a central role in the structure of the story.

Keywords: Barthes five codes, structural analysis, structural approach to Narratology.

Introduction

Structuralism is a human science that tries to understand, in a systematic way, the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience and therefore, all human behavior and production. (Tyson, 2006, p. 209-210). Roland Barthes has applied the proairetic, hermeneutic, semiotic, symbolic and cultural codes to Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* for its sweeping analysis of the text. This is the best way to study of the structure of the text through literature. It tries to fling out the indicative codes that shaped a clocklike text. That is why the important and secondary side for structuralism is thematic meaning of a text. Roland Barthes, a French structuralist, philosopher, and linguist, in his book S / Z (1970) described and demonstrated methods of literary analysis. During his analysis of Balzac's story 'Sarrasine' identified five codes, i.e., hermeneutic code, proairetic code, semantic code, symbolic code and cultural code. These codes enlighten the space of meaning that emerges/looms/springs up from the text. The present study avails /exertions Barthes five codes to analysis the short story the piece of string by Guy de Maupassant to beams/ glimpses how for the theory is befitting and pertinent in a different social and cultural context.

The selected/screened short story is designated /gleaned for multiple reasons. This short piece of writing is delphian/ sticking/perplexing for the reader. It is beefs up/ waxes/bolsters by the action of perplexity besides having many symbolic and cultural references. The story coevals a marvelment confutation/defiance between two different cultures. Through Barthes codes we can acumen/ drifts into the themes and structure of the text.

Roland Barthes' five codes.

To understand the pragmatics structure of text Barthes presents the theory of five codes. He proposed that these five codes are the basic underlying structures of all narratives (Barry,

2002, p.151). we can recognize, through the study of five codes that the text belongs to which genre or lamps/tumbles the characteristics of an already/formerly inaugurate genre. The bluff/ abrupt characterization of these codes is cardinal/crucial for further moves on.

The Hermeneutic Code

The hermeneutic code is also called delphian/unfathomable. It extracts/ speaks of those elements of a text that are abstruse, esoteric, and unexplained or entirely manifested/annotated in the narrative. It makes the reader snoopy and tempering to know and understand these codes. The reader raises different question because he cracks/pops to lay bare/ make public the crux of these elements. This code not only structures the narrative, it also "generates various strategies and devices aimed at capturing and maintaining the reader's interests" (Ribière, 2008, p.46). Mostly this code is seen at near the start of the text or end of the text.

The Proairetic Code

The proairetic code, which is also called the code of actions it contracts with those elements of the text that captivate, beguile, and enslave the interest of the reader by the action of suspense and perplexity. Every action of perplexity harbinger that what will happen in the next. Owing to this suspense the reader 'interest remains animate/cognizant for the coming actions, situation and characterization of the story. The reader gems/jewels a chronological sequence of actions by the above-mentioned codes that are the chief/ primary part of traditionally literary work. The rest of the codes are free from the chronological order and thus can be understood paradigmatically. (Ali, 2013, p.120).

The Semantic Code

The connotative code which is recognized as semantic code that refers to the additional meanings is in fact, the linguistics chunks. The connotative meaning is found in the characterization. This code is also related with theme (Barry, 2002, p.151 & Selden, Widdowson& Brooker, 2005, p.152).

The Symbolic Code

The symbolic code is termed as the antithetic code. This code is similar to connotative code in character to some extent, but its function is submerged and bottomless than the latter on in application. It deals with those elements that lavish/shell out diametric/diverse meanings. The concept of polarities or binary oppositions are central to the theory of Structuralism. By these binary oppositions a

structuralist understands reality. (Barry, 2002, p.151)

The Cultural Code

The last code which is known as referential code that enlightens the common knowledge about the sets of norms and touchstones which are to supervenes or outraged in the action of the story. Owing to this code the reader can catch the physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary or historical knowledge. The gnomic code is one of the cultural codes and refers to those cultural codes that are tied to clichés, proverbs, or popular sayings of various sorts. (Felluga, n.d.).

Application of Barthes' codes

Hermeneutic Code

There is puzzling situation in the story from the start to the end. Firstly, why the piece of string such a trivial thing was picked by the old man Hubert? However, an economical man but he never explained his aim to pick the piece of string and remained an enigma which was

not answered even in the end. 'O, him! Yes! He saw me pick up this string here. And as he said so, he drew out little piece of string from his pocket.' (line 27-28).

The second most unexplained and puzzled situation for the reader is why nobody trusted Mr. Hubert however there was no hint of any past incidence of theft or stealing by him. The testimony of a harness man Mr. Manana was given more importance than all the claims and swears of honor given by him as evidence of innocence. Mayor did not believe his words but accepted the testimony by Mr. Manana at once without any further inquiry. 'But the Mayor shook his head. You will not make me believe that Mr. Manana, who is a man of worth credence, mistook the cord for a pocketbook. (line29,30). Not only the Mayor but even his own friends did not put heed on his explanations and called him lair and rascal. 'There was no use of Mr. Hubert's protesting, for nobody believed him. (line37). Mr. Hubert went along stopping his friends giving them his statement and presentation, turning his pocket inside out to prove that he had nothing. All they said was, 'You old rascal! Get out of here!' (lines 45-46).

Even after getting the pocketbook by someone else the blame was not completely shed off from him. The most disgraceful situation for him was even proved at triumph still not believed innocent by people. 'Those are lying excuses. They said behind his back. (line 58)

Proairertic Code

The story is also fabricated with suspense which keeps the interest of the reader in the story. In the beginning when the drum beater enters it created a sense of curiosity in the reader's mind what will happen next. The announcement of the lost pocketbook was itself an action proceeding statement which developed more the interest of the reader. 'After the drum beat has ceased, the drumbeater called out to the people who are now attentive and impatiently waiting for him to call out the public announcement'(line 7). This line not only depicts the curiosity of the people in the story but also develop the suspense in the reader's mind who also felt same and impatiently waiting for the drumbeater to call out public announcement.

The entry of police chief on the scene and inquiry about the identity of Mr. Hubert increased the mystery of lost pocketbook. 'Mr. Hubert, he said, you were seen this morning to pick up the pocketbook lost by Mr. James.'(line17.) These words by Mayor were as terrifying as for Hubert. And the question asked by him was the very question came to the reader's mind. 'Who saw me?' (line24). However, by knowing that it was Mr. Manana who gave the testimony the action was proceed towards more thrilling situation as he was the man who saw him to pick the piece of string. The denial of Mayor to believe Mr. Hubert's words and warring to consult the public prosecutor for further proceeding created the atmosphere of fear and suspense and pave the path for action to move towards the climax of story.

'The next day in the afternoon a man named George returned the pocketbook and its content to Mr. James the owner of the pocketbook.'(line49) This line describes the truth of Mr. Hubert and proved his innocence. 'He was in triumph.'(line53) But it was not real success as still people did not trust in his innocence. 'People started to tell the story of the string to amuse themselves and told it in a manner of soldier who had been on a campaign and talked about his battles'. (line61).

It is important to note that throughout the story Mr. Hubert was the action receiver and only action done by him was to pick the piece of string, but this single trivial action led to his tragic end. The action proceedings were taken by the surrounding people of the society and the authority or the elite class.

Semantic Code

The story is full of semantic code and connotative meanings. Many elements have used to describe the connotative meanings as the author aimed to depict the shallowness of the society and fact of life. The '*Pocketbook*' has the connotative meanings of materialism and the so-called elite's status which was falsely blamed to pick by the peasant Hubert. Hubert was not a man of authority and pocketbook was never picked up by him as pocketbook was out of his approach because it only belongs to authority and Mr. Hubert was falsely blamed to pick up that as the elite class thought him as outsider who wanted the status and the materialistic happiness by joining them in the dinner hall.

'The Piece of String' is the conservative thought and old norms of the society that is dirty and useless thrown out by others in the mud, but Mr. Hubert find it economical and choose to pick it up. That choice of Mr. Hubert to keep the societal rotten norms and believes with him brought his destruction. It was his choice to let go the incident and do not bother the rumors or to stick with them. He gives more importance to reputation and kept explaining his innocence to the people who were never able to understand his situation. The more he explained the more he ridiculed by the people. It showed that the society to which Mr. Hubert belongs was more concerned about the reputation and it was hard to prove one's innocence if suspected once and lost the good reputation there was no credibility of one's words if did not belong to elite class. The credibility of words also linked with class and standards. As no one bother to investigate from Mr. Manana about the truth of the incident and took the testimony as enough evidence to declare Mr. Hubert guilty.

Symbolic Code

The symbolic code is related to the binary opposition on which the structure of the story rests. 'The Piece of String' is also structured with binary opposition first of all *'Pocketbook'* is mistook by *'Piece of String'.* *'The pocketbook'* was worth of five hundred shillings and some business papers is completely opposite to the worn out *'The Piece of String'.* These two things are totally opposite to each other in worth and cost but mistook for each other.

Then the words used by the *narrator* and by the characters in the story are representation of absolute binary. 'Mr. Hubert, *the simple countryman* looked at the Mayor and astounded and already terrified by the suspicion resting on him.'(line18). At another place the narrator called him as; '*The good soul*, Mr. Hubert, choked with indignation and fear.' (line34)

On the other hand characters of the story called him *'rascal'* and *'lair'.* 'All they said was you old *rascal!* Get out of here!' (line46). 'There was nothing so shameful as to be called a *'lair'.* (line55).

Another binary was resented by the opposite class and standards of Mr. Hubert a village man and Mayor, caretaker of public hall Mr. James and Chief of police. Mr. Hubert a '*peasant' is* representative of low class of society whereas Mayor and Mr. James are the representative of elite class who was in authority.

There is also binary within the lower class. At one side there is Mr. Hubert a man of honor who is struggling to prove his innocence and on the other end is Mr. Manana who was trusted blindly by all without any effort to prove his truthfulness.

Cultural Code

There are many references about the cultural and historical knowledge of the age which gave the structure to the story. The starting paragraph is all about the cultural code where the writer depicted market hall and gave a full account of the people and their discussion. 'At the end of

the market day, the rich people with vehicles of all kinds, carts, gigs, wagons, dumpcarts, gathered at a big hall for a great meal.' (line1). This line gave the hint of time by telling about the means of transport used by the people also gathering at hall shows that it was place where people gathered to celebrate and discussion their business affairs. 'Everyone told his affairs his purchase and sale.' (line4). It also gave the description of the work and business of people which was hinted as trade and agriculture. 'The dinner discussed the crops and the weather which was favorable for the green things but not for the wheat.' (line5). In this line not only gave hint about the occupation of people but also tells the time of the year which was probably summer season. The table full of meal and variety of appetizing dishes gave the hint that it was happy time of year when business and crops were at peak and all were enjoying it as merrymaking time.

Conclusion

The application of five Barthes' code provides a deep analysis of the story by providing a structuralist view. The story is constructed with all five codes and tangled with suspense and enigma. It also provides the cultural and social view of the age in which the story is narrated by the narrator.Reader is perplexed between the view of narrator about the hero Mr. Hubert and characters of the story which structured the plot of story. It gave a deep insight of the psychology of society in which it was impossible to prove innocence if you are once got suspected in false blame. The use of semantic code gave many implicational meanings to the story. It has made the story a representation of the real picture of society and the shallowness in their behaviors. Present study has explored different aspects of the story which were imbedded in the story through symbolic and semantic code. The binary gave the distinction of different classes of society.

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