Investigating Hemingway's *Cat in the Rain* within the Framework of Barthesian Codes

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Abstract

This paper investigates Ernest Hemingway's short narrative *Cat in the Rain* in the light of Roland Barthes' theory of poststructural narratology also known as narrative codes. This poststructural approach to narratology that precedes Derrida's theory of deconstruction claims that in the actualisation of an artistic creation, different social, cultural and aesthetic factors take part and to grasp the value and significance of the aestheticised product the critical exploration of each of its building block is essential. This process of deconstruction of art consists of the examination of proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and cultural codes. Rationalising and justifying his concept of 'death of the author', this Barthesian technique targets the exploration of meanings at various levels: the meanings that are lying within text and beyond the text. Working mainly though the elements of the form of the text, this creative and material way of criticism makes a reasonably in-depth attempt to identify the aims, objectives and concerns behind the artistic compositions. Usually, these codes work like the fingers to make a hand. Under this creatively critical strategy, text is divided into paragraphs, sentences and phrases to function as units of analysis called lexia. The present study would verify whether Hemingway's narrative under analysis can be brought under the narrative codes, which codes are emphasised and what types of meanings are stressed.
The study is expected to substantiate Barthes' narrative codes as a critical methodology that is relevant to the narratives of authors like Hemingway.

**Keywords**: Roland Barthes; Narrative Codes; Lexia; Poststructural Narratology; Hemingway; Cat in the Rain

**Introduction**

Roland Barthes, in a sense, is the name of transition/shift from structuralist poetics to the poststructuralist theory. The earlier Barthes remained absorbed in the study and research of the structures of a narrative. Things like the narration, and actants in a narrative engaged his attention for sometimes. Then he realised that the net results of the studies are not much encouraging because his structuralist approach to narratology did not deal with the social factors that construct an artistic creation. That is why he instead of restricting himself to the structures of a narrative switched to the concept of poststructuralist narratology that aims at the dissection of the factors and forces- narrative codes- that combine together to realise a cultural product or an artistic creation.

His theoretical notion of the 'death of the author' also played a significant role to move to the narrative codes. The narrative codes- proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and cultural- are a practical way to pursue the theory of the death of the author. These poststructural codes deconstruct the weave of a cultural product in a material and thorough manner. Put simply, Barthes' poststructural codes anticipate Derrida's theory of deconstruction. These codes interact with and overlap each other consistently to encode artistic meanings there; "These five codes create a kind of network, *topos* through the entire text passes" (Barthes, 1973, p.20). Barthes' use of this ploy to trace the meanings behind the text is new but more useful way to study art. Proairetic code, the first factor in this regard, deals with the scenes, situations, and events in the
narrative. Theoretically speaking, Barthes includes each and every type of event of the narrative in this code. Before him theorists like Aristotle and Todorov gave importance to the typical events only (Scholes, 1982, p.99). This code signifies the importance of events with reference to their time, length and completion in the narrative. Hermeneutic code is the next technique that is linked with the ambiguities, complications and riddles in the story. Barthes identified various types of aporias in his world known book *S/Z* on Balzac's writing *Sarrasine*. This readerly text is replete with lexias that delay the puzzles to maintain suspense till the end of the narrative. Cultural code is the name of the material that is already existent in settled form in the social formation like proverbs and the norms of the cultural life. These codes provide a foundation upon which the artistic beauties and metaphorical content of the social text is to be built. Connotative code is the other significant building block of a literary discourse. It accounts for all the suggestive, metaphorical and implicational aspect of an artistic creation. Normally, we are convinced of art being a social product that evokes some pragmatic content and this content is considered the soul of art (Leech, 1989, p. 48-49). For the realisation of figurative dimension of art, various methods are brought to the fore; semantic deviations, imagism, uncollocational patterns and deviations of register are the main terms in this respect. Most of the intertextual material to be used in a literary write up is recontextualised for the sake of implicational purposes. The last code that is introduced by Barthes is the symbolic aspect which consists of binarities in situations, scenes, discourses and characters. To seek the contrasts in writing is a type of componential analysis that ultimately culminates in symbolic interpretations. This is code is broader in its area than the connotative code.

Roland Barthes' poststructural approach to narratology that he theorised and exemplified through his seminal book *S/Z* proved the start for a new dimension in the field of literary theory.
Under this analysis Balzac's novella Sarrasine was targeted. The present study is to position this book as a conceptual framework.

**Data Analysis and Discussion**

Barthes’ post structuralist approach to the narrative analysis consists of five codes. In this study, these five codes are applied to Hemingway's short narrative *Cat in the Rain*. The proairetic code or the code of actions that consists of trivial actions as well heavily important actions like adventure is relevant to the present story. Following five scenes make the total of the actions taken.

- **First Scene**  
  'The American wife stood at the window looking out'.

- **Second Scene**  
  'The wife went downstairs'.

- **Third Scene**  
  'She opened the door and looked out' and 'she walked along the gravel path until she was under their window'.

- **Fourth Scene**  
  'They (the wife and servant) went back along the gravel path and passed in the door… As the American girl passed the officer, the padrone bowed from the office'.

- **Fifth Scene**  
  'She went on up the stairs. She opened the door of the room'. Then 'she sat on the bed'. Then 'she went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table'. Then 'She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the widow and looked out'.

American wife’s action is completed through "symmetrically arranged" (Hagopian, 1964, p.221) five scenes of the story. But she does not succeed in getting the desired object through her own actions. Her actions symbolize her intense desire to come out of her lonely, boring mechanical and issueless life; her actions are targeted to exploit her feminity and fertility for the sake of happy, engaged and responsible life. But the passivity of her life partner is adamant and rigid in this regard. That is why we do not see any action on the part of her husband. He remains bed ridden throughout the story; rather he snubs the American wife 'Oh shut up and get something to read'
when she repeatedly instigates him to listen to her desires. Barthes' proairetic code is suggestive in character. The America wife's journey, to get a hold on the cat, commences from the room and finishes at the room. Her motion proved cyclical and useless. When she comes to the window, her eyes are filled with a dream to be fruitful by catching a cat; her body movement makes an attempt to realise this dream but fails and ultimately she is again, at the end of the story, looking through the window. All this is symbolic of her present conditions, performance and image. Cat, it seems, is the symbol of her desire to have her own baby and also to be fondled by her husband like a cat.

Hermeneutic code is the second but equally vital code along with the code of actions. This signifying system deals with complications, aporias, riddles, enigmas, and puzzles. The narrator sometimes withholds the necessary information to create suspense in the narrative (Barthes, 1973, pp17-20). There are different enigmas and puzzles in the text under investigation. First, the setting of the story, stay in a hotel and the American woman’s urge for 'fun' indicate that the couple is here in Italy to enjoy life. But it is not the fact. Has the husband come from America to study a book in an Italian hotel? Why the husband does not allow the hearty desire of the lady to grow her hair like a girl? Why he does not stretch his hear effectively to her desire to have a 'kitty'? Like the priest in Eveline, a story of James Joyce from Dubliners, who had gone to Melbourne, the presence/mention of 'the war monument' is not justified explicitly in the discourse. The monument attracts the Italians from the distant areas; even then we do not know about it explicitly. These two Americans are much different from each other. Why they married in the presence of these differences among them? How it is possible that marriage is still going on? What is the bond between them that keeps them united in spite of so many contrasts between them? Will their marriage continue or break? The American wife says 'I get so tired of looking like a boy'. From whence she is like a boy and from whence she is 'tired of looking like a boy' we do not know. There are two cats in the story.
Are they the same entity? If they second one is a toy then why it is sent to the American girl from the owner of the hotel? There are some other puzzles also in the narrative. The writer himself does not try to resolve these enigmas explicitly. However, the perceptive eyes of the reader can be helpful in this regard. With the help of symbolic and connotative codes most of the interrogative material is comprehended. For example, the war monument symbolises the strong split between them that can blow away their marriage any time in future.

Cultural codes refer to the things that already have come into existence and are recognised in the culture; the behavioral and intellectual tendencies of the people of a culture and its proverbs, clichés and axioms are all to fall under the cultural codes (Scholes, 1982, p.100). In the Italian culture it is a well grounded cultural trait to build war monuments with shining material and visit these monuments with the spirit of pilgrimage. The American wife goes into rain to save the cat from the rain; the hotel owner extends a lot of honour to the American wife. These are all customary aspects of the two cultures. The wife wants to grow hair and the husband likes her present boyish hair style. She wants change and freedom and he wants status quo.

Connotative codes refer to the words, phrases and other linguistic structures in a literacy piece of work that are foregrounded for their suggestive, implied and figurative meanings to establish the theme or themes (Scholes, 1982, p.102). There are so many examples of these connotative codes and meanings in the present story. The code of loneliness and boredom is the most important feature in the character of the American wife. To enhance this code of isolation, different signifiers are used in the discourse. The signifiers, in the setting of the story, like 'the empty square' and 'the motor cars were gone' refer to the vacant, and deserted life of the American wife. 'It was raining. The rain dropped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths'. Bad weather, continuous rain, and the stagnant water on pools connote primarily to the
barren, cold and friendless life of the American wife. Then American wife’s repeated verbal desire for a cat: 'I am going down to get that kitty', 'Oh I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty', 'I wanted it too much', 'I want a cat now' and 'if I cannot have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat' accounts for the lady’s desire to transform her feminity, fertility and dynamism into the mother of a baby. The presence of considerable distance between the husband and wife, which is no doubt due to the different dispositions of the character, is connoted by the opposite directions of the activities of life of the life partners. 'George was reading again'. 'He was reading again'. 'George was on the bed reading'. The emotionless and riveted to the bed husband keeps on reading a book of his choice along with two pillows near the foot of the bed. On the other hand the married lady wife stands at the window to look out, sits on the bed and sits before the mirror to examine her profile. Both are busy in activities which contrast their characters as husband and wife. The thrice mention of the monument of war also connotes the future strains in the marriage of both the characters. Rain metaphorises the critical situation in their life; the artists who work on their canvas when the weather is good like the garden and the way the palm trees grew. It pragmatically stands for the romantic moments in the life of the American couple that now have gone to the past time like the artists. The monument of war glistens in the rain; the garden stands for the warm youthfulness of the couple that is under the shower of rain drops now. The shine of the monument that dims the greenness of the garden and the palm trees refer to the dangerous and possible explosion in their future matrimonial life. John V. Hagopian (1964) believes that the American woman's leaving her room to save the cat from rain, her deep appointment to see that the cat is gone, her insistence to replace her boyish hair style to be replaced by a girlish hair style, and her repeated desire to have a 'kitty' symbolises her desire to use her feminine fertility to become the mother of a baby (p.121).
The symbolic code, according to Barthes, is concerned with the meanings of a text that come from binary oppositions as /p/ and /b/ produce different meanings in ‘pin’ and ‘bin’. There is a lot of binary based material in the text of the under story. First, the husband of the American wife George is a sharp contrast to the tall, aged but emotionally elastic hotel owner. Though the desk of hotel owner is much far-away but he bows before the American lady with sincerity, devotion, respect and affection. He is the owner of the hotel but his thickly intimate behaviour with the lady presents him in the role of a hotel keeper. The American lady liked his dignity, elderly and huge face, large hands, the familiar way he listened and addressed the complaints and the manner he liked 'to serve her'. When she is again to go by the desk, the old man again stooped. In the interior of the girl, a paradisiacal landscape is felt as a response behaves to the stimulus. Unaddressed by life partner, she feels herself 'really important' due to the warm encounter with the padrone. 'She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance'. He symbolises the father figure where she feels cared for and protected; where she no more feels suffocation, rather she feels cosiness of existence, and warmth of ideal life; she feels rapturous, loved, respected, cared by someone, exalted and satisfied. On the other hand her husband brought for her boredom, loneliness, dissatisfaction, anxiety and listlessness. This "bookish chap" just "neglects her emotional needs" (Chatman, 2001, p.218). He symbolizes a suffocating atmosphere where the American girl is but 'the American wife', 'so tired of looking like a boy'; he issued but negative, imperative and interrogative utterances only: 'do not get wet', 'oh shut up and get something to read' and 'Did you get the cat?' Second, the Americans staying at the Italian hotel are reserved people. While going on the stairs from and to the hotel room, they do not interact with anyone. On the other hand both the Italians- the hotel owner and a female servant- leave no stone unturned to help, gratify, honour, and please the American lady. The Italians, as a nation, are loving characters not only to the living
humans but their past memories like the tombstone of war also; from all over the state, the Italians rush to visit this war monument with religious zeal. George does not even listen to the problems, frustrations and desires of his wife but the Italian hotel owner arranges for a cat to be provided to the lady at her room at the end of the discourse. Inside the room of the hotel where the two Americans are stopping stands for culture that is boring and non committal. On the other hand outside of the room is the presence of nature which is an invitation to life for the American wife. The monument stands for relations that have become stagnant like those of the American couple. And sea is indicative of dynamism that is a feature of the Italians as a nation.

**Conclusion**

The present study concludes that Roland Barthes' five narrative codes that stem from his poststructural approach to narratology are quite relevant and suitable for an effective analysis of Hemingway's short fiction *Cat in the Rain*. They interpret the narrative from different angles so tactically and successfully that the central theme, the bored life of the American couple, is explored comprehensively (Hagopian, 1964, p.121). The five moves of the American wife, to leave the room to go out for saving a cat in the rain, constitute the code of action with reference to the central theme. The action ends from where it started; it suggestively proves that the American wife's desire and attempt to become a mother remains fruitless because her husband remains at variance with motion in life. There are a few cultural codes that are mentioned in the story. This narrative is very economical in words, therefore it consists of so many enigmas and puzzles. Most of the enigmas are resolved in the light of the connotative codes and symbolic material. The codes that are expansively employed are connotative codes. These codes are the real source of deeper and implicational interpretations of the text. Rain, disappearance of the good weather and that of the artists, the empty square, the war monument, the palm trees and the garden in the grip of rain
drops, and the American wife's insistence to have a cat are all pragmatic and metaphorical images that vigorously point to the isolated and barren life of the principal female character in the story. The symbolic code is also a preferred code in this text; it deals with the contrasts between the two cats, the husband and the inn keeper, the war monument and the garden, the girl and the American wife. All these five codes continue to overlap each other to lead to the artistic weave of the text and the discovery of deeper meanings. Barthes' five codes constitute a comprehensive critical framework to analyse any narrative successfully. There are so many short stories and novels that can be investigated reasonably with the help of these codes by the future researchers.
References


