

Barthes Five Codes In The John Cheever's Short Story The Enormous Radio: A Structural Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study applies Roland Barthes' notion of five codes to present a structural analysis of John Cheever's 1947 short tale "The Enormous Radio" (hermeneutic, symbolic, semantic, proairetic and cultural code). Without these rules, a reader cannot comprehend the notion of the story. A reader may learn about the cultural and societal features of that period, the hidden background or meanings that the writer wishes to express, and the inconsistencies of the characters by using these codes. In his short narrative, John Cheever employs these codes in order for readers to grasp the heart of his work. The analysis concludes that the author established a delicate balance in the short narrative via the characteristics of Jim and Irene. The application of five codes in selected texts increases readers' aesthetic enjoyment as well as their knowledge of the text's genre and topics, according to the article.

Keywords: Five codes, Roland Barthes, Structuralism, The Enormous Radio.

1 Introduction

This research presents a structural analysis of "*The Enormous Radio*", a short story written by John Cheever in 1947, using Roland Barthes' concept of five codes (hermeneutic, symbolic, semantic, proairetic, and cultural code). No reader can make sense of "story" without these guidelines. By deciphering these codes, the reader may get insight into the cultural and socioeconomic norms of the time period, the author's motivations, and the contradictions of the characters. In his short story, John Cheever employs these codes to help his readers get to the meat of the story. It was determined via this research that the author achieved a fine balance in the little story by carefully crafting the personalities of Jim and Irene.

The short story "*The Enormous Radio*" from John Cheever's 1953 book *The Enormous Radio and Other Stories* will serve as the text for this discussion. It's told from the perspective of an all-knowing third-person narrator. This tale exemplifies the literary genre known as "domestic Gothic" (the house becomes the focus of trauma instead of a castle). Jim and Irene Westcott are a typical middle-class New York City couple, raising two young kids. The enjoyment of musical performances is important to them. Their previous radio had broken, so they went out and bought a new one. The new radio has an unusual appearance because its owner can listen in on apartment conversations. The radio plays a pivotal role throughout the story, first showing that Westcott's neighbors are concealing a plethora of secrets and then, at the story's conclusion, sparking a fight that exposes those secrets and their own horrible ones. John Cheever is sometimes referred to as the "Chekov of the Suburbs" for the way he wrote about suburban life. He developed his own style and managed to express the latent frailty of human beings in his work. John Cheever was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1979, and over the course of his career, he penned hundreds of short tales.

The short tale "*The Enormous Radio*," which he wrote, has been chosen for examination, and structuralist theory has been used to examine it in depth. Barthes viewed the connection between a text's creator and its readers as intricate, and he set out to disentangle it by first identifying the system's role in the text's production, then deconstructing its structure to better grasp its meaning, and finally investigating how readers construct their own interpretations of the text. Barthes identified 561 meaning components and classified them into "five codes" (Barry, 2002). The text is disjointed due to the voices operating inside the codes. These rules are the patterns by which the parts are organized to generate meaning and stitch the narrative together. According to Barthes, there are five codes (proairetic, hermeneutic, symbolic, semantic, and cultural code) that are present in every short tale and may be used to examine the narrative's structure and the meaning of texts.

The "Proairetic code" is also referred to as the "Narrative code" (Herman & Eagleton, 1998), which Barthes (1974) refers in "*The Voice of Empirics*". This code provides a system of actions and reactions in the text. Selden (2005) states, "the proairetic code deals with the basic sequential logic of action and behavior" (p. 152) and refers to every additional action or incident that suggests something else is going to happen and leaves the readers

wondering what will happen next, also heightening the suspense. It is applicable to actions that imply further narrative action. In addition to the "proairetic code," the "hermeneutic code" is known as a "code of enigma" (Selden et al., n.d.) , which for Barthes (1974) is "The Voice of Truth". This code deals with mysterious things within the text. Readers ask themselves questions to understand the concept. The author left readers to form their own interpretations of the events or to question them. This code refers to any part of the story that is not fully explained, and we make predictions about why this has happened. What is its value? Some enigmatic events have their answers at the end; others are left unsolved, forcing readers to use their own mental capacities to make sense of them. "The hermeneutic code concerns the enigma that arises whenever discourse begins," (Selden et al., n.d.)

The proairetic code aids the reader in understanding the sequence of events and the characters' responses, while the hermeneutic code aids the reader in making sense of obscure concepts and inferring the truth behind the story even when it isn't explicitly stated. The two codes together constitute the heart of every story. Connotative code is also known as "semantic code" (Barry, 2002) and "the voice of the person" (*Barthes_Roland_S-Z_2002*, n.d.). The connotation of this code helps readers understand it in a broader context than just its literal meaning. This secret code is also associated with the text's key ideas. The connotations that are commonly elicited in characterization or description are what Selden (2005) calls "the semantic code" (p. 152). While "antithetical code," what Barthes (1974) calls "the voice of a symbol," is another name for "symbolic code" (p. 21), Here, binary oppositions and systems are discovered. Like semantic code, but on a much grander scale, it uses binary polarities to categorize semantic concepts into more nuanced and all-encompassing categories. This is often achieved using antithesis, the blending of seemingly incompatible concepts to produce a new interpretation. Other names for the "cultural code" include "referential code" and "the voice of science" (*Barthes_Roland_S-Z_2002*, n.d.). This cypher alludes to the familiar and established facts we all know. The following is a list of resources for people who want to learn more about the environment. The term "canonical sense" is used to describe any body of knowledge that cannot be challenged and is accepted as the foundation of reality. The story is broken because of the several "voices" present in these codes.

This article looks at "*The Enormous Radio*," a short tale by John Cheever, through the lens of Roland Barthes' five codes to determine how the author's thoughts are structured throughout the piece. The narrative was selected because it has many words and deeds that may be interpreted in several ways, as well as perplexing components, dichotomies, cultural references, and numerous symbolic activities. All real tales were formed by reading the text via these codes, which also established their meanings. The story's events revolve around the choices made by Jim and Irene, the two main characters. The narrative is enriched with various cultural and social components, such as a poem by poet Edward Lear, a state anthem, and an army band, and includes many words and utterances with multiple connotative meanings outside their denotative context. This research endeavors to reveal the underpinnings of the story's narrative structure and context by applying five codes to a sample text and then discussing the findings.

2 Literature Review

According to Nasrullah Mambrol's (2023) analysis of John Cheever's writing, the author "understands how separation from the natural world destroys self-worth" and "his characters, who live in a comfort world, face a suddenly dangerously darkened world around them, which derives their focus to emotional needs". A gloomy universe opens up in front of Irene in "*The Enormous Radio*" as she hears Jim's harsh remarks, just as she unexpectedly discovers her neighbor's hidden secrets that she wishes she could keep to herself. According to Kendle, "*The Enormous Radio*" is a satirical or sardonic retelling of the Garden of Eden tale that serves to extrapolate the unhappiness of mid-century urbanites and draws parallels between the naiveté of Irene and that of Eve. The radio is the adversarial invader, the intruder representing Satan in the Westcotts' innocent world. A reflection of Eve's pride may be seen in Irene's self-aware growth in sensitivity (Baig, 2022; Kendle, 1967). According to Henrietta Ten Harmsel (1972), there are similarities between the protagonists of "*The Enormous Radio*" and "*Young Goodman Brown*", a short tale by Nathaniel Hawthorne. He discovered that both Irene Westcott and Goodman Brown became enamoured with their travels and were unable to return home willingly. The last transmission left them with the same understanding of the corrupt society in which they lived but without any means of escape.

Even though (Stories, 2007) suggests that drunkenness, divorce, and generational disputes are recurrent themes throughout John Cheever's work, the writers argue that there is always hope at the end of each tale. They decided that John Cheever's tales mostly focused on realizations that came at the conclusion of his novels, and that he showed suburban life and his stance in Christianity. The contemporary American psyche, Yingshi (2013) found,

feels sad and alienated in the harsh world but is not willing to accept its sorrows and pains, and so the author examines the primary issues of marriage, money, and personal connections. A website's (2019) take on "*The Enormous Radio*" is that it's about addiction and George W. Hunt's theory, which is that the narrative expresses the universal subject of evil. Listening to the radio is a habit for Irene, and it is this habit that ultimately exposes the actual nature of her neighbors and her own life (*Addiction in John Cheever's "The Enormous Radio" Essay - Book on Study Boss*, n.d.). When he became addicted to the radio, she began to hear about the hidden evil in the world. Aino Liina Salo (2019) examined how patriarchal culture affects males and females alike. Jim, a hard worker, and devoted family man. He stands in for the American male and fulfils the stereotypes of his gender, while Irene spends her time doing what any normal woman would do—spending time with her kids and talking about her obligations in the short narrative. He defended traditional gender norms by saying they are present in both characters (*Ordinary Masculinities in John Cheever - Search*, n.d.). Colford (2015) sees the short story as merely the moral downfall of the couple, while Nasrullah Mambrol (2023) argues that the short story is itself the enormous radio who transmits the unpleasant truths to the reader that they would prefer not to face, just as Irene does not want to face her truths.

This paper makes an effort to close that gap by analyzing Roland Barthes' structuralist perspectives. This study uses textual analysis to look for hidden meanings, cultural considerations, binary polarities, and character conflicts that have not been addressed in other publications. The sum of these parts, according to Roland Barthes' notion of five codes, is the story's essential core. This article seeks to decipher the hidden codes in John Cheever's "*The Enormous Radio*" by breaking the book down into five sections, each of which is affected by one of Barthes' five codes.

3 Research Methodology

Since Roland Barthes argued that the reader's role is not to be passive; he must play an active role during reading, this paper employs a qualitative approach since research is based on textual analysis and depends on the narrative style and hidden context that the writer wants to convey to the readers through his work. The text's subject is broken up into pieces, and it's up to the reader to piece them together into a whole (Sturrock, 2003). Moreover, Barthes employs Saussure's notion of semiotics, but his analysis of the signals used in text-based communication systems emphasizes their arbitrariness. Barthes argues that there is no meaning in the world until it is expressed via a language. Barthes (1957) argues that, contrary to Saussure, the signifier and the signified are related. Signifier and signified, he said, are "endowed with importance" (p. 114). Barthes argues that the structure of a text can be deduced by analyzing the language used within it, which operates on two levels: denotation, which reflects the external world, and connotation, which deals with associations (Brier & lia dwi jayanti, 2020). Symbolic systems are the building blocks of the connoted system (Allen, 2003). Barthes, in addition to highlighting the importance of connotation, sets the groundwork for its connotative meaning, complementing Saussure's emphasis on denotative meaning.

According to Barthes, structuralism is an "activity" that arranges the order of a certain number of mental processes where text is woven fabric, and the reader is the maker. This renders the text's literary value indefinable. Barthes argues that there is no need to attribute meaning to the speaker while reading a text since the text itself does it with the use of language (*A Lovers' Discourse: Fragments*). Furthermore, Barthes's work centers on the randomness of signals within systems of communication, which literature exemplifies. Like a bundle of threads that must be unraveled, text is difficult to read and understand in its original form. According to Barthes, the text is, "a galaxy of signifiers rather than a structure of signified; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach; they are indeterminable. The meaning system can take over this explicitly plural text, but their number is never closed because it is based on the indefinite infinite possibilities of language" (*Barthes_Roland_S-Z_2002*, n.d.)

Although, Barthes is known for many works—including "*Criticism and truth*", "*The Pleasure of the Text*", "*Image, Music, Text*", "*Mythologies*", "*Writing Degree Zero*", "*The Elements of Semiology*", "*The Empire of Signs*", "*Introduction to Structuralism*" (1966), and "*The Death of the Author*" (Barthes, n.d., 1967, 1972, 1977b, 1977a, 1983; Kramnick, 2021). It was Roland Barthes who recommended using a set of five codes to decipher a text's organization. In his seminal book, "*Rhetorical Structure*", Barthes (2002) argued that these five rules provide the essential building blocks for every story. These symbols were referred to by his several monikers: "mirage of structures," "perspective of quotes," and "the sign of virtual digression" (*Barthes_Roland_S-Z_2002*, n.d.). According to Selden (2005), Barthes's book (*S/Z*) is a prime illustration of structuralism since it starts by mocking the "vain aspirations" of structuralist narratologists who attempt to classify all tales into a single block. In his book *S/Z*,

Roland Barthes (1974) discussed a code analysis of Balzac's short tale "Sarrasine," identifying five different types of codes: proairetic code (action), hermeneutic code, symbolic code, semantic code, and cultural code. These codes are given by the text and are in no way imposed upon it. Barthes argues that there should be no order placed on these codes and that they should be seen as equivalent (Sturrock, 2003).

4 Analysis and Discussion

Proairetic Code

The Proairetic code describes a system of actions and reactions in the text. The action starts in the story when Jim tries to start the radio: "Jim struck the cabinet repeatedly, but there was no response; the Schubert was lost to them forever" (Cheever, 1947), but the radio didn't respond. The new radio was then brought because they both enjoyed listening to the radio. "The radio was delivered at the kitchen door the following afternoon" (p.1). Irene was threatened by the radio's odiousness after seeing it. "She was stuck at once with the physical ugliness of large gumwood cabinet" (p.1). The action alarms the readers about what's on the radio that threatens her. Irene tried to understand the radio's functions: "She was confounded by the number of dials and switches on the instrument panel, and she studied them thoroughly before she put the plug into a wall socket and turned the radio on" (p.1). The radio transmits different sounds, such as elevator doors, bells, and crackling sounds. and one day Jim and Irene were eating supper, and they overheard Jim say, "For Christ's sake, Kathy," he said, "do you always have to play the piano when I get home?" (p.2). These voices create suspense for the reader, who is left wondering what has happened and how the characters will respond. "Irene asked to try another station. He turned the knob. "Have you seen my garters?" "A man's garters?" the man said again. (p.3). They got up from the table to investigate. What took place? Further, they found out that the radio transmitted their neighbor's sounds, which Irene listened to interestingly, and one day when Jim arrived home after work, she said, "Go up to 16-C, Jim," she screamed. Don't take off your coat. Go up to 16-C. "Mr. Osborn is beating his wife." (p.5). After hearing news about Osborn beating his wife, he said, "You know you don't have to listen to this sort of thing" (p.5). Jim turns off the radio instead of going to stop him. The radio reveals all the secrets of her neighbors, and at last, the most significant action takes place when Jim says to Irene, "Oh, I am sick!" He shouted. I'm sick to death of your apprehensiveness. The radio can't hear us. Nobody can hear us. And what if they hear us? Who cares?" (p.7). He expressed his rage to Irene and revealed all the secrets. Frightened and requests that Jim be quiet. "Please, Jim," she said. "Please, they'll hear us" (p.7). The reader was left wondering if it was true that radio could also transmit their sounds.

Hermeneutic Code

This code refers to enigmatic elements of text. untold reality, which is not explained directly in the text but which the reader comprehends. The title "*The Enormous Radio*" appears as an enigma at first. It forces the reader to ask, "Why was this title chosen?" What is its significance? Why is the word colossal in the title? Is it a mystery? It is a riddle for a reader until he understands the significance of the title. When the writer says that "his manners were earnest, vehement, and intentionally naive" (p.1), The word intentionally is disturbing in Jim's description; however, is Jim truly naive or is he pretending to be naive? If he is pretending, then why is he acting this way? What was his purpose? On the other hand, Jim said to Irene that she must stop listening to the radio and turn it off (p.5). When Irene tells Jim to stop Osborn from beating his wife, Jim says, "Turn the radio off." Why did Jim do this? Why didn't he go and stop him? The major enigma in "*The Enormous Radio*" is that money is the basic issue, which is revolved throughout the story. It was stated that they were satisfied with their income, but Irene wanted to appear to be very wealthy, her neighbor Charlie's husband didn't want to go to the doctor because medical expenditures are depressing, another neighbor compelled her boy to attend school because she had paid eight hundred dollars to enroll him in school, and Mr. Hutchinson's mother is dying of cancer because they lack funds to see a clinic. Jim said at the end of the story that the repair of the radio cost 400 dollars, and this melancholy was followed by other secrets of Irene, including that she had neglected to pay her clothing bills. He exposed all of Irene's secrets as the dispute continued. That's how it can be said: everyone has a secret, and everyone works to maintain their social standings.

Semantic Code

The reader attempts to deduce additional meaning from this code beyond its denotative context. The story's title, "*The Enormous Radio*", a connotative meaning can be derived, namely, that technology invades our privacy and creates insecurity; it seems as if it poses a danger to our survival. It shows how being aware of other people's business affects you; it illustrates how technology brings them out of their blissful ignorance. Irene and Jim are both addicted to radio, which has become so important in their lives that it has exposed their harsh realities.

Radio symbolizes today's television, how this technology dramatizes reality, and how human thoughts are affected by these dramatized realities. In the text, when the writer says, "she wore a coat of fitch skin dyed to resemble mink" (p.1), its connotative meaning is that although Irene seems to be happy with her average income, she wished to look like an affluent girl. When Irene asked Jim if they are "hypocrites, money-hungry, or dishonest, are we?" (p.6). And Jim replied, "No, darling" (p.6). Jim apparently denied that he was concerned about money, but he claimed during his conversation with Irene that he had spent a lot of money on the radio's repair.

Symbolic Code

Symbolic code describes the binary system or binary contrasts. In text of "*The Enormous Radio*" the binary polarity is present when writer said "The Westcott's differed from their friends, their classmates, their neighbors only in an interest they shared in serious music" (p.1). They were interested in music listening which is opposite to their society's interest and they rarely told their friends about their interest. Another binary polarity is present when Jim said Irene "I bought this damned radio to give you some pleasure-I thought it make you happy. I wanted to make you happy" (p.5). On the contrary, radio delivers melancholy, dissatisfaction and anxiety which destroy the joyful circle of Irene's house. Then in the middle of story Jim asked Irene "Why do you have to listen to this stuff it makes you so miserable?" (p.6). while Irene has obsession to listen the radio, despite the fact it made him depressed, she was curious to hear the radio.

Cultural code

Cultural code A refers to previous knowledge about cultural, social, and psychological aspects of the text. The Missouri Waltz is the state song of Missouri, and it is also associated with the University of Missouri. This song, which is played at every home football game by Marching Mizzou, appears to have become the culture of that society, and when Irene hears it, it "reminded her of thin, scratchy music from old-fashioned phonograph that she sometimes heard across the lake where she spent her summers" (p.2). Madison Avenue is known as a shopping Centre for wealthy people. It is known for its graceful fashion and jewelry. Irene's neighbor found a diamond, and she said it must be Mrs. Dunston's bracelet, and his husband told her to "take it down to the jeweler on Madison Avenue and sell it" (p.5). The Salvation Army Band is affiliated with corps and performs in public during Christian events on the calendar. Irene says to Jim, "They're really such nice people, aren't they?" (p.5) because now she is aware of her neighbor's hypocrisy. Sweeney's nurse sings a poem, "Lady Jingly." Lady Jingly! will you come and be my wife, sitting where the pumpkins blow? said the Yonghy—Bonghy—Bo" (p.3). This poem was written by Edward Lear and shows the social influence of writers on society.

5 Conclusion

This research paper sums up that every text creates aesthetic pleasure and this aesthetic pleasure is meaningless without the structure of any story. Similarly, the short story "*The Enormous Radio*" has narrative structure which gives insight into the theme and structure of the text and gives chance to readers to approach the text grammatically. This paper will support readers to apply structuralist aspects on every short story, novel and poem through textual analysis because every work in the field of literature has structure and this structure can analyze definitely through theory of Roland Barthes' five codes. Further the short story "*The Enormous Radio*" can analyze in light of Saussure's concept of signifier and signified.

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