

A POST-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF SHAHRAZ'S SHORT STORY A PAIR OF JEANS

Izzah Rashid*

ABSTRACT

The paper qualitatively provides a post-structural analysis of Shahraz's short story, A Pair of Jeans under the implementation of Barthesian five codes' theory. The paper aims to decode the hidden voices of the target story and follows Barthes' theoretical framework as „text is a galaxy of signifiers that can be unfolded and understood through the application of five codes, namely; proairetic, hermeneutic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural, on it.“ Relying on text-based analysis, the study shows that the target story has several words and dialogues that have multiple meanings. Here Miriam's jeans and short vest connotatively undermine her innocence and makes her an epitome of imperfection. Her first persona and second persona, her modernism versus traditionalism of her parents-in-law, etc., are thematic polarities of the story. There are certain referential words including jeans, sari, shawl, duppata, etc., which share the cultural knowledge of our world. Finally, the paper concludes that application of codes on the selected text enhances an understanding of the reader to justify its genre and its several themes in writerly/modern reading style.

INTRODUCTION

Post-structuralism is a critique of structural science which asserts on an unfixed and unstable nature of language. According to post-structuralists, language is a medium by which a single idea can be interpreted into multiple meanings. The concept widens the scope of literary analysis of novels, poems and stories. Keeping this notion, a critic can provide several interpretations to a single literary piece.

BSc English, University of Okara*

The French linguist, Roland Barthes belongs to the domain of post structural theorists. Being a critical narratologist, he abandons the traditional concept of interpreting a narrative according to the closed structure of the text or according to the fixed point of view of the author. While, he states that a text (narrative) is a galaxy of signifiers which can produce multiple meanings by the participation of the reader in a meaning producing phenomenon (Barthes, 1974). He proposes a theory of five codes which helps the reader to unfold and understand any narrative into several meanings. The article provides a post-structural analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's short story A Pair of Jeans. The paper applies Barthesian five codes on the target story. Relying on step-by-step text text-based analysis method, the study aims to explore the concealed meanings, multiple voices, and so also the depth of text.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

THEORY OF FIVE CODES

Barthes mentions that all narratives have one or all the five codes that work as “weaving of voice” (1974, p. 20) of that narrative (Lashari, 2013, p. 118). These codes are the proairetic, the hermeneutic, the semic, the symbolic, and the cultural code (Barry, 2002, p.151).

1. THE PROAIRETIC CODE

The code is also termed as the “narrative code” (Eagleton, 1993, p. 120). It refers to those elements of a narrative which create tension in its plot. These suspensive elements play dual role in a text. At first, they proclaim that something is going to happen and secondly, they make the reader attentive and respondent to resolve the tension. Here, the reader tries to get an advance knowledge about the actions by asking some of the questions as „What will be the reaction of a certain action?“

2. THE HERMENEUTIC CODE

The hermeneutic code is also known as the code of “enigma” (Selden, Widows & Brooker, 2005). It refers to all the enigmatic, puzzling and mysterious elements of a text that make reader curious to unveil their mystery. Here, the reader tends to disclose certain secrets by asking several questions of his/her knowledge as “what is happening and why that happening is? What is the obstacle?”

3. THE SEMANTIC CODE

The semantic code is also termed as the connotative code (Barry, 2002, p. 151). It refers to those elements of a text which can better be understood by implying their suggestive and connotative meanings. According to Barthes, all narratives have some definite “characters, places and objects” that connotatively help the reader to understand the theme of the text (Eagleton, 1993, p. 120).

THE SYMBOLIC CODE

This code is also known as antithetical code (Barthes, 1974, p.19). It resembles to semantic code and thence it creates a difficulty for the readers to make a clear distinction between semantic and symbolic codes. As Felluga mentions that “Barthes is not always clear in the distinction between these two codes”. The code refers to the antithetical and contrasted elements of the text by which the reader (being a poststructuralist) tries to organize the reality (Barry, 2002, p. 151; & Seldon, et al., 2005, p. 152). Through this code the reader focuses on the binary polarities.

5. THE CULTURAL CODE

This code is also referred as the referential code (Barthes, 1974, p.20). It pertains to those elements which share a common knowledge of the world. Here, the reader focuses on the physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary and historical properties of characters of the story to identify a common knowledge (Barthes, 1974; & Felluga, n.d.).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study is based on textual analysis process which is conducted through step by step method. Step-by-step method is a particular method used by Barthes in his S/Z in which he divides Sarrasine, a French novella, into lexias and then applies the five codes on it. Though in the paper, we do not divide the target text into lexias, yet have tried to follow a few other steps proposed by Barthes.

At the beginning, the text was examined (story) carefully to identify its embodied suspense, enigmas, symbols, binary polarities and cultural references that are five elements of Barthes' theory. It was found that the story has several dialogues and words that may be interpreted in multiple ways: then, we divided the text into five segments corresponding to the characteristics of the five codes. Finally, we designed to discuss the analyzed data in the present paper in two ways. Firstly, it presents a critical overview of the story and secondly, it discusses the results from the application of five codes on the selected narrative.

CONCLUSION

Now, it can be concluded that the application of five codes on the selected story discloses it into five different voices. The codes help reader to understand the theme in a new dimension. Here the proairetic and the hermeneutic elements work together and develop the plot. The semantic meanings of the words "Jeans" and "tradition" give in-depth understanding to the ironic representation of Miriam's modern dress which ruptures the traditional concept/dreams of Begum and Ayub. The antithetical code helps reader to understand the psyche of characters. It gives a clue of thought that how cultures represents identity of man.

The cultural code gives light to the embodied Eastern and Western cultures, especially Pakistani and Indian marriage systems, and their baseless ideology of patriarchy. The plot and the characters altogether develop the theme of cultural clash. Pakistani people love their culture

and Islamic principle and if anyone rebels against their established rules in the name of modernism so they break their relationship with them as Begum breaches the engagement of Miriam and Farook.

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