Typology of Narrative Codes: A Post-structural Analysis of Text Encoded in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy (2008)*

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Abstract

This paper tends to explore narrative codes embedded in the text of Morrison's novel, *A Mercy (2008)*. For this, the present research takes Ronald Barthes model of narrative codes which consists of five different codes as primary approach while the analytical part also utilizes the theory of binary opposition as poststructuralists have proposed. Barthesian model involves five narrative codes; *Enigma, Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic* and *Cultural* code. Barthes argues that to understand the mystery, plot structure, binary opposition and cultural representation in a literary text, a reader should focus on these five codes. In the light of Enigma the analytical part shows that Morrison's text holds a complex and to some extent odd narration. While the plot structure is narrated through various voices and does not follow a linear series of events. However, the symbolic inquiry reveals the ways in which women suffer through threatened, violence and patriarchy; black life restrained under stereotype social commands and the abuses of slavery. However, from cultural, gender discrimination prevailing in society compelled females to consider they are stigma. Thus, the entire discussion aptly concludes thatBathesian model is remained throughout a powerful tool in analyzing Morrison's novel to conduct the structural and thematic analysis.
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Keywords: Post-structuralism, narrative codes, binary opposition, plot structure, semantic, culture

1. Introduction

Post-structuralism in literature has acquired philosophical and critical approach leaving behind textual approach in fiction. It has taken into light the reader centered approach for the better version of understanding the text. Moreover, it has followed the Saussure's philosophy of language

providing instability of the language having stable meaning in the text. Post-structualists put more

emphasis on taking language just beyond the written and speaking domain; rather it signifies how a

single meaning or phrase could have a different meaning while conceptually analyzing its determinacy in the text. This theory of difference was given by Derrida.

Barthes is a key theorist of this post-structuralist theory of truth. He openly challenges the restriction on the reader while reading a text. He demands the truth for the reader which he actively perceives during the reading. This is when a new meaning to the text is given every time a person with different mind-set and cultural conception is going through it.

Structuralism deals with the study of literature, which is the compilation of underlying experiences of human behaviour, in a systematic way. It does it to understand the literary text systematically and putting aside the thematic aside to secondary place.

Ronald Barthes, a French structuralist, philosopher and linguist in his book described methods of literary analysis. He gave five methods of literary analysis: Enigma code, proairetic code, semantic code, symbolic code and cultural code (Barthes, 1995). All these codes to systematically define the network space of meaning in the text. The present study uses Barthes' five codes to analyze Tony Morrison novel "*A Mercy (2008)*" to determine how far the theory is applicable and relevant to different contexts.

1.1 Rationale

Post-structuralist philosophers propose that text is non-static in terms of sign and signification. Whereby the words of the text do not signify ultimate truth for which we can take the signification as a whole. Holding this uncertainty of meanings, the text of Morrison's *A Mercy (2008)* escapes the limitations of culture, time and space. Further, the plot structure is woven with ambiguous and multiple emerging themes. To understand and explore such complexity, Barthes has established a model of five narrative codes which helps reader to employ the appropriate meaning to a particular text; unfold the plot structure and explicate the core theme. In this regard, the present research aims to analyze and interpret the text of A Mercy (2008) by utilizing Barthes' model of narrative codes. These narrative codes predominantly provide a practical paradigm to analyze the structure of text and interpreting techniques.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To understand the art of fabricating narrative codes in the text
- To unfold contiguous fragments of plot structure
- To sentence the genre of literary text through its dominating premise and theme

1.3 Research Questions:

Primary Question

   1. How the structure of Morrison's novel is tangled with a series of narrative codes?

Secondary Questions

   a) How the text of *A Mercy* articulates the core narrative of binary opposition?

   b) How plot of the novel is compiled with multiple entrances and exits?

2. A Review of Relevant Literature

Foucault (1980), like Derrida (1974), opposes the notion of language structure as a single principle. Foucault assumes that it is, under certain circumstances, the ability to put meaning into speech instead of fixed punctuation. In the same way, Edwards (1990) challenges the notion of contextual and universal structure to eliminate ambiguity and language openness, and cultural significance" (p. 40). Belsey (2002) in his article on post-structuralism states that in the text "language is a way in which a single concept can be translated into many meanings" (p. 5).

This freedom expands the compass of text analysis in pieces of text. Literacy reading can only be understood by considering the plasticity of the language. Selden, Widdowson & Brooker (2005) also view this as a "mystery code" for revealing the mysterious parts that binds the reader to the end so that he may know the unspoken truth through the guessing path. Semantic code makes it necessary to understand the meanings of text elements in order to find their indirect meanings. This can help readers to identify those "characters, places and objects" that according to Zaib and Mashori (2014) are important in understanding the text. Narrative, the most widely accepted style of writing, is a story whether it is told in a prose or a verse, describing the actions of the characters (Abbott, 2020). Everything and everything else using a narrative style can be either verbal or written. . The style of narrative style can be novel, fairy tale and short story. Narratives are often classified as a form of imitation. "Mimesis" is a term used to describe writing styles that aim to mimic human behavior and knowledge (Oatley, 1995). Not only have those who are focused on literary works but also ordinary people listened to these stories at an early age from their parents and teachers. Johnson said the narrative was very acceptable to man for his own enjoyment, making both the listener and the speaker; and can block information that may be provided to the lower class as a narrative of events (Amigoni, 2000).

In addition, all meteorologists agree that a text or story can be seen as a reference system. The sign system is non-linguistic and semiotics analyzes its basic meaning. (Tyson, 2014). The symbol however, however, is the code that enables readers to recognize and clarify the meaning that is not clearly visible in the text. The meaning of the symbol depends on the codes that allow the reader to

compose part of the hidden meaning (Chandler, 2007). The functionality of the codes within the text needs to be acknowledged by readers to see the meaning of the story. Barry (2020) said Barthes presented his five-point theory to understand the basic structure of text. According to Barthes, the text itself provides the code that enables him to relate, grammar, and orderly to the elements of the story (Cuddon, 2012).

3. Research Methodology

The present study deliberately falls in the discipline of Post-structuralism and its subfield narratology. This research will follow qualitative method in both data collection and data analysis. The entire discussion will be done through referential description, logical interpretation and evidential evaluation.

Barthes' model of five-narrative codes

This study will fairly obey Barthesian model of narrative codes as core analytical framework.

1. *Enigma* code is a mystery within a text
2. *Proairetic* code is order of the narrative sequence
3. *Semantic* code involves literal and connotative meaning
4. *Symbolic* code or binary opposition where meanings come on surface by opposing or conflicting linguistic structures
5. *Cultural* code offers cultural reference in a particular social structure in which the text is produced

Enigma means any part of the story that isn't fully explained, leaving the reader with unanswered questions. It's common for authors to leave out crucial information when better the disclosure of the diegetic climax. These are referred to as "snares" (deliberate attempts to deceive) by Barthes, as well as "equivocations," "half responses," "suspended answers," and "jammings" (acknowledgments of insolubility). Barthes argues, "The diversity of these sentences (their imaginative breadth) attests to the great labour the discourse must accomplish if it desires to arrest the mystery, to keep it open" (76). The best kind of examples are mysteries with a detective in it. Everything happens because of the hermeneutic code. The narrative resolves the concerns raised by the murder at its outset. An analysis of the evidence allows the detective to piece together what happened. For an example of this code in action, see the Star Trek Lesson Plan.

The *proairetic* code is a significant structural principle that also contributes to the development of tension. The proairetic code is implicit in any narrative action. We can't help but speculate what will occur if a gunslinger opens fire on an adversary. Whether he wins or loses, we will wait. Suspense,

then, is generated not by the thirst of a reader or spectator for explanations, but by the very act of doing something.

Semantic code refers to any part of text that conveys a particular, connotative meaning. Barthes' S/initial Z's lexia links "femininity" to "Sarrasine" in the prior module because of the latter's concave shape (as opposed to the masculine form, "Sarrazin"). The novel by Balzac about a man's love for a castrato he mistakes for a woman delves into female identity. According to Barthes, "connotation" refers to "a connection immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association formed by the text-as-subject within its own system" (8). This is how Barthes draws attention to the work's significant semantic meanings.

To organise semantic meanings, often through antitheses or mediations (particularly forbidden mediations) between antithetical concepts, the ***symbolic*** code serves as a "deeper" structural principle. Barthes's understanding of the distinction between these two encodings is murky at best. The closest is Algirdas Greimas's concept of narrative antagonism and contradiction. (While the Greimas components are being built, you can check out an application to "There is a road" for a similar feel). Contradictory symbols can serve as roadblocks in writing. According to Barthes, this means that "any merging of two contradictory conceptions, every mixture, every conciliation—in short, every transit through the wall of the Antithesis" is inherently problematic. (27)

Culturally, "to a science or body of knowledge" is the reference for narrative devices (20). This means that ***cultural*** norms reflect our common worldview across the "physical, physiological, pharmaceutical, psychological, literary, historical, etc." disciplines (20). Clichés, proverbs, and other commonly used sayings are examples of the "gnomic" cultural code.

For Barthes, these five codes constitute a "weaving of voices" (20). "The grouping of codes, as they come into the work, into the flow of the reading, produce a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing" (20). (20). (160).

4. Narrative Analysis: A Mercy (2008)

4.1 Enigma Code

Intriguingly, the novel opens with the reader wondering who is narrating and to whom. Don't worry, it all kicks off with those three little words. There are questions that arise from this order, such as the source's credibility and the motivations for the recipient's fear. Second, I'm curious as to the motivation for the narrator's claim that "telling can't impact you despite what I have done." This admission from Florens suggests that he has harmed the addressee in a way that could raise suspicions.

> *Nothing frights me more than this errand ... [and] nothing is more temptation. (Ch. 1)*

Florens writes this chapter to someone who has not read the book. She "starves" for this person who abandoned her. The goal of her mission is to find the blacksmith. The errand both terrifies and tempts her at this point in the story. She suggests that this is an important and private errand.

Years later, when the blacksmith came, the weather of the place changed. (Ch. 8)

In this chapter, we learn more about Sorrow and her background. Sorrow has more brains than she gives off. Lina doesn't put much stock in the blacksmith, but she has a lot of respect for Florens and Rebekka. Only Sorrow is aware that the arrival of the blacksmith causes Jacob's death, Rebekka's illness, and Florens's falling in love. Their connection will be different now.

One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference. (Ch. 12

The final chapter is written by Florens' mother, who abandoned him. Florens's mom claims she did it in a fit of desperation to shield her daughter. Florens' mother was raped by D'Ortega. So, her mom thinks Florens's decision to follow Jacob is a good one because it gives her daughter a chance at safety and a brighter future. Even though she knows that safety is not certain, she is willing to consider it if it is preferable to the alternative. Moreover, Florens' mother reveals in the final chapter that she sent her to live with Jacob out of fear that their master might rape or mistreat her as she was growing up. Morrison emphasises Florens' mother's unfathomable anguish at having to make such a life-altering decision on the fly without explaining her reasoning to her daughter.

Florens's mother tells her why she sold her to Jacob Vaark in a scene called A Mercy. Florens's mother recalls, "It was a mercy." Florens's mother thinks that as a slave, Florens would have suffered. Jacob will be gentler to Florens, something her mother enjoys.

4.2 ProaireticCode

A young slave girl named Florens was shown right at the start of the action, which marked the commencement of the exposition phase of the story. Her mother was unable to provide for her, and a number of other trying circumstances led to the sale of her to Jacob. A little later on, the activity slows down when she realises she loves Blacksmith. "There is no protection" powerfully shows the mother's concern that Florens would be harmed by the master's or his son's sexual abuse if she continued to live with her. This fear was fueled by the fact that the master had a son who was also sexually abusive. At the conclusion of the book, Florens finds her own voice through the writing she creates for herself.

4.3 Semantic Code

Once they terrified her, then they rescued her. (Ch. 4)

Lina thinks of her relationships with Europeans through the lens of a Native American. The smallpox brought by Europeans wiped out the majority of her people. Some European guys saved

her and a few youngsters when they burned down the village to eradicate the sickness. Lina appreciates Jacob's generosity, but she still has to work for him. She doesn't understand his behaviour and has a negative impression of white people in general. She finally says, "Judge them one at a time."

Morrison's modernist novel, A Mercy, is not set in contemporary African American culture but rather early 18th-century America. Throughout the narrative, we see four women, including British Rebekka and Sorrow, an orphan, as well as Indian Lena and young black slave Florens, and two males, both indentured workers, vehemently fighting their roles as slaves, husbands, and servants. The critique of male control in Morrison's 1998 novel Paradise is deepened and Beloved's historical viewpoint is adopted in A Mercy. Thanks to her notoriety, Morrison saw her work cross over into the realm of the mainstream to become postmodern and popular.

At least thrice throughout A Mercy, Jacob relies on his wife Rebekka. She is her husband's "servant," "prostitute," and "wife." Additionally. Like Jacob's sex ritual, all the women of A Mercy serve their lords, Rebekka. It was a May tradition for all the women to gather together and fill tubs with hot water and get ready for a soak master. Women still hold men in high regard even when they show less concern than their female counterparts, men as predators who can defend their territory and ensure their place in the social order. Feminine characters are reassuring to female readers. But males tend to ignore their emotions and they do so for purely aesthetic reasons.

4.4 Symbolic Code

Morrison writes, "a corn-husk doll sitting on a shelf is soon splayed in the corner, and the account of how it got there is obvious." The picture represents both something great and dreadful, and it has the power to "wickedly" affect a doll. To be wicked is to conceal evil. Florens, the narrator, is a young slave girl who questions the motivations of whoever is creating these puzzles. Morrison conceals the blacksmith's identity until the end of the story. Morrison also makes use of the footwear that has been an obsession of hers, Florens's shoes. They stand for her fragile sense of worth and her need for security.

Florens' mother disapproves of her shoe obsession as a child. After her mother abandons her, Lina tells Florens that shoes won't toughen her feet, foreshadowing her weakness. Morrison suggests Florens associates shoes with civility and can't stand going barefoot. Shoes represent humanity and protection in the narrative, and Florens' shoes are taken twice. Her shoes are stolen on the first trip to Jacob Vaark's farm. Lina gives Florens her first pair of real soft shoes, emphasising their surrogate mother-daughter relationship. Florens says Malaik took her shoes again, forcing her to trek to Jacob's farm barefoot. After another apparent blacksmith abandonment, this act ultimately toughens her feet, mirroring her soul.

Despite Jacob Vaark's initial scorn for the D'Ortegas' mansion, his visit seems to plant the idea that a home could be a symbol of a family's lineage. After the deaths of his children, Jacob becomes preoccupied with his legacy. For a man who previously looked unconcerned with social status and material wealth, his obsession with constructing the home is indicative of a profound change in his outlook. After investing in a sugar plantation in Barbados that employs slave labour, Jacob's moral compass begins to erode. Because of his obsession with wealth and material possessions, Jacob does not live to enjoy his new home.

4.5 Cultural Code

This part analyses Toni Morrison's A Mercy through the lenses of cultural memory and ethnic cultural identity. Many American historical monuments and museums were implicated in slavery, and Morrison employs architecture, inscription, and the body to question and challenge their legitimacy. Jacob, a white coloniser, builds an extravagant mansion to reflect his ideals, but it soon becomes a blasphemous shrine to slavery. Morrison inscribes the shared horror of African women slaves onto the domestic space with Florens. Lina, a Native American who has suffered cultural trauma, subtly introduces elements of Indian culture into White culture and performs this reformed culture, incorporating its sediments into her own body. Morrison uses the historical approach to the concept of "culture memory" in A Mercy, prompting the reader to reconsider what constitutes a valid American cultural memory.

Florens, Lina, and Sorrow are three farm slaves who our protagonists follow throughout the novel. The three women share a common bond despite their divergent histories. The point of view of the characters shifts from chapter to chapter, and sometimes even within the same chapter. Mismatched syntax and sentence structure make reading challenging. This is one of the ways in which Morrison forces her readers to pay attention to the finer points of her story.

When Florens first sees the blacksmith's shop, that's when she starts to consider her own autonomy for the first time. By having the blacksmith accuse Florens of having "become mentally a slave," Morrison examines how a person's birth into slavery might shape his or her identity. Morrison places her fictional characters in historically accurate locations to highlight the contrast between the two extremes of slavery and freedom. Though it would have lasting effects, Jacob Vaark removes Florens from her mother in secret. A look at the experiences of Lina, Sorrow, Willard, and Scully reveals how indentured slavery left them vulnerable to exploitation and torture. Morrison illustrates how D'Ortega and Jacob treat slaves like objects rather than people. Men of their calibre amass wealth off the backs of slaves and make decisions devoid of empathy.

In A Mercy, we see people of different races, social classes, and genders fighting for their individuality as the society around them evolves. This employs sociological theories of memory and

trauma to analyse how Morrison's dispossessed characters navigate between the need to form bonds with strangers in the New World for their physical or spiritual survival, and the need to cling to memories from their past that help them maintain a sense of who they are. In this struggle between the past and the future, memory often stands in the way of adaptation. Oftentimes, characters are hampered by their own traumatic memories. Morrison's abandoned and displaced characters share the vulnerabilities and shared concerns that serve to both separate and bind them throughout A Mercy. A character's current connection to society is built on the foundation of their past friendships and acquaintances.

5. Conclusion

Not only does Morrison build a complicated narrative with various levels of narration, but she also subverts the immovable subjectivity of the American Empire by her inventive use of language. This is accomplished in the context of the novel "Beloved." As a result, A Mercy plays the role of a mediator between explanations that are overly simplistic and intricate happenings. Her reputation as a powerful voice is, however, called into question due to the linguistic immaturity of the other characters as well as the narrator. Its narrative terrain is a parody on the lives of people of a diverse range of racial and cultural backgrounds living in the United States of America. Nevertheless, the author emphasises the significance of women preserving their sense of self-respect and never allowing themselves to be pushed down. As a consequence of this, the Bathesian model proved to be quite helpful while analysing the novel by Morrison from both a structural and a thematic perspective.

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