SYMBOLIC CODE OF S/Z: A SEMIOLOGICAL READING OF JAMES JOYCE'S

"TWO GALLANTS"

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Abstract

Like a number of other stories of *Dubliners*, "Two Gallants" because of it coded polyphony is debatable on the level of significance. It seems that the story strategically convey some crucial information to the reader by deciphering its symbolic codes. Accordingly, this study in accord with Roland Barthes' semiology and specified codes in *S/Z* makes an attempt to explicate the symbolic codes and structural components that carry an invisible message of James Joyce's "Two Gallants."

Keywords: semiology; sign, symbolic code; negative polarity; Two Gallants; Dubliners

Academic Discipline: Semiology

Introduction

Semiology is the general science of signs. Barthes advocates semiology for its explanatory energy and power of estrangement, the power that coerces one into looking closely at what goes without saying and to make explicit what one implicitly knows. Similarly, Barthes in *S/Z* demonstrates that "the world we perceive is one not of 'facts,' but rather of 'signs about facts,' which we encode and decode ceaselessly from signifying systems to signifying system" (Waugh, 2006, p. 271). In *S/Z* Barthes, as a structuralist and due to the "principle of parsimony" (Chandler, 2007, P. 149), enumerates five codes employed in literary texts. One of these codes is symbolic code. This code is a structural and complicated code. With a resort to this code, complexities of the elements of a text can be elucidated since there is an antithetical nature behind each of them. In other words, antithesis is one of the important rhetorical figures related to this code. By putting antitheses beside each other, the symbolic layers of text show up. Barthes believes that in stories meaning originates from a binary opposition or differentiation and symbolic codes are based on this criterion.

Since symbolic codes can create many meaning in the text, unitary meaning cannot be followed. Furthermore, the symbolic structure is completely reversible: it can be read in any direction. Barthes declares that: "The five codes mentioned . . . in fact endow the text with a kind of plural quality (the text is actually polyphonic), but of the five codes, only three establish per-mutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time (the semic, cultural, and symbolic codes)" (Barthes, 1970/1990, P. 30). He adds that "As a symbolic ideality, the character has no chronological standing" (Barthes, 1970/1990, P. 68). Because symbolic code guides extrapolation from text to symbolic and thematic readings (although an adequate account of thematic interpretation would have to do more than specify models for symbolic reading) and can be assigned to the realm of character respectively, distinguishing between it and connotative code seems troublesome.

In order to elucidate the symbolic codes and examine the antithetical nature of "Two Gallants" the concept of polarity is helpful. Polarity is a choice between positive and negative. Structurally, "negative polarity is a formally marked category in the sense that negatives are typically formed by adding linguistic material to their positive counterparts" (Norgaard, 2007, P. 36). Furthermore, negative polarities are not just formally formed, but also exist in terms of their pragmatic function. Talmy Givon (b. 1936) one of the founders of functionalism in linguistics distinguishes three general categories of negatives: "syntactic negation, morphological negation, and inherent negation" (Givon, 1993, P. 202). According to semiotic studies, recognizing and deciphering symbolic codes also entails decoding antitheses or negative polarities.

According to Barthes in order to reveal the codes of a text the best way is dismantling the text into lexias or textual signifiers of changing length that have a specific effect or function different from that of neighbouring stretches of text. Therefore, this research according to the applied methodology in *S/Z* divides the text of "Two Gallants" into several lexias in order to identify and decipher its symbolic codes.

Discussion

Polyphony and polarity are salient features of *Dubliners*, especially "Two Gallants": a short story of vitiated gallantry and inverted romance about two young Irishmen, Lenehan and Corley, that at their inchoate dialogue reminds one of its presumed antithetical counterpart, *Don Quixote* (1605). The first polarity that attracts attention is polyphony of gaze. The pantomimic quality of the gaze can be interpreted as a symbolic promulgation for the semiology of the story as a whole. In *Dubliners*, "Joyce unrelentingly represents the female body as the object of the male gaze" (Conboy, 1991, P. 407). By recalling Roland Barthes' statement that "the Text is not the decomposition of the work, it is the work that is the imaginary tail of the Text; or again, the Text is experienced only in an activity of production" (1977, P. 157), one may find ways to be a resisting reader: to read against the text's logic. Therefore, this gaze can have an equivocal nature. It begins from "An Encounter" where the supposed feminized little boy runs into an apparent pederast and encounters with "the gaze of a pair of bottle-green eyes" (*Dubliners* 20), haunts the houses of "Araby" that "gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces" (*Dubliners* 23), obsesses the mind of little boy by the brown figure of Mangan's sister, and finds its stable venue in "Two Gallants." Identically, at the debut of its plot in order to seduce and annex the young woman Lenehan, as a surrogate for his friend Corley, tries to stipulate the condition by gazing at her: "'Let's have a look at her, Corley,' he said" (*Dubliners* 50). Behind the contravention of heterosexual gallantry, it seems that there exist solidification of homo-social chivalry—men protecting the probity of men. In an antithetical counterparts Lenehan finds his own body vulnerable to scrutiny by others when he enters a bar: "The mechanic and the two work-girls examined him point by point" (*Dubliners* 53). The first selected lexie signifies that spectating is masculinized; the second lexie insinuates that the spectacle is feminized or psychologically paralyzed. With the help of the first lines of *Dubliners* where the word paralysis sounds strangely to the little boy, the name of paralysis can appropriately be allocated to this symbolic code: "Paralysis is the inability of physical movement, but it is also a spiritual, social, cultural, political, and historical malaise" (Bulson, 2006, P. 36). This code has absolute affinities with other codes such as defeat, self-oppression, and entrapment. The signs and motif of paralysis can equally be found in each single story of *Dubliners*: for example, Eveline Hill in "Eveline" is a creature "passive, like a helpless animal" (*Dubliners* 35) who is paralyzed and unable to accept the chance of new life she is offered.

In the lexias "uncovered wooden table" (*Dubliners* 52) there is an instance of morphological negation that unconsciously attracts attention to its establishment: the awareness of the word negated by the prefix which means that the table could have been covered but is not. In the story that is ostensibly about male sexual potency and merciless power, its venue as male economic impotence maybe neglected. The absence of tablecloth signifies that the bar is a place of inferior standards. This lack of quality that appears to be a simply trivial detail is a sign which helps the characterization of Lenehan as being more indigent than he pretends to be. Here fraternal gallantry in the midst of insolvent economic and symbolic systems becomes equivalent with deception, perfidy or decomposed codes of honour. Not only Corley has

misrepresented himself carnally in order to earn money out of financial need, but also Lenehan has metamorphosed into a procurer of sorts (a kind of "Madam" that appears in "The Boarding House," the subsequent story of *Dubliners*) by his own fiscal insecurity.

The incompatible concepts also play a role in the construal of Corley's girlfriend character:

The ends of her tulle collarette had been carefully disordered and a big bunch of red flowers was pinned in her bosom stems upwards. Lenehan's eyes noted approvingly her stout short muscular body. Frank rude health glowed in her face, on her fat red cheeks and in her unabashed blue eyes. (*Dubliners* 51)

From a particular time until now a girl on a date is usually expected to have ordered her clothing, so the fact that the girl has disordered her collarette seems a bit weird and unconventional. Since her garment is "carefully disordered," (*Dubliners* 51) she may have done so according to some fashion of the time, but this weirdness appears to match the rest of the girl's description such as her "unabashed" (*Dubliners* 51) blue eyes that could be abashed. These signs not only transmit a quality of the girl's appearance and eyes, but furthermore explicitly inform of what she could have been, but is not.

Another type of contradictory concept that occurs in the description of Corley's while he meets the girl is a syntactic negation: "He approached the young woman and, without saluting, began at once to converse with her" (*Dubliners* 51). If "without saluting" was omitted from Corley's meeting with the girl, the sentence would express the same thing empirically, that is to say Corley does not salute the girl. The importance of its existence is in its opposition, saluting: a decent and respectable action when meeting someone. Like the title of story, the polarity here functions as "an instruction to modify the world-building parameters which have already been set up" (Werth, 1999, P. 144). By means of this sign, the attention is drawn to the significance of an undone action. This sign therefore has the effect of foregrounding certain impertinency and intimacy, which intensifies the sense of the dissimilarity between Corley's behavior and the gallantry that the title looks forward to. He has symbolized a reverse wooing, heroism and harlotry. Instead of being magnanimous in his love affair, he estimated to swindle the woman and coerce her to spend her scant salary: "Cigarettes every night she'd bring me and paying the tram out and back" (*Dubliners* 46).

The young woman quick short steps versus Corley's long stride also represent her miserable state. Her relation with Corley who in her eyes has "a bit of class" (*Dubliners* 47) contrasts with the romantic and nationalistic legends which are related to the Ireland harp. Moreover, her face which ranks "rude health" (*Dubliners* 51) contrasts with Lenehan's face which "had a ravaged look" (*Dubliners* 45). Totally, she is his counterpoint. Her thraldom is due to poverty of the purse and financial necessity, but Lenehan's thraldom is not obligatory. It is optional and discretionary. Furthermore, the cigarettes that every night she brings for Corley and paying the tram out and back versus Lenehan offering Corley a cigarette and Corley's paying the price of other girls' tram tickets signifies that unknowingly they are slave like the young woman and trapped in the circle. Their thralldom and paralysis also implies prior freedom and vitality.

These polarities in Joyce's Jargon sometimes are connected with a verbal process. The statement that Corley does not answer Lenehan heightens the awareness that he could have done so, and to make the reader consider the significance of his not doing so:

The two young men walked up the street without speaking, the mournful music following them . . . the noise of trams, the lights, and the crowd, released them from their silence . . . Work it all right now, Said Lenehan in farewell. Corley did not answer . . . They did not seem to be speaking. (*Dubliners* pp. 51-54)

In the quoted lines, there is also a model of Corley using silence to evince his authority over his accomplice since for Lenehan maintaining the conversation is a crucial means of keeping intimate relations with Corley. In the next selected lexie the act of speaking refers to both gallants. Here silence can be construed: their release from it is indicative that speech takes priority over silence. When Corley and the girl are returning from their date a similar dialogue approximately happens. The negative polarity encodes the additional information that Corley and the girl could have been talking and that the scene is seen from the perspective of Lenehan who thought talking equates to amity and means that everything is immaculate.

The first paragraph of story which in a romantic way describes evening of Dublin, "The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily colored crowd" (*Dubliners* 45) and its seemingly happy people under pearl like lamps contrasts with the harsh and realist description of last paragraph: "Corley halted at the first lamp and stared grimly before him. Then with a grave gesture he extended a hand towards the light" (*Dubliners* 56). Similarly, for the woman after acquiescing to Corley's plan the verge of "the turf" looms closer at the end than it did at the beginning of the story. In fact, the lamp that represents a romantic luminosity at the beginning becomes a manifestation of excruciating realism at the end, and divulges the greed, hypocrisy and disgracefulness, the main ideas of the subsequent story of *Dubliners*, "The Boarding House." Therefore, all of these ambivalent, antithetic lexias become signs which authenticate and lead to the symbolic code of "simony." The word "simony," that to accompaniment of "paralysis" appears in the first lines of *Dubliners*, in Catholicism stands for the act of buying or selling ecclesiastical services, but it also connotes the dehumanizing or debasement of love, religion, and the intellect. Similar to code of paralysis this code is dominant in the stories. The "simony" or moral paralysis of Dublin is seen from the child's limited, naïve point of view to which it appears (in the figures of paralyzed priest of "The Sisters" and the pervert of "An Encounter") as something mysterious because not yet experienced or understood and also penetrated at the end of "Araby" as mere shabby vanity, where the boy is confused about lust and love. This ambiguity continues up to "Two Gallants" and reaches to its apex in "The Boarding House" where Mrs. Mooney makes use of the word "business" (*Dubliners* 59) instead of marriage, a "mercenary search for an advantageous sum" (Boysen, 2008, p. 163). According to this symbolic code some stories of *Dubliners* teach a lesson:

"not that lovers are fools, or that romantic feeling is only for experienced lovers, but that love is both spiritual and carnal" (Herring, 1987, P. 33).

Conclusion

Since semiology has a close connection to the literary conventions such as the rules or formal elements, in terms of literary analysis there is some overlap between it and reader-response criticism. Semioticians believe that the structures we perceivein literatureare projections of the structures of humanconsciousness.So, they seek a universal science that would link innate structures of human consciousness to all human experience, behavior, and production. This science exists at the level of langue or what they call code. Because signs are classified within codes and codes are in relation with each other and mutable through time, the perspective that a reader chooses while encoding them is of importance.

Dubliners the most widely read of Joyce's works needs to be seen as a starting point of his career as an incredibly ingenious and talented writer. Joyce believed that the domination of Roman Catholic Church and the British Empire over his country were the main causes of Dublin backwardness and inferiority. They made the Irish paralytic and learned them to oppress themselves. It was precisely this paralysis and self-oppression that first frustrated and then motivated Joyce to write. As it was demonstrated and clarified according to Roland Barthes classification, the symbolic code of paralysis can be considered as a major symbolic code around which the whole sign system of the text turns. It has strong affinities with other symbolic codes such as simony. Simony that denotatively means the selling of material goods for spiritual benefit, through the course of signs connotes the vulgarization of religion, romance, and the intellect.

Although Joyce and Barthes never met each other and *S/Z* was written twenty nine years after the death of Joyce, this study demonstrated that the applied codes in *Dubliners* and especially "The Boarding House" are categorically corresponding to those of *S/Z*. It means that not only can the text of "The Boarding House" be encoded by the same criteria Barthes encoded "Sarrasine" but also Joyce himself presents particular names for these codes. Despite the fact that Barthes' codes are not magical codes that open doors for any final interpretation, they do contribute to the rich texture of short story and demonstrate the degree to which "The Boarding House" was shaped by the evocative power of signs.

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