

SEMIOTIC HIDDEN CODES IN THE SHORT STORY “A ROSE FOR EMILY” BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

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Abstract

This research discusses the application of Semiotic theory proposed by Rolland Barthes which describes that literary work has some symbolic codes viewed from Semiotic studies. In this analysis the writer discusses a short story “A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner published in 1930. Here, the writer wants to prove the existence of some symbolic codes semiotically in the short story.

This research is qualitative research by using descriptive method. Data is gained by library research method and other sources taken from the web. In this research, the data is analysed based on its relationship with the purpose of the research both intrinsic and extrinsic element in literary work, then applying five codes in Semiotic theory proposed by Barthes.

After applying the symbolic codes into the short story, the writer found there are three symbolic codes hidden in “A Rose for Emily”, proairetic, hermeneutic, and cultural code. The proairetic code gives the reader explanation about what happen to the main character during her life and the cause of her madness. The hermeneutic code gives the reader the explanation about the madness of the main character. Finally the cultural code in “A Rose for Emily” is regarding from family status too high will cause the bad effect to the member of the family. The writer also finds the similarity within the cultural code about the culture of the white to indifference the African American people.

INTRODUCTION

Living in a world means that we have to look beyond the surface of reality in order to get the meaning that will guide us to live in it. As in literary works, everything is not always tangible. Sometimes some of the stories has a hidden sign. Daniel Chandler says in his book *Semiotic for Beginner* ‘is a system of sign’. We have to learn to interpret the signs to get the meaning behind them. One of the way to learn in interpreting the signs is reading a text. In reading the text, we interpret signs with reference to what seems to be appropriate codes. Daniel Chandler in his book *Semiotic for Beginner* argues ‘every text is a system of signs organized according to codes and sub codes which reflect certain values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and practices’. By reading and analyzing the text, we can get the meaning through the codes that reflect certain values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and practices as guidance for us to live in the world.

We have to use the proper theory in analyzing the text in order to get the correct meanin then it can be considered that semiotics is the appropriate theory to be applied in the text because it studies how meanings are made and concerned not only with

communication but also with the construction and maintenance of reality.

In this analysis, the writer chooses short story: “A Rose for Emily”, by William Faulkner. This short story is Faulkner’s selected stories that success to gain notice by the reader. The writer sees that this story has many codes that are implied through the action, words, images, and other elements that support it, thus they can be analyzed using semiotics.

Statement of the Problem

There are some hidden codes in semiotic, Proairetic code, hermeneutic code, cultural code, semic code and symbolic code. These codes are difficult to be understood because they cannot be seen from the surface of the works. To reveal the codes, the author uses the actions, words, and images of the character in the story. Thus the writer has to analyze them with appropriate theory in order to understand about the codes because they hide the meaning of the works.

Therefore, the writer uses Roland Barthes’s semiotics theory on ‘five codes’ to explore what are implied behind the codes in those literary works to get their meaning. This theory is appropriate to analyze the meanings that are implied behind the codes.

Objective of the Study

The writer conducts this study in order to understand about the codes that are available in those short stories to get the meaning of the works and get a better understanding about the works. The writer hopes this study can help the reader to understand the works deeply through semiotics’ perspective.

Limitation of the Study

This study concerns the codes that are revealed in the short story that take the form of words, images, sounds, favors, acts or objects. Charles Sanders Peirce (in Chandler, 2005:2) says: “Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as ‘signifying something’ referring to or standing for something other than itself”

In order to limit the research, the study will be conducted on these questions:

1. What are the types of hidden codes found in A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner?
2. What are the meaning behind the codes in A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner?

Method of the Research

In conducting the analysis the writer follows some steps. They are collecting data, analyzing data and presenting data. In collecting data, the writer conducts library research. The primary data are the short story A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner, taken from the book “Collected Stories of William Faulkner”. The writer uses mainly of books and articles concerning the history, the theory, and the application of literary criticism which especially deals on semiotic that are available through library and internet as the secondary data.

In analyzing data the writer follows some steps:

1. Analyzing and describing the element of fictions of those short stories

2. Understanding those short stories which contain the five codes by reading them many times.
 3. Analyzing the five codes that are hidden in the actions, words and images of the character.
 4. Describing the five codes and their functions in the texts
 5. Finding out the meaning of the works from the codes
- In the last step, the writer will present the analysis using descriptive method. The writer will describe the analysis based on the data she gains.

Theoretical Framework

The writer will use one of semiotic theories developed by Roland Barthes. In analyzing the text line per line, Barthes uses five system of codes approach (Selden,1993:134)The codes are merely expressive but they are both manipulated. They act upon each other to form a kind of meaning which is resulted from a narrative work of art. (Grodin,1997:7).

The five levels of coding are:

- a. Action Code or Proairetic Code is the main equipment of a text. It establishes what actions are conventionally prescribed in certain situations and how much of each action is, must, or must not be shown.
- b. Hermeneutic Code has the purpose to get the truth of a puzzle or question that probably appears in the text.
- c. Cultural Code has the connection with any system of knowledge or system of value which is hidden in the text
- d. Semic code let readers label persons and places in the narrative in an adjectival way
- e. Symbolic Code delivers the meaning that come from binary opposition, and dialogues or process of contrastive elements to describe the symbols of a narrative and defines the major rhetorical device in literature.

According to Barthes, there are two ways in judging the values of the work. They are 'readerly' and 'writerly' text. 'Readerly' text is the meaning of the work has been determined and takes the reader to final conclusion. 'Writerly' text is the text which has various meanings and it depends on the reader's interpretation about the work.

ANALYSIS

Proairetic Code

The story begins with the funeral of Miss Emily. Then, the story backs to the time of Miss Emily's life. The townspeople explain about Miss Emily when she was alive.

The first thing they tell is about the arrival of a deputation at her house. They wanted to confirm Miss Emily about her taxes that have never been paid.

"...I have no taxes in Jefferson"

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by

the- “

“See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson.”

“But, Miss Emily- “

“See Colonel Sartoris.” (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.)

“I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!” The Negro appeared. “Show these gentlemen out.” (p-1)

This event indicates ‘to ignore’. Miss Emily ignored the explanation of the deputation’s explanation about her taxes, and she kept standing that the deputation has to see Colonel Sartoris to confirm about her taxes. In fact, Colonel Sartoris had death. And Miss Emily did not care about that. She ignored their explanation.

When the bad smell came from Miss Emily’s house, many people asked Judge Stevens to overcome it.

“But what will you have me do about it, madam?” he said.

“Why, send her to stop it, the woman said. “Isn’t there a law?”

“I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” Judge Stevens said. “It’s probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I’ll speak to him about it. (p-3)

This event indicates ‘to complain’. The townspeople complain about the bad smell that came from her house. But the judge did not deliver the townspeople’s complaint to Miss Emily. He only asked ordered them to sprinkle lime around her house to cover the smell.

The memory backs to the time when Miss Emily’s father was alive. During his life, Miss Emily’s father controlled of her actions. She could not have any relationship with other people especially the young man. Because he considered his family’s social status is higher than the other’s. And it made her to be still alone until the age of thirty.

The action code here is ‘to protect’. Miss Emily’s father protected her longer than she needed thus it caused her did not have any friend or any lover.

The next important event is when Miss Emily fell in love to “a Yankee-a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face” (p-2). After her father passed away, she went outside and met Homer Baron, she fell in love to her directly.

This event indicates ‘rebellion’. By making a special relationship with Homer Baron, Emily has encroached upon her family tradition. She has rebelled to her family because she makes a special relationship with a low class people. In south, a nigger is considered as the low class people. A white southern woman was forbidden to have a love relation with the African American man. As the townspeople says: “Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her.” (p-4). The townspeople’s comment about her family emphasize that her family would not like their love relation and it would cause them to get up from their grave.

Then, the townspeople tried to separate Miss Emily from Homer Baron, because he was a gay. And it was impossible for him to marry Miss Emily. The proairetic code here is ‘redemption’. The townspeople tried to save Miss Emily from Homer Baron with

many ways. First, they asked the Baptist Minister to talk to her, but it did not work. Then they asked her relations in Alabama to talk to her. It also did not work. Even, they seemed to get married, because Miss Emily bought the equipment for the man.

But Homer Baron disappeared. The last time the townspeople saw him one night in the kitchen of Miss Emily's house. After the leaving of Homer Baron, Emily had never come out. She only stayed in her house passing her life in loneliness. This scene indicates 'to isolate'. The departure of Homer Baron made her disappointed and it caused her to lock herself in her house. No one knew what was happening inside her house except the Negro men who served her. Until she was sick and caused her to die.

The story backs to the present time. After the funeral, the townspeople go into Miss Emily's house that has never been entered by other people except her servant.

This event indicates 'to investigate'. The townspeople enter Miss Emily's house to investigate the mysterious house because they have never known the content of the house.

They explore the house and find a mysterious room above the stairs. The situation inside the room surprises the townspeople. The room seems to be set for the bridal.

“A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver,” (p-7).

The corpse that lies in the bed makes them more surprised. It is the corpse of Homer Baron. In this scene, the action code is 'to prevent'. From the situation of the room and the corpse of Homer Baron, the townspeople know that Miss Emily tried to prevent her love. She tried to prevent Homer Baron by killing him and made him to be by her side forever. And that is the cause of the bad smell that came from her house many years before.

Another fact is also can be seen from the corpse. It is the activities of Miss Emily when she isolated herself in the house. She had been sleeping with the corpse pretending that they were husband and wife. It can be seen from the condition of the corpse that “it had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace” (p-7) and the pillow next to the corpse: “Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head” (p-7). Miss Emily had tried to prevent her love by doing an illogical thing.

Hermeneutic Code Analysis

A Rose for Emily is one of William Faulkner's short story that contains many puzzles that make the readers feel confuse to understand about it.

The main question of this short story comes from the title of the short story. From the beginning until the end, the writers can not see that the sentence says there is a rose that has been given to Emily. The word 'rose' only appears in the mysterious room of Miss Emily's house. But it still can not answer the question. The readers can get the answer only from the interpretation about rose. On this short story, Emily is like the rose

that can be admired but can not be touched. She is described as the figure that can be admired but can not be touched too. So the townspeople compare Miss Emily with the rose.

The next questions that comes to the reader's mind is the cause of the bad smell of the house, the usage of the arsenic, Homer Baron existence, and the activities of Miss Emily to endure her lonely life inside the house.

The writer gathers this question because these answers reveal in the same time. It blows up when the townspeople enter the mysterious room.

The bad smell comes from the corpse that lies in the bed. The arsenic is used to kill Homer Baron to prevent Miss Emily's love. Homer Baron is in Miss Emily's house that has become useless after the death picks him up. And the activities of Miss Emily in her house are taking care of her 'death husband'.

Cultural Code Analysis

There are many cultural references that available in *A Rose for Emily*. Most of them related to the culture of southern honor. Through *The Grierson Family* it can be seen the importance of honor in the south.

The first cultural reference can be seen in the early of the story.

"...dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the Mayor-he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron -remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town. Which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying" (p-1)

The abolition of Emily's taxes by Colonel Sartoris is caused by her father's merit to the town when he was alive. It is common because in South, the social status and wealth has the relationship with the governmental power. The wealth can determine the governmental system (Bertram Wyatt Brown, 70). The second cultural reference is also can be seen from the text above. The black women in South have to work as a domestic servant for the whites. Thereby, their appearance in the street with an apron indicates their job as a servant.

The third cultural reference is about the treatment of Miss Emily's father to her. The culture of the parents' behavior to their children in South is reflected through her father. In the story, Miss Emily's father is described as the father who controls his entire daughter's life. He protects his daughter redundantly. Brown states in his book *Southern Honor Ethics & Behavior in the Old South*:

"The southern parent of high gentility perceived the child as a moral figure to be molded as if made of clay, not as an independent personality with talents, interest, and temperaments to be developed for individualistic rather than family needs" (p-132).

The parents are allowed to do anything they want to their children for the family needs although their children have their own talents and interests.

The last cultural code is the townspeople's opinion about Miss Emily and The Grierson Family. Since the beginning of the story, the author describes the townspeople opinion and observation to Miss Emily's entire life. Every action she does is never missed by them. It is related to her status and reputation as an honor woman. In south, as Brown states in his book *Southern Honor Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* "the opinion of others is an indispensable part of personal identity and gauge of self-worth" (p-34). It means that opinion of the society is very important in judging someone's status or identity.

From the cultural code it can be known that the white and black people are the two opposite races. The culture in south considers the black people have the lower status than the white people. The whites consider themselves as the master of the blacks.

Miss Emily and Homer Baron also symbolize the opposition of the south and north culture. In south, the whites treat the black cruelly and they do not have any right in any aspect of life. For example; the way of using public services, the opportunity to have job, schools and others. On the contrary, The North, as Stephen and Abigail Thernstrom state in their book *America in Black and White* "was indeed a promised land, a place where black would find freedom systematic racial subordination and oppression" (p-55). There are not many separations between black and white people in the north. The black people have more freedom in North.

The writer finds several codes in proairetic aspect which most of them focuses on Miss Emily's action. The cultural code gives the reader clear explanation about the southern honor and caused the madness of Miss Emily. It means that regarding the social status too high will cause a very bad damage to the member of the family.

CONCLUSION

In "A Rose for Emily", the meaning of the work can be got from the proairetic code, the hermeneutic code and cultural code. The proairetic code gives the reader explanation about what happen to the main character during her life and the cause of her madness. The hermeneutic code gives the reader the explanation about the madness of the main character. Finally the writer concludes that the meaning of "A Rose for Emily" is regarding the family status too high will cause the bad effect to the member of the family. After analyzing all the codes in this short story, the writer finds the similarity within the cultural code. It is about the culture of the white to indifference the African American people.

Finally, from those five hidden codes, there are three hidden codes found which make the writer concludes that this short stories as '*writerly*' literary works. The texts force the readers to interpret them to get their meanings because they cannot be seen from the surface. Thus the readers have to analyze those short stories with appropriate theory which on this case Barthes's semiotic theory on five codes.

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