



## Unveiling Meaning: Barthes’s Five Codes in O’Connor’s *Revelation*

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this research is to use Barthes’s five narrative codes when reconstructing meaning of Flannery O’Connor’s short story Revelation, published in 1965. Barthes believed that the texts always have certain archetypes so that the readers may enter the analysis on a deeper level. This qualitative analysis is focused on the performance of these codes in the selected text to disclose the intended message of the story. The hermeneutic code is denoted by the title; it creates a sort of intrigue and curiosity. This type is involved with response, directions, and control and progresses the story. This cultural code can be detected as far as the feature of the characters and their background refers to the specific social standards. Thus, the semantic code builds as a result of interactions of characters, for example, when they are in the waiting room and during the corresponding shifts in the mood. The symbolic code manifests through items as well as activities that have concealed significance.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Flannery O’Connor (March 25, 1925) was an American writer.. She was prominent poet of 20<sup>th</sup> century. She grew up in Savannah, in United States. Since her childhood, she has had a passion and huge interest for writing. She attended the University of Iowa. She belonged to a Catholic household, and her writing has been affected by her Catholic beliefs, background, views, and Christian upbringing. American South culture also influenced her writing.. Because the Catholic genre resonates with her convictions, she chose to write in it. This encouraged her to explore issues of salvation and religion in her writing. Her articles, short tales, and novels brought her fame. While pursuing her master’s degree, she participated in several workshops and had her first short story published in The Geranium in 1946. The most frequent themes that appeared in her writing were religion, American African, and South

America culture. *A Good Man Is Hard to find* and *Wise Blood* are two of her notable works. She wrote her stories mostly by using religious themes like *Mystery and Manners* (1969), *Revelation*, and *Good Country People*. She received numerous awards, including the O. Henry Award and the National Book Award, for her well-known pieces of writing.

O'Connor's writing style reflects themes of sin, morality, racism, spirituality, human nature, social issues, and religious beliefs. Flannery O'Connor fought with lupus disease caused by genetics; her father also died because of lupus. She fought with that disease for ten years and died on August 3, 1964. *Revelation* is the last story written by her in the hospital, published in a collection called *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. *Revelation* got the O. Henry Award.

It is an exploration of human nature and delves into themes of pride, redemption, inequality, class, and racism. The story has well-developed characters and is portrayed with rich symbolism. The setting of this story in South America, *Revelation*, reveals social inequality and identity issues. This story revolves around two main characters, Mrs. Turpin and Mary Grace; both are main figures of the story. The protagonist, Mrs. Turpin, is religious herself, but actually, she is a biased, proud woman and a hypocrite. Another main character in the story is Mary Grace, a bold, educated, and broad-minded girl.

### **Problem:**

The main problem is, firstly, understanding the Barthes five codes, which are proairetic, hermeneutic, cultural, semantic, and symbolic codes. Secondly, figure out these codes in texts, because they are not easily visible. For analysing the stories, researchers use these codes to understand the meaning, characters' actions, symbols, ideologies, and background of the stories. Barthes five-code theory is selected because of its effective approach to uncovering underlying meaning within the text.

### **Objective:**

This study's objective is to use five codes of Ronald Barthes and identify where these codes are present in the selected narrative. By using these codes, we can grasp the meaning and understand the structure of narratives. This study aims to explore the story *Revelation* through a detailed analysis of its characters, themes, symbols, and other narrative features. Roland Barthes' five narrative codes—hermeneutic, proairetic, cultural, connotative, and symbolic—These codes are the proairetic, the hermeneutic, the semantic, the symbolic, and the cultural code (Barry, 2002, p. 151). These codes help to understand the hidden meaning of the narratives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dantas (2022) examined this story through the grotesque approach. It is about weird, strange, and ghostly things present in a story. This grotesque perspective is used to understand hidden message of this story. O'Connor's most stories possess grotesque features within them. Another author named Muller G. Hails also used this lens to look into this story. He believes that Flannery's stories reflect strange characters and weird things and events to explain that the world is also confusing.

Jensen used a thematic approach to explore the *Revelation* narrative, which focus on how violence influenced the main characters spirituality and moral development. The author

explains how violence is not only meant to hurt someone but can also help individuals grow and change their personalities.

Jacky Dumas, Jessica Hooten, and Wilson used a cultural lens to understand O'Connor and delve deeper into their understanding of this story. It focused on American and African cultures by showing tension between these cultures. It focused on how Mary Grace's encounters shaped and transformed Mrs. Turpin's worldview.

Scott Hubbard has seen this story from an identity perspective. It portrays how one can shape their identity by accepting and making up our mistakes.

Mark Bosco , Brent Little (2017), explore Revelation by religious lens and explore how O'Connor's literary works are influenced by her Catholic background.

Nicholas Crawford (2003), analysed Revelation through the lens of racism. Crawford focuses on American and African characters and social and spiritual struggles in the story. He reflects how this inequality, racism and internal conflict to understand the story profoundly.

Robert Drake (1974), examines Revelation through a critical lens. He explores O'Connor's work and helps readers to understand American literature. He also suggests that most of O'Connor's works revolve around themes of religion, Christianity and American African society.

Many other scholars and authors have explored the Revelation story by using a distinct approach to disclose its embedded meaning. Ronald Barthes's seminal framework is not applied to this story. Narrative analysis, through the utilisation of Barthes' codes, offers a new interpretation and meaning for understanding this story. By applying hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes. These codes make us understand what is mysterious in the story, how the story moves forward, which actions happened, what symbolic and semantic objects and actions are present and what they convey, and what cultural background is defined in the story. By using this approach, it aims to provide fresh insight and a deeper understanding of the story Revelation.

This paper discusses the narrative structural models of Roland Barthes, exploring their implications for short stories. In order to describe and classify the infinite number of narratives, one then needs a "theory" (in the pragmatic sense that we are here intending), and we must turn to the task of searching for one and sketching it out (Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit). Let's define the Narratology before discussing about narrative analysis it is the study of stories language, meaning and structure of narratives. It is the crucial approach for analysing narratives, events, their structure, and format.

Referencing Barthes' analysis of narrative structure, this story Revelation can be examined using the five codes outlined: the hermeneutic code (HER.), proairetic code (ACT.), semantic code (SEM.), symbolic code (SYM.), and cultural code (REF.). These codes are widely accepted to unravel narratives according to them (Onega & Landa, 1996; Kenan, 2002; Prince, 1985; Allen, 2003). Barthes presents his structuralist model of narrative analysis in his 1974 book *S/Z*. Let's briefly define these five codes.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Utilising a qualitative research design, it employs Barthes five codes to examine the narratives and the text to uncover their underlying meanings. Through this, readers get fresh insight into this narrative. In this study, the research method is based on analysing and employing the Barthes five codes. These codes are present in the selected story named Revelation. The five codes have been found in the title of the story, characters, objects, actions, and images. The purpose of this research is to get insight into how codes are used and what their function is. Through the lens of Barthes five codes, research is presented using a qualitative research method.

### **Theoretical framework:**

Ronald Barthes 'Five codes: The five codes were suggested by Ronald Barthes. These codes help to understand how narratives are organised and what the text is giving meaning to. Further, he divided narrative texts into two types: one is readerly text, in which the author leads readers to a predetermined end. In this type of text, readers do not have to use their mental faculties to understand and interpret the story. These texts are also known as closed texts because they have fixed meanings. Another one is writerly texts, in which the author urges readers to interpret meaning on their own. Barthes divided text into readerly and writerly (Barthes, 1974). These interpretations can be influenced by the reader's understanding, critical thinking, culture, background, perspectives, and knowledge.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **The Hermeneutic Code (Enigma Code):**

In Revelation by O'Connor, a hermeneutic code reflect enigma or mystery in the narrative. It could be the mystery about characters like Mrs. Turpin, She seems judgmental and proud woman. This character make readers curious about her true beliefs and religion.

Revelation by O'Connor shows enigmas in the story, which could be the enigmas around the main character, Mrs. Turpin. She seems religious at the surface level but has conflict at a deeper level and has a judgmental personality that leaves the reader in doubt about her true personality.

Furthermore, the title of the story reflects the mystery itself; it seems to reflect spiritual awareness. In the beginning, it's not clear who got the revelation, why this revelation occurred, or what its purpose was. This makes this story full of enigmas.

Waiting room interactions also make the reader ask questions because all characters have different backgrounds and contribute to the overall enigmatic situation of the story.

In Revelation, the ambiguous and complex main character, Mrs. Turpin, highlights dominance. She has a judgmental nature and judges everyone by their appearance. She may consider herself religious, but she values materialistic things over spirituality. Her pride is so big that the waiting room is too small, and she observes everything with her black eyes. Mrs. Turpin's character and its complexity play an important role in the story. Because her personality causes readers to wonder why she acts in such a way. It is because of her desire to control or because any other force is forcing her to do this.

### **The Proairetic Code (Action Code):**

The proairetic code, or action code, is those characters' actions or events in the story that move the story forward. Mrs. Turpin's character and her behaviour are the main parts of the story that set the stage for the entire story. Her attitude and how she interacts with others affect the story's progression. For example, Mrs. Turpin's coming to the waiting room, watching, and talking with others helps the story unfold other events. These things tell readers what is going to happen in the story. These are like pieces of a puzzle put together to unravel how the story moves forward. In *Revelation*, Mary Grace's frustrated behaviour and how she throws a book at Mrs. Turpin are prominent events in the story. Mary's aggressive action broke down Mrs. Turpin, challenged her beliefs about her personality, and confronted her prejudices. She ponders how it happened to her and why God let Mary do that. So, Mary Grace's character serves as both enigmatic code and action code because it creates suspense and moves the story forward.

### **The Semantic Code (Connotative Code):**

In this story, the title *Revelation* itself reflects something religious or spiritual. "The waiting room" is a setting where much of the story takes place, and it is a place where different characters with different backgrounds interact with each other, which highlights classism in the story.

"Ugly" is a connotative code that reflects how Mrs. Turpin judges everyone by their appearance. She judged Mary Grace by looking at her at first sight. "Jesus" can also be considered an SEM code because it reflects Christianity and the Christian background and spiritual beliefs of Mrs. Turpin.

Nigger also represents people who are marginalised in every manner; its use reflects racism and societal tensions in the story. It reflects the deep symbolism of discrimination against Negro. Black boys also represent the darkness of society and social differences in the world.

The title of Mary Grace's book, "Human Development, is also a hermeneutic and semantic code; it gives insight into why she is reading this book in the waiting room. This book explores themes of personality formation and identity development. There are many words used in the story that reflect many interpretations, like how Mrs. Turpin labels people by their appearances, like "well-dressed," "black," "white trash," and "pleasant lady," which suggests that Mrs. Turpin judges people by their outward looks and neglects their inner qualities. These labels can be considered SEM codes because they reflect the deeper meaning of society and characters.

### **The Symbolic Code:**

The title of the story *Revelation* resonates with the final book of Christians, which is the Bible, which states about the destruction, end of the world, or day of final judgment. After the vision, Mrs. Turpin comes to know what will happen on the day of the judgment. People may be judged by their deeds, not by their wealth, class, or colour, because, in the eyes of God, everyone is equal.

Eyesight serves as a symbolic code throughout the story, as it is said that eyes are a window to the soul. Mrs. Turpin's domineering behaviour and habit of judging everyone by their appearance and labelling individuals by derogatory terms. In the end, she also gets a vision in

her backyard that people are ascending towards heaven, but she and her husband are last in the row, and she understands everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Mrs. Turpin's character and her eyesight reflect deep meanings about social biases and classism.

Pigs can also be considered a symbolic code because Mrs. Turpin's takes pride in having pigs, which reflects her materialistic desires over spirituality. She often values surface-level cleanliness over inner-level cleanliness, like when she compares a pig's cleanliness to that of a child present in a waiting room. Pigs themselves represent uncleanness. Pigs are cleaned before they are sent to slaughterhouses, which symbolically gives a sense of purgatory, which is similar to the cleansing of humans before they reach heaven.

O'Connor urges readers to believe in God's sovereignty, which can change people's personalities. Mary Grace is the source of transformation for Mrs. Turpin.

### **The Binary Oppositions:**

The SEM code is also about binary opposition. This story is about two characters who are fully opposite each other. Both characters are different in many ways in their appearance, backgrounds, and cultures; they are different.

Binary opposition refers to the contradiction between two ideas, like Mrs. Turpin and Mary Grace's moral differences, such as good versus evil. There are financial differences between them that reflect the contrast between wealth and poverty. Mrs. Turpin seems wealthy, and Mary seems poor. Mrs. Turpin's pride in wealth and materialistic things over her spiritual beliefs reflects her opposition to spirituality and materialistic desire. There are many other oppositions in the story, such as pride vs. acceptance, beauty vs. Ugliness, and white vs. Black, which serve to highlight the significance of the story.

### **The Cultural Code (Referential Code):**

Revelation by O'Connor revolves around religious beliefs and especially explores the themes of Christianity. As readers delve deeper into the story, they can uncover the truth about religion, morals, human beliefs, and the Christian cultural framework. Christian culture is prominent in this story, and it is understood by Mrs. Turpin's character because she belongs to Christian culture and her personality and views are shaped by her culture.

In this story, there are cultural codes juxtaposed that enhance understanding of the cultural, societal, and complex nature of human nature. In the waiting room, there are people of different backgrounds and cultures, like Americans and Africans, which reflect clashes between cultures. Additionally, there is a mix of cultures in this narrative that helps readers resonate with the characters more profoundly.

## **DISCUSSION**

Using Barthes' s five narrative codes in analyzing Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation" enriches the understanding of the text as it offers various interpretations in terms of the story's outline and symbolism. The hermeneutic code in "Revelation" is mostly identified with the use of the title of the story – 'Revelation', which creates the suspense of a mystery or a revelation of something important. Such coding creates a tense and interested readership from the very first line that is read. The anticipation or an 'expectation of a revelation' drives the plot forward and readers in search for the hidden truth within a particular text. This

anticipation is beneficial in sustaining the listeners' attention as well as fueling the interpretative process. The master code of the proairetic type is significant in moving the story forward. This is the Antti's interpretation of this code as seen in "Revelation". The conflict that occurs in the waiting room, the discussion with Mary Grace, and the final scene with visions – all these are significant actions of a heroine that contribute to the plot progression. These events are organized in a way which creates suspense and culminating in a climax, thus stressing the dramatic aspect. Cultural references in "Revelation" are entwined into the character and his background quite skillfully. The aspects of the mid-twentieth-century southern USA culture and life O'Connor illustrate in her story mainly through Mrs. Turpin and other characters. This code gives the reader adequate information regarding the actions and decisions of the characters within the specifics of their culture. They include the representation of the important social statuses and racism that is a major focus of the story. And the semantic code is also in the shift of characters' attitudes to each other and in the allegories that may be outlined in dialogues and actions. Getting into more detail, Mrs. Turpin's condescending demeanor, her thoughts about people she considers to be inferior, and the conflict with Mary Grace are filled with semantic overtones. These interactions show the core competitiveness and racism that are characteristic of Mrs. Turpin. It will be considerably more difficult to define the imagery for its meaning in "Revelation" is contained within the symbolic code, which consists of the objects and actions the author describes, as well as the visions they signify. That is why Mrs. Turpin's final vision of people rising up with the souls of those destined for the heavenly kingdom represents the process of spiritual renewal. This vision turns out to become a moment of conversion, (another) moment which forces her to review her value system and moral superiority. Through an analysis of Barthes's narrative codes, this study shows that these codes are effective modes of carrying out interpretation in literature since they reveal concealed information that ordinarily remains unapparent. When using these codes for "Revelation," we find the answers to not only the narrative architecture of the story but also its social, cultural, and spiritual signification.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research concludes that the narratives can be analysed using Ronald Barthes' codes. These codes help us understand the structure, themes, and deeper meanings of the texts. Revelation by O'Connor is analysed through Ronald Barthes' codes, and all codes are identifiable in the story. The HER code, which means enigma in the story, is present in the title of the story, which causes readers to ask questions and make them curious. Readers draw their interpretations, like why this story is named Revelation, to grasp the idea of the story. PER is the sequence of events that leads the story forward, like Mrs. Turpin and her behaviour and interaction with people in the waiting room. Mary Grace's angry encounter with Mrs. Turpin: These characters and their actions tell us more about what is going on in narratives. SEM adds extra meaning to a text waiting room. Jesus, nigger, blond child, white trash, and the title of the Mary Grace book, which is "Human Development," are considered semantic codes in Revelation. Binary opposition helps us understand the text in a better way, and there are many binary oppositions that occur between both the Mrs. Turpin and Mary Grace characters. The title of the story itself reflects Christian culture, and it is related to the day of judgement. The cultural code is present throughout the story, from the title to the end of the story. Mrs. Turpin belongs to Christian culture, and she interacts with people present in the waiting room. All people have different social classes and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, these codes offer a profound and comprehensive approach for analysing the Revelation.

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