

Reading Ernest Hemingway's 'A Very Short Story' in the Light of Roland Barthes' Theory of the Five Codes

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1.1. Overview

This paper aims at analyzing a selected story of Ernest Hemingway in the light of Roland Barthes' five codes. The researcher uses a methodology that Barthes had used in analyzing *Sarrasine*. Before analyzing the story, a summary of it is introduced. Then chopping the story into lexias, the researcher analyses the story in the same manner Barthes used. Finally, a critical comment follows the analysis.

Keywords: Roland Barthes, proairetic code, semes code, hermeneutic code, symbolic code, cultural code, writerly text, readerly text, Ernest Hemingway.

1.2. Type of Texts

Readerly and *writerly* are two terms Barthes employs both to delineate one type of literature from another and to implicitly interrogate ways of reading, like positive or negative habits the modern reader brings into one's experience with the text itself. These terms are most explicitly fleshed out in S/Z, while the essay "From Work to Text", from *Image*—

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Music—Text (1977) provides an analogous parallel look at the active and passive, postmodern and modern, ways of interacting with a text.

1.2.1. Readerly text.

A text that makes no requirement of the readers to "write" or "produce" their own meanings. The reader may passively locate "ready-made" meaning. Barthes writes that these sorts of texts are "controlled by the principle of non-contradiction" (156), that is, they do not disturb the "common sense," or "Doxa," of the surrounding culture. The "readerly texts," moreover, "are products [that] make up the enormous mass of our literature" (5). Within this category, there is a spectrum of "replete literature," which comprises "any classic (readerly) texts" that work "like a cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked, [and] safeguarded" (200).

1.2.2. Writerly text

A writerly text is a text that aspires to the proper goal of literature and criticism: "... to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (4). Writerly texts and ways of reading them constitute, in short, an active rather than passive way of interacting with a culture and its texts. A culture and its texts, Barthes writes, should never be accepted in their given forms and traditions. As opposed to the "readerly texts" as "product," Barthes writes:

[the] writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus,

Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages (5).

Thus, reading becomes for Barthes "not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing", but rather a "form of work" (10).

Accordingly, hermeneutic and proairetic codes are called 'readerly' codes because the readers just follow the story presented by the authors and are restricted to just reading without having freedom to produce other text based on the former text. Traditional readers may spend some time only to know what the story is all about (proairetic) and the revelation of truth (hermeneutic).

Semic, cultural, and symbolic codes are considered as 'writerly' codes because they are the real concerns of the writer of the story, rather than the reader, who may not even notice them. A careful reader who notices these codes will be able to produce his own text according to his understanding of them.

1.3. The Five Codes

As Barthes explains them in *S/Z*, these five codes are text-bound.

1.3.1. Hermeneutic Code (HER)

It is designated as all units in the text that articulate in many ways a question (or more than a question), its response, events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer, or constitute an enigma and lead to its solution (17). Barthes gives it another name: the Voice of Truth. It is also called the enigmatic code.

1.3.2. Proairetic Code (ACT)

It is the code of actions and behaviors. It is the Voice of the Empirics. Actions "can fall into various sequences which should be indicated merely by listing them"(19). It is a series of actions that ultimately gather finally to form the plot of the narrative.

1.3.3. Semes Code (SEM)

It is the unit of the signifier, as Barthes defines it (17). It is the Voice of the Person. It refers to any element in the text that connote a particular or additional meaning. It stands for all the suggestive , metaphorical and implicit aspects of an artistic creation. It is also called the connotative code.

1.3.4. Symbolic Code (SYM)

It refers to those elements in the text that have polarities and antithesis. It is the Voice of Symbols, according to Barthes. It is deeper than the semes code. It is also called the antithetical code as it concentrates on binaries in situations, scenes, discourses, and characters.

1.3.5. Cultural Code (REF)

It refers to the common body of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, literary, historical ...etc.) shared by a community. It is the Voice of Science(20-21). It is also called the referential code.

1.4. A VERY SHORT STORY

It was first published as a vignette or chapters in 1924 Paris edition titled *In Our Time*. Later it was rewritten and added to Hemingway's first American short story collection *In Our Time*, published by Boni & Liveright in 1925.

In the story, a World War I soldier and a nurse named "Luz" fall in love as she tends to him over the course of three months in the hospital. They decide to marry, but when the soldier returns home to the United States, he receives a letter from Luz with the news that she has fallen in love with an Italian officer. Later she writes that she has not married, but the soldier ignores her. The soldier contracts gonorrhoea in a taxi from a sexual encounter shortly afterward.

Hemingway based the story on his World War I affair with a nurse he met in Milan while recuperating in the hospital from leg injuries sustained at the Italian front.

1.4.1. Analysis

1) A Very Short Story* is a direct title of the story that gives the reader a clue from the early beginning of its brevity in space, scale and time. (SEM. Shortness: Brevity). The actions of the story started in Italy in summer and ended in USA in spring.

2) One hot evening in Padua, they carried him up onto the roof and he could look out over the top of the town. There were chimney swifts in the sky. After a while it got dark and the searchlights came out.*

(HER. Enigma. Who?). Who was the carried and who were the carriers? (REF. Evening) (SEM. Hot) (REF. Padua: Italy). The actions of this very short story took place in an Italian town called Padua. It seemed to be in summer. (ACT. To carry). Some people carried a person up to the roof of a building so he could look out over the town. (ACT. To look out). (SEM. Overview). Soon it became dark and no electricity was available so searchlights were working. (SEM. Darkness) (SYM. Dark vs. Light).

3) The others went down and took the bottles with them. He and Luz could hear them below on the balcony. Luz sat on the bed. She was cool and fresh in the hot night.*

(REF. narration: third person narrator). Those who had carried the man left the room with the bottles. (ACT. To leave). Nothing was mentioned about those people or the person they carried. (HER. Enigma. Who?). Another person was introduced here but with a name, Luz. She seemed to be the companion of the person carried to the roof. (HER. Enigma. Positioning: Who is the woman?). (SYM. Sexual implications). Her sitting on the bed implied the role of the bed in the relationship between the couples. The sexual relationship was referred to in a very smart manner: Luz was 'cool and fresh in the hot night'. (SEM. Sex: sensuality: Coolness & Freshness). This sense of coolness and freshness in hot nights was very sensual and unique. The sensuality appeared in the anatomy of the words 'cool' and 'hot'. The uniqueness emerged from the freshness of the relationship and the freshness that opposed the laziness and dullness resulted from the hotness of

the weather. (SYM. Binary opposition: cool and hot, freshness and dullness). Nothing was mentioned about the relationship. Everything was said in short sentences that might reflect the shortness of the story as mentioned in the title. (SEM. Brevity).

4) Luz stayed on night duty for three months. They were glad to let her. When they operated on him, she prepared him for the operating table; and they had a joke about friend or enema. He went under the anesthetic holding tight on to himself so he would not blab about anything during the silly, talky time.*

(HER. Enigma. Partial response: Who is the woman? A nurse). What was a companion in lexia 3 appeared here to be a nurse who took care of a man who needed an operation. (REF. hospital). (SEM. Sickness/wound). At that stage of the story, the author chose to hint at the fact that the story took place in a hospital and there was a man who had to have an operation and there was a nurse taking care of him to the utmost level, that is, sexual gratification. That man seemed to be important to the hospital authorities. (HER. Enigma. Formulation: Who? Important person: sick/wounded).

(ACT. To stay). (REF. Three months). The persons in charge of the hospital let, happily, the nurse stay on night duty for three months with the wounded man perhaps to please him. (HER. Enigma. Ambiguity: Why?). (SEM. They: undisclosed authority). (ACT. To operate) Luz prepared him for the operation and he went under the anesthetic holding tight on to himself lest he would not speak during the operation perhaps about what he

and Luz were doing. (SEM. Self-control), (SEM. Nervous of unconsciousness). (SYM. Binary: conscious vs. unconscious). The joke of the friend and enemy was ambiguous. (SEM. Ambiguity). (HER. Enigma. Ambiguity. Who is the friend and who is the enemy?). (SYM. Antithesis: friend vs. enemy).

5) After he got on crutches he used to take the temperatures so Luz would not have to get up from the bed.*

(SEM: Brevity). (SEM. Improvement in health). As it was a very short story, the reader noticed a jump in time and the patient now got on crutches after the operation. (SEM. Crutches: able to walk). The reader knew that the patient became able to walk using the crutches, which was a hint at the wound of the patient in the leg: more information about the man. (HER. Enigma. Partial response: Who? A wounded person: disability to walk). (ACT. To take temperature). (SEM. Independency). He was now able to take temperature for himself so his beloved nurse would not be bothered to get up from bed. (SEM. Love). His love to her made him do her job instead. She was completely devoted for pleasing him in bed. (SEM. Devotion for Love and pleasure).

6) There were only a few patients, and they all knew about it. They all liked Luz. As he walked back along the halls he thought of Luz in his bed.*

(SEM. Fewness). The hospital seemed to be vacant; there were few patients so all knew the relationship between Luz and that patient. (SEM.

Known relationship). The narrator tried to evade mentioning the relation so he referred to it using the pronoun 'it'. (SEM. Luz: liked by all). She was a loveable character.

(ACT. To walk: Exercise). He was doing exercises after the operation. However, during this exercise he thought of Luz in his bed. (SEM. Love: Overwhelmed). He was completely overwhelmed with Luz. She fulfilled his sensual needs to the extent that he could not stop thinking of her though she was all the night in his bed.

7) Before he went back to the front, they went into the Duomo and prayed. It was dim and quiet, and there were other people praying. They wanted to get married, but there was not enough time for the bans, and neither of them had birth certificates.*

(HER. Enigma. Partial response: Who? A soldier/an officer). The word 'front' gave the clue that Luz's lover was a soldier or an officer who was wounded in the Italian front and hospitalized in Padua. (ACT. To leave) (ACT. To marry1: want to). They went to the church to pray and marry. (SEM. Dimness & quietness). Most of the time worship places were dim and quiet. (SEM. Time as obstacle). The couple could not get married because they did not have enough time to declare their marriage, as he would go to the front. In addition, both of them did not have birth certificate. (SEM. Civil marriage: failure). (ACT. To marry2: failure).

8) They felt as though they were married, but they wanted everyone to know about it, and to make it so they could not lose it.*

(SYM. Reality vs. Imagination). As they could not marry officially, they escaped to imagination. (ACT. Figuritive:To escape). They felt that they were married. It was enough for them though they wanted it to be public. (SEM. Social restrain).

9) Luz wrote him many letters that he never got until after the armistice. Fifteen came in a bunch to the front and he sorted them by the dates and read them all straight through. They were all about the hospital, and how much she loved him and how it was impossible to get along without him and how terrible it was missing him at night.*

(ACT. To write letters). Writing him letters was a sign of affection. (SEM. Affection: love and longing). She expressed her love and yearning to him especially at night. (SEM. Implication of sex).

10) After the armistice, they agreed he should go home to get a job so they might be married. Luz would not come home until he had a good job and could come to New York to meet her. It was understood he would not drink, and he did not want to see his friends or anyone in the States. Only to get a job and be married.*

(ACT. To agree). They had an agreement that he should go home and get a job to make it possible for them to get married. (ACT. To marry3: to get a job). (SEM. Possibility of marriage). It seemed that she did not give him a strong promise. The word 'might' suggested different choices and possibilities. Apparently, she would not come to New York until he got a

'good' job. (SEM. Conditional agreement). She added other conditions too: no drinks and no friends. It was quite clear that she had a strong personality and she treated him like a mother not like a beloved. (SEM. A dominating woman). (REF. Home: USA). Obviously, both are from United States of America. (HER: Enigma. Partial response: Who? : Americans). What did the man do in the Italian front? Was he a volunteer participating in the World War I? What about Luz, was she also a volunteer nurse? No answers in the story are given for these questions. It was let for the reader to infer. As there were Americans, the reader might understand why they were let with each other in the hospital. As the whole story was based on real incidents happened to the author himself, the reader might get answers to these questions.

11) On the train from Padua to Milan they quarreled about her not being willing to come home at once. When they had to say good-bye, in the station at Milan, they kissed good-bye, but were not finished with the quarrel. He felt sick about saying good-bye like that.*

(REF. Padua and Milan: Italy). (ACT. To leave: to farewell). He was leaving and she came to farewell him. (ACT. To quarrel). (SEM. Conflict). Upon her rejection to go home with him at once to marry, they quarreled. (ACT. To kiss farewell). They separated without a clear decision. (SEM. Sick: unsatisfactory). (SEM. To feel sick: anticipation of what is coming). It seemed that both were nervous but the narrator here as well as in the whole story was depicting the man's feelings and reactions from a near distance as if he was an observer. This observation was dedicated to the man

only; no one knew about the woman's feelings or reactions even the narrator himself. (REF. Male psychology) Readers knew that he felt sick about such unpredictable adieu but they knew nothing about how she felt. (HER. Enigma: woman's feelings were not reported).

12) He went to America on a boat from Genoa. Luz went back to Pordenone to open a hospital.*

(ACT. To leave) (SEM. Separation). (REF. Genoa, Pordenone: Italy). (ACT. To open a hospital). She had a specific job and knew where to go and for what but her lover had to look for a job and had to work under specific conditions she imposed on him before marriage.

13) It was lonely and rainy there, and there was a battalion of *arditi* quartered in the town. Living in the muddy, rainy town in the winter, the major of the battalion made love to Luz, and she had never known Italians before, and finally wrote to the States that theirs had only been a boy and girl affair. *

(SEM. Loneliness) Loneliness, rain, winter and soldiers were key words of what is coming. For a woman who lived a warm, hectic sexual life for the past few months with a young soldier, living in a muddy, rainy town in winter seemed to be difficult. Lonely and cold, she looked for warmth. (ACT. To make love). (SYM. Antithesis: cool vs. warm, lonely vs. company). She never knew Italian before. That is, either Italian way of love was something different or they often lied to their beloved. (SYM.

Ambiguity: to know Italians). What was important here is that she seemed to be ignorant of that. (SEM. Ignorance). (REF. Italians). The relationship between her and the Italian major seemed to be something different that made her convinced that the previous relation was immature: just a boy and girl affair. (SEM. Immature). It seemed that she got a promise from the major to marry her. (SEM. Urgency). In order to depict the quick and urge movement of the episodes, the narrator arranged in one sentence a chain of actions that took place in a limited period after the departure of the protagonist. (ACT. To write a letter). To write a letter to her first lover saying that their relationship was just a boy and girl affair implied her decision to quit all her obligations towards him. (ACT. To quit). This urge to break away was strange because she did not offer a reason. (HER. Enigma: Why?). Linking herself with somebody who can support her is better than waiting for somebody who needed support. She might feel more secure with the Italian officer. (REF. Woman psychology).

14) She was sorry, and she knew he would probably not be able to understand, but might some day forgive her, and be grateful to her, and she expected, absolutely unexpectedly, to be married in the spring. She loved him as always, but she realized now it was only a boy and girl love. She hoped he would have a great career, and believed in him absolutely.*

The narrator preferred to be completely detached. The girl's letter was paraphrased and not quoted. (ACT. To apologize). She started her letter with an apology and an assumption that he might not understand the

situation. (ACT. To assume). (SEM. Not Understandable). She assumed that he might later in future forgive her and be grateful that she ended everything between them. All promises of coming to the US to marry him vanished with the first relationship she made. (SEM. Break off the relation). She expected that he would be grateful to her that she broke off the relationship as if this relationship would be harmful if it continued. (ACT. To expect: illusion). Then suddenly she informed him that she expected, "absolutely unexpectedly, to be married in the spring."(ACT. to marry 5: another person) (SYM. Antithesis: expect vs. unexpectedly). (ACT. To love : consolation). She said that 'she loved him as always'. Her expression of love here was just a consolation for what was coming. (SEM. Realization: children love). This late realization would affect the man absolutely but she believed "in him absolutely" that he would understand the situation. (SEM: opportunism). She did not want to lose the chance of getting a ready major beside her in Italy for a "boy" looking for a job in USA. (ACT. To wish him the best). She did not forget at the end of the letter to wish that he would get "a great career".

15) She knew it was for the best.*

This was the end of it. (ACT. To know). She knew what the best was for her and for him. (SEM. Omniscient). Her strong personality prevailed and she decided to end it this way.

16) The major did not marry her in the spring, or any other time. Luz never got an answer to the letter to Chicago about it.*

(ACT. To marry 6: failure again). The Italian major did what the narrator hinted at in the lexia 13. He did not fulfill his promise to marry her in the spring or, let us say, what she had expected turned to be just an illusion. (SEM. Illusion). (SYM. Spring: rebirth) She expected to marry in the spring, the season of rebirth and growth but unfortunately, the major would not marry her "in the spring or any other time." (SYM. Irony). The detached narrator becomes ominous and inform the reader that she will not marry the Italian officer at all. The irony is very clear. On the other hand, she did not receive any reply from her ex-lover from Chicago. (SEM. Neglect: Revenge). His neglect of her letter is a sign of a revenge. It seemed to be a dual loss. (SEM. Dual Loss). It seemed that the young soldier had nothing to say about it. Perhaps the surprise made him unable to reply. (SEM. Surprise). Alternatively, he did not want to contact with a dishonest beloved who chose to desert him for an Italian officer. He got even with it. (SEM. Desertion).

17) A short time after he contracted gonorrhoea from a sales girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park.*

(ACT. To make love). As she broke her promises, he became free now from his obligations to her. He made love with another girl, " a sales girl in a loop department store."(SEM. Hurry). His relation with her seemed to be impermanent and on a hurry because it was with 'a' sales girl "while

riding in a taxicab". Though it seemed to be a single intercourse precipitately, he caught a dangerous sexual disease, gonorrhoea. (REF. Gonorrhoea: sexually transmitted disease). In a short single sentence, the whole story of the man came to a tragedy. He ended up with a sick body and a broken heart. (SEM. Tragedy).

1.4.2. The Hermeneutic Code

This code refers to the hidden situations in a narrative such as enigma, complications, riddles that engage the reader's attention throughout the story. To increase suspense on the part of the reader to follow the text to the end, it raises questions that need explanation, which is usually held back as far as possible.

The story started with an enigma regarding the characters of the story. Who were they? What was the name of the man? What were they doing in Italy? What was the nature of the operation? Why were 'they' interested in the welfare and pleasure of the man in the hospital? What was different in the Italians? Most of the questions remained unanswered until the end of the story. No name was mentioned except the nickname of the girl, Luz. The reader has to infer the answers from the context which unfortunately does not offer so many clues. However, the story was intelligible as if the author wanted to tell the readers that there was no use in knowing such information.

1.4.3. The Proairetic Code

As Barthes formulated it, this code refers to the sequence of actions, the plot events, or any minor and major action in a piece of writing to supply the reader with more information about the narrative.

The actions appeared under the proairetic code could be gathered into eight major movements.

1. In the summer, a wounded soldier was brought to the hospital for medical operation.
2. A love story took place between the soldier and a nurse before the operation and after it.
3. After recovery, they went to the church for marriage but they could not finalize the civil marriage because of time and documents.
4. He went back to the front and received her love letters.
5. They agreed he should leave for USA to get a job in order to marry her and she would follow him when he became ready.
6. He left and she went back to Pordenone where she met an Italian major who made love to her. In winter, she sent him a letter that their love was just a boy and girl affair and she would marry an Italian officer in the spring.
7. She sent him a letter that she did not marry as planned and he did not reply.

8. He contracted gonorrhoea from a temporary relation with a sales girl.

There were not so much actions during the period of nearly a year; the story, of only two pages long, started in summer and ended in spring. The love story actions were shortened as it was a "very short story" and many incident were not mentioned and left for the reader to guess it. Time lapses were evident and Hemingway's style helped so much in hiding them as if the story cycle of actions was running so fast that there was no time for details. In seven paragraphs, a love story between a young soldier and a nurse started during the war time in the hospital and ended tragically as she decided to marry another one. The eight action movement described above almost imitated the movements of the seven paragraphs of the story. The last two action movements appeared in the last paragraph of the story.

1.4.4. The Symbolic Code

This code is concerned with the antithetical and contrasted elements of the text. The reader should get the meaning of the text from the binary oppositions/polarities.

Hemingway is an expert in sending messages to his readers through symbols. His distinctive style helps the practical reader to dive deep in the text to get what he wants to convey. From the first paragraph, he hints to the sexual relationship between the soldier and the nurse using binary oppositions, 'hot' and 'cool'. Luz was "cool and fresh in the hot night" (107).

The whole story is about love in war circumstances; is it real 'love' or 'a boy and girl affair'? In most of Hemingway's stories, rain symbolizes death, separation and catastrophe. The Italian major's love affair with Luz was in the rainy winter,

It was lonely and rainy there, and there was a battalion of *arditi* quartered in the town. Living in the muddy, rainy town in the winter, the major of the battalion made love to Luz,...(108)

The irony of the words, 'expected' and 'unexpectedly' draws the attention of the careful reader to the futility of Luz's expectations.

1.4.5. The Semantic Code

This code refers to those elements that give some additional or connotative meaning. This kind of meaning is usually found in the characterization.

This story has almost two characters: the soldier and the nurse, Luz. The narrator, detached observer, prefers not to depict the feelings of the young man and the girl. The reader has to know more about the characters from the text itself. The only reference to the protagonist's feelings is after their quarrel, "he felt sick about saying good-bye like that" (108). The readers know nothing about his feelings after her letter to him saying that

their love was childish. Yet, his neglect of her second letter and his relationship with the sales girl convey his wrath and disappointment.

There is not a conversation or a dialogue between the characters. Yet, the text tells the reader that Luz is cool and fresh in the bed in the hot night. Everybody in the hospital likes her. The connotation is that she is a lovable character. Her insistence that he should travel back to the States to get a job and never drink or see friends, reflects her determination and strong personality.

1.4.6. The Cultural Code

This code refers to the elements that give common knowledge. Through this code, reader gets the physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary or historical knowledge.

From the very beginning, readers know that the incidents of the story take place in Italy in wartime. Italy was one of the battlefields of World War I. A strange reference to Italians appear when the narrator comments on the love relationship that has emerged between Luz and the Italian major: "she had never known Italians before" (108). What is different in Italians? If she knew Italians before, would not she fall in love with the major? The story sheds light on the way some women take regarding marriage. A woman needs a stable life with an able man who can establish with her a good and secure family.

In the USA, he contracted gonorrhoea, which is one of the worst sexually transmitted diseases. The reference to this disease reflects the tragic end of the love story that started in Italy.

1.4.7. Discussion

It seems that the application of Barthes' five codes to this story provides better and deeper insights for understanding its structure and theme. The text is tangled with enigmas that keep the reader alert while reading the story. The proairetic code along with the hermeneutic code help in developing the plot to reach its climax in the sixth paragraph. The semic and symbolic codes help the reader to know some traits of the characters of Luz and the young soldier despite the brevity of the story and the detachment of the narrator. The limited scope of the one-and-half-page story makes the elements of the cultural code very few but effective.

However, since the author is Ernest Hemingway, this may make the story different and distinguished. There is almost a story behind each story of Hemingway. This seems to be ordinary and natural but perhaps what makes it unique is that Hemingway has recorded almost all the circumstances that led to the birth of the story. This record appears in his manuscripts of his stories, his letters to his publishers and friends, his nonfiction writings, and his interviews. So many of his stories are related to biographical elements with some alterations for artistic, aesthetic and

literary purposes. What is important here is whether the knowledge of these circumstances will affect/change/develop/strengthen, the readers' understanding of the story or not. What is more important, then, is whether Barthes' five codes are enough for comprehensive understanding of the story or not.

Robert Scholes, in his essay, "Decoding Papa: 'A Very Short Story' as Work and Text", asserts that this story is a brief account of Hemingway's personal experience in Italy where, in the hospital after his 1918 wounding near the front, he and nurse Agnes von Kurowsky had a relationship that she soon brought to an end. Scholes says,

A nineteen-year-old American Red Cross worker named Ernest Hemingway meets a Red Cross nurse named Agnes Hannah von Kurowsky, a twenty-six-year-old American woman, at a hospital in Milan, and falls in love with her. She calls him Kid and he calls her Mrs. Kid. When she volunteers for service in Florence during an influenza outbreak, he writes her many letters....They continue to correspond when she moves to Treviso near Padua to help out during another epidemic. He travels around in Italy, but his wounds prevent him from returning to the front. He sees Agnes a few more times before leaving Italy for the State. ...When Ernest leaves Italy from Genoa in January 1919, the romance is still

sexually unconsummated (according to Agnes herself). Hemingway in fact goes home believing that when he gets established in a job that will support two people, Agnes will return and marry him. He still did not have a regular job when a letter from Agnes arrived in March 1919.(43-44)

Scholes quotes Marcelline Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway's sister, describing his situation after the letter. According to her, Hemingway was actually ill and did not respond to medical treatment. They were worried about him. Later, she learnt from him that Agnes was not coming to America and she was going to marry an Italian major instead. Hemingway had recovered by the end of April (45).

In June he received another letter from Agnes, in which she told him that her Italian lieutenant's (his actual rank) aristocratic family had forbidden the marriage, so she would be coming home unmarried after all. Ernest did not answer this letter. (45)

1.4.8. Conclusion

The questions now are: will the readers' understanding of the story be affected after knowing this biographical background or not? Does this information answer some unanswered questions in the story (Hermeneutic code)? Do these biographical inputs explain some actions and reactions in

the story (Proairetic code)? Does this information change the connotations of some symbols available in the story (Symbolic code)? Does this biographical information affect the distinguished traits of the characters the readers know after the first reading (Semantic code)? Does this information affect the cultural inputs the readers get after the first reading of the story (Cultural code)? The answers will be yes.

The reader now can guess the identity of the protagonist despite some artistic differences the author uses to hide it. He can now understand the reason behind keeping the name of the soldier unknown. Mentioning the name of the girl and keeping her feelings unknown can be justified as the author's intention is to victimize the man and to drive the reader to take a definite attitude against her. Many of the questions raised under the hermeneutic code could be answered after knowing the biographical background.

Regarding the proairetic code, semic code, symbolic code, and cultural code, the biographical background of the story may not affect them very much. What may affect the reader's interpretation of the story is Hemingway's alterations of the plot of the story. In the real story, no sexual relation took place between Hemingway and Agnes. However, in the fictional story, the reference to sexual gratification came in the second paragraph. Hemingway kept sending Agnes letters whereas in the story Luz was doing so. Hemingway's wounds prevented him from going back to the

front but in the story he went back to the front. Such changes draw the attention of the readers to Hemingway's skills of writing that help him to convey his messages and attitudes to his readers. These changes compel the readers to sympathize with the soldier and victimize the nurse.

2.1. Barthes and Hemingway: Reading Process

It is interesting to notice the similarities in Barthes's and Hemingway's concepts of the story reader and the reading process itself. Barthes in his book, *Image, Music, Text*, claims that

A text is not a line of words releasing a Single "theological" meaning (the "message" of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable sources of culture. (146)

Therefore, the text does not have a single message but multiple messages. Each reader has his own reading and understanding. Jonathan Culler, in his book, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction*, argues

A striking feature of Barthes's accounts of literature since *S/Z* is how easily reader and text switch places in the stories he tells: the story of the reader structuring a text flips over into a story of the text manipulating the reader. (103)

However, Hemingway himself said to his interviewer of the *Paris Review*,

It is hard enough to write books and stories without being asked to explain them as well. Also, it deprives the explainers of work. If five or six or more good explainers can keep going why should I interfere with them? Read anything I write for the pleasure of reading it. Whatever else you find will be the measure of what you brought to the reading. (17-18)

In his book, *New Essays on Hemingway's Short Fiction*, Paul Smith asserts that

If we let him, Hemingway will teach us how to read. The stories also resist interpretive simplification. They are very clear, but they are also enigmatic, with meanings that spread out in ripples from their apparently simple core. To read, to visualize, to participate actively in the creation of the story- and to follow threads of meaning without moving too quickly toward closure- these are lessons we can learn from a serious engagement with Hemingway's short fiction. (34)

As the researcher aspires to reach a deeper comprehension of Hemingway's short fiction, the interpretation involves one of two different scenes: a scene and time of writing or a scene and time of reading. Should the reader direct his effort to restore the exact intention of the author at the time of writing the text? Or should the reader feel free to understand the text

as he/she wants to understand it? It is necessary to recover the author's intention if it is possible but it is also well known that no author can be entirely clear or aware about his/her own intentions. Hemingway is a clear example. He keeps on omitting parts of his stories and leaves the end of most of them open. In his memoir *A Moveable Feast*, he remembers

It was a very simple story called "Out of Season" and I had omitted the real end of it which was that old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood. (75)

For an ordinary reader, shall this piece of information affect his understanding of the story? Of course, yes. Analyzing the story in the light of Barthes's five codes will not drive the reader to such an information. There is a gap here. Hemingway's scholars are lucky in that many of his manuscripts are available for study and they show the omitted parts of his stories and show how he did start and end his stories. Add to this, some scholars believe that Hemingway

Requires his readers around the world to notice the specific cultural context of his narrative and to familiarize themselves with that context in order to follow what is literary happening in the plot. (Sylvester 243)

2.2.. Findings

In "A Very Short Story", the five codes seem to be quite enough for understanding the story. However, the autobiographical elements that expose the real story of Hemingway and the nurse Agnes will definitely affect the reader's point of view towards the characters and the plot of the story. Changing some incidents in the story that differ from what really happened in reality to victimize the boy and get the readers' sympathy compels the reader to read the story from another perspective. The real story has had its own effect on Hemingway the young man, the writer and the male – his attitudes towards woman, love and sex are quite controversial.

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