

## *Reading as Decoding: Focusing on the Indicial Narrative*

コードの解読としての読み — 「指標的」物語を中心に —

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物語には大きく分けて二つのタイプがある。一つは出来事中心の物語で、ロラン・バルトはこの種の物語を「分布的」または「機能的」と呼ぶ。もう一つはバルトが「組み込み的」または「指標的」と呼ぶタイプである。後者のタイプの物語では、出来事それ自体よりも、出来事に対する読者の受容や認識の程度が問題となる。

ウラジミール・プロップらによって先鞭をつけられた物語の構造分析の方法は、バルトが「機能的」と呼ぶ物語構造の記述には有効であったが、「指標的」な物語構造の記述にはあまり有効ではない。バルトは『S/Z』で物語を読む際に私たちが参照する五つのコードを同定し、それぞれを「行為のコード」「解釈のコード」「文化のコード」「含意のコード」「象徴のコード」と呼んだ。

以下の拙論では、バルトが同定した五つのコードをもとに、「指標的」な物語構造の記述の可能性を探る。

### キーワード

Code (コード) Roland Barthes (ロラン・バルト) Indicial (指標的)  
Narrative (物語) Structural Analysis (構造分析)

### 1

In his “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” French literary critic Roland Barthes classifies narrative structure into three categories: functions, actions, and narration. Barthes’s “functions” are equivalent to those of Propp, whose definition is “an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.”<sup>1)</sup> In other words, functions are certain segments of the story whose meaning is acquired when they are scrutinized from the perspective of the entire story. By “actions,” Barthes refers to characters, and Barthes’s narration is equivalent to discourse. Each narrative category has meaning only if it is integrated with another category. Thus Barthes says:

These three levels are bound together according to a mode of progressive integration: a function only has meaning insofar as it occupies a place in the general action of an actant, and this action in turn receives its final meaning from the fact that it is narrated, entrusted to a discourse which possesses its own code. (“Introduction” 88)

Then he divides functions into two classes: distributional and integrational. The former class of functions are those that “have as correlates units on the same level” (“Introduction” 92). For example, “the purchase of a revolver has for correlate the moment when it will be used...picking up the telephone has for correlate the moment when it will be put down” (“Introduction” 92). In these examples, the narrative units “the purchase of a revolver” and “the moment when it will be used” or “picking up the telephone” and “the moment when it will be put down” are distributed on the same level.

The latter class of functions includes “the units now referring not to a complementary and consequential act but to a more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story” (“Introduction” 92). For example, a narrative unit, “Bond picked up one of the four receivers” in one of James Bond stories, is an index of its correlate, “a highly developed bureaucratic technology” (“Introduction” 91). In this example, “[t]he relation between the unit and its correlate is now no longer distributional...but integrational” (“Introduction” 92). Based on these classifications, Barthes uses the term “functions” for distributional functions and “indices” for integrational functions.

As for distributional functions, Barthes makes a further distinction:

some [distributional functions] constitute real hinge-points of the narrative (or of a fragment of the narrative); others merely ‘fill in’ the narrative space separating the hinge functions. Let us call the former cardinal functions (or nuclei) and the latter, having regard to their complementary nature, catalysers. (“Introduction” 93)

For example, in the narrative segment, “[T]he telephone rang. Bond moved towards the desk, picked up one of the receivers, and put down his cigarette. Bond answered,” “The telephone rang” and “Bond answered” are cardinal functions because even if a telephone rings, Bond can choose not to answer the phone. Therefore, whether he answers the phone or not carries “the narrative along different paths.” In other words, if Bond chooses not to answer the telephone, the story would be a different one. On the contrary, “Bond moved towards the desk, picked up one of the receivers, and put down his cigarette” are catalysers because these are trivial incidents that fill in the space between the two cardinal functions, without which the story remains the same.

Elaborating on Barthes’s distinction between cardinal functions and catalysers, Seymour Chatman says “Only the kernels (“cardinal functions” or “nuclei” in Barthes’s terminology) are

essential to the causal network...All catalysts are expansions of kernels,...Thus, catalysts are always deletable" ("New Ways" 14). He continues:

Since the sole criterion for kernelhood is capacity to allow alternative action, some kernels will seem relatively trivial as far as the large-scale movements of the story are concerned...On the other hand, other kernels are essential if the story is not to change radically...Such inevitable, nonreplaceable kernels can be called "macro-kernels," as distinct from "micro-kernels." ("New Ways" 14)

Macro-kernels are kernels that are essential to a story, without which a story becomes a different story. On the other hand, micro-kernels are kernels that can be eliminated without changing the story. For example, Chatman analyzes James Joyce's "Eveline" based on Barthes's theory and identifies 8 kernels ("nuclei" or "cardinal functions" in Barthes's terminology) and gives each of those kernels narrative notations as follows: 1. sitting and looking; 2. musing and reminiscing; 3. rehearsing the decision to go; 4. questioning; 5. preparing to embark; 6. indecision changing to anxiety; 7. Frank's urging her to go; 8. balking. According to Chatman, these 8 nuclei are essential "hinge-points" that are required if the story is to remain the same.<sup>2)</sup>

Barthes also divides the integrational functions into two sub-classes: indices proper and informants. He defines these concepts as follows:

Indices always have implicit signifieds. Informants, however, do not, at least on the level of the story: they are pure data with immediate signification. Indices involve an activity of deciphering, the reader is to learn to know a character or an atmosphere; informants bring ready-made knowledge, their functionality, like that of catalysers, is thus weak without being nil. Whatever its 'flatness' in relation to the rest of the story, the informant (for example, the exact age of a character) always serves to authenticate the reality of the referent, to embed fiction in the real world. Informants are realist operators and as such possess an undeniable functionality not on the level of the story but on that of the discourse. ("Introduction" 96)

Paraphrasing Barthes's definitions, Chatman comments:

Barthes divides the integrative, like the distributional, functions into major and minor types. The major integrative functions, corresponding to kernels, are indices...The difference is that indices are always inferred, implicit, in need of decipherment, dependent upon our ability to sense character or atmosphere; whereas informants are given...immediately comprehensible, explicit, referable. Informants are chiefly for verisimilitude, to root the fiction as deeply as possible in reality. ("New Ways" 21)

Indices are narrative units that give the reader information about the story, but the reader has to

decipher the information and attain its significance by himself. On the other hand, informants are narrative units that give the reader straightforward information, and their validity cannot be disputed. For example, a narrative segment such as “A scaremonger gains nothing by raising false alarms. He merely makes people disbelieve him when he does speak the truth”<sup>3)</sup> has significance in our society because our society values honesty and truth and does not tolerate deception or falsity. In this case, the narrative segment “A scaremonger gains nothing by raising false alarms. He merely makes people disbelieve him when he does speak the truth” is identified as an informant in the story.

## 2

According to Barthes, “Some narratives are heavily functional (such as folktales), while on the contrary, others are heavily indicial (such as ‘psychological’ novels)” (“Introduction” 93). Using Barthes’s dichotomy, Seymour Chatman distinguishes plot-type into two types:

The proportion of cardinal functions to indices is a good characterizer of plot-types. Popular tales and detective stories are strongly distributional, relying chiefly on the reader’s interest in what happens next. Psychological novels, on the other hand, are strongly indexical: the reader cares more about the characters than about the next turn of events. (“New Ways” 5) In other words, if the development of a story depends heavily on “the reader’s interest in what happens next,” the story is distributional in the way of folktales or detective stories, whereas if a story is the type in which the reader wonders “What is this story about?” the story is integrational in the way of modern psychological novels.

The structural analyses of plot developed by Propp and other structuralists are useful for analyzing plot-oriented stories. For example, Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan” is a heavily plot-oriented story. If we explicate the story based on the notions of narrative functions, it may go as follows:

The initial situation or equilibrium of this story is that a young girl lives in a small town. There are only five houses in the town. This stasis statement or information about the town is an index which shows the girl is lacking experience in general, especially with sexual matters, or the girl has romanticized ideas about the outside world.

A man comes to the town where she lives. The initial situation is changed or the equilibrium is destroyed by the appearance of another person who is a foreigner and a man of experience. This change prepares the situation in which she becomes a subject who seeks her desired object. Her immature romantic ideas about love make her like him. Now she becomes the subject, and the man becomes the object that she seeks. The man goes out hunting. The absence of the object intensifies her desire for him.

He comes back from hunting, and they celebrate his return by having dinner. This dinner plays the role of a magical agent or helper which prepares the way for her obtaining her desired object. Circumstances are prepared. They go out for a walk. The story is moving toward equilibrium. But at the last moment, the subject fails to obtain the desired object, that is, the story fails to attain equilibrium.

The chief interest of this story is what will happen to the young girl. As pointed out above, "Up in Michigan" is a plot-oriented or distributional story. Although the structural analyses of narrative functions are useful for the analyzing distributional narratives, they are not so useful for integrational stories. Here, Barthes's theory paves the way for the analysis of the latter type of narratives.

In *S/Z* Barthes analyzes Honore de Balzac's "Sarrasine," dividing it up into 561 constitutive elements he calls "lexias." Barthes provides five codes (hermeneutic, semic, symbolic, proairetic and referential) to which the reader refers in order to recognize the significance of each lexia.

First, the hermeneutic code is a "‘story telling’ code, by means of which the narrative raises questions, creates suspense and mystery, before resolving these as it proceeds along its course (Hawks 116)." This code creates uncertainty and develops curiosity. Barthes writes:

Let us designate as hermeneutic code (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can neither formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution. (*S/Z* 17)

Thus, based on the hermeneutic code, the title "Sarrasine" "raises a question: What is Sarasine? A noun? A name? A thing? A man? A woman?" (*S/Z* 17). The hermeneutic code is used by the reader to raise questions and answers to understand the plot of a story.

Next, the semic code is a code of connotation. This code "enables the reader to take in various details relating to the protagonists of the story and to interpret and combine them to gradually build up an overall view of the character" (Ribi re 46). Barthes says in *S/Z*:

The word Sarrasine has an additional connotation, that of femininity, which will be obvious to any French-speaking person...Femininity (connoted) is a signifier which will occur in several places in the text; it is a shifting element which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols. Although every unit we mention here will be a signifier, this one is of a very special type: it is the signifier par excellence because of its connotation, in the usual meaning of the term. We shall call this element a signifier...or a seme. (17)

In other words, this code makes the reader build up ideas or feelings based on narrative information in a story. For example, by referring to this code the reader can identify the wolf in "Little Red Riding

Hood” or the queen in “Snow White” as evil doers.

Third, the symbolic code is “the way in which connotations fall into established, contrasted categories, such as cold versus hot, light versus dark, life versus death, good versus evil…Sarrasine’s behavior during fights can be interpreted in terms of the opposition between male and female symbolism” (Rivière 46). Terence Hawks says “[t]his is the code of recognizable ‘groupings’ or configurations, regularly repeated in various modes and by various means in the text, which ultimately generates the dominant figure in the carpet” (117). When we grasp the meaning of something, we cannot understand it in itself. We can understand the significance of it in relation to other things. The concept of “high” can be obtained in relation to the other concept “low.” In this way, the opposing concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong are arranged in a text through the symbolic code.

As for the proairetic code, Barthes says “In Aristotelian terms, in which *praxis* is linked to *proairesis*, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action, we shall name this code of actions and behavior *proairetic*” (*S/Z* 18). Rivière provides the following explanation for this code: “The proairetic code determines and helps the reader identify the various actions which, arranged logically according to the conventions of narrative discourse, constitute a coherent story line” (45). As a very simple example, if a telephone rings and somebody picks up the receiver in a story, we simply assume that the person puts the receiver down when he finishes talking, even if this action is not explicitly mentioned. By referring to the proairetic code, the reader can construct a story by filling in the actions and behaviors that are not explicitly mentioned in the story.

Lastly, the referential (cultural) code is a code of gnome. As for Lexia 3 in *S/Z*, “which overtake even the shallowest of men, in the midst of the most tumultuous parties,” Barthes says “The phrase is a conversion of what might easily be a real proverb: ‘*Tumultuous parties: deep daydreams.*’ The statement is made in a collective and anonymous voice originating in traditional human experience” (*S/Z* 18). In other words, “[T]his code is one of the numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which the text continually refers” (*S/Z* 18). Rivière comments on this code as follows: “[t]his code includes everything that does not contradict current opinion and is, therefore, accepted as natural. It also gives the narrative the appearance of truth or reality, its ‘verisimilitude’” (Rivière 47). For example, Irwin Shaw’s “The Girls in Their Summer Dresses” begins as follows:

Fifth Avenue was shining in the sun when they left the Brevoort. The sun was warm, even though it was February, and everything looked like Sunday morning—the buses and the well-dressed people walking slowly in couples and the quiet buildings with the windows closed.

(84)

In this extract, the statement “everything looked like Sunday morning—the buses and the well-dressed people walking slowly in couples and the quiet buildings with the windows closed” is made based on the referential code because the narrator’s knowledge that particular aspects of “the buses and the well-dressed people walking slowly in couples and the quiet buildings with the windows closed” are similar to those of Sunday morning and “is made in a collective and anonymous voice originating in traditional human experience.” In this way Barthes’s referential code gives a reality effect to a text.

As we have examined by studying Barthes’s five codes, when we are reading a story, we are not simply following a plot but actually deciphering codes. To read a story is the very activity of deciphering the codes, without which a story is an unintelligible mass of accounts of events and descriptions. Thus Barthes’s five codes provide us with good references for the structural analysis of integrational stories.

### 3

Hemingway’s “A Canary for One” is a story about an American couple and an American lady who happen to share a train compartment when traveling to Paris. As is often the case with Hemingway’s short stories, not many events happen in this story. The story begins as follows:

The train passed very quickly a long, red stone house with a garden and four thick palm-trees with tables under them in the shade. On the other side was the sea. Then there was a cutting through red stone and clay, and the sea was only occasionally and far below against rocks. (258)

This excerpt mostly consists of stasis statements. Stasis statements are narrative statements in a story that do not report what happens or what is done. Rather they describe things that exist in a story or give color to the actions and events that happen in a story.

In *Story and Discourse*, Seymour Chatman discusses two types of narrative statements according to “whether someone did something or something happened; or whether something simply existed in the story. Process statements are in the mode of DO or HAPPEN,” whereas “Stasis statements are in the mode of IS” (32).

The process statement presents events or actions conducted by someone, and the stasis statement shows the state of affairs or the attributes of something. Moreover, he says that “A process statement may be said either to recount or to enact an event according to whether or not it is explicitly presented, that is, uttered as such by a narrator” (*Story* 32). “A stasis statement may communicate either or both of two aspects: the identity of an existent or one of its qualities, for

example, traits (*Story* 32).” Below are some other stasis statements from “A Canary for One”:

It was very hot in the train and it was very hot in the lit salon compartment. (258)

There was no breeze came through the open window. (258)

The American lady was a little deaf. (258)

In the night the American lady lay without sleeping because the train was a *rapide* and went very fast and she was afraid of the speed in the night. (259)

Based on his distinction between a stasis statement and a process statement, Chatman distinguishes narrative into two types: one with a resolved plot and the other with a revealed plot.

In the traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem solving...of a kind of ratiocinative or emotional teleology...“What will happen?” is the basic question. In the modern plot of revelation, however, the emphasis is elsewhere, the function of the discourse is not to answer that question or even to pose it...It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically) but rather that a state of affairs is revealed. (*Story* 48)

In other words, using Barthes’s terminology, stories with a resolved plot, such as detective stories, are distributional, and stories with a revealed plot, such as modern psychological novels, are indexical or integrational.

Following this distinction, Hemingway’s “A Canary for One” is an indexical story with a revealed plot.

What is this story about? The title of this story is “A Canary for One.” As Julian Smith points out, the first enigma is raised with this title.

...what does the title mean? “A Canary for Monica” might make sense, but what is a “canary for one”? (233)

According to Barthes’s hermeneutic code, the title raises a question and creates uncertainty and develops curiosity, and the enigma “what is a ‘canary for one’?” should be solved somewhere in the story.

After the opening paragraph that describes the landscape observed by the American husband from the train compartment, the American lady who happens to share the compartment with the American couple says:

“I bought him in Palermo,” the American lady said. “We only had an hour ashore and it was Sunday morning. The man wanted to be paid in dollars and I gave him a dollar and a half. He really sings very beautifully. (258)

Another enigma is raised. What is it that she bought? What did she pay a dollar and a half for? Again, the hermeneutic code creates uncertainty.



At night, when they are preparing to sleep, the reader comes across the statement, “The canary from Palermo, a cloth spread over his cage, was out of the draft in the corridor that went into the compartment wash-room” (259). Now we come to know that what the American lady bought in Palermo is a canary. Here the second enigma is solved.

In the morning, the American lady goes to the restaurant car for breakfast and then comes back to the compartment. She starts talking about the canary.

“He loves the sun,” the American lady said. “He’ll sing now in a little while.”

The canary shook his feathers and perked into them. “I’ve always loved birds,” the American lady said. “I’m taking him home to my little girl. There—he’s singing now.” (259) Now we know that the canary is for the American lady’s daughter. The first enigma is also solved here. But obviously this is not a story of resolved plot.

A resolved plot is one in which the reader follows the events of the story with a sense of problem solving, whereas the revealed plot is the one in which certain circumstances or phenomena are revealed to the reader. Chatman also says “Revelatory plots tend to be strongly character-oriented, concerned with the infinite detailing of existents, as events are reduced to a relatively minor, illustrative role” (*Story* 48). According to Chatman’s distinction, “A Canary for One” is a story in which what happens in the story is not so important as the state of affairs of the American lady and the American couple.

What are their states of affairs? Julian Smith says in “‘A Canary for One’: Hemingway in the Wasteland”:

“A Canary for One” is a story of traps and cages. The American couple are trapped in the compartment with the American lady, they are trapped by their memories and exposed nerves and by the train itself. (236)

The canary is trapped in its cage, the American lady’s daughter...is trapped by her mother’s prejudices and her own weakness. (236)

But the strongest cage is reserved for the American lady. It is a cage of deafness, pettiness, intolerance, ignorance, and fear. (236)

Also, as Scott Donaldson points out in “Preparing for the End: Hemingway’s Revisions of ‘A Canary for One,’” we see much miscommunication in this story. Symbolically, the American lady is a little deaf. The American couple never speaks to each other. The first time the American husband speaks, the American lady did not hear him. The second time he speaks, he only disturbs a conversation between the American lady and his wife. The first time he is mentioned in this story, he is described as follows: “For several minutes I had not listened to the American lady, who was talking to my wife” (259). Then they say goodbye to the American lady separately.

...my wife said good-by and I said good-by to the American lady. (261)

Furthermore, the American lady prevents her daughter from marrying a Swiss because of her bigotry that a foreigner never makes a good husband for an American girl. As a result of this, her daughter loses her appetite and interest toward everything. She suffers from insomnia. We know that the American lady bought the canary to console her daughter but not because her daughter likes canaries. Rather she bought the canary because she has always loved birds. She does not care about her daughter's real feelings; she only cares about herself, that is, another form of miscommunication.

At the end of the story, we encounter the statement, "We were returning to Paris to set up separate residences" (261). The reader understands the irony of the American lady's belief that Americans make the best husbands, that is, it is groundless. Once more this irony is created from the failure of communication between the American lady and the American couple.

As we have seen, such concepts as "trap" and "cage" are inferred based on the semic code. The semic code, as introduced previously, is the code of connotation that "enables the reader to rake in various details relating to the protagonists of the story and to interpret and combine them to gradually build up an overall view of the character" (Ribi re 46). According to Telence Hawks, "This code deals to a certain extent in what Anglo-American criticism familiarly thinks of as 'themes' or 'thematic structures'" (117). One way of reading Hemingway's "A Canary for One" is to read it as a story that depicts a certain mode of human existence, that is, all of the main characters in this story are trapped in a "cage," and their communication is not functioning properly. At the surface level, they are exchanging verbal expressions, but they are not really communicating to each other.

From this thematic reading, based on the symbolic code, we obtain the idea of "miscommunication" or flawed communication. As we have seen, the symbolic code is "the way in which connotations fall into established, contrasted categories, such as cold versus hot, light versus dark, life versus death, good versus evil" (Ribi re 46); thus, in the case of this story, valid communication versus miscommunication.

#### 4

As Barthes says, "To read is to struggle to name, to subject the sentences of the text to a semantic transformation" (*S/Z* 92). In other words, reading is a "process of nomination." In order to name narrative constituents with cover terms obtained by deciphering various codes, we must be able to refer to the codes we have acquired through living in our own environments. Thus, to read a story is not to follow the successive accounts of events arranged in a book but to decipher the significance of meanings in a text through the process of decoding.

### Notes

- 1 ) Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 1968 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984) 21.
- 2 ) For details, see Seymour Chatman, "New Ways of Analyzing Narrative Structure, with an Example from Joyce's *Dubliners*," *Language and Style* 2.1 (1969): 3-36.
- 3 ) Aesop, "Crying Wolf Too Often," *Fables of Aesop*, trans. S. A. Handford (1954; London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1964) 200.

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