

Roland Barthes' Narrative Codes in the Reading of Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*: A Reader Response Approach

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to apply Roland Barthes' narrative codes to *Buried Child*, one of the most celebrated plays by Sam Shepard. The purpose of the study is primarily to examine Barthes' narrative codes in the genre of drama. The significance of the study is in its potential to add to the body of knowledge concerning the multilayered nature of literature and the role of readers in the interpretation of literary texts. This study can also give insights to readers on how to read the texts more attentively in order to detect the signs or codes and consequently reach new meanings which in turn will add to the enjoyment of reading. The importance of the study lies in its ability to one more time reveal the rich, broad, and evasive nature of literature and the way in which different readers of a text can discover multiple underlying meanings, the traces of which are left on the surface of the text.

Keywords

Reader Response Criticism, Semiotics, Narrative codes, Readerly and writerly texts, Lexia, Sarrasine

Introduction

For many years the notion of Reader Response Criticism has been a controversial topic in the realm of literary criticism. The fundamental tenets of this theory have been described by Zima (1999, p. 55) as "the idea that the meaning of a literary text is not contained in the object itself, but in the reactions of the reader." Zima further points out that considering the literary text as a static whole will be a mistake. Therefore,

readers should not perceive the literary text as a semantic totality, but experience it as an ambiguous and often contradictory process at the end of which a meaning comes about that is subject to change: to re-reading and new modes of reader-response or reception. (Zima, 1999, p. 55)

The proponents of Reader Response Criticism, from the American critic Stanly Fish to the German critics Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, have contributed much to the development of this theory. Fish strongly objected to the ideas of the New Critics and regarded them as rigid and dogmatic. In his opinion, "meaning in a literary work is not something to be extracted, as a dentist might pull a tooth; meaning must be negotiated by readers, a line at a time" (Guerin et al, 2005, pp. 358-9). Jauss' concept of reader-response theory centers around what he calls "horizons of expectations". According to Jauss, because of the different expectations of the reading public, a literary work will make different impressions on different readers throughout history.

As another exponent in the camp of reader-response critics, Iser believes that a literary work is where the reader and text converge. The text provides “the materials and determines the boundaries for the creative act of reading” (Dobie, 2011, p. 137). In his opinion, the convergence of the reader and the text is the point from which a literary work will emerge. Reader-response theory was also advocated in France by the distinguished semiotician and literary critic Roland Barthes. Influenced by the Swiss theorist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and his definition of words as signs, Barthes presented a novel way of reading literary texts as well as analyzing them to discover potential meanings. His approach and unique style of textual analysis “depended heavily on structuralist semiotics in the tradition of Saussure and Jakobson” and “later, perhaps partly under the influence of Derrida and Lakan” (Lodge, 2000, p. 145).

Barthes makes a distinction between two basic kinds of text: the *lisible* (“readerly”) and the *scriptible* (“writerly”) texts on which he expounds in his book *S/Z*. By “readerly” text he means a classic text which can be read but not rewritten. This text makes the reader a consumer. A “writerly” text, however, is a text that can be rewritten and can make the reader a producer; “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (Barthes, 1974, p. 4).

Notwithstanding its limitations, the present study lends at least partial support to the claim of Barthes’ theory of semiotics (the study of signs) and underscores Barthes’ claim concerning the role of an attentive reader in the analysis of a text and the way he/she can apply the stated five codes in the process of decoding the text. This research generally aims at showing how, by using Barthes’ codes, Shepard’s play *Buried Child* (and of course other similar plays) can be read in a different and more analytic way. Therefore, the main question to be answered in this study is: how can Barthes’ five narrative codes in Shepard’s *Buried Child* become devices by which new meanings may be discovered?

By examining Barthes’ five narrative codes briefly in the following section we can gain an understanding of how to detect and use them in a text.

Barthes’ Five Major Codes

In order to have a systematic analysis of a text Barthes introduced his textual codes which he believes are clues or signifiers to help readers draw diverse meanings from the text. In his textual analysis of Poe’s *Valdemar*, Barthes introduces a number of codes such as symbolic, social, scientific, actional, rhetorical, enigmatic, cultural, and chronological. However, in *S/Z* these codes are classified under five major categories, which are: Hermeneutic (HER), Proairetic or Action (ACT), Semantic (SEM), Symbolic (SYM), and Cultural or Referential codes (REF).

The Hermeneutic code (HER) refers to any element in a story that is not explained and, therefore, exists as an enigma for the reader, raising questions that demand

explication. The Hermeneutic code can be best applied to the genre of detective stories or mysteries.

The Proairetic or Action code (ACT) refers to the other narrative principle that builds interest or suspense on the part of a reader or viewer. This code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action and consists of at least two terms, the start of an action and the end of it.

The Semantic code (SEM) points to any element in a text that suggests a particular, often additional meaning by way of connotation.

We shall call this element a signifier (without going into further detail), or a seme (semantically, the seme is the unit of the signifier), and we shall indicate these units by the abbreviation SEM, designating each time by an approximate word the connotative signifier referred to in the lexia. (p. 17)

The Symbolic code (SYM) can be defined as the more connotative and deeper level of a semantic code; “this is the place for multivalence and for reversibility” (p. 19). Another manifestation of a symbolic code is in the form of an antithesis.

The Cultural code (REF) designates any element in a narrative with “references to a science or a body of knowledge”. In other words, the cultural codes tend to point to our shared knowledge about the way the world works, including properties that we can designate as “physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc”. Together, these five codes function like a “weaving of voices”, as Barthes puts it. (p. 20)

Barthes has shown the application of his five narrative codes first in a thorough analysis of Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *Valdemar*, and then in another comprehensive analysis of Balzac’s story *Sarrasine*, which appears in Barthes’ notable book *S/Z*. One of the reasons that made these two stories better candidates for Barthes’ experiment might have been the mysterious and detective-like atmosphere which overshadows these types of literary genres. These two remarkable works can undoubtedly be of great assistance to other students and researchers who are interested in applying Barthes’ narrative codes to literary genres, especially mysteries.

Barthes’ semiotic codes have been applied by Felluga (2011) in his *Barthesian Reading of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights*. Barthes’ approach to reading texts has also been attempted by Dimock (2008) in his article “Beyond Interpretation: A Barthesian Approach to the Oral Reading of Literature”. Emphasizing the “influence of social-political-economic condition on the practice of oral reading” (p. 61), Dimock regards the Barthesian approach to oral reading as a “sound theoretical basis” and a “critical perspective” by which we are guided through the practice of reading. He further writes,

I believe that the perspective of Roland Barthes (1915-1980) can enhance our understanding of oral interpretation as both a competitive speaking event and a social activity and that a Barthesian paradigm may further the evolution of oral interpretation as a critical art form. (Dimock, 2008, p. 63)

Apart from literary texts, Barthes narrative codes have been applied to several movies such as *Speed*, *Phone Booth*, and *Casino Royal*, and also by Lockwood (2007) to a photo of the September 11th incident in the article, “Barthes’ Semiotic Theory and September 11th, 2001”, reflecting on Barthes’ theory “The Photographic Message”.

However, apparently the application of Barthes’ narrative codes to literature and in the field of drama and more specifically to Shepard’s plays, as a study or as academic research, has not been carried out before, while there are several works of this playwright, and other playwrights as well, which can lend themselves really well to this type of analysis. Shepard’s *Buried Child* is a play which was chosen as proper material for the purpose of this study. What follows is a brief glimpse at the life of Sam Shepard before attempting to analyze *Buried Child*.

About Sam Shepard

Samuel Shepard Rogers is undoubtedly one of the most prominent and influential playwrights in the history of American drama. He has been described by Ousby (1992) in his *Companion to Literature in English* as “a leader of the avant-garde in contemporary American theater since his earliest work” (p. 848). Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1979, his *Buried Child* is one of the plays of his trilogy, together with *Curse of the Starving Class* and *True West*, which mainly focuses on the disillusionment of American individuals and their struggle to “adjust to historical realities”. *Buried Child*’s mysterious plot, elusive quality and loose end brought Shepard international fame as a playwright.

Textual Analysis of *Buried Child*

In order to apply Barthes’ narrative codes to *Buried Child*, segments of the play (lexias) were selected as units of reading in which the codes or textual signifiers were identified and then used to draw out meanings. Lexias, as put by Barthes, are segments (a sentence, part of a sentence, or at most a group of three or four sentences) which are cut from a text to be studied by using the narrative codes. A lexia is then a textual signifier. Barthes (1974) in *S/Z* clarifies the notion of the lexia by saying: “The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call lexias, since they are units of reading. ... The lexia will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences; ...” (p. 13).

It should be noted that in doing this study an attempt was made to carry out a textual analysis similar to the way Barthes (1974) has done in *S/Z*. Besides, choosing a limited number of lexias from inside the play is due to the fact that analyzing each and every sentence of the play exactly the way Roland Barthes has done in his textual analysis of Poe’s *Valdemar* and Balzac’s *Sarreasin* is far beyond the scope of this study. The following extracts of Shepard’s *Buried Child* have been taken from the

book *Sam Shepard: Seven Plays* published by Dial Press. The twenty-one lexias analyzed in this section are marked by letter “L”.

L.1. BURIED CHILD. (61)

The mysterious and intriguing title of the play presents an enigma. Instant questions occur: Who is the buried child? Is it a boy or a girl? Whose child is it? Has it died or been killed? (HER. Enigma. Who is the buried child?)

L.2. “The Description of the Scene” (63)

The codes identified are as follows:

- a. In the description of the inside of the house everything seems old, dull and dismal. Old and worn-out household items and Dodge’s “well-worn T-shirt” indicate that this farm family is not a fortunate family. The description provides for a semantic code (SEM. Unfortunate family).
- b. In the same scene Dodge is described as a “thin and sickly” looking person. He has covered himself in an old blanket and there are bottles of pills next to the sofa on which he is sitting. By these signs a semantic code is formed to imply the condition of Dodge’s health on the one hand and the unfavorable condition of the place on the other (inside is not warm enough) (SEM. Dodge’s health problem).
- c. In another part of the scene Dodge is staring at an old TV which has no image or sound. Dodge’s character is shown to be lazy and useless, a person who would rather sit the whole day on the sofa staring at an old TV than stand up and do something or go out to the farm (SEM. Inactivity).
- d. Dodge’s interior life is as dull and absurd as his daily entertainment. The word “stare” is significant. He is not watching TV but staring at it, so it is not entertainment, but boredom. His eccentric behavior connotes uselessness and absurdity in today’s life of an American farmer (SEM. Absurdity).
- e. The name “Dodge” can have a negative connotation because of its meaning in English and can be well associated with Dodge’s character (REF. Literature: association of the name and its meaning).
- f. Dodge’s staring at the TV in this play is quite similar to staring at the refrigerator by the characters in Shepard’s *Curse of the Starving Class* and therefore another cultural code (REF. Literature. Intertextuality).

L.3. “HALIE’S VOICE: Dodge?” (64)

In the first act Halie’s voice, which comes from upstairs talking to Dodge for a long time, makes it possible to discuss the following codes:

- a. Unlike traditional farming families in which the father in the family is the chief and rules over his territory, here Halie seems to be the ruler. Her position upstairs can imply her dominance over the family members who are downstairs. Her superiority over Dodge can as well be detected from her way and tone of speaking. Accordingly, an antithesis can be formed: Halie, the chief, upstairs and controlling versus Dodge, the underdog, downstairs and

being controlled (SYM. Antithesis. Halie up and superior/Dodge down and inferior).

- b. Another implication of the situation in which Dodge and Halie talk to each other for almost half of Act One while they do not see each other is their unwillingness to have a face-to-face conversation (SEM. Lack of intimacy).

L.4. “...Tilden enters... his arms loaded with fresh ears of corn. ... wears heavy construction boots, covered with mud, dark green work pants, a plaid shirt and a faded brown wind breaker. Something about him is profoundly burned out and displaced.” (69)

The codes identified are as follows:

- a. Here a symbolic code comes into use. The word “corn” symbolizes fertility and abundance for land owners and farmers (SYM. Fertility and abundance).
- b. Tilden’s clothes may signify hard and tough work on the farm with no significant or favorable outcome as opposed to city life. (SEM. Hard life and poverty).

L.5. “DODGE: I know you had a little trouble back in New Mexico. That’s why you came out here.” (70)

The codes identified are as follows:

- a. This is the beginning of an enigma. The reader wonders what happened in New Mexico that caused trouble for Tilden, and probably made him leave there and come back home. In other words with regard to Barthes’ analysis of Balzac’s *Sarrasine* in *S/Z*, here an enigma has been first thematized (Tilden was in New Mexico”), then proposed (there is an enigma) and later formulated (what was Tilden’s trouble?) (HER. Enigma: thematization, proposal, and formulation).
- b. Here there is a reference to another of Shepard’s plays, *True West*. In that play Lee, Austin’s brother, like Tilden, has come home from New Mexico. A cultural code is then represented (REF. Literature: intertextuality).

L.6. HALIE’S VOICE: Bradley can’t look after us. Bradley can hardly look after himself. After Bradley lost his leg, Tilden’s the oldest. I always thought he’d be the one to take responsibility. I had no idea in the world that Tilden would be so much trouble. Then ..., I put all my hopes on Ansel. Of course Ansel wasn’t as handsome, but he was smart. He was the smartest probably.... didn’t go and chop his leg off with a chain saw. I think he was smarter than Tilden too. Especially after Tilden got in all that trouble. Doesn’t take brains to go to jail. Course then when Ansel died that left us alone. He could’ve earned lots of money. (72)

Together with a semantic code a series of enigmas is presented, some of which will reach a conclusion as we go further on in the play and some of which will remain unanswered. The codes identified are as follows:

- a. The sentence “Bradley can hardly look after himself” immediately suggests that Bradley must be suffering from a deficiency, either physical or mental which

- has made him unable to look after himself and his family (SEM. Bradley's weakness).
- b. The enigma formulated here is: What is the reason for Bradley's deficiency? This enigma will be partly answered later by the sentence: "didn't go and chop his leg off with a chain saw". Now it is clear that Bradley has cut his leg with a chainsaw. But throughout the play no mention has been made of why or how this happened, so the enigma stays unresolved (HER. Enigma: Jamming of the answer).
 - c. The second enigma comes up when Halie talks about Ansel and says that he was the smartest son. Keeping in mind the list of characters (Ansel is not in the list), the reader might wonder who Ansel is and why he is mentioned in the past tense, "he was the smartest". Again it will be made clear when Halie says: "... then when Ansel died ...", so, we realize that Ansel was another child in this family, one who is dead now. However, with a few other signs in Halie's words, Shepard has left it to the reader to decide how Ansel died or was killed. This will be touched on in lexia eight (HER. Enigma. Jamming).
 - d. The enigma put forth in the previous lexia is repeated in the sentences, "after Tilden got in all that trouble", and "doesn't take brains to go to jail". A semantic code is followed by the enigma: Why did Tilden go to jail? Was it murder, smuggling, robbery, or something else? This is also left to the reader to decide. (SEM. Committing a crime)
 - e. The exact reason for the imprisonment remains unclear (HER. Enigma: Jamming).
 - f. The sentence "He could've earned lots of money" also creates another enigma: What occupation was Ansel involved in? (HER. Enigma: Ansel's occupation. Jamming).

L.7. "(Halie enters She appears dressed completely in black, as though in mourning)". (73)

The codes identified are as follows:

- a. Halie's black dress connotes sadness, mourning, etc., and it all makes sense since it is a Sunday and Christians usually go to church on Sundays to pray or to practice other religious rituals. Besides, Halie says she wants to talk to Father Dewis about putting up a plaque for their dead son Ansel. But it all becomes contradictory when Halie later says: "I'm going to have lunch with Father Dewis." (77) , and later in Act Three when she appears again with Father Dewis while they are both drunk and her dress has changed from black to bright yellow. Deceptive and unfaithful behavior on the part of Halie is indicated by her words, her change of dress and her drunkenness (SEM. Deception).
- b. The existence of a situational irony represented by Halie's change of dress is a literary reference and thus a cultural code (REF. Literature: irony).

L.8. "HALIE: It's not fitting for a man to die in a motel room. Of course, he'd still be alive today if he hadn't married into the Catholics. The Mob You remember? All those Italians. ... I think even the priest was wearing a pistol." (73)

Two of the enigmas in lexia six are answered here. Shepard provides the reader with clues such as a motel room, the Mob (another word for the Mafia), Italians and a pistol. Therefore, we can conclude that Ansel was involved in gang activities with the Mafia, and was most probably killed by this group while staying in a motel (HER. Enigma answered).

L.9. “DODGE: He was born in a goddamn hog wallow... .he doesn’t belong in this house! ... he’s not my flesh and blood! My flesh and blood is buried in the back yard!” (76)

Dodge’s attitude toward Bradley indicates tension and hatred between the two which is intensified by saying “He’s not my flesh and blood!”. The following codes prepare the ground for interpretation:

- a. The existence of hatred between the father and the second son is a semantic code (SEM. Hatred).
- b. The sentence “he’s not my flesh and blood” shows that Dodge doesn’t consider Bradley as his own son; therefore, it can be considered as a semantic code (SEM. Infidelity in the family and the existence of an illegitimate son, Bradley).
- c. The word “buried” makes the first reference to the title of the play. It must be a child from this family (Dodge’s flesh and blood, who is buried in the back yard). On the other hand, being buried in the back yard and not in a cemetery implies that there is a secret about the death of the child (SEM. Murder).
- d. The age and gender of the child besides the reason for his/ her being buried there is still kept from us (HER. Snare: age, gender, and the reason for death are not clear).

L.10. “HALIE: I’m going out now. I’m going to have lunch with Father Dewis. ... (She crosses to the door up right. She stops in the middle of the porch, speaks to Dodge ...). (... She takes an umbrella off a hook, and goes to the door.)” (77)

An actional sequence starts here which will come to an end in Act Three. The terms of the sequence can be arranged in the following order:

- 1: To want to leave
- 2: To delay
- 3: To leave

A code of action is then introduced (ACT. To leave).

L.11. “TILDEN: We had a baby. (Motioning to Dodge.) . He did. Dodge did. Could pick it up with one hand. Put it in the other. Little baby. Dodge killed it. ... Dodge drowned it. ... never told Halie. Never told anybody. Just drowned it. Nobody could find it. ... little tiny baby just disappeared. ...” (103)

The enigma put forth in lexia nine is repeated here and the reader’s appetite for the truth is whetted. Tilden’s words give more clues as to who killed the baby and how it

was done. The baby was drowned and then buried by Dodge, but the questions which still remain unanswered include: where exactly was the baby buried so that nobody could find it, and was the baby a boy or a girl? (HER. Enigma: equivocation)

L.12. “SHELLY: Last night I went to sleep up there in that room.

DODGE: What room?

SHELLY: That room up there with all the pictures. All the crosses on the wall.

DODGE: Halie’s room?

SHELLY: Yeah. Whoever “Halie” is.” (110-111)

Crosses on the wall in Halie’s room and her pious words as signs of strong faith in God and religion are in contrast with her pretentious and hypocritical character. This contrast in Halie’s behavior provides for what is called a situational or dramatic irony in literature. Therefore we consider the code here as a cultural code (REF. Literature: Irony).

L.13. “DODGE: The past. What do you know about the past?

SHELLY: Not much. I know there was a farm.

DODGE: A farm?

SHELLY: There’s a picture of a farm. A big farm. A bull. Wheat. Corn. All the kids are standing out in the corn.” (111)

The codes identified are as follows:

- a. The words “big farm”, “ bull”, “wheat”, and “corn”, all signify the prosperous life this family had in the past. The code is semantic (SEM. Happiness and prosperity).
- b. A symbolic code can be detected as well when the happy and successful life of this family in the past is compared to their present life (SYM. Antithesis: Prosperity of the past/Adversity of the present).

L.14. “DODGE: I remember the whole thing from start to finish. I remember the day he was born.

HALIE: Dodge, if you tell this thing—if you tell this—you will be dead to me. You will be just as good as dead.” (122)

Halie is desperately trying to silence Dodge and stop him from talking about the baby. The vain attempt to hide the secret of the child from people reminds one of a similar thing that happens in Albee’s *Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. In that play, George and Martha have kept the secret of their imaginary child hidden for many years, and whenever Martha brings up the talk about the child in front of their guests, George tries to stop her. On the other hand, when in Act Three George begins to talk about their son’s homecoming and the way he was killed, it is time for Martha to try to stop George. The half-real, half-illusory atmosphere of Albee’s play is also similar to and dominant in Shepard’s plays. The reference to another literary text will then be considered as a cultural code (REF. Literature: intertextuality).

L.15. “DODGE:Halie had this kid. This baby boy.”(124)

The enigma concerning the gender of the child is now answered. It was a boy (HER. Revelation of the gender).

L.16. “DODGE: She wanted me to believe in it. Even when everyone around us knew. Tilden knew. Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He’d walk for miles with that kid in his arms. ... Talking to it. Singing to it.”(124)

Dodge never directly says that Tilden was the biological father of the child. However, Tilden is shown as the one in the family who knew the truth better than anyone else. Moreover, according to Dodge’s words, Tilden was the only one who looked after the child (SEM. Tilden is the child’s father).

L.17. We couldn’t allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives. It made everything we’d accomplished look like it was nothin’. Everything was canceled out by this one mistake. This one weakness.” (124)

Three semantic codes can be drawn from Dodge’s words:

- a. First, Dodge emphasizes that he couldn’t stand having the baby in his family, so he was getting more determined to eliminate it (SEM. Intention to kill).
- b. Second, with the coming of the child came the misery of this family (SEM. The start of the misfortune).
- c. Finally, the words “mistake” and “weakness” again refer to the act of the conception of the child. Committing a sin is the real mistake (SEM. A sin was committed).

L.18. “DODGE: I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter just drowned it.” (124)

Dodge’s confession gives the final answer to the enigma of who killed the child (HER. Enigma answered).

L.19. “SHELLY (through holes from porch): You want to stay here?
Vince (as he pushes Bradley’s leg out of reach): I’ve gotta carry on the line. I’ve gotta see to it that things keep rolling.” (129)

The identified codes are as follows:

- a. The key words “carry on the line” here stand for another semantic code. Vince has to stay because he is trapped in a family cycle which he cannot break. Moreover, he has to turn his back on Shelly, because she is the one who tries to make Vince break away from this trap (SEM. Family attachment).
- b. “Carry on the line” may also connote the existence of a vicious cycle in the lives of American farm families (SYM. Vicious cycle).

L.20. “Vince places the roses on Dodge’s chest, then lays down on the sofa, arms folded behind his head, staring at the ceiling. His body is in the same relationship to Dodge’s. ... Vince keeps staring at the ceiling.” (131)

The identified codes are as follows:

- a. Vince’s staring can imply his confusion about the future. It’s as if he is wondering what to do now (SEM. Confusion).
- b. When people are in trouble and need God to help them, they often look up, at the sky, or at the ceiling to pray (SEM. Praying).
- c. Vince is now sitting on the sofa the way Dodge used to sit staring at the TV. It can signify that Vince is going to be Dodge’s successor (SYM. Vicious cycle).

L.21. “HALIE: I’ve never seen a crop like this in my whole life. Maybe it’s the sun.” (132)

The similarity between the words “crop” and “corpse” and “sun” and “son” has made it sound like Halie is talking about the corpse of the buried son. The use of a pun represents a cultural code (REF. Literature: Pun).

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to show how exploring Barthes’ codes while reading a text can strengthen readers’ analytical ability and, in turn, add to the pleasure of reading by helping the readers extract multiple new meanings out of the written text. The application of Barthes’ narrative codes, while reading literary texts, can enhance readers’ analytical ability to decode possible mysteries hidden in deeper layers of the texts that might remain unrevealed otherwise.

Although almost all texts can be analyzed by applying Barthes’ semiotic codes, some texts tend to lend themselves more to this type of analysis. Shepard’s *Buried Child*, due to its mysterious plot and enigmatic atmosphere, may be considered as one such text. The play includes many ambiguous scenes and enigmas, which can be used as a means of identifying the hermeneutic code. In many parts of this play, in order to uncover an enigma, readers might encounter confusing, and sometimes frustrating, situations termed by Barthes as “equivocation”, “snare”, and “jamming”. Therefore, the existence of numerous enigmatic or hermeneutic codes in genres like mysteries and detective stories, employed by writers such as Edgar Allen Poe, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, make them compatible with a Barthesian approach towards reading and analysis.

Furthermore, this study reveals a general classification of literature into two categories of “literature of escape”: and “literature of interpretation”, *Buried Child* tends to fall into the latter category, and, in a Barthesian classification of a text into “readerly” and “writerly” texts, it can be classified as a text of the second type.

Finally, regarding the fact that each and every reader can freely apply these codes with reference to their social, political, historic, or scientific background, there may be as many codes, signs, or meanings as the number of the readers of a text.

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