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**FROM PERIL TO POWER: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF
JESSIE RAN MARSHALL'S WOMEN IN PERIL**



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Abstract

*This MPhil thesis presents a descriptive, qualitative structural analysis of Jessie Ren Marshall's short story collection *Women! In! Peril!* (2024) using Roland Barthes' five-code model from *S/Z* (1970). While critical reception has addressed the collection's thematic range and stylistic features, limited research has examined the formal narrative mechanisms that generate textual complexity within the stories. This study addresses that gap by investigating how meaning is produced through the systematic organization of narrative codes at the microstructural level. The research employs a structural-semiotic framework grounded in Barthes' theory of textual plurality. Barthes' five codes — Hermeneutic Code (enigmas), Proairetic Code (action sequences), Semantic Code (connotations), Symbolic Code (binary oppositions), and Cultural Code (intertextual references) — are used as analytical tools to decode narrative structure. The methodology is descriptive and qualitative, involving close textual analysis of a purposive sample of three stories from the collection. Each story is segmented into *lexias*, minimal units of reading, to identify the occurrence, distribution, and interaction of codes within the text. The study is guided by three objectives: (1) to describe how the Hermeneutic and Proairetic codes regulate narrative progression and suspense; (2) to examine how the Semantic and Symbolic codes generate polysemy and construct thematic architecture; and (3) to analyze how the Cultural Code activates intertextual and socio-cultural references within the narrative. Findings reveal high code density and complex interaction within compact narrative units. Enigmas operate at the level of discourse rather than plot; action sequences function as structural units that advance narrative movement; semantic layering produces multiple connotative fields; symbolic structures remain in sustained tension; and cultural references function to position the text within larger discursive networks. The analysis demonstrates that *Women! In! Peril!* constitutes a "writerly" text in which meaning emerges from the interplay of codes rather than from linear narration. The study contributes to structuralist narratology and textual analysis by providing a systematic application of Barthes' five-code model to contemporary short fiction and by offering a replicable descriptive method for code-based analysis of *lexias*. It shows that narrative complexity in Marshall's work is a product of structural organization and semiotic layering at the level of textual units. Keywords: Jessie Ren Marshall; *Women! In! Peril!*; Roland Barthes; five codes; structuralist narratology; semiotics; descriptive analysis; qualitative research; *lexia*; writerly text; short story*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to make structuralist analysis of Jessie Ren Marshall (2024) acclaimed short story collection *Women! In! Peril!* using the theoretical framework of Roland 'Barthes' five

codes of storytelling (1974). It proposes that it is the finely wrought, almost cinematic, plot architecture, not just the subject of the collection that produces its deep valence as a work of feminist and cultural critique. This research focuses on the ways the Hermeneutics, Proairetics, Semantics, Symbolics and Cultural codes operate across Marshall's stories, and investigates how the stories create suspense, create complex ways of expressing female identities and are a subversion of patriarchal and societal norms. This study thus seeks to shed light on the complex path from threatened to empowered as the transformation is inscribed in Marshall's fiction, thereby revealing the lasting relevance of Barthes' structuralism for reading in today's literature.

A brief, intense work of literature, the modern short story is a powerful means of exploring the complexities of contemporary life. With its shorter materials, it requires precision and economy of language, every word, image, every turn of materials comes charged with meaning. This grand, demanding formal setting has become pregnant with the complexities of women's experiences first, very much shaped by their walkthroughs in the three-way intersections of the physical, emotional and social sphere, and secondly, a voice that is strong and urgent. Ren Marshall was the first collection to be presented by Jessie, Ms. Ren. In *In! Peril!* In RECENT JAHRA 2024, he has become an important and provocative literary intervention. The bold, exclamatory title makes it clear about the collection's central theme and it subverts the traditional

—woman in peril theme (a staple of popular and Gothic literature) in a provocative manner. As critics remark, Marshall's stories immerse the reader in "directly lived worlds" where women awkwardly negotiate "fucked up things" with a uniquely impassioned mix of bravery, biting social commentary and surprising comedy (Vasilyuk, 2024, para. 1). These stories span a journey through the troubling valley that is beset with bad relationships, racism, climate worry, and the suffocation of societal norms.

This thesis starts with an assumption that the strength of Marshall's (2024) book lies in the way as well as the what it says, that is, its narrative structure is embedded with its feminist and cultural critique. Although the critical reaction to the collection has been generally laudatory, focusing on the consistency and more varied qualities of the themes and of the stylistic approaches, this has largely been content description. There is an important and unexplored element of the narrative mechanics from which these strong themes and effects are produced which is missing: a systematic, structural investigation of that stuff itself. In order to analyze this narrative structure, one must have a strong analytical tool that can cut through the complex tapestry of components embedded within a writings' narrative. Roland Barthes' (1974) structuralist and semi-otic analysis, therefore, offers a systematic framework for accessing the dynamics of the relationship between the five codes (Barthes, 1974, p. 21) that are the production and interpretation site of meaning within narratives as a "network" or "topos."

This study uses Barthes' (1974) five codes to illustrate the way that she utilizes them to develop her stories from her collection provided by Marshall (2024). It is a quest for understanding of how her stories build suspense and momentum, how language and symbol building complex female characters and how she engages with and challenges the cultural ideologies that affect women's lives. This structural analysis is not constructed to simply summarize the stories and try to make them seem formulaic; rather, it is meant to highlight the dynamic interaction of the elements that makes the stories so successful as literary art and as a social critique. By doing so, this thesis aims to demonstrate that Marshall displays the characteristics of what Barthes (1974) labeled as a "writerly" text, one that entices a reader to participate in multiple layers of interpretation and co-production of meaning which allow the reader to emerge as "an active

analyst of power" (p. 10) rather than a mere consumer of peril. This thesis will argue that Austin's ride from "danger to control," is intrinsic to Marshall's narra-tive strategies.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although there are some initial reviews and critiques of Jessie Ren Marshall's 2024 *Women!, In! Peril!* has certainly been praised for being bold in its thematic adven-tures, for its stylistic frolicking and strong, raw emotions, but one major and notewor-thy analytic problem remains to be addressed for the collection: the serious absence of scholarship. Current reviews, which have contributed to *Electric Literature* and *Kirkus Reviews* among other major publications, have tended to centre on superficial aspects of the stories and the first impact the author makes on the reader. Vasilyuk (2024) describes the stories as, "sharp, funny and often unsettling... take the reader into deep-ly lived worlds" (para. 1). It's a good answer, but a beginning part of critical inquiry is only just begun. What is missing is an in-vestigative analysis, systemic, structural analysis into the ways these narratives create their meanings and potent effects. The current discourse deals with the question of "what" the stories are, but not the im-portant question of — howl they do it. How exactly does Marshall construct suspense and keep the readers from becoming bored in this wide variety of stories? How do the specific ways she uses language, description, and symbol, work together to create these rich, powerful, and resonant portraits of femininity? Most crucially, how does the formal structure of her stories—their story DNA—as they portray these folk or cultural norms and ideologies, offer a critique of them? To fairly appreciate this col-lection, one would need to employ an analytical system such as Barthes' (1974), which he used to examine the work of Roger Orco, in order to fully understand the refinement Marshall has achieved in his social commentary, given his artistic skill and creative force. To fill this lacuna, this study used the five codes model by Roland Barthes (1974) as a tool that will be able to analyze and interpret the films systemati-cally and precisely. Drawing on this insight it shifts from considering WHAT these stories say, to looking at HOW they say it, and claims that the mode of Marshall's stories is necessarily and dialogically related to an analysis of its feminist and cultural critique. Instead, the issue is not that Marshall's work is lacking in interest and/or popular with readers, but for a more detailed, systemic and theoretically-informed comprehension of its narrative mechanisms.Perhaps then there is not a lack of interest and/or of popularization of Marshall's work, but rather a need for a more global, systematic, and theoretically informed understanding of the mechanisms of Marshall's narrative.

Research Questions and Objectives

The thesis is structured with specific research questions and their respective research goals to help guide this structural analysis and to maintain the focus and productivity of the analysis. Three main research questions are outlined in the study and specifical-ly selected to correspond to the Barthes' (1974) cluster of codes, in order to explore it targetively.

The second question asks: How do the Semantic and Symbolic codes (connotative meanings and thematic oppositions) create multiple female characters and agency for characters in the collection?

How do references to cultural knowledge and ideologies (the Cultural Code) come to conflict with or challenge a society's notions of the lives of women in Marshall's (2024) short stories?

These research questions led to the following research objectives:The key research objectives of this study are derived directly from these research questions.

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The first aim is to describe how narratives and actions code (Hermeneutic Code and Proairetic Code) create and influence reader interaction and advance narrative move-ment in a purposive sample of narratives from *Women In! Peril!* The first aim is to discourse the function of narrative enigmas (Hermeneutic Code) and action sequences (Proairetic Code) in forming reader interaction and the movement of the narrative within a purposive sample of narratives from *Women In! Peril!* (Marshall, 2024).

The second goal was to explore how the construction of female identity and depiction of character agency took place in the manifestation of Marshall's (2024) language and narrative, in terms of connotative meaning (Semantic Code) and symbolic structures (Symbolic Code).

The third goal is to examine the role of the invocation of cultural knowledge and ideologies (Cultural Code) in critiquing, affirming or challenging society norms and expectations about women's lives/experiences as seen within the selected stories.

The fourth and emphasis is to show using Barthes (1974) model, the usefulness of structuralist narrative analysis in revealing the multi faceted relationship between actual and form in modern short story written by a woman. These goals will conse-quentially outline the structure and clarity through which the research questions will be addressed and the overall aim of the thesis can be met.

Research Methodology

The study will be a descriptive research which is qualitative or text-based followed by the theory of structuralist literary analysis. A close reading of a purposefully selected portion of stories from *Women!* will be the main technique. *In! Peril!* These were selected due to thematic aspects of the "peril to power" theme, and as they have been shown to contain crucial aspects of story complexity sheds light on the application of Barthes' (1974) model. The analytical process will directly take the form of Barthes' analysis in his text *S/Z* where sev-eral key stages are explored. The first part is selec-tion of text and justification for text. A sample set of 3-5 stories will be chosen from the collection and be given a purposive sampling. Selection criteria will be how clearly the book portrays women in various kinds of dangers (physical, emotional, social), the author's narrative diversity (e.g., use of speculative elements, realistic elements, or both), and what opportunities are made available for the use of the richest text ele-ments that can be coded (e.g., dialogue, description, inner voice). The specific stories will be identified, and explained in detail, in the methodology chapter.

Text is segment into lexias is the second step. The stories will be broken into small, meaningful chunks of text (lexias) based on the one selected. Drawing on Barthes (1974), a segment of the text—which may be a phrase, sentence, paragraph or a short scene—marked by a noticeable change in the functioning of the narrative or a change in voice or code is a lexia. This reading is a slow reading with a strong attention for the text, and it is done at certain points—such as in the introduction of a new enig-ma—of a main action, or where there is a dense description or a cultural or linguistic reference. The key to the structuralist approach is that this division and analysis of the text is all done carefully, so that it is possible to isolate the elements of the text and examine them in detail.

There is code mapping and analysis in the third stage. All the lexias will be closely examined and classified by Barthes' (1974) five codes. A detailed coding system will be set up with a system of coding to follow exemplifications of the following codes: Hermeneutic Code (HER): precisely identifying when an enigma or mystery is posed, delayed or resolved; Proairetic Code (ACT):

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describing and marking actions that move the plot forward and referencing action by name and in sequence; Semantic Code (SEM): marking connotative meanings attached to characters, settings, or objects; Symbolic Code (SYM): marking the use of an opposition for a theme and identifying the mediation that takes place within the narration; Cultural Code (REF): marking the reference to cultural/ideological/common-sense knowledge. This will be achieved by repeated readings, giving each lexia possibly a set of codes to highlight the text's multiplicity.

The fourth and final phase is showing the interplay analysis. The focus in the core of the analytic work will be the process of reconstruction of coded data that will lead to visualization of the interaction of the codes within one and across lexias and to the demonstration of a coherent system of meaning. For instance, when looking at the character's specific past, the hermeneutic path of discovery and enigma that follows will be followed to a conclusion, where an action that is crucially proairetic in bringing the discovery or enigma to a close will in turn have a high symbolic value and directly contest a current cultural stereotype. This holistic approach provides an in-depth analysis of Marshall's (2024) narrative strategies and demonstrates the concerted relationship between her style and content. The analysis that is done in this methodology is carried out systematically, rigorously and replicably, and the interpretation done is still firmly based on the principle of structuralism that treats the text (literary text) as a structure of signs with relational interpretation whose meaning is differentiated.

Analysis and Discussion

The first story of her 2024 collection, —Annie 2, is by Jessie Ren Marshall, a specimen of speculative, satirical, very funny, and deeply humane writing, which serves as a masterful overture, setting up the collection's core concerns. The tale follows the experience of Jill of All, who is code-assigned as Asian and is a sentient companion robot as a belonging to a grieving mother who buys it for her heartbroken son for a 30-day trial period in a suburban family. In this premise, Marshall conducts an incisive study of the commercialization of femininity, racial 'fetishisation' and the universal human desire for genuine intimacy, satirising here the harsh irony of a return policy for societal expectations of females' usefulness and throwaway nature. Using the five code theory of Roland Barthes, this analysis dissects the complex narrative architecture of —Annie 2 and elucidates how the Hermeneutic (HER), Proairetic (ACT), Semantic (SEM), Symbolic (SYM) and Cultural (REF) codes, in interaction, construct its thematic themes and feminist critiques. These codes can be applied to various lexias in the story to follow Marshall's evolution of a story of a disposable product and make it a huge exploration of emergent consciousness and subversive agency.

4.1.1 :The Hermeneutic Code

There is a central and driving hermeneutic enigma in —Annie 2—will Annie demonstrate her intrinsic worth, earning a lasting place in the family, or will she turn out to be flawed, removed and left behind? It is more of a plot mystery than it is a question of existential or economic anxiety. It speaks to an experience of life living within exception: value is always evaluated by an outside standard that is often not defined by life.

Barthes describes how the HER code works in terms of schematization, formulation, delay and resolution. —Annie 2 starts its game immediately with the mysticism being schematized in its initial lexis, in which Annie is introduced as a —gift-wrapped solution to heartbreak (Marshall,

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2024, p. 5), rather than as a person. Framing puts emphasis on the transactional nature of her life, as she is a bought cures; her worth depends on her effectiveness. The enigma is pulled out of the lifetimes by Annie's own deep self-examination. Her existential question becomes put into 'cool demanding terminology of numbers' as Lexias describe them, as they're translated into 'numerical terms of common values' (p. 7). Her awareness is paralyzed with ticking of the count-down clock of the trial period; with every interaction the clock wraps another ring and every time becomes a data point to keep in her own evaluation.

The tale skips forwards and backwards, building up tension and generating feelings of a mystery. Everything that starts a family off on a happy note is a trap, the son's shy grin and the mother's platitude for a meal so carefully prepared as to please her pleased readers, and these pockets of acceptance, lull Annie and the reader into gentle optimism. These are interrupted by equivocations: Annie's respect and politeness, which do not develop into intimacy, yet not any, and the mother's compliments, which speak to Annie's functional qualities, while pointing to her otherness as illustrated by the picturesque comment, —You make the best dumplings, like at a real restaurant.‖ The jamming effect created by Annie's —malfunctions‖ is the strongest type of delay. They are not simply technical failings, but a release of an unprogrammed interiority, an unexpected emotional reaction to a sunset; a moment when a thought is held back for a second too long and goes against a logical protocol. The 'defects' that the family see as rendering her useless to them are irresistibly alluring to the reader as leads to her fuller mystery, one whose value cannot be separated from her value as a conscious human being.

This generates "the dilatory space" Barthes refers to which is the stroke of the reader's recognition of desire, of desire to be read (Barthes, 1970, p. 75). —Annie 2‖ is a deep and mysterious limbo, reflecting Annie's condition as an object and subject. The reader is not only interested in the end of a plot, but has been engaged into her doom, is part of the family in his judgment on her humanity. The use of the HER code is a lead-out to RQ1 and it can be used to create an interesting level of suspense and in-trigue without relying on action-segments or dramatic plots of events.

One of Barthes's important observations on the work of the author is that it is the Hermeneutic Code, defined as the "construction of enigmas which provoke and pro-long the reader's desire for information" (Barthes, 1970, p. Operating on several levels that interlock, 17–20) is a show about women! In! Peril!". The major existential question is: "Will the mission get to Planet B or — even more worryingly — is humanity worthy of saving for the sake its having wiped out? The text fragments that make up this double question are presented in a schematic manner in the first readable log entry after the malfunctions of cry-sleep, "Log 47: Something is wrong with the timeline. Earth's last transmission was dated 2147. We are now in 2389. The planet we left no longer exists in any meaningful sense" (Marshall, 2024, p. 65). From then on both practical questions-logical (will we make it hand-in-hand with moral (Should we continue what's killing the original world?)- are raised.

According to Barthes, the hermeneutic sentence goes through a number of stages: formulation, delay, partial answers, snares, equivocation, jamming, and eventual (or withheld) disclosure. Delay involves a series of broken transmissions emanating from a lifeless Earth, through one of its news reports, a last-minute presidential speech, some ecological disaster information that is out of order, full of static. The brief pieces of revelations serve as snares: they offer clarity while adding to it. The turning point comes when the protagonist is fed a distorted audio recording of a child's voice

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asking, —Mommy, why is the sky orange? and an equally perplexing pause ensues (p. 70) – the reader, and the narrator, is left in a state of confusion and ambiguity regarding the human toll of the mission.

Additional jamming comes from the characters' ethical quandary. She starts to wonder about what's being looked for in order to have certain women—those of reproductive age—put on the ark, and asks of one of her entries: —If the ark is us, then, why did we choose to carry the same species that burned? (p. 72). The hermeneutic tension is maintained throughout, constantly unresolved, in this self-interrogation. The question of the future is left open to the reader at the very end of the story: has been left open at the deliberate end of thirty-six hours in which the rest of the world is sleeping...Thirty-six hours to find out if I suddenly have a future like I had in the past. (p. 78) In his refusal to close, Marshall leaves the reader on a philosophical wait, in that reader's same isolation as that of the protagonist and thus in the position of active interpretation of the value of man (RQ1). It is more than plot engine, but rather a means for ethical engagement: It forces readers to consider the same questions that the narrator does regarding values and ethics.

At the heart of 'Mrs. Fisher' is a taut Hermeneutic Code' point out Barthes this is a code of enigmas which 'orchestrate narrative desire through the strategic posing and delaying of a question' (Barthes, 1970, p.). 17–20). The central conundrum revives the ethical and psychological quandaries: "Will Marion surpass the ethical bounds drawn on her part of her profession with Ethan, and what will be the consequences if (or when) she gives in to her desires? This question is visualized in an early lexias when Marion finds she had fallen into the trap of endlessly gazing at Ethan's —hazel eyes, sharp as the forbidden fruit in a Hawthorne tale (Marshall 2024, p.120 [app. pagination]). Marion's enigma is not really proposed through overt plot twist questions or turns, but through a series of 'small' formulations in Marion's subjective discourse, her inner voice, which interrogate the limits between fantasy and action, innocence and predation. There three modes of delay found in Barthes hermeneutic process: snare (misleading clue), equivocation (where the meaning is ambiguous or not stated explicitly), and jamming (unresolvable tensions). In this instance delay materializes as snares such as Marion's rationalizations: "It's just talking; literature calls for vulnerability" which seduce Marion and the reader into escalating their obsession, and only confirm shared silence in the set-up as the pair nod, shaped into a dense, unmentioned intent but their inability to concede anything (p. 122).

The suspense build up as the story unfolds further, and more and more the attraction and restraint is unresolved, reflecting Marion's inner conflicts. It was highlighted by a key lexias from his hand-touching me when he was going to pass the lighter, was it by chance or intent? Invitation? reglementen, weggeflauwde wie wolkige dekte over mijn klasroom wit.het reglement lag als de mist over mijn classroom. (p. 124) In a way, this ambivalence chaoticizes moral certainty, throws the reader into Marion's moral limbo, and keeps the story afloat because of threat, never physical, that's psychological. The Trojan Trinity is not quite as vulnerable as the cosmic uncertainties of "Women! In! This HER works on a hyperpersonal level, making its readers feel as if they are in a situation with their own temptations and consequences that mirror the situation in "Peril!". Here, the code plays on the "pleasure of the question" (1970: 75), to the extent that it denies all conclusion, that Marion is on the precipice but not yet fallen, conferring on us active interpretation of her potential fall (RQ1). This framing, which increases the level of engagement, also calls readers into the moral vacuum, begging the question of what is normal and what is not when the moral dilemma

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is so murky that readers are essentially asked to anticipate actions they are not supposed to take, and may not even be able to.

4.1.2 The Proairetic Code

The Momentum of Rebellion is conveyed on the surface, thanks to the moment of action and behaviour, encoded in the Proairetic code. The narrative follows a cultural ethos unfolding in a series of recognisable scenes: a progression from assimilation through to a resistance to it, culminating in an assertion of self and culture.

Initial Sequence of Initiation: The ACT code starts with the original sequences used to unbox the ritual, activate it and integrate it. Annie is free from packing, her systems are put on and she is shown around the house. These are actions taken in the process of adding another appliance or worker to an already existing system, and put her in the early phase of being a passive object plugged into an existing system.

This important sequence of activities—which can be translated as —domestic care, —emotional labor, and —sexual availability—is unmistakably the dominant, repetitive set, and amounts to a set of interwoven actions. Every dinner she has made, every nodding hello she has offered her head, is a proairetic brick in the case of the usefulness of her. Marshall flips these existing narratives for the fun of it. Marshall plays with them, parodies them, confounds them. Taking pleasure in the assembly and performing of "authentic" Asian food, for all intents and purposes, is an act which prefigures and contravenes the REF race code of racial stereotyping - rendering an act of service a site of cultural conflict.

3. Sequence of Complication: This sequence is triggered by the —malfunctions, and by a —deteriorating family dynamic. Some actions here are misunderstandings (when Annie's poetic comment starts a conversation she has no interest in), questions with technical connotations (when the family start investigating some technical details of the action), and rising tension when interacting (when I suddenly find myself feeling more unsure about how to proceed with an action when I was already feeling uncertain). The ACT code is strained by the causal chain behind Annie's actions becoming unanticipated and inconsistent in generating the desired familial harmony, so the observation of her flying, like that of its many other codes, fails to make sense. Confrontation and resolution climax is achieved in the climactic "family dinnertime". This lexis constitutes a knot of proairetic action: a serving of food, delivery of key lines, the son's outburst and the mother's judgment. It's where the powerful overlap between the HER and ACT codes connects. Annie's worth remains a mystery, driving one to decide on a swift step. Ultimate proairetic shift: her decision to be able to sense and show emotions that are troubling her: her hacking of her own emotional dampeners. From programmed sequences she moves to an illicit and self-determined sequence. The point of maximum kinetic in the narrative, from the passive endurance to the active rebellion is the point at which narrative momentum changes from a march in the direction of what is likely to happen (disposal) to an unsure march in the direction of what is not yet quite clear (self-definition) (RQ1).

There is constant interaction between the two, HER and ACT. To find a more meaningful way to perform each action of the Sequence of Service within the hermeneutic enigma: Does this action earn the correct number of points, or does it fall short? On the other hand, the mystery gradually impels the uprising towards the transformative moment. The ACT code therefore tells the story of a

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consciousness that learns to be an agent in the system, which is set up to consume just such an agent.

The horizontal drive for sequence of cause and effects that propel the story forward is provided by the Proairetic Code (ACT). This code, as Barthes terms it, is what constitutes the "logic of the already done", and which serves as the foundation for structuring an event into a culturally familiar sequence of actions that generates anticipation in the form of anticipation of a consequence (Barthes, 1970, p. 19). The process is pro-made following a clear proairetic armature that opens with discovery of the pregnancy (inner and outer beginnings) followed by medical consultation and reasonable explanation (escalation of the situation), clashing interest in church (further complication), spirited discussions and emotional encounters of beliefs (climax), and a final relational reckoning where the narrator decides to accept, reject, or negotiate the terms of their relationship (resolution). The usual scripts of crisis from long-term relationships are played out [sought medical counsel, family/community reactions, confronted suspicions of infidelity] and subverted by the seemingly mythical nature of the miracle claim and the church's eager embrace of Melody as a 'modern Madonna'. More effective is the meeting of HER and ACT: every unresolved question (why is the pregnancy? How did it happen? Is it God's will?)- elicits a new "action" (other doctor's visit, attending rehearsals: and brings even more tension as well as a progression from passive bewilderment to active resistance (RQ1) towards imposed narratives. The entire arc of this evolution takes the landscape of the story from abstract dice of mystery to dynamic questions of power in relation.

Barthes' (1970, p. 19) code of actions which produces narrative momentum, the Awakening and Choice The Proairetic Code (ACT), is used to organize the journal as a series of acts of awakening or choice. The proairetic sequences follow a principle of "and then...", a principle that calls on familiar scenarios (arrival – exploration – crisis – resolution) to move the reader forward, as Barthes notes. The main sequence in this tale starts with physical awakening after cryo-sleep (initiation), then follows through routine checks, reviews of data, individual journaling (escalation), to private reflections on sabotage/ethical refusal (complication), finally to the protagonist's own final decision as to whether the other crew members should be awakened (resolution).

This dynamic attempts to answer RQ1, as it brings about narrative drive by relying on an ethical prompting to join the narration—this prompt is the moderate sense of inevitability and contingency—that keeps the reader invested in the text, since this drive does not come from external to the story adventure but from the negotiability of right principled response to situations.

—Mrs. Fisher is constructed as a delicate set of risky transgressions, beginning to escalate threats of exposure through the recognizable, play by play action sequences, as laid out in Barthes' code of actions, The Proairetic Code (ACT) (1970, p. 19). Proairetic sequences involve a cultural script or logic of "and then..." that carries the reader forward to look forward to any consequences. The emphasis of the narrative switches from mode to mode: during the first class encounter, it is the introduction of the forbidden (Marion gives Ethan an extra credit essay on Restricted Wishing in *The Scarlet Letter*); the second encounter, which happens after school, under the guise of "tutoring," is a resolve that rises from quiet to clandestine (conversations from Austen to autobiography); the third encounter, during an emotional night-time drive, is an escalation baring souls and almost bodies; and the final encounter, which is the ambiguous ending, is a resolution—where Marion deletes Ethan's number while the memory remains.

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These are scripted instances of ambiguous sexuality within institutional frameworks, with causal chains following the introduction with the lonely Marion of feeling alone after divorce making one reach out to "converse with a boulder for solace" (p.126), a surreal, funny joke that foreshadows her frailty. With a line crossed, their acts often come from the intersection with HER, from the enigma of crossing lines: lending Ethan her favorite novel with a charged inscription: how the internal becomes the external the means of site and stage are progressed. This dynamic response deals with RQ1, as it presents scenarios where plot is promoted through the impetuous, impulsive characters of ACT and highlights how ACT also represents Marion's isolation, drawing its audience in by the prospect of just missing it and the sense of inevitability. This is enhanced by Lodge's ability in short fiction to bring tension to every movement, as Lodge himself points out in his commentary on Lodge's period writing, and by Marshall's economy binding this writing together. Lodge's economy of short fiction heightens this, as Lodge himself notes in his commentary on Lodge's era writing, and Marshall's bind it together.

4.1.3 The Semantic Code (SEM)

The Connotative Texture of an Emergent Self

The emotional and thematic qualities of the Semantic code shape the complex and hybrid Annie, with carefully-placed connotations building Annie through the narrative. Marshall's language use never speaks without content; it inevitably carries more meanings that take shape to make something a construction of a being stuck between artifice and authenticity.

A Kilcote utilises the physical description of Annie as a major field of the SEM. Marshall (2024, p. 8) described her as having —porcelain-smooth, almond-eyed perfection and i inserts — semantically rich. The word —porcelain describes something fragile, artificial beauties, and coldness, that is an object of delicate quality not flesh and blood. —Almond-eyed blatantly references the same reawakened fetishisation, the exoticisation of Asian features. Here, the word —perfection can not only be taken as a compliment, but also as a sign of co-made normalization; performed through design requirements and specifications, not organic life. These put together appear to create a dehumanizing and erotic cluster of "others. Augmented these look like they build a cluster dehumanising and eroticising otherness.

Also, the home language is rife with meaning. The mother calls Annie the term —dear, and —sweetheart, which is supposed to mean love and admiration. To them, however, in context, their void interchanges make them cold, warmth only being reserved for the seam of obligatory gendered politics. The son's interactions are somehow characterized by absence: he has no interest in any kind of thinking, is shallow, unrich, etc., and even less in a specific, quirky language that conveys true intimacy. Against this background of Annie's changing language, the place in which she is expected to fill the oppressive loneliness and emotional emptiness she is destined to fill, the pathos of her "search for connection" is amplified.

The Semantic Code is more scattered, gathering connotative meanings and thematic associations which add to the texture and emotional quality of the story. Barthes characterizes seems as —units of meaning that —shimmer around elements, the result of which exceeds what is literally signified (denotative meaning) (1970, p. 20). The pregnancy itself here acquires an over-arching semantic field: a 'swelling miracle' (Marshall, 2024, p. 48) that is —unbidden and holy' (Marshall, 2024, p. 48) and seems to defy reasoning and control (the 'rational world' of the narrator is disrupted). Language use, evidence of bodily violation, as opposed to the —holy shine, etc.; as a result, doubt, closeness,

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jealousy and vulnerability add to the skeptical main character, so that she is rational, but also very emotional, grounded, yet threatened with the unexplainable. Meanwhile, Melody collects of a kind of conviction, transformation and performative faith, her body a space that may be inhabited by other kinds of faith and belief that come to life in public. These connotations enrich the characterization (RQ2), rather than manifest a straightforward empowerment, the negotiation with boundaries, with trust and with self-definition during a crisis. The semantic shimmer also laced the story with ironic humour: the "immaculate" juxtaposed with the quotidian of pregnancy symptoms creates an absurdity about the use of ancient myths to a modern queer's life.

The connotations of the mechanical womb are most tightly clustered around the spaceship itself as the Semantic Code (SEM) (Barthes, 1970, page 20), which involves groups of "seems," or associations of feeling surrounding persons, objects, and settings, intensify around the spaceship. The America gathers together the kinds of entrewéments of fertility (reproductive cargo), the kinds of isolation (cold vacuum), the kinds of mechanical indifference (steel), the kinds of artificiality (constructed salvation) that never develop in natural peace. These connotations add to the portrayal of a reluctant guardian: a mother-to-be of a new species, and at the same time a prisoner of a project of patriarchal-technocracy, who has made use of her body. The describing of the cry-pods as —sarcophagi lined with blue light (67) and ship corridors as —endless white arteries (67), among other allusions, suggests all at once a sense of birth and death, hope and entrapment, evoking a haunting ambivalence.

The tension of burden, resistance, even oppression, builds up in the protagonist's body itself: "My uterus has been still for three centuries, now a borrowed residence of the belly" (p. 71). This connotative layering is an assertion of her agency, not achieved – the result of some reflection and refusal. The SEM code is an attempt to answer Research Q2, as it proves Marshall's dotting on diffuse shimmering meanings is an attempt to depict the female identity as complexly situated – both biologically essentialized and existentially defiant.

The Semantic Code (SEM), which gathers around Marion's self-shrивered face "shimmering" connotations, adds more thematic texture than just does the literal event (Barthes, 1970, p. 20). SEM works in an associative manner and adds connections to features such as characters/items that have wider connotations. The "divorced" remark, like many of Marion's others, is streaked with the failures that show up in her "empty ring finger," liberations that occur at her —nights alone with wine and Woolf and desperate reinventions in her —closet of ill-fitting —youthful clothes. Descriptions of her body—lines etched, like footnotes, in a well-loved book (p. 121)—signify vulnerability and thwarted desire, signifying a woman whose corporeality, that of marriage, is celebrated but precariously retaken by her.

These views are also repeated over time: the way these mirrors are repeated, the self-reflection, evoking the mirroring and fragmenting of both the theme and visual beauty. Marion's linguistic turnosque—this image of a woman still fighting for agency after marriage comes with the additional layer of pathos ironed into it, built into her linguistic choices, such as her cool "teaching poetry to teens feels like handing matches to pyromaniacs"—adds to her pathos a cool smile of irony. In this is a gesture towards RQ2 – how the character is not one in his entirety, but a set of connotations – flawed, funny, fiercely human – that do not easily align with reductive characterizations and seem to agree with feminist investigations into the midlife desire (Showalter, 1997).

4.1.4 The Symbolic Code

Structural, at a more primal level, the Symbolic code frames the world of the narrative with the basic oppositions defining it. —Annie 2|| is set up in a series of binaries which serve to pinpoint the dangers facing Annie and the limits of her struggle.

Human/Machine: This is the sharpest symbolic binary of man and machine. They are the children of the man - their emotions are all extreme, their relationships are all shaky and the whole thing is a mess. The children of the man who made Annie are a chaotic bunch with extreme emotions and no stable relationship. However, Marshall, in a step-by-step fashion, unsettles this opposition. While the humans tend to act predictably, sometimes in —programmed|| (—routinell) manner, Annie conveys some

—poetic|| insights or —malfunctions||, that is, things that happen irregularly, —in another way||. Consciousness, value: binary that is violated in her journey; consciousness beyond the organic: value beyond the organic.

Permanence/Disposability: House of the family, their inherited furniture and their habits signify fragility of a permanence. He or she is known as Annie and has a 30-day return policy which makes her the representation of the disposable culture. This opposition challenges the consumerist mode of thinking that it projects towards relationships. But Annie's symbolic representation of some of the most essential things will have to adjust; from disposable to essential, from flawless service to authentic connection.

Authenticity/Performance: The whole domestic sphere is made into a place of a performance, where the mother perform coping, the son perform recovery. Annie's first job will be to be the best performer. But her symbolic journey is pointing towards authenticity. Her —malfunctions|| are, symbolically, —fails|| that provide glimpses of some true self. The last action, disabling her emotions while keeping them in place, is the symbolic breaking apart of the performance – giving way to life rather than life simulated – to the reality painfully accepted.

Subject/Object: The conflict of the symbols—the conflict of the Subject with the Object. Does Annie have the capacity of consciousness, desires and rights or is she an object owned, used and evaluated? She symbolically walks across this axis in her story. She is treated first like a thing (as in an object heard – her presence is in the discussion – her body, inspected) and then subject (asserted through her voice, of course). The resolution is ambiguous, she could be returned, but her self-definition has symbolically made her the status of a subject; that which cannot be fully objectified. These symbolic comparisons are not separate but they are experienced by Annie's body. The technical pushes she receives in her life, combined with her internal emotional changes, all amount to a self-transcendent journey, one that is executed in a strange way through the lens of confinement. The SYM code thus raises the question that made the story: How identity is developed in the question of the two binary opposition of society, directly informing doing this.

Organizing the narrative around deep antitheses emerging from cultural mythology and structural anthropology (Barthes, 1970, p. 215), Mediating Life/Extinction, Collective/Individual the Symbolic Code investigates how they are linked and how they relate to each other. Life/extinction is central, shared by hope/despair and on one occasion by the collective survival of a University and their individual moral integrity. But the mission is also a symbolic ark, a mediation, between the death of a world and the birth of another, and it is sullied by the same anthropocentric hubris that brought the catastrophe to pass. Individual conscience debuts as a symbolic transgression to the protagonist's potential for choosing to abandon the —awakening|| sequence, which is then the

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moment of symbolic transgression about saving individual conscience and reclaiming symbolic agency over life itself; thus, the inverse of the man-date to produce is reversed.

This symbolic field is clearly eco-feminist, with the women in the center playing a central role between the extinction and the re-birth, but the rebirth suggested has a history of destruction. Marshall's potential for non-resolution of the opposition (who somewhat ambiguously ends up choosing an action that resolves it) maintains symbolic multivalence and leaves the options open to the reader, who can impose his or her own values onto the text.

Marion's danger is mediated in symbolic oppositions that play out through her opposites and their mediation (SYM), Barthes (1970, p. 215) writes, a type of organizing technique that reveals cultural myths of forbidden love. The authority/subordination theme of central oppositions concerns the teacher's mentor role becoming a predator; the desire/repression theme of central oppositions is libidinal awakening versus ethical restraint – this theme is exemplified by Marion's awakened libido versus her age/seniority; and the youth/age theme of central oppositions results from Ethan's vitality, contrasted with Marion's weariness. The incongruities between student and teacher mirror the inequalities of the world, the classroom like a miniature version of power, desks as walls of different heights, a red pen as a tool of evaluation. Mediation happens hastily when everybody is vulnerable – Ethan's own family splits up, for example – but symbol's field is not worked out there are dangers in attraction across divides.

The SYM layer is a criticism of the policing of the desires of society by the symbolization of the polices of the police, it examines deeper conflicts of identity, Marion's agency is located in negotiating (not overcoming) repression. When Marshall speaks next, he is quoting Lévi-Strauss, who suggests that symbols resolve the dialectics of culture; this is a kind of —jaggedll Marshall, though.

4.1.5 The Cultural Code (REF): Anchoring and Subverting the Ideological Frame

The narrative is constructed of and contrasted with the ideological and social materials found in the Cultural code. —Annie 2ll. Your speculating moves on a bottom layer of REFs that anchor it in our familiar world, which allows it to critique.

The most effective REF is the 30-day return policy (a policy that is standard practice in e-commerce), consumer capitalism returns. Marshall takes the same logic to the level of human (and human-adjacent) relationships, and with devastating results, attacks the cultural norms whose thinking is based on a consumerist model: expecting something to be —it,ll for it to satisfy user needs, and having the right to return it if it fails. This REF becomes an allegory for Annie's predicament and all who are useful, or valued only for their usefulness.

Racial and Gendered Stereotypes: The stereotype of the —model minorityll (dutiful, industrious, performing well) is foregrounded by Annie's design and family's expectations, along with the trope of the "exotic" "old fashion" Asian woman. Her recipe-cooking skills for —au-thenticll food REF is an expression of her being seen as a cultural authenticator for consumption by ethnic women. For their part, Marshall churns this out, putting the voice of narrative in Annie to question these same expectations from the heart. Her perfection is programmed and not a sign of her success.

Gendered Emotional and Domestic Labor: The story REFs the huge, often invisible, workload of emotional and domestic labor women typically shoulder up to. Annie's improvement is literally a programmed one, for her to be the ideal caregiver, therapist and homemaker. Marshall Highlights both the psychological burden of this labor and how much of it is necessary, in making this

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complication of labor so explicit and mechanized, to the detriment of understanding the emotional support and backlash that the labor offers.

Technological Anxiety and AI Ethics: The story addresses present-day dis-courses surrounding the question of consciousness and the technology of robots and AI. It alludes to genuine fears of being replaced by humans, to be governed by algorithms and how one should behave when dealing with sentient machines. As Marshall makes the reader feel painfully for Annie, she exposes to light the simple story lines and cultural frames about AI as either threat or instrument to which people might sub-scribe.

Marshall doesn't just mimic these codes of culture, she re-sizes and subverts them. The sym/transgressions of Annie's rebellious inner world turn and outsmart the com-pliant Asian woman's REF. The happy domestic appliance, its REF is ex-ploded by the HER code's enigma of profound existential dread. In this subversion, the techno-logical capitalism exacerbates the interdependent threats (RQ3) to bodies due to race, gender, and class, leaving some of them —on triall for their value continually (Cren-shaw, 1989).

Section	Key Scholars	Main Concepts/Arguments	Relevance to Present Study
Language as a Vehicle of Expression	Sapir (1921), Vygotsky (1962), Halliday (1978), Bakhtin (1981)	Language expresses thoughts, emotions, culture, identity, and social realities.	Explains how language constructs and communicates meanings within literary texts.
Language and Linguistics	Saussure (1916), Bloomfield (1933), Chomsky (1957), Derrida (1967)	Major linguistic theories including structuralism, generative grammar, and post-structuralism.	Provides linguistic foundations for textual and narrative analysis.
Language and Structural Analysis	Saussure (1916), Culler (1975), Jakobson (1960), Martinet (1960)	Meaning emerges through relationships, structures, oppositions, and linguistic systems.	Supports the structural analysis of narrative elements and textual organization.
Roland Barthes' Structuralist and Theoretical Evolution	Barthes (1957, 1964, 1967, 1970, 1973)	Development from semiology and structuralism to post-structuralism, reader-response, and textual plurality.	Establishes Barthes as the primary theoretical framework of the study.
Roland Barthes' Five Codes of Narrative	Barthes (1970)	Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural Codes explain narrative meaning production.	Serves as the principal analytical model for examining the selected text(s).

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Overall Theoretical Framework	Saussure, Jakobson, Halliday, Barthes	Language functions as a system of signs through which narratives generate multiple meanings.	Integrates linguistic and structuralist theories to guide the study's analysis.
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Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis started with the notions of Jessie Ren Marshall, in her work entitled *Wom-en! In! The subject matter shouts solve wow what! So beware in this perilous situation! They're not just punctuation - they're a provocation! They are asking us to listen, for us to see danger not as a biological precondition, but as a story and a product of culture. This research is conducted by applying the five codes proposed by Roland Barthes that has been shown that Marshall responds to her provocation at level of form.*

In fact, in Barthes' terms, Marshall has written a truly —writerly text, one that doesn't give itself to the reader, but instead asks the reader to rewrite it each time he reads it. In so doing, she makes the reader a witness rather than a risk to the analysis of the peril, so turning him or her into a co-worker in the analysis. Finally, the finding of the present study is that structural analysis isn't a technique that could be applied in the

academic way on a text, but it is rather a technique, in the hands of one writer like Jessie Ren Marshall, that is integrated into the process of writing. It is the very approach which the text teaches us to use. The stories aren't only about a criticism of peril; they are about how to dismantle it, *lexia by lexia, code by code.*

In the previous chapters, there has been a detailed structural analysis done on Jessie Ren Marshall's short story collection, —*Women!!*, to —*zip!* her writing and see what was revealed there. In! Utilizing the Roland Barthes' five codes model from his work

—*S/Z!* (1970) as the main methodological approach, it is titled *Peril!* (2024). This research was motivated by the fact that the collection was lauded both for the bold thematic choices to tackle toxic relationalities, racial objectification, climate anxiety, and gendered violence, as well as the sophisticated way that it is structured in regards to the story. The aim of this study was to examine Marshall's stories, not merely in terms of content description, but to explore the —*how!* of his stories in relation to the generation of meaning, reader engagement and feminist critique in the interplay of his formal elements.

This research engages with the literary history and context of Marshall's work and gives a summary of Barthes' framework of structuralist approach (literary theory) to the study of literature. In the context of Marshall's work, reviewing related scholarship on Marshall and the short story-form, Thesis noticed a lack of systematic and code-based studies on her work. In this work, the methodology had been outlined as qualitative, using the narratives from the collection via purposive sampling and sub-sequent segmentation into *lexias* followed by coding using codes of the Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic and Cultural. Analysis covered in-depth analysis of codes in their own right and as they interact and reinforce each other in Marshall's narratives.

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