

“Adrift on the Street Formerly Known as Buendia”: The Signification of Descriptive Details

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Introduction

French philosopher Roland Barthes explains that a number of structural features or codes affect how a reader understands narratives. The codes enable the perception of multiple meanings in every sentence which interact with those of other sentences that comprise the text. This is achieved through what he terms a “writerly” approach in reading, which is a process of interrupting and rereading meaningful units of the material, different from the “readerly” approach, which is reading for how events are sequenced towards a closure. Through reading and rereading, a plurality of meanings is exposed (Felluga, 2011).

The descriptive details, dialogues, and thoughts of the narrator in Nikki Alfar’s short story, “Adrift on the Street Formerly Known as Buendia,” stimulates a rereading for multiple meanings. Its plot is revealed through images and short dialogues that alternate the narrator’s thoughts. These images, dialogues, and thoughts can be taken as elements that function like the “weaving of voices,” as Barthes describes narrative codes.

This study focuses on the significations of the narrative details. It attempts at an understanding of the interconnections among these details which expose the theme of the story. In this way, the enigmas that baffle a reader are solved.

The “Writerly” Approach to a Text

Barthes’ organizational structures or codes affect the reading of a text so that the reader thinks beyond the temporal development of a story. He/she divides, criss-crosses, and stops a text as he / she decides on its genre and the ideologies it communicates. The reader can also discover the meanings and possibilities that each sentence contains. The interaction among the meanings in the sentences

allows different entries to and exits from the story (Felluga, 2011). The story, as explained by Clayton (2008), becomes a methodological field infused with the capacity to act and transgress the boundaries of genre and history, which, I think, agrees with Barthes's explanation that "rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology and recaptures a mythic time" (Felluga, 2011).

Barthes' Five Codes

The five codes that suggest the multiple meanings in a text are the hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural.

The hermeneutic code (HER.) is a puzzling element or an enigma in a story. It needs an explanation or the revelation of a truth. The enigma is presented through "snares" or intended evasions of the truth, "equivocations" or "combinations of truth and snare, and the holding back of answers to possible questions in a reader's mind.

The proairetic code (ACT.) is the structuring principle that keeps a reader interested about what is to happen next. This is achieved through action. For example, if a character dives into the ocean to look for the most sought-after pearl, interest lies in whether or not he would find it. Suspense is created by the action of the pearl-diver.

The hermeneutic and proairetic codes are fully realized when the text is read traditionally from beginning to end or through the "readerly" approach to a material. This is when truth and the connections among the actions in a story are fully understood. The rest of the five codes are not bound by the chronological aspect of the plot.

The three other codes include the semantic code (SEM.) which refers to an element that expresses connotations through the correlation of ideas in a narrative. The connotations should result from an association of ideas limited within the system of a text. A famous example from Barthes is the suggestion of femininity by the name Sarrasine, different from its masculine form, Sarrasin. The connotation of femininity turns out to be significant in the story about a man's love for a man whom he thought was a woman. The correlation of the connotative meanings is exemplified by the notion of feminine in the story of Sarrasine, giving the text special meaning.

The fourth code, the symbolic code (SYM.), is a principle that organizes meanings through the concepts of antithesis or mediations between antithetical terms. This is similar to Algirdas

relies on what it means for a road to be busy. Based on the binary opposition between the quietude suggested by the word clear and its implied opposite, activity, are suggested semantic possibilities like the lack of human element, the concrete, industrial, and probably inhuman setting (Chandler, 2002).

The cultural code (REF.) points to shared knowledge designated as “physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical,” and other fields of knowledge. Another cultural code known as the gnomic code relate to cliches, proverbs, or various types of sayings (Felluga, 2011).

Table 1 Presents a summary of the Barthesian codes.

Table1

Barthes' Narrative Codes

Code	Meaning	Distinguishing Feature/s	Example	
hermeneutic	HER	puzzling element	need for an explanation	one name written in varied characters with different surnames leading to the question of identity
proairetic	ACT	principle that maintains a reader's interest through action	action that arouses curiosity on its outcome	a dive in search of the biggest pearl -its outcome
semantic	SEM	element that expresses connotations	meanings associated with the literal meaning	the name Sarrasine as feminine;Sarrazin as masculine -

				associated with gender identity
symbolic	SYM	principle that organizes meanings through the concept of antithesis	the opposite of a term	white for black death for life
cultural	REF	shared knowledge	included within various fields like the medical, literary, historical, socio-economic; sayings	socio-economic statuses in the Filipino society

The five codes which function like the “weaving of voices” as described by Barthes, result in the plurality of the text. There is a plurality of signifiers that weave the text; the word text is mentioned to mean “cloth” and to have been derived from *textus*, meaning “woven” (Barthes in Harari, 1979).

An Application of the Barthesian Codes

An example of how Barthes’ codes are applied to a text is the reading of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* presented by Felluga (2011). Among the sentences analyzed are the following.

The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was Earnshaw; here and there varied to Catherine Heathcliff, and then again to Catherine Linton.

That one name, Catherine, has been repeated in different characters, presents an enigma, a need for an explanation on the identity of Catherine, who could be one and the same person but could also be more than one, literally or figuratively. Along with this is the presentation of meanings such as vagueness, identity, and repetition, and two actions, the placing of the candle and the act of reading the names which is suggested by the phrase “This

writing,” at the beginning of the second sentence. A third implicit act is the narration of the speaker. The text suggests the concern of the novel on identity and symbolically, the replication of Catherine from an idealized to a violent being. The reading continues to that of Lockwood, the narrator leaning his head against the window, spelling the name Catherine with the different surnames until when his eyes close, the letters glare like vivid disembodied spirits. Lockwood waking up to drive away the obtrusive name finds his candle starting to burn one of the old books. The window here is viewed as suggestive of a boundary or antithesis. The use of the phrase “as vivid as spectres” to describe the vividly glaring letters further implies a transgression of a border or a reversal because spectres should not be vivid. The later appearance of the ghost is also anticipated in this part of the story. In dispelling the name, Lockwood enforces the boundaries. This is taken as symbolic of the antitheses of inside / outside and death / life.

The Problem and Its Methodology

This study is aimed at a deconstruction of the short story, “Adrift on the Street Formerly Known as Buendia” by Nikki Alfar, through an examination of its five dimensions based on Barthes’ method of analysis. The questions addressed are: (1) How do the proairetic codes build interest and suspense in a reader? (2) What connotations explain the significant enigmas? (3) What symbolic codes interrelate to expose the theme of the story? (3) What cultural codes contribute to the interpretation of meanings?

The questions involve the five codes of Barthes –the proairetic in the first, the semantic for connotations and hermeneutic for the enigmas in the second, the symbolic in the third, and the cultural in the fourth question.

This study is a qualitative examination of the significations of the descriptive details in Alfar’s (2007) short story. As the story is read by parts, the significations of the words that represent details on the images, the dialogues, and the narrator’s thoughts

are noted and discussed based on the five codes of Barthes such as the hermeneutic (HER.), proairetic (ACT.), semantic (SEM.), symbolic (SYM.), and cultural (REF.). A holistic presentation of the significations is presented as answers to the four questions addressed in this study.

Reading the Short Story

THE TAXI GUY won't take me any farther than Ayala intersection which I can't blame him for, really, because as early as this point, the water's already knee-deep, and it's only going to get worse down the street.

This happens a lot on Buendia (which is supposed to be named Gil Puyat now, only I don't think anyone but the post office actually calls it that in the wet season. Every year (or so I'm told) they muck out the sewers; and every year it floods anyway, drastically and chronically, at even the slightest hint that the sky might be vaguely considering rain. You'd think that no one would keep on living in this area anymore, but it's not like any of us can afford to move. Or at least I can't.

The beginning of the story presents the reality of the situation in the story paralleled by the narrator's thoughts about it. This part of the narration presents two actions that start the whole story:

ACT.: "The taxi guy won't take me any farther," or the act of stopping the car; ACT.: the suggested reaction of the narrator—getting off and walking to probably find a ride of some sort. The change in the narrator's mode of travelling proceeds from one of convenience, somehow, to that which is unpleasant. SEM.: This shift from the good to the bad is implied by the change of the street name, Buendia, which is a shortened form of buenos dias translated into English as "good morning" or "good day". In Gil Puyat, now the name of the street, days are no longer good due to the "drastic" and "chronic" flooding. And we understand that one cannot do anything but get along with the inconveniences in such a circumstance. This idea of helplessness amidst an unpleasant transformation is suggested by the title. The word, "adrift" in the title implies a lack of direction. We expect more of the plot but the beginning of the story already suggests a focus on the antithetical semantic meanings of

good/bad, power/helplessness, stability/instability or change.

I don't even know if I'll be able to pay the rent once the deposit Jimmy put down runs out, but for now I'm stuck –in my condo if not permanently on this corner. I've gotten the hang of how things work in just the couple of months I've been here. I know manong will be along soon—piloting a transformed tricycle with the motorcycle part replaced by a bike and the seat jacked up to what used to be shoulder level, or a wooden cart with one or two monobloc benches strapped haphazardly to its surface with plastic straw –in either case charging some ridiculous but incontestable amount to get people home safe and sound, if not entirely dry.

SEM.: The narrator calls her condo a “corner,” which connotes isolation; her use of “stuck” communicates helplessness, and that of “if not permanently” means she is starting to lose hope. She is new in the place, however, with “just the couple of months” stay.

And who is Jimmy? If he paid the deposit, he must have been in charge of her, but not anymore, for she is now worried about the rent. This unpleasant change which she is helpless about is more significant than that of her mode of travel.

SYM.: The transformation of a tricycle into Manong's improvised flood transport could be taken to symbolize the change from good to bad. A sturdy tricycle transformed into a shaky improvisation has been assembled using monobloc benches and plastic straw—products that carry the notion of the industrialization that has been causing floods, the transgression of the bad.

I'm hoping it's a cart manong who shows up, really, because with the seat propped so high, you have to totally hunch over in those tricycles, almost like a fetus; and besides, there are already two people in line ahead of me and I don't want to have to wait around anymore than I absolutely have to although thankfully the actual rain has stopped. (And of course I don't have an umbrella; no one does; it's one of those evil Manila days that started out like the scorching height of summer and then turned traitor right after lunch.

SEM.: The words “hunch” and “fetus” further imply the helplessness that the narrator feels. But the word “fetus” connotes something more. It is suggestive of the helplessness of an innocent

being cramped in a crowded space. She is that innocent in the face of the treacherous weather that she gets to experience the inconveniences it causes. Her worrying about the rent and feeling of being stuck in a corner are all part of the bad weather.

I'm sure my mother would just be as relieved not to have to share with strangers, but I've discovered that in these situations people who have nothing else in common are suddenly willing to chatter away like old chums, which I admit isn't always desirable, but there you go – catastrophe (or the current local equivalent anyway) makes strangers into neighbors, something that doesn't happen all too often in the city.

These two in front of me, for instance; I'm sure I would never think of talking to them under ordinary circumstances. I mean, the girl seems normal enough—in fact, she's spectacularly pretty, even though she's wearing a horrible fuchsia glitter T-shirt with the words Kiss Me Quick! embossed on it—but the guy is wearing something that looks like a diver's wet suit, a one-piece rubbery getup in black and bright blue, so I'm trying not to stare at him, which isn't easy. At least you could say he's dressed for the weather, unlike me in my one good suit and formerly good heels.

SEM.: The narrator is very much influenced by her mother. The sense of exclusiveness she has developed from the mother is implied by her description of the girl as seeming to be normal and her use of the word horrible for the fuchsia shirt. It is possible that she finds self-expression of the need for attention suggested by the fuchsia shirt with the words, "Kiss Me Quick" but denies it due to her mother's disdain for such gestures. HER.: Why she criticizes the girl, needs explanation. This is an enigma created through the suspension of the answer.

That she is in her one good suit differentiates her from the girl. T-shirt girl cares about her feminine attractiveness while she concerns herself with a profession. The formerly good heels, however, signify the now bad condition. Due to this bad condition, her one good suit could signify her remaining strength to maintain her composure.

HER.: Obviously needing explanation is the incongruity of the diver's wet suit, which the narrator later tries to logically interpret. The story then continues.

He's obviously thinking along the same lines because when Manong finally arrives (with a cart, thank you, Lord!) and we clamber aboard, Diver Guy says, "Too bad about your shoes. They look expensive."

They are, too—or they were, blush-colored Nine West that were a present from Jimmy back when things were good (although even then I noticed that the shoes had faint scuff marks on the soles, but I was stupidly in love and brilliant at making excuses to explain away all things I didn't want to understand).

I go. "It's okay. If I get the job I interviewed for today, it'll be worth it," as I settle in to my position in the middle of the bench. (It's Buendia Flood Etiquette that the third person in line gets the least desirable position—not that the sides of a precariously perched monobloc are exactly the lap of luxury, but at least you get an armrest and you're only squashed on one side by your companions.)

Another ACT.: Diver Guy's initiation of a dialogue, reveals that Jimmy is the man in the narrator's life. She then thinks about her evasion of a possible truth implied by the scuff marks on the soles of the shoes. This is an enigma in the form of an equivocation –a mixture of a truth and a snare because we get to understand that Jimmy's love did not prove true but we are not provided with an exact explanation for the scuff marks. This adds strength to her seeming denial of finding a sense of self-expression in T-shirt Girl.

The dialogue continues with the narrator responding to Diver Guy. It is then revealed that the narrator has applied for a job, which adds to the transitory nature of her life, the change that leads to the antithesis of power / helplessness amidst uncertainties.

ACT.: The narrator settling between manong's two other passengers describes her position as one where a passenger gets squashed on both sides. (SEM.): If she were happy, being squashed on both left and right would not be that distressing. What are actually squashing her are her depression over the loss of Jimmy on the one hand, and the consequences of these such as her financial uncertainties, on the other.

"Oh?" he says, zipping the collar of his wet suit up and down a couple of inches (not in a gross way, just sort of idly). "What kind of a job?"

"Call center," I say. I've already been training myself to say it without

cringing, so it rolls out nice and smooth, even though of course I'm still thinking –graduated with honors in Comp Lit, and this is what I'm doing?

SEM.: The zipping up of the collar could be taken to be more than a physical closure with the idle unzipping for only a “couple of inches,” as a partial revelation of self. It connects to the hidden truth about the scuff marks on the shoe soles. It could also be noted that Diver Guy is a complete stranger and it is not usual for an unfamiliar man to be talking to a woman the way he does. He appears to depict a certain degree of confidence. This calls for an answer.

The narrator's application at a call center further explains why she is squashed on both sides of Manong's bench. This brings to mind her being part of a transformation larger than those that have happened at Buendia--a cultural code (REF.), our shared knowledge about how finding a job in Philippine society is. The number of graduates so overwhelmingly exceeds the number of job opportunities that professionals work in call centers and other positions that do not relate to their college degree. This partly accounts for the helplessness that the narrator is experiencing, but of more weight in her search for a job is the urgency that she is into, her worry of not being able to pay the rent.

“That's good money,” Diver Guy says. “Are you transferring from another call center, or just starting?”

“Just starting,” I say. “I used to be a dentist's assistant because –“ Okay, hang on, camaraderie in the face of catastrophe is one thing, but there are limits to how much I'm willing to share here.” I just kind of fell into it.”

I look away from Diver Guy and focus instead on the water swirling past us as Cart Manong trudges forward. It's around thigh-high here, and things are floating around in it—squashed cigarette butts, translucent plastic bags, a ragged square of carton. Dirt too, of course, though it colors the water brownish-gray instead of being visible on its own; and I'd rather not think about what else is in there that I don't see. It can't be pleasant to be immersed in.

The symbolic codes (SYM.) of good/bad and stability/change are at work in this part of the story. REF.: The cigarette butts and translucent plastic bags surface as pieces of evidence of the crimes

against nature that have caused the flooding. The dirt that has colored the water makes it unpleasant to be immersed in it like how it feels to be squashed by frustrations and uncertainties that have transformed life.

Poor Manong, but at least he's making a killing at twenty bucks a passenger, just to go down the street. I look over at him and see that he's wearing a flimsy cardstock crown, like the kind they gave out at my nephew's last birthday party, only with just three points in front instead of all the way around—more Wonder Woman than Burger King, maybe. Anyway, it's open on top and doesn't protect him from the rain at all, so who knows why he's wearing it? It's just Buendia, I guess; the rain comes down and the weirdos come out. (And it's not that I'm being snotty, exactly; I figure I fit right in.)

SEM.: On a rainy day like this, Manong rules over the flooded Buendia. The dirt of the flood does not inhibit him from trudging through despite the risks he is exposed to as suggested by the open top of the crown. The flimsy material of the card fits the kind of domain he has. His rule will wear out soon. REF.: Helping passengers get across the flood, he is more like Wonder Woman than Burger King. However, in real life, he would not be doing this if he came from an upper stratum of the society. Therefore, he is undergoing no transformation from good to bad. He has mastered the hang of things in Buendia; hence, he is king. But could Manong really be wearing the crown? The narrator finds him weird and thinks she is a weirdo herself.

With all the reasons to feel stuck in a corner, it is possible that the strangeness is all coming from her. A symbolic antithesis begins to surface here then—that of reality/illusion.

"What about you, what do you do?" T-shirt Girl, from my other side, asks diver Guy. "And why is it you're wearing a diving outfit?" Wow, obviously they're not big on manners in Fuchsia Glitter Land, or at least she doesn't have her mother's voice perpetually at the back of her mind, telling her what is and isn't proper to talk about. (And yes, I know a lot of things wouldn't have turned out the way they did if I'd listened more, but I will never admit that to you, so shut up, Mental Mama.)

ACT.: The girl in fuchsia now starts a dialogue which makes her the narrator's point of reference for her having disobeyed her

mother. Without her mother's voice, the girl lacks manners, like how the narrator disobeys her mother. She criticizes herself as she criticizes the girl.

HER.: Whether T-shirt Girl is the narrator herself could be a deliberate evasion of the truth, a snare as Barthes terms it.

"I'm a marine biologist," says Diver Guy. "I study aquatic life."

"You mean in Manila Bay?" I ask, unable to prevent my voice from squeaking up a couple of registers. I mean, obviously, it's the only sizeable body of water close enough for him to already be wearing his wetsuit (though that's still weird, if you ask me), but I wouldn't have thought anything could live in that cesspool aside from rats and roaches—then again, who knows? Maybe all the pollutants everyone dumps in the bay have caused the rats and roaches to mutate into some new kind of amphibious life form, and that's why he's studying them.

The action (ACT.), the dialogue between Diver Guy and the narrator continues. And the narrator tries to control showing her wonder about what Diver Guy says. HER.: His words are an enigma. Could these be how Jimmy talked with the narrator before, when things were good according to the perceptions of her innocent mind?

"No, no, right here," he says; and I smile because that's exactly the joke my train of thought was leading me to, that if anyone wanted to study aquatic vermin or pollution-spawned fungi all they'd have to do is come visit Buendia on a rainy day like today.

But it seems like he's actually serious, because he goes on with, "We forget, don't we, that the wellspring of life continues to flow even in the most unlikely places, whether by accident or design," and I don't have anything to say to that, so I look at T-shirt Girl to see if she thinks he's as wacky as I suddenly do, only she's looking at him with disgusting dewy-eyed admiration, like he's MacArthur slogging through the surf at Leyte or something. Then Diver Guy says, "In fact, I should really get to work," and, holding his nose like a kid on the edge of a diving board, stands up and steps right off the edge of the cart.

SEM.: Diver Guy could be a projection of the image of Jimmy for whom the narrator has had doubts, seeing the scuff marks on the shoe soles, but still continued the relationship with him. Likewise, she finds the things Diver Guy says absurd but tends to believe him.

It is not easy to believe what Diver Guy is saying. But T-shirt Girl reacts with admiration which could be a reflection of the immediate emotional reactions of the narrator herself. She is intelligent enough to detect the absurdities in his words but gets hooked emotionally. When Diver Guy disappears, who knows which of the things he has said are true. Did he not zip “the collar of his wet suit up and down a couple of inches (not in a gross way, just sort of idly)?” His gestures signify his reservations.

“Wait!” I try to say; but he’s already gone, which is ridiculous, because the water isn’t even above Cart Manong’s waist yet, and no one who isn’t, you know, vertically challenged like Mahal, should be swallowed up by the water that’s no more than three feet deep, but Diver Guy has completely disappeared.

“Did you see that?” I ask the world in general; but Manong doesn’t seem to hear me, so I address it to T-shirt Girl, who’s staring at the water, but doesn’t seem particularly fazed. In fact, she’s smiling. Did you see that?!”

“It’s nice to find out that a man can be so devoted,” she says, smiling even wider to reveal annoyingly perfect pearly white teeth. “He just vanished!” I lean further toward the side of the cart and look down, but all I see is debris and dirty water. Maybe he landed badly, and twisted his foot, and fell. Maybe he stepped straight into an open manhole. Either way, he could be drowning and no one else seems to care.

“I mean, obviously it’s to his work, but still, T-shirt Girl says, “it’s nice to see such commitment in a human male. Do you think he’d be the same way in a relationship?”

ACT.: Diver Guy’s disappearance heightens our interest because the earlier enigma.

(HER.) about him has not been solved. SEM.: After his disappearance, she sounds panicky asking the “world” about it. But she finds herself the only being bothered for all the world is at its usual state. She leans to look down on the water displaying a nostalgic feeling mixed with doubts because of the many questions about the loss. Why is she annoyed at T-shirt Girl’s pearly white teeth? She could be another girl, happy admiring Diver Guy and the narrator does not like this because she herself gets charmed by him.

She hates this either.

*I should go after him, I think (even if he is quite possibly a lunatic),
But I'm scared Manong will just leave me and I'll have to slog through
the filthy water on my own all the rest of the way home. What if I'm
the one who falls through an open manhole? In these stupid heels, too;
I could break an ankle. Maybe Diver Guy is just fine and –I don't know
–swimming around, catching cockroaches underwater. No one else is
worried, so maybe I'm overreacting, like Jimmy always says.*

SEM.: The narrator cannot be so affected by Diver Guy himself. He is a stranger, but with the image of Jimmy in him, that she remembers how Jimmy always says she is overreacting. And maybe her overreactions were due to her doubts due to instances like that of the shoe soles she did not want to explain. It is an evasion of a truth on the part of Jimmy when he would counteract her worries, saying she was overreacting.

*Not that I've known many human males, you understand," T-shirt Girl
goes on. "I've only been on the land for some few days, but it certainly
appears as if they're not very—"*

*I finally make sense (literally, if not figuratively) of what she's saying.
"What?"*

*"Reliable," she says, twining a lock of hair in her fingers in that
coquettish way I can't stand. "You know, my father warned me that it
was foolish to leave everything I knew behind, but love makes people
foolish, don't you think?"*

*I can't help but stare this time; she's hitting too close to home, and
I'm starting to think that maybe, I'm on one of those TV pranks shows
somehow. Joey de Leon hosts one, doesn't he?*

*"Where's the camera?" I turn my stare into a glare, hoping I look
threatening and not quite as idiotic as I feel.*

The ACT. continues with the dialogue between T-shirt Girl and the narrator. Now she thinks T-shirt Girl is "hitting too close to home" in implying that she has been foolishly in love.

SEM.: This is an acknowledgement of her pretense. Putting on a threatening look is no longer as easy as thinking stupid of

T-shirt Girl because it is now difficult to deny her own idiocy.

"I know what a camera is!" she says. "He liked to use one when we were together; he said it would give him something to remember when he got hitched."

"How did you know he was married?" I try to snarl this at her, but it comes out as a weak little whisper, because I never told anyone but Rina, and she swore never to breathe a word, and I'm going to kill her, that bitch of a supposed best friend.

"I didn't," T-shirt Girl says, "I didn't know what 'hitched' means; I only found out later, when he told me he's getting married next week."

"I realize she's not talking about me (How self-centered can I get, honestly?) and she's about to cry; her eyes are all shiny, though in a pretty way, like brand-new marbles before they get scarred from being played with.

ACT.: Even as the dialogue between the narrator and T-shirt Girl continues, we are not fully satisfied about their identities. HER.: Our suspicion that they are the same person is not confirmed. This appears to be partially true. After all she has hated T-shirt girl because this girl is her stupid self. The playing with the marbles connotatively refers to Jimmy's making her cry.

Well, a lot can happen in a week," I say, hating myself even as the words come out. Why am I trying to give her false hope? "I mean, you could wake up tomorrow and find that you're completely over him, just like that." I snap my fingers, improvising. "You never know."

She does start to cry then, and I look away so she can compose herself. The water is almost up to Manong's chest now, and something swirls past the cart that's way too big to be a rat, not even one of those cat-sized rats you catch sight of, running on the top of electric wires at night. It swishes by too fast to really see, and probably the muddiness of the water is messing up its real color anyway but it almost looks purple, bright purple like ube ice cream; and it's moving something alive.

As the narrator tries to console T-shirt Girl, she notices that the flood has risen to Manong's chest. SYM.: It appears that the bad is transgressing over the good; T-shirt Girl has begun exposing her

weakening state. Then an ACT – that of a swirling is introduced.

“I don’t have a week. I don’t have any more time,” T-shirt Girl sobs and now I see that it’s not just her eyes that are shiny, it’s everything about her—skin, clothes, hair—gleaming suddenly as if she’s been wrapped in transparent plastic. I have no idea what’s happening (which seems to be the theme of my day and possibly, my life); but I want to comfort her despite the fact that she seems to be the kind of girl I ordinarily detest, so I touch her shoulder gently.

SEM.: It is not surprising that the narrator detests T-shirt girl because she is influenced by her Mental Mama. Having been influenced by her, it is not surprising that she dislikes her weak self.

My hand passes right through her. I snatch it back and stare at it; and my hand is covered in bubbles, like I’ve been washing the dishes. I look back up at T-shirt Girl and she’s turning into bubbles –first, different colored ones, still in more or less the outline of a human being, in all the shades of her hair and skin and clothes—then purewhite foam that slips through the oblong air holes on the monobloc over the surface of the wooden cart (and my once expensive shoes).

SYM.: There is a continued transgression of the bad and unstable. HER.: Although hints point to the narrator being T-shirt Girl herself this remains to be an enigma. One of the hints is the white foam that gets washed over her shoes as if the foam comes from the narrator’s body.

I can’t seem to think what I should say, or do. I want to reach forward and shake Cart Manong by the shoulders (since he never seems to hear me), screaming like the proverbial Sisa; but frankly, I’m afraid to. Less afraid that he’ll be upset, or get distracted and stumble, really, than that he’ll twist around and turn out to be –I don’t know –maybe the Creature from the Black Lagoon, the way things are going.

REF.: The choice of “Sisa” is so suggestive; the narrator is so confused. If Cart Manong never seems to hear her, she is hearing and witnessing what only she hears and sees.

I don’t know where I am anymore, I’ve been too distracted to pay attention; but it’s pretty clear now that this is no longer Buendia, though I can see my condo building—just the very top of it with its

In God We Trust logo—in the distance behind us, as we'd gone past it already when I'm pretty damned sure we didn't, at least not in any kind of way that obeys the laws of physics as I know them, not that what I know seems to count for very much in whatever place this is that I've somehow slipped into.

REF.: The narrator's trend of thinking starts to support the idea of the proverbial Sisa.

I wipe my bubbly hand on my suit jacket and keep my mouth shut, as what's left of T-shirt Girl floats farther and farther away on the brownish-gray surf.

I'm hardly surprised at all when a small boy pops out of the water and climbs aboard the cart, onto the bench beside me. He looks like a typical urchin with his tanned skin and orange-and-brown sun-striped hair except for the wide flaps—of -skin?—that stretch from his wrist to his ankles on either side, like a miniature manta ray. (Or a regular-sized manta ray, I guess, if you think about it ; and obviously this isn't the most useful thing for me to be thinking about in this situation, but I'm just yammering away in my head right no, because it's hard to make sense when the world refuses to.

"You're not pregnant, you know," Manta Boy says; and it should probably stun me that he knows exactly what I've been trying to worry about for a week and a half, but I think I've gone beyond amazement now. I'm just looking at the water. It's still filthy; and it's obviously much deeper than it has any right to be (and obviously Cart Manong is much taller than any human being ought to be). And I could drown in it; or lose my bearings and never find my way home (And besides, you can't go home again, isn't that what they say? It's what Mama said, anyway); or be attacked by who knows what else is swimming around down there that is probably much, much worse than Diver Guy or Manta Boy. It would be foolish to leave what little I still do know, when I could just stay where I am.

ACT.: Nothing physical is happening here. The narrator is physically passive but mentally active—adrift in the street formerly called Buendia. She thinks of the much deeper water which symbolizes the worst of her life (SYM), the opposite of buenos dias. SEM.: She also senses she is losing control, mentally, but she still has a choice, saying "it would be foolish to leave what little I still do know, when I could just stay where I am.

SEM.: On the other hand, Cart Manong is much taller because he has adapted to this kind of life. He has proven himself tough. The deeper the water, the more he thrives.

SEM.: It is clear now that the reason for her feeling stuck in her corner extends beyond the loss of Jimmy, and the lack of money. Aside from these is the rejection from home.

"It's only that you haven't even let yourself cry," says Manta Boy. You'll dry up completely if you keep holding it all in. You need to learn to go with the flow."

SEM.: This is what Cart Manong was able to achieve. Without pretense, he swam in the water, immersed himself in the flood. SYM.: To the narrator, nevertheless, the flood is too much of a transition from good to bad, that she is caught helpless.

I stand up and look at him. Skin flaps aside, he's adorable, really—big earnest eyes, and the beginnings of awesome cheekbones that will have girls falling over him when he's older. Especially if he become whatever the weird aquatic equivalent is of a professional; a doctor, a lawyer, or even just a dentist.

"You shut up," I tell him. "None of it is any of your business anyway, any of you." And I take off my suit jacket; take off my hand-me-down shoes from my hand-me-lover; take a breath; and dive in, before I can change my mind.

SEM: Connecting the possibilities that Manta Boy could become to the narrator's worry about her possible pregnancy relates Manta Boy to the narrator's thoughts of her own child. But this thought which she has considered did not successfully prevent her final decision.

SEM.: Like T-shirt Girl and Diver Guy, Manta Boy is a combination of the logic and incongruities taking shape in the narrator's confused and troubled mind. The embossed "Kiss Me Quick" in the fuchsia shirt connects to the girl's words when she sobbed before she vanished—"I don't have a week. I don't have any more time." Like her, the narrator could withstand her life no more.

SEM.: It is a tiring busy trip adrift the street which is no longer called Buendia. Helpless and unstable, the narrator gets lost.

A Holistic Presentation of the Significations

The answers to the questions on the most significant details posed for this study are presented as follows.

1. Answering the first question on how proairetic codes build interest and suspense in a reader involved referring to hermeneutic codes. The most enigmatic element is the absurdity of the images, words, and actions of the other characters in the story such as Diver Guy, T-shirt Girl, Manong, and Manta Boy.
2. The connotations that explain the significant enigmas in the story are the following.
 - A. The narrator seeing herself as a fetus and mentioning that she has no umbrella on evil Manila days when the height of summer turns traitor imply her innocence unprotected not only from the weather but also from the deceitful cunning of the man she got attracted to.
 - B. The narrator's intense dislike for T-shirt Girl is due to the latter being a depiction of the narrator's weaknesses.
 - C. Diver Guy's words and actions suggest the actions of Jimmy, the man in the narrator's life.
 - D. The appearance of Manta Boy reflects the narrator's worry about being pregnant.
3. The symbolic codes that work to bring out special meanings in the text are the antithetical ideas of good/bad, stability/change, and power/helplessness. The narrator, faced with changes mainly in her personal life experiences distress and helplessness that lead to a psychological instability. Another symbolic antithesis noted towards the end of the reading is that of reality or illusion. As the connotations are explained, the illusory world of the narrator is conceptualized which finds a link to the concept of "adrift" in the title. The whole

- narration is revealed to be based on this illusory world.
4. Significant to the interpretative interconnections is an understanding of the common situation of young Filipino graduates in a plodding economy wherein images of a struggling modernization comprise chaotic urban scenes.

Summary

The study aimed to analyze the significations in the narrative dated 2007, “Adrift on the Street Formerly Known as Buendia” by Nikki Alfar. The analysis was conducted using Barthes’ theory of five codes such as the hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes. The multiple meanings of descriptive details were revealed considering the interconnections of these and other elements in the story. The details are interwoven and form a meaningful whole.

Conclusion

This is a conclusion on the holistic meaning of the story based on an explanation of the enigmatic details.

The beginning of the story presents the mini situation of the narrator having to transfer from a taxi to Manong’s transport cart due to the flood. As the author deals with the inconveniences of the situation, the sights around rouse her thoughts on the distressful circumstances in Buendia which is connected to her own life. The sights include the two other passengers in Manong’s cart with whom she engages in dialogues. Explaining the details of her narration using the semantic and the symbolic codes leads to the idea that these passengers depict her sentiments and the man in her life, Jimmy’s actuations, which are involved in the most significant transformation in her life –her idiocy—the frustration caused by her falling all in for the already married, Jimmy. The consequences of this are her uncertainties in terms of her material needs, the rejection of her family, and her possible pregnancy. Unstable, helpless, adrift, she loses track of life. She says she dived into the filthy water, yet all these that she has gone through along Buendia are but the realities

in her mind -- a reality that has swerved, entangled and vanished into a maze. Barthes explains that when a term in an antithetical pair crosses the wall in between the pair, there is transgression. The bad transgressed the good, instability transgressed steadfastness, helplessness transgressed power, and illusion transgressed reality.

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