

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS (ROLAND BARTHES) OF THE LYRICS IN MAHALINI RAHARJA'S ALBUM *FABULA*

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Abstract

This study examines the lyrics in Mahalini Raharja's album **Fabula** by applying Roland Barthes's semiotic approach to uncover denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings, while also exploring their potential use as teaching materials for poetry at the high school level. The method used was qualitative descriptive analysis employing the listen-and-note technique, followed by data analysis using the referential correspondence method and the key element sorting (PUP) technique. The research data consisted of words, phrases, and lines extracted from ten songs in the album. The analysis identified 36 data points divided into three types of meaning: 16 denotative data points (44.44%), 18 connotative data points (50.00%), and 2 mythical data points (5.56%). The predominance of connotative meaning indicates that Mahalini primarily expresses her emotional experiences through metaphors of the body and feelings, while the two mythical data points the phrases "tuan" and "putri" and the word "restu" represent the values of social hierarchy and the legitimacy of family blessing that are deeply ingrained in Indonesian society. These findings confirm that the lyrics of popular songs deserve to be treated as literary texts that can be studied scientifically and utilized as alternative teaching materials for poetry, given that their diction, stylistic elements, and layered meanings are relevant to the interpretive skills that high school students need to master particularly within the framework of the Deep Learning Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful, mindful, and enjoyable learning.

Keywords: Roland Barthes's semiotics; song lyrics; *Fabula* album;.

1 INTRODUCTION

Language is, in essence, a system of signs in which the relationship between form and meaning is determined by conventions established within society. The study of signs, how they function, and the process by which meaning is formed is called semiotics (Efendi et al., 2024). In human life, various elements such as words, symbols, and images can function as signs that convey specific meanings. Therefore, the study of semiotics not only highlights the form of signs but also examines how these signs are interpreted based on the surrounding social and cultural context.

The semiotic approach is widely used in research on texts containing diverse signs and layers of meaning, including song lyrics. In popular music, lyrics do not merely serve as a complement to the music but also function as a medium for conveying ideas and emotions through word choice, metaphors, and symbols. One work worthy of analysis is the album **Fabula** by Mahalini Raharja. The lyrics in this album contain a variety of symbolic and metaphorical expressions. One example is found in the line "Saat ku rindu ku coba tak rindu" ("When I miss you, I try not to miss you") from the song "Bohong Hati." This expression can be understood not only literally but also opens up possibilities for other interpretations related to connotative and mythological aspects.

Some previous studies have used a semiotic approach to uncover meaning in song lyrics. But those studies usually just focus on one or a few specific songs, and it's still rare to see someone analyze every song in an entire album fully. The album *Fabula*, released in 2023, was chosen for this study because most of its lyrics talk about love, loss, and human emotional journeys. This makes it different from the album *Koma*, which covers a wider range of themes. The term *Fabula*, which means 'story' in Latin, also reflects the series of emotional narratives conveyed through the songs in the album from happiness and disappointment to loss. The use of poetic, symbolic, and emotionally rich language makes this album interesting to analyze with a semiotic approach. Plus, these characteristics could be used in classrooms to help. Besides that, these characteristics have the potential to be used in the classroom to help students understand the use of diction, symbols, and figurative meanings in literary texts. Based on the explanation above, this study focuses on applying Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to the lyrics in Mahalini Raharja's album *Fabula* to identify the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings contained in them.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, considering that semiotic analysis is basically based on a qualitative paradigm, with data categorized into auditory, textual, or audiovisual forms (Hoed, 2011). This approach was chosen because the research data consists of texts that are analyzed and explained in depth based on the meanings contained in them, rather than through statistical calculations, in line with the definition of qualitative research as a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of words explained in detail and in depth (Juhadi et al., 2022). The research data comes from the lyrics of ten songs in the album *Fabula* (2023), namely "Ini Laguku," "Buru-buru," "Bawa Dia Kembali," "Putar Waktu," "Bohong Hati," "Melawan Restu," "Sial," "Sisa Rasa," "Pecahkan Hatiku," and "Kisah Sempurna." The data analyzed consists of words, phrases, clauses, and lines that have the potential to convey certain meanings and messages.

Data collection was carried out using the note-taking listening technique. The researcher listened to all the songs repeatedly, then noted parts of the lyrics suspected of containing denotative, connotative, or mythological meaning. The collected data were then analyzed using the equivalence method, also known as the identity method, which is a way of determining the essence of a linguistic unit through a determinant outside the language itself (Zaim, 2014). This method is supported by the element sorting technique (PUP), which is a technique of sorting linguistic units to be analyzed by utilizing the researcher's mental sorting ability as the determinant (Kesuma, 2007). The analysis process was carried out by identifying potentially meaningful linguistic units, determining diction or symbols as the determinant elements, relating them to the context of the relevant lines, and then interpreting their meaning based on the three levels of meaning according to Roland Barthes. The analysis results are presented informally in the form of a descriptive explanation that shows the research findings using everyday language so that readers can easily understand (Kesuma, 2007).

3 RESULTS

Analysis of ten songs in the album *Fabula* resulted in 36 pieces of data, which were classified into three types of meaning, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Classification of types of meaning in the lyrics of the Album *Fabula*

Type of meaning	Number of Data	Percentage
Denotation	16	44,44%
Connotation	18	50,00%
Myth	2	5,56%
Total	36	100%

3.1 Denotative Meaning

According to Hanifah et al. (2023), denotative meaning is the meaning of a word or group of words based on the direct relationship between the linguistic unit and the external reality it accurately represents. In addition, Efendi et al. (2024) stated that denotative meaning is the literal meaning that encompasses what is explicitly indicated by the word, or the direct relationship between the sign and its referent. Denotative meaning is straightforward, objective, and aligns with the reality referred to by the word. In practice, denotative meaning emphasizes a clear relationship between the linguistic sign and its intended reference, making it easy to understand for both speakers and listeners.

Sample Data (1)

A snippet of the lyrics: "Ku mohon, dengar *ini laguku*, Semua tentang rasaku padamu." (Ini Laguku),

The phrase 'Ini laguku' combines the word 'song' with the possessive suffix '-ku,' turning it into 'Ini Laguku.' This word acts as a demonstrative pronoun that emphasizes the closeness of the object to the speaker. According to the Online KBBI 6.1.0 (2025), the word 'lagu' refers to a type of sound with rhythm in a song. In Barthes' semiotic framework, the relationship between this phrase (signifier) and the song created by the character 'I' (signified) is at the level of primary meaning, which is straightforward and easy to understand. Its beauty comes from the simplicity and honesty of the language itself the character 'I' humbly offers something personal to the person they love. it's not just about asserting ownership of the song, as reinforced by the next line, 'All about my feelings for you,' which makes this phrase an honest starting point before the meaning of the lyrics becomes more metaphorical.

Sample Data (2)

A snippet of the lyrics: “Kan ku kembali ke *masa kecilku*, Tak harus mengerti rasanya pilu.” (Putar Waktu)

A similar pattern can be seen in the phrase '*masa kecilku*,' which is made up of the root word '*masa*' according to the Online KBBI 6.1.0 (2025), it means time, moment, or a certain period with a clear beginning and end and the word '*kecil*,' which means not big or smaller than usual. The root '*kecil*' is then combined with the first-person singular bound pronoun '*-ku*,' referring to 'I,' forming the phrase '*my childhood*,' which refers to the period when 'I' was a child, directly pointing to the speaker's childhood without any figurative meaning. In Barthes' semiotic framework, the relationship between this phrase (the signifier) and the real childhood of 'I' (the signified) is at the first level of meaning, which is straightforward and easy to grasp, so its charm actually comes from the honesty of simply remembering the past, a feeling reinforced by the following lines, 'No need to understand the feeling of sorrow' and 'Face the harshness of the world,' which emphasizes that childhood is understood as the stage of life before facing the harshness of the adult world.

Sample Data (3)

A snippet of the lyrics: “Dengarlah doaku yang tak pernah meminta. Bawa dia kembali Bersama walau hanya sesaat.” (Bawa Dia Kembali)

My word '*doaku*' comes from the root word '*doa*,' which according to the KBBI Online 6.1.0 (2025) means a request, hope, or plea to God. In the context of Barthes' semiotics, the relationship between this word (the signifier) and the request made by the character 'I' (the signified) is at the first level of meaning, which is direct and easy to understand. This makes the lyrics feel sincere and touching, precisely because they are delivered in simple, unadorned language, as reinforced by the next line, 'Bring him back even if only for a moment,' which clarifies the content of the plea, namely the hope that the lover can return, even if just for a short time.

3.2 Connotative Meaning

Unlike denotation, connotative meaning arises from a shift in meaning caused by the interaction between a sign and the emotional experiences of the character "I." According to Efendi et al. (2024), connotative meaning refers to non-literal meanings that include feelings, values, culture, and even the perspective of a particular group. Meanwhile, according to Nisa & Febriani (2022), connotative meaning refers to the implied or indirect meaning of a word, which comes from the listener's or reader's response to something, combined with social attitudes and personal views about the word. Thus, connotative meaning emerges from an interpretive process influenced by someone's experiences, feelings, and viewpoint towards a word or expression.

Sample Data (4)

A snippet of the lyrics: “Bersanding dilemaku di hati, Kau hantuiku dengan rayumu. Kaupuja `kan pesonaku. Yang `kan pudar seiring waktu.” (Buru-buru)

The word '*hantuiku*' is a combination of the root word '*hantu*' with the suffix '*-i*' (becoming '*hantui*'), which is then followed by the clitic '*-ku*,' making it '*hantuiku*.' Lexically, according to KBBI Daring 6.1.0 (2025), the word '*hantu*' means an evil spirit believed to inhabit certain places. In Barthes' semiotic framework, the relationship between this word (signifier) and the emotional unease felt by the 'I' character (signified) exists on the level of secondary meaning, formed through the interaction of the sign with the inner experience of the 'I' character. The beauty, in fact, comes from the shift in meaning itself the mystical nuance that was originally frightening is transformed into a depiction of dramatic and poetic longing, as reinforced by the next line, 'with your coaxing. I will adore your charm,' which emphasizes that the shadows come from the enticing appeal of the 'you' figure that keeps echoing in their mind.

Sample Data (5)

A snippet of the lyrics: “Jika kau minta aku menjauh. Hilang dari seluruh memori indahmu.” “Kan kulakukan semua walau tak mungkin sanggup. *Bohongi hatiku*.” (Bohongi Hati)

The phrase '*bohongi hatiku*' is formed from the root word '*bohong*' with the suffix '*-i*,' and the root word '*hati*' followed by the possessive clitic '*-ku*.' Lexically, according to KBBI Daring 6.1.0 (2025), the word '*bohong*' means not in accordance with the actual state, or a lie, while '*hati*' refers to the reddish organ located in the upper right part of the abdominal cavity, functioning to process nutrients in the blood and produce bile. However, this phrase no longer refers to the physical act of lying, but has shifted to symbolize the act of hiding or denying the true feelings that still exist within the character 'I'. Within

Barthes' semiotic framework, the relationship between this phrase (signifier) and the act of hiding true feelings (signified) is on the level of the second-order meaning, formed through the interaction of the sign with the inner experience of the character 'I', so its beauty actually comes from this shift in meaning the heart, what originally referred to a physical organ is elevated to represent feelings, making this seemingly contradictory request feel poetic and depicting deep inner conflict, as reinforced by the previous line, 'If you ask me to step away. Vanish from all your beautiful memories,' which expresses the 'I' character's surrender to let go of the one they love, even though their heart must endure deep pain.

Sample Data (6)

A snippet of the lyrics: "Bagaimana dengan aku terlanjur mencintaimu?. Yang datang beri harapan." "Lalu pergi dan menghilang. Tak terpikirkan olehmu, *hatiku hancur* karenamu." "Takkan kuterima cinta sesaatmu." (Sial)

The phrase 'hatiku hancur' comes from the root word 'hati' with the possessive clitic '-ku' attached, as well as the root word 'broken.' Lexically, according to the Online KBBI 6.1.0 (2025), the word 'hati' refers to a reddish organ located in the upper right part of the abdominal cavity that functions to process nutrients in the blood and produce bile, while 'broken' means shattered into small pieces or crushed. However, this phrase no longer refers to physical damage to a body organ, but has shifted to symbolize deep emotional pain and immense suffering caused by betrayal. In Barthes' semiotic framework, the relationship between this phrase (the signifier) and the deep suffering experienced by the 'I' character (the signified) exists at the level of second-order meaning, formed through the interaction of the sign with the inner experiences of the 'I' character. Because of that, its beauty actually comes from that shift in meaning: the damage to a solid object is lifted into a metaphor for the deep pain in the heart, as if the feelings of the 'I' character have shattered into pieces, an impression reinforced by the next line, 'I will never accept your fleeting love,' which emphasizes the disappointment of being toyed with by false hope from the one they love.

3.3 Myth

According to Widarti et al. (2025), myths are a construction of meaning through signs that present a certain perspective or ideology in such a way that it appears natural and is accepted as truth in society. Myths often play a role in shaping social images, power relations, and collective beliefs. They work by masking cultural values into something ordinary that doesn't need to be questioned. In communication practices, myths also influence public perception of individuals, groups, or certain events. That's why studying myths is important to uncover the hidden meanings and ideologies behind specific signs or representations.

Sample Data (7)

A snippet of the lyrics: "*Tuan dan putri* mulai menghakimi. Berkata-kata usik tidak naman dihati." "Aku manusia sama seperti mereka. Tetapi mengapa seolah paling sempurna." (Putar Waktu)

The terms 'tuan' (lord) and 'putri' (princess) come from the base words 'tuan' and 'putri.' Lexically, according to the KBBI Online 6.1.0 (2025), 'tuan' means a person to whom others serve, as opposed to a servant or slave, while 'putri' means a king's daughter. However, in this context, the phrase has shifted in meaning to symbolize people who see themselves as having higher status and position compared to others. From Barthes' semiotic perspective, this phrase has reached the third level of meaning, which is myth, because the connotative meaning about superiority has been naturalized as a truth that is generally accepted, as can still be seen in cyberbullying, when the opinions of public figures seen as 'successful and perfect' are often used as a moral standard to judge ordinary people. Its aesthetic value comes from a noble-toned style of language that subtly and ironically criticizes arrogance, as reinforced by the following line, "I am just like them. But why do I seem the most perfect," which questions the fairness of that view, even though basically all humans hold equal status..

4 CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the album *Fabula* by Mahalini Raharja shows that out of 36 identified data points, the distribution consists of connotation (50.00%), denotation (44.44%), and myth (5.56%) categories, which confirms that the lyrics in this album mostly convey emotional experiences indirectly through metaphors of the body and feelings, rather than expressing them explicitly. Denotation serves as the basis for literal

meaning; connotation builds layers of emotional meaning through shifts in meaning; while myth, although only found in two data points, shows how social hierarchy values and family approval legitimacy have been naturalized as truth in Indonesian society. These three levels of meaning confirm the relevance of Barthes' framework in uncovering the complexity of meaning in popular song lyrics.

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