

Semiotics Analysis in the Symbolic of Colors on “Ave Maryam” (2018)

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Abstract. A movie must have a purpose and a message according to the directors’ vision and plans. There are many ways to convey the message to viewers around the world, explicitly or implicitly. Yet, every individual has their perspective, ideology, opinion, and cultural background, and this difference results in a different interpretation of a movie. Nevertheless, viewers can still analyze a movie with theories that have been studied for generations, for instance, semiotics theory, feminist film theory, psychoanalysis, etc. We will analyze how Robby Ertanto, as the director, the writer, and the producer of *Ave Maryam*, conveys messages through the symbolism of colors using the method of semiotics theory.

Keywords. Movie, Symbol, Semiotics.

1. Introduction

Semiotics is the study of signs. It revolves around things that can be categorized as a sign, or one thing that represents another thing. This sign could appear as words, images, sounds, gestures, or objects [1]. Essentially, every film theory always analyzes and makes presumptions of films and the connection with the real world [2]. Film and sign are two inseparable things. A movie must have many signs in every scene that have different meanings from what’s seen in frame. With some conventions, culture, and through the characters in a movie, viewers can make interpretations about the signs shown in a movie. Semiotics can give an overview of the communication system of a movie [3]. Thus, by analyzing semiotics, viewers can understand messages conveyed implicitly or explicitly better; in a scene, a sequence, or even in the whole movie itself. In this opportunity, we will analyze the semiotics in *Ave Maryam* and how it works in conveying implicit messages and meanings.

Ave Maryam is an Indonesian movie directed, written, and produced by Robby Ertanto. It was released in 2018. The movie revolves around a young woman called Maryam, set in Semarang, Indonesia in the 1980s. Maryam is a Catholic nun, serving in a monastery. Her simple life is turned upside down when she meets a priest serving at the same monastery. They fall in love, which they know is forbidden for nuns and Catholic priests to have any intimate relationships. Throughout the movie, Ertanto has successfully conveyed various signs with their meanings while keeping the aesthetics intact.

2. Method

The methodology used in this paper is qualitative analysis method through literature study, convention, and culture study to create a proper semiotics analysis that can be approved by audiences.

Semiotics analysis of Roland Barthes in analyzing the symbols of Ave Maryam by analyzing denotative signifier and denotative signified. Analyzing signs and symbols in a movie can be done by understanding the intrinsic elements, the plot, the setting, the characters, and the theme of the movie. From there, we can analyze the details in a frame; emphasized objects, color palette, colors, dialogue, gestures, acting. Then we can connect these details to the intrinsic elements. Finally, we will be able to make a hypothesis about the symbols we’re analyzing.

3. Results and Discussions

In Ave Maryam, the first symbol that will catch viewers’ eyes would be the dream that Maryam has. She finds herself, still in her monastery nun clothing, opening a couple of windows which brings her to the view of a wide-open sea. (Figure 1). After that, a blue butterfly starts to flutter at her right and it catches her attention. In some cultures and beliefs, blue butterflies are said to be a message of a wish-come-true. This brings us to think about what wish that Maryam has. Her dream of staring at the wide-open sea symbolizes that she wishes to be free, as seas often symbolize freedom and liberty. Deep down, Maryam wishes to be a free woman, even though she knows that she has decided to completely surrender her soul and life to be a nun and swear to serve God until her last breath.



Figure 1. Maryam’s dream of the wide-open sea. Minutes of 3.30’
 (Source: Ave Maryam, 2018. Summerland)

Table 1. Screenshot scene of Maryam’s dream

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Screenshot scene of Maryam’s open window with red blocks to wide-open sea and there’s a blue butterfly on the window.	Maryam’s a nun. She is wearing a nun dress and headcovers, the colors are similar to the blue sea. She lives in a monastery and opens a red window, representing her free spirit and thinking to see the world outside of the monastery. The blue butterfly that similar in color to her dress is also her spirit that can fly but still afraid to fly in distance.

Her wish to be a free woman, to choose her path, and to have a life more than being a nun has been granted when a substitute priest, Father Yosef, comes to the monastery to replace the previous one. Yosef is a free-spirited man, even though he’s a priest. That trait of Yosef becomes a threat which encourages Maryam’s will to be free. Right from the start, Yosef has been attracted to Maryam, and vice

versa. Yosef finally dares to ask Maryam out. At first, Maryam turns down Yosef’s invitation. Viewers can also see a brief yet meaningful conversation about life between Maryam and Yosef when they’re alone at the monastery’s graveyard. “Happiness becomes the most important thing when it comes to enjoying all the beautiful things in the world,” said Yosef. “But everything comes in its portion, Father,” Maryam then answered. From this dialogue, viewers can conclude that Maryam still holds her principle as a nun. She agrees that happiness is an important thing, but everything comes in its portion. She believes that happiness and freedom have their portion to every individual.

Yosef is a dedicated man, so he doesn’t give up on asking Maryam out. After some time, Maryam finally decides to accept his invitation and they go on dates together. On Maryam’s birthday, Yosef takes her to the beach. If we pay close attention to Maryam’s clothing, she always wears neutral colors or colors that don’t stand out on her previous dates. But this time, on her special day, she wears a long pink dress that catches the eyes of anyone who sees (Figure 2). For decades, pink has been known to represent femininity. It expresses nurturing, caring, and empathetic love. In other times, pink symbolizes fragility and weakness [4]. The pink in Maryam’s dress shows that she is embracing her full femininity by going out to the beach with her lover. It’s probably her best moment in life for a long time. However, when she comes back to the monastery, all the nuns are expecting her with a birthday cake and singing “happy birthday to you”. Maryam, still in her soaked dress from the rain, is touched and also filled with guilt for lying to them and God and starts crying when the crowd recedes. Here, her pink dress turns from embracing her femininity to exposing her fragile self.



Figure 2. Maryam in her pink dress. Minutes of 52.50’ (Source: Ave Maryam, 2018. Summerland)

Table 2. Screenshot of Maryam and Yosef on the beach

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Screenshot scene of Maryam and Yosef, and white car on the beach. The cloudy weather in the background.	Maryam is wearing a pink dress, as a nun, she couldn’t wear shocking colors. Yosef is wearing clothes the same colors with the cloud and sea as background. Cars as a symbol of medium to bring them to another place.

After that event, Maryam, again, has a dream where she finds herself on the beach. But this time, she is soaked wet from the seawater, probably not wearing any clothing. Her dream of being free, as free as the water in the sea, is granted. She finally tastes freedom, love, and embraces her femininity with the man she loves. But Maryam’s face doesn’t show that she’s happy or satisfied, on the contrary, she looks anxious, guilty, and terrified (Figure 3). Perhaps, freedom is what she wants, but her loyalty is questioned here. She had promised to dedicate herself fully to God and God only. Maryam and Yosef had broken the most crucial and fundamental abstinence; sexual intercourse in any form.



Figure 3. Maryam’s last dream. Minutes of 58.50’(Source: Ave Maryam, 2018. Summerland)

Table 3. Screenshot of Maryam’s in the sea

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Screenshot scene of Maryam’s on the sea without any clothes	Maryam thought of guilty and sinner, having thought of loving a man beside her God. She is naked, with wet hair, head without her scarves, under the sun and facing the oceans.

At the end of the movie, Maryam goes to a church to confess her sin in the confession booth, where Father Yosef is serving on the other side of the booth. Maryam cries as she confesses, and Yosef silently breaks down into tears knowing that he also needs to let Maryam go and end their relationship for good.

4. Conclusions

In the end, analyzing a movie through its symbols and signs cannot be separated from subjectivity. If two individuals come from different cultures, their interpretation of one thing would be different. But one thing we can do is to learn about the culture and its diversity and to see things from multiple perspectives. Semiotics theory is one of the credible theories that can conform to the changing and globalizing world. Thus, it is still widely used by moviemakers and movie critics to create analogous ideas and opinions about a movie.

5. References

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- [4] Karen H 2019 *The Little Book of Colour* (London: Penguin Books Limited)