

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 own perspective, ideology, opinion, and culture background, and this difference results in different interpretation of a movie. Nevertheless, viewers can still analyse a movie with theories that has been studied for generations, for instance semiotics theory, feminist film theory, psychoanalysis, etc. We will analyse how Robby Ertanto, as the director, the writer, and the producer of *Ave Maryam*, conveys messages through symbolic of colours using 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 own 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 analysing the symbols of Ave Maryam by analysing denotative signifier and denotative signified. Analysing 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 analyse the details in a frame; emphasized objects, colour palette, colours, 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 analysing.

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 a window with red blocks to wide open sea and there’s blue butterfly on the window. | Maryam’s a nun. She is wearing nun dress and head covers, the colours are similar with the blue sea. She lives in monastery and opens red window, representing her free spirit and thinking to see the world outside of the monastery. The blue butterfly that similar color with 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 own 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 has the courage 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 own 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 own portion. She believes that happiness and freedom have its own 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 colours or colours 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 a 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 to God and starts crying when the crowd recedes. Here, her pink dress turns from embracing her femininity to exposing her fragile and weak 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 in the beach. The cloudy weather on the background. | Maryam is wearing pink dress, as a nun she couldn’t wear shocking colours. Yosef is wearing clothes the same colours with the cloud and sea as background. Cars as symbol of medium to bring them to another place. |

After that event, Maryam, again, has a dream where she finds herself in the beach. But this time, she is soaked wet from the sea water, 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.

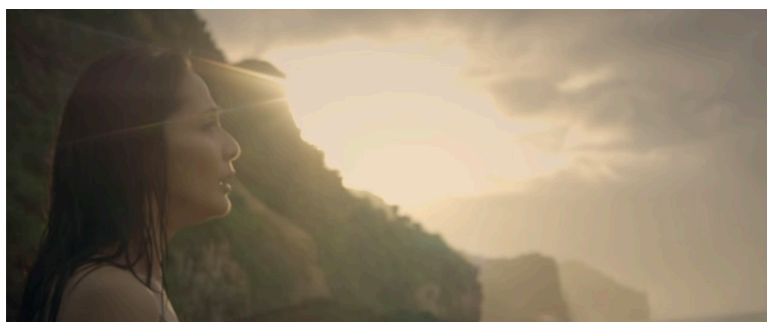


Figure 3. Maryam’s last dream. Minutes of 58.50’(Source: Ave Maryam, 2018. Summerland)

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’s thought of guilty and sinner, having a thought of loving a man beside her God. She is naked, 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, analysing 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 culture and its diversity and to see things from multiple perspectives. Semiotics theory is one of the credible theories that can conform with 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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