



The Representation of Chicken Noodles as the Meaning of Life in Brian Khrisna's Novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*: A Gastrocritical Study

Adinda Safitri^{1*}, R Panji Hermoyo², Yarno³

¹²³Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

*Email: adinsaft@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Literary works serve as a medium for authors to express themselves, presenting various social experiences one of which is the exploration of culinary themes as part of the creative process. Gastrocriticism serves as a framework for discussing the relationship between cuisine and literature, focusing on various aspects of food that offer a deep understanding of what we eat and embody powerful symbols of identity, meaning, and human experience beyond mere biological needs. The purpose of this study is to describe (1) the representation of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* through a gastrocritical analysis; and (2) the representation of chicken noodle soup in the life experiences of the character Ale within the narrative of Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* using a gastrocritical analysis. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a gastrocritical approach, utilizing data collection techniques through reading and note-taking. The results indicate that chicken noodle soup carries meanings of comfort and the hope of survival; the life experiences of the character Ale are portrayed as simple yet worthy of gratitude, making chicken noodle soup a symbol of emotion, acceptance of life, and hope for an individual. These findings confirm that in gastro-critical studies, food not only serves as a narrative element but also carries symbolic meaning related to the characters' emotional experiences and psychological states.

Keywords: chicken noodles, meaning of life, novel, gastrocriticism

Representasi Mi Ayam sebagai Makna Hidup dalam Novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* Karya Brian Khrisna: Kajian Gastrokritik

ABSTRAK

Karya sastra hadir menjadi tempat pengungkapan ekspresi penulis yang menghadirkan berbagai pengalaman sosial, salah satunya mengangkat isu kuliner sebagai proses kreatif di dalamnya. Gastrokritik hadir menjadi wadah yang membahas mengenai hubungan kuliner dengan sastra dan berfokus pada berbagai aspek makanan yang memiliki pemahaman mendalam tentang apa yang di makan dan mengandung simbol kuat dari identitas, makna dan pengalaman manusia bukan hanya sekedar kebutuhan biologis. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan (1) representasi mi ayam sebagai makna hidup dalam novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* karya Brian Khrisna melalui kajian gastrokritik (2) representasi mi ayam pada pengalaman hidup tokoh Ale dalam narasi novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* karya Brian Khrisna menggunakan kajian gastrokritik. Metode penelitian ini adalah kualitatif bersifat deskriptif dengan pendekatan gastrokritik, menggunakan teknik pengumpulan data melalui metode membaca dan mencatat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mi ayam memiliki makna kenyamanan dan harapan tetap bertahan hidup, pengalaman hidup tokoh Ale menjadi pengalaman sederhana yang patut disyukuri sehingga mi ayam menjadi simbol bagi emosi, penerimaan hidup, serta harapan bagi seseorang. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa dalam kajian gastrokritik, makanan tidak hanya berperan sebagai unsur naratif, melainkan juga mengandung makna simbolis yang berkaitan dengan pengalaman emosional dan kondisi psikologis tokoh.

Kata kunci: mi ayam, makna hidup, novel, gastrokritik

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INTRODUCTION

In modern society, people are confronted not only with various material needs but also with existential issues related to the search for the meaning of life, self-identity, alienation, and life's purpose. Increasingly complex social pressures often cause individuals to experience feelings of emptiness, a loss of direction, and difficulty finding a reason to continue living. These conditions contribute to a rise in various mental health disorders, particularly among the current generation, which faces increasingly elusive existential issues such as identity, alienation, social pressure, and a loss of life's meaning. This is supported by previous research findings indicating that, among adolescents, 3.7% experience anxiety disorders (social anxiety and generalized anxiety), 1.0% have major depressive disorder, and 0.9% have behavioral disorders (Tyas et al., 2023). Mental health issues can become fatal if they lead to death by suicide.

In this era of globalization—or an era often defined by human social behavior, such as the era of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), where people fear missing out on trends or popular moments; the era of “flexing,” which involves showing off wealth or achievements; and the era of insecurity and healing, which is closely tied to issues of mental health, a lack of self-confidence, and the need for a vacation or rest. Mental health issues have become a major concern in society and are frequently represented in literary works. Literary works are depictions of life blended with imaginative reality, resulting from the author's creativity (Mukaromah & Anggraini, 2026). Literature serves as a medium for reflecting on human life, presenting various social, cultural, and existential experiences through aesthetic language. Literary works in the form of novels, poetry, and plays frequently explore inner conflict, suffering, freedom, love, and alienation as elements that shape human existence (Alfia & Syihabuddin, 2025). Through characters, plot, conflict, and setting, literary works often express complex and moving life experiences,

Both in the personal and social spheres, literary works also serve as a medium for reflection, a critique of social reality, and a means of raising awareness about issues that are often overlooked in daily life; thus, literature possesses the power not only to entertain but also to educate and drive change (Saputri & Karlina, 2025).

Literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as a mirror and a source of life lessons. One author who frequently addresses social issues in his works is Brian Khrisna, a young writer born on January 17, 1992, in Bandung. Brian Khrisna explains in his novel that his writing career began in 2010 on the Tumblr platform, where he shared stories a practice he continues to this day. Brian Khrisna has produced a variety of works, ranging from poetry, prose, essays, short stories, to serialized stories. Brian has published nine novels, including *Merayakan Kehilangan* (2016), *The Book of Almost* (2018), *This is Why I Need You* (2019), *Kudasai* (2019), *Museum of Broken Hearts* (2020), *Parable* (2021), *23:59* (2023), *The Matchbreaker* (2023), and *The Darkest Side of Heaven* (2023) (Umifa, 2024). In 2025, Brian published his eleventh novel, *A Bowl of Chicken Noodles Before I Die*, following his tenth novel, *Bandung at Dawn*, which was published in 2024. The novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, published in January 2025, depicts the social conditions of modern society. Written by Brian Khrisna, this novel portrays contemporary life, showcasing the author's skill in addressing social issues. The work reached its 50th printing in less than a year, earning it a nomination for mega bestseller (Kurniasih et al., 2026). Through the main character, Ruslan Abdul Wardana often called Ale the author portrays the harsh realities of urban life, marked by simplicity, mental stress, social inequality, and crime (Khrisna, 2025). The main character is portrayed as an individual trapped in a mechanized urban lifestyle, lacking emotional support, and living in an environment that tends



to be individualistic and unfriendly toward mental health (Kadir et al., 2025).

Mental health is a psychological experience shared by some individuals that can be represented through characters. In novels, a character's mental state is depicted not only through dialogue or inner conflict but also through habits, memories, and the character's relationship with specific objects that provide a sense of comfort. One such object that frequently appears in literary works is food. The human connection to food serves not only to fulfill biological needs but also embodies cultural identity and lifestyle, and can serve as a medium for literary expression (Hartati & Karim, 2023). Today's generation often faces various psychological pressures stemming from social demands, existential crises, or past traumas. In such situations, food frequently becomes a source of emotional comfort for an individual. This phenomenon is depicted in the novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, in which chicken noodles serve as both an escape and a source of hope for the character Ale. Based on this discussion, the focus of this study is: (1) How is the representation of chicken noodles as the meaning of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* analyzed through a gastrocritical lens?, (2) How is chicken noodle soup represented in the life experience of the character Ale in the novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* by Brian Khrisna, using a gastrocritical analysis? This study aims to describe (1) the representation of chicken noodle soup as the meaning of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* through a gastrocritical analysis, and (2) the representation of chicken noodle soup in the life experiences of the character Ale in the narrative of Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* using a gastrocritical analysis.

The meaning of life refers to a person's evaluation of their existence as they lead a life full of responsibility, while also contributing to their own well-being in every aspect of life even when facing suffering (Najmi et al., 2025). In

contemporary literary studies, food is understood as part of a cultural sign system that can represent a character's identity, social values, and psychological state. Through the stories in literary works, readers are invited to recognize the importance of food's role, both in shaping the narrative atmosphere and as a medium for conveying moral messages and worldviews (Firmansyah et al., 2026). The relationship between food and characters opens up diverse interpretive possibilities regarding identity formation in literary works. The literary gastronomy approach opens up a deeper interpretive space for literary works by positioning food not merely as a narrative element, but as a cultural symbol, an embodiment of identity, and a reflection of complex social values. Thus, food becomes a crucial means of uncovering layers of meaning, power relations, and the dynamics of the society depicted in literary works (Wachidah et al., 2025).

Gastronomy has conceptual roots that can be traced back to an approach known as gastrocriticism. Gastrocriticism is a fusion of gastronomy and literary criticism one field that examines food and the other that explores meaning in literary works (Darmurtika & Mataram, 2023). Thus, literary gastronomy has developed as a field of study grounded in gastrocriticism as its methodological foundation, while gastrocriticism serves as an analytical approach to interpreting the dimensions of meaning contained in the representation of food within literary texts. A prominent figure in the world of gastronomy who has discussed the theory of gastrocriticism is Ronald W. Tobin (in Darmawan et al., 2025), who states that food in literary works is never merely a means of satisfying physical needs; rather, food often functions as a powerful symbol of culture, identity, and human experience.

In literary works, authors not only depict major events or the main conflicts faced by characters, but also portray everyday experiences that seem simple yet are rich in meaning. Characters in a novel can be understood through their relationship with food, which authors often use as inspiration

in creating literary works or even as the central theme in the creative process of writing (Febrina et al., 2022). The Novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* occupies an interesting position in contemporary Indonesian culinary literature because it presents food as a symbol of the characters' inner experiences, rather than merely an element of biological need or consumption. Unlike previous studies, which generally discuss food as a cultural identity and narrative tool, this study examines chicken noodle soup as a representation of the characters' meaning of life through a gastro-critical analysis. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of Indonesian literary studies, particularly in understanding the role of food as a medium for interpreting life, a symbol of hope, and an existential value that influences how characters interpret their lives in contemporary literary works.

Previous research examining literary gastronomy, conducted by (Fatimah et al., 2025) and titled "Gastronomy in the Novel *Negeri Van Oranje* by Wahyuningrat and Colleagues," discusses the function of gastronomy and cultural cross-pollination as reflected through gastronomy in the novel *Negeri Van Oranje*. Another study on gastronomic criticism was conducted by (Ariska et al., 2024), titled "Tobin's Five Concepts in Akiyoshi Rikako's Novel *Jisatsu Yotei Bi: A Gastronomic Criticism Study*," which examines how food is used as a narrative tool in literature to influence plot development and characterization. Another relevant prior study was conducted by (Mukti & Rengganis, 2025), titled *Desire, Trauma, and the Absurdity of Characters in Brian Khrisna's Novel Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, which also discusses the act of eating as a symbol of existence.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explain in detail the significance of chicken noodle soup in the life of the character Ale in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*. This approach was chosen because

the descriptive qualitative approach provides a detailed and in-depth examination of the research subject (Siu & Namang, 2025; Razak, 2017). This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because the data collected consist of words and phrases in literary works, rather than statistical data or numbers. Thus, descriptive quantitative research is a method of depicting a research object that mirrors reality in society (Salsabillah et al., 2024).

This type of research generally focuses on the study of a single individual in the process of attributing meaning to an experience that has occurred (Effendy et al., 2023). The approach used in this study is gastrocriticism to identify the meaning contained in a text with a culinary theme. This approach makes it possible to explain in detail the significance of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, in line with the objective of this study, which is to describe the representation of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* through a gastrocritical analysis, as well as to examine the representation of chicken noodle soup in the life experiences of the character Ale within the narrative of Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* using a gastrocritical analysis.

This study was conducted in several stages in accordance with qualitative research methods. In the first stage, the researchers began by reading and thoroughly analyzing the text of Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* to fully identify and understand the plot, conflict, and meaning of every word in the story. In the second stage, the researcher collected and analyzed data through a literature review, documenting in writing relevant data regarding the representation of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of life in accordance with the gastrocritical approach. In the third stage, the researcher synthesized the accumulated data to draw conclusions from the findings. The researchers were not restricted to a specific location for data collection; however, the primary source of this study was the novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* by Brian Khrisna,



supported by supplementary sources from relevant journals and scientific articles. Data collection was conducted independently by the researchers using the method of reading and note-taking.

The data analysis used in this study consists of several processes: data filtering, data presentation, data verification, and, finally, a re-examination of the conclusions drawn from the data (Firmansyah, 2024). The results of the data analysis, presented in a descriptive format to explain the representation of chicken noodle soup as the main character's meaning of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, provide a contextual and systematic portrayal. Consequently, the objective of elucidating the meaning of life conveyed through food in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* within the framework of gastrocriticism can be clearly understood.

RESULTS

1. The Representation of Chicken Noodles as the Meaning of Life in the Novel *A Bowl of Chicken Noodles Before Death* by Brian Khrisna

The novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* by Brian Khrisna is one of many literary works that feature food as a central motif in the story. Chicken noodles themselves are a traditional Indonesian dish. The representation of chicken noodle soup in this study not only provides a nuanced explanation of the significance of this dish in Brian Khrisna's *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, but also clearly illustrates the meaning of life embodied in it. The representation of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of life in Brian Khrisna's *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* is presented in the following data.

Data 1

"It's been an hour since I was supposed to die. I walked along the sidewalk, my heart pounding. I imagined a bowl of chicken noodle soup before I died. I turned at the end of the street, toward the spot where the blue chicken noodle cart with its

tattered cherry-blossom-patterned tarp usually parked. I was ready."

Data 2

"But suddenly, I stopped in my tracks right after turning the corner at the end of the street. My body went completely limp. The chicken noodle cart I usually visit was still neatly covered with a tarp. There were no office workers waiting in line as usual. The place was deserted. The chicken noodle cart was closed."

Data 3

"My body suddenly went numb and felt as limp as could be. I staggered and hurriedly leaned against the fence—the spot where people usually line up when that chicken noodle stall is open. Maybe to you, this seems like an overreaction—to be so disappointed over just a bowl of chicken noodles. But not for me. There was a sense of frustration and heartbreak so intense I can't even begin to describe it."

Data 4

"This is the last plan of my life. A very simple plan: a bowl of chicken noodles for 15,000. But at the very last moment, I'm still a failure. A useless person who can't do anything."

Data 5

"The vendor never looked down on me. To the chicken noodle vendor, all customers are equal as long as they pay. That's why, before I die, I want to eat a bowl of these chicken noodles one more time."

Data 6

"Even though it's simple, there has to be one thing in my life that goes exactly as I want it to. I don't care. When I get to Mr. Zolam's house Mr. Jo's real name I have to ask him to make me some chicken noodles. If I can, I'll force him to. My suicide condition must be met!"

Data 7

“My heart was pounding as if I’d just caught a breath of fresh air. But there was still a doubt lodged in my mind a doubt about myself. If I waited one more day and chose to go home tonight, chances are I’d swallow all those pills without even getting a chance to eat the chicken noodle soup. I really wanted to die tonight.”

Data 8

“I’m still undecided. I really want to eat chicken noodles before I die. It has to be Pak Jo’s chicken noodles!”

Data 9

“Hearing the words ‘chicken noodle soup,’ I was immediately startled. It was as if I’d just heard words that hadn’t come from a human mouth. It was like another voice gently stroking my back and washing away all the dark stains etched in my heart. It felt as though no human being had ever asked me to take them out for chicken noodle soup for breakfast a meal that I had originally intended to be my last before I ended my life.”

2. The Representation of Chicken Noodles in the Life Experience of the Character Ale in the Novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* by Brian Khrisna

The chicken noodle soup mentioned in several parts of Brian Khrisna’s novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* is directly linked to the life experiences of the character Ale. The character’s psychological state whether at the lowest point of his life or experiencing joy is reflected in the chicken noodle soup in several parts of the story. This narrative has been categorized in the following data.

Data 1

“I swallowed hard when I accidentally thought of the bowl of chicken noodles I always eat for breakfast before heading to the office. It’s my go-to chicken noodle place near my apartment. The savory broth, the tender diced chicken, the sweet-

and-salty chicken sauce, the chewy meatballs and ground meat inside, and the little dumplings on the side. Damn, my mouth is watering.”

Data 2

“Even if I were to die today, I must die with dignity as a corporate slave of the capital; die after eating the most iconic breakfast this city has to offer—a bowl of chicken noodles.”

Data 3

“I want to die, but I also want chicken noodle soup. It’s really an unfair comparison. But in a situation like this, both options make perfect sense to me.”

Data 4

“I was still sitting there, motionless. It had already been more than two hours since I’d set out to die. I glanced at the chicken noodle cart across the street, where a long line of customers was waiting. Should I just buy some chicken noodles? But come on—was I really going to give up again? Was I really never going to get what I wanted, not even as I faced death?”

Data 5

“That’s right. The teak tree sheds its leaves every year, but it still stands tall, waiting for the rainy season to come so it can become lush again. It won’t die. It’s just taking a short break. It doesn’t give up in the face of the dry season. It’s just adapting. Life is the same—just live it to the best of your ability, and eventually everyone will find their own rainy season. It’s a shame to decide to give up on life before your time. Chicken noodle soup is still delicious. Don’t you agree, Ale?”

Data 6

“There was no more conversation between the two of us. The silence made me look around. When I saw the chicken noodle cart from which I’d asked for a tissue earlier, my breathing suddenly grew heavy. I let out a long sigh, as if the darkness in my head were quietly surging back to engulf everything. Just from catching a fleeting glimpse



of that chicken noodle cart, I immediately felt the gloom of my life all this time come flooding back.”

Data 7

“Don’t forget to give yourself some credit. Life is already hard enough. Don’t force yourself to keep going, Mas. Try to take a break every once in a while. Enjoy that chicken noodle soup with a happy heart—not as if it were your last meal before you die.”

Data 8

“I’m still holding that bowl of chicken noodle soup. I wonder—what if I’d been holding this bowl of chicken noodle soup three weeks ago? Would everything have been different? Would I no longer be in this world? And would someone have found my body?”

Data 9

“I felt the sunlight hitting my face. Then, with a slow motion, I set down the bowl of chicken noodles along with the 50,000 rupiah I’d slipped under the bowl. I left the noodles untouched, then sped away on my motorcycle, leaving the place behind.” “I glanced in the rearview mirror and looked at the bowl of chicken noodles one last time.” “There’s always tomorrow to eat.”

This classification of data illustrates that the representation of chicken noodle soup in the novel’s narrative also serves as a symbol of the protagonist’s life experiences. These life experiences are emotionally charged, and their presence reinforces the idea that food can serve as a medium to represent inner conflict, hope, or even a person’s simple reason for surviving. Thus, the repeated appearance of chicken noodle soup in the story underscores the closeness of Ale’s experiences to the dish. This also serves to remind readers not only that chicken noodle soup is a food, but also that it carries memories and represents inner conflict for the character.

utama.

DISCUSSION

In Brian Khrisna’s novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, chicken noodles are repeatedly featured and emphasized not merely as an act of eating, but as a representation of the meaning of life and the characters’ life experiences. As a representation of the meaning of life, chicken noodles symbolize how a simple dish can help someone like the character Ale survive even if only for a few hours before his death. Ale’s constant desire to eat chicken noodle soup before he dies indirectly symbolizes that there is still one thing he hopes for to stay alive amid the despair he is grappling with. Thus, chicken noodle soup represents the simple joy that makes Ale feel at ease and gives him a glimmer of hope for survival.

The protagonist’s life experiences filled with loneliness, solitude, and mental strain make chicken noodle soup a major symbol in Brian Khrisna’s novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*. Through the simple experience of eating a bowl of chicken noodles, the character Ale periodically finds a sense of security and the realization that there are still many small things in life for which he should be grateful and that he can still enjoy. Thus, chicken noodles become not only a symbol of food that can be consumed for free, but also a symbol of emotion, acceptance of life, and hope for a person.

This is supported by Ronald W. Tobin’s view that food is not merely a human necessity; rather, it embodies symbols, meanings, values, and experiences for humans (Billa et al., 2025). Thus, in Brian Khrisna’s novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, the meaning of life is represented through a traditional Indonesian dish: chicken noodles. This savory chicken noodle dish serves as a simple symbol representing the psychological state and life experiences of the character Ale. In addition to explaining the meaning of life embodied in a serving of chicken noodles in Brian Khrisna’s novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, this study also examines how the author narrates the dish within the story to provide insight to readers.

This study was conducted to explain the representation of chicken noodle soup as a symbol of the meaning of life in Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* through a gastrocritical analysis. However, this study offers a unique focus by examining chicken noodle soup as a symbol of the characters' sense of life in the novel. Thus, it sufficiently demonstrates that a literary work that repeatedly emphasizes a particular food can take on additional meanings when analyzed through a gastrocritical lens. This approach was also taken by a previous study examining food in a literary work, namely (Qalbi & Nugroho, 2024) titled *Potret Makanan Aceh dalam Cerpen Kontemporer: Kajian Gastronomi Sastra*. However, that study had a limitation in that the authors focused solely on the context of the novel, thus failing to explore broader societal aspects regarding the representation of chicken noodle soup.

CONCLUSION

As a representation of the meaning of life, chicken noodle soup symbolizes how a simple dish can become a source of hope for survival amid the despair that plagues Ale; thus, it embodies the simple happiness that brings Ale comfort and the possibility of survival. The character's life experiences, filled with loneliness and mental pressure, make chicken noodle soup a major symbol in the novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*. Through the simple experience of eating a bowl of chicken noodle soup, Ale realizes that there are still many small things in life to be grateful for and enjoy, making chicken noodle soup a symbol of emotion, acceptance of life, and hope for a person.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that this study shows chicken noodle soup serves as a symbol that represents both the meaning of life and life experiences for the character Ale. Physically, chicken noodle soup is merely a simple, readily available meal, but symbolically, it holds

various emotional experiences that give profound meaning to the character's life. It was found that in gastro-critical studies, food does not merely function as an object of consumption or a narrative device but can also serve as a symbol representing the meaning of life and the character's life experiences. In Brian Khrisna's novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati*, chicken noodles exemplify how something simple can embody profound life values. Hope, comfort, memories, and reasons to keep living can all be embodied in the symbol of food. This finding confirms that the recurring depictions of food in literary works do not merely serve as narrative elements but also carry symbolic meanings closely tied to human experiences, emotions, and psychological states.

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