



A Semiotic Reading of Connotative Meaning in the Lyrics of Song "Monokrom" by Tulus: Reflections on Identity and Nostalgia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover the connotative meaning in the lyrics of the song "Monokrom" by Tulus through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This song was chosen because it presents a strong nostalgic nuance and reflection of identity, and is full of color symbolism and poetic language. The research method used is a literature study with a descriptive qualitative approach. The data in this study are in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences in the lyrics of the song "Monokrom" by Tulus. The data collection technique was carried out by knowing and searching for the type of literature needed, reading and reviewing the literature, collecting and recording data, and presenting the data. The data analysis technique was carried out using content analysis techniques by analyzing the text of the song lyrics "Monokrom" by paying attention to linguistic signs such as words, phrases, and metaphors that have the potential to have connotative meanings. The results of the study show that "Monokrom" represents gratitude and appreciation for the past through black and white symbols that depict the balance between joy and sorrow. This song also displays a reflection of self-identity, where past experiences play an important role in shaping emotional and spiritual maturity. Through the use of metaphors, color symbols, and a gentle style of language, Tulus successfully conveys a universal message about the appreciation of memories and the importance of social relationships in building human identity. This research confirms that Barthes's semiotics is effective in reading connotative meaning in musical works because it can reveal the relationship between language, culture, and emotional experience.

Keywords: semiotic reading, connotative meaning, lyrics of song, reflection on identity, nostalgia

Pembacaan Semiotika atas Makna Konotatif dalam Lirik Lagu "Monokrom" Karya Tulus: Refleksi Identitas dan Nostalgia

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap makna konotatif dalam lirik lagu "Monokrom" karya Tulus melalui pendekatan semiotika Roland Barthes. Lagu ini dipilih karena menghadirkan nuansa nostalgia dan refleksi identitas yang kuat, serta sarat akan simbolisme warna dan bahasa puitis. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dalam penelitian ini berupa kata, frasa, klausa, atau kalimat dalam lirik lagu "Monokrom" Karya Tulus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan mengetahui dan mencari jenis pustaka yang diperlukan, membaca dan menelaah pustaka, mengumpulkan dan mencatat data, serta menyajikan data. Teknik analisis data dilakukan menggunakan teknik analisis isi dengan melakukan analisis teks lirik lagu "Monokrom" dengan memerhatikan tanda-tanda linguistik seperti kata, frasa, dan metafora yang berpotensi memiliki makna konotatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa "Monokrom" merepresentasikan rasa syukur dan penghargaan terhadap masa lalu melalui simbol warna hitam-putih yang menggambarkan keseimbangan antara suka dan duka. Lagu ini juga menampilkan refleksi identitas diri, di mana pengalaman masa lalu berperan penting dalam membentuk kedewasaan emosional dan spiritual. Melalui penggunaan metafora, simbol warna, dan gaya bahasa yang lembut, Tulus berhasil menyampaikan pesan universal tentang penghargaan terhadap kenangan dan pentingnya relasi sosial dalam membangun identitas manusia. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa semiotika Barthes efektif digunakan untuk membaca makna konotatif dalam karya musik karena mampu menyingkap relasi antara bahasa, budaya, dan pengalaman emosional.

Kata kunci: pembacaan semiotika, makna konotatif, lirik lagu, refleksi identitas, nostalgia

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INTRODUCTION

Music is a form of artistic expression that not only entertains but also conveys profound messages about life, emotions, and social values. Song lyrics are often a medium rich in symbolic and connotative meanings that can be interpreted through a semiotic approach. In this case, the song "Monokrom" by Tulus is one of the musical works that is interesting to study semiotically because it contains a deep reflection on identity, memories, and life values. This song conveys a strong message of nostalgia, in which Tulus describes the journey of life, togetherness, and gratitude for the people who have shaped him. Through the use of symbols and linguistic signs, the song's lyrics contain meanings that are not only denotative, but also connotative, which can open up space for broader interpretations of the singer's personal and social experiences. The semiotic study of song lyrics is important because it can reveal how signs in musical texts work to shape meaning. Roland Barthes, a key figure in modern semiotics, proposed that every text has two levels of meaning: denotative meaning, the literal meaning, and connotative meaning, the deeper cultural meaning (Wati & Ikmaliani, 2022). Within this framework, song lyrics are viewed not simply as a collection of words, but as a system of signs that construct a particular reality. The song "Monokrom" represents the human journey of remembering the past through colors and metaphors that serve as symbols of life and memory. Monochrome, synonymous with black and white, symbolizes simplicity, eternity, and the balance between joy and sorrow—two things that are always present in the process of forming human identity.

Based on the above background, the formulation of this research is: How can the connotative meaning contained in the lyrics of Tulus's song "Monokrom" be interpreted through Roland Barthes's semiotic approach?

Meanwhile, the purpose of this research is to uncover the connotative meaning in the lyrics of

Tulus's song "Monokrom" through Roland Barthes's semiotic approach.

The theoretical benefit of this research is its contribution to the development of semiotic studies, particularly in analyzing connotative meaning in popular Indonesian music and literature. The results can enrich our understanding of how signs, symbols, and cultural contexts work to shape the implicit messages in these works and open up opportunities for further, more in-depth research.

Practically, this research can serve as a reference for students and researchers of language, literature, and music in understanding the application of Roland Barthes's semiotic theory. It can also provide insight for music listeners and the general public into the symbolic meaning and life values implied in the lyrics of the song "Monokrom." The results of this study help them see that song lyrics function not only as entertainment but also as a medium for conveying emotional, social, and cultural messages that can deepen their appreciation of the work.

The connotative meaning in "Monokrom" emerges through the use of diction that represents feelings of nostalgia and appreciation for the past. The word "monochrome" itself has a literal meaning as a single color or gradation between black and white, but connotatively depicts the simplicity and eternity of memories (Gusriani, Suryadi, & Yanti, 2025). Lyrics such as "Thank you for being there in my journey" reflect gratitude and appreciation for individuals who have been part of the singer's life. This meaning shows that the connotation in the song's lyrics contains not only emotional but also spiritual value, as it invites listeners to reflect on the relationship between themselves and past experiences. According to Umami & Marwan (2024), connotative meaning in songs often serves as a means for singers to express hidden messages that are not always spoken directly, but rather presented through symbols and poetic nuances of language. Furthermore, a semiotic approach to the song "Monokrom" can also reveal



how collective and individual identities are constructed through nostalgic experiences. This song not only represents personal memories but also depicts universal values of togetherness. Ratnadhita, Riyanto, and Khusyairi (2025) emphasize that the signs in song lyrics often serve as representations of social experiences that shape an individual's worldview. Thus, "Monokrom" can be read as a reflection of identity formed through the interaction between individuals and their social environment. In this case, Tulus uses musical language as a means to express collective feelings—a palpable sense of loss, gratitude, and nostalgia. Roland Barthes's semiotic approach provides a strong analytical foundation for reading the lyrics of "Monokrom" because it uncovers layers of meaning behind the linguistic and cultural signs used. Dewi (2025) emphasizes that the connotative meaning of musical texts can stimulate the listener's imagination through indirect symbolic associations. Similarly, Zahra, Ainusyamsi, and Mardiansyah (2025) argue that, in Barthes's semiotics, connotative meaning is often influenced by the ideology and culture surrounding the composer. Previous research has shown that a semiotic approach can reveal profound meaning in musical works. Agustina & Wijaya (2024), for example, found that the symbolism in the lyrics of Rio Clappy's song "Bunga Abadi" reflects the human outlook on love and loss through the use of natural metaphors. Meanwhile, Maulana, Zaini, and Ridwan (2024) in their analysis of Soegi Bornean's song "Asmalibrasi" showed that the connotative meaning in the song's lyrics not only conveys emotions but also reflects the surrounding social and cultural context. These findings strengthen the argument that semiotics is an effective approach in understanding how language in musical lyrics functions as a complex and meaningful sign system. Tulus himself is known as a musician who often presents depth of meaning in each of his works. According to Anwar and Dewi (2023), Tulus's works in the album "Manusia" often display reflections on human values and interpersonal re-

lationships, expressed symbolically through simple yet meaningful language. This is in line with the results of research by Permatahati, Kanzunudin, and Hidayati (2025), which shows that Tulus often uses metaphors and color symbols to describe the journey of life and human emotions. Thus, "Monokrom" can be understood as part of Tulus' artistic identity which seeks to connect personal experiences with universal values through symbolic and connotative language.

METHOD

This research uses a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to analyze the connotative meaning in the lyrics of Tulus's song "Monokrom" through the perspective of Roland Barthes's semiotics. This library research was chosen because this research does not focus on field data collection, but rather on the collection and analysis of data from various written sources such as scientific journals, proceedings, semiotic theory books, and previous scientific works relevant to the research object. This approach allows researchers to understand the phenomenon of meaning in depth through the interpretation of signs and symbols appearing in the song's lyrics. According to Zed (2014), library research aims to gather information and data relevant to the research problem through bibliographic materials, resulting in a conceptual and theoretical analysis.

The data in this study consist of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences in the lyrics of Tulus's song "Monokrom," which will be analyzed using Roland Barthes's semiotics approach.

Data collection was conducted online through access to a website containing the lyrics to the song "Monokrom," and the data collection date was November 7, 2025.

Data collection techniques included identifying and searching for the required literature, reading and reviewing the literature, collecting and recording data, and presenting the data.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, analyzing the lyrics of "Monokrom," paying attention to linguistic signs such as words, phrases, and metaphors that have the potential for connotative meaning. This analysis was conducted by interpreting these signs based on Barthes' theory of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which then produces a second-level meaning, namely connotation.

RESULTS

The findings of the semiotic analysis of the lyrics of "Monokrom," based on the literature review, are as follows.

Table 1
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-1

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-1	Thank you for being there on this story journey
Signifier	Expression of gratitude, presence, journey
Signified	The presence of important people in life
Barthes	Gratitude, nostalgia, appreciation for the past

Table 2
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-2

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-2	Monochrome, my memories of you
Signifier	The word "monochrome" (black and white)
Signified	Simple color gradient
Barthes	A symbol of the simplicity of life, the balance of joy and sorrow, the eternity of memories

Table 3
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-3

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-3	You are my best friend, who understands without me having to explain anymore.
Signifier	Best friend, understand
Signified	Close emotional relationship
Barthes	Spiritual closeness, a relationship that forms self-identity

Table 4
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-4

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-4	Now everything is different, only memories remain
Signifier	Change, memories
Signified	Change of time, loss
Barthes	Self-reflection, acceptance of life changes

Table 5
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-5

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-5	Remember my happiness, remember my sadness
Signifier	Happy and sad
Signified	Two sides of life
Barthes	The realization that joy and sorrow shape emotional maturity



Table 6
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-6

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-6	You give color to my life
Signifier	Colour
Signified	Pengaruh orang lain
Barthes	Identity is shaped by the contribution of social relations

Table 7
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-7

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-7	The old me is not the same as the current me
Signifier	Past versus present
Signified	Self-change
Barthes	Identity transformation through past experiences

Table 8
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-8

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-8	Monochrome dances on the eyelids
Signifier	Monochrome + eyelids
Signified	Visual memory
Barthes	Memories that are alive and continue to shape emotional awareness

Table 9
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-9

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-9	We were once together, but now we're going our separate ways
Signifier	Togetherness, direction
Signified	Changing relationships
Barthes	Everything that changes

Table 10
 Lyrics Analysis Results of the Song
 "Monokrom" Piece-10

Component Analysis	Description
Lyrics Excerpt-10	You're still my friend, even though we're no longer on the same page
Signifier	Friendships are not aligned
Signified	Inner loyalty
Barthes	Social values: continue to value relationships even when they change

RESULT

1. Connotative Meaning as a Representation of Nostalgia and Gratitude in the Lyrics of "Monokrom"

A semiotic analysis of the lyrics of Tulus' song "Monokrom" shows that the connotative meanings that emerge represent feelings of nostalgia, remembrance, and gratitude for the life journey shared with those closest to him. The song evokes a reflective atmosphere about the past, linking personal memories with universal collective experiences. Denotatively, lyrics such as "Thank you for

being there in my journey" express gratitude to a person or group of people who have been present in the singer's life. However, connotatively, these lyrics signify a form of appreciation for the past, which has shaped one's identity and provided meaning to one's life journey. This aligns with Barthes's view in his semiotic theory, that every text has a second-layer (connotative) meaning derived from the cultural values, emotions, and experiences that accompany it (Wati & Ikmaliani, 2022). In this context, "Monokrom" can be understood as a symbol of the simplicity of life, a balance between joy and sorrow, and an expression of love and appreciation for memories.

The nostalgic connotation in "Monokrom" is reinforced through the use of the color metaphor, which literally means one color or black-and-white gradation. However, this color represents eternity, simplicity, and timeless memories. Gusriani et al., 2025; Rejeki, 2025; Rustam et al., 2024) state that color symbolism is often used in musical works to represent emotions and life values, where the connotative meaning of color can reflect the composer's inner state. In "Monokrom," black and white not only serves as a visual aesthetic symbol but also reflects the emotional balance between happiness and sadness that shapes the meaning of life. Barthes emphasized that signs have no fixed meaning; their meaning depends on cultural context and social interpretation (Maulana et al., 2024; Mufid et al., 2024; Mukminin, 2024). Therefore, Tulus's lyrics can be read as a reflection of the emotional dynamics experienced by humans, where past memories are viewed not with sadness but with gratitude.

The gratitude that is the main theme in "Monokrom" is evident in the repetition of appreciative expressions for those who have enriched life. Lines like "You're my best friend, who understands without me having to explain" carry a connotative meaning of emotional closeness that transcends verbal boundaries. This emphasizes the idea that human relationships are built through understanding and presence, not just words. Research

by Umami & Marwan (2024), Kuntanto (2024), and Kusumawati et al. (2019) found that in reflective songs, connotative meaning often serves to reinforce spiritual and emotional values that are difficult to express directly. Thus, Tulus uses linguistic symbols and signs to convey a message of gratitude, not only to a specific individual, but also to all the life experiences he has gone through.

The song's lyrics also feature the image of time as a crucial element in the formation of connotative meaning. Lines like "Now everything is different, only memories remain" represent an awareness of change, as well as an acceptance of the cycle of life. According to Anwar & Dewi (2023), Tulus's works often demonstrate the dynamics between the past and the present, where the process of self-acceptance is at the heart of the search for meaning in life. In this regard, "Monokrom" can be understood as a self-reflection that reminds people of the importance of remembering without being trapped in the past. This song presents a space of contemplation, inviting listeners to celebrate memories, not to regret the passing of time, but to appreciate them as part of life's journey.

Furthermore, the poetic style and gentle tone of "Monokrom" reinforce its nostalgic feel and emotional depth. Barthes noted that artistic style in text can create "meaning effects" that reinforce the symbolic messages of linguistic signs (Ratnadhita et al., 2025). The use of simple yet meaningful diction in these lyrics gives each word a high emotional weight. This aligns with Dewi's (2025) perspective, which explains that connotations in musical texts are often constructed through the nuances and atmosphere created by word choice and musical intonation. Therefore, this analysis demonstrates that "Monokrom" not only depicts nostalgia and gratitude but also constructs a meaningful space where listeners can reflect on their own personal experiences through the symbols used by Tulus. This song successfully conveys both aesthetic beauty and depth of meaning, making it not just a piece of music but also a form of existential expression about the human journey.



2. Reflection of Identity and Social Meaning through Linguistic Signs in the Lyrics of "Monokrom"

Besides representing nostalgia, the semiotic analysis also reveals that the lyrics of "Monokrom" function as a reflection of identity and social expression, depicting how individuals build self-awareness through experiences and relationships with others. In Roland Barthes' theory, musical text can function as a sign system that shapes self-image and cultural identity through symbolic language (Wati & Ikmaliani, 2022). Lyrics such as "I used to be not who I am now" contain a denotative meaning of self-change, but connotatively signify the process of identity development formed from past experiences. This suggests that Tulus interprets change not merely as a physical or situational transformation, but as an internal process that affirms self-existence.

Research by Permatahati et al. (2025), Hanif (2022), and Harnia (2021) found that in Tulus's works, symbolic language is often used to express his life journey and search for self-meaning. In "Monokrom," color symbolism becomes a crucial element in constructing narrative identity. Monochrome symbolizes unity and balance, illustrating that identity is not formed from a single aspect of life, but from a combination of good and bad experiences. This concept aligns with the research of Agustina & Wijaya (2024), Imron (2018), and Ishar & Irawan (2023) who highlighted that the use of natural symbols and color in song lyrics serves as a medium for representing emotional and spiritual identity. Thus, the color in this song can be read as a symbol of the personal journey that shapes the wholeness of the self, where every event, both pleasant and painful, contributes to the formation of character and outlook on life.

The social meaning in the lyrics of "Monokrom" is also evident in the message of solidarity and appreciation for social relationships. Lines like "Thank you for giving color to my life" demonstrate that the formation of one's identity is inseparable from the contributions of others. This

aligns with the concept of "relational identity," where individuals understand themselves through social interactions and memories (Maulana et al., 2024; Damayanti, 2022; Dzakiyyah & Khoiroh, 2024). The lyrics demonstrate the connection between individuals and their social environment. Barthes emphasized that the connotative meaning of a text is influenced not only by the structure of language but also by the ideology and value systems of the surrounding society. Therefore, "Monokrom" can be understood as a representation of Indonesian cultural values that emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships, respect for the past, and acceptance of change.

Furthermore, the musical aspects and calm writing style of the lyrics reinforce the introspective feel, inviting listeners to reflect on their identity and life values. Research by Zahra et al. (2025), Adilah (2024), and Amalia et al. (2025) confirms that in the semiotic analysis of music, connotation can be constructed not only through verbal text, but also through musical expression and tone that support emotional meaning. In "Monokrom," the slow tempo and soft tones serve as nonverbal cues that emphasize a reflective and contemplative meaning. The music, in this case, serves as an emotional marker that reinforces the lyrical message, creating a unity of meaning between the words and the melody.

Thus, the identity reflected in "Monokrom" is not only about the individual singer, but also about humanity in general, who learn to accept themselves through past experiences. This song depicts a journey toward emotional maturity, where one realizes that every memory, both sweet and bitter, is an important part of the process of becoming oneself. Dewi (2025) emphasizes that connotative meaning in musical works often contains philosophical messages about life and humanity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Tulus's song "Monokrom" is a musical work rich in connotative meaning, reflecting a blend of nos-

talgia, gratitude, and reflection on self-identity. Through the use of monochrome color symbols to represent the balance of life, Tulus conveys a philosophical message that every experience, both joy and sorrow, is an important part of a person's journey toward emotional and spiritual maturity. The lyrics in this song are not only a personal expression but also reflect Indonesian social and cultural values that uphold togetherness, respect for the past, and the importance of human relationships. Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis shows that the connotative meaning of "Monokrom" is not limited to linguistic aspects but also encompasses symbolic and ideological dimensions that shape the listener's understanding of the song's message. Thus, this song can be seen as a representation of identity and personal identity, transforming past memories into positive self-reflection.

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