

Representation of Transcendental Communication through the Symbol of a Letter in the Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*

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Abstract

Film is an audiovisual communication medium that functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for representing social, cultural, moral, and spiritual messages through the system of signs constructed within its narrative. This study aims to analyze the representation of transcendental communication through the symbol of letters in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This research employed a qualitative method with a semiotic analysis approach. Data were collected through observations of scenes, dialogues, and visual elements featuring letters as symbolic objects and were analyzed using Barthes' three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings indicate that the meaning of the letter evolves from a written communication medium into a representation of transcendental communication between humans and God. At the denotative level, the letter functions as a medium for conveying messages. At the connotative level, it represents prayer, hope, and human surrender to God. At the mythological level, the letter constructs the belief that prayers may receive answers through various forms of divine assistance represented in the film. The findings demonstrate that a simple symbol can convey complex spiritual meanings through the film's visual and narrative construction. This study also reinforces Jalaluddin Rakhmat's concept of transcendental communication and confirms that Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is relevant for analyzing the representation of transcendental communication in audiovisual media. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the letter as the primary symbol representing transcendental communication in film.

Keywords: Transcendental Communication, Roland Barthes' Semiotics, Film, Letter Symbol.

Abstrak

Film merupakan media komunikasi audiovisual yang tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana hiburan, tetapi juga mampu merepresentasikan berbagai pesan sosial, budaya, moral, dan spiritual melalui sistem tanda yang dibangun dalam narasi film. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis representasi komunikasi transendental melalui simbol surat dalam film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* menggunakan pendekatan semiotika Roland Barthes. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis semiotika. Data diperoleh melalui observasi terhadap adegan, dialog, dan unsur visual yang menampilkan simbol surat, kemudian dianalisis berdasarkan tingkatan makna denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa simbol surat mengalami perkembangan makna, dari media komunikasi tertulis menjadi representasi komunikasi transendental antara manusia dan Tuhan. Pada tingkat denotasi, surat dimaknai sebagai media penyampaian pesan. Pada tingkat konotasi, surat merepresentasikan doa, harapan, dan kepasrahan manusia kepada Tuhan. Sementara itu, pada tingkat mitos, surat membangun keyakinan bahwa doa dapat memperoleh jawaban melalui berbagai bentuk pertolongan yang direpresentasikan dalam film. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa simbol yang sederhana dapat menghadirkan makna spiritual yang kompleks melalui konstruksi visual dan naratif film. Penelitian ini juga memperkuat konsep komunikasi transendental Jalaluddin Rakhmat serta menunjukkan bahwa semiotika Roland Barthes relevan digunakan untuk mengungkap representasi komunikasi transendental dalam media audiovisual. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada pemusatan analisis terhadap simbol surat sebagai representasi komunikasi transendental dalam film.

Keywords: Komunikasi Transendental, Semiotika Roland Barthes, Film, Simbol Surat.

INTRODUCTION

Film is an audiovisual communication medium that serves not merely as entertainment but also as a vehicle for conveying various social, moral, cultural, and spiritual messages to the audience. Through a blend of visual elements, dialogue, music, sound, and cinematography, film can evoke emotions and present diverse meanings that viewers interpret based on their own knowledge, experiences, and social backgrounds (Ikhar Yuharto, 2016). Consequently, film is considered a significant subject in communication studies because it represents reality through a system of symbols that shape various interpretations of the messages conveyed (Winda Primasari, 2014). Recent growth in the Indonesian

film industry reveals an increase in the production of religiously themed films that resonate more closely with societal realities by addressing various life issues. These religious films do not simply present religious teachings in a normative manner; instead, they portray characters' inner struggles, the discovery of life's meaning, moral dilemmas, and the relationship between humanity and God through a more humanistic storytelling approach. This demonstrates that film can serve as a space for representing spiritual experiences and a medium for conveying spiritual messages. Film is a form of symbolic communication that allows viewers to interpret meaning through dialogue, expressions, visual elements, and plotlines. Thus, religious films function not only as entertainment but also as a medium that fosters emotional and spiritual experiences through the various symbols presented in the story.

Titip Surat untuk Tuhan (A Letter to God), directed by Karsono Hadi, produced by Clockwork Films, and released on March 7, 2024, tells the story of its characters' lives through interpersonal relationships and depicts inner struggles deeply connected to the relationship between humanity and God. In the film's narrative, a letter appears repeatedly as a crucial element driving the plot's development. The letter also serves as a symbol that constructs meaning through dialogue, visuals, and the sequence of events portrayed in the film. Therefore, *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* is highly relevant when analyzed through a semiotic approach to reveal the representation of meaning constructed via the symbol of the letter throughout the storyline.

Transcendental communication is a form of communication discussed within the field of communication studies because it addresses the relationship between humans and God (Wahyu Budiantoro, 2019). Unlike interpersonal communication, which involves direct interaction between the communicator and the communicatee, transcendental communication refers to a process that takes place through various spiritual activities. According to Jalaluddin Rakhmat, transcendental communication is expressed through prayer, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and other forms of servitude, serving as a manifestation of the human relationship with Allah. In this process, the transmission of the message does not rely on the physical presence of the communicatee; instead, it is grounded in the conviction that Allah as the communicatee is All-Hearing and All-Knowing regarding every prayer offered by His servant. Consequently, transcendental communication is understood not merely as a religious ritual but also as an expression of the spiritual closeness between humans and God (Ajeng

Monikaselis, 2022). This concept serves as the theoretical framework for the study, aiming to understand how the human Divine relationship is represented through letters acting as signs and symbols within the film.

The film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* (A Letter for God) is compelling due to the recurring presence of letters as a key element; this warrants analysis because the symbol of the letter can be understood not only literally but also through various meanings shaped by social and cultural contexts as well as spiritual experiences. From a semiotic perspective, a sign is understood not merely by its denotative meaning but also by its connotative meaning and its capacity to generate myths within society. Therefore, to comprehend the representation of transcendental communication via the letter symbol in *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, a semiotic approach is required one capable of examining the multiple layers of meaning embedded within the symbols presented.

This study employs the semiotic approach proposed by Roland Barthes to analyze the representation of transcendental communication through letters—as symbols in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*. According to Barthes, a sign possesses not only a denotative (literal) meaning but also a connotative meaning influenced by the experiences, culture, and ideologies prevalent in society. Connotations that are continuously reproduced eventually form a myth that is imbued with meaning in social life. This approach enables researchers to uncover the layers of meaning embedded within the various symbols presented in the film. Therefore, the semiotic framework proposed by Roland Barthes is considered relevant for analyzing the symbol of the letter across the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the representation of transcendental communication in the film.

Representations in film are constructed not merely through dialogue between characters but also through visual elements, objects, expressions, body language, and the sequence of plot events. From a semiotic perspective, each of these elements is understood as a sign possessing denotative and connotative meanings, as well as mythic significance, shaped by the underlying social and cultural context. Consequently, analyzing symbols within a film is crucial for understanding how messages are constructed and presented to the audience. In this study, the letter serves as the primary narrative element, analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotics to reveal the representation of transcendental

communication through meanings at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth.

Research regarding the representation of religious messages in film has frequently employed Roland Barthes' semiotic approach (Aas Astuti, n.d.). Such studies demonstrate that film is a medium rich in signs and symbols, capable of representing Islamic values, religious symbols, dakwah (religious outreach) messages, and spiritual experiences through visual elements, dialogue, and plot. Regarding the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, previous research has generally focused on the representation of Islamic values and religious symbols constructed through various scenes and the film's narrative. Meanwhile, research on transcendental communication in the film *Izinkan Aku Berdosa* indicates that the relationship between humans and God can be analyzed through denotation, connotation, and myth using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. These findings demonstrate the relevance of Roland Barthes' semiotics for uncovering symbolic meaning in film. However, previous studies have not specifically positioned the symbol of the letter as the central focus of analysis regarding the representation of transcendental communication. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by analyzing the letter as the focal point for interpreting transcendental communication in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*.

A review of existing literature reveals a research gap that warrants further exploration. Most prior studies have focused on the representation of Islamic values, religious symbols, dakwah (religious outreach) messages, and transcendental communication in film generally (Ida Afidah, 2022). Although Roland Barthes' semiotic approach has been widely employed to uncover symbolic meanings in cinema, the objects of study have remained broad, without specifically positioning the symbol of the "letter" as the primary focus of analysis. A literature search indicates that research specifically examining the letter as a semiotic object of analysis in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* remains limited. Yet, the letter serves as a crucial narrative element that drives the plot while conveying various meanings open to semiotic interpretation. Consequently, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the letter as a symbol through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotics and the perspective of transcendental communication.

Addressing this research gap, this study offers a novel contribution by centering its analysis on the letter in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic approach integrated with Jalaluddin Rakhmat's

concept of transcendental communication (Wahidah Suryani, 2015). This differs from earlier studies that predominantly examined the representation of Islamic values, religious symbols, dakwah messages, or transcendental communication in a general sense (Anwari, 2025). This study analyzes the representation of transcendental communication through the symbol of the letter based on the layers of denotation, connotation, and myth. This approach is expected to provide a fresh perspective on understanding transcendental communication in film, while accounting for the visual and narrative contexts that shape the interpretation of meaning. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the field of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting specifically within the realms of communication, semiotics, and film media by exploring themes of spiritual experience.

METHOD

This study aims to analyze the representation of transcendental communication through the symbol of a letter in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, employing Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Data were obtained by observing scenes in which the letter serves as a central object within the narrative. The observations reveal that the letter appears across several scenes, with its function evolving alongside the story's progression shifting from a mere medium for conveying messages to becoming a crucial element of the protagonist's spiritual experience.

Image 1

The postal worker explained that the letter must bear the recipient's address.



Source: Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, sutradara Karsono Hadi

The opening scene shows a postal worker puzzled over where to deliver a letter written by a child; the letter is slated for return, but the worker has lost it. In the dialogue, the worker explains that a letter is a "trust" or an item "entrusted" to them, meaning it can only be delivered if the recipient's address is known. This scene illustrates the function of a letter within the context of standard delivery procedures.

Image 2

The mother character receives a letter written by Tulus.



Source: Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, sutradara Karsono Hadi

The second scene features a conversation between a parent and a child regarding a letter that has been written. When the father asks about the letter's contents, the child reveals that it is addressed to God. This scene illustrates a shift in the letter's intended recipient compared to its function in the previous scene.

Image 3

The child character finds a receipt inside an envelope.



Source: Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, sutradara Karsono Hadi

The third scene shows the child character discovering a receipt inside the envelope they received. After seeing the contents of the envelope, the child asks their mother, "Is this a reply from God?" This question serves as a crucial element in the development of the storyline, as it reveals how the child interprets the events they have experienced.

Image 4
That means God answered my letter.



Source: Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, sutradara Karsono Hadi.

The fourth scene is conveyed through the child character's statement: "That means God replied to my letter." This remark follows the child's receipt of a receipt that had previously been found inside an envelope. Although the film does not visually depict God as the sender of the letter, the dialogue reveals the child's conviction regarding the experience.

Image 5
The child character returns to entrust the letter to the postman.



Source: Film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*, sutradara Karsono Hadi.

The fifth scene shows the child character once again entrusting a letter to the postal worker. This scene demonstrates the child's unwavering belief in conveying a message to God through the medium they understand a physical letter. The reappearance of the letter in the final section highlights the consistent use of the letter as a crucial element in the progression of the storyline.

Information of the Table

Data	Scene Excerpt	Denotation	Connotation	Myth	Analysis
Data 1	A postal worker plans to return a letter addressed to a children's character because it lacks a destination address.	A letter is understood as a medium of communication that requires a sender, a recipient, and a destination address.	The letter began to be viewed as something intended for God, even though it could not be sent through administrative channels.	The belief that communication with God is not restricted by the procedures for sending letters.	The scene preserves the literal meaning of the letter before it evolves into a symbol of transcendental communication.
Data 2	The child shows their parents a letter addressed to God.	The letter remains a physical object written by the child character.	Letters serve as a medium for conveying prayers, hopes, and supplications to God.	Doa dapat diwujudkan melalui simbol sederhana yang memiliki makna spiritual.	The meaning of the letter shifts from interpersonal communication to transcendental communication.
Data 3	The child received an envelope containing a receipt and then asked, "Is this a reply from God?"	The character receives a receipt in an envelope.	A receipt is interpreted as a potential answer to a prayer that has been offered.	It is believed that God's help comes through everyday events.	The film depicts the characters' process of interpreting an event as a response from God.
Data 4	The child said, "That means God replied to my letter."	The character expresses their conviction regarding the	The letter becomes a symbol of the conviction	God answers human prayers through various forms	The scene illustrates the formation of mythological

		events they experienced.	that the prayer has been answered.	of help, not through physical letters.	meaning according to Roland Barthes.
Data 5	The child returned to entrust the letter to the post office officer.	The character resumed writing and sending letters.	The letter becomes a symbol of the continuity of hope and prayers to God.	Faith compels people to keep praying, even though God's answers come in different ways.	The film underscores the consistency of the transcendental communication the character engages in through the symbol of the letter.

Sumber: Film Titip Surat untuk Tuhan, sutradara Karsono Hadi (Clockwork Films, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that the symbol of the letter in the film Titip Surat untuk Tuhan undergoes a shift in meaning: initially serving as a medium for communication, it evolves into a symbol representing transcendental communication between humans and God. This evolution of meaning is analyzed using Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach, specifically through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth.

At the level of denotation, the letter is understood as a medium of written communication used to convey a message. This meaning is evident in the scene where a postal worker returns a letter written by the child protagonist because it lacks a clear destination address. Literally, the letter is perceived as a communication tool requiring a sender, a recipient, and a destination address to be processed through standard postal procedures. These findings demonstrate that the film Titip Surat untuk Tuhan retains the letter's fundamental function as a medium for interpersonal communication before introducing an expanded meaning in subsequent scenes.

However, the meaning of the letter subsequently expands at the level of connotation. The film Titip Surat untuk Tuhan portrays the letter not merely as a medium for conveying messages, but as a symbol representing prayer, hope, supplication, and human surrender to God. This interpretation is illustrated

when the child protagonist writes a letter addressed to God and maintains their faith, even though the letter cannot be administratively processed by the postal worker. In this context, the letter is no longer defined by its literal communicative function; instead, it represents an inner communication between the human and God, grounded in the protagonist's conviction regarding the content of the letter they have written.

These findings align with the concept of transcendental communication proposed by Jalaluddin Rakhmat. According to Rakhmat, transcendental communication is the interaction between humans and God, manifested through prayer, acts of worship, dhikr (remembrance of God), and other forms of devotion. Unlike interpersonal communication, which involves direct interaction between a communicator and a recipient, transcendental communication does not require the recipient's physical presence; instead, it rests on the conviction that God hears and knows every prayer offered by His servants. Within this framework, the letter in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* is not treated as a physical object literally sent to God, but rather as a symbolic representation of prayer a medium for transcendental communication between the child character and God.

This connotative meaning is reinforced when the child character discovers a receipt inside an envelope and asks, "Is this a reply from God?" This question reveals how the child interprets the event as a response to the prayer previously offered via the letter. Although the film does not visually or verbally depict God as the one providing the response, the dialogue illustrates the child's belief that the assistance received is an answer to the prayer addressed to God. Thus, transcendental communication in the film is established through the character's interpretation of their lived experience.

At the level of myth, the symbol of the letter fosters the belief that prayers offered to God can elicit answers through various forms of assistance in life. The myth represented in the film is not that God sends a reply in the form of a physical letter, but rather that God can answer prayers through events that humans interpret as manifestations of His help. This is evident when the child character remarks, "That means God answered my letter." Through this dialogue, the film constructs a narrative suggesting that communication between humans and God does not always yield a direct response; instead, it can manifest through experiences and events interpreted as God's response to the prayers offered.

Research findings indicate that the letter in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* serves not merely as a medium of communication but also as a symbol representing the character's spiritual experience. Using the letter as a symbol reinforces the delivery of the spiritual message through a visual element rooted in everyday life, thereby making it easier for the audience to grasp the story's underlying meaning. Consequently, the letter functions not only as a plot device but also as the central representation of transcendental communication within the film.

The study demonstrates that concrete symbols can be employed in film to represent abstract concepts, such as the relationship between humans and God. From the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotics, a simple symbol can generate meanings that evolve from the level of denotation to connotation and myth. Thus, the symbol of the letter transcends its role as a mere communication medium, evolving into a representation of faith, hope, resignation, and trust in God's assistance.

Compared to previous studies, this research focuses more specifically on analyzing the symbol of the letter as a representation of transcendental communication, employing Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Prior studies have generally addressed the representation of Islamic values, religious symbols, dakwah (religious outreach) messages, or transcendental communication within a broader scope (Izharul Haq, 2023). In contrast, this study centers its analysis on the symbol of the letter as the primary object of interpretation, thereby offering a more specific perspective on the representation of transcendental communication in film.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce Jalaluddin Rakhmat's concept of transcendental communication, which posits that communication between humans and God can be represented through various symbolic media, rather than being limited to direct acts of worship. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that Roland Barthes' semiotic approach can be utilized to uncover denotation, connotation, and myth within the representation of transcendental communication in audiovisual media. Thus, this research contributes to the development of studies in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, particularly in the fields of transcendental communication, semiotics, and film media analysis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the letter symbol in the film *Titip Surat untuk Tuhan* is not merely represented as a medium of communication in the denotative sense; rather, its meaning expands to symbolize transcendental communication between humans and God. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the letter is interpreted at three levels: as a medium for conveying messages (denotation); as a representation of prayer, hope, and surrender to God (connotation); and as a symbol of the belief that prayers can be answered through various forms of aid depicted in the film (myth). These findings address the research problem by demonstrating that the representation of transcendental communication in the film is constructed through the interpretation of the letter symbol, which connects the character's inner experience with their faith in God.

Theoretically, this study reinforces Jalaluddin Rakhmat's concept of transcendental communication by showing that the relationship between humans and God can be represented through symbolic media in film. Furthermore, the study confirms that Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is capable of revealing denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings within the representation of transcendental communication in audiovisual media.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the letter symbol as the primary object for representing transcendental communication distinguishing it from previous studies that largely examined Islamic values, religious symbols, or transcendental communication in general. Consequently, this study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting studies, particularly in the areas of transcendental communication, semiotics, and film media analysis. Future research is encouraged to examine the representation of transcendental communication in other films or audiovisual media using different semiotic approaches or theoretical perspectives, thereby enriching the study of how spiritual messages are represented in media.

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