ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF MORAL MESSAGES IN FILM IS QUITE DIFFERENT

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Abstract

Film is one of the forms of mass media that serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for delivering messages, values, and moral teachings through a combination of visual and audio elements. In addition to portraying social realities, film also functions as a means of expression in response to various events and phenomena occurring in society. The moral messages conveyed in films often reflect human behavior and attitudes in everyday life, as well as demonstrate the positive and negative consequences of actions taken. This study aims to examine the meaning of signs and moral values in the film Agak Laen *using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Barthes' approach analyzes signs through three levels of meaning: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (emotional or cultural meaning), and myth (ideological meaning shaped by society). This research is qualitative in nature, with data collected through direct observation and literature review. The results of the study show that* Agak Laen *contains a number of signs that convey moral messages through its narrative and characters. These signs construct myths that reflect cultural and social values in community life.*
Keywords: *Film, Moral Values, Semiotics, Roland Barthes*

Abstrak

Film merupakan salah satu bentuk media massa yang tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai sarana penyampaian pesan, nilai, serta ajaran moral melalui kombinasi unsur visual dan audio. Selain menggambarkan kenyataan sosial, film juga berperan sebagai media ekspresi terhadap berbagai peristiwa dan fenomena yang terjadi di tengah masyarakat. Pesan-pesan moral yang tersaji dalam film biasanya mencerminkan perilaku dan sikap manusia dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, serta memperlihatkan dampak positif maupun negatif dari tindakan yang dilakukan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji makna tanda dan nilai-nilai moral dalam film *Agak Laen* dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotika Roland Barthes. Pendekatan Barthes menelaah tanda melalui tiga tingkatan makna, yakni denotasi (makna harfiah), konotasi (makna emosional atau kultural), dan mitos (makna ideologis yang berkembang dalam masyarakat). Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi langsung dan studi literatur. Hasil penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa film *Agak Laen* memuat sejumlah tanda yang menyampaikan pesan moral melalui narasi dan karakter-karakternya. Tanda-tanda ini kemudian membentuk mitos yang mencerminkan nilai-nilai budaya dan sosial dalam kehidupan masyarakat.
Kata kunci: Film, Nilai Moral, Semiotika, Roland Barthes

I. INTRODUCTION

Film as a form of mass communication media has a strategic role in shaping public opinion and conveying messages to the wider community. More than just entertainment, film has the capacity to reflect social reality, depict the dynamics of community life, and become an educational medium that conveys moral, social, and cultural values. In this context, film functions as a social mirror that represents various actual problems that occur in the community, visualized symbolically so that they are easy for the audience to understand and reflect on (Dwi, 2023).

The development of the national film industry in recent years has shown significant growth. This progress is not only reflected in technical aspects such as cinematography and production quality, but also in terms of increasingly complex narratives and the courage to raise relevant social issues. Indonesian films are now no longer focused on entertainment functions alone, but also include social criticism and reflective invitations, making them more meaningful and appreciated by various groups in society (Sabandar, 2024). One of the films that marked this development was Agak Laen by the production house Imajinari which was released on February 1, 2024.

The film Agak Laen is an interesting example of the success of comedy cinema in conveying profound moral and social messages. Carrying the horror-comedy genre, this film managed to attract the attention of more than 9.1 million viewers (Kompas.com; Iandi & Pangerang, 2024), making it one of the highest-grossing films in the history of Indonesian cinema. However, the success of this film lies not only in its commercial aspect, but also in its ability to raise local social and cultural issues through a light but touching approach. The story of four friends—Boris, Jegel, Bene, and Oki who work in a haunted house becomes a narrative stage to depict social problems such as class inequality, stereotypes against the lower classes, to the issue of moral integrity under social pressure (Ubaidillah & Patriansah, 2024).

Interestingly, the moral messages conveyed in the film Agak Laen are not present explicitly, but through various visual signs and symbols that imply certain meanings. Elements such as film properties, character expressions, and story settings have symbolic functions that are rich in connotative and ideological meanings. Therefore, a scientific approach is needed that is able to systematically read and reveal the layers of meaning contained in the film.

One relevant approach to studying these messages is the semiotic approach, especially Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes developed a semiotic analysis framework that views signs as units of meaning consisting of three layers: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (emotional or cultural meaning), and myth (ideological meaning that is considered normal in society) (Alfikri, 2022). Through these three layers, films can be analyzed not only from the surface of their narrative, but also from how they represent social reality and construct the audience's understanding of the world.

Barthes views films as not neutral, but rather as cultural constructions that are full of ideological interests. Films shape the audience's perspective on reality through the system of signs contained in them, be it images, sound, dialogue, or narrative structure (Mutiah et al., 2023). Thus, film becomes a medium that not only depicts the world, but also plays an active role in shaping the way we interpret that world.

Through this semiotic approach, the film Agak Laen can be read as a visual text that contains moral and social messages hidden behind its humor and popular narrative. Symbols such as haunted houses, scary dolls, clown costumes, and the facial expressions of the characters become a medium for conveying meaning about marginality, social stereotypes, and the struggles of the lower class. In fact, the location of the haunted house as the main setting can be interpreted as a metaphor for marginalized social space, where "unimportant" people struggle to stay alive and be heard.

By highlighting how this film represents "ordinary" people, namely those who do not have access to higher education, power, or wealth, this film conveys a critique of discriminatory social structures. The moral messages conveyed include the importance of empathy, equality, and tolerance in social life. Social myths such as perceptions of success, legal justice, and political power can be analyzed as part of the ideological construction that is trying to be revealed or resisted through the film's narrative (Ubaidillah & Patriansah, 2024).

Unfortunately, so far there have not been many academic studies that have deeply analyzed the moral meanings hidden in the visual symbols and narrative of the film Agak Laen. Most previous studies still focus on the narrative aspect or general sociological studies. In fact, Barthes' semiotic approach opens up wide opportunities to understand how moral messages in films are constructed cinematically (Mutiah et al., 2023). Based on this background, this study aims to reveal the meaning of the moral message in the film Agak Laen through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. With this approach, it is hoped that a more

comprehensive understanding can be obtained regarding how films convey social criticism and moral messages through visual symbols that form layers of meaning in stages.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES

Mass Communication

Communication is the process of delivering messages from the sender (communicator) to the recipient (communicant), which is then followed up through a response or feedback as a reaction to the message. The communication process does not only take place between individuals, but can also occur intrapersonally, namely when someone speaks or has a dialogue with themselves, for example when considering a decision to be taken. Communication is a mechanism that allows someone to understand others, and can also be understood. This process is dynamic and flexible, depending on the context and social conditions that surround it. The essence of communication is the exchange of ideas, information, thoughts, and views between participants (Romli, 2016).

One form of communication that has its own characteristics is mass communication. This type of communication is aimed at a wide and diverse audience socially, economically, and culturally. Unlike interpersonal communication that takes place directly and is limited, or organizational communication that has a formal structure, mass communication targets large and heterogeneous groups without a direct personal relationship between the sender and recipient of the message (Nurudin, 2011). Mass media such as television, radio, newspapers, and digital media are used as the main channels in disseminating messages to the public. Therefore, the content of messages in mass communication must be carefully designed so that they can be understood, accepted, and influence audiences from various backgrounds.

In a broader perspective, mass communication is also seen as a process of producing and exchanging meaning. The main focus is on how messages or texts are used in social interactions to form certain perceptions and meanings. This approach highlights the central role of text in building and reflecting cultural values in society (Fiske, 2018).

Film as a Mass Communication Media

The term mass communication comes from the English Mass Media Communication, which refers to the process of delivering messages through mass media to a wide audience. This communication relies on modern technology as a means to disseminate information quickly and simultaneously to the public on a large scale. Mass media acts as an intermediary between the communicator and the communicant, thus allowing for indirect and one-way communication. Although there are various definitions from experts, basically mass

communication can be understood as the process of sending messages to the public through various types of media, both print media such as newspapers and magazines, and electronic media such as television, radio, and the internet. The existence of these media is the result of technological advances that allow information to be distributed widely and efficiently (Nurudin, 2011). Mass communication has distinctive characteristics, namely it is one-way, reaches a heterogeneous audience, and relies on media as the main channel that distinguishes it from interpersonal or small group communication.

Mass communication, film is one form of media that is very popular and influential. According to Joseph V. Maschelli, films are formed by a structural arrangement of shots, scenes, and sequences, where camera placement is an important element in communicating the storyline visually (Wibisono & Sari, 2021). Films are not only a means of entertainment, but also a learning medium that conveys moral messages and life values that are relevant to the audience (Wulansari, 2021). With its audio-visual power, films can influence the feelings, thoughts, and social awareness of the audience. Furthermore, films can also reflect social and cultural realities by containing messages influenced by values, ideologies, institutions, and certain cultural contexts (Wibisono & Sari, 2021). Therefore, films not only function as a medium for conveying information and entertainment, but also as a vehicle for social reflection that shapes people's perspectives on the world and the social structures around them.

Semiotics

The term semiotics comes from the Greek word semion, which means "sign", and in English is known as sign (Sobur, 2016). Semiotics or in other terms semiology is a branch of science that studies signs and how these signs work in the communication process. This discipline was first introduced in the 19th century by Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher known for his pragmatism approach. Peirce defines a sign as something that functions to represent something else in a certain context (Sobur, 2016).

Meanwhile, according to Ferdinand de Saussure, modern semiotics is understood as part of a broader linguistics and is often called semiology. Saussure distinguishes two main components in a sign, namely the signifier and the signified. The signifier refers to the physical aspect of the sign, such as sound, writing, or image, while the signified is the meaning or concept contained behind the form (Kurniawan, 2001).

In general, semiotics studies how signs are used in human life to convey meaning. Because communication always involves signs, semiotics is very closely related to the

communication process itself. In a social context, signs are used to convey ideas, values, and messages which are then interpreted by the recipient. The study of semiotics includes three main aspects (Kurniawan, 2001):

a. Signs, namely elements that can only be understood in certain contexts and based on mutually agreed meanings;

b. Code, namely a system of rules and conventions that help humans in composing and interpreting signs according to cultural and social norms;

c. Culture, namely the social space in which signs and codes function and are influenced by the values, traditions, and practices of society.

The main objective of the study of semiotics is to explore the hidden meanings behind various forms of communication such as text, images, symbols, and audiovisuals. Through an understanding of the sign system, we can read and interpret the messages conveyed more critically, especially in the context of modern media, both print and digital.

Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Semiotics, as a branch of communication science, not only views communication as an exchange of information, but also involves the use of signs and symbols that have social agreements (Lantowa in Alfikri, 2022). These signs become an important medium in conveying messages, which are then interpreted by the recipient based on their respective cultural backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. Thus, semiotics becomes the main tool in understanding how meaning is formed, conveyed, and received in various communication situations. The semiotic communication process requires critical thinking skills and skills in designing effective messages, which include symbolic interpretation of signs so that messages are conveyed accurately without causing misunderstandings. This ability is crucial especially in literary and cultural studies, where meaning is usually implicit and complex (Alfikri, 2022).

Roland Barthes developed the theory of signs previously proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, which distinguishes between the signifier as the physical form of the sign, and the signified as the concept associated with it. Barthes expanded this view by emphasizing the role of signs in constructing social meaning in society (Hidayati, 2021). He explained that signs have two main levels of meaning: denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning refers to the literal or objective meaning of a sign, while connotative meaning involves the cultural values, emotions, and subjective associations attached to the sign. This connotation

reflects the shared experiences of society and shows that signs are never free from the influence of certain cultures and ideologies (Sari, 2023).

In his study, Barthes also introduced the concept of myth as a secondary meaning system that operates on denotative meaning. Myth is not just an ordinary story or legend, but an ideological construction formed through a system of signs. In the structure of myth, literal denotative signs become new markers in the connotative system, thus producing new meanings that appear natural and neutral, even though these meanings are actually constructed by certain ideological forces.

Myths function not only as a medium for conveying messages, but also as an ideological mechanism that strengthens and maintains dominant values in society. The signs in myths often look ordinary and without content, but in fact they contain certain hegemonic intentions. This additional meaning creates the impression that certain values are natural or reasonable, when in fact they are the result of cultural and power construction (Harahap & Alfikri, 2024).

Barthes emphasized that connotative meaning plays an important role in strengthening dominant values in society. Connotation not only adds layers of meaning, but also functions as an ideological label that contains important symbols to shape social perception. Thus, connotative meaning works subtly but effectively in directing people's views of reality, so that the meanings formed appear natural and are rarely questioned. This system shows how signs can be used to strengthen cultural hegemony and power through symbolism. By understanding the connotative realm, readers or interpreters can explore how figurative language, metaphors, and cultural symbols work that are not apparent in denotative meaning. Knowledge of connotation allows for a deeper analysis of cultural texts or phenomena, because this layer of meaning often contains hidden messages that shape people's ways of thinking (Haryati & Mustafa, 2020).

Therefore, Roland Barthes' semiotic approach invites us to be critical when reading various forms of communication, so that we are not only fixated on literal meaning, but are also able to reveal the ideological dimensions hidden behind language and symbols.

Moral Message

Messages in communication are the main tool used to convey ideas or ideas from the communicator to the communicant. This process takes place through symbols that have a clear physical form and meaning so that they are easily recognized. A message is information conveyed from the sender to the recipient (Lasswell in Banjarnahor & Cindoswari, 2023). In

addition, a message can also be interpreted as a symbol, either in oral or written form, which represents the sender's ideas, feelings, or goals. Messages are very important in communication because they allow for the exchange of ideas and the achievement of understanding between individuals or groups.

Symbols in communication function as a medium that represents objects, ideas, or emotions. These symbols consist of various characters or symbols that are used to convey meaning verbally or in writing (Rahayu, 2023). Messages are not only conveyed directly through face-to-face interactions, but can also be spread through various types of communication media, such as print, electronic, and digital media (Islam et al., 2021). The diversity of these media allows messages to reach a wider audience and play a role in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of something.

In general, morals can be understood as a collection of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are considered good or bad in a community. These values are the basis for individuals to act and behave, especially in social life together. The word "moral" comes from the Latin *mores* which means custom, character, or behavior (Chelvanathan, 2023). Morals are important because they serve as standards or guidelines that help society maintain order and distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate actions according to certain cultural norms.

Moral messages are important elements that can be analyzed from the content of the story and the characters that appear. Films often reflect the reality of life, both directly and through symbolism. Therefore, films are not only entertainment, but also a medium that reflects moral values to the audience. Moral messages are usually implied in the plot and character development, which if observed carefully, can provide life lessons or new insights into social issues (Alfikri, 2022).

In addition to conveying life values, moral messages in films can also be a source of inspiration and solutions to problems faced by viewers every day. When the audience experiences a situation similar to the story of the film, the moral message conveyed can be used as a guideline or material for reflection. Thus, films have a dual function as a medium of entertainment as well as an educational medium that presents valuable lessons. Therefore, understanding the moral message in a film not only enriches the viewing experience, but also broadens insight and moral awareness in social life.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical analysis approach to

examine the moral message in the film Agak Laen through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the meaning and socio-cultural context contained in the film's visual and verbal signs, which cannot be measured quantitatively. Primary data in the form of Agak Laen film material was analyzed in detail, supported by secondary data from literature related to semiotics and moral messages. Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation by watching the film repeatedly and literature studies to obtain theoretical materials and supporting references. Data analysis includes the process of reduction, presentation, and verification by identifying important signs in the film based on Barthes' three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. This method aims to reveal moral messages comprehensively and critically according to the culture being analyzed.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Agak Laen is an Indonesian comedy horror film released in 2024 and directed by Muhadkly Acho, adapted from a popular podcast of the same title. The film was produced by Imajinari with Jagartha and features four main characters, namely Bene Dion, Oki Rengga, Boris Bokir, and Indra Jegel, who are also the creators of the podcast and are known for their typical Medan humor style. As a form of expansion from digital media to the big screen, Agak Laen has succeeded in combining light horror elements with fresh comedy that is close to the local culture of North Sumatra, so that it is able to reach a wide and inclusive audience without prioritizing fear but laughter in absurd situations.

Figure 4.1 – Rather Laen Film Cover

The film premiered in Indonesian cinemas on February 1, 2024, and attracted public attention thanks to the popularity of its original podcast and its lighthearted and culturally relevant storytelling approach. Agak Laen not only serves as entertainment, but also as a

social reflection that conveys important moral messages such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance through the visual symbols, dialogues, and characters presented. This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to analyze these moral messages by looking at the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings contained in the film, so that the film can be understood as a cultural text that forms moral awareness and social ideology for its audience.

Scene	Moral message	Meaning (Connotation and Myth)
Boris bribes his way into the army	Honesty & Integrity	Corruption system, social criticism
Bene fights for Naomi's love	Firmness and Respect for Tradition	Love needs social struggle
Jegel is chased by loan sharks	Financial Responsibility	Debt becomes a moral burden
Oki & his mother	Family Love	The noble value of dutiful children

They hid the body 	Moral Responsibility	Consequences of shortcuts
End of the movie: free from prison 	Sincerity and Patience	The power of love and forgiveness

The analysis of the film Agak Laen using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach aims to explore the visual and symbolic meanings contained in each element of the film. This approach focuses on three layers of meaning, namely denotation as a literal meaning that appears directly, connotation which contains implied cultural and emotional meaning, and myths that reflect the grand narrative or ideology that shapes society's perspective. The method used in this analysis involves identifying visual and verbal elements in each scene, such as dialogue, character expressions, settings, and symbols that appear. Furthermore, these elements are analyzed to see how the film represents the social, moral, cultural, and psychological values implied in the narrative. With this approach, the moral message contained in Agak Laen is not only understood superficially, but also as a reflection of broader social and cultural constructions, thus providing in-depth insight into how films play a role in shaping and conveying moral awareness to their audiences.

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1. Boris' Bribery	Conversation about backdoor entry into the army	Instant and pragmatic ambition	Criticism of corruption and bureaucracy

2. Bene's Proposal	Formal application process	Courage and commitment of love	Parental blessing as the key to a relationship
3. Jegel and Loan Sharks	Debt chase	Social pressure and fear	Debt as a moral and social burden
4. Mr. Basuki's affair	Cheating & secret messages	Emotional betrayal	Dishonesty in relationships = destruction
5. Basuki's Burial	Secret burial	Fear of the law	People are afraid of the formal legal system

V. CONCLUSION

The film Agak Laen is more than just entertainment; it also conveys a profound moral message and social reflection through the use of symbols and narratives rich in meaning. With Roland Barthes' semiotic approach that analyzes denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings, the film successfully raises various important issues such as corruption, sacrifice in the family, the struggle for love, friendship, and the moral consequences of every action. From the analysis, ten main moral messages were found, including honesty, courage, responsibility, compassion, loyalty, and patience in facing obstacles. However, the three most prominent core moral messages are responsibility for actions, the importance of self-confidence and self-development, and the value of true friendship that is tested in various life tests. All of these messages emphasize that Agak Laen is not only entertaining, but also provides valuable lessons that can be a guide for the audience in living a more meaningful social life.

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