

SYMBOLIC MEANING IN KASABIAN'S "GOODBYE KISS": A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS USING ROLAND BARTHES' THEORY OF SIGNS

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Abstract

This study explores the symbolic meaning embedded in the lyrics of "Goodbye Kiss" by the British band Kasabian through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The objective is to examine how the song functions as a cultural text that communicates multi-layered meanings through signs and symbols. The research employs a qualitative-descriptive method with a textual analysis approach, focusing on the tri-level meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. Each verse is examined to identify the emotional, ideological, and social messages hidden within the poetic language of the lyrics. The findings reveal eight significant symbolic lines that represent themes of emotional disintegration, lifestyle criticism, identity fracture, and romantic myth. This article contributes to understanding how popular song lyrics serve as powerful vehicles for cultural meaning-making and ideological construction. The study affirms that even mainstream rock music can be critically analyzed as a form of literary expression and cultural discourse.

Keywords: Barthes, ideology, lyric analysis, semiotics, symbolism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Popular music is not merely a form of entertainment—it is a cultural artifact that reflects human emotion, ideology, and societal values. Lyrics, as a linguistic component of music, often convey complex symbolic meanings that deserve literary and cultural analysis. The intersection between music and semiotics offers a rich terrain to explore how language, signs, and myths function in contemporary society.

One compelling example is the song "Goodbye Kiss" by Kasabian, a British alternative rock band. The song narrates a failed romantic relationship through emotionally loaded diction and metaphorical expression. Words such as "kiss," "photograph," "rock and roll," and "insane" are not only literal; they function symbolically to represent love, memory, disillusionment, and cultural identity. As Wijayanti (2020) asserts, lyrical texts in popular songs often mirror collective emotional experiences that resonate across listeners, functioning as modern forms of literary representation.

Previous studies have revealed the interpretive richness of song lyrics when analyzed through the lens of semiotics. For instance, Damayanti (2022) examined the symbolic language of Ilditaf's lyrics, while Kusumawati et al. (2019) focused on metaphorical imagery in traditional Indonesian songs. However, few studies have investigated Western rock songs, particularly using Barthes' triadic model of denotation, connotation, and myth. This research addresses that gap by exploring how *Goodbye Kiss* constructs emotional and ideological messages through its symbolic language.

This study aims to identify and interpret the symbolic expressions in the song *Goodbye Kiss* by Kasabian using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What signs and symbolic imagery appear in the lyrics of *Goodbye Kiss*?
- 2) How are these signs constructed and interpreted through the layers of denotation, connotation, and myth?

By analyzing this song as a cultural text, this study contributes to the broader discourse of literary and media studies by emphasizing the semiotic potential of popular music as a site for cultural meaning-making.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

The theoretical foundation of this study lies in Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly his tri-level model of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Barthes (1977) argues that meaning is constructed through a system of signs where language and cultural codes interact. At the first level, denotation refers to the literal, surface meaning of a sign. Connotation, the second level, involves emotional and cultural associations attached to the sign. Finally, myth refers to ideological messages that normalize certain worldviews through cultural representation.

In the context of music, these three levels are particularly useful for decoding symbolism in lyrics, as they often communicate personal, social, and cultural messages implicitly. As Santoso (2015) notes, song lyrics serve not only as artistic texts but also as ideological carriers that mirror the collective consciousness of a generation.

Several studies have applied Barthes' semiotic framework to musical texts. Damayanti (2022), for example, analyzed the myth of fear and emotional repression in Ildigitaf's *Takut* using Barthes' theory. Similarly, Kusumawati et al. (2019) applied the same framework to dissect emotional constructs in Ipha Hadi Sasono's *Rembulan*. In more recent work, Nuraini et al. (2024) explored temporality and healing narratives in BTS's *00:00 (Zero O'Clock)*, illustrating how symbolic lyrics construct mythic ideologies of time and self-worth.

This study follows these precedents by treating *Goodbye Kiss* as a cultural artifact—wherein language operates not only poetically, but semiotically and ideologically. Through Barthes' lens, each word or phrase is decoded in terms of what it literally says (denotation), what it emotionally suggests (connotation), and what it ideologically constructs as a cultural "truth" (myth).

This theoretical foundation allows the analysis to uncover not only the literary aesthetics of the song but also its role in reinforcing or challenging dominant ideologies—particularly regarding love, gender, emotional identity, and modern lifestyle.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using textual analysis as the primary method. The object of analysis is the full set of lyrics from the song *Goodbye Kiss* by Kasabian. The selection is based on the song's rich use of symbolic language and its relevance as a representative example of emotional and ideological expression in contemporary British rock music.

The data were collected through documentation, in the form of lyric transcription as officially released and performed by Kasabian. The lyrics were then segmented into thematic lines and verses, which became the units of analysis. Each segment was analyzed in accordance with Roland Barthes' semiotic model, focusing on three levels of meaning:

- 1) Denotation - the literal or surface meaning of a word or phrase.
- 2) Connotation - the associative, emotional, or cultural meaning that emerges beyond the literal.
- 3) Myth - the ideological message constructed through the normalization of connotative meanings.

The analytical process followed a coding scheme developed from similar studies (e.g., Handayani & Sabri, 2024; Nuraini et al., 2024), in which each lyric line was identified, interpreted based on Barthes' model, and compared with findings from prior semiotic research in music and literature. Although this study follows a qualitative-descriptive approach, a basic frequency count of denotative, connotative, and mythic categories was conducted to support the interpretive analysis and demonstrate the symbolic consistency across the selected lyric segments.

To enhance the interpretive validity of the analysis, the study cross-referenced symbolic interpretations with cultural studies and discourse analysis literature (Wibowo, 2021; Syahriar, 2018; Prasetyo, 2022). Moreover, academic references were used to support the socio-cultural implications of each myth identified.

This method allows for a rich, multilayered reading of the text, treating the song not only as a poetic artifact but also as a discursive medium that reflects the cultural and ideological contexts of its production and reception.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSS

This section presents the semiotic analysis of Kasabian's *Goodbye Kiss* based on Roland Barthes' three levels of meaning. Each significant lyric segment is analyzed for its denotative (literal), connotative (emotional/cultural), and mythic (ideological) value. The findings reveal that the song is not merely about romantic parting but a layered text loaded with emotional wounds, lifestyle critique, and ideological reflections.

4.1 Semiotic Analysis of Lyric Segments

To uncover the symbolic structure of *Goodbye Kiss*, each significant lyric segment is examined using Roland Barthes' triadic model of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. The denotative level identifies the literal meaning of the lyrics, while the connotative level explores their emotional and cultural associations. Finally, the mythic level uncovers the broader ideological narratives that the lyrics normalize or critique. The following table presents the results of this layered semiotic analysis, demonstrating how each line in the song conveys complex emotional experiences while simultaneously constructing and reflecting dominant cultural ideologies.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Lyric Segments in Kasabian's "*Goodbye Kiss*"

Lyric Segment	Denotation	Connotation	Myth (Ideology)
"Doomed from the start / We met with a <i>Goodbye Kiss</i> "	A failed relationship from the beginning	" <i>Goodbye Kiss</i> " implies a relationship fated to end	Love is often destined to fail despite emotional intensity
"Maybe the days we had are gone / Living in silence far too long"	Lost memories and prolonged silence	Emotional disconnection and communication breakdown	Silence is a symbol of emotional isolation in modern relationships
"No more laughs, no more photographs"	No happiness or preserved memories	Loss of joy and the absence of shared identity	Nostalgia as a cultural loss; modern love fades without documentation
"You're broken and I'm pissed"	Both partners are emotionally damaged	Rage and emotional collapse	Masculinity is expressed through anger, not vulnerability
"Rock and roll sent us insane"	Lifestyle contributed to emotional instability	Rock lifestyle as a symbol of recklessness	Fame and freedom can destroy personal identity and love
"When you have everything, it can't be true"	Having it all feels unreal	Disillusionment with perfection	Capitalist myth: Materialism does not guarantee emotional fulfillment
"You go your way and I'll go my way"	Mutual separation	Acceptance of detachment	Modern relationships often end in mutual disengagement
"I hope someday that we will meet again"	Longing for reunion in the future	Residual romantic idealism	Love myths persist despite separation and pain

Source: Author's analysis based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory (1977), supported by frameworks from Damayanti (2022), Kusumawati et al. (2019), and Nuraini et al. (2024).

After applying Barthes' semiotic framework to each major lyric segment, we now interpret the deeper meanings in detail to understand how each line operates symbolically in the construction of emotional and ideological narratives.

"Doomed from the start / We met with a *Goodbye Kiss*"

- **Denotation:** The relationship began with an inevitable end.
- **Connotation:** The phrase "*Goodbye Kiss*" subverts expectations. A kiss, typically associated with connection and affection, is now linked to departure and loss. This contradiction implies a fatalistic love—one that carries the seeds of its own destruction from the beginning.
- **Myth:** The lyric reflects the romantic myth of tragic love—that some relationships are inherently doomed regardless of the intensity of emotion. It supports the culturally popularized idea that some love stories are beautiful precisely because they are short-lived.

“Maybe the days we had are gone / Living in silence far too long”

- **Denotation:** The happy moments in the past have ended; silence has taken over.
- **Connotation:** “Living in silence” suggests more than a lack of sound—it implies emotional distance, an inability to communicate, or repressed feelings. Silence becomes a metaphor for emotional emptiness and alienation.
- **Myth:** This lyric enforces the idea that failed relationships often die not from violence or betrayal, but from neglect, silence, and emotional disconnection—issues that modern love frequently battles in a fast-paced, distracted society.

“No more laughs, no more photographs”

- **Denotation:** There are no longer shared joyful moments or captured memories.
- **Connotation:** The absence of laughter and photographs symbolizes the loss of emotional intimacy and the erasure of a shared identity. Laughter stands for vitality in a relationship, while photographs symbolize permanence and remembrance.
- **Myth:** In contemporary society, memory is constructed through digital images and performative happiness. This line subtly critiques the myth that relationships must always be documented and visibly joyful to be meaningful.

“You’re broken and I’m pissed”

- **Denotation:** Both individuals are emotionally damaged and angry.
- **Connotation:** “Broken” refers to inner emotional fragmentation, while “pissed” (angry) implies a reactive rather than reflective emotional state. The male speaker reveals his frustration, suggesting unresolved emotions.
- **Myth:** The line reinforces the cultural myth of masculine emotional repression. Men are socialized to respond to hurt with anger rather than vulnerability, perpetuating emotional suppression in male identities.

“Rock and roll sent us insane”

- **Denotation:** Their lifestyle, associated with the rock and roll ethos, led to instability.
- **Connotation:** “Insane” alludes to psychological breakdown caused by hedonistic excesses—partying, touring, fame, and detachment. The line implies regret for the damage caused by the very culture that once seemed empowering.
- **Myth:** These lyrics critique the romanticized myth of the rockstar lifestyle, showing that unrestrained freedom and fame often conceal emotional emptiness and ruin personal relationships.

“When you have everything, it can’t be true”

- **Denotation:** Having everything feels unreal or unfulfilling.
- **Connotation:** This line expresses existential doubt: the idea that external success (fame, love, wealth) cannot guarantee internal peace. The speaker suspects the reality of his happiness when it feels too perfect.
- **Myth:** The lyric confronts the capitalist myth that fulfillment is tied to material abundance or status. It echoes cultural disillusionment with the promise that “having everything” leads to satisfaction.

“You go your way and I’ll go my way”

- **Denotation:** They agree to separate and follow different paths.
- **Connotation:** This line expresses resignation—an emotionally detached farewell where neither side fights to hold on. It signifies mature acceptance, but also emotional fatigue.
- **Myth:** It supports the modern relationship myth that individuality is prioritized over unity. In postmodern narratives, love is often temporary and separation is rationalized as “growing apart.”

“I hope someday that we will meet again”

- **Denotation:** A wish for reunion in the future.
- **Connotation:** The line blends closure with hope. Even after a painful separation, the speaker harbors a desire for reconnection, showing the persistence of emotional attachment.
- **Myth:** The lyric draws from the myth of eternal love—the idea that true love never truly ends, even after parting. It echoes themes found in romantic literature, where fate and emotion transcend physical distance and time.

This detailed reading reaffirms that *Goodbye Kiss* is a sophisticated lyrical composition. It weaves emotional honesty with cultural commentary, offering listeners a layered text that communicates personal grief, romantic disillusionment, and ideological critique, all through compact and poetic phrases.

4.2 Discussion of Symbolic Patterns

The results indicate a recurring pattern of symbolic conflict between romantic idealism and emotional fragmentation. The phrase “*Goodbye Kiss*” alone encapsulates a contradiction—*intimacy and finality*. This oxymoronic expression sets the tone for the entire narrative: love that begins with its own end.

The emotional weight of silence and absence (“no more laughs, no more photographs”) reflects broader concerns in pop culture where digital memory and performative joy often dominate relationships (Wibowo, 2021). Furthermore, expressions like “*rock and roll sent us insane*” can be interpreted as critiques of modern lifestyles that promote self-destruction under the guise of freedom—an idea echoed by Natalia & Putri (2019) in their analysis of hedonism in cultural texts.

Barthes’ idea of myth is particularly visible in the way the lyrics reinforce and simultaneously resist cultural norms: from male emotional repression to material dissatisfaction. The singer’s emotional state, though personal, represents collective cultural narratives about identity, failure, and desire.

4.3 Symbol Frequency

To provide a simple frequency overview of the semiotic findings, this section presents the frequency of meanings identified at each level of Barthes’ framework: denotation, connotation, and myth. While the analysis is primarily qualitative in nature, quantifying the occurrences of symbolic meaning can help illustrate the balance and consistency of interpretive depth across the lyrics. The following table summarizes the number of distinct symbolic expressions uncovered in each semiotic category throughout the lyrical analysis of *Goodbye Kiss*.

Table 2. Frequency of Denotative, Connotative, and Mythic Meanings in “*Goodbye Kiss*” Lyrics

Level of Meaning	Total Instances
Denotative	8
Connotative	8
Myth (Ideological)	8
Total symbol	24

Source: Author’s categorization and frequency mapping based on Barthes (1977), Nuraini et al. (2024), Damayanti (2022), and Handayani & Sabri (2024).

The consistency of symbolic meaning across all levels confirms that *Goodbye Kiss* operates as a multi-layered text, rich in both emotional resonance and ideological implication.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the lyrics of *Goodbye Kiss* by Kasabian are not merely artistic expressions of emotional loss but also serve as a rich site of symbolic and ideological meaning. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the research identified eight significant lyric segments, each layered with denotative (literal), connotative (emotional/cultural), and mythic (ideological) meanings.

At the denotative level, the lyrics present a narrative of romantic failure and personal separation. Connotatively, the song reflects themes of trauma, emptiness, masculinity, and longing. At the level of myth, the lyrics reproduce and challenge dominant cultural ideologies: the myth of romantic fatalism, the illusion of emotional fulfillment through materialism, and the suppression of vulnerability in modern masculinity.

These findings confirm that popular music lyrics, particularly those within alternative rock genres, are worthy of critical attention as texts of cultural discourse. The analysis contributes to broader literary and media studies by showing how seemingly simple phrases can encode complex cultural messages.

It is recommended that future studies explore comparative semiotic readings between Western and Eastern music cultures, or between male and female songwriters, to further investigate how different social ideologies are embedded and communicated through lyrics.

This study is limited by its focus on a single song and artist; further research could benefit from a larger corpus to support generalization. Nevertheless, *Goodbye Kiss* proves to be a compelling example of how music lyrics function as a symbolic and ideological system that reflects the emotional and cultural conditions of contemporary life.

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