

## SIGNS THROUGH SONGS: SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE WATER FOUNTAIN'S LYRICS BY ALEC BENJAMIN

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### abstract

*This study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings within the lyrics of Alec Benjamin's The Water Fountain. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with a semantic approach, data were obtained through lyric analysis and a questionnaire distributed to University students aged 19-22. The findings reveal that the lyrics convey literal meanings about love and youth while connotatively expressing emotional experiences such as regret, loss, and relationship uncertainty. The analysis highlights that connotative meanings are strongly influenced by listeners' emotional, cultural, and social backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** Denotation; connotation; semantics; song lyrics

### abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna denotatif dan konotatif dalam lirik lagu The Water Fountain karya Alec Benjamin. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan pendekatan semantik, data diperoleh melalui analisis lirik serta kuesioner yang dibagikan kepada mahasiswa berusia 19-22 tahun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lirik lagu tersebut secara denotatif menyampaikan makna tentang cinta dan masa muda, sedangkan secara konotatif mengungkapkan pengalaman emosional seperti penyesalan, kehilangan, dan ketidakpastian dalam hubungan. Analisis juga menyoroti bahwa makna konotatif sangat dipengaruhi oleh latar belakang emosional, budaya, dan sosial pendengar.*

**Kata kunci:** Denotasi; konotasi; semantik; lirik lagu

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In language and cultural studies, semiotics is one of the most important analytical approaches used to examine how signs convey meaning in various forms of communication.

The term semiotics itself comes from the Greek semeion, which means 'sign'. According to (Piliang, 1998), semiotics provides a perspective to understand various social phenomena as language systems, where every social practice can be seen as a sign system that contains certain meanings.

One of the important figures in the field of semiotics is Roland Barthes. Barthes introduced the concept of Two Orders of Signification or two levels of meaning. In this theory, (Barthes, 1964) divides meaning into two levels, namely denotation and connotation, which contain additional meanings in the form of cultural values, emotions, and ideologies attached to a sign. Connotation meaning is formed from people's social and cultural experiences, so it is subjective and can change according to the context of the audience. Barthes' theory is widely used in the analysis of media texts such as advertisements, films, and literary works, as it is able to reveal not only the surface meaning but also the ideological message hidden behind the text.

In the context of music, song lyrics can be positioned as cultural texts that reflect emotions, values, and ideologies in society. Through semiotic analysis, the literal meaning and implicit meaning in a song lyrics can be revealed to find out the cultural narrative and emotional experience conveyed by the creator. (Sobur, 2019) states that song lyrics are a sign system that conveys layered meanings based on its cultural and emotional context. Therefore, semiotic analysis is a relevant approach to understanding the hidden messages in song lyrics.

Language is not only a medium of communication, but also a means of expressing importance and conveying messages in various forms, including song texts. Songs often carry implicit news and symbols that require interpretation to understand more profound meanings. In linguistics, meaning is an important aspect that can be examined with semantics. One of the related semantic approaches is Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation, which explores the literal and implicit meanings behind the text. Song text as a form of artistic expression has levels of meaning beyond what is often showcased explicitly. For example, Alec Benjamin's *The Water Fountain* showcases various signs and symbols that convey deeper social and emotional messages. This makes semantic analysis of the song text important, revealing literal meaning and interpreting cultural and emotional values.

In recent years, the development of music has shown a tendency to convey implicit social and personal messages through symbolic language. Song texts often reflect the songwriter's personal experiences, social criticism, or cultural values in poetic and comparative forms. As a result, many listeners may misinterpret the message if not carefully analyzed. Alec Benjamin's *The Water Fountain* is an example of a song rich in symbols and implicit meanings. The text seems simple, but carries deep, emotional, and philosophical reflections that require interpretation through a semantic approach. Therefore, this study considered it important to use Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to clarify the explicit (denotative) and implicit (connotative) meanings contained in the song text. The purpose of this study is to explain and analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in the text of *The Water Fountain* by Alec Benjamin, and to reveal the hidden messages conveyed by the song.

Several previous studies have analyzed song lyrics through various linguistic approaches, such as stylistic analysis, discourse analysis, and semantic analysis, including Leech's figurative language theory. However, research that specifically uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to reveal denotative and connotative interpretations in modern English song is still rare, especially in academic circles in Indonesia. This research introduces a unique approach by utilizing Barthes' semiotic theory to explore the significance of signs in Alec Benjamin's *The Water Fountain*, a song that has seldom been analyzed semantically in earlier studies. This study aims to offer a fresh denotation and connotation. In theory, this research can enhance the utilization of semiotic and semantic theories in literature, while in practice, it can assist readers and listeners in gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying messages in song lyrics.

Some previous studies have analyzed song lyrics using a semiotic approach. (Hermawan & Damayanti, 2022) Their research examined the lyrics of the song *Interaksi* by Tulus using Barthes' theory to find denotative and connotative meanings in the lyrics. Similar research was conducted by (Fauzan & Sakinah, 2020) who analyzed the literary meaning and symbolic meaning in the song *Film Favorit* by Sheila on 7 using Barthes' theory to analyze denotative and connotative meanings in modern English songs, such as Alec Benjamin's *The Water Fountain*, is still rare in Indonesia. (Barthes, 1964) In *Elements of Semiology* explains that denotative meaning is the literal or direct meaning in a form of cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations that accompany it. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the literary meaning and implied meaning contained in the lyrics of the song *The Water Fountain*, and provide a new perspective in the study of analysis.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach because it aims to describe the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the lyrics of Alec Benjamin's *The Water Fountain* song and students' perceptions of the song. The subjects in this study are students who are respondents in filling out online questionnaires. The data used consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is in the form of student responses to the meaning of the song obtained through distributing online questionnaires using Google Forms, while secondary data is in the form of lyrics to *The Water Fountain* song taken from the Genius.com website as an official source of lyrics.

Data collection techniques were employed in two ways: documentation and online questionnaires (Sudaryanto, 2015). Documentation was carried out by collecting song lyrics from the Genius.com website, which were then analyzed for denotative and connotative meanings using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Online questionnaires were distributed to several students via Google Forms to find out their perceptions of the song's meaning. The data obtained were then analyzed by identifying the literal meaning and additional meaning in each line of the song lyrics. Then the results were reinforced by questionnaire data showing respondents' responses to the meaning of the song, so that a more comprehensive picture of meaning was obtained based on text analysis and audience perception.

## 3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the lyrics of Alec Benjamin's song "The Water Fountain" using Roland Barthes' semiotic Theory. It also examines students' perceptions of the song's meaning through an online questionnaire. The findings are presented and analyzed in the following section.

### Denotative and Connotative Meaning Analysis Of Song Lyrics

Based on the results of denotative and connotative analysis of the lyrics of *The Water Fountain*, various literal and implied meanings were found that successfully elicited emotional responses from the respondents. The denotative meaning shows the literal meaning in each lyric, while the connotative meaning reflects the listener's emotional experience and social condition.

A total of 20 university students aged 19 to 22 participated in the questionnaire. The results showed that 80% of the respondents interpreted the song as an expression of loss, regret, and youthful memories, while 13% interpreted it as a story of uncertainty in a romantic relationship. The remaining 7% stated that the song contains messages about social unrest and emotional immaturity.

This finding shows that connotative meanings in song lyrics tend to be emotional and influenced by personal experiences. This opinion aligns with (Sobur, 2019) view that connotations in texts are subjective, but can be understood collectively by audiences with similar cultural backgrounds or experiences.

The results of the analysis of denotative and connotative meanings in each lyric are presented as follows:

**Table 1. "The Water Fountain" Song**

<b>Lyrics</b>	<b>Denotative Meaning</b>	<b>Connotative meaning</b>
She told me that she loved me by the water fountain	A girl expressed her love near a water fountain.	A beautiful moment from the past that now only remains as a memory.
She could not be at home in the night time.	She was unable to stay at home during the night.	A sense of discomfort, inner conflict, or emotional restlessness within the family environment.
And that was really lovely because it was innocent	The statement of love feels beautiful because it is sincere	A phase of innocent love that is now only a fragile nostalgia.
Now he is grabbing her hips and pulling her in	A man is seducing and making out with the woman.	Betrayal, heartbreak, and the experience of emotional abandonment.
I was too young	The speaker admits to being too young.	Regret for lacking emotional maturity in dealing with love and loss.
But now she has got a cup with something else in it	She was holding a glass that was not full of water.	A symbol of changing attitudes, losing innocence, and shifting emotional values.
It's getting blurry at a quarter past ten	The situation starts to get blurred or chaotic at over 10 o'clock	Symbolize inner obscurity, chaos of thoughts and deteriorating emotional situations.

Based on the analysis presented in the previous table, it can be concluded that the lyrics of Alec Benjamin's *The Water* contain implied meanings that far exceed their literal meanings. Denotative meaning is reflected in the direct meaning of each lyric, while connotative meaning is closely related to the listener's emotional response, psychological condition, and socio-cultural context. (Ishar & Irawan, 2023)

The Lyrics "She told me that she loved me by the water fountain" denotatively means a declaration of love in a specific place. However, most respondents interpreted it connotatively as a sweet memory that now leaves feelings of longing and regret. This finding is in line with (Regina & Harisma, 2024) Who mentioned that song lyrics can bring up deep emotional nostalgia in listeners.

Denotatively, the lyrics "And that was really lovely 'cause it was innocent" state that the declaration of love was enjoyable because it was based on sincerity without any interest. However, respondents interpreted it more deeply. For most students, this sentence describes a time when feelings of love were still pure, honest, and not colored by wounds or expectations. Memories of that innocent love are now a painful nostalgia, because the following events changed everything. (Fitriyani et al., 2020) mentioned that expression reflection for listeners who miss the time when love was not complicated. This kind of connotative meaning shows that the symbol of innocence in music texts not only conveys romance, but also records wounds due to changing circumstances.

Denotatively, the lyrics "Now he's grabbing her hips, and pulling her in" illustrate a scene where a man is physically interacting intimately with a woman. On connotative level, however, respondents interpreted this as a reflection of infidelity, emotional detachment, and the collapse of trust within a relationship. The majority of the respondents mentioned that this lyric captures the moment when the person who was once emotionally close chooses to give their affection to another, both emotionally and physically. For them, the physical intimacy described in these lyrics serves not merely as a romantic gesture but as a vivid representation of loss and betrayal.

This finding aligns with (Ishar & Irawan, 2023) opinion, which states that in song lyrics, representations of physical actions are often used to mark shifts in emotional and social relationships between characters. In addition, this kind of scene is also a form of visual expression in song texts about the destruction of relationships that can no longer be saved. Respondents viewed this lyric as the most painful part of the song because it shows directly that the woman in

the song has turned away, and the genuine love that once existed has been replaced by physical closeness without feelings.

Denotatively, the lyric “I was too young” means that the singer felt he was too young at the time. However, the connotative meaning is much more profound. Most respondents interpreted the lyric as an expression of regret for not being emotionally mature enough to deal with love and loss. For them, this sentence represents the phase at a young age when emotional decisions are often made impulsively and without calculation. This interpretation is reinforced by (Fitriyani et al., 2020) who in their research stated that song lyrics about age immaturity often symbolize emotional transition for adolescent and early adult listeners. The element is considered effective in presenting emotional identification because it is close to the audience’s experience.

Then, the lyric “But now she’s got a cup with something else in it” denotatively describes the woman in the song holding a cup whose content is no longer water. However, the connotative meaning is much more profound. Respondents associated this line with symbolizing the woman’s shifting character and emotional values. Previously portrayed as innocent, this lyric shows that she is starting to enter a different environment or situation, moving away from her initial innocence. Some respondents called it a symbol of changes in inner mood and feelings that began to be contaminated. This is in accordance with the opinion of (Wulandari & Kurniawati, 2022) that symbols of objects in song lyrics, such as ‘cup’ or ‘drink’, are often used as metaphors for emotional changes and life decisions, as well as emotional situations that begin to change.

The lyrics “It’s getting kind of blurry at a quarter past ten” denotatively convey that the situation begins to blur or is unclear when the time points to ten past fifteen minutes. The connotative meaning that emerges in the minds of respondents is that the mental condition is starting to be unstable. They interpreted it as a symbol of overthinking, emotional turmoil, and uncertainty in relationships that worsen over time. Most respondents associated this phrase with personal experiences when night falls and the mind is filled with regret, worry, and fear of uncertainty. (Putri & Amelia, 2021) assert that specific depictions of time in song lyrics generally symbolize certain emotional states, where night is often a metaphorical space for heavy thoughts and inner tension.

In general, all the analysis results show that the lyrics in The Water Fountain contain literal meanings and diverse emotional layers. The connotative meanings in each lyric can evoke collective emotional experiences among respondents, especially students aged 19-22 who are vulnerable to feelings of loss and relationship uncertainty.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the denotative and connotative in the lyrics of Alec Benjamin’s The Water Fountain, it can be concluded that this song has a meaning that is not only literal but also holds a deep emotional message. Denotatively, the lyrics in this song describe simple events around love and feelings at a young age. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning reflects emotional experiences such as regret, loss, relationship uncertainty, and shifting emotional values over time.

Most respondents interpreted this song as representing feelings of loss and unforgettable memories of youth. In addition, the lyrics are also perceived to imply messages about uncertain relationships and emotional immaturity in dealing with love and hurt. This proves that connotative meaning in song lyrics is highly influenced by the listener’s background experiences as well as the cultural context that surrounds them.

This research also shows that semantic analysis using Roland Barthes’ theory effectively uncovers layers of meaning in popular song lyrics. The findings are expected to enrich the repertoire of semantic and semiotic research in Indonesia, especially in the study of text analysis of modern English language songs. Future prospects include developing this research by analyzing songs from different genres, cultures, or periods and involving audiences with more diverse social backgrounds to see possible differences in the interpretation of connotative meanings between groups of listeners.

In addition, this research also opens up opportunities for other semantic and semiotic studies, especially in modern popular song lyrics that often contain emotional messages relevant to the lives of

today's youth. Through the semantic approach, researchers can explore various implied meanings in song texts that are often overlooked. In the future, this research is recommended to be conducted on songs from different genres or involving respondents from a wider age and cultural background, in order to obtain a comparative picture of the differences in interpretation of connotative meanings in musical works.

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