

The Symbolic Meaning of the Jasmine Ronce Necklace in the Film "Jumbo" (2025): Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Film, in its narrowest definition, refers to the presentation of images on a large screen; however, in a broader context, it may also encompass those broadcast on television. As a mass medium, film is a complex form of audiovisual art. This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to explore the symbolic significance of the jasmine ronce necklace in Ryan Adriandy's film "Jumbo." The analysis is conducted through two levels: denotation and connotation, along with the concept of myth. The jasmine ronce necklace is interpreted not merely as a physical object but as a cultural and ideological signifier. Findings from this study reveal that the jasmine ronce necklace embodies spiritual meaning, the sanctity of love, and emotional depth, which together construct cultural myths within the Indonesian context.

Keywords:

*Semiotic,
Roland Barthes,
Film,
Cultural Symbol*

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1. Introduction

Film serves as a powerful medium of mass communication. It connects communicators and audiences on a large scale, reaching numerous individuals dispersed across various locations, characterized by a diverse and often anonymous audience, and

eliciting specific effects. While film and television share similarities, particularly in their audiovisual nature, the methods of conveying information and the production processes exhibit some differences (Tan and Wright in Ardianto and Erdinaya, 2005:3).

As a visual communication medium, film is abundant in signs that communicate implicit messages. The film "Jumbo" (2025), directed by Ryan Adriandhy, explores psychological themes through surreal animation that merges fantasy with a child's emotional reality. Wieianto notes that film is an especially pertinent field for semiotic analysis due to its composition of various signs. These signs encompass multiple sign systems that work collaboratively to achieve the intended effect. Films generally convey meaning, aligning with Roland Barthes' concept of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Viewers typically grasp the overall meaning of a film, but deeper analysis uncovers a plethora of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings.

According to Supiarza et al. (Manalu & Warsana, 2021), imagery is a fundamental and inseparable aspect of film. Films serve as a social discourse that possesses unique characteristics, spreading across diverse contexts. The psychoanalytic perspective in film shapes perceptions and aligns values through the communication of information. Ultimately, films serve as a conduit for directors to deliver messages to their audiences, often addressing themes or phenomena that resonate within society.

The film "Jumbo" follows the story of Don, a 10-year-old boy whose large physique often leads his friends to underestimate him. He finds solace in a fairy tale book inherited from his parents, titled "Bubble Island." Don intends to use the book for an upcoming talent show but becomes disheartened when it is stolen. In his desperation, he encounters Meri, a mysterious little fairy who seeks help in finding her lost parents. Together, Don and Meri embark on a transformative adventure that reshapes Don's self-perception, teaching him valuable lessons about true friendship, courage, and self-confidence.

In the animated film, Meri is portrayed wearing a jasmine garland necklace imbued with magical powers. Each time Meri utilizes her superpower, a jasmine flower from her necklace burns away. Similarly, Meri's parents also wear garland necklaces; however, theirs feature burnt jasmine flowers and they are depicted as malevolent spirits, starkly contrasting with the kind-hearted nature of Meri.

"Jumbo" is a children's film that centers on themes of family, adventure, and friendship. Each scene is imbued with signifiers and signified meanings, employing a denotative signifier that also serves as a connotative signifier. Semiotics, the study of signs, posits that social events, society, and culture comprise a collection of signs. Roland

Barthes expanded upon Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas by highlighting the interplay between text and individual experience.

Barthes's concept, known as the 'order of signification,' encompasses both denotation (the literal meaning as defined by the dictionary) and connotation (the varied meanings shaped by cultural and personal experiences). This distinction illustrates a divergence from Saussure's theories, even though Barthes retains the terminology of signifier and signified (Husaina et al., 2018). A significant symbol in this film is the malachite garland necklace worn by the ghost character Meri, which holds meanings that extend beyond its role as a mere narrative prop.

Indonesians are renowned for their flowers, particularly white jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*). This fragrant flower is native to Sri Lanka and has since spread to India, the Philippines, China, and Indonesia. In Indonesia, white jasmine is honored as the "national flower" or symbol, representing purity and holiness. It holds deep significance within Indonesian traditions, reflecting the country's rich tapestry of ethnicities and cultural diversity.

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Jasmine's various applications contribute to its popularity. It is highly sought for perfumes, tea, skincare, and medicinal purposes. Beyond these practical uses, jasmine is steeped in myths that link it to mystical and spiritual elements. The flower is frequently employed in wedding offerings and other traditional ceremonies to ward off evil spirits. Additionally, jasmine holds religious significance, being used during grave visits in Sha'ban, the month leading up to Ramadan. In various regions, jasmine is also utilized in rituals to purify weapons, an essential aspect of these traditions. Indonesians are renowned for their flowers, particularly white jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*). This fragrant flower is native to Sri Lanka and has since spread to India, the Philippines, China, and Indonesia. In Indonesia, white jasmine is honored as the "national flower" or symbol, representing purity and holiness. It holds deep significance within Indonesian traditions, reflecting the country's rich tapestry of ethnicities and cultural diversity.

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Jasmine flowers often play a significant role in ceremonies, rituals, customs, and cultural expressions. Myths surrounding jasmine elevate it to a symbol frequently used

as an offering. Despite these formidable myths, jasmine enjoys popularity as a flower with numerous benefits in beauty, health, and other areas. The emergence of myths in society can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, making the study of these myths essential for helping individuals comprehend and navigate such situations.

To gain a deeper understanding of jasmine's significance, we can apply Roland Barthes's semiotic theory. Barthes emphasized the importance of studying the relationship between the signifier and the signified within a sign. This relationship is not simply about similarity but rather the correlation between the two. However, Barthes went beyond this definition; he perceived signification as a myth indicative of societal constructs. His work aimed to deconstruct the myths embedded in society (Alfandi et al., 2024).

2. The literature review

Preminger argues that semiotics is the science of signs. A science that considers social phenomena, society, and culture to be signs, semiotics studies the systems, rules, and conventions that enable these signs to have meaning (Pradopo, 2003: 119). Semiotics explores how the meanings constructed by texts are acquired through the arrangement of signs in certain ways and through cultural codes (Barker, 2004).

Semiotics is the science of signs and a branch of philosophy that studies and analyzes "signs." A sign can be defined as something, referring to philosophy as a thing or entity. Something can be considered a sign if it has meaning behind it, while meaning itself can be in the form of meaning, significance, impression, perception, concept, and so on (Nawiroh, 2022: 3).

Roland Barthes was a French cultural and literary theorist who developed a semiotic approach to text analysis, particularly in media and popular culture. He expanded Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs into two levels: denotation and connotation, and introduced the concept of myth as a second-level sign system.

Barthes's semiotics categorizes the meaning of signs into three distinct layers:

2.1. First Layer: Denotation and Connotation

- Denotation: This refers to a sign's literal or objective meaning.
- Connotation: This encompasses a sign's additional ideological, cultural, or emotional meanings.

2.2. Second Layer: Myth

Barthes describes myth as the "sign of the sign," illustrating how connotation can evolve into a new sign system used to convey ideology.

2.3. Third Layer: Signs as Ideology

Barthes argues that media and popular culture embed hidden ideological messages. By adopting a semiotic approach, he prompts readers to become "active readers," fostering awareness of socially constructed meanings.

Denotation

Barthes explains that denotative meaning represents the relationship between the signifier and the signified within the sign and between the sign and the object it denotes in external reality. Denotation pertains to the observable meaning of a sign. Barthes states this is the first level of meaning, characterized by openness. The features of denotative meaning include:

- A basic, straightforward meaning
- Frequent usage in scientific literature
- Clarity and transparency, devoid of hidden implications
- A general meaning that is typically included in dictionaries.

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3. Third Layer: Signs as Ideology

Barthes argues that media and popular culture are imbued with hidden ideological messages. By employing a semiotic approach, he urges readers to become "active readers" who are aware of the socially constructed meanings within these texts.

Denotation

Barthes explains that denotative meaning pertains to the relationship between the signifier and the signified within a sign, as well as between the sign and the object it represents in the external world. Denotation refers to the observable meaning of a sign. In Barthes's perspective, denotation represents the initial level of meaning, where interpretations are neither entirely open nor closed. The characteristics of denotative meaning include:

- A basic and straightforward interpretation
- Commonly utilized in scientific discourse
- This meaning is clear and unambiguous, devoid of any concealment
- It is so universally recognized that it is often included in dictionaries

Jasmine flowers were first cultivated in the 16th century, gaining prominence in Italy by 1629 as a vital ingredient in perfume. Duke Cosimo de' Medici later introduced this flower to England, where cultivation began in 1665. By 1812, England introduced the *J. revolutum* variety, originally from India, followed by the *J. parkeri* variety from Northwest India in 1923.

Jasmine then spread to several countries, including Indonesia, where it is extensively cultivated for flower arrangements, garlands, traditional medicine, and tea fragrances. Recognizing its numerous benefits, *J. sambac* was designated the national flower, or "Puspa Bangsa," on June 5, 1990. Additionally, jasmine serves as a symbol of rank for officers in the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI).

This delicate white flower carries deep significance in various contexts, representing purity, nobility, and holiness. It is often associated with the beauty and virtue of young women. In Indonesia, jasmine is notably abundant in Maribaya Village, where cultivation began in the 1960s and 1970s, originating from Kali Prah Village. The flower quickly became a source of livelihood for the Maribaya community. Today, approximately 80% of the land in Maribaya Village is dedicated to jasmine cultivation.

In Maribaya, jasmine is widely used for various purposes, including tea, perfume, garlands, wedding decorations, and funeral ceremonies. The extensive cultivation of jasmine has prompted residents to enhance production efforts. As a result, jasmine has been exported to numerous countries and regions across Indonesia, establishing it as a highly valuable plant and a symbol of Maribaya Village (Novarizka, 2022).

3. Method

This study employs qualitative research through content analysis, which involves an in-depth examination of written or printed information in mass media. Harold D. Lasswell's pioneering work on symbol coding techniques is foundational, as it systematically records symbols or messages for subsequent interpretation (Syafrizaldi et al., 2022; Tohari & Prayogi, 2022). Additionally, the research utilizes Roland Barthes's semiotic approach.

The units of analysis selected for this study are scenes from the 2025 film *Jumbo* that prominently feature jasmine garlands. These scenes are analyzed for their denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings within the context of Indonesian culture. The author undertook direct research by watching, listening to, and interpreting the film, employing Barthes's semiotic theory, which focuses on two levels of signification.

The first level of signification, denotation, concerns the relationship between the signifier and the signified within a sign and its external reality. This represents the most concrete meaning of a sign. The second level, connotation, refers to how signs operate through myth, shedding light on the cultural explanations or understandings of various aspects of reality or natural phenomena (Hidayatullah, 2021; Suryaningputri et al., 2022).

4. Findings and discussion

Upon a deeper exploration of the film “*Jumbo 2025*”, the author identified scenes that effectively convey symbolic meanings through the jasmine garland necklaces worn by several characters.



Figure 1 The First Meri's appearance in Jumbo film

Denotation

The scene depicted in Figure 1 illustrates Meri's initial appearance. It shows her adorned with a jasmine garland necklace featuring numerous fresh white flowers. Meri is portrayed with a transparent body, in stark contrast to the other children, whose bodies appear opaque.

Connotation

The connotation derived from this scene suggests that Meri's garland is largely intact with fresh white flowers before its powers are utilized to assist Jumbo. In Indonesian culture, jasmine is often associated with purity, sincere love, and spirituality (Faronny et al., 2024). Additionally, Meri is characterized as a ghost, reinforcing her transparency compared to the other children.

Myth

This symbolic portrayal constructs a myth concerning the distinction between humans and spirits or ghosts, such as Meri, who are represented as transparent. Since ancient times, ghosts, enigmatic entities woven into the fabric of human culture, are commonly regarded as the spirits of the deceased. Many belief systems depict these spirits as existing in a different dimension than humans, often associated with haunted or mystical places. The physical manifestations of ghosts vary widely, ranging from transparent figures to those resembling living humans (Damayanti & Taum, 2025).



Figure 2 Meri's ghost is depicted as no longer having a transparent form.

Denotation

In the scene described, Meri is no longer the ethereal figure she initially was; she now appears as an ordinary human child. She is requested to dress and assume a human form so others can perceive her. Additionally, Meri is encouraged to assist in ensuring Jumbo's performance is successful. Notably, the jasmine garlands adorning Meri's necklace are visibly diminishing.

Connotation

The film subtly suggests that the jasmine garlands, which symbolize Meri's purity and strength, gradually wither away, one by one, as she expends her powers. In this instance,

she utilizes these powers to make herself visible to others and to support Jumbo's performance.

Myth

In Islamic tradition, ghosts or spirits are often linked to jinn or demons. These entities can shapeshift and take on various forms, including those resembling humans. However, to be seen by the human eye, they must harness a significant amount of energy to create a physical form that is sufficiently dense for our senses to perceive. This process of self-revelation is challenging for spirits, as they need to expend considerable energy, resulting in a form that is frequently imperfect or even unsettling. This may explain why ghosts are typically portrayed as blurry, transparent, or shadowy figures.

Furthermore, the substantial expenditure of energy can weaken a spirit's powers. The notion that ghosts struggle to manifest clearly is also linked to their inherently spiritual nature. Spirits exist in a different realm than humans—specifically, the supernatural realm (Damayanti & Taum, 2025).



Figure 3 Meri and Jumbo Sing Along

Denotation

In the scene described, Meri's jasmine garland necklace is prominently displayed, with only two fresh flowers remaining. The rest have withered as Meri expends her power to assist Jumbo in his performance, ensuring its success. Previously, Meri hesitated to offer further help, feeling that she had already contributed significantly to the event preparations. As a result, she is left with only a few jasmines.

Connotation

Meri is often seen anxiously glancing at her necklace. The decreasing number of fresh jasmine garlands signifies her waning chances of reuniting with her parents. This reduction in jasmines highlights that Meri's powers are diminishing, and she risks transforming into a malevolent and fearsome being once all the garlands have withered.

Consequently, the fewer fresh garlands she possesses, the less power she retains. Ultimately, Meri will inevitably become an evil spirit if her necklace completely dries up. Additionally, her parents are depicted with dried or wilted jasmine garlands, emphasizing their malevolent nature.

Myth

In Javanese tradition, a concept known as *sesajen* (offering) involves jasmine flowers and is typically conducted in jasmine fields or in locations deemed haunted or perilous by the community. Beyond its mystical connotations, the fragrance of the flowers in these offerings signifies one's identity, suggesting that one must preserve the aroma of their name to avoid being tarnished. Jasmine also embodies purity and refinement, implying that an individual must cultivate subtle feelings and be attuned to their surroundings (Novarizka, 2022). This scene illustrates how Meri, as a compassionate and kind spirit, is willing to assist her friends, even though they hail from different realms. The fewer fresh jasmine garlands Meri possesses, the more her power diminishes. Once her entire necklace dries, she transforms into an evil spirit. In parallel, Meri's parents are portrayed with dried garlands, reinforcing their wicked nature.

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Figure 4: The spirits of Meri's father and mother adorned with jasmine necklaces

Linguistically, jasmine is interpreted by the Javanese as "melat saka jeroning ati," which translates to "originating from the conscience." This interpretation suggests that human actions should be guided by one's conscience, emphasizing that the inner self and outward actions must align, with hypocrisy being unacceptable. The heart should be engaged in all endeavors, not merely in a physical sense (Achmad, 2017).

Additionally, jasmine embodies simplicity, as reflected in its white color, which symbolizes purity and kindness. Its soft, non-pungent fragrance is comfortable and calming (Purnomo, 2013). Historically, many people have associated the scent of jasmine with the presence of spirits or mystical beings. This belief has been woven into Javanese customs and traditions since ancient times, with the aroma often heralding the arrival of spirits. In the film "Jumbo," jasmine flowers play a significant role for Meri and her deceased parents, further illustrating this connection.

5. Conclusion

In a landscape dominated by modern visuals and narratives, the film "Jumbo" (literally translating to "jasmine garland") incorporates a small yet profoundly significant element of Indonesian culture: the jasmine garland necklace. This ornamentation transcends mere decoration; it embodies a deep symbolism that connects the spirit world to the often-overlooked roots of Indonesian traditions. Within "Jumbo," three spirits—Meri and her parents—are depicted wearing jasmine garland necklaces. At first glance, these necklaces may seem like ordinary accessories. However, as the narrative unfolds, they emerge as pivotal elements, particularly for Meri.

The jasmine garland serves as an adornment and a reflection of the spirits' spiritual and moral well-being. The garland operates within an active cycle; each time Meri employs her powers to assist humans, one of the flowers wilts. In contrast, her parents, transformed into malevolent spirits, wear necklaces with completely withered or dried flowers. This visual representation indicates that jasmine symbolizes not only goodness but also the spiritual equilibrium of the spirits. When the garland wilts, the spirits lose

their sanity and succumb to evil, whereas a fresh jasmine garland signifies awareness and virtue.

While the dialogue does not explicitly detail the significance of the jasmine garland, Meri frequently glances at her necklace with anxiety, aware that her time may be limited. This invites the audience to explore and interpret the necklace's deeper meaning. The symbolism suggests that something as pure and fragrant as jasmine can help maintain a soul's purity and brightness. In Javanese tradition, jasmine flowers play a vital role in ceremonies surrounding weddings, births, and deaths, and in welcoming esteemed guests. This illustrates that jasmine is often present during significant moments in people's lives.

Through this symbolism, the film "Jumbo" effectively embodies local values within a universal narrative. Although the plot of "Jumbo" is relatively straightforward and predictable, it stands out due to its captivating and meaningful animation. The jasmine necklace in the film serves as a symbol and a link between humans and spirits. By the story's conclusion, Jumbo and Meri find an implicit connection, as Meri was a childhood friend of Jumbo's grandmother. In one poignant scene, Jumbo observes Meri and her grandmother wearing the same garland necklace.

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