

Communication Patterns of Meaning in the Melancholic Character of Gundala: A Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce

Jaqualine Pramanta Putra¹, Fauzi Syarief², Mursyid Kasmir³, Susana⁴

Faculty of Communication and Language, Bina Sarana Informatika University
Jl. Kayu Jati V No. 2, Pemuda Rawamangun, Pulo Gadung, Jakarta Timur 13220, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: jaqualine.jpr@bsi.ac.id¹, fauzi.fzy@bsi.ac.id², mursyid.myk@bsi.ac.id³, susana.suq@bsi.ac.id⁴

This study aims to analyze how the construction of melancholic character meaning is represented in the film *Gundala* directed by Joko Anwar through the semiotic approach of Charles Sanders Peirce. The focus of this research is directed toward identifying visual and verbal signs that represent the melancholic characteristics of the main character, as well as interpreting the meanings embedded within those signs. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using Peirce's semiotic analysis framework, which consists of three categories: icon, index, and symbol. The data were collected through film observation and in-depth interviews with the director. The findings reveal that the character is constructed as a melancholic figure characterized by doubt, reflectiveness, and emotional depth. This representation is developed through visual signs, such as gloomy facial expressions, dim lighting, and cool color tones, as well as verbal signs in the form of dialogues that reflect inner conflict and hesitation. Therefore, the film can be interpreted as a reflection of human psychological conditions in the midst of social and moral pressures.

Keywords: Communication Patterns, Melancholic Character, Charles Sanders Peirce Semiotics, Film

This is an open access
article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license



Corresponding Author:

Jaqualine Pramanta Putra
Faculty of Communication and Language, Bina Sarana Informatika University. Jl.
Kayu Jati V No. 2, Pemuda Rawamangun, Pulo Gadung, Jakarta Timur 13220, DKI
Jakarta, Indonesia
jaqualine.jpr@bsi.ac.id

1. Introduction

Film has long been recognized as a powerful medium of visual communication that plays a significant role in shaping social and cultural meanings. As a cultural text, film does not merely function as a storytelling device; rather, it actively constructs meaning through a complex system of signs embedded within narrative structures, visual elements, and cinematic dialogue. This process enables audiences to interpret deeper symbolic messages beyond the surface storyline. One of the most compelling aspects in film studies is the representation of characters, particularly melancholic characters, who are often portrayed through intense inner expressions and profound emotional struggles (Hall, 2019; Sobur, 2007).

To examine how such meanings are constructed, this study employs the semiotic framework of Charles Sanders Peirce, which provides a systematic approach to analyzing signs and their meanings. According to Peirce, meaning emerges from a triadic relationship consisting of the representamen (sign), object (referent), and interpretant (interpretation). Furthermore, Peirce categorizes signs into three fundamental types: icons, which are based on resemblance; indices, which indicate causal or existential relationships; and symbols, which are formed through social conventions (Peirce, 1931; Pateda, 2015). This framework allows researchers to understand how meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual, narrative, and symbolic elements within cinematic texts.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, this study aims to explore the construction of melancholic character representation in the film *Gundala*. Specifically, it seeks to address three key research questions: first, how the melancholic character is constructed within the film narrative; second, what signs—both visual

and verbal, indicate melancholic characteristics; and third, how these signs are interpreted through the lens of Peirce's semiotic theory. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how film operates as a medium that not only reflects but also constructs emotional and social realities (Hall, 2019).

2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

Literature Review

Film is widely recognized as a form of visual communication that not only delivers narratives but also constructs social and cultural meanings through a system of signs. As a cultural text, film operates within a framework of representation in which meaning is produced through the interaction of visual elements, dialogue, and narrative structures. According to Hall (2019), representation is an active process of meaning-making that involves language, symbols, and images, rather than merely reflecting reality. This constructionist perspective emphasizes that meaning is deliberately shaped through cultural codes and communicative practices embedded within media texts.

To analyze how meaning is constructed in film, semiotics provides a fundamental theoretical framework. The semiotic theory developed by Charles Sanders Peirce conceptualizes meaning through a triadic relationship consisting of representamen (sign), object, and interpretant. This triadic model explains how signs function as mediators between reality and interpretation (Peirce, 1931; Pateda, 2015). Peirce further classifies signs into three main categories: icons, which are based on resemblance; indices, which indicate causal or existential relationships; and symbols, which rely on social conventions. In the context of film, these categories are manifested through visual expressions, cinematic techniques, and narrative elements that collectively construct meaning.

The concept of representation is also closely related to character construction in film. Hall (2019) identifies three approaches to representation: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. The constructionist approach is particularly relevant in film analysis, as it highlights the role of filmmakers in shaping meaning through deliberate use of signs and symbols. Cinematic elements such as lighting, color composition, camera angles, and dialogue function as signifiers that communicate specific emotional and psychological states of characters.

One of the most complex forms of character representation is the melancholic character. Melancholic personality traits are generally associated with introspection, emotional sensitivity, perfectionism, and a tendency toward deep reflection (Suryabrata, 2020). In film, these characteristics are often represented through specific cinematic signs, such as dim lighting, slow pacing, subdued color tones, and introspective dialogue. These elements function not only as aesthetic choices but also as semiotic indicators that convey the inner emotional struggles of the character.

The film *Gundala*, directed by Joko Anwar, presents a rich context for examining the construction of melancholic meaning. The film depicts a social environment characterized by conflict, injustice, and moral tension, which shapes the psychological condition of its main character. Through the use of visual and auditory elements, such as cold color palettes, shadow-dominated lighting, and reflective narrative sequences, the film constructs a melancholic atmosphere that reflects both individual and societal struggles. This makes *Gundala* a relevant object for semiotic analysis, particularly in understanding how melancholic meaning is constructed through cinematic signs.

Problem Statement

Despite the extensive application of semiotic theory in film studies, there remains a limited number of studies that specifically examine the construction of melancholic character representation using Peirce's semiotic framework, particularly within the context of Indonesian cinema. Most previous studies tend to focus on general symbolic meanings or narrative structures without providing a detailed analysis of how melancholic traits are systematically represented through icons, indices, and symbols.

Furthermore, the representation of melancholic characters is often discussed from a psychological perspective rather than a semiotic one, resulting in a lack of understanding of how cinematic signs function in constructing emotional meaning. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive analysis that integrates semiotic theory with character representation in film.

Based on this gap, the problems addressed in this study are formulated as follows. First, how is the melancholic character constructed in the film *Gundala*? Second, what types of signs, icons, indices, and symbols, are used to represent melancholic characteristics? Third, how are these signs interpreted within the framework of Peirce's semiotic theory?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in film through semiotic processes, particularly in representing complex emotional states such as melancholy. In addition, this study contributes to the development of communication and film studies by offering a more structured analysis of character representation using the semiotic approach of Peirce.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore the construction of meaning in the representation of a melancholic character in the film *Gundala*. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because this study focuses on interpreting signs, symbols, and meanings embedded in visual and narrative elements, rather than measuring variables numerically. The descriptive design allows the researcher to present a detailed and systematic explanation of how meaning is constructed through cinematic representation.

The primary object of this study is the film *Gundala*, which serves as a cultural text containing various visual and verbal signs. The unit of analysis is centered on the main character, particularly in scenes that reflect emotional expressions, internal conflicts, and symbolic representations associated with melancholic traits. These scenes are selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, ensuring that the analysis remains aligned with the objective of identifying melancholic meaning construction.

Data in this study are obtained through direct observation of the film. The researcher carefully watches and re-watches selected scenes to capture significant visual elements, including facial expressions, body language, lighting, color composition, camera angles, and sound elements such as music and silence. In addition, verbal elements such as dialogue and narrative context are also examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of the character's emotional state. This process enables the researcher to identify patterns of signs that contribute to the construction of meaning.

The analytical framework used in this study is the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. The analysis focuses on identifying and classifying signs into three categories: icons, indices, and symbols. Icons are analyzed based on their resemblance to the object they represent, indices are examined through their causal or existential relationships, and symbols are interpreted based on shared cultural conventions. This classification provides a structured way to understand how different types of signs contribute to the representation of melancholic characteristics.

To deepen the interpretation, this study also applies the theory of representation proposed by Stuart Hall (2019), particularly the constructionist approach. This perspective allows the researcher to understand that meaning is not naturally embedded in the film but is actively constructed through cinematic techniques and narrative strategies. By combining semiotic analysis with representation theory, the study is able to capture both the structural and interpretative dimensions of meaning.

The data analysis process follows an interactive model consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects and categorizes relevant scenes and signs related to melancholic representation. In the data display stage, the identified signs are organized systematically to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions are drawn by interpreting the relationship between signs, objects, and meanings based on the theoretical framework.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher applies a careful and consistent interpretation process by repeatedly reviewing the selected scenes and cross-checking the identified signs with the theoretical concepts used in the study. This approach helps maintain the credibility of the analysis and minimizes subjective bias in interpreting cinematic elements. Through this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how melancholic meaning is constructed in the film *Gundala*, particularly through the interplay of visual, verbal, and symbolic signs within the framework of Peirce's semiotics.

4. Results And Discussion

Results

The findings of this study indicate that the character is portrayed as an individual who is emotionally sensitive, introspective, and deeply engaged in internal conflict. These characteristics are reinforced through various cinematic signs, including dim lighting, sorrowful facial expressions, and the consistent use of cool color tones. Visual elements such as tears and a slouched body posture function as icons that directly represent sadness and contemplation. Meanwhile, symbolic elements, such as the dominance of blue and gray hues, serve to express emotional coldness and psychological distance.

The semiotic analysis based on the framework of Charles Sanders Peirce demonstrates that these signs collectively construct a coherent meaning associated with a melancholic personality. Furthermore, through the lens of representation theory proposed by Stuart Hall (2019), the film not only illustrates the character's internal emotional condition but also reflects broader social realities embedded within the narrative.

Icon Analysis

Visual elements such as low-key lighting, melancholic facial expressions, and slow body movements function as icons that directly depict the character's emotional state. The frequent use of close-up shots emphasizes isolation and internal reflection, allowing the audience to engage more deeply with the character's psychological condition. These visual signs strengthen the impression of an introverted and contemplative personality.

Index Analysis

Several indexical signs are identified in the film, including tears, empty gazes, and prolonged silence, all of which indicate a causal relationship with the character's emotional state. For instance, scenes depicting the character staring out of a window during rainfall serve as indexical signs of sadness and despair, suggesting that these emotions are rooted in past traumatic experiences.

Symbol Analysis

Symbolic elements such as blue and gray color palettes, water imagery, and minor-toned musical compositions function as representations of sadness and alienation. Cool color tones symbolize emotional emptiness, while soft, minor-key music accompanies reflective scenes, intensifying the melancholic atmosphere throughout the narrative.

Discussion

Construction of Meaning through Representation

The construction of melancholic meaning in the character is achieved through the integration of visual, verbal, and symbolic signs. This representation is not natural or incidental; rather, it reflects the ideological intention of the director in portraying themes of social trauma and existential struggle. The character ultimately emerges as a symbol of collective suffering shaped by social pressure and moral conflict rooted in the past.

Reflective Representation

From a reflective perspective, the character is depicted as someone who frequently engages in silent contemplation, speaks softly, and appears absorbed in their own thoughts. Scenes such as 08:03–09:43 and 09:43–10:43 illustrate visual signs including vacant stares, rainfall outside the window, and soft lighting, all of which construct a melancholic atmosphere. These elements generate interpretants associated with deep emotional suffering and internal conflict.

Intentional Representation

From an intentional standpoint, the director consciously constructs the character as melancholic to convey that struggle is not always expressed through overt strength or heroism but can also manifest in quiet, internal resilience. Scenes such as 05:01–05:47 and 28:45–29:00 portray the character avoiding eye contact, lowering their gaze, and speaking in a subdued tone—signs that symbolize unresolved trauma. This portrayal positions melancholic traits not as weaknesses, but as expressions of emotional courage and empathy.

Constructionist Representation

Within the constructionist framework, meaning is produced through the deliberate combination of visual and verbal elements. Dark color tones, slow movements, and static camera compositions function as icons and indices of a fragile and contemplative inner world. In scenes such as 23:02–23:50, orderliness and neatness emerge as symbolic expressions of the character's need for emotional control, reflecting an internal effort to manage psychological instability.

Representation through Cinematic Elements

Cinematic elements play a crucial role in reinforcing melancholic representation. The use of bluish tones, minor-key piano music, and prolonged silence creates a deeply immersive emotional atmosphere. Additional audio elements, such as the sound of wind, ticking clocks, and footsteps, serve as symbolic representations of time, loss, and isolation. Through this poetic integration of visual and auditory techniques, the film successfully constructs melancholia not merely as an observable emotion, but as a lived psychological experience.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of the integrated public service policy at the Center for Plant Variety Protection and Agricultural Licensing under the Ministry of Agriculture has shown a generally favorable trajectory. The policy has played a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery, particularly through the consolidation of administrative procedures and the adoption of information and communication technologies. The shift from conventional manual processes to digital-based services has improved accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness, allowing users to access information and submit applications in a more practical and timely manner.

The effectiveness of this policy implementation is largely determined by the availability and competence of human resources, the adequacy of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities among implementing personnel. Continuous efforts in capacity building, including training and skill development, have contributed to improving staff performance and professionalism in delivering accountable services. Moreover, the provision of services without financial charges has further strengthened public trust and acceptance toward the policy.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight the importance of continuous improvement, particularly in expanding policy dissemination, enhancing communication mechanisms, and ensuring that technological systems remain responsive to evolving user needs. Sustained coordination, accountability, and adaptability are essential to maintaining service quality. Overall, the integrated public service policy demonstrates strong potential to improve public satisfaction and institutional trust when supported by consistent commitment, organizational readiness, and ongoing innovation in public service management.

6. References

- Al-Hannanien, M. F., & Wirawanda, Y. (2024). *Analisis Semiotika Pesan Social Withdrawal Dalam Film Anime Weathering With You* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta).
- Aprinta, R. (2011). Representasi dalam media dan budaya populer. Prenada Media Group.
- Dianthi, M. H., Agung, R. D., Putra, R., & Dahlia, D. (2025). Representasi Cinta, Budaya, Dan Kehilangan Dalam Lagu 'Beral' Sheila On 7: Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes. *Professional: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Administrasi Publik*, 12(2), 593-600.
- Dite, S. A. (2023). Representasi Identitas Jawa Pada Cerita Maya (Film Maya Daya Raya) Melalui Analisis Unsur Sinematik: Mise en Scene. *TONIL: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema*, 20(1), 8-20.
- Hall, S. (2019). Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. Sage Publications.
- Hidayatullah, B., & Hariyanto, D. (2024). Semiotic Analysis of Social Class Representation in Satria Dewa Gatotkaca Movie: Analisis Semiotika Representasi Kelas Sosial dalam Film Satria Dewa Gatotkaca. *House of Wisdom: Journal on Library and Information Sciences*, 1(4), 10-21070.
- Jakaria, M. I., Mayasari, M., & Lubis, F. M. (2024). Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Representasi Makna Kehilangan Film "Generasi 90an: Melankolia". *Da'watuna: Journal of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting*, 4(2), 513-522.
- Keirsey, D. (1998). Please understand me II: Temperament, character, intelligence. Prometheus Nemesis.
- Melius, H., Sihabuddin, M. A., & Hamandia, M. R. (2023). Analisis Semiotika Pola Komunikasi Kelompok Yang Dibangun Dalam Film Mencuri Raden Saleh. *J-KIs: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam*, 4(2), 159-176.
- Nurbani, T., & Adim, A. K. (2024). Representasi Toxic Masculinity Dalam Film the Croods Melalui Analisis Semiotika John Fiske. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi UHO: Jurnal Penelitian Kajian Ilmu Komunikasi dan Informasi*, 9(3), 730-746.
- Pateda, M. (2015). Semiotika: Teori, metode, dan penerapannya dalam analisis media. Rajawali Pers.

- Perdana, S. R. S., & Muadz, M. (2025). Analisis Semiotika Representasi Kepribadian Karakter Pada Series Anime Horimiya. *Translitera: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi dan Studi Media*, 14(2), 1-15.
- Razi, A. F., & Fauziah, K. (2025). Melampaui Hiburan: Analisis Semiotika Transmisi Nilai Maudhah Hasanah dalam Anime Demon Slayer: Mugen Ressha-hen. *AL-MUSTAQBAL: Jurnal Agama Islam*, 2(3), 01-10.
- Sasmita, D. (2017). Teori semiotika dalam kajian komunikasi visual. Alfabeta.
- Sobur, A. (2007). Analisis teks media. Remaja Rosdakarya.