

## DENNOTATION, CONNOTATION, AND MYTH MEANINGS IN MARIAH CAREY'S SONG LYRICS THROUGH THE RAIN

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### Abstract:

Semiotics a field linked to linguistics, studies how signs convey meaning. Unlike traditional linguistics, semiotics also includes symbols, images, and context in its analysis. When it comes to analyzing song lyrics, both linguistic and semiotic methods are essential in revealing the deeper meanings hidden in artistic expression. Lyrics frequently make use of figurative language such as metaphors and symbols, making them ideal subjects for semiotic exploration. The aim of this research is to analyze denotation, connotation, and myth meanings in Mariah Carey's song lyrics "Through the Rain" using theory from Roland Barthes. And this research used qualitative descriptive method for this research. In this research, the researcher found 19 signs of denotation, connotation, and myth in Mariah Carey's song entitled "Through the Rain". The song "Through the Rain" by Mariah Carey describes as a powerful message of resilience, hope, and inner strength in the face of adversity.

**Keywords:** *Dennotation, Connotation, Myth, Barthes*

### INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is often described as the scientific study of language, but this description alone does not fully capture the essential concepts of the field. To gain a clearer understanding, it is important to consider what is implied by the term 'scientific'. In this context, it refers to analyzing language through systematic, observable, and testable methods, guided by overarching theories about how language is structured and functions (Knodel, 2023). This research provides a foundation for analyzing various forms of language, including spoken discourse, written text, and artistic expressions like song lyrics.

Meanwhile, semiotics is one of the branches of linguistics. Semiotics examines the ways in which signs and symbols are used to convey meaning, focusing on how individuals interpret various forms of communication. These signs can take many forms – such as language, visuals, movements, or sounds – and help us understand and navigate to our environment. (Campbell et al., 2019) semiosis refers to any behavior, action, or process that makes use of signs. While signs are frequently express through spoken language, they can also appear in gestures or artistic forms such as music, visual art, and sculpture. Modern semiotics, as a scientific discipline, focuses on how meaning is produced and understood, regardless of whether it is explicitly communicated and also examines different forms of knowledge.

When it comes to analyze song lyrics, both linguistic and semiotic methods are essential in revealing the deeper meanings hidden in artistic expression. Lyrics frequently make use of figurative language such as metaphors and symbols, making them ideal subjects for semiotic exploration. According to (Chandler, 2007) semiotic analysis help researchers understand how meaning is generated through cultural texts like media and music. By applying a combined semiotic and linguistic perspective to song lyric, one can gain a greater insight into how signs and language work together to express emotion, beliefs, and cultural

norms. In the field of language, media, and cultural studies, semiotic serves as a valuable tool for examining how meaning is formed and conveyed. A central figure in this area is Roland Barthes, a French theorist who broadened the traditional scope of linguistics to include cultural meaning. His semiotic theory not only focuses on the content of a text, but also on the way that content is communicated and underlying ideologies it may reflect.

Roland Barthes explained that signs function on two main levels: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the basic, literal meaning of a sign—what it directly represents in a straightforward, dictionary-like way. In contrast, connotation encompasses the additional meanings a sign suggests, shaped by cultural or emotional associations (Leak, 1994). For instance, a rose may literally be a flower (denotation), but it often symbolizes love or beauty (connotation). Barthes also introduced a third layer of meaning called myth. According to him, myth is a form of connotation that becomes so normalized within a culture that it feels natural or like common sense. He contended that myths help uphold dominant ideologies by making certain cultural values appear universal and unquestionable. As a result, the socially constructed nature of these meanings is obscured, reinforcing specific perspectives as if they were inherently true. (Leak, 1994)

The researcher found the previous research from (Ishar & Irawan, 2023) about Semiotic Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meaning on The Beatles' Songs Lyrics. This research analyses five songs by The Beatles – “Hey Jude”, “Here Comes the Sun”, “Come Together”, “Yesterday”, and “Let It Be” – Using Barthes' semiotic theory. Next from about Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis of the Meaning of Independence in the Song "Ain't It Fun" by Paramore This article explores the theme of independence in Paramore's song "Ain't It Fun" through Barthes' semiotic framework. The analysis delves into the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings, highlighting the song's commentary on self-reliance and societal expectations (Wahid, 2024). The similarities between this research and the two previous research are discussing about denotative, connotative, and myth meaning from Roland Barthes theory. Meanwhile, the differences between this research and the two previous research are about the song that each researcher chose for the research. In this research, the song chose the song from Mariah Carey entitled “*Through the Rain*” which described about personal struggle, resilience, and self-liberation.

In this research, the researcher will discuss about semiotics in song lyrics *Through the Rain* from Mariah Carey. “*Through the Rain*” served as the lead single from Mariah Carey's ninth studio album, *Charmbracelet*, released in 2002. Categorized by Carey as a ballad, the song blends elements of pop and R&B, showcasing a minimalistic arrangement with a gentle piano melody and subtle electronic synthesizer background. The song was intended as a reflection of Carey's personal hardships, particularly those experienced in 2001, and its lyrics aim to offer encouragement and hope to listeners facing similar challenges. Commercially, *Through the Rain* achieved moderate success in the United States. It reached #81 on the Billboard Hot 100, #17 on the Adult Contemporary chart, and #69 on the R&B chart. Notably, it topped both the Billboard Hot Dance Club Songs and the Hot Singles Sales charts. This research employs Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze cultural texts—specifically, song lyrics—to reveal what are denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings are embedded in language. Song lyrics often serve as a reflection of social values, emotions, and ideologies, making them fertile ground for semiotic analysis. By applying Barthes' theory, this research aims to analyse what are denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings of the semiotics terms which found in song lyrics *Through the Rain* from Mariah Carey.

Roland Barthes played a significant role in shaping semiotics; the discipline concerned with how signs communicate meaning. In semiotic terms, a “sign” can be anything—such as a word, image, or symbol—that conveys an idea or message. Barthes stressed the importance of distinguishing between culturally constructed meanings and those that are naturally occurring, cautioning against the assumption that cultural interpretations are universally valid. He also underscored the necessity of analyzing language and symbols with precision in scholarly work. One hallmark of Barthes' method was his detailed examination of short texts or single images to uncover the complex layers of meaning they contain Roland Barthes played a significant role in shaping semiotics; the discipline concerned with how signs communicate meaning. In semiotic terms, a “sign” can be anything—such as a word, image, or symbol—that conveys

an idea or message. Barthes stressed the importance of distinguishing between culturally constructed meanings and those that are naturally occurring, cautioning against the assumption that cultural interpretations are universally valid. He also underscored the necessity of analyzing language and symbols with precision in scholarly work. One hallmark of Barthes' method was his detailed examination of short texts or single images to uncover the complex layers of meaning they contain (Chandler, 2007).

Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's theories, Barthes developed a dual-level model of meaning known as denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the straightforward, literal interpretation of a sign, while connotation involves the additional meanings shaped by cultural and emotional influences. This model laid the groundwork for Barthes' critique of mass media and popular culture, where he explored how signs can generate deeper meanings that go beyond their surface-level appearance (Leak, 1994). Additionally, Barthes expanded semiotic theory by introducing the idea of myth, which he described as a culturally produced narrative that disguises specific ideologies as natural or obvious truths. He argued that texts are not interpreted in isolation but through an interaction between their content, the conventions they use, and the cultural expectations of the audience. This interpretive process is referred to as the second order of signification, where connotation and myth combine to influence how meanings are constructed and understood in society (Fish, 2020).

Roland Barthes advanced the field of semiotics by illustrating how meaning is generated through signs across different levels. Meaning semiotics of Roland Barthes theory.

### **Denotation**

Denotation, according to Barthes, refers to the first and most basic level of meaning. It is the literal or direct interpretation of a sign, where the relationship between the signifier (the form) and the signified (the concept) is seen as straightforward and objective. Although this level of meaning appears neutral and fixed, Barthes emphasizes that it serves as the essential framework upon which more complex meanings—namely connotations—are constructed (Fish, 2020). In the study of signs, denotation focuses on the explicit or descriptive interpretation of a sign, typically aligning with commonly accepted definitions or conventional understandings. For example, the word "bunga" (flower) denotes a plant with petals, appreciated for its beauty. This surface-level interpretation is the foundation upon which other cultural or emotional meanings may develop. Thus, denotation acts as the first-order meaning, forming the base of Barthes' two-tiered model of signification.

### **Connotation**

Connotation constitutes the second level in Barthes' model of meaning. It involves the cultural, emotional, or ideological associations that a sign evokes beyond its literal meaning. These meanings are not fixed but are shaped by individual experiences, cultural knowledge, and social values (Fish, 2020). The term "connotation" itself is derived from Latin, meaning "to signify with," indicating an additional layer of interpretation. For instance, the term "Vespa" literally refers to a scooter, but it may also connote ideas of youth, nostalgia, or freedom, depending on the viewer's cultural context and personal experience. Barthes argues that connotation is not only subjective but also deeply influenced by ideology, operating through what he terms "myth." Signs carry implied meanings shaped by cultural codes, which often go unnoticed but subtly influence interpretation. These second-order meanings allow media and communication to transmit cultural values and emotional responses without directly stating them.

### **Myth**

At the third level of signification, Barthes introduces the concept of myth. Myth represents a form of ideological messaging that embeds cultural values into signs and presents them as natural or common sense. Barthes describes myth as a second-order semiological system, where signs that already carry connotative meanings are transformed into symbols of dominant ideology (Fish, 2020). Myths function not as abstract concepts but as modes of speech—ways in which societies communicate meanings that uphold specific worldviews. Any image, object, or phrase can become mythologized if it participates in broader cultural narratives. For example, symbols such as the Union Jack, Victorian dress, or the English language can carry mythic meanings that support the ideology of British imperialism, transcending their

literal appearances. Myths, in Barthes' framework, serve to obscure the constructed nature of cultural values, making them appear natural, timeless, and universally accepted. They are dynamic, evolving alongside cultural discourse and social change. Rather than merely being fanciful tales, Barthes' idea of myth aligns with the classical Greek distinction between *muthos* (story) and *logos* (reason). Myths in semiotics represent how language and signs can be used to perpetuate ideologies, often unconsciously, through everyday symbols and media content.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to analyze signs and meanings based on semiotic theory. The qualitative approach is suitable for interpreting non-numerical data such as words, images, and symbols, which aligns with the nature of semiotics that focuses on meaning-making in cultural texts (Ummah, 2019). Specifically, the research applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which includes three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. These levels help reveal both the literal and ideological meanings embedded in the signs being studied. Creswell stated that qualitative descriptive research is that the researcher would interest in the process, meaning, and understanding gain through the word. In this research, the researcher focuses on the theory of Roland Barthes semiotics that was familiar with denotation, connotation, and myth (Fish, 2020). The source of the data is from the song lyrics *Through the Rain* from Mariah Carey on *Genius.com*. And the data of this research is from song lyrics *Through the Rain* from Mariah Carey. The techniques of collecting the data are collected through download the song lyrics from Mariah Carey *Through the Rain*, listen to every single the song lyrics, identify all of the meaning of denotative, connotative, and myth meanings in the song lyrics, and the last classify the song lyrics to find out the meaning of the song.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

##### Data Findings

This research focused on identifying semiotic terms in the form of sentences found in the lyrics of *Through the Rain*. A total of 19 signs were categorized into three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth based on Roland Barthes' theory.

##### Data Analysis

After collecting the data, this research was analyzed the whole data which already completely found out the three meaning of the semiotic term based on Roland Barthes Theory namely: denotation, connotation, and myth meaning.

##### Datum 1

"When you get caught in the rain with nowhere to run"

In the lyrics above, the "rain" is semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "rain" means problem. The denotation meaning of the word "rain" there is a problem between parents and their daughter. Their daughter wants to get married with a man who her love so much but her mother does not give her a permit to marry the man. In the connotation meaning of the word "rain" is feeling lost, vulnerable, and exposed to emotional or life changes. And in the myth meaning of the word "rain" itself is as we know rain is identical with something that happens in our life often brings unavoidable hardships, and individuals must endure without always having a clear escape or protection. Therefore, this lyric describes if you caught in a problem especially with your parents there is no way to run.

##### Datum 2

"When you're distraught and in pain without anyone"

In the lyrics above, the word "distraught and in pain" is semiotic sign which has denotation and myth meanings. The denotation meaning of the word "distraught and in pain" is describing someone experiencing emotional suffering alone. The connotation of this word has meaning someone feels isolation, depression, and inner struggle to come out from their problem. And the last for the myth meaning the word "distraught and in pain" in this lyric describes to the listener that society's ideal of inner strength and the romanticized narrative of solitary endurance during hard times. Thus, this lyric describes when you desperate in pain without anyone you have to still stand up and face it.

##### Datum 3

"You feel so far away that you just can't find your way home"

In the lyrics above, the word “home” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The denotation meaning of the word “home” is when a daughter has a problem with her parents especially her mother, and a mother for the children is a “home” for them, moreover being far from a physical or emotional place called ‘home’. The connotation meaning of this word is a metaphor for being disconnected from oneself a sense of safety. And the last the myth meaning of this lyric to the listener is the cultural ideal of ‘home’ as a space of comfort, belonging, and identity which is sometimes lost during personal crises. Therefore, the lyric describes when you feel so far away from your parents or anyone you feel lost and do not know where the home is. It should be the safe place but the fact it is not.

Datum 4

“You can get there alone, it's okay, once you say”

In the lyrics above the word “alone” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word ‘alone’ means something by yourself. The denotation meaning of the word ‘alone’ is you are able to reach a goal or overcome something by yourself. The connotation of this word has meaning of empowerment, inner strength, and belief in oneself. And the last the myth meanings of this lyric to the listener is the individualistic myth of self-reliance, especially prominent in Western culture – the idea that personal triumph can and should be achieved independently. Thus, the lyric describes when you lost your home when you have a problem you can be alone by yourself and it is okay for being alone to think of the problem and find the way to solve it.

Datum 5

“I can make it through the rain”

In the lyrics above the word “rain” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word “rain” here means able to solve the problem. The denotation meaning of the word ‘rain’ is she can walk and get out from a rainstorm (problem). The connotation of the word ‘rain’ in this lyric has meaning resilience and hope in the face of adversity. And the last the myth meaning of this lyric to the listener is the belief that suffering has redemptive power and that surviving hardship makes one stronger — a common motif in inspirational narratives. The lyric describes that everyone can through the rain and able to face all of the problem and face the storm we have and there is always a good way to face and finish it.

Datum 6

“I can stand up once again on my own”

In the lyrics above the word “stand up” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word “stand up” means can stand with their own. The denotation meaning of this word is standing up by oneself even the problem comes. The connotation of this word in this lyric is regaining strength and independence after a fall. And the last the myth meaning of the lyric to the listener is the cultural of valuation of emotional recovery, autonomy, and triumph over personal failure. This lyric describes when you have even a big problem you still have to raise up and stand still with your own. Only yourself or on your own can make it.

Datum 7

“And I know that I'm strong enough to mend”

In this lyric above the word “strong” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word “strong” means able to withstand great or pressure. The denotation meaning of this word is that you are strong enough or withstand to heal the pain. The connotation of this word is you are confidence in emotional healing and self-worth to yourself. And the last the myth meaning is emotional resilience – that strength is proven by one’s ability to heal and move forward. Therefore, the lyric describes to the listener that she knows that she is strong enough to fix the problem.

Datum 8

“And every time I feel afraid, I hold tighter to my faith”

In this lyric above the word “faith” is a semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word “faith” means belief. The denotation meaning of this word is when you scared, you can rely more on belief. The connotation of this word is faith as a personal source of strength. And the last the myth meaning to this word is the religious/cultural narrative that faith or belief (in God, self, or purpose) is what sustains people through fear and hardship. Therefore, this lyric describes to the listener every time we feel afraid, just hold tight to our faith. There is GOD protect us.

Datum 9

"And I live one more day and I make it through the rain"

In this lyric again the word "rain" is semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "rain" in this lyric means survive. The denotation meaning of this word is surviving one more day during rain. The connotation meaning of this word is enduring emotional turmoil and continuing life. And the last the myth of the word "rain" is the idea that surviving each day is an act of courage and that persistence itself is a victory. Therefore, this lyric describes someday if you live you can pass even it is the worst thing.

Datum 10

"And if you keep falling down, don't you dare give in"

In this lyric the phrase "dare" is semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The phrase "dare" in this lyric means denotation do not surrender even after multiple failures. The connotation meaning is to encouragement and motivational support. And the last the myth meaning of the word "dare" is the hero myth – the brave individual who fights against all odds and never gives up. Therefore, this lyric describes if you are still falling to the problem, do not surrender and try to fight to face the problem.

Datum 11

"You will arise safe and sound, so keep pressing on steadfastly"

In this lyric the phrase "safe and sound" is semiotic sign which denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The phrase "safe and sound" in this lyric means denotation you will recover and be okay. And the connotation meaning in this lyric is assurance of healing and security. The last the meaning of "safe and sound" for the myth in this lyric to the listener is the promise of salvation and healing after trials, echoing religious or redemption narratives. So, this lyric describes that everything that happens to in the end you will be okay.

Datum 12

"And you'll find what you need to prevail"

In this lyric the word "prevail" is semiotic sign which denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "prevail" in this lyric means denotation you will find what is necessary to succeed. And for the connotation meaning it means hope and faith that the answers or strength will come. And the last the myth meaning is the destiny myth – that everyone is equipped with the tools they need, often believed in individualistic or spiritual ideologies. Therefore, this lyric describes in the end you will find a way to reach and to win.

Datum 13

"And when the wind blows"

In this lyric the word "wind" is semiotic sign which denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "wind" has connotation meaning, it is the wind is moving or blowing. Next for connotation meaning it is wind symbolizes external conflict, emotional turbulence, or life's trials. And the last the myth meaning in this lyric is life's challenges are unpredictable forces; wind becomes a metaphor for hardship that we must endure. Therefore, this lyric describes even if the wind blows, life's challenges are unpredictable and even if the hardship comes we must endure it.

Datum 14

"And shadows grow close"

In this lyric the word "shadows" is semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "shadows" is denotation which means darkness or shadows approach. Next, the connotation meaning in this word of "shadow" is fear, uncertainty, depression, or emotional darkness. The last the meaning of the words "shadows" in the myth meaning is darkness or "shadows" represent the looming presence of hardship; the myth of the "dark night before the dawn"—a universal story of hope after difficulty. Therefore, this lyric describes even the fear appears just do not be afraid, there is a hope after difficulty.

Datum 15

"Don't be afraid"

In this meaning the word "afraid" is semiotic sign which has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word "afraid" for denotation has meaning a command to not feel fear. Continue to the connotation

meaning in this lyric is encouragement to stay strong and emotionally resilient. And the last the myth meaning for the word “afraid” in this lyric is the cultural ideal that courage is defined by facing fears; fear is natural but must be conquered.

Datum 16

"There's nothing you can't face"

In this lyric the word “face” has denotation, connotation, and myth meanings. The word “face” for denotation has meaning you are capable of facing anything. Continue to the connotation meaning in this lyric is message of self-empowerment and inner strength. And the last for the myth meanings, the word “face” in this lyric means the myth of the heroic individual — the belief that personal willpower and resilience can overcome all obstacles. Therefore, this lyric describes that you are able of facing anything and this is the message of the inner strength.

Datum 17

"And should they tell you, you'll never pull through"

In this lyric the phrase “pull through” has denotation, connotation, and the myth meanings. The phrase “pull through” for denotation meaning is if others say you will not succeed or recover. For connotation meaning it is criticism, discouragement from others, or societal doubt. The last for the myth meaning, it is the underdog myth — that society or people may doubt you, but true strength comes from proving them wrong. This lyric describes if the others say you will not succeed or still falling down, but the strength will come to prove them wrong.

Datum 18

"Don't hesitate"

In this lyric the phrase “don’t hesitate” has denotation, connotation, and the myth meanings. The phrase “don’t hesitate” for denotation meaning is do not delay or second-guess. The connotation in this lyric means take action confidently, trust yourself. The last, the myth meaning to this phrase in this lyric is the myth of decisive action as a sign of strength and clarity — often seen in narratives of leaders or heroes.

Datum 19

"Stand tall and say"

In this lyric the phrase “stand tall” has denotation, connotation, and the myth meanings. The phrase “stand tall” has denotation meaning, it is stand proudly and speak. And for the connotation meaning, it is asserting self-worth, dignity, and strength. And the last for the myth meaning it is standing tall is a symbolic gesture of defiance and empowerment — an archetype of claiming one’s identity and power against adversity.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the research is semiotics a field linked to linguistics, studies how signs convey meaning. It is defined a sign as consisting of a form (representamen), its reference (object), and the meaning interpreted by the observer (interpretant). Unlike traditional linguistics, semiotics also includes symbols, images, and context in its analysis. In this research, the researcher found 19 signs of denotation, connotation, and myth using Roland Barthes’ theory in Mariah Carey’s song entitled “*Through the Rain*”. The song “*Through the Rain*” by Mariah Carey describes as a powerful message of resilience, hope, and inner strength in the face of adversity. It tells the story of someone who endures emotional struggles and hardships but chooses not to give up. Through poetic lyrics and a heartfelt tone, Mariah Carey encourages listeners to believe in themselves, stand tall, and push forward despite challenges. The rain serves as a metaphor for difficult times and making it through symbolizes triumph and personal growth. Ultimately, the song inspires empowerment and faith in one’s ability to overcome life’s obstacles.

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