

## VICTORIAN STUDY OF *THE YOUNG VICTORIA* MOVIE: A BARTHESIAN SEMIOTIC APPROACH

### STUDI VICTORIA TERHADAP FILM VICTORIA MUDA: PENDEKATAN SEMIOTIKA BARTHESIAN

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#### ABSTRACT

Literary studies undeniably comprise a variety of meanings that implicitly need to be analyzed to know the unknown. For instance, in the film *The Young Victoria*, beyond the storyline and the cinematography, some signs and attitudes reflect a philosophical fact to reveal the history of the Victorian era. In conducting this study, the data was taken from a movie titled "The Young Victoria" with a duration of one hour, eighty minutes, and 13 seconds. It was aired in 2009. The data in this study was obtained by using an observation method and note-taking technique. The data was classified into verbal and non-verbal signs. Thus, by using the Barthesian semantic approach, the signifiers that appeared in the film were taken to present a signified narrative style of descriptive qualitative research. References related to the Victorian age and discourse analysis of semiotics were applied in this research to complete the elaboration of the flow of discussion in this study. Three results were eventually revealed in this research. First, the signifier wigs embody a noble class and formal outfits in a British court in the 18th century. Second, the classes in the movie can be determined by the means of transportation used in the town. Last, women in the Victorian period had limited opportunities to express their voices or speak up regarding pursuing an outdoor activity.

**Key words:** *Victorian age, Barthesian semiotic approach, British, The Young Victoria*

#### ABSTRAK

Didalam penelitian sastra, tidak dapat dipungkiri bahwa terdapat berbagai makna yang harus dianalisis secara implisit untuk mengetahui yang tidak diketahui. Sebagai contoh, dalam film "The Young Victoria", seiring dengan cerita dan filmnya, terdapat beberapa karakter dan skenario yang juga mencerminkan fakta filosofis untuk mengungkapkan sejarah di era atau zaman Victoria. Dalam penelitian ini, data diambil dari film berjudul "The Young Victoria" yang berdurasi satu jam, delapan puluh menit, dan tiga belas detik. Film ini tayang di tahun 2009. Data dalam penelitian ini diperoleh melalui teknik observasi dan pencatatan. Data tersebut dibagi menjadi isyarat verbal dan syarat non-verbal. Dengan pendekatan semantik Barthesian, penanda-penanda yang hadir dalam film ini diangkat dalam gaya naratif yang khas dari penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Referensi era Victoria dan analisis semiotika wacana dibawa ke dalam kajian ini untuk melengkapi alur pembahasan kajian dalam penelitian ini. Terdapat tiga hasil yang terungkap dalam penelitian ini. Pertama, di pengadilan Inggris pada abad ke-18, wig dan pakaian formal mencirikan kelas bangsawan. Kedua, kategori kelas yang terdapat di film tersebut dapat ditentukan berdasarkan alat transportasi yang digunakan di kota tersebut pada saat itu. Terakhir, wanita di Victoria memiliki kesempatan yang terbatas untuk bersuara atau mengeluarkan pendapat tentang kegiatan diluar ruangan atau di alam bebas.

**Kata Kunci :** *Zaman Victoria, pendekatan semiotika Barthesian, Inggris, "The Young Victoria".*

#### INTRODUCTION

Language is the source of human life and is used to exchange information and express feelings, knowledge, beliefs, actions, thoughts, and desires. Language is any system of phonetic symbols used in human communication (Wardhaugh, 2010). Communication is the exchange of ideas or the process of establishing commonality or unity of thought between a sender and a receiver (Kurnia, 2013). The above statement gives the impression that semiotics has become one of the key scientific approaches in developing a coherent and unique scientific methodology in communication research.

Therefore, a semiotic analysis can be found immediately after or parallel with other communication text analysis techniques such as content analysis and discourse analysis.

In written communication, signs are found in the human environment. Humans use signs and symbols to communicate with others who share the same feelings, ideas, and desires when the communicator agrees to a system of signs (Perlmutter, 2011). However, not everyone can interpret the meanings of the symbols correctly. Hence, there exists a study of the meaning of

signs called semiotics. It is designed to help people understand signs as a means of communication.

In literary works, beyond verbal utterances such as in movies, they may imply specific meanings that need to be discussed, as well as the use of property, signs, and other objects for specific purposes. Thus, *The Young Victoria* contains a wealth of data that can be portrayed both as a kind of philosophical discussion and as information.

*The Young Victoria* (2009) is a chronicle of the 18th century and early Victorian era, and the film uses certain symbols, icons, and signs to convey philosophical facts under the framework of a dramatization of the turbulent first years of Queen Victoria’s rule and her enduring romance with Prince Albert.

The movie essentially portrays an 18th-century atmosphere in which Victoria still remains restricted in her freedom, but following the death of her uncle, the 18th-century revolution until the early Victorian era saw the role and rights of women emphasized. This film also includes the icons, symbols, and services to the royalty in which Victoria’s life becomes the centre of the storyline. As conveyed in the movie, those icons, symbols, and services always represent the same characters as described by their social status in society.

Henceforth, this research strives to explore the signs, words, symbols, and other things reflected in the film to convey meanings. A semiotic approach here is a way of exploring the theory and information based on the signs that appeared in the film. Other secondary recourses were also presented to complement the information in this study.

Semiotics (often referred to as ‘semiology’) is derived from the Greek word *semeion* meaning ‘sign’ (Prasojowati, 2019). It is a study of signs and symbols with a focus on words. Every aspect of communication counts as a character, from photos to hairstyles. The author believes that semiotics is the study of the meanings of signs to help people gather more information and communicate more appropriately and efficiently about the symbols around them.

A sign is comprised of something that expresses meaning (Trisnayanti et al., 2021). A sign is divided into two types: verbal and non-verbal. A verbal sign is a kind of

communication that takes the form of spoken or written words. On the other hand, a non-verbal sign is known as visual communication that conveys ideas through images or illustrations that combine symbols, arts, colors, gestures, facial expressions, graphics, postures, etc. Therefore, the effectiveness of verbal and non-verbal signs is an important part of our lives. Both verbal and non-verbal signs have many functions in daily life, for example, as a medium to represent something or convey a message.

Semiotics is the scientific or analytical method of studying signs in the form of devices and symbols used in human relationships (Uswatun, 2014). Communication Semiotics is therefore the approach and method of analysis used to understand the signs in the communication process, which includes six elements of communication including the sender, the receiver of the code or symbol system, messages, channels, and the references/things.

In addition to the term semiotics, some experts use the term *semiotics*. In principle, there is no fundamental difference in intent between the use of these two terms. The use of these two terms tends to convey to scholars the identity of pioneers in research on signs. Semiotics is widely used by followers of the European (French) school, with the protagonist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) as the main and predominant point of view in the semiotic analysis to group symbols into two categories: the signifier concept and the signified-image (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2021). A signifier refers to the physical sign of a symbol such as an utterance, image, or painting. Signified, on the other hand, refers to the spiritual aspect of a sign, or the associative way of looking at it. Among others, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) is known as the next person to bring a more complete conception to this semiotic approach using the concepts of connotation and denotation. On the other hand, the term *semiotics* is related to the American Tradition established by Charles Sanders Peirce from 1839 to 1914 (Yakin & Totu, 2014). Although still underdeveloped, the term *semiotics* is more widely used because it is thought to cover more aspects of the practical study of signs themselves than *semiotics*, which tends to theorize the science of signs.

Table 1. Semiotic Analytical Process (Trisnayanti, 2021)

<i>language</i> MYTH	1. Signifier	2. Signified
	3. Sign	
	I. SIGNIFIER	II. SIGNIFIED
III. SIGN		

The main point of a semiotic analysis is to group symbols into two categories: signifier and signified (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2021). Signifiers refer to the physical symbols from signs such as utterances, pictures, or paintings on the other hand, signified refers to the mental

aspect of symbols or an associative view of symbols. Roland Barthes, who was known as one of the foremost semioticians, gives a semiotic approach to a more perfect concept with the notions of connotation and denotation. However, in its development, the term “semiotics” is

more widely used because it is considered to cover more aspects of the practical study of signs compared to semiology, which tends to theorize the science of interpreting signs.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article applied a descriptive qualitative approach. Regular exploration requires scientists to separate their voices from the information and environment they see. In-depth studies of this kind raise questions about the incidence and nature of distribution. Since research describes what is natural, this research only measures what already exists (Fakhrian, 2016).

This type of research is based on the collection of qualitative data. The characteristics of qualitative research are described as follows: data is collected and expressed in the form of relative values and research on social issues in general. This allows authors to interpret (Fakhrian, 2017). In conducting this study, the data was taken from a movie titled "The Young Victoria" with a duration of one hour, eighty minutes, and thirteen seconds. It was aired in 2009. The data was obtained by using an observational method and note-taking technique. The data was categorized into verbal and non-verbal signs. Afterwards, it was analyzed by using a qualitative method. First, the researcher applied Saussure semiotics to classify the verbal and non-verbal signs found in the film (Saussure, 1983). The researcher then used semiotics to consider the verbal and non-verbal meanings. However, the analysis was presented using informal methods.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Reflection of Old England in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

##### 1. Wigs in the Victorian Era



Image 1. Queen Victoria's moment of pre-coronation (Source: The Young Victoria '40:20:13')

Wigs seen in courtrooms are legal costumes worn from the Victorian era to the present day, worn not only by senators but also by other upper-class members (noble families), and must also be worn by guests invited to court.

Back its history, as quoted in an article by American Battlefield Trust (2021), explains that 18th-century gentlemen wore curly white wigs as a part of their everyday look. Gilbert Stuart, a famous portrait artist of

Anything that exists sensibly that represents the heart and mind is a costume. Later in the century, Wilde's "Portrait of Dorian Gray" (1891) included clothing and textiles from Dorian's collection of historical curiosities, not only because they are exquisite artistic objects, but also because their materiality, unlike Dorian's ageless visage, marks and is formed by time. Thus, to say that we are "dressed in the past" means that history is aesthetically mediated and that its identity is aesthetic both in its determination and willful nature. It is sensory, formative, relational, and critical (Kurnia, 2011).

From the 18th century to the early Victorian period, several attributes of British costumes reveal the philosophical context represented by certain symbols. Wigs were a dying fashion. Before the Victorian era, it was mainly fashionable to wear wigs among the upper classes, and it was also a symbol of social class: the upper class. Wigs are still used in England today as an attribute of formal attire for the century, especially at court. The judge is the one with the long wig and the more flamboyant red robe. The purpose of all these costumes, subtly ranked to indicate status, is to evoke respect for the court and the position held by each person in the court. Civil cases can be heard without any trimming, but the wig-wearing judge (or Queen's Counsel, short wig-wearing senior attorney) is more than just a decision-maker. It is also representative of the entire British legal system. In the criminal justice system, wigs (though apparently based on outdated dress styles) emphasize this point very well (Chandler, 2019). Wigs have not always been an upper-class fashion since the Victorian era, but wigs are more than just clothing. They are formal attributes and belong to a certain class that can be worn to emphasize one's position in society.

the Founding Fathers, painted five of the first six presidents with pure white hair. Modern viewers often assume that they are wigs because wearing wigs in the movies and on television has become popular.

By the time of the American Revolutionary War, however, wigs were no longer available and were replaced by the trend of covering natural hair with powder. Early in the late 18th century, wigs were an important status symbol, but by 1800, short, natural hair

was all the rage. Politics, cleanliness, disease, and expense contributed to the rise and fall of wigs.



Image 2. Legal Costume: Wigs in the Victorian Era (Source: American Battlefield Trust, 2021).

But never before has a top hat been so sophisticated and dominant in the fashion world. It was not until the 19th century that top hats became popular when Prince Albert started wearing them in public and became a fashion trend. Top hats were made of silk. Men wore top hats for business, entertainment, and special occasions

like weddings and dances. The Victorian top hat was not just worn as a part of an outfit.

When men wear top hats, they are simply saying that it is important and elegant. The symbol used by the human hat thus represents the philosophical background of gentle and noble human nature. Below is a still scene from *The Young Victoria*.



Image 3. Prince Albert and Queen Victoria (Source: *The Young Victoria* '53:20:21')

#### The Role of Victorian Women

Knowing the signs through some attributes that are identical with women may define the roles of women in the 18th century. A scholar emphasized in his writing that signs are associated with denotations and/or linguistic

signs of meaning. The denotative meaning itself is what the facts attempt to provide (Chandler, 2019). Hence, in the movie, *Victoria* portrays the activity of painting as a routine hobby.



Image 4. The Role of a Victorian Woman at the Palace (Source: *The Young Victoria* '55:22:11')

During the 18th century, women's education was represented by domestic activities such as drawing, painting, and so forth. One article explained that the rights of women were limited in the 18th century. They were allowed to learn music-related knowledge and painting activities at home. Patriarchal societies were controlled by men (Nurman et al., 2020). Moreover, a sign of Victoria's activity as a representative of women

illustrates the fact of reality in the era of the 18th century by showing her activity in painting.

The other facts that describe the role of women in *The Young Victoria* are through the analysis of the spoken words as a signifier. Barthes largely used a crucial distinction between the signifier and signified.

The signifier is the image used to stand for something else, while the signified is what the real thing stands for, or in a stricter reading, a sense-impression

(Abaker, 2019). Thus, a sign that comprises the essence of a woman's rights in the 18th century is captured by being forbidden to hold and read a book. Victoria is called by her mother. Once she reaches the room, she touches a book and tries to read it. However, as paraphrased, it was stated that "Sir John Conroy forbids her to read the book, and warns her to put the book off" ('01:45:03'). The spoken words which are expressed by Sir John Conroy are simply a fact about the role of women in the 18th century, as women were forbidden to read, go to a formal school, and so on.

The patriarchal society of 19th-century Britain sought to limit women's reading by promoting the risk of reading certain literary works unsuitable for women, imposing prohibitions, and setting standards for what women should read. Gender played a major role in Victorian patriarchal society, and women were believed to need to be protected from reading certain passages. Curiously, women had little resistance to emotionally charged content (Abaker, 2019). In-depth, the words uttered by Sir John Conroy serve as signifiers to create philosophical facts about eighteenth-century women. However, because reading was considered to belong to the world of men, women were restricted in their freedom to enjoy reading.

Depictions of women's roles in the 18th century can be found in Victorian photographs. "Victoria admits her weaknesses as a woman and lack of knowledge, but she is still learning to lead society ('01.03.46'). These words are spoken before the servants, who are mostly men. Additionally, her admission reflects her background as a woman, demonstrating her lack of knowledge about politics and general education. This tendency toward social inequality is particularly pronounced in the eighteenth century. In general, the 18th century was a very difficult time for women in England. They were considered second-class citizens, who were barred from voting, education, etc. Victoria's words describe the image of women at the time. This clearly shows that women in patriarchal societies still have limited rights.

#### Royal Services

A magnificent and precious carriage housed in the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace in London is used by members of the royal family and others on special occasions (Nurman et al., 2020). Horse-drawn carriages in England became iconic during the Victorian era, serving as a means of transportation. In the movie, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria's carriage went to and fro.



Image 5. A Carriage as a Portrayal of Royal Service in the Victorian Era (Source: The Young Victoria '01:12:10')

The royal family uses horse-drawn carriages, while the lower and middle classes travel by horse or on foot. The carriage is also a symbol that emerges from its history and use. It belongs to the upper class or nobility. But it is not just about looks. Not only the clothes and wigs worn by them during this period but also their mode of transportation could also reflect their status in society.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, not only can the situation be described in detail, but sometimes a complete description of the captured reality represents the whole. The Young Victoria (2009) directed by Jean-Marc Vallée reveals particular philosophical facts about certain symbols, icons, and spoken words from the 18th century to the early Victorian era. As a result, a study of semiotics by Roland Barthes guided this literary research to analyze its forms which are symbols, icons, and spoken words that act as the signified

and the signifier. Furthermore, the accompanying article reveals the philosophical background as the main goal of this theory in finding meaning in all forms. First, the attributes in British costumes represent history, pride and gender identity. Secondly, women's roles and rights are limited and made evident through recorded speech and some symbolism. Lastly, transportation like horse-drawn carriages was used to service the royal family from the 18th century to the early Victorian era.

Understanding signs or symbols in communication is important for clarifying meanings and messages. In this case, semiotic analysis is one of the most important sciences to master in order to understand the meanings and messages of communication. A brief theoretical consideration of a semiotic analysis as an approach to understanding the meaning of texts in communication will help advance communication science and communication understanding in the future.

### Suggestions

Although the writing of this article may not be perfect, there were still many shortcomings faced by the authors when examining and describing this study in detail. The authors pointed out that Indonesian films contain many characters and symbols that may reflect Indonesian culture itself. Therefore, the authors suggest to future Indonesian researchers that studying Indonesian films that reflect the symbols and culture would be better to help readers broaden their knowledge of Indonesian cultural identity. Therefore, Indonesian films can become more famous internationally.

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