



## ROLAND BARTHES' SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM "ET ON S'ENVOIE DES LETTRES" BY EMMA BUISSON

Sela Susanry Samura<sup>1</sup>, Tengku Ratna Soraya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Departement of French Language Education, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

### \*Corresponding Author

Email:

[selasusanry963@gmail.com](mailto:selasusanry963@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This research is based on the difficulties readers, particularly French language students, face in understanding the implied meanings of modern French poems due to the use of symbols, metaphors, and figurative language rich in meaning. This research aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in the poem "Et on s'envoie des lettres" by Emma Buisson, the poem "Coucher de soleil" by Zoé Robo, and the poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with text analysis methods. The data source for the research consists of three poems in the anthology "Cent poèmes pour voyager : Finalistes du Grand Prix Poésie RATP 2025". Data collection was carried out thru in-depth reading, identification of important words and phrases, and interpretation based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The research results show that the three poems have denotative and connotative meanings that are interconnected; the connotative meaning is more dominant because symbols and metaphors depict human emotional, social, and cultural experiences. Therefore, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is effectively used to uncover the implied meanings in modern French poems.

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## Introduction

Literary works are a form of artistic expression that contain meaning, emotion, and reflection of human experience. Among the various genres of literature, poetry occupies a unique position because it conveys meaning thru dense language, symbolism, imagery, and figurative



expressions. Unlike ordinary texts, poetry often conveys meaning indirectly, requiring readers to interpret the signs contained within the words, metaphors, and structure of the poem. Therefore, understanding poetry is not limited to literal interpretation but also involves a deeper process of meaning construction.

French poetry, especially contemporary poetry, often uses symbolic and figurative language to represent emotional experiences, social realities, and personal reflections. These characteristics pose a challenge for readers, especially students of French language and literature, in understanding meanings that go beyond literal interpretation. Readers often have difficulty distinguishing between the explicit meaning and the emotional or symbolic meaning that the poet intends to convey.

In literary studies, semiotics plays an important role in uncovering hidden meanings within the text. Semiotics is the study of signs and the process of meaning formation in communication. One of the influential figures in the study of semiotics is Roland Barthes, who developed a theory regarding two levels of meaning, namely denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal and direct meaning, while connotation relates to the implied, emotional, cultural, or symbolic meaning attached to a sign (Barthes, 1977). Through this concept, literary texts can be interpreted more comprehensively because words and symbols are understood not only based on their surface meaning.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory has been widely applied in literary analysis, media studies, film, advertising, and various cultural texts. Previous research shows that semiotic analysis is effective in uncovering hidden meanings in literary works. Heru Prasetyo (2023) analyzed the poem "*Cinta yang Agung*" by Kahlil Gibran using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and found connotative codes, symbolic codes, and action codes contained within the poem. Similarly, Jariyah and Prihatin (2024) examined the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in the poems "*Aku dan Sunyi*" and "*Kepada Sajakku*," which highlight the importance of a semiotic approach in understanding the meaning of literary works.

However, research focusing on contemporary French poetry, particularly the poems selected in the anthology "*Cent poèmes pour voyager: Finalistes du Grand Prix Poésie RATP 2025*", is still relatively limited. This anthology contains poems rich in emotional symbolism and cultural meaning, making them relevant for semiotic analysis. The three selected poems, namely "*Et on s'envoie des lettres*" by Emma Buisson, "*Coucher de soleil*" by Zoé Robo, and a poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez, present emotional experiences related to love, loneliness, memories, identity, and belonging. The poems contain linguistic signs that have the potential to reveal deeper meanings when analyzed through Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation.

The poem "*Et on s'envoie des lettres*" by Emma Buisson reflects emotional attachment through letters that symbolize memories, longing, and hope. Meanwhile, the poem "*Coucher de soleil*" by Zoé Robo uses natural imagery such as sunsets, the sea, and boats to represent self-reflection and emotional escape. As for the poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez, it explores the conflict of identity and emotional attachment between two places and two cultures. Although they have different themes, the three poems share the same characteristic, which is conveying emotional reality through language rich in symbolism.

Based on this background, this research aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in selected poems from "*Cent poèmes pour voyager: Finalistes du Grand Prix Poésie RATP 2025*" using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. This research is expected to contribute to the study of French literature, particularly in understanding the implied meanings in contemporary poetry, as well as enriching the application of semiotic analysis in literary research.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a text analysis approach. The qualitative method was chosen because literary research focuses more on understanding and interpreting meaning rather than numbers or statistical data. In this study, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is used to identify the denotative and connotative meanings found in the analyzed poems. The research data source comes from three poems in the anthology "*Cent poèmes pour voyager: Finalistes du Grand Prix Poésie RATP 2025*", published by Éditions Bruno Doucey in 2025. The three poems are "*Et on s'envoie des lettres*" by Emma Buisson, "*Coucher de soleil*" by Zoé Robo, and a poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez. The poems were chosen because they contain many symbols, emotional expressions, and figurative language that can be analyzed using semiotic theory.

The research data consists of words, phrases, clauses, and expressions in poetry that contain denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meaning is the meaning that corresponds to the actual meaning or the meaning that is immediately visible, while connotative meaning is the additional meaning related to feelings, symbols, or certain cultural values. Data collection is carried out thru several stages. First, the researcher reads the poem repeatedly to thoroughly understand its content and meaning. Second, the researcher marks words, phrases, and expressions that contain semiotic elements. Third, these elements are analyzed using the concepts of denotation and connotation according to Roland Barthes. To support the analysis results, the researcher also used various reference sources such as books, dictionaries, scientific journals, and relevant literary studies.

Data analysis is conducted by reading the poem deeply, identifying the signs within it, and then categorizing the meanings into denotative and connotative categories. After that, these meanings are interpreted based on the context of the poem. The results of the analysis are then linked to emotional experiences, cultural values, and the message the poet intends to convey. In the final stage, the researcher draws conclusions about the role of denotative and connotative meanings in building the overall meaning of the poem. Thru this approach, the research can uncover the implied meanings in contemporary French poetry and provide a deeper understanding of the use of symbolic language and emotional expression in literary works.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the three analyzed poems contain interrelated denotative and connotative meanings. At the denotative level, the poems depict events, objects, and experiences that are directly observable. However, at the connotative level, deeper meanings related to emotional, social, and cultural experiences are found. The research results indicate that connotative meanings are more dominant than denotative meanings because the poets use symbols and metaphors to convey emotional attachment, self-reflection, identity conflict, longing, and the search for inner peace.

In the poem "*Et on s'envoie des lettres*" by Emma Buisson, letters serve as symbols of memories, love, longing, and hope. In the poem "*Coucher de soleil*" by Zoé Robo, natural elements such as the sunset, the sea, and the boat become symbols of self-reflection and the process of emotional healing. Meanwhile, the poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez uses spatial symbols such as islands, horizons, and homes to represent identity conflicts and a sense of belonging to more than one culture.

Overall, the research results show that the three poems utilize symbolic language to

convey emotional and social experiences that are not directly expressed. The dominance of connotative meaning in the three poems indicates the importance of symbols and metaphors in constructing the meaning of contemporary poetry.

## Discussion

The connotative meaning becomes the most dominant element in the three analyzed poems. According to Roland Barthes' theory, signs not only convey literal meaning but also generate deeper meanings thru emotional and cultural associations. In this context, various objects and natural elements used by the poet serve as symbols to depict human feelings, life experiences, and inner struggles.

In the poem "*Et on s'envoie des lettres*", the symbols of letters, envelopes, colors, and seasons depict the continuity of emotional relationships despite being separated by time and circumstances. The expression "*des bouts d'éternité*" shows that letters not only contain written messages but also hold memories and feelings that endure over time. The colors red, green, and blue that appear in the poem symbolize various emotions accompanying human relationships, such as love, hope, tranquility, and sadness. Thus, the letter becomes a symbol of emotional attachment that transcends its literal function as a means of communication. This finding is in line with Heru Prasetyo's (2023) research, which shows that symbols in poetry function to convey emotional meaning indirectly. However, Emma Buisson's poetry has its own uniqueness because it uses simple everyday objects to build meanings related to memories, love, and hope. This shows that ordinary objects can acquire deeper meanings thru the process of connotation as explained by Barthes.

Meanwhile, the poem "*Coucher de soleil*" by Zoé Robo illustrates how elements of nature are used as symbols of a person's emotional journey. The sunset symbolizes change and self-reflection, while the calm sea represents inner peace and emotional balance. The boat used by the character in the poem becomes a symbol of life's journey and the search for self-meaning. Additionally, the expression "*l'orage des gens*" depicts the social pressure, conflict, and noise of life that the character in the poem wishes to leave behind. Based on Barthes' theory, the elements of nature in this poem generate connotative meanings related to human psychological experiences. Nature not only serves as a backdrop but also as a symbolic space that represents the process of emotional healing and the search for tranquility. These findings reinforce previous research that shows symbolism in poetry is often used to convey feelings and experiences that are difficult to express directly.

Unlike the previous two poems, the poem by Lucia Garrido Martinez highlights the themes of identity and belonging. Symbols such as "*deux îles, deux horizons, and deux maisons*" represent two cultures, two identities, and two living spaces that all hold significance for the poem's character. The expression "*mon cœur balance entre deux îles*" indicates an inner conflict arising from attachment to more than one place. Meanwhile, the phrase *étranger et chez moi pourtant* describes a paradoxical feeling, namely feeling accepted yet feeling foreign in the same environment. According to Barthes' semiotic perspective, these symbols generate meanings that go beyond their literal interpretation. This poem depicts the experience of an individual who must negotiate their identity between two different cultural worlds. These findings expand previous semiotic studies by demonstrating that spatial symbols can be used to represent the process of identity formation and multicultural life experiences.

Overall, the three poems show that emotional reality is conveyed more thru symbolic language than direct statements. Letters become symbols of memories and emotional attachment, natural elements become symbols of self-reflection and emotional recovery, while spatial symbols represent identity and a sense of belonging. The results of this study reinforce Roland Barthes' theory that connotative meaning plays an important role in the interpretation of literary works.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the study of contemporary French literature by demonstrating how poets use everyday objects, natural elements, and spatial metaphors to construct complex emotional and cultural meanings. The implication of this research is that the semiotic approach is still highly relevant for uncovering implicit meanings in contemporary poetry, particularly those related to emotional experiences, identity, and the relationship between humans and their social and cultural environments..

## Conclusion

This research aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings in three poems found in the anthology "*Cent poèmes pour voyager: Finalistes du Grand Prix Poésie RATP 2025*" using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The research results show that the three poems contain denotative and connotative meanings that are interconnected, with a dominance of connotative meaning in constructing the overall meaning of the poems. Thru symbols and metaphors, the poets convey various emotional experiences, such as love, longing, self-reflection, identity conflict, and a sense of belonging.

Analysis shows that the meaning of poetry is not only shaped by the literal meaning of words but also by signs that generate deeper emotional, social, and cultural meanings. Letters, elements of nature, and symbols of space function as media to represent complex human experiences and demonstrate how poetic language can convey emotional realities indirectly. The findings of this research reinforce the relevance of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in uncovering implicit meanings in contemporary French poetry. Furthermore, this research contributes to French literary studies by demonstrating that simple symbols can generate rich meanings thru the process of connotation.

Further research can expand the scope of study by analyzing more contemporary poetry or using other semiotic approaches to gain a more diverse understanding of the symbolic meanings in literary works.

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