

## **Naturalizing Family Values in Disney's Encanto (2021): A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the representation of family values in Disney's Encanto (2021) by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The study aims to identify how family values are represented through denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings, particularly the process of naturalization reflected in the film. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The data consisted of visual and verbal signs related to family values in the film and were collected through observation and documentation. The data were analyzed using Barthes' semiotic framework, including denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings reveal that the film represents family values through signs of love, responsibility, sacrifice, empathy, forgiveness, acceptance, solidarity, and family unity. At the connotative level, these values are conveyed through characters' facial expressions, gestures, dialogue, settings, and symbolic objects that reflect emotional experiences within the Madrigal family. At the mythological level, the film naturalizes cultural beliefs that family members are expected to support one another, maintain family harmony, and prioritize collective well-being. At the same time, the film challenges the naturalized belief that personal worth depends on perfection or extraordinary abilities by emphasizing that unconditional love, mutual understanding, and acceptance are the true foundations of a strong family. Therefore, Encanto demonstrates that genuine family strength is constructed through emotional connection rather than supernatural power.*

*Keywords: family values, semiotics, Roland Barthes, myth, naturalization, Encanto*

### **A. Background**

Family is the primary social institution in which individuals develop values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior. Within the family, people learn essential values such as love, responsibility, empathy, sacrifice, acceptance, and mutual support. These values are not only experienced in everyday life but are

also represented through various forms of media, including films. As a medium of mass communication, films do more than entertain audiences; they also communicate social and cultural values through visual and verbal signs. Therefore, films can be analyzed as systems of signs that construct and convey meanings about social reality.

One film that strongly represents family values is Disney's *Encanto* (2021). The film tells the story of the Madrigal family, whose members possess extraordinary magical gifts. Beyond its fantasy elements, *Encanto* portrays various family issues, including emotional pressure, unrealistic expectations, intergenerational conflict, self-acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. These issues are expressed not only through dialogue but also through characters' facial expressions, gestures, settings, colors, and symbolic objects, all of which contribute to the construction of meaning throughout the narrative.

To interpret these meanings, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. According to Barthes (1977), meaning operates at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a sign, connotation explains the implied meanings generated through visual and verbal signs, while myth reveals how cultural values and ideologies become naturalized and accepted as common sense within society. Barthes' framework provides a comprehensive approach for examining how family

values are represented and how cultural beliefs are constructed through cinematic signs.

Previous studies have examined *Encanto* from perspectives such as family relationships, cultural representation, and character development. However, limited attention has been given to the representation of family values through Barthes' three levels of signification, particularly the concept of myth as a process of naturalization. This study therefore focuses on how family values are represented through denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in *Encanto* (2021).

The objective of this study is to analyze the representation of family values in Disney's *Encanto* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The findings are expected to contribute to semiotic studies by providing a deeper understanding of how films construct family values through systems of signs. Furthermore, this study may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in film analysis from a semiotic perspective.

## **B. Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design

to examine the representation of family values in Disney's *Encanto* (2021). The study focused on visual and verbal signs that represent family values throughout the film. The primary data were obtained from the film *Encanto* (2021), while books, journal articles, and other relevant references on semiotics and family values were used as secondary data. Data were collected through observation and documentation by repeatedly watching the film, identifying scenes related to family values, taking screenshots, transcribing the dialogues, and classifying the data according to the research objectives.

The collected data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which consists of three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. The analysis began by identifying the visual and verbal signs in each selected scene. The denotative meaning was then interpreted based on the literal representation of the signs, followed by the connotative meaning derived from the relationship between the identified signs and their implied meanings. Finally, the mythological level was analyzed to

explain how the film naturalizes cultural values and ideologies related to family through the process of naturalization. The findings were then interpreted descriptively to explain how family values are represented in the film.

## **C. Findings and Discussions**

### **Extract 1**



The first extract shows the moment when Mirabel accompanies Antonio to his Gift Ceremony. Although Mirabel is the only member of the Madrigal family without a magical Gift, she encourages Antonio and hands him the ceremonial candle before he opens his magical door.

Denotation. The scene depicts Mirabel smiling while giving the candle to Antonio. Antonio looks nervous before entering the ceremony, while Mirabel reassures him through supportive words and gestures. The ceremony takes place in front of the Madrigal family and the villagers, who are waiting for Antonio to receive his magical Gift.

Connotation. At the connotative level, Mirabel's warm smile, gentle gesture of handing the candle, and

reassuring dialogue connote affection, emotional support, and encouragement. Although she does not possess magical abilities, Mirabel sincerely supports Antonio and helps him overcome his fear. These visual and verbal signs suggest that genuine care for family members is expressed through love, empathy, and emotional support rather than through extraordinary abilities.

Myth. At the mythological level, this scene naturalizes the belief that older family members are responsible for guiding and supporting younger generations. Through Mirabel's actions, Encanto presents emotional support and encouragement as natural and unquestionable family responsibilities. At the same time, the scene reinforces the idea that a person's value within the family is not determined by magical abilities but by love, care, and willingness to support others.

#### **Extract 7**



This extract depicts Luisa singing "Surface Pressure" while carrying enormous rocks and

supporting collapsing structures. Although she possesses extraordinary physical strength, Luisa appears exhausted and overwhelmed by the responsibilities placed upon her. Through both visual imagery and song lyrics, the scene illustrates the emotional burden hidden behind her strong appearance.

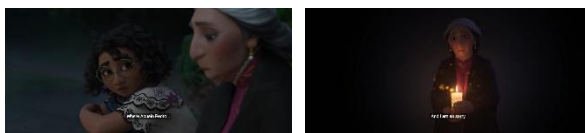
Denotation. The scene shows Luisa carrying giant rocks, lifting heavy objects, and preventing buildings from collapsing. Despite her remarkable strength, her facial expression appears tired and anxious. The accompanying song expresses her fear of failing and disappointing her family if she can no longer fulfill everyone's expectations.

Connotation. At the connotative level, the enormous rocks and collapsing structures connote the emotional burden, family expectations, and responsibilities that Luisa carries every day. Her exhausted facial expression connotes emotional pressure and fear of failure, while the song lyrics connote that she measures her self-worth through her ability to help and support others. Together, these visual and verbal signs suggest that constant expectations have become a source of

emotional exhaustion despite her physical strength.

Myth. At the mythological level, this scene naturalizes the belief that the strongest member of a family should always be dependable, self-sacrificing, and capable of carrying every responsibility without expressing weakness. Encanto presents this expectation as a normal family obligation before gradually challenging it through Luisa's emotional confession. The film ultimately suggests that vulnerability does not diminish a person's value and that emotional well-being is equally important in maintaining healthy family relationships.

#### **Extract 17**



This extract takes place at the river where Abuelo Pedro sacrificed his life to protect his family. In this emotional scene, Abuela Alma finally reveals the pain and trauma she has carried for many years and apologizes to Mirabel for placing excessive pressure on the family. Their conversation becomes a turning point in restoring the emotional bond within the Madrigal family.

Denotation. The scene shows Abuela Alma and Mirabel talking beside the river. Abuela recalls the moment of Pedro's sacrifice and expresses her regret through tears and an apology. Mirabel listens attentively and responds with empathy, leading to a moment of reconciliation between them.

Connotation. At the connotative level, the river connotes unconditional love, sacrifice, and the origin of the Madrigal family's miracle. Abuela Alma's tearful eyes and trembling voice connote deep remorse, unresolved grief, and the emotional burden she has carried since Pedro's death. Her apology, together with Mirabel's attentive response, connotes forgiveness, emotional acceptance, and the restoration of trust. These visual and verbal signs suggest that healing begins when family members openly acknowledge their pain and choose understanding over blame.

Myth. At the mythological level, this scene naturalizes the belief that the head of a family is responsible for protecting the family at all costs, even if it requires suppressing personal emotions and imposing high expectations on others. However,

Encanto challenges this naturalized belief by showing that true family leadership is sustained through honesty, forgiveness, empathy, and unconditional love rather than fear, authority, or perfection.

#### **Extract 22**



The final extract presents the Madrigal family gathering for a family portrait after Casita has been rebuilt and the family's magical miracle has been restored. All family members, including Bruno, stand together with joyful expressions, while Mirabel is positioned beside Abuela Alma, symbolizing the complete restoration of family relationships. This scene serves as the conclusion of the film and emphasizes the importance of unity, forgiveness, and unconditional love.

Denotation. The scene shows the entire Madrigal family posing together for a family photograph in front of the rebuilt Casita. Mirabel stands beside Abuela Alma, Bruno rejoins the family, Antonio is accompanied by his jaguar, and all

family members smile as they prepare for the photograph.

Connotation. At the connotative level, the family portrait connotes reconciliation, unity, and the restoration of emotional bonds within the Madrigal family. Mirabel's position beside Abuela Alma connotes her acceptance and equal recognition as an essential member of the family despite not having a magical Gift. Bruno's presence in the photograph connotes forgiveness and his reintegration into the family, while the smiling facial expressions of all family members connote happiness, mutual acceptance, and emotional fulfillment. Together, these visual signs suggest that the family's greatest achievement is not the return of their magical powers but the restoration of trust, love, and togetherness.

Myth. At the mythological level, this scene naturalizes the belief that family unity is sustained through reconciliation, mutual acceptance, and unconditional love. Encanto presents forgiveness and togetherness as the natural foundation of a harmonious family, making these values appear normal and unquestionable. At the same time, the film challenges the belief that individual worth depends on

extraordinary abilities by demonstrating that every member of the Madrigal family is equally valuable because of their love, commitment, and sense of belonging rather than their magical Gifts.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that Disney's *Encanto* (2021) represents family values through a combination of visual and verbal signs that can be interpreted using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. At the denotative level, the film portrays everyday interactions among the members of the Madrigal family. At the connotative level, the identified signs convey values such as love, responsibility, sacrifice, empathy, forgiveness, acceptance, solidarity, and family unity. At the mythological level, the film naturalizes cultural beliefs about family roles, responsibilities, and relationships while simultaneously challenging the assumption that an individual's worth depends on perfection or extraordinary abilities. Instead, *Encanto* emphasizes that genuine family strength is built upon unconditional love, mutual understanding, forgiveness, and emotional acceptance. These findings demonstrate that films function not

only as entertainment but also as cultural texts that construct and communicate social values through systems of signs.

Future studies are encouraged to examine family values in other animated or live-action films using different semiotic perspectives or complementary approaches, such as discourse analysis or cultural studies, in order to provide broader insights into the representation of family and cultural values in contemporary media.

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