

Semiotic Analysis of the Meaning of 'Lemon' in *As Long as The Lemon Trees Grow*

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the meaning of the lemon symbol in Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, and quotations containing the lemon symbol in the novel. Data were collected through library research and note-taking techniques and analyzed using Barthes' three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings revealed 14 occurrences of the lemon symbol, of which 13 contained symbolic meanings classified into four categories: scarcity and the suffering caused by war, emotional comfort and recovery, identity and memories of homeland, and hope and the continuity of life. The study concludes that the lemon symbol represents not only a fruit but also the lived experiences of the Syrian people, particularly hope, resilience, and the continuity of life amid armed conflict. These findings offer a new perspective for literary semiotic studies by enriching the interpretation of symbols in contemporary novels.

Keywords: Roland Barthes semiotics; lemon symbol; *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*; novel Syrian war

A. Introduction

Literary works are a medium used by authors to convey their ideas, feelings, and views on life through the use of meaningful language (Novelia & Thahar, 2021). In a literary work, meaning is not only conveyed directly, but also through signs and symbols that have a certain meaning (Nurgiyantoro, 1994). These symbols are often used by authors to reinforce the message they want to convey to the reader. Therefore, understanding symbols in literary works is important to uncover the meaning contained behind the text.

The novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh is one of the literary works that is rich in the use of symbols (Katouh, 2022). This novel tells the life of the Syrian people who are facing a prolonged war conflict. In the midst of various events full of suffering, loss, and uncertainty, the author presents the symbol of "lemon" that repeatedly appears in various contexts of the story. The appearance of the symbol not only refers to the literal lemon fruit, but also contains a deeper meaning according to the situation and experience of the characters.

Based on the data found, lemon symbols appear in various forms, such as lemons that are rare in supermarkets, lemon drinks, the aroma of lemons attached to the character of Kenan, lemon trees in Homs, to the expression that lemons will never go extinct. The repetition of the symbol shows that lemons have an important function in establishing the overall meaning of

the story. In some quotes, lemons are associated with comfort, tranquility, hope, memories, as well as the sustainability of life in the midst of devastating war situations.

This study uses a semiotic study. Semiotics is a science that studies signs and the process of meaning signs in human life (Lantowa et al., 2018). Through a semiotic approach, lemon symbols can be analyzed as signs that have denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. This analysis allows researchers to understand how the author constructs the symbolic meaning of lemons as well as the message they want to convey through their appearance in the novel.

The theory of semiotics used by the author is Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics. Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics was chosen because it is able to examine the meaning of signs through three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 2017). Denotation is used to understand the literal meaning of a sign (Kurniawan, 2001), connotation is used to reveal the implied meaning based on social and emotional context, while myth is used to examine the values, ideologies, or beliefs built through the sign (Barthes, 1972). Through this theory, the lemon symbol can be analyzed not only based on its literal meaning as a fruit, but also the symbolic meaning related to comfort, hope, resilience, and the sustainability of life depicted in the novel.

The lemon symbol was chosen as the object of the research because it appears repeatedly and is closely related to the development of the plot and the psychological condition of the character. Therefore, the symbol is worth studying to reveal the representation of hope, survival, emotional comfort, and survival in the novel.

Several previous studies have applied Roland Barthes' semiotic approach in examining the meaning of literary works. These studies are the basis as well as a comparison for this research. Previous research entitled *Construction of Emotional and Cultural Meaning in the Novel Lembayung Senja: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis* (Anjani et al., 2025). This research shows that emotional and cultural meanings in novels are constructed through denotations, connotations, and myths of Roland Barthes. The similarity lies in the use of Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics, while the difference is that this study focuses on the analysis of the meaning of the lemon symbol as the main object.

Another study entitled *A Piercean Semiotic Analysis of The Indonesian Edition Cover of As Long As The Lemon Trees Grow* (Hardianti & Sakinah, 2025) analyzed the cover of the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics. In contrast

to this study, this study examines the symbol of the lemon in the content of the novel using Roland Barthes' theory.

The research (Arianti et al., 2021) entitled *Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes in the Novel Trilogy of Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk by Ahmad Tohari* examines the connotative meaning through the semiotic code in the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk Trilogy* using Roland Barthes' semiotics. This study is different because it analyzes lemon symbols through aspects of denotation, connotation, and myth.

Based on previous research, (Anjani et al., 2025) examined emotional and cultural meaning in novels using Roland Barthes' theory, (Hardianti & Sakinah, 2025) analyzed visual meanings on novel covers using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, while (Arianti et al., 2021) examined connotative meaning through semi-code in novels. However, no research has been found that specifically analyzes the meaning of *the lemon* symbol as a central symbol in the content of the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Thus, there is still a research gap regarding the meaning of *the lemon* symbol at the level of denotation, connotation, and myth in the novel.

Based on the research gap, this study offers novelty in the form of an analysis of *the lemon* symbol as the central symbol in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* through three levels of Roland Barthes meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. This research shows that *the lemon* symbol not only represents hope, but also establishes the meaning of scarcity due to war, emotional comfort, cultural identity, and the survival of the Syrian people. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the study of literary semiotics, especially regarding the meaning of symbols in novels with the theme of humanitarian conflict.

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

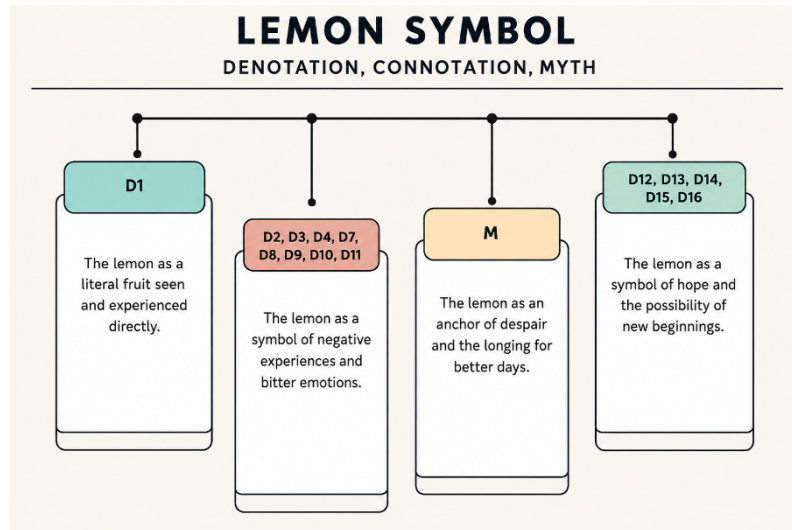


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework of the research. This study analyzes *the symbol of the lemon* in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory through three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The results of the analysis showed that the lemon symbol formed four main categories of meaning, namely the symbol of scarcity and suffering of war, comfort and emotional recovery, identity and memories of the homeland, and hope and sustainability of life.

B. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method (Moleong, 2021). The qualitative approach is used because this research focuses on understanding and interpreting the meaning of the lemon symbol contained in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh. The descriptive method is used to describe and explain the meaning contained in the symbol based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

The source of data in this study is the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh. The research data was in the form of 14 quotes containing the lemon symbol in the novel. Data collection techniques are carried out through literature studies and read-note techniques (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The researcher read the novel carefully, identified the parts that contained the lemon symbol, then recorded and grouped the data according to the focus of the study.

The data analysis technique was carried out with the following steps: (1) identifying data containing lemon symbols; (2) classify data based on the context in which it appears; (3)

analyze the meaning of denotations, connotations, and myths based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory; (4) interpret the results of the analysis to find the meaning of the lemon symbol in the novel; and (5) draw conclusions based on the results of the research.

The validity of the data in this study was carried out by theoretical triangulation and repeated rereading (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). The triangulation theory is carried out by comparing the meaning of the lemon symbol found in the novel with Roland Barthes' concept of semiotics, especially in the aspects of denotation, connotation, and myth. Meanwhile, repeated rereading is carried out by repeatedly rereading the data to ensure the accuracy of identification, consistency of interpretation, and suitability of the meaning obtained with the context of the story in the novel.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The results show that the lemon symbol in Zoulfa Katouh's novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* appears 14 times in various contexts. The appearance is in the form of lemons as food, drinks, body aromas, lemon trees, and symbols of the sustainability of life. The research data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on the Appearance of the Lemon Symbol in the Novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*

Code	Text Snippets	Page
D1	Three wrinkled lemons and a plastic piece of pita bread that has dried even though it has not sunbathed side by side on the shelf. That's all that's sold in supermarkets	7
D2	She held up a glass of cold lemon, and the diamond ring on her finger shimmered.	186
D3	My legs weren't strong yet, and I almost tripped over, but Kenan slipped his arm under mine, supported me so that my cheeks were against his jacket, the jacket felt soft from wear, and I inhaled the scent. Lemon. Somehow, Kenan's body emitted a fresh lemon-like scent, and the scent gave me a sense of comfort when my panic raged.	197
D4	He wrapped his jacket over my shoulders, and I was immersed in the warmth of his body that was still left in the inner layer of the jacket. Lemon. The scent disguised my regrets, muffled the screams of the people I failed to save, and blurred the Vague Images covered in blood in the hospital bed.	198
D5	I closed my eyes, inhaling the scent of lemon from his jacket, hoping this would be enough to return the darkness to its place.	244
D6	Yusuf got the highest score and told everyone about the lemon trees	260

	in Homs.	
D7	My breath was choked, the scent of lemon filled my nose.	261
D8	Why do you always smell lemony?	261
D9	It is flavored with smoke, sarin gas, and lemon	272
D10	Each grain of lemon will bring a child and the lemon will never go extinct	289
D11	The scent of lemon wafting from her body filled the distance between us and she lifted my chin	362
D12	I curled up close to him, while we finished the lemons	437
D13	Each lemon will sprout new buds, and the lemon will never go extinct.	458
D14	Lemons take time, Kenan.	460

Description: D = data

Based on Table 1, 14 data points were found containing *lemon* symbols. After being analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, as many as 13 data showed symbolic meanings that could be grouped into four categories, namely symbols of scarcity and suffering of war, comfort and emotional recovery, identity and memories of the homeland, and hope and sustainability of life. Meanwhile, D2 only shows the denotative meaning, namely lemon as a drink, so it is not discussed further because it does not show the dominant symbolic meaning.

Based on the results of the analysis of 13 data that have symbolic meaning, the researcher grouped the meaning of the lemon symbol into four main categories as follows.

1. Lemon as a symbol of scarcity and the suffering of war.
2. Lemon as a symbol of comfort and emotional recovery.
3. Lemon as a symbol of identity and memories of the homeland.
4. Lemon as a symbol of hope and sustainability of life.

The four categories are the result of a synthesis of researchers based on all data analyzed through three levels of Roland Barthes' meaning, thus illustrating the development of the function of the lemon symbol throughout the narrative of the novel.

2. Discussion

Lemon as a symbol of scarcity and the suffering of war

This meaning appears in the quote: "Three wrinkled lemons and a plastic piece of pita bread that has dried even though it is not yet moldy side by side on the shelf. That's all that's sold in supermarkets" (D1).

Denotatively, lemons are interpreted as fruits sold in supermarkets. However, the small number and the cramped condition indicate the limited food due to the war. At the level of

connotation, the lemon symbolizes suffering, crisis, and the difficulty of maintaining a normal life in the midst of conflict. As for the mythical level, lemons represent the reality of the Syrian people who have to survive in conditions of deprivation due to the prolonged war.

According to (AS & Umayya, 2011), in Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, signs are not only interpreted denotatively, but also develop into connotative and mythical meanings. In this context, lemons are no longer interpreted as fruits, but rather as a symbol of the suffering and crisis experienced by the Syrian people as a result of the war. This finding expands on the study of Roland Barthes' semiotics because it shows that the lemon symbol not only functions as a physical object, but also represents the humanitarian crisis caused by war.

These findings are in contrast to research (Anjani et al., 2025) that interpreted symbols in novels as representations of emotions and culture. In this study, the lemon symbol develops into a representation of the humanitarian crisis caused by war, thus showing that the meaning of the symbol is not only shaped by the cultural context, but also by the conflict situation behind the story.

This shows that the meaning of myth according to Barthes is formed through the social construction that develops in society. In this novel, the lemon becomes a sign that represents the reality of the life of the Syrian people who live in limitations due to the war, so that its meaning expands beyond the literal function as a fruit.

Lemon as a symbol of comfort and emotional recovery

This meaning can be seen in quotes D3, D4, D5, D7, D8, D9, and D11, which describe the scent of lemon in Kenan. One of them is as follows. "Somehow, Kenan's body emits a fresh lemon-like scent, and that scent gives me a sense of comfort when my panic rages" (D3).

Denotatively, lemon is present as an inherent scent on Kenan's body. Connotatively, the scent provides a sense of security, tranquility, and a refuge for Salama when haunted by war trauma. Lemon becomes the emotional link between Salama and Kenan. On a mythical level, lemons build the belief that affection and the presence of those closest to them can be a source of strength to survive even the most difficult situations.

(Alfandi et al., 2024) explain that in Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, connotative meanings are formed through the relationship of signs to emotional experiences and cultural contexts. Therefore, the scent of lemon in the character of Kenan not only indicates the scent of the body, but also symbolizes a sense of security, comfort, and emotional support for Salama.

This finding shows that Zoulfa Katouh consistently uses the lemon symbol as a marker of a safe space for the character of Salama. In the midst of a war situation filled with fear and loss, the scent of lemon is always present as a symbol of calm and protection. Thus, the lemon forms opposition to the atmosphere of war, reinforcing the psychological conflict experienced by the main character. The findings show that the meaning of symbols is greatly influenced by the context of their appearance in the story. In this novel, the lemon is no longer understood as a physical object, but turns into a sign that builds an emotional connection between Salama and Kenan and presents a sense of security in the midst of a war situation.

Lemon as a symbol of identity and memories of the homeland

This meaning is seen in the quote: "Joseph got the highest score and told everyone about the lemon trees in Homs" (D6). At the level of denotation, the quote refers to the presence of lemon trees in Homs. Connotatively, lemons became a symbol of memories of childhood, home, and peaceful life before the war destroyed everything. On a mythical level, lemons represent the collective identity of Syrian people that remains attached even though they live under the threat of conflict and loss.

(Aryani et al., 2026) explains that in Roland Barthes' semiotics, myth is a system of meaning that represents cultural values and ideologies through signs. In this study, lemon trees not only represent plants, but also become a symbol of the identity, memories, and attachment of the Syrian people to their homeland.

The findings show that the lemon symbol serves as a medium that connects the characters' personal experiences with the collective identity of Syrian society. The presence of lemon trees reminds the characters of life before the war while at the same time confirming that the memory of the homeland survives even though its physical space has changed due to the conflict.

Thus, the lemon symbol not only represents the place of origin of the figure, but also becomes a representation of a cultural identity that continues to live on through memory. This shows that symbols can maintain the collective meaning of society even though social and geographical conditions have changed due to war.

Lemon as a symbol of hope and sustainability of life

This meaning is evident in the quotes "Every lemon will carry a child and a lemon will never go extinct" (D10) and "Every lemon will bring forth new shoots, and lemons will never go

extinct" (D13).

Denotatively, lemons are understood as fruits that have seeds and are capable of producing new shoots. Connotatively, lemons symbolize growth, regeneration, patience, and hope for a better future. On a mythical level, lemons have become a symbol of the survival of the Syrian people, that life will continue despite the war that has taken many lives.

This meaning is also supported by D12 which describes the activity of enjoying lemons together as a symbol of emotional closeness and hope for a return to normal life. Meanwhile, D14 ("Lemons take time, Kenan.") show that lemon growth becomes a metaphor that hope, recovery, and life require process, patience, and time to grow.

This shows that the meaning of myth according to Roland Barthes reflects not only the literal meaning, but also the values and beliefs that live in society. The lemon symbol represents hope and belief that life will continue even in the midst of war.

In contrast to the meaning of the lemon symbol in the previous category which emphasizes suffering and identity, in this part the lemon develops into a metaphor for the continuity of life. The growth of lemon trees is a picture that the recovery process takes time, but hope for the future can still grow even in a situation full of destruction.

These findings show that the lemon symbol undergoes a development of meaning throughout the storyline. At the beginning of the novel the lemon is associated with scarcity due to war, while at the end the lemon develops into a symbol of regeneration, hope, and sustainability of life. These changes show that the meaning of signs is dynamic according to the narrative context as explained in Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Overall, the results of the study show that the lemon symbol is a central symbol that undergoes a transformation of meaning throughout the novel's plot. Through Roland Barthes' three levels of meaning, the symbol develops from a representation of everyday objects to a symbol of scarcity due to war, emotional comfort, cultural identity, to the hope of the sustainability of life. These findings show that the process of interpreting signs is dynamic and influenced by the development of narratives and the experiences of the characters in the story.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that *the lemon* symbol in Zoulfa Katouh's novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* has a layered meaning based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. At the level of denotation,

lemon is interpreted as fruits, drinks, aromas, and trees that are present in various events of the story. At the level of connotation, the lemon symbol represents scarcity and suffering due to war, comfort and emotional recovery, identity and memories of the homeland, and hope for a better life. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, lemons represent the survival of the Syrian people who continue to maintain hope, humanity, and survival in the midst of a protracted war conflict. Thus, the lemon symbol not only serves as a supporting element of the story, but also becomes a sign that builds a deep meaning regarding the humanitarian experience of the Syrian people.

This research shows that the use of simple symbols can convey the values of humanity, resilience, and optimism, while enriching the study of literary semiotics, especially the analysis of symbols in contemporary literary works. Thus, this research contributes to the study of literary semiotics by showing that lemon symbols form a network of meanings that develop from aspects of denotation, connotation to myth according to the development of novel narratives. Further research is suggested to examine other symbols in this novel or compare the use of symbols in conflict-themed novels using different semiotic approaches. Thus, an understanding of the representation of human experience in literary works can be obtained more comprehensively.

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