E-Clue *Journal of English, Culture, Language, Literature,and Education* published by English Education Department Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Manado, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 134-148

A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis of Elphaba's Mythological Construction in the Movie *"Wicked"*

Esse Shalsadilla[1], La Sunra[2*], & Muh. Safar Nur[3]

[1]*English Education, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia*
Email: esseshlsdlla22@gmail.com

[2]*English Education, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia*
Email: la.sunra@unm.ac.id

[3]*English Education, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia*
Email: muhsafarnur@unm.ac.id

ARTICLE HISTORY

Receive : 09 February 2026
Accepted: 10 June 2026
Published: 20 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Connotation
Denotation
Myth
Roland Barthes
Semiotic Signs

LICENSE

Copyright © 2026 **authors**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the semiotic signs used to construct the myth of Elphaba as the Wicked Witch in the film *Wicked* and to explain how this mythical construction functions within the film's social context. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of denotation, connotation, and myth. Data were collected from selected scenes representing Elphaba's character and analyzed through repeated viewing and transcription. The analysis reveals 15 semiotic signs, classified into six categories: physiological signs (e.g., green skin), visual signs (e.g., all-black clothing), artifactual signs (e.g., black pointed hat, flying broom), behavioral signs (e.g., strange dance, uncontrollable magic), linguistic signs (e.g., "Oz Dies" message), and atmospheric signs (e.g., father's death). The dominance of negative connotations such as green skin being associated with strangeness and danger indicates that the film leverages social prejudice to shape public perception. Mythologically, these signs are used by ruling figures (the Wizard and Madame Morrible) to label Elphaba as evil, diverting attention from their own corruption. The findings suggest that *Wicked* constructs the myth of Elphaba not only for narrative engagement but also to critique how society judges individuals based on appearance and conformity, offering a deeper reflection on morality, identity, and the social construction of wickedness.

***Corresponding author**: la.sunra@unm.ac.id

Citation in APA style: Shalsadilla, E., Sunra, L., & Nur, M. S. (2026). A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis of Elphaba's Mythological Construction in the Movie *"Wicked"*. *Journal of English Culture, Language, Literature and Education, 14(1), 134-148.* https://doi.org/10.53682/d514sx12

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is the study of signs and how they produce meaning in communication. It encompasses the analysis and interpretation of signs in various contexts, including art, literature, media, advertising, and everyday life (Prasetyo,

2023). In media such as film, semiotics helps us understand how visual, audio, and narrative elements shape meaning for the audience. According to Mudjiono, semiotics studies how meaning is formed through sign systems, whether in visual form, text, or a series of scenes in films (Yuwono et al., 2025). As noted by Kevinia et al. (2024), signs are diverse, including songs, dialogue, notes, logos, images, facial expressions, and gestures. Therefore, every object, color, symbol, and dialogue in a film can be considered a "sign" that carries specific meaning, which can be interpreted at various levels.

This study focuses on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, a leading framework in the field. As explained by Septiana (2019), Barthes distinguished two main levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal or first meaning of a sign what is directly visible or explicitly contained in the object or symbol. Connotation is an additional, culturally and emotionally shaped meaning that arises from interpretation based on social and cultural context. According to Barthes, the signifier of the connotative sign is the key factor in connotation (Riwu & Pujiati, 2018). Furthermore, Barthes introduced myth as a third layer of meaning, expanding signification into the realm of ideology and culture. A myth is a narrative or social construct that adds meaning to signs and symbols in society. Myth and ideology share similar concepts because both operate at the level of connotation. In fact, according to Barthes, a powerful myth becomes an ideology (Husaina et al., 2018). In this process, myth naturalizes ideological values, making specific messages seem normal and common sense.

The film *Wicked* was chosen for this study because it presents rich themes surrounding identity, morality, and power. It explores complex symbols related to power dynamics, prejudice, and the nature of good and wicked, making it fertile ground for examining how meaning is constructed through visual elements. The film presents the backstories of two witches, Glinda and Elphaba, who represent two sides of the moral spectrum: good and wicked. As stated by Siti (2025), the film presents characters who are neither entirely good nor entirely wicked, creating space for the audience to reflect on long-held values of goodness. Among these two main characters, this study focuses on Elphaba, the figure of the wicked witch. The film also explores the struggle against social pressure and how society shapes perceptions based on appearance and actions.

The character of Elphaba was chosen because she embodies the mythical construct of the Wicked Witch, shaped by physical difference and marginalization. Denotatively, Elphaba is identified by her green skin; connotatively, the people of Oz associate that color with strangeness, threat, and a curse. Through physiological and artifactual signs such as her black clothing and magical powers Elphaba's identity is constructed by those in power as a public enemy and a dangerous Wicked Witch. Thus, analyzing Elphaba is crucial to uncovering how the "wicked" label is actually

a product of social labelling and manipulation that obscures the truth behind her actions.

Previous studies on *Wicked* and semiotics include Sisiana and Febrian (2024), who focused on social criticism and stereotypes using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach. Siti (2025) analyzed the moral development of Elphaba and Glinda using Kohlberg's theory. Sanchez (2026) examined two principles associated with witches in classic fairy tales: the "mystery of ugliness" (unattractive appearance symbolizing inner evil) and the "defamation of magic" (portraying magic as dangerous). However, none of these studies specifically explored how the mythical character of Elphaba is constructed as a wicked witch through Barthes' semiotic approach.

Consequently, this study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing how the film *Wicked* constructs the myth of Elphaba as an wicked witch partly because of her status as a green-skinned minority who is perceived as strange. It also examines how the film reflects dominant ideologies about evil and challenges them, opening space for more diverse interpretations. Thus, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into how *Wicked* contributes to the discussion of wickedness and how we understand Elphaba in a broader context.

Based on the background above, the researcher formulates two research questions:

1. What semiotic signs are used to construct the myth of wickedness through the character Elphaba?
2. How do these signs function mythologically within the social context of the film *Wicked*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs and the process of signification. It is rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916/1959) structural linguistic theory, which views language as a relational system between signifier and signified. According to Saussure, semiology is the science that studies the role of signs as part of social life (Soemantri & Machdalena, 2020), including what signs are and what laws govern their formation. Meaning is not intrinsic but formed through differences between signs in a cultural code system. The semiotic approach is not limited to verbal language but also includes non-verbal elements such as color, costume, and movement, all of which contribute to the construction of cultural myths. As Danesi (2004) states, a sign is something such as a color, gesture, wink, object, or mathematical equation that represents something other than itself. Saussure emphasizes that signs are arbitrary; the relationship between signifier and signified is socially conventionalized.

Roland Barthes' Theory

Roland Barthes expanded Saussure's semiotic theory by introducing myth as a second-level semiotic system, in which denotative signs (first level) acquire ideological content through connotation. According to Barthes, language is a system of signs that stores the assumptions held by a particular society at a particular time (Sobur, 2013). Barthes distinguishes three core elements: denotation, connotation, and myth.

- Denotation: the literal or descriptive meaning of a sign, often considered the most basic and objective. Denotation forms the basis for deeper layers of meaning.
- Connotation: an additional meaning that emerges from denotation, shaped by cultural and ideological contexts. According to Hoed (2014), connotation arises because the user of the sign gives a new interpretation based on personal desires, knowledge, and social conventions. Connotation is dynamic and context-dependent, and it can reinforce existing ideologies.

Myth: the second-order semiological system. Myth is constructed from the first level (language), where the material aspect (signifier) and mental aspect (signified) form a denotative sign. Myth then takes this sign and gives it new, ideological meaning, naturalizing it as truth.

Mythological Construction

Mythology is the study of myths, including their origins, functions, and meanings in cultural contexts. Figures such as Müller, Lang, and Tylor contributed to the development of mythology as an academic discipline. Tylor, considered the father of the cognitive process in myth formation, focused on how myths are remembered and passed down. Mythological construction refers to the systematic process by which myths are constructed, naturalized, and perpetuated in cultural narratives. According to Von Hendy (1992), the meaning of a mythical concept is culturally constructed. Although a concept may seem natural within a particular belief system, it is the result of cultural construction. This process involves a complex interaction between individual and collective consciousness, in which myths serve to reflect and shape reality. As Okorova (2019) notes, citing E. Cassirer, myths have always been alongside humans, hiding in the darkness, then emerging when the time is right.

The Myth of "Wicked"

The myths of good and wicked are fundamental cultural constructs that shape our understanding of the moral world. Within this binary opposition, "good" is associated with positive values such as conformity, beauty, and social acceptance, while "wicked" symbolizes difference, darkness, and rejection. This phenomenon is reflected in *Wicked* through the characters of Glinda and Elphaba. Glinda's image as a "good witch" is constructed through her ability to adapt to social standards. As

Kruse and Prettyman (2008) argue, Glinda dedicates herself to strengthening her popularity, where self-worth is determined more by public perception than by ability. Glinda's compliance with societal norms of beauty and behavior makes her a symbol of ideal "goodness." In contrast, Elphaba is labeled a wicked witch simply because she is different. Her green skin is considered unusual and causes society to reject her. Because of this challenging appearance, she struggles to form social relationships, until finally the label of "wicked" is publicly confirmed by Madame Morrible.

The Role of Social Context in Shaping Mythological Construction

Social context provides the dynamic foundation for mythological construction. Norms, values, and historical events constrain and enrich the process of myth formation. Without social context, mythological constructions would lose their ideological depth, as myths are always tied to broader power structures. Myths help humans adapt and integrate into their environment by providing hope, regulating behavior, and facilitating social activity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning given by individuals or groups to a social or human issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This approach is highly relevant because the main focus is on deep understanding of meaning and interpretation, not on measuring elements quantitatively. It allows for subjective and contextual interpretation, which is essential for Barthesian semiotic analysis.

Data were collected by watching *Wicked: Part One* (2024) and *Wicked: For Good* (2025) multiple times. Twenty-four scenes featuring Elphaba were purposively selected based on their potential to reveal semiotic signs. Each scene was transcribed, and signs were identified according to Barthes' three levels. The analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) denotative description of the sign, (2) connotative interpretation grounded in cultural codes, and (3) mythological analysis linking the sign to broader ideologies. The identified signs were then grouped into six categories (physiological, visual, artifactual, behavioural, linguistic, and atmospheric) based on their nature. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher conducted repeated viewings and discussed preliminary interpretations with a research supervisor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis identified 15 semiotic signs that construct the myth of Elphaba as the Wicked Witch. These signs are classified into six categories: physiological, visual,

artifactual, behavioural, linguistic, and atmospheric signs. Each sign is presented below with its denotation, connotation, and mythological meaning, along with the scene timestamp.

Physiological Signs

Physiological signs refer to biological conditions, natural physical characteristics, or organic changes in a character's body. These signs are inherent to the subject's physical existence. In Barthes' theory, myths operate by taking something natural and imbuing it with cultural meaning.

Extract 1 – Elphaba's green skin (*Wicked: Part One*, 00:15:35)

Denotation: Elphaba is depicted with green skin, in contrast to other characters at Shiz University.

Connotation: Green is often seen as strange, repulsive, dangerous, and threatening.

Myth: Elphaba's green skin becomes a symbol of evil. The people of Oz use this physical difference to ostracize, stigmatize, and ultimately demonize her. As Shufelt (2007) asserts, in American popular culture, green skin is no longer simply a biological pigment but has shifted to a symbol that evokes concepts of evil, danger, and inhumanity. This physical characteristic creates quick prejudice that ignores a person's true nature.

Extract 2 – Boq's transformation into an iron man (*Wicked: For Good*, 00:44:48)

Denotation: Nessarose recites a random spell and turns Boq into an iron man.

Connotation: The transformation symbolizes cruelty that strips away humanity.

Myth: This incident reinforces the myth that the magic associated with Elphaba is the source of suffering. Although Elphaba does not directly cast the spell, she becomes the target of accusations simply because the Grimmerie is in her possession. Boq, transformed into an iron man, blames Elphaba, mythologically portraying her as the cause of his horrific transformation. This obscures the fact that Nessarose initiated the mistake. As Barthes notes, myths operate by eliminating complexity, and Elphaba's pre-existing label as "strange" makes her an easier target.

Visual Signs

Visual signs encompass signs constructed through outward appearance or deliberately displayed aesthetics. Fashion and clothing are powerful sign systems in constructing myths. Barthes argues that clothing is a visual language system that conveys connotative messages about moral and social identity.

Extract 3 – All-black clothing (*Wicked: Part One*, 00:23:46)

Denotation: Dark-colored clothing worn every day.

Connotation: Black is associated with darkness, mystery, evil, and mourning.
Myth: Elphaba's black attire reinforces her image as a wicked witch. In Oz, where bright colors are the norm, her black clothing distinguishes her as an outcast or someone rejected by society. As Krauss and Schulman (1997) note, minority groups are often expected to conform to majority perspectives; Elphaba's refusal to adopt bright colors marks her as an outsider.

Extract 4 – Long black nails (*Wicked: Part One*, 00:27:51)
Denotation: Long nails painted black.
Connotation: Black signifies evil; long, sharp nails suggest aggression and harm.
Myth: According to Dahl (2007), true witches in folklore hide sharp claws under gloves. Elphaba's long black nails serve as a reminder that behind a human mask lies a dangerous instinct. The black color is seen as a sign of dark magic seeping out. These nails become deadly weapons, reinforcing the myth that Elphaba is a dangerous figure to be avoided.

Artifactual Signs

Artifactual signs refer to objects or items owned or used by a character. Through repeated use within a culture, these objects become artifacts that carry specific myths. Barthes explains that myths strip an object of its original meaning and fill it with new ideological meaning.

Extract 5 – Strange glasses (*Wicked: Part One*, 00:09:37)
Denotation: Vision aids.
Connotation: Glasses suggest studiousness, intelligence, shyness, or a need to shield oneself.
Myth: In Oz, where appearance is highly valued, Elphaba's asymmetrical glasses mark her as an outsider. As Kaplan (1997) argues, the "Imperial Gaze" perceives physically different individuals as a threat. Glasses also connote intelligence, which in Oz is seen as dangerous; Elphaba is the most intelligent and critical character at Shiz University.

Extract 6 – Long black robe (*Wicked: Part One*, 02:25:33)
Denotation: A long black cloak touching the floor.
Connotation: A cloak conceals the body, suggesting secrets. Black implies evil.
Myth: The image of a witch in a black robe is a long-standing stereotype in folklore and popular culture. Feng and Murakami (2023) found that over 90% of AI-generated witch images depicted them wearing long robes. Elphaba's robe makes her appear larger, stronger, and more intimidating, reinforcing her reputation as a wicked witch.

Extract 7 – Black pointed hat (*Wicked: Part One*, 01:09:55)
Denotation: A tall, black, pointed hat with a wide brim.
Connotation: A top hat at a modern party suggests someone who does not understand social etiquette.
Myth: In Western culture, the black pointed hat is a universal symbol of the wicked witch. According to Feng and Murakami (2023), this hat is a key component in constructing visual stereotypes that instantly establish a character as a wicked witch. Elphaba, by wearing the hat, unconsciously places herself within the confines of societal prejudice. She is not merely donning an accessory but accepting the narrative of evil that society has imposed upon her.

Extract 8 – Flying broom (*Wicked: Part One*, 02:27:47)
Denotation: A traditional broom with a wooden handle and twigs.
Connotation: Flying brooms evoke magic and power; only witches can fly.
Myth: The association between witches and brooms dates back to the 15th century. Historical records indicate that a 1451 illustration by French poet Martin Le Franc was the first Western artwork to depict a witch on a broom (Feng & Murakami, 2023). In *Wicked*, Elphaba's flying broom, used to fight Mrs. Morrible and the Wizard, is seen as a threat by the people of Oz. Although the broom is a tool of resistance, a society resistant to change labels her rebellion as a criminal act.

Behavioural Signs

Behavioral signs encompass actions, gestures, or character behaviors. These signs convey connotative messages about who is socially acceptable and who is considered deviant. Barthes emphasizes that an action becomes meaningful when contrasted with "normal" actions.

Extract 9 – Uncontrollable magical powers (*Wicked: Part One*, 00:23:17)
Denotation: Elphaba tries to stop a wheelchair using magic.
Connotation: Public use of uncontrollable magic frightens people.
Myth: Elphaba's accidental magic is misinterpreted and exploited to create a negative image. According to labeling theory (Fitch, 2010), society uses symbols (here, accidental magic) to define a deviant identity. Elphaba's inability to control her inner impulses is seen as a sign that she poses an unpredictable and dangerous threat to the social order of Oz.

Extract 10 – Strange dance (*Wicked: Part One*, 01:11:47)
Denotation: Elphaba performs stiff movements among students.
Connotation: The dance suggests a lack of social understanding or deliberate defiance.

Myth: In American culture, there is an expectation of conformity in public spaces. Elphaba's odd dance violates social norms, and her determination to continue despite mockery is seen as arrogance. In many world mythologies, witches are believed to do everything in reverse; if humans dance gracefully, witches dance stiffly or strangely.

Extract 11 – Magic-fuelled rage (*Wicked: Part One*, 01:31:34)
Denotation: Elphaba slams her fist on the table in anger.
Connotation: Her magical powers are tied to her emotions.
Myth: The people of Oz do not remember that Elphaba was angry because she was defending a lion cub; they only remember that she put the cub to sleep and took it away. Although her actions were motivated by justice, the witnesses viewed her as a wicked witch acting on a whim. This illustrates how power driven by emotion is labeled a sign of evil rather than compassion.

Extract 12 – Spells causing suffering to animals (*Wicked: Part One*, 02:07:25)
Denotation: Elphaba gives monkeys wings using a spell.
Connotation: The monkeys' pain portrays her as cruel and lacking empathy.
Myth: In American culture, there is high sensitivity toward animal welfare; animals are viewed as symbols of purity and vulnerability (Wrenn, 2019). Harming helpless creatures is seen as a primary indicator of moral bankruptcy. Moreover, this incident is a strategy for creating an enemy deliberately designed by the rulers of Oz to unify the nation under the Wizard's leadership.

Extract 13 – Stealing the spellbook (Grimmerie) (*Wicked: Part One*, 02:17:26)
Denotation: Elphaba flees with the Grimmerie.
Connotation: Stealing the spellbook is outright defiance against Oz's rules.
Myth: Mrs. Morrible's announcement of the theft is not a mere criminal report but a strategy to construct a new identity for Elphaba. As Kruse and Prettyman (2008) note, Elphaba pays a high price for daring to defy authority; she is definitively defined as an evil figure who must be destroyed. This phenomenon reflects "trial by media" (Sarıbas, 2025), where dramatized representations of criminality influence public perception.

Linguistic Signs

Linguistic signs refer to signs in the form of language, writing, or naming. Barthes explains that a text guides the reader or viewer through the various meanings available in an image, and a myth is most effective when expressed through words.

Extract 14 – The "Oz Dies" message in the sky (*Wicked: For Good*, 00:21:40)
Denotation: A message appears in the sky, causing panic.

Connotation: "Oz Dies" implies total destruction and chaos.
Myth: The message mythologically links Elphaba to the threat of total destruction. Although she is not directly responsible, she becomes a symbol of chaos. The people of Oz accept this narrative as truth without questioning its origin. In reality, the original message "Our Wizard Lies" was manipulated by Mrs. Morrible. Through mythologization, Elphaba is transformed from an individual who sought to protect animals and expose lies into the embodiment of chaos and disaster.

Atmospheric Signs

Atmospheric signs relate to environmental situations or events surrounding a character.

Extract 15 – Father's death (*Wicked: For Good*, 00:36:54)
Denotation: Elphaba does not attend her father's funeral.
Connotation: Her father's death from shame signifies family rejection.
Myth: Elphaba's absence from the funeral is reduced to the implication that she is disobedient and heartless. This overlooks the possibility of complex motives. Her father's death reinforces the myth that Elphaba is a harbinger of disaster, even to her own family. The people of Oz interpret this as proof of her indifference, reinforcing her image as a selfish and unempathetic figure—traits typically associated with the Wicked Witch.

Discussion

Semiotic Signs Constructing the Myth of Elphaba as the Wicked Witch

This study successfully identified 15 semiotic signs systematically classified into six main categories: physiological signs, visual signs, artifactual signs, behavioural signs, linguistic signs, and atmospheric signs. These signs were used to build the image of Elphaba as a wicked witch through her distinctive physical characteristics—such as her green skin, strange glasses, all-black clothing, long black nails, black pointed hat, black cloak, and flying broomstick—which visually marked her as a different and foreign figure in Oz. As Sobur (2013) notes, Barthes views language and visual signs as systems that store societal assumptions; here, Elphaba's appearance stores the assumption that difference equals danger.

Furthermore, her strange dancing, uncontrollable magical powers, magic-fueled rage, spells causing suffering to animals, theft of the Grimmerie, the "Oz Dies" message in the sky, her father's death, and Boq's transformation into an iron man collectively reinforce her myth as a dangerous and uncontrollable figure. These signs not only mark her difference but also associate her with negative connotations—evil, darkness, and destruction—which are then naturalized into the

myth that she is inherently evil and brings disaster. This aligns with Hoed's (2014) argument that connotation arises from cultural and personal interpretation, and with Okorova's (2019) observation that myths emerge from collective consciousness to shape reality.

Mythological Functioning of the Signs in the Social Context of Wicked

These semiotic signs function mythologically by utilizing Roland Barthes' two-stage system of signification to naturalize certain ideologies within the social context of the film *Wicked*. At the connotative level, Elphaba's physical differences are associated with darkness and menace, which then develops into the myth that she is inherently evil because she does not meet the standards of normality in Oz society (Barthes, 1972). The use of semiotic signs that consistently associate Elphaba with negative connotations shows that the film effectively utilizes existing cultural codes to construct myths about wickedness. As Danesi (2004) emphasizes, a sign represents something other than itself; here, green skin and black clothing come to represent moral corruption and threat.

The findings indicate that the construction of the myth of wickedness in *Wicked* is not merely intended for narrative aesthetics, but rather as a profound reflection of social prejudice and power dynamics. The negative signs surrounding Elphaba illustrate how society often judges someone's morality solely based on outward appearance and compliance with general rules. This resonates with Kruse and Prettyman's (2008) analysis of how women in leadership are often labelled as "wicked" when they defy social expectations. In *Wicked*, the Wizard and Madame Morrible exploit these signs to create a scapegoat, diverting public attention from their own corruption a strategy that aligns with Barthes' concept of myth as a tool for naturalizing ideology (Husaina et al., 2018).

This study positions itself between existing research on *Wicked* and semiotic analysis. Compared to Sisiana and Febrian (2024), who explored social criticism and stereotypes using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach, this study adopts Roland Barthes' framework to analyze the mythological construction of Elphaba. While Saussure focuses on the structural relationship between signifier and signified (Soemantri & Machdalena, 2020), Barthes extends this to uncover how myths naturalize ideology. Thus, this study offers a deeper ideological critique.

Similarly, Siti (2025) analyzed the moral development of Elphaba and Glinda using Kohlberg's psychological theory, but did not specifically explore how these characters are constructed as myths through Barthesian semiotics. This study provides a more focused and in-depth insight into the mythological construction of Elphaba and how it influences culture and ideology through myth formation. Meanwhile, Sanchez (2026) examined two principles associated with witches in classic fairy tales: "The Ugly Mystique" (unattractive appearance symbolizing inner

evil) and "Vilification of Witchcraft" (magic as dangerous). The present study complements Sanchez by showing how these principles are semiotically encoded in *Wicked* and then naturalized as truth.

Although this study provides deep insights into the mythical construction of the main character, several limitations should be noted. First, the analysis is limited to the visual and narrative representations of Elphaba; consequently, the roles of supporting characters such as Mrs. Morrible and the Wizard in shaping the narrative have not been fully explored. Future research could examine how these figures use similar semiotic strategies to construct their own authority.

Second, this analysis is centered solely on the Barthesian semiotic framework, which relies heavily on the researcher's cultural context and experience in interpreting the signs present in the film. As Prasetyo (2023) notes, semiotic interpretation is always situated within a particular cultural lens. Different cultural backgrounds might produce different readings of the same signs.

Third, this study is limited in its ability to capture the perspectives of a broader audience. The diversity of viewers' cultural backgrounds can lead to differing interpretations and deconstructions of the myths surrounding the symbols in the film. Future reception studies could investigate how Indonesian audiences, for example, interpret Elphaba's green skin and black clothing compared to Western audiences.

Finally, while Barthes' theory effectively deconstructs the myth of the Wicked Witch, it does not offer a prescriptive solution for countering such myths. Therefore, further research might explore how critical media literacy education can help audiences recognize and resist these mythological constructions in popular culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the film *Wicked* effectively employs various semiotic elements to construct the concept of wickedness. Through the lens of Roland Barthes' theory, this study successfully identified 15 semiotic signs classified into six main categories: physiological signs, visual signs, artifactual signs, behavioral signs, linguistic signs, and atmospheric signs. An analysis of the denotative, connotative, and mythological levels of Elphaba's character reveals how the film utilizes existing cultural codes to construct a myth.

Elphaba is portrayed as a wicked witch through semiotic signs such as her striking green skin, the dark clothing she always wears, and her rebellious attitude toward the rules. Within the social context of Oz, these signs serve not merely as film decorations but function to legitimize power. Mythologically, they act as tools of political manipulation by ruling figures—the Wizard and Madame Morrible—to shape public opinion. By labelling Elphaba as wicked through physical symbols, the rulers successfully divert public attention from actual injustice. This demonstrates

that in Oz society, morality is often determined by an individual's compliance with prevailing standards of appearance and social norms.

Overall, this research has examined how the film *Wicked* constructs the narrative of Elphaba as a wicked witch. The author found that Elphaba is portrayed as a wicked witch through elements that make her appear different and frightening. Essentially, *Wicked* uses these elements to create a powerful narrative about wickedness, illustrating how a film can shape viewers' perceptions of identity and how society often judges based on outward appearance and adherence to norms.

Future research could explore how audiences from different cultural backgrounds interpret Elphaba's myth, or analyze the role of supporting characters (e.g., the Wizard, Madame Morrible) in reinforcing the label of wickedness. Additionally, comparative studies with other film adaptations of witches may further illuminate how myths of evil are semiotically constructed across popular culture.

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dahl, R. (2007). *The witches*. Penguin Puffin Books.

Danesi, M. (2004). *Messages, signs, and meaning: A basic textbook in semiotics and communication theory* (3rd ed.). Canadian Scholars' Press.

Feng, X., & Murakami, M. (2023). Stereotypes: Make witches wicked again. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Applications (IJAIA)*, 14(2), 1–15.

Fitch, F. (2010). Laggards, labeling and limitations: Re-connecting labeling deviance theory with Deweyan pragmatism. *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 41, 17–28.

Hoed, B. H. (2014). *Semiotik & dinamika sosial budaya*. Komunitas Bambu.

Husaina, A., Haes, P. E., Pratiwi, N. I., & Juwita, P. R. (2018). Analisis film Coco dalam teori semiotika Roland Barthes. *Jurnal Ilmiah Dinamika Sosial*, 2(1), 1–15.

Kaplan, E. A. (1997). *Looking for the other: Feminism, film, and the imperial gaze*. Routledge.

Kevinia, C., Putri Syahara, P. S., Aulia, S., & Astari, T. (2024). Analisis teori semiotika Roland Barthes dalam film Miracle in Cell No.7 versi Indonesia. *COMMUSTY Journal of Communication Studies and Society*, 1(2), 38–43.

Krauss, E., & Schulman, M. (1997). Myth of black juror nullification: Racism dressed up in jurisprudential clothing. *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 7, 57–79.

Kruse, S. D., & Prettyman, S. S. (2008). Women, leadership, and power revisiting the Wicked Witch of the West. *Gender and Education*, 20(5), 451–464.

Okorova, V. V. (2019). Mythological foundation of society virtualization. In *Philosophical and methodological challenges of the study of modern society* (pp. 45–58). Liha-Pres.

Prasetyo, H. (2023). Analisis semiotika teori Roland Barthes dalam puisi "Cinta Yang Agung" karya Kahlil Gibran. *Edukasi Lingua Sastra*, 21(2), 183–191.

Riwu, A., & Pujiati, T. (2018). Analisis semiotika Roland Barthes pada film 3 Dara (Kajian semiotika). *Journal LPP UNSADA*, 10(1), 1–15.

Sanchez, M. (2026). The ugly mystique and the vilification of witchcraft in classic fairy tales. *Journal of Folklore and Popular Culture*, 15(1), 45–62.

Sarıbas, S. (2025). Trial by media and the spectacularization of justice: A comparative examination of jury influence and mediated public opinion models in the United States and Turkey. *Uluslararası İnsan Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 8(15), 38–62.

Septiana, R. (2019). *Analisis semiotika Roland Barthes pada film [title]* [Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Indonesia].

Shufelt, C. A. (2007). "*Something Wicked This Way Comes*": *Constructing the witch in contemporary American popular culture* [Doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center.

Sisiana, G. M., & Febrian, F. (2024). Kritik sosial dalam film berjudul Wicked: Sebuah pendekatan analisis semiotik. *Sintaksis: Publikasi Para Ahli Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris*, 3(1), 176–187.

Siti, N. (2025). *An analysis of morality and identity in the Wicked (2024) movie script* [Doctoral dissertation, UNSADA].

Sobur, A. (2013). *Semiotika komunikasi*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Soemantri, Y. S., & Machdalena, S. (2020). Pemaknaan tanda model Saussure dan Peirce pada tanda-tanda yang berkaitan dengan laut: Kajian semiotika. *Metahumaniora*, 10(2), 123–138.

Von Hendy, A. (1992). *The modern construction of myth*. Indiana University Press.

Wrenn, C. L. (2019). Atheism in the American animal rights movement: An invisible majority. *Environmental Values*, 28(6), 715–739.

Yuwono, S., Luik, J. E., & Lesmana, F. (2025). Representation of social inequality in the film "Wicked": Reconfiguring power through fantasy: A semiotic reading. *Journal of Content and Engagement*, 3(1), 222–241