

A Semiotic Analysis on *Leaving Home* Short Film

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze verbal and non-verbal signs in the short film *Leaving Home* using semiotic theories by Saussure (1983) and Barthes (1967). A qualitative descriptive method was applied through observation and note-taking to identify and interpret the signs within the short film. The analysis revealed 20 verbal signs and 20 non-verbal signs, classified into seven denotative meanings and thirty-three connotative meanings. The findings indicate that connotative signs are more dominant, highlighting the reliance on implicit representations of the concept of "home." Verbal and non-verbal elements work together to portray themes of nostalgia, emotional struggle, and identity. This semiotic analysis is an effective approach to uncover layered meanings in short films. The significance of this study lies in its focus on short films a medium less examined in semiotic research while its novelty is shown through exploring how minimal dialogue and visual storytelling construct deep emotional meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental process through which humans exchange information, thoughts, and emotions. It involves both verbal and non-verbal forms, allowing individuals to connect, understand, and influence one another in various social contexts. As stated by Halliday (1978), this dynamic aspect of communication is central to human interaction and is shaped by cultural and social norms. In everyday communication, the way individuals use language often varies depending on the context, the relationship between speakers, and the purpose of the interaction. Levinson (1983) distinguished between explicit messages, which use clear expressions, and implicit ones, which rely on shared knowledge or contextual cues. This highlights the role of semantics in interpreting meaning. Within semantics, semiotics provides a broader analytical lens by exploring how signs convey meaning in various forms of communication (Chandler, 2017).

Semiotics, as the study of signs, examines how meaning is communicated through language, images, gestures, and symbols. Eco (1976) argued that every cultural phenomenon can be studied as a system of signs, while Barthes (1977) emphasized that signs often carry ideological messages shaped by cultural codes. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) noted that meanings are not fixed but are constructed by viewers according to their cultural and social contexts. In short films, these two forms often

combine, where meaning is conveyed not only through dialogue but also through visual storytelling.

Short films are cinematic works that deliver complete narratives or messages in a concise and impactful way. Corrigan and White (2012) noted that short films often focus on a single idea or moment, allowing filmmakers to experiment with creative forms without the narrative demands of feature-length films. Raskin (2002) further explained that short films encourage innovation by relying on minimal dialogue and strong visuals. This potential is illustrated in *Leaving Home* by Jake Wagyu, a short film that explores deep emotional themes through simple verbal expressions and evocative visual storytelling. As Metz (1974) observed, cinema itself functions as a language system, operating through both syntactic and semantic codes.

The objective of this study is to analyze how *Leaving Home* employs verbal and non-verbal signs to construct meaning using the semiotic theories of Saussure (1983) and Barthes (1967). Specifically, this research seeks to demonstrate how short films, despite their brevity, can convey profound messages about identity, memory, and the emotional experience of leaving home.

METHOD AND THEORY

The data of this study were taken from a short film entitled *Leaving Home* by Jake Wagyu, published on YouTube. The film tells the story of a young man who must make a difficult decision to leave his home and family in pursuit of personal growth and independence. The duration of the film is 1 minute 4 seconds and it contains both verbal and non-verbal elements. This study applied a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected through four steps: watching the short film, taking notes on scenes and dialogues containing verbal and non-verbal signs, classifying the data based on types of signs and their meanings, and analyzing the data using semiotic theories by Saussure (1983) and Barthes (1967) to interpret the relationship between denotative and connotative meanings. For data analysis, the study employed the interactive model by Miles et al. (2014, as cited in Marantika, 2025), which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions. The findings were presented in tables to clearly illustrate how each sign functions in conveying meaning throughout the short film.

This study expands upon previous research in semiotic analysis. Artawan and Irwandika (2023) analyzed icons and symbols in Ed's Heinz advertisement using Peirce's semiotic theory and found that cultural context strongly shaped connotative meanings. Similarly, Satriana and Ariyaningsih (2024) examined verbal and visual signs in Skin 1004 skincare advertisements through Barthes' semiotics and Wierzbicka's color theory, showing how language and visuals create associations of purity and beauty. Pratami, Santika, and Utami (2022) applied Saussure and Barthes to Downy advertisements and demonstrated how persuasive phrases and visual elements build a luxurious brand image. In another study, Suryani and Suastini (2023) analyzed tourism magazine advertisements using Saussure and Barthes, identifying verbal and non-verbal signs that function persuasively in marketing contexts. Pratama and Budiarta (2025) investigated Converse shoe advertisements, combining Saussure's semiotics and Barthes' connotation theory with Cerrato's color symbolism. Their study revealed how text, imagery, and color work together to represent individuality, rebellion, and cultural identity. These related studies highlight how semiotic analysis has been widely applied to advertisements, focusing on how verbal and non-verbal elements create persuasive

meanings. However, fewer studies have applied semiotics to short films, which leaves a research gap that this study aims to address through the analysis of *Leaving Home*.

To support the analysis in this study, several relevant theories are used, including:

Semiotic Theory from Saussure (1983)

Saussure defined language as a system of signs composed of two elements: the signifier (the form of the sign, such as a word, sound, or image) and the signified (the concept or meaning represented by the signifier). Both elements are psychological in nature and exist through the connection of form and concept. For example, the word closed on a store door signifies the idea that the store is not open for business. This framework emphasizes how meaning is created through the relationship between form and concept, which becomes essential in analyzing verbal and non-verbal signs in film.

Theory of Meaning from Barthes (1967)

Barthes extended semiotic analysis by distinguishing two levels of meaning: denotation (the literal, direct meaning of a sign) and connotation (the implied or culturally shaped meaning). Denotation explains what is explicitly presented, while connotation reveals hidden associations influenced by culture, emotion, and context. This dual framework enables a deeper interpretation of signs, moving beyond surface meaning to uncover symbolic or ideological messages.

Together, Saussure's and Barthes' theories provide the analytical tools for interpreting how *Leaving Home* constructs meaning through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal signs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis was conducted using data taken from the short film *Leaving Home* by Jake Wagyu. A total of 20 signs were selected and analyzed. Based on the table below, the data are classified into two categories: verbal signs and non-verbal signs (table 1).

Below are several examples from the analysis, showing the verbal and non-verbal signs found in the short film and their interpreted meanings.



Picture 1. Leaving Home Short Film

The first verbal sign is "There's something..." as the signifier. It is categorized as an incomplete declarative sentence that conveys ambiguity and an unspoken emotional pull. The ellipsis leaves the thought unfinished, implying a feeling of attachment that the speaker cannot fully articulate. Connotatively, it suggests a deep, indescribable bond to the idea of "home." According to Saussure (1983), a sign is formed by the connection between the signifier (the form of the word or expression) and the signified (the concept

it represents). In this case, the phrase “There’s something...” functions as a signifier that points to a personal, emotional concept as its signified.

Table 1. The Analysis of Verbal Signs and Non-Verbal Signs in *Leaving Home* Short Film

Scene	Verbal Signs	Non-Verbal Signs
1.	There’s something...	Picture of the back view of a person walking alone on an empty road, centered on the white lane line
2.	Sad about leaving home	Picture shows a person walking away from the camera on a deserted road, placed at the center of the white line
3.	And I can’t place my finger on it	Picture of the person walking alone through a forest.
4.	You know, it’s not a place	Picture shows a person sitting alone by the edge of a lake
5.	That I’ve loved	Picture of the same person sitting by the edge of a lake
6.	But	Picture shows a person wearing a yellow cap and checkered shirt
7.	We don’t really get to choose	Picture of the same person sitting still, facing sideways with a blank or serious look.
8.	Where we...	Picture shows the person is smiling slightly with his eyes closed
9.	Where we grew up	Picture of the person is softly smiling while looking down
10.	And our surroundings	Picture shows the person is still looking down
11.	And the people we meet	Picture shows a person still sitting and looking down
12.	Umm...	Picture shows the back of a person's head and shoulder as they look out across a calm lake
13.	But this place	Picture shows a person sitting on the ground by a lake, leaning back
14.	Will always evoke memories	Picture presents a close up shot of a person
15.	You know,	Picture depicts a serene scene by the lake, where a white swan is sitting on the grass beside several ducks
16.	And it’s not the most picturesque,	Picture shows a natural lakeside scene with a white swan, a group of ducks, and a smaller dark bird
17.	But	Picture of a person walking alone in the forest
18.	I think there’s an art to finding beauty in	Picture a person walking alone through a lush green forest path
19.	Even the most mundane of surroundings.	Picture of a serene lake scene
20.	HOME	Picture shows a calm natural landscape with a grassy foreground

The non-verbal sign in the [Picture 1](#) shows the back view of a person walking alone on an empty road, centered on the white lane line. It depicts a solitary walk, but connotatively it symbolizes a personal journey and emotional solitude. The empty

surroundings and the figure's posture evoke uncertainty and introspection. Barthes (1967) explained that signs can operate on two levels: denotation, or the literal meaning, and connotation, which includes cultural and emotional associations. When combined, the unfinished phrase "There's something..." and the image of isolation reinforce one another. The verbal ambiguity mirrors the character's solitude on the road, creating a layered meaning of searching for identity and belonging. This interplay exemplifies Barthes' view that connotative signs emerge when language and imagery work together to produce symbolic associations.



Picture 2. Leaving Home Short Film

The second verbal sign is "And I can't place my finger on it." This is a declarative sentence expressing uncertainty. Connotatively, it reflects the struggle to define what makes "home" special, suggesting that it is tied to feelings and memories beyond clear articulation. As stated by Saussure (1983), language consists of signs made up of a signifier and a signified. In this case, the phrase functions as the signifier, while the speaker's vague emotional connection to the concept of "home" becomes the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 2](#) shows a person walking alone through a forest. Denotatively, it depicts movement, but connotatively it symbolizes an inner journey and emotional reflection. The dense trees and path represent exploration of the unknown, while the neutral facial expression conveys being emotionally lost. Barthes (1967) argues that images can carry meanings beyond their literal appearance by evoking emotional, cultural, or symbolic associations. Together, the verbal uncertainty and the visual of wandering in nature reinforce each other. The idiom about not being able to "place" something gains depth when paired with the solitary walk, symbolizing an unclear yet emotionally charged search for meaning.



Picture 3. Leaving Home Short Film

The third verbal sign is "You know, it's not a place." This declarative sentence shifts the concept of home from a physical location to an emotional one. Connotatively, it highlights home as relationships and feelings rather than geography. Saussure (1983)

proposed that a verbal sign is composed of the signifier (the actual words spoken) and the signified (the concept or idea they represent). In this case, the sentence serves as a signifier that points to the abstract, emotional concept of “home” as something beyond a tangible space.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 3](#) shows a person sitting alone by the edge of a lake, gazing at the calm water surrounded by greenery. This can be classified as connotative because it suggests emotional and symbolic meaning beyond the literal scene. As Barthes (1967) explained, images evoke cultural and symbolic associations beyond their literal form. The verbal rejection of home as a mere “place” is reinforced by the introspective solitude of the lakeside, producing a shared interpretation that home is an inner state, not a fixed location. The combination emphasizes that home is not fixed in geography but experienced in emotional stillness. The reflective statement is strengthened by the lake scene, where the imagery embodies the idea of home as an inner feeling.



Picture 4. *Leaving Home* Short Film

Another verbal sign is “Where we grew up.” This is a declarative sentence referring directly to the place of childhood. It carries denotative meaning of childhood location, while connotatively evoking nostalgia, identity, and formative memories. Saussure (1983) mentioned that every sign consists of a signifier and a signified. In this case, the phrase acts as the signifier while the associated childhood memories and emotional connections represent the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 4](#) shows the person softly smiling while looking down, still wearing his yellow cap and checkered shirt. His expression appears peaceful and reflective, as if he is thinking about the past. The nostalgic expression resonates with the verbal memory, forming a unified meaning, home as both a literal place of upbringing and a symbolic source of belonging. As shown in Barthes (1967), connotative signs involve cultural and emotional meanings layered on top of the literal image, which is evident in how the subtle facial expression communicates memory, warmth, and a sense of belonging. Together, the phrase about childhood and the nostalgic smile reinforces one another, showing that home is inseparable from memories and formative experiences.

Then comes the verbal sign “Umm...” which is an interjection. It signifies emotional pauses when trying to articulate complex feelings about home. As asserted by Saussure (1983), even simple utterances can be seen as signs where the signifier conveys a psychological or emotional state, and in this case, “Umm...” signifies the speaker’s internal processing and emotional hesitation.



Picture 5. Leaving Home Short Film

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 5](#) shows the back of a person's head and shoulder as they look out across a calm lake surrounded by greenery. The person is wearing a checkered shirt, and a portion of a yellow cap is slightly visible. This can be categorized as a connotative meaning because it conveys a sense of hesitation, reflection, or being lost in thought. Barthes (1967) states that visual elements often communicate layered meanings beyond what is seen directly. The pause in speech and the contemplative posture visually and verbally reinforces each other, presenting home as something emotionally overwhelming and difficult to capture in words.



Picture 6. Leaving Home Short Film

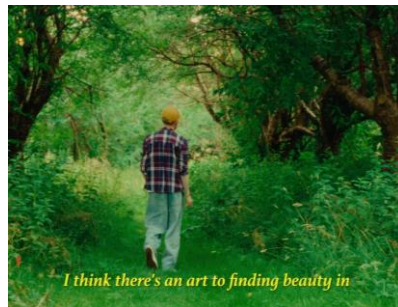
Next, the verbal sign is “You know,” which is used to express feelings or thoughts that are not said explicitly. It does not carry a denotative meaning, but connotatively serves to create a shared connection with the listener, implying that the feeling of home is something universally understood. Saussure (1983) identified that even brief expressions such as “You know” can function as signs, where the signifier refers to an unstated but shared emotional understanding as the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 6](#) depicts a serene scene by the lake, where a white swan is sitting on the grass beside several ducks that are huddled together, seemingly sleeping or resting. This carries a connotative meaning, as it conveys deeper symbolic messages beyond the literal elements. The presence of the swan and its young symbolizes themes of family, protection, and nurturing. As explained by Elkins (2003), animals in visual representation often carry emotional and cultural meanings that go beyond their literal appearance, allowing viewers to interpret scenes through personal and symbolic lenses. In line with Barthes (1967), visual signs are capable of suggesting cultural or emotional associations beyond their direct representation. The verbal attempt to seek connection merges with the visual metaphor of togetherness, producing a unified message home is a shared, nurturing experience.

Picture 7. *Leaving Home* Short Film

Then, the verbal sign is “And it’s not the most picturesque.” This is a declarative sentence. It means that the place is not the most beautiful or visually appealing. Denotatively, it suggests that the place is not visually attractive. Connotatively, it implies that beauty is not the standard for what makes something meaningful, and that home can be imperfect yet still deeply cherished. Saussure (1983) highlighted that signs consist of a signifier and a signified. In this case, the sentence serves as the signifier, while the underlying idea that emotional value does not depend on visual beauty acts as the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 7](#) shows a natural lakeside scene with a white swan, a group of ducks, and a smaller dark bird, all resting on a patch of grass and clover flowers. Behind them, a calm lake reflects the surrounding greenery and a small dock structure. The presence of ducks huddled together next to a calm adult swan adds to the emotional warmth, evoking feelings of family, safety, and care. According to Barthes (1967), connotative signs extend beyond their literal representation, conveying emotional or cultural significance. The combination reinforces that home is not defined by outward beauty but by emotional resonance found in everyday simplicity.

Picture 8. *Leaving Home* Short Film

After that, the verbal sign is “I think there’s an art to finding beauty in.” It means that discovering or appreciating beauty in something is not always obvious or easy. This declarative sentence carries connotative meaning, suggesting that beauty is subjective and can be found in ordinary places through emotional perception. It reflects a thoughtful, appreciative perspective on life and home. As proposed by Saussure (1983), language operates through signs composed of a signifier and a signified. In this case, the sentence serves as the signifier, while the deeper idea that beauty is found through emotional awareness and personal experience functions as the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 8](#) is a connotative sign because the image does not merely show the literal act of walking, it evokes ideas of inner thought, peaceful solitude, and the value of small moments. The person walking away suggests movement

that is not only physical but also symbolic of a personal or emotional journey. Barthes (1967) mentioned that visual signs can express cultural and emotional meanings beyond their literal representation. Combined with the verbal phrase, this image connotes reflection, the search for meaning, and the quiet appreciation of everyday or imperfect beauty. Together, the phrase and the imagery highlight the theme that home is found not in grandeur but in mindful recognition of small, beautiful moments.



Picture 9. Leaving Home Short Film

Next is “Even the most mundane of surroundings” as a verbal sign. It is a declarative sentence. It refers to the simplest or most ordinary places, that usually do not catch people’s attention because they appear uninteresting. The connotative meaning is strong, it emphasizes that beauty and emotional connection can emerge from the most ordinary and overlooked places, reinforcing the theme of emotional attachment over aesthetic value. Saussure (1983) described that every sign consists of a signifier and a signified. In this case, the phrase acts as the signifier, while the underlying message that emotional value and beauty can be found in simplicity serves as the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 9](#) shows a serene lake scene bordered by green plants, trees, and still water reflecting the natural surroundings. A partial blur of a person in the left corner wearing a purple top subtly suggests the presence of an observer, though the focus remains on the environment. This can be categorized as a connotative meaning because it does not merely depict a literal natural landscape. Instead, it invites the viewer to reflect on the idea that beauty and meaning can be found in simplicity and overlooked spaces. As shown in Barthes (1967), connotative signs involve symbolic and emotional dimensions beyond the literal level. In this case, the symbolic presence of nature and the subtle human figure together evoke themes of mindfulness, reflection, and emotional resonance, making it a strong example of connotative visual meaning.



Picture 10. Leaving Home Short Film

The last verbal sign is “HOME” written in all capital letters. It is a declarative, emphatic one-word statement. Connotatively, it symbolizes emotional safety, identity, warmth, belonging, and memory. The capitalization emphasizes the importance and finality of the concept, tying all previous reflections into one powerful word and acting as the emotional anchor of the entire short film. Saussure (1983) claimed that a sign is composed of a signifier and a signified, in this case, the word “HOME” serves as the signifier, while the deep emotional associations it evokes such as comfort, origin, and identity function as the signified.

The non-verbal sign in [Picture 10](#) shows a calm natural landscape with a grassy foreground, tall green trees, and a still body of water reflecting the sky and surrounding foliage. There are no people present in the frame, allowing the scenery and the word to carry the full emotional weight of the image. This visual can be categorized as a connotative meaning because it goes beyond the literal depiction of a lake and trees. The lush, untouched environment combined with the presence of the word “HOME” suggests that home is not merely a physical structure but a feeling often found in places of peace, memory, and emotional grounding. As found in Barthes (1967), connotative signs communicate emotional and cultural meaning beyond their surface appearance. In this case, the harmony between text and image transforms the landscape into a symbolic representation of belonging, inner peace, and the emotional essence of home.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has analyzed verbal and non-verbal signs in Jake Wagyu’s short film *Leaving Home* using Saussure’s and Barthes’ semiotic theories. The findings reveal 20 verbal and 20 non-verbal signs, with connotative meanings being dominant. Verbal expressions such as short reflective phrases interacted with visual signs like natural landscapes, body language, and framing to construct layered meanings. Together, these signs conveyed themes of identity, nostalgia, and the emotional struggle of leaving home. These results directly address the research objective by showing how short films, despite their brevity, can construct profound messages through the interplay of language and visuals. The study highlights that meaning in *Leaving Home* emerges not from dialogue or images alone, but from their combination, which creates symbolic and emotional depth.

For future research, applying semiotic analysis to short films from different genres or cultural contexts may provide broader insights into how meaning is constructed across media. Incorporating audience perspectives could also enrich understanding of how viewers interpret verbal and non-verbal signs in digital storytelling.

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