



A semiotic analysis of witchcraft practices in the Korean drama *The Cursed*

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ABSTRACT

People in Korea still believe in witchcraft, even though the country is known for its modern and technological progress. *The Cursed* uses both visual and verbal mystical symbols to show this belief. This study seeks to elucidate the symbolic representation of witchcraft in the drama and the audience's interpretation of these representations. The study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology utilizing a note-taking technique, and it applies Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as the analytical framework. Seven primary scenes were selected for analysis, incorporating symbols such as voodoo dolls, blood, Hanja characters, and verbal curses. The results show that these symbols are not only part of the story, but they also show how power works, how people fight against injustice, and how tradition and modernity clash. Words, things, and ritual actions are used to make the moral message and spiritual atmosphere stronger. So, *The Cursed* can be thought of as both a horror drama and a look at Korean culture and society today.

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1. INTRODUCTION

People often think of modern Korean society as a symbol of how quickly technology and popular culture are changing around the world. But even though this is a modern facade, traditional beliefs still exist and even change in response to modern changes. Kendall (2009) stresses that even though Korea is changing quickly, people still believe in mystical things. One example of this is witchcraft, which still exists in private settings and has even made its way into politics, businesses, the media, and even popular entertainment. A tangible illustration of this representation is evident in the drama "The Cursed" (Bangbeop, **방법**), which portrays curses as a fundamental element of its narrative. This phenomenon exemplifies the dialectic between tradition and modernity; as Giddens (1991) posits, modernity does not eliminate tradition but instead transforms it into new forms suited to contemporary contexts.

Popular culture is an important way to keep traditions alive and also a place where cultures can come together and talk about their differences. Jenkins (2006) posits that popular media serves as a platform for the renegotiation of traditional elements to maintain their relevance in contemporary society. Additionally, Kim and Kim (2017) assert that the portrayal of mystical elements enables individuals to engage with traditions reflectively, without the necessity of literal belief. In this context, "The Cursed" features ritual symbols like dolls and blood, as well as verbal expressions like curses and incantations. These elements serve as horror elements but also have deep social, historical, and political meanings (Cho, 2013). Using Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic framework, we can look at these symbols in terms of their denotation, connotation, and myth. This shows how modern media reinterprets mystical practices.

Moreover, the symbols in "The Cursed" elucidate the political aspect of witchcraft practices. Hall's (1997) theory of representation posits that media not only reflects reality but also generates meanings intricately linked to power structures. In the drama, curse rituals frequently symbolize conflicts for supremacy in corporate and political spheres, framing traditional practices as metaphors for denunciations of injustice, corruption, and power misuse. This representation is made even stronger by modern technology. Castells (1996) posits that in a network society, information technology not only propagates rationality but also fortifies irrational cultural currents. Park (2018) emphasizes that in Korea, traditional beliefs endure through digital media, resulting in a paradox where societies progress towards data-driven rationality while concurrently upholding faith in supernatural forces.

This phenomenon holds significance in both academic and practical realms. Kim (2015) asserts that a critical analysis of Korean dramas can provide fresh insights for general audiences and enhance the comprehension of learners and practitioners regarding the interaction between tradition and modernity. Lotman (1990) characterizes this process as resemantization, the assignment of new meanings to established traditions, while Robertson (1995) associates it with globalization dynamics that transform cultural identities. In this regard, the portrayal of witchcraft in "The Cursed" not only safeguards traditional heritage but also situates it within a global cultural context that is accessible to international audiences.

The originality of this study resides in its emphasis on visual and verbal manifestations of witchcraft in contemporary Korean dramas, a topic that remains insufficiently examined in academic research. Most prior research on traditional Korean beliefs has focused on anthropological or historical viewpoints (Yoon, 2007). Utilizing Barthes' semiotic framework, this study aims to elucidate the role of mystical signs in popular dramas as a multifaceted system of meaning interconnected with both tradition and modern social, political, and cultural frameworks.

Storey (2015) emphasizes that popular culture is a fluid domain where the negotiation of meaning and identity occurs, whereas Eco (1976) stresses the significance of interpreting minor signs in narratives as gateways to broader structures of meaning within society. This study enhances Korean cultural studies and enriches semiotic analysis within contemporary media contexts.

Prior studies indicate that contemporary Korean culture often integrates traditional beliefs into modern narratives in film, drama, and literature. For instance, Lee (2019) analyzed family representation in Korean dramas through semiotic frameworks to elucidate how visual and verbal signs formulate cultural narratives. However, there is a dearth of studies that utilize Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine signs of witchcraft in contemporary Korean dramas. This study aims to fill this gap by concentrating on the drama "The Cursed." Novan Ramadhan et al. (2025) examined the depiction of sacredness in "The Conjuring 2" utilizing Barthes' semiotics and Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding model, demonstrating that spiritual symbols, including crosses, prayers, and exorcism rituals, signify both sanctity and defiance against supernatural entities. Their research indicates that contemporary horror films not only evoke fear but also function as arenas for the negotiation of religious values, spirituality, and social critique within popular culture.

In his thesis "The Persistence of Shamanistic Beliefs in Modern Korean Society," Kim (2018) examined the resilience of traditional spiritual practices in the context of Korea's modernization. Through ethnographic interviews and participant observation, he discovered that belief in supernatural powers, including curses, endures in urban communities as a reaction to social and economic pressures. In his dissertation "Myth and Power: Representation of Spirituality in Korean Horror Films," Park (2020) utilized qualitative discourse analysis to illustrate how Korean horror cinema often employs spiritual symbolism to critique social injustice, corruption, and abuses of power, without concentrating on a singular text through a semiotic framework. Outside of Korea, Nabila (2018), Abdullah (2018), Putra (2019), and Ardila (2023) examined religious themes in Indonesian horror films, whereas Safira (2023) and Korompot (2023) employed semiotic methodologies to analyze "Pengabdi Setan 2" and "Makmum." Lestari (2024) examined occult representation in "Sewu Dino" through Barthes' semiotics, while Rosyidah (2022) investigated feminist representation in "Perempuan Tanah Jahanam." These works collectively affirm the importance of semiotics, particularly Barthes', in revealing denotative and connotative meanings, as well as embedded cultural values, ideologies, and social critique.

A review of these ten studies shows that semiotic analyses of film have shed light on different aspects of religion, politics, and feminism through visual and verbal signs. However, they are still limited in how they deal with traditional belief practices like witchcraft and how they apply Barthes' theory to just one object of analysis. To address this limitation, the current study, "The Representation of Witchcraft Practices in the Drama The Cursed: A Semiotic Analysis of Visual and Verbal Signs," expands Barthes' framework to analyze the depiction of traditional practices in contemporary Korean popular media in a more systematic, contextualized, and comprehensive manner.

1.1. Semiotics by Roland Barthes

Semiotics is a discipline that investigates signs and the mechanisms of signification in human existence. The term "semiotics" comes from the Greek word *sēmeion*, which means "sign." Roland Barthes' semiotics grew out of the socio-political situation in Europe after World War II, when ideologies were becoming more and more common in popular culture through media, advertising, and fashion (Hebdige, 1979). Many people have used Barthes' ideas in media, representation, and

cultural studies since then. For example, Stuart Hall used them to look at racial stereotypes in media (Hall, 1997) and Storey used them to look at popular culture (Storey, 2018). This methodology has been applied to the examination of visual arts, utilizing semiotics to elucidate the politics of representation in art and visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999), as well as to the domain of digital culture, encompassing the use of emojis, memes, and emerging signs in interactive media (Manovich, 2001).

This theoretical framework has impacted research on gender and identity, exemplified by Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, and has been applied in critical pedagogy to improve media literacy (Buckingham, 2003). Barthes (1977) asserted that the interpretation of signs is inherently biased, as each sign is intrinsically linked to values, ideology, and power through two dimensions of the sign system: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (ideological meaning), which collectively forge myth as a mode of cultural representation.

1. Signifier (penanda)	2. Signified (petanda)
3. Denotative sign (tanda denotatif) (<i>first system</i>)	
4. Connotative Signifier (penanda konotasi)	5. Connotative Signified (petanda konotasi)
6. Connotative Sign (tanda konotasi) (<i>second system</i>)	

Picture 1.1 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957)

According to Roland Barthes' semiotics, there are three main levels of meaning for signs: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal or surface meaning, such as an apple signifying "a round red fruit" (Barthes, 1972). Barthes (1977) asserted that denotation is never wholly neutral, as it invariably arises within the context of language and culture. Chandler (2007) also said that denotation is basically written down in certain social systems. Connotation, conversely, denotes the supplementary meaning that emerges from associations with cultural values, emotions, or ideology (Barthes, 1972). Eco (1976) emphasized that connotation is indeterminate, subject to negotiation, and perpetually evolving in response to social contexts. In today's visual world, connotation has become more complex. For instance, a smiling emoji can mean different things depending on the situation (Rose, 2012).

At a higher level, myth serves to normalize ideology, making it seem natural and universal (Barthes, 1957). Barthes (1972) elucidated that myth transfigures history into a semblance of nature, exemplified by the depiction of smiling peasants in food advertisements that fabricate the myth of purity in nature and traditional labor. Digital media has produced new myths, such as healthy lifestyles, travel as a symbol of freedom, and digital entrepreneurship, all of which ultimately bolster neoliberal ideology (Kellner, 1995). Barthes' theory illustrates that signs not only signify reality but also shape ideology, social relations, and worldviews in contemporary culture.

1.2. Sign in a Cultural Setting

In the realm of cultural semiotics, every media sign is intrinsically connected to the cultural values and historical context of the society in which it exists. Barthes (1972) asserted that cultural signs embody ideologies that seem natural, indicating that the analysis of the drama "The Cursed" must

extend beyond superficial forms to encompass the cultural context of Korea, where supernatural practices endure despite modernization. Signs like sacred trees, incantations, and curse dolls show how shamanism (musok), the use of talismans (bujeok), and beliefs in ancestral spirits have been around for a long time. In Korean culture, these signs represent human relationships with the spirit world, sacrifice, fate, and cosmic balance. However, when shown to a global audience, these local signs take on new meanings: they can deepen cultural understanding, strengthen stereotypes, or create new meanings. Consequently, a semiotic analysis of “The Cursed” necessitates comprehension of both local and global contexts, in accordance with Hall’s (1997) assertion that the exchange of meaning invariably occurs within the contentious realm of locality, power, and globalization.

1.3. Roland Barthes’ Semiotics in *The Cursed*

This study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory to elucidate the representation of witchcraft practices in the drama “The Cursed” through the examination of denotation, connotation, and myth. Things like curse dolls, talismans, incantations, and occult rituals are not just physical things; they also have cultural and ideological meaning. For example, on the denotative level, the curse doll is just a physical object; on the connotative level, it stands for black magic and belief in the spirit world; and on the mythological level, it shows how powerless people are against supernatural forces in the modern world. The interaction between spoken and written texts in the drama serves as either an anchor, which strengthens meaning, or a relay, which adds to it. So, “The Cursed” is not just a scary story; it also shows the conflict between tradition and modernity and how Korean pop culture reproduces and negotiates ideology, which is what Barthes (1977) said when he said that every act of making meaning is an ideological arena.

1.4. Shamanism

South Korea has rapidly modernized and industrialized; however, traditional practices such as shamanism (musok) have persisted and even thrived among the younger generation as an alternative means to address socio-economic anxieties and the predominance of modern rationality (Cho, 1999). Korean shamanism is passed down from one generation to the next, with mudang (female shamans) as the main figures. There are two types of mudang: gangsinmu (shamans through possession) and *seseupmu* (hereditary shamans). They perform different rituals, such as naerim-gut, ssitgim-gut, jaesu-gut, and dodang-gut (Lee, 2023; Kim, 2003). These practices serve purposes of healing, protection, and blessings, but they also include offensive rituals like jeoju-ui bangbeop (저주의 방법), which is a way to curse using talismans (bujeok) or cursed dolls (jeoju inhyeong). This is similar to the idea of black magic (santet) in Indonesian culture (Kim, 2003). Choi (2013) characterizes this cursing practice as “shadow shamanism,” a covert form of dissent by marginalized communities. KISTI (2020) says that these kinds of things happen because of ideas like gamyeom jusul (infectious magic) and yusa jusul (sympathetic magic). Kim Chong-ho (2003) stresses that Korean shamanism is a cultural contradiction. On the one hand, it encourages healing and harmony; on the other hand, it can be a way to show anger, revenge, and spiritual violence. This is why jeoju-ui bangbeop is still a popular form of Korean black magic.

2. METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive methodology, anchored in Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework (1977) as the principal analytical lens. This method was selected as it allows the

researcher to thoroughly describe and interpret the meanings inherent in visual and verbal signs, especially in the context of depicting witchcraft practices in contemporary Korean popular culture through the drama "The Cursed." According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative descriptive method is useful for finding hidden meanings in social and cultural phenomena and for looking into complicated symbolism in specific situations.

Barthes' semiotic framework in this study is utilized to analyze the construction of meaning on three levels: (1) denotation, which pertains to the literal interpretation of signs as directly perceived; (2) connotation, which relates to the symbolic interpretation derived from cultural associations, beliefs, and collective emotions; and (3) myth, which refers to the ideological interpretation formulated from sign systems that serve to uphold prevailing societal values or narratives. Utilizing Barthes' model, this study elucidates not only the superficial visual meanings but also delineates the symbolic and ideological significances concealed within the representation of witchcraft practices in the drama's narrative.

Along with semiotic theory, this study uses ideas about Korean shamanism and witchcraft (Jeju-ui Bangbeop, 저주의 방법) to help understand the cultural roots and social roles of the mystical symbols shown. Shamanistic rituals, the connection between people and spirits, and the use of objects as tools for cursing will all be important parts of figuring out what the signs mean. This research seeks to elucidate the representation of witchcraft practices, integral to Korea's traditional belief system, in dramatic form and their construction as a semiotic system within popular media.

This study utilizes two categories of data sources: primary data and secondary data. The main data comes from the Korean drama "The Cursed," which was chosen because it shows witchcraft practices in a clear way and uses a lot of visual and verbal signs. The drama was scrutinized through meticulous viewing of all episodes, with pertinent scenes, ritual artifacts, mystical symbols, incantations, and narrative components recorded for analysis. The secondary data encompass texts on semiotic theory, notably Barthes (1977), in addition to academic articles, journals, and literature pertaining to Korean culture, traditional beliefs, and cultural representation in popular media. These sources furnish theoretical foundation, contextual richness, and legitimacy to the interpretation of signs.

3. RESULTS/FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Cursed* Drama Series

In South Korea, "The Cursed" (Bangbeop, 방법 in Korean) is a supernatural thriller TV show that started in 2020. Kim Yong-wan directed the drama, and Yeon Sang-ho wrote the script. Yeon Sang-ho is a well-known writer and director known for his horror and social criticism works like "Train to Busan" and "Hellbound." The TVN channel aired the series, which had 12 episodes, each about 60 minutes long. "The Cursed" has a lot of rituals, magical items, and strong images of the spirit world. This makes it full of visual and verbal signs that can be looked at using Roland Barthes' semiotic method.

The choice of "The Cursed" as the research subject is predicated on its provision of a supernatural horror narrative alongside a significant portrayal of Korean culture, especially in relation to beliefs in mystical practices and shamanic curses (jusul 주술, jeju 저주) within contemporary society. The drama utilizes curse dolls, blood talismans, sacred trees, and




incantations, creating an opportunity to analyze the reanimation of traditional symbols within a rational and corporatized contemporary context.

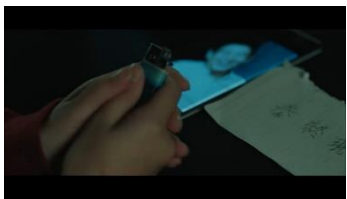



In Barthes' semiotic framework, objects like talismans and dolls in the drama serve initially as denotative signs (physical objects), subsequently transform into connotative meanings (associations with supernatural power, suffering, or vengeance), and ultimately constitute modern myths, specifically the belief that the spiritual realm persists and functions within contemporary social structures.

3.1.1 *The Cursed* portrays Shamanic Cursing Practices

The researcher observed scenes that showed symbols, rituals, and actions related to shamanic curses or other dark spiritual practices. The table below shows the first data, which includes pictures and time stamps of the scenes in the drama that show shamanic practices.

3.1 Findings on the Representation of Shamanic Cursing Practices in *The Cursed*

Scene 1	Scene Excerpt, Representation of Shamanic Cursing, and Time Stamp	Scene Description
1.	 Eps 1 - 01:00:00 - 01:01:30	So-jin grasps the pen cap while gazing at the victim's photograph and name.
2.	 Eps 2 - 32:10 - 33:35	So-jin touches the hand of the bullying perpetrator, causing the victim to experience a nosebleed.
3.	 Eps 4 - 54:20 - 01:00:42	The scene portrays Jin Jong-hyun gazing sharply at Jin-soo, which results in Jin-soo's body becoming stiff.

4.	 <p>Eps 4 - 54:20 - 01:00:42</p>	So-jin performs a curse using a lighter inside the car.
5.	 <p>Eps 7 - 39:00 - 40:44</p>	Jin-kyung presses Joo-bong's forehead while expressing her anger.
6.	 <p>Eps 8 - 16:10 - 18:33</p>	Jin-kyung attaches a black paper to Joo-bong's forehead while punishing him.
7.	 <p>Eps 8 - 52:29 - 54:55</p>	The scene shows So-jin touching Jin-kyung's finger, with the red background symbolizing a supernatural dimension.

Based on Table 3.1, the representation of shamanistic curse practices in *The Cursed* is shown through a series of scenes that show the use of supernatural powers to harm the victim. In the first scene, So-jin holds a pen cap while staring at the victim's photo and name, which represents the use of the victim's identity as the main medium in the curse process. Furthermore, in the second scene, So-jin touches the bully's hand, causing the victim to experience a nosebleed, illustrating that curses can be transmitted through physical contact and have a direct impact on the victim's body. In the third scene, Jin Jong-hyun stares intently at Jin-soo, who then stiffens his body, indicating that the power of the curse can also work through spiritual energy without physical contact. These three scenes as a whole represent the practice of cursing in Korean shamanism through various mediums, such as names and photos, touch, and gaze, which serve as a means to channel supernatural powers, causing physical suffering and loss of control in the victim.


Based on scenes 4–7 in Table 3.1, the representation of shamanistic curse practices in *The Cursed* increasingly demonstrates the use of various ritual media and emotional expressions as a means of channeling supernatural powers. In the fourth scene, So-jin performs a curse ritual in a car using a lighter as a medium, demonstrating that simple objects can function as ritual tools in shamanic practices. In the fifth scene, Jin-kyung presses Joo-bong's forehead while venting her anger, representing the relationship between negative emotions and the power of the curse directed at the victim. The sixth scene shows Jin-kyung sticking black paper on Joo-bong's forehead as a form of punishment, which can be interpreted as a ritual symbol to control or exert supernatural influence over the target. Meanwhile, in the seventh scene, So-jin touches Jin-kyung's finger in a red setting that symbolizes the supernatural dimension, confirming the existence of a spiritual connection that allows the transfer or activation of the curse's power. Overall, these four scenes represent the practice of shamanistic curses through the use of ritual objects, physical contact, magical symbols, and the involvement of emotions and supernatural spaces that strengthen the bond between the curser and the victim.

3.1.2 An analysis and discussion of scenes from the Korean drama *The Cursed* that show shamanic cursing practices

(a) Scene 1 Description

A teenage girl is sitting alone in a dark, creepy room. She is wearing a red jacket and holding a pen cap like she is doing a magical ritual. A pen cap, a piece of paper with Korean characters on it, and a cell phone with a picture of a person on it are all on the table. These are all things that are needed to channel energy or cast a curse. The girl's focused movements and the low light make the activity feel sacred and secret. This scene shows a kind of modern shamanic cursing that mixes traditional elements like candles and spells with digital technology. This shows that regular people can use supernatural power in a private space and still have a big effect on their target.

Tabel 3.1 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 1 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework

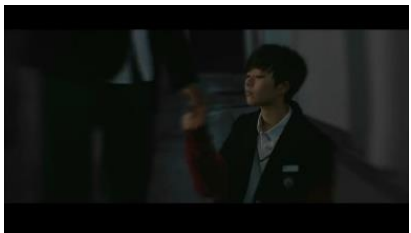
<i>Signifier</i> (Penanda)	<i>Signified</i> (Petanda)
	A teenager is performing a seemingly structured spiritual ritual, using a pen cap, handwritten text, and a photograph of the target as part of the process of channeling supernatural power.
Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)	
So-jin is engaged in an individual ritual act, focusing her attention on the pen cap, photograph, and written text placed before her. She appears to be in a dark and quiet room that reinforces the sacred atmosphere. This act signifies an attempt to transmit something to the target represented in the photograph.	
Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)	Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)
The teenager's action symbolizes a shamanic cursing practice carried out in secrecy by employing symbolic elements to concentrate supernatural energy.	Shamanic cursing is represented as a practice that is personal yet systematic, one that can be performed by anyone—including adolescents—through the use of symbolic objects that unify intention, target, and energy. Cursing is not only inherited through tradition but also transformed through modern media, such as mobile phones, which serve as substitutes for dolls or physical talismans.
Myth (Mitos)	

Shamanic cursing is portrayed as a legitimate and powerful way to harm someone without the need for physical contact, believed to operate through invisible forces.

(b) Scene 2 Description

In this scene, a teenage girl in a school uniform with a boyish look is sitting on the floor of a dark, quiet room. She is making a hand gesture toward someone with a calm but focused look on her face. Her body and hand movements represent symbolic actions that have spiritual or magical meaning. They channel energy or a curse directly through intention and the body, without the need for ritual objects. The dim lighting and lack of conversation make the act seem more private, hidden, and sacred. This scene shows that a shamanic curse ritual can be done simply and effectively with just gestures, intention, and spiritual focus.

Tabel 3.2 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 2 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework


Signifier(Penanda)	Signified(Petanda)
	<p>The teenager is engaged in a spiritual or magical ritual using symbolic media, appearing to concentrate intensely in order to channel energy toward the target.</p>
Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)	
<p>So-jin is seen kneeling on the floor in her school uniform, extending her hand upward to touch the finger of someone standing before her. Her expression appears calm and focused, while the dim lighting creates a quiet and serious atmosphere. Although no explicit ritual objects such as candles or photographs are present, physical interaction becomes the central element of this scene.</p>	
Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)	Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)
<p>This scene implies a process of inheritance or transmission of power symbolically through physical touch. The gesture of raising the hand and touching the finger conveys a sense of acknowledgment or acceptance of a certain power or mission, within a sacred and private context.</p>	<p>The touch between the two characters can be interpreted as a symbol of the transfer of spiritual power or blessing within the practice of shamanic cursing, which does not always require ritual objects but may occur through bodily connection and inner intention. This represents the idea that supernatural power in this narrative is personal, intuitive, and can be transmitted without words.</p>
Myth (Mitos)	
<p>Cursing can be performed without intermediaries as long as the practitioner possesses supernatural power.</p>	

(c) Scene 3 Description

This scene shows a middle-aged man with a piercing gaze and a tense expression, which shows that he is very focused on something emotional or spiritual. The dark background and low lighting bring out the details of his face. The lack of ritual objects shows that supernatural power comes from intense focus and inner will. The scene depicts shamanic cursing as an individual and psychological practice, signifying a transition from conventional rituals to inner symbolism in Korean popular culture.

Tabel 3.3 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 3 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework

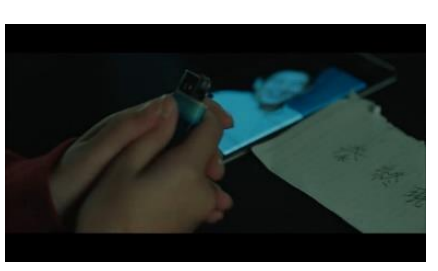
Signifier(Penanda)	Signified(Petanda)
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	<p>A man is staring sharply ahead with an intense gaze filled with pressure and emotion. His face appears sweaty, his forehead furrowed, and his jaw clenched, signaling an inner conflict or deep concentration in channeling spiritual energy.</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)</p>	
<p>Jong-hyun is depicted in a state of deep emotional intensity. His gaze is fixed on something before him, and his serious facial expression conveys a tense atmosphere. The dim lighting and dark background further emphasize the sacred, serious, and suspenseful mood of the scene.</p>	
<p>Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)</p>	<p>Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)</p>
<p>The man's piercing gaze and concentrated facial expression carry a connotative meaning as a symbol of supernatural practice. His face, filled with emotional intensity, suggests that he is engaged in inner contact or the transmission of unseen power toward a specific object or target. Within the context of Korean popular culture, this indicates that spiritual power can be manifested through facial expression and internal concentration without the explicit use of ritual objects.</p>	<p>The man is represented as a figure possessing special abilities to access inner power, resembling a shaman or an individual connected to supernatural forces. No physical objects or verbal incantations are employed; instead, the practice relies solely on concentration and emotional intensity. This illustrates a form of modern witchcraft that is invisible yet effective, aligning with the transformation of spiritual practices into a more subtle cinematic representation within Korean popular culture.</p>
<p>Myth (Mitos)</p>	
<p>Witchcraft does not necessarily require explicit rituals; it can be manifested through an intense gaze.</p>	

(d) Scene 4 Description

A teenager is holding a lighter over a dark table that has a picture of a man and a piece of paper with Korean characters on it. These three things are used in rituals as a structured sequence of spiritual actions. The dim lighting and focus on the hands add to the sacred feel and intense focus. This is a type of modern shamanic cursing that uses traditional symbols and digital media to send supernatural power to the target.

Tabel 3.4 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 4 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework


<p>Signifier(Penanda)</p>	<p>Signified(Petanda)</p>
	<p>The Teenager is preparing to perform a burning ritual involving symbolic media, which is believed to transmit magical power to the target depicted in the photograph.</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)</p>	
<p>So-jin's hand is shown firmly holding a lighter above a table. On the table lies a photograph of a man with his face clearly visible, alongside a piece of paper inscribed with characters, possibly Chinese or Hanja. This scene illustrates the adolescent preparing symbolic media for an act of burning. The dim lighting enhances the tense and sacred atmosphere, reinforcing the ritualistic and mystical undertone of the moment.</p>	
<p>Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)</p>	<p>Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)</p>

<p>This scene implies a ritualistic process in which the act of burning symbolic objects forms part of executing a shamanic curse. The lighter represents the trigger of energy, while the photograph and handwritten text serve as media representing the individual who is the target of the supernatural power. This act reinforces the notion that mystical energy can be transmitted through intermediary objects treated symbolically.</p>	<p>Shamanic cursing in this scene is represented as an act that can be mediated through physical objects such as photographs and written texts. The process is not merely an ancient ritual but has been adapted in a modern context through a dramatic and personal visual approach. This illustrates how magical practices are reimagined in popular culture to emphasize individual agency, particularly that of adolescents, in accessing and controlling supernatural power.</p>
Myth (Mitos)	
Seorang remaja dengan kekuatan spiritual dapat menjalankan santet hanya dengan menggunakan benda-benda sederhana.	

(e) Scene 5 Description

In this scene, a man is in bed in pain, and a woman in green presses her hand against his forehead, which is a physical and direct spiritual act. When there are no ritual objects like candles or written texts, touching each other becomes the most important part of the action. The facial expressions, cries, and pressure on the head show the fight between supernatural forces and the human body. The bright lights and clean space are a sharp contrast to the strong spiritual conflict. This is like shamanic cursing or traditional exorcism, where the body is used to channel supernatural power.

Tabel 3.5 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 5 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework


Signifier(Penanda)	Signified(Petanda)
	<p>A man experiences a spiritual manifestation in the form of possession, while a woman (shaman or spiritual intermediary) appears to perform a direct physical ritual to expel the evil spirit, associated with traditional healing practices</p>
Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)	
<p>The scene depicts Joo-bong, Jin-kyung's assistant, groaning in pain and rendered powerless as Jin-kyung presses firmly on his forehead. He appears to be lying on a bed in a brightly lit room, with a facial expression conveying extreme suffering. The physical action indicates that Jin-kyung is attempting to control or expel something from Joo-bong's body.</p>	
Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)	Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)
<p>This scene signifies a form of exorcism or evil spirit expulsion through direct physical contact. The emphasis on the forehead can be interpreted as a symbol of the spiritual center or a point of contact between the body and the supernatural entity. The woman's actions demonstrate spiritual authority, associated with the role of a shaman in traditional Korean culture.</p>	<p>This exorcism act represents a form of spiritual healing practice that continues to exist within Korean popular culture, even in the modern world. The practice is not only rooted in traditional heritage but has also become part of entertainment narratives that romanticize or dramatize spiritual power. Exorcism here is seen as a manifestation of the belief that healing or cleansing the soul can be achieved through symbolic and physical actions</p>
Myth (Mitos)	
<p>Extraordinary spiritual power can possess the human body, causing both physical and psychological suffering, and only a spiritual figure with strong abilities can confront and expel it.</p>	

(f) Scene 6 Description

In this scene, a woman in green touches the forehead of a young girl in a dark and tense setting. The serious gestures and low lighting give the scene a mystical feel. The interaction shows the

transfer or release of supernatural energy, which makes it more of a spiritual or exorcistic ritual than a physical act. The child's submissive posture, the hand gesture, and the way the picture is put together all add to the sacred feeling, making the woman seem like the main spiritual agent. The scene combines traditional Korean beliefs with modern visual styles, showing that supernatural power can be used through the human body in healing or spirit-expelling rituals.

Tabel 3.6 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 6 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework


<i>Signifier(Penanda)</i>	<i>Signified(Petanda)</i>
	<p>A spiritual figure is channeling supernatural power to expel evil forces or spirits from the body of a possessed victim.</p>
Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)	
<p>Jin-kyung appears to touch the victim's forehead with two fingers while standing in a dominant position, whereas the victim seems submissive, seated with their head being held. The scene takes place under dim lighting, creating a serious and intense atmosphere. This indicates an ongoing process of expelling supernatural forces directly from the victim.</p>	
Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)	Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)
<p>The two-finger gesture on the forehead signifies an exorcism practice, in which the human body is perceived as a medium for unseen forces. The female character's green attire can also be associated with natural power or healing energy. The silence and dim lighting further enhance the sacred and spiritual atmosphere.</p>	<p>This scene represents that in modern spiritual practices, the expulsion of evil spirits does not necessarily require elaborate rituals, but can be carried out directly by individuals possessing high supernatural abilities. It illustrates that exorcism-like practices in contemporary Korea can manifest in a simple yet intense form, without diminishing elements of traditional belief.</p>
Myth (Mitos)	
<p>Only shamans or spiritual figures with exceptional powers are believed to be capable of countering witchcraft attacks.</p>	

(g) Scene 7 Description

This scene is scary because it's in a dark train car with slime and strange organic tissues all over the floor and walls. You can see two people in dark clothes. One stands with a serious look on their face, and the other kneels and holds the standing person's hand as if they are giving up or asking for help. The deep red light makes it seem like there is blood, danger, and a supernatural atmosphere. The scene shows how supernatural power can invade a public space, turning the train from a symbol of order into a place of chaos and uncontrollable forces.

Tabel 3.7 Semiotic Analysis of Scene 7 Based on Roland Barthes' Framework

<i>Signifier(Penanda)</i>	<i>Signified(Petanda)</i>
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	<p>A woman stands with her hands directed toward a kneeling teenager inside a train carriage filled with visuals of blood and mystical roots. The deep red lighting creates a terrifying atmosphere, implying that supernatural forces have infiltrated a public space (the train) as a manifestation of a curse or witchcraft.</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (Tanda Denotatif)</p>	
<p>The scene depicts So-jin kneeling and holding Jin-kyung's hand inside a train carriage. The setting appears filled with blood and root-like structures resembling living networks spreading across the walls and floor. The red lighting creates a sense of horror and threat. Their body composition indicates that the male is in a pleading or submissive position, while the female stands upright as a dominant figure.</p>	
<p>Connotative Sign (Penanda Konotatif)</p>	<p>Connotatif Signified (Petanda Konotatif)</p>
<p>Visual cues such as blood, spreading roots, and the damaged train carriage indicate that the space has been “contaminated” by unseen forces. The teenager’s act of holding the woman’s hand symbolizes submission or supplication. The woman stands as a medium of dark energy, depicted as the center of mystical power. This suggests that even public spaces can be dominated by spiritual forces.</p>	<p>Witchcraft practices are understood not only as personal ritual acts but can also manifest as collective forces that intervene in social spaces. The drama illustrates that curses or negative energies can take over systems (with the train symbolizing modern civilization). This representation expands the scope of witchcraft practices from private spaces to the public realm. The woman, as the practitioner, occupies an active role in distributing mystical power, transcending traditional gender norms.</p>
<p>Myth (Mitos)</p>	
<p>Only shamans or spiritual figures with exceptional powers are believed to be capable of countering witchcraft attacks.</p>	

3.2. Discussion

The following shows the results of the analysis that was done with the data that was collected. In this scene, a teenager in a school uniform is sitting on the floor in a dark room, looking at someone and raising their hand in a serious way. There are no ritual tools present, but the focused gaze and hand movement show that there is a specific spiritual purpose. The audience sees a literal interaction between the two characters at the denotative level. On a deeper level, the hand gesture stands for the transfer of supernatural energy, which makes it clear that the power is within the person. At the mythic level, the scene builds the idea that shamanic power can come from a person without any tools in between. This makes the idea that spiritual energy can be sent through gesture and intention normal. This image shows that shamanic practices have been made simpler while still keeping their mystical quality. This makes them relevant to modern Korean pop culture and easy for younger people to understand.

In the second scene, a teenager makes a hand gesture toward someone in a dark room while looking serious and focused. The gesture becomes the most important part of symbolic meaning when there is no ritual media. The audience sees the teenager's hand move toward another character literally at the denotative level. At the connotative level, this gesture is seen as a way to send supernatural power to the target, which shows how shamanic rituals have been made simpler in Korean pop culture. At the mythic level, the scene builds the idea that shamanic powers can come directly from people who are naturally talented, making spiritual energy a normal part of the story. The scene shows that younger people can do shamanic rituals and that they have been changed to fit with the way stories are told today.

The third scene is a close-up of an adult man's face, which looks tense and has a strong gaze. There are no ritual media present; the only thing that matters is expression and focus. At the denotative level, the audience sees a serious man looking straight ahead in a dark room. At the

connotative level, his facial expression shows that he has inner power that can send supernatural energy, which is a personal and psychological form of shamanic practice. On a mythical level, the scene reinforces the belief that supernatural ability is personal and innate, making it seem normal that one can change others without any outside help. This representation shows how traditional practices have been adapted into modern stories that focus on psychology and film, highlighting the importance of inner strength in Korean pop culture today.

In this scene, a teenager is holding a lighter over a dark table that has a picture of a target and a piece of paper with Hanja characters on it. The camera's focus on these things shows how important they are to the ritual. Denotatively, it shows a planned way to prepare for a shamanic act, where the teenager puts together symbolic objects without touching the target directly. The lighter symbolizes destruction or energy mediation, the photo identifies the victim, and the handwritten note serves as a mantra enhancer or a means to invoke supernatural power. The calm and focused movements show that the practitioner is in spiritual control, even though they are young. This goes against the idea that only older people or shamans can do shamanic practices. At the mythic level, the scene builds the idea that anyone with special skills and symbolic media can use supernatural power. This shows that shamanic practice has become a personal and private act in modern Korean popular culture, still relevant and connected to modern symbols.

This scene shows a man screaming in pain as another person pushes his head down, showing a strong physical interaction. It literally shows the hand pressing on the head and the victim's face showing pain, but it is also seen as a spiritual event. This act, in a connotative sense, is a ritual for getting rid of evil spirits or supernatural forces that affect the human body. The person pressing the head is thought to be a shaman or spiritual practitioner. On a mythic level, the scene sets up the idea that supernatural power can take over the human body and that only certain spiritual agents can handle it. This scene shows how **The Cursed** keeps traditional spiritual heritage alive in a modern story while using popular media to show shamanic practices in a way that is both visually and symbolically appealing. Barthes' semiotic framework elucidates the formation of denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings, influencing the ideology of supernatural power and validating the spiritual practitioner as a salvific agent.

In this scene, a woman touches a man's forehead with her finger while he is in pain. The mood is dark and tense. In a literal sense, it shows a direct physical action that is seen as a spiritual intervention. In a connotative sense, the touch represents the movement of supernatural energy from the practitioner to the victim. This shows that there is a power imbalance because the practitioner can control the target's body and mind without using traditional ritual tools. At the mythic level, the scene builds the idea that supernatural power is real and can directly affect the human body. This shows that shamanic practices are still used today. This depiction also highlights the role of young women as spiritual agents, demonstrating that dark spirituality can serve as a form of resistance against social injustice or established power structures. The scene shows that modernity doesn't get rid of traditional beliefs; instead, it changes them so that they are still interesting and relevant to today's audiences.

The scene shows two people inside a broken train car that is full of dark web-like structures. The bright red light makes it feel like the scene is happening in another world. One character is standing up straight, while the other is crouching down and touching the floor. There are no ritual tools present. The dark web connotes that evil forces can enter public places, turning modern settings into spiritual battlegrounds. At the mythic level, the scene shows that supernatural power can change and adapt to modern systems, and that only people with a lot of spiritual sensitivity

can see or deal with it. The drama depicts shamanic practices as a cultural and social symbol rather than solely a source of fear.

According to Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of shamanic representations in *The Cursed*, shamanic practices are depicted not only as aspects of horror but also as symbols of power struggles, social inequality, and the quest for justice in contemporary Korean society. Shamanic practice is represented at the denotative level through visual rituals, including spirit summoning, drum beating, and the employment of mediums. These symbols imply the presence of sinister forces employed to manipulate or annihilate individuals or institutions. Moreover, the mythic significations generated by these signs elucidate the ideology that conventional beliefs, such as shamanism, persist and are utilized within contemporary social frameworks as instruments of resistance or oppression. So, the play shows that even though Korea is modern, myths and supernatural practices are still very important in shaping popular stories and the way people think about society.

4. CONCLUSION

This study seeks to examine the portrayal of witchcraft practices in the Korean drama "The Cursed" utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, concentrating on visual and verbal signs, alongside the processes of denotative, connotative, and mythological meaning-making inherent in the narrative. The analysis of several pivotal scenes reveals that witchcraft is depicted in cinema as a vital and significant spiritual force in contemporary Korean society. These representations are shown through ritual objects like dolls, talismans, and fire, as well as through the characters' body language and gestures.

The semiotic analysis employing Barthes' framework demonstrates that these signs convey not only literal meanings (denotation) but also generate symbolic meanings (connotation) intricately linked to power, revenge, and societal fear. On a mythological level, the play suggests that people see supernatural forces as a different kind of power that can compete with formal structures like law and politics. This means that, in addition to state-regulated authority, people still believe that mystical powers can affect human life. In this way, **The Cursed** doesn't just show witchcraft as a scary part of horror entertainment; it also tells a cultural story. The narrative demonstrates the ongoing clash between traditional beliefs and spiritual values with contemporary rational viewpoints, portraying supernatural forces as a means of resistance to established authority.

The results also show that modern Korean popular culture, especially through TV dramas, is very important for keeping and rebuilding traditional beliefs like shamanism and witchcraft. This shows that modernity doesn't mean the end of tradition; instead, it opens up a new space for negotiation where old meanings can be reinterpreted, reframed, and shared in ways that make sense to today's audiences.

This study paves the way for future research by proposing comparative analyses of additional Korean dramas or films with spiritual themes to discern overarching patterns of representation. It also makes an academic contribution by being an interdisciplinary teaching tool in Korean studies that combines cultural studies, media studies, and semiotics. Additionally, it offers filmmakers guidance on how to engage with traditional beliefs more thoughtfully in modern narratives, framing media as both entertainment and a conduit for cultural and social messages. These findings underscore the significance of interpreting symbols in dramas or films as cultural and social representations, thereby fostering enhanced cultural literacy and critical thinking among the general public. In conclusion, this study enhances the field of contemporary Korean cultural studies

through a semiotic framework, while simultaneously initiating novel discourses in media and traditional belief studies in the modern context. Future research is anticipated to yield more varied and comprehensive insights, thereby enhancing the comprehension of Korean cultural dynamics within a global framework.

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