



Spiritual Symbolism in *The Stone Roses* (1989):

A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-01-09 Revised: 2026 02-22 Accepted: 2026 05-30</p> <p>Keywords: Symbolism; Spirituality; Semiotic; Barthes; Music; Lyrics; Culture</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.9281</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Axello Balya Putra axelloputra83@gmail.com Sastra Inggris, Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Jakarta</p>	<p><i>This study examines spiritual symbolism in selected lyrics from <i>The Stone Roses</i> (1989) by The Stone Roses using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Although symbolism has been widely explored in literary texts, alternative rock lyrics have rarely been analyzed through Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, particularly in relation to spiritual meaning. This qualitative study analyzes four songs: "I Wanna Be Adored," "Waterfall," "I Am the Resurrection," and "She Bangs the Drums." The findings reveal recurring symbols of water, resurrection, rhythm, and adoration that construct a myth of spiritual self-awakening and collective transcendence. The study positions the album as a poetic text that encodes modern spiritual identity through secular rock expression.</i></p>

1. Introduction

The 1989 debut album *The Stone Roses* by The Stone Roses represents not only a landmark in alternative rock but also a lyrical composition rich in symbolic and spiritual imagery. Emerging from the Madchester movement in late-1980s Britain, the band combined psychedelic musical textures with poetic lyrics that

evoke themes of rebirth, transcendence, identity, and existential desire. While the album has frequently been examined in terms of its musical innovation and cultural influence, its symbolic and spiritual dimensions remain underexplored within literary scholarship.

Symbolism has long occupied a central role in literary studies. Somani (2023) explains, symbolism developed as a distinct creative mode that enables writers to express abstract and philosophical ideas through metaphorical and poetic imagery. Similarly, Abbar (2023) emphasizes that symbolic language functions as a mechanism for articulating complex emotional and ideological meanings in modernist literature. Spirituality in literature, moreover, represents a quest for meaning beyond material existence. Mamta garg (2024) argues that spiritual literature provides reflective space for individuals to seek transcendence and inner awakening in contemporary life. These theoretical perspectives demonstrate how symbolism and spirituality operate together to construct layered meanings within texts.

Semiotic approaches have further expanded the analysis of symbolic meaning in literary and cultural texts Irwansyah (2024), for instance, applies semiotic analysis to Sufi literature to reveal how metaphors represent spiritual journeys and metaphysical transformation. However, most of these studies concentrate on canonical literary works or religious narratives rather than popular music. Even when semiotic methods are applied to song lyrics, research often focuses on figurative language or linguistic structures rather than spiritual myth construction Talita Zahria & Wibowo (2024). Consequently, the intersection of symbolism, spirituality, and alternative rock lyrics remains insufficiently examined.

Despite the extensive scholarship on symbolism and spirituality in classical and mystical literature Abbar (2023); Irwansyah (2024); Somani (2023), limited attention has been given to how these elements function within secular Western rock music. In particular, The Stone Roses (1989) has rarely been analyzed through the semiotic framework of Roland Barthes to uncover its construction of spiritual meaning. Barthes' model of signification distinguishes three levels of meaning: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural and emotional associations), and myth (ideological narratives naturalized within culture). This framework provides a systematic method for examining how song lyrics encode spiritual symbolism beyond their surface meaning.

This study therefore investigates selected lyrics from The Stone Roses (1989) using Barthes' semiotic theory to explore how spiritual symbols are constructed and naturalized. The analysis focuses on four songs "I Wanna Be Adored," "Waterfall," "I Am the Resurrection," and "She Bangs the Drums" which prominently feature imagery of resurrection, water, adoration, rhythm, and transcendence. Through Barthes' three levels of signification, this research seeks to identify how these symbols function not merely as poetic devices but as components of a broader myth of spiritual self-awakening within a secular rock context.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What spiritual symbols are present in selected lyrics of The Stone Roses (1989)?
2. How do denotation, connotation, and myth operate to construct spiritual meaning in these lyrics?

By situating alternative rock lyrics within literary and semiotic analysis, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in cultural studies and music semiotics, demonstrating that popular music can serve as a site for myth formation and contemporary spiritual expression.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive methodology with a semiotic approach grounded in the theory of signification proposed by Roland Barthes. Qualitative research is appropriate because the objective of this study is to interpret symbolic and spiritual meanings embedded in song lyrics rather than to quantify data. Barthes' framework provides a systematic model for analyzing cultural texts through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Through this structure, interpretation moves beyond literal meaning to uncover cultural codes, ideological narratives, and metaphysical constructions embedded within artistic expression. Previous studies have successfully applied Barthes' semiotics to popular music analysis, demonstrating its effectiveness in revealing cultural and spiritual narratives in song lyrics Alfarisi (2022)

The primary data source of this study is the album *The Stone Roses (1989)* by The Stone Roses. Although the album consists of twelve tracks, this research purposively selects four songs: "I Wanna Be Adored," "Waterfall," "I Am the Resurrection," and "She Bangs the Drums." These songs were chosen due to their prominent symbolic imagery and recurring spiritual themes such as rebirth, transcendence, existential longing, and identity formation. The unit of analysis consists of words, phrases, and lyrical lines that function as signs representing spiritual symbolism.

Data were collected through documentation and literature review. The song lyrics were obtained from verified and officially published sources. Secondary data include scholarly articles and academic journals discussing semiotics, symbolism in music, and spirituality in literary studies. Similar semiotic procedures have been employed in contemporary research analyzing song lyrics and performance texts through Barthes' theoretical lens Alfarisi (2022) Wiflihani et al (2024)

The data analysis follows Barthes' three levels of signification. First, the denotative level identifies the literal meaning of the lyrics. Second, the connotative level examines cultural, emotional, and associative meanings attached to the signs. Third, the myth level interprets how these signs construct broader ideological narratives and spiritual archetypes that become naturalized within cultural discourse. Through these analytical stages, the research reveals how the selected

lyrics construct a myth of spiritual awakening and existential self-definition within a secular alternative rock context.

To ensure validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing interpretive findings with established theoretical frameworks and previous scholarly discussions. Interpretations are cross-referenced with existing literature on semiotics and music symbolism to maintain analytical consistency and theoretical coherence Alfarisi (2022; Wiflihani et al., 2024b)

3.Result

The semiotic analysis of *The Stone Roses* demonstrates that the album constructs a layered system of symbolic and spiritual meaning. By applying the three levels of signification proposed by Roland Barthes denotation, connotation, and myth the lyrics reveal recurring themes of transcendence, identity formation, rebirth, and collective awakening.

1. "I Wanna Be Adored"

At the denotative level, the repeated line "*I wanna be adored*" directly expresses a desire for admiration. The phrase is literal and declarative. Connotatively, this repetition reflects an existential longing for recognition and validation, suggesting a deeper psychological need for affirmation.

Another significant line, "*He's already in me*", introduces a spiritual dimension. Denotatively, it suggests presence; connotatively, it implies internal transcendence or spiritual union.

At the mythic level, the song constructs identity as a spiritual quest in which fulfillment is achieved through symbolic integration with a higher or internalized power. The repeated structure transforms personal desire into a cultural myth of self-realization.

2. "Waterfall"

In "Waterfall," the line "*Don't build me up just to let me down*" expresses vulnerability at the denotative level. However, the recurring imagery of falling and flowing suggests natural movement and continuity.

Water imagery functions connotatively as a symbol of purification and liberation. The metaphor of a waterfall implies release, surrender, and renewal.

At the mythic level, nature becomes an archetype of spiritual cleansing. The flowing water naturalizes the idea that transformation is cyclical and inevitable, constructing a myth of renewal embedded within natural processes.

3. "I Am the Resurrection"

The opening declaration "*I am the resurrection and I am the life*" directly echoes biblical language. Denotatively, it asserts identity as resurrection. Connotatively, it signals personal transformation and emancipation from past

oppression.

Later lines such as *"I have scars upon my fingers"* introduce imagery of suffering and endurance, reinforcing the theme of rebirth through struggle.

At the mythic level, the song appropriates religious discourse to construct a secular narrative of redemption. The speaker assumes divine language, transforming spiritual resurrection into a myth of self-empowerment and autonomy within modern rock culture.

4. "She Bangs the Drums"

Denotatively, the title phrase *"She bangs the drums"* describes rhythmic performance. Connotatively, rhythm becomes a symbol of emotional intensity and collective energy.

Lines such as *"The past was yours but the future's mine"* suggest generational transformation and forward movement.

At the mythic level, rhythm functions as a secular sacrament that unites individuals in shared transcendence. The song constructs a communal myth in which music itself becomes a medium of awakening and identity formation.

Collective Symbolic Structure Across the album, recurring motifs adoration, water, resurrection, rhythm form an interconnected symbolic network. Through Barthes' semiotic framework, these signs operate at the mythic level to naturalize spiritual awakening within a secular alternative rock context. Rather than presenting overt religious doctrine, the album transforms spiritual symbolism into cultural myth, where transcendence is achieved through identity formation, emotional release, and collective musical experience.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that the symbolism and spirituality embedded in *The Stone Roses* function not only as aesthetic devices but as a structured system of meaning that shapes existential and cultural identity. Through the application of Roland Barthes' theory of signification denotation, connotation, and myth the album can be understood as a cultural text that constructs layered spiritual narratives. At the mythic level, recurring motifs of adoration, water, resurrection, and rhythm naturalize themes of transcendence and self-definition within a secular alternative rock framework.

The analysis of "I Wanna Be Adored" demonstrates how the desire for recognition evolves from personal longing into a broader myth of modern identity formation. This interpretation aligns with Ramdani Sandy Muhammad & Sakinah (2023), who argue that popular music frequently constructs spirituality through symbolic structures embedded in lyrical signification. Similarly, "Waterfall" supports Situmeang M (2022) findings that natural metaphors in music often encode renewal and purification, reinforcing the symbolic function of water as

emotional and spiritual cleansing. "I Am the Resurrection" further illustrates how rock music appropriates religious discourse to construct narratives of redemption and rebirth. This corresponds with Jumiyanti Jumiyanti Jahida (2025) who demonstrate that mythic archetypes remain central to identity formation within rock lyrics. Meanwhile, "She Bangs the Drums" highlights rhythm as a symbolic mechanism of collective awakening, consistent with Wiflihani et al. (2024), who emphasize the role of musical performativity in generating communal spiritual experience.

Collectively, these findings confirm that the album operates as an interconnected symbolic system rather than a series of isolated lyrical expressions. In line with Laura et al. (2022) and Zaki Pahrul Hadi & Ceriyani Miswaty (2023), the study supports the view that popular music functions as a cultural artifact capable of encoding ideological and spiritual narratives through semiotic structures. The application of Barthes' framework enables interpretation beyond literal meaning, revealing how repetition, metaphor, and archetypal imagery construct spiritual ideology within contemporary music. The results suggest that alternative rock can serve as a site of myth formation, where secular discourse incorporates spiritual symbolism to articulate existential concerns.

Implications and Future Research

This study contributes to literary and cultural scholarship by positioning alternative rock lyrics as legitimate objects of semiotic and spiritual analysis. The findings demonstrate that Barthes' semiotic theory remains applicable to modern musical texts across diverse cultural contexts.

Future research may expand this inquiry by examining additional works by The Stone Roses or by conducting comparative analyses across genres such as metal, pop, or spiritually influenced music traditions. Comparative semiotic approaches such as Peircean or Riffaterrean frameworks may also provide alternative perspectives on meaning construction in song lyrics. Furthermore, audience reception studies could deepen understanding of how listeners interpret and internalize symbolic and spiritual dimensions in music.

Overall, this research underscores the role of contemporary music as a medium through which literary symbolism, cultural identity, and spiritual meaning intersect within modern society.

5. Conclusion

This research highlights that the album *The Stone Roses* (1989) possesses a meaning structure that goes beyond its musical role, functioning instead as a literary work that utilizes symbolism and spirituality to weave an existential narrative. By employing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this analysis demonstrates that each lyric within the album not only communicates messages on a literal level but also produces connotative meanings that mirror the human

struggle with identity, the search for purpose in life, freedom, and personal transformation. Tracks such as *I Wanna Be Adored* and *Waterfall* illustrate how symbols like water, the repetition of mantras, and metaphors of desire act as instruments that forge a myth surrounding self-renewal and liberation from material attachments.

In contrast, *I Am the Resurrection* and *She Bangs the Drums* create spiritual experiences through religious imagery, collective energy, and rhythms that invoke a sense of connection to a greater entity beyond the self. Collectively, these insights indicate that this album not only expresses artistic creativity but also articulates a multifaceted inner journey through symbolic representations. Overall, this research enhances the comprehension that music, especially within the alternative rock genre, can act as a medium for literary expression that encompasses philosophical and spiritual dimensions akin to contemporary literary works.

The findings of the analysis suggest that the symbolism utilized by The Stone Roses is not merely ornamental but functions as a conduit for transmitting messages that resonate with inner experiences, self-awareness, and the quest for meaning. This study also identifies deficiencies in prior research that predominantly concentrated on symbolism and spirituality in classical literary texts or religious literature, rather than in the lyrics of popular music.

Consequently, this study offers a novel perspective that music can be examined as a system of signs that produces cultural and spiritual significances within a modern framework. It is anticipated that this research will lay the groundwork for future investigations into how other musical compositions employ symbolism to express philosophical, spiritual, and collective identity narratives within the contemporary cultural milieu.

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