SYMBOLISM IN THE ANIMATED FILM **RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON**

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**Abstract**
The aim of this study is to find out major symbols in the animated film entitled *Raya and the Last Dragon*. The film has presented lots of signs. This study focuses on the major symbols in the film. The major symbols are most frequently mentioned and presented in the film. They are considered as the representative symbols in the film. The major symbols were analysed by the application of the qualitative approach. Five symbols are presented in this study. To begin with, the land of heart symbolically means the centre of prosperity. *Heart* is considered the land of welfare. In addition, *Kumandra* means the land of harmony and peace. The people live harmoniously and peacefully in *Kumandra*. Furthermore, Dragon’s Gem has also a symbolical meaning of unity. The gem gives a message of being united. Additionally, *Sisu* is the last dragon awakened by *Raya*, the protagonist. *Sisu* also gives a symbolical meaning of trust. *Sisu* teaches other characters to trust each other. Lastly, *Drunn* implies a symbolical meaning. It conveys threat of sustainable development for human and environment. All in all, the five major symbols in the film contain meanings. Their meanings are as the message of the film. Above and beyond, the five symbols give a message of living with unity, harmony and peace with nature to maintain environmental sustainability. The five symbols as well prove reading a literary work is advantageous because the readers can be enlightened by the moral message of the literary work.

**Keywords**— meaning, message, sustainability, symbol, symbolism, ,

**Introduction**
To study a literary work, Wellek and Waren (1949:221) recommend two ways in their popular book *Theory of Literature*. The two methods are extrinsic and intrinsic one. Extrinsic method covers all environmental factors from the author of the story such as biographical, psychological, sociological, philosophical, and other arts (music, sculpture, painting), while the intrinsic element covers what in the works itself by putting aside the environmental factors and focus on the work itself such as plot, characters, setting, world-view, and tone. Then, another intrinsic element relevant to this study is symbolism.

To recognize symbolism, there are some processes where people should use their imagination. Without imagination, understanding literary works with many symbolisms is difficult. That is why reading a lot of literary works is advantageous. People can get philosophical lessons by reading literary works. This is the reason why symbolism is one of philosophical topics to enlighten people, and it is interesting to examine. This work is focused on the analysis of the major symbols found in the animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon*.

*Raya and the Last Dragon* is a Disney animated film inspired by Southeast Asian Culture which was officially released on March, 2021. The film of *Raya and the Last Dragon*
tells the story of the search for dragons to save and reconcile humans, which long ago, human
and dragons lived with harmony and prosperity side by side in Kumandra. But then, the peace is
shattered when a monster they call The Drunn attacks. The Drunn are monsters that attack humans and turn them into stone or statues. The dragons who see this assault go to fight the
Drunn, but unfortunately the dragons also turn into statues or stones just like humans. Then, the
dragons are united to gather strength to defeat the Drunn. They create a dragon gem. This
dragon’s gem, of course, becomes the symbol of united strength by which not only Drunn is
finally defeated but also all tribes are united.

There are several previous studies on this film. One of them is Atmaja (2021) who
clarifies that this film is full of cultural element. Those elements are meaningful signs. His
studies was focused on the semiotic analysis of the main character in the film. Besides, Tawakkal, Monix, and Watani (2021) have also studied on the film. They discussed the
semiotic analysis of moral messages in the film. What makes different from previous
studies is that this study is scoped to the major symbols in the film. Then, the major
symbols imply the same message of the film. The message implied by the smajor symbol is about the harmonious and peace life with nature.

Indee, this film gives a lot of messages based on signs that are often found in films. There are several symbols that are mentioned very often in films. These signs certainly contain meaning as the message conveyed in this film to the audience. Although lots of symbols are used in the film, only the most frequently mentioned symbols are discussed to avoid too wide
discussion. In short, it is hoped that this study may give enlightenment to the readers; therefore,
this analysis may rove that reading a literary work can contribute goodness to the readers.

Literature Review

The word symbol is derived from ‘symbollein’, meaning ‘to throw together’, from the
Greek ‘symbolon’ and Latin ‘symbolum’, which means token, ‘sign’ (Webster, 2003: 1190). In
the field of literature and art, symbolism refers to a kind of rhetoric skill, a genre, a prototype
structure unit and even regarded as a concept which is equivalent to the art of ontology. In the
Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word “symbolism” is explained as: symbolism is used to
represent or imply certain things, especially an invisible thing represented by visible symbols,
such as a belief, a quality, a country or a religious school (Zhang, 2017). Symbolism is the most
essential aspect in the world of literature. Symbolism has a big part in literary work because McMah, Day, and Funk (Yunita, 2017) ay symbolism as one of the most important aspects of serious imaginative literature. Symbol is the common thing used by people to make something
easier to understand. Furthermore, they explain that a symbol is something solid that represent things more than itself. For example, a horseshoe is a symbol of good luck, or heart shape is a
symbol of love.

If a repeated image gathers significant meaning and seems to stand for something more
than itself, it then becomes a symbol. (McMah, Et. Al., 2017 p. 125). Further, Griffith in
Friskahana, Kuncara, and Astuti (2020) says that a symbol is a concrete object, but it has
abstract meaning. Other opinion about symbol, a symbol represents something deeper and even
more complex than it is uttered (Rafis and Syahputra, 2020).

Symbolism is symbol that appears in literary work was a literary movement in
nineteenth century (Fadaee, 2011). Symbolism term was used for arts in the beginning and then
to spread to other literary works like book. It was when writers started to use symbolism in
their work. But, before going further about symbolism, people should understand symbol and
what symbol is.

Symbolism is used as a tool by an author to deliver a message. By using symbolism in
literary works, message will be completely caught by the reader or audience. In addition, the
sense of the message will be more powerful. Besides, symbolism does not only give powerful
message. It also makes something observable (Green, 2013). By applying symbolism in a
literary work, readers can get the advantages such as broaden the readers’ mind even sharpen
philosophical understanding from some symbolical messages in literature. This becomes new
knowledge for the readers or audience. It is like what we can find in the film of Raya and the
Last Dragon. There are a lot of symbolical signs used in the film. This study only focuses on the major symbols that are considered as the most frequent symbols in the film.

Research Method

This work has been carried out by applying qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln in Aspers & Corte (2019), qualitative research is multi-method oriented and includes interpretative and naturalistic research. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Investigating the symbolical meaning of five signs in the film Raya and The Last Dragon. The five symbols are regarded as the major symbols in the film since they are mostly mentioned along the film.

This study uses the theory of symbolism as the main theory. This theory is used to identify the major symbols contained in the film Raya and the Last Dragon. Many symbols can be found in this film. However, only major symbols are taken. Major symbol means the symbols in the film which are the main topic that often appear throughout the series of stories in this film. Furthermore, the analysis of major symbols is developed with several supporting theories. This supporting theory is applied to examine the depth of the symbolic meaning of these symbols. Each symbol will be examined its symbolic meaning. These meanings carry a philosophical and moral message from this film.

Results and Discussion

The Land of Heart

Heart is the heart of Kumandra country. Kumandra is an area in the shape of a dragon's body that has rivers flowing from one end to the other end of the country, and like its name Heart is as the heart of the dragon in the Kumandra map. Cultural definition, heart the hollow muscular organ that is the center of the circulatory system. Another definition, heart means the center of the total personality, especially with reference to intuition, feeling or emotion. (Thesaurus, 2022). Heart in this film has a symbolic meaning because Heart seems to have significant meaning and it stands more than itself as proposed by McMahan, Et. Al. (201, pg. 125). Heart means the central land of prosperity. An area is called Prosperity can be characterized from several aspects, namely social, cultural, economic, and environmental. Cultural indicators, referring to the maintenance and restoration of historic and cultural heritage. Social indicators, touching upon issues such as health, education, housing, security, population characteristics financial indicators, that focus on measurable economic sectors. Environmental indicators, reflecting the quality of the environment or natural resources of the region. They mainly aim towards dealing with environmental concerns (Markou, et. al., 2015).

For social and cultural indicators, It can be seen from the following picture that gives illustration about Heart is a magical area full of rocks that form natural formations to protect dragon gems. The Heart tribe takes great care of the dragon heritage and always tries to preserve the beliefs of the Kumandra people. It is also the goal of the leaders of Heart that they must maintain the harmony that once existed in Kumandra. This confirms that Heart is the central land that brings prosperity to its people. The meaning of the symbol of the Heart can be illustrated by the picture below.

![Picture 1. The Land of Heart](image-url)
Besides preserving culture and social harmony in Heart, the leader of this tribe, Benja, is also very aware of the relationship between humans and the environment. Therefore, Benja is very focused on this matter so that he always tries to always realize environmental sustainability. One of his efforts is to unite all tribes in maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature and the environment. This is seen in the following image which illustrates that he is trying to convince all the tribes to reunite to become Kumandra. By living always in harmony with the environment they can live in prosperity.

![Image](image1.png)

**Picture 2. The Leader of Heart Invites All Tribes**

Furthermore, Heart as the central land of prosperity is recognized by all the tribes in this film. The prosperity that resides in the Heart is thought to be bestowed by the power of the gemstones they guard. In fact, because of this assumption, all the tribes were hostile to the Heart tribes. This was conveyed by Benja, the head of the Heart tribe, to his daughter, Raya.

*Benja*: They’re only our enemies because they think the Dragon Gem magically brings us prosperity. (00:10:06)

The above is also corroborated by the opinion of other tribes that Heart is a land of prosperity. The Heart tribe is considered to have everything. This is conveyed by one of the leaders of the Talon tribe when they were invited by the Heart tribe. Moreover, the Heart tribe seemed to be more prosperous in all aspects. It can be seen from the food intake shown in the following scene. So many kinds of food are shown in the following scene. There are various fruits and vegetables as a dish for all tribes that will be invited to Heart.

![Image](image2.png)

**Picture 3. Preparation for the Invited Tribes**

The picture above shows how the Heart tribe prepares various foods and fruits which of course come from and grow in the land of the Heart. Economically, this shows that their food adequacy is fulfilled. And this shows their land is very rich. Wealth and food adequacy is prosperity that is measured economically. This growth was seen in the Heart tribe. This is in line with the statement that economic growth can be an important factor of prosperity. A distinct possibility remains that growth is functional for prosperity; that continued economic growth is a necessary condition for a lasting prosperity (Țîrcă, Badea, & Octavian, 2010).

From the evidence above, it can be concluded that all aspects of the prosperity, Heart assessment indicators meet all the criteria or social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects. This proves that the Heart symbolizes as the center of prosperity depicted in the film Raya and the Last Dragon. This proves that Heart has a symbolic meaning.

**Kumandra**

In the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*, Kumandra is a fantasy land where the people live in peace and harmony side by side with dragons. Kumandra also has a symbolic meaning. **Kumandra** means the land of environmental sustainability. **Kumandra** is illustrated as a
The harmony of human life with nature can be seen from the scene presented at the beginning of the film. *Kumandra* is depicted as a human who lives in harmony with the dragons. The water flows beautifully. Plants thrive. Life looks harmonious and peaceful like heaven. *Kumandra* is like heaven. This is symbolized by the green color at the beginning of introducing *Kumandra*. The green color symbolizes fertility and a good and clean ecosystem and environment. The picture below illustrates the harmony of life in *Kumandra*.

![Picture 4. Kumandra](image)

**Raya**: This is what we used to be. When our land was whole, and we lived harmoniously alongside... dragons. Magical creatures who brought us water and rain and peace. It was paradise. (00:01:46)

**Kumandra** was introduced like heaven. This is why **Benja**, the leader of the Heart tribe, really wants to restore harmony and peace like **Kumandra**. He didn't want all the tribes to attack each other for the dragon gems. He wanted all tribes to live in prosperity and peace. In other words, he wants to continue the environmental sustainability that existed in **Kumandra** five hundred years ago. In this kingdom, they live in harmony with nature. There is no division or competition. They are united and live in harmony. This is what **Benja** conveyed to his daughter **Raya** in the following quotation.

**Benja**: Raya, there's a reason why each land is named after a part of the dragon. We were once unified. Harmoniously as one. **Kumandra**.

(00:09:23)

The above statement emphasizes that life in **Kumandra** is a dream. Life there is like living in heaven. This proves that **Kumandra** is symbolized as the land of environmental sustainability. A harmonious and peaceful life is found there.

**Dragon’s Gem or Orb**

This Dragon's gem or Orb is located and guarded by the **Heart** tribe. It was this dragon gem that was the cause of all the tribes fighting. Tribes other than **Heart** considers that this dragon gem is a source of prosperity for the land of **Heart**. They think **Heart** is very rich because there are dragon gems stored there. This dragon gem is the source of jealousy for other tribes such as **Tail**, **Talon Spine** and **Fang**. They want to have the dragon gems so they can also be rich like **Heart**. The followings are the statements from two leaders of the **Talon** tribe and **Spine** one who say that **Heart** can fulfill his dream of becoming **Kumandra** because he has the dragon's gem. The statements are made when all the tribes are invited by **Benja**, the leader of the **Heart** tribe.

**The Chief of Talon Tribe**: The land of **Heart** already has everything.
The Chief of Spine Tribe: Oh, it’s easy to pontificate on Kumandra when you hold the mightiest weapon in all the lands. (00:11:50-52)

The leader of the Heart tribe argues that the dragon gem is not a weapon that functions and is used as what other tribes think. He made a statement in front of all tribes presented that the dragon gem was a sacred relief that had to be guarded because it was a relic of the dragons.

Benja: The gem’s not a weapon. It’s a sacred relic. It’s the last bit of dragon magic left in the whole world. (00:11:58)

Hundreds years ago, dragons combined their powers and formed this dragon gem. It is this dragon gem that gives the last dragon the strength to fight off Drunn's attacks. Seen in the following scene, all the dragons give their strength and unite the holy power. All dragons believe that if they unite, their strength can destroy Drunn.

Picture 5. The Unification of All Dragons’ Power

All the dragons unite their faith to entrust their power to the last dragon, Sisu. It becomes a sacred source of power due to the sincere belief of all dragons. It is this union that is the source of the power embedded in the dragon gems. Therefore, this dragon gem has a symbolic meaning as the sacred strength of harmonious unity. As illustrated in the image below, the dragon gems give off a blue light and is surrounded by splashes of water which symbolize cleanliness or purity.

Picture 6. The Dragon’s Gem or Orb

In addition, all the dragons unite their faith to entrust their power to the last dragon, Sisu. It becomes a sacred source of power due to the sincere belief of all dragons. It is this union that is the source of the power embedded in the dragon gems. Therefore, this dragon gem has a symbolic meaning as the sacred strength of harmonious unity. As illustrated in the image below, the dragon gems give off a blue light, and it is surrounded by splashes of water. The water splash symbolizes cleanliness or purity.

This dragon’s gem carries a message of unity. Unity is a source of strength. This is conveyed through the dragon gem’s symbol in the film Raya and the Last Dragon. In all aspects of life, unity or cooperation is very much needed. This becomes a spirit for humans to carry out their social roles in life. Unity is a solid foundation for all social organizations to achieve compatible goals because with unity all elements can gain new benefits and experiences which are mutually beneficial (mutual) in social or commercial activities. This is as stated by Spinuzzi and Bilandzic et al. in Troisi, Carrubbo, & Maione (2017). In line with this, the dragon gems are brought together from the power of all the dragons to achieve the one goal of winning against Drunn. When a group has the same goal, and they unite to achieve that goal, a powerful force will be formed. Strength is very important for us in living this life. Hausmann (2022) said strength is vitality, endurance, the ability to persist and to establish the purposes in life.
Based on the description above, the Dragon’s Gem in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* has a symbolic meaning. It also carries a message from this film. It conveys about the importance of unity. The importance of staying united in every situation is emphasized through the creation of the orb like a proverb says unity is strength. Finally, the dragon’s gem in this film brings a motto for various organizations as well as missions across the globe.

**Sisu**

Symbolically, *Sisu* means spirit of trustworthy. *Sisu* is the last dragon entrusted by his brothers to protect the orb from *Drunn’s* attacks. *Sisu* is a living water dragon summoned by *Raya*, the protagonist of this film. Then, *Sisu* can live again to bring back harmony and prosperity to all tribes. Not only that, *Sisu* is also believed to be able to help all tribes against *Drunn*. The following is *Sisu’s* confession to Raya when she tries to convince *Raya* of the trust he has received. *Sisu* was chosen to guard the dragon stone and gathered all the dragon power within the stone.

*Sisu*: I don’t know why they chose me. It could have been any of us. All I know is I trusted them, and they trusted me. And so...Everyone, give me your gems. We can still put it together. It can still work(1:08:51).

*Sisu* always brings up the issue of a crisis of trust in every conversation she has with *Raya*. She tries to make *Raya* realize that trust is the key to their success in saving everyone from *Drunn’s* attack. *Sisu* proves that on the basis of trust, she was given the responsibility of guarding the dragon stone and he managed to keep it until she came back to live again. *Sisu* wants *Raya* to do the same thing as she has done. *Sisu* wants *Raya* to reduce her distrust of other people. That belief will bring good luck that can help *Raya* to save everyone. The following scene shows the conversation between *Sisu* and *Raya*. *Sisu* tries to convince *Raya* that trust will make her able to save people.

Picture 7. The Dialogue between *Sisu* and *Raya* about Trust

*Sisu* fails to prove that belief can bring luck and help. *Sisu* and *Raya* are trapped by the Spine tribe's inhabitants. However, in the end *Sisu* is able to convince *Raya* to believe in *Namari*. *Raya* agrees with *Sisu’s* plan believing that *Namari* will help them. They believe that *Namari* will give them the dragon stone shards. Although, their plan fails, in the end *Raya* convinces everyone including *Namari* that belief is the key to the dragon stone's power. Without belief, the power of the dragon stone cannot be manifested. Trust is the magical power of dragon stone. It is revealed by *Raya* when they are trapped by *Drunn’s* group. *Raya* turns to realize that trust is the source of power. After she sees the following dragon pendant, she believes that they will be able to make the dragon gem powerful again.

Picture 8. The Dragon Pendant
From the dialogue above, it is clearly revealed that Sisu carries a message of trust between them. They must trust each other to revive the power of the dragon stone. This proves that Sisu contains the meaning of trust. This is the symbolic message of the dragon character Sisu. The character of Sisu is very strong in carrying one of the moral messages in the film Raya and the Last Dragon. This message is conveyed symbolically through the character Sisu which carries the meaning of spirit of Trust. This is revealed at the end of the story of this film.

It can be seen that there is a message about trust issues conveyed through the last dragon character, Sisu. He is constantly trying to convince the other characters to trust each other and maintain that trust. Mutual trust is the key to their success against Drunn’s attacks. What this film wants to convey is that mutual trust between humans is a gift that becomes human strength to fight against whatever obstacles are faced in life.

Drunn

Drunn is a villain in the film Raya and the Last Dragon. The Drunn also has symbolical meaning. It means threat to sustainable development. The Drunn is an evil force that threatens the citizens of Kumandra. Though Drunn is not presented as the primary villains, the monsters remain the underlying threat in Disney’s latest animated movie. Not only do the Drunn have a long and dark history with Kumandra but also their return ends up teaching the kingdom about the importance of unity. Five centuries before, Kumandra stood as a prosperous land where humans and dragons lived in harmony. When Drunn arrived, the kingdom was ravished as living things fell victim. To save humanity, a group of dragons combined their magic to form an orb that could banished the Drunn. It worked, but the remaining dragons went extinct, except for Sisu. The orb also survived. After the five distinct tribes fight for control of the magical object in the present timeline, it breaks, awakening the Drunn. To save humanity and the fate of Kumandra, Raya makes it her mission to find Sisu to help obtain the dragon gem pieces to banish the Drunn.

The essence of the concept of sustainable development derives from the triple bottom line concept, which implies the balance between three pillars of sustainability – environmental sustainability focused on maintaining the quality of the environment which is necessary for conducting the economic activities and quality of life of people, social sustainability which strives to ensure human rights and equality, preservation of cultural identity, respect for cultural diversity, race and religion, and economic sustainability necessary to maintain the natural, social and human capital required for income and living standards. Sustainable development is achieved through a balance between all these pillars, however, the required condition is not easy to achieve, because in the process of achieving its goals each pillar of sustainability must respect the interests of other pillars not to bring them into imbalance (Klarin, 2018). Sachs (2010: 28) also suggests how there is no development without sustainability or sustainability without development. In line with this concept, Drunn disturbs all the pillars of sustainability.

Overall, the development of humanity has led to the increasingly unfavorable change. This change can threaten the human growth. This happens to the land of Kumandra. Drunn comes as a threat to all sustainable development in Kumandra. Everything Drunn destroy life in Kumandra and it also finally happens in the land of Heart. As a result, the sustainable development in Heart is also threatened. That is why Raya has a mission to put all pieces of the dragon’s gem together to banish Drunn. Raya and Benja, the leader of Heart tribe, realize that Drunn will block human sustainability. They will not be able to live harmoniously and peacefully by the existence of Drunn. It can be seen from the following scene. Drunn turns everything into stone. All human beings touched by Drunn stop living.
All tribes want the dragon’s gem to protect them from Drunn’s attack. They all fight for the orb. This condition also makes the stability into a mess. Furthermore, they distrust each other. Each of them considers others their enemies because all people want the dragon’s gem. Greed and hatred grow among them. This shows that social condition is also in mess. Such fight for the dragon’s gem is shown in the following scene. All tribes try to rob the dragon’s gem. Even, they attack each other.

Conclusion

In general, all symbols convey messages about human sustainable development. From the findings, the five symbols carry messages that have the same theme. All symbols are reflected in the general message of the film. From, Land of Kumandra which gives the meaning of symbols as the land of prosperity, Kumandra as the center of environmental of sustainability, Dragon’Gem as unity, Sisu as trust and Drunn as threat of sustainable development. It can be concluded that all the messages lead to sustainable development. How humans maintain the harmony of the ecosystem and how they should maintain the stability and sustainability of life. These messages touch on all aspects of life such as social relations, culture, economy, harmony with nature and the environment, and the historical meaning. This complexity is what makes the film special. It is appropriate that ideally, a literary work should carry a message that is beneficial for the development of thought and knowledge of the audience. And this film has contributed it.

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