

Death Note: Symbols of Power and Morality through Peirce's Semiotics

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the representation of power and morality in *Death Note* through the semiotic approach of Charles Sanders Peirce. *Death Note*, a popular manga written by Tsugumi Ohba and illustrated by Takeshi Obata, explores themes such as absolute power, justice, and moral dilemmas. Using Peirce's semiotic theory, this study identifies how the visual and narrative symbols in *Death Note* shape the discourse on power and morality. The research findings suggest that *Death Note* is not only a work of entertainment but also a medium for critical reflection on social, political, and ethical issues in modern society.

KEYWORDS: *Death Note*, Peirce's semiotics, power, morality, justice, popular culture.

I INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the study of popular culture products has seen rapid development in the academic realm, particularly within the disciplines of semiotics, cultural studies, and media theory. Popular cultural phenomena such as anime and manga, which have a global reach, have become increasingly fascinating subjects for researchers. These products not only provide entertainment but also contain symbolic layers that reflect the social, political, and philosophical dynamics of society. One notable work in this regard is *Death Note*, a manga written by Tsugumi Ohba and illustrated by Takeshi Obata, published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from 2003 to 2006[1]. With its growing popularity, *Death Note* has transcended mere entertainment consumption and become the subject of cross-disciplinary academic studies, including philosophy, psychology, communication studies, and political theory. The success of this manga in capturing the attention of both the public and academics lies in its narrative complexity and exploration of profound themes, such as power, morality, and the ethical consequences of individual actions. The story of *Death Note* follows Light Yagami, a genius teenager who discovers a supernatural notebook that has the ability to kill anyone whose name is written in it. With the idealism of creating a better world free from crime, Light uses this power to enforce his version of justice. The main conflict in the story arises when Light faces off against L, a genius detective trying to uncover his identity and stop his actions. The conflict between Light and L not only represents a battle between law and crime but also raises deeper issues regarding epistemology, ethics, and the legitimacy of power. Issues such as justice, authority, and individual responsibility become particularly relevant in the context of an increasingly complex and fragmented modern society.

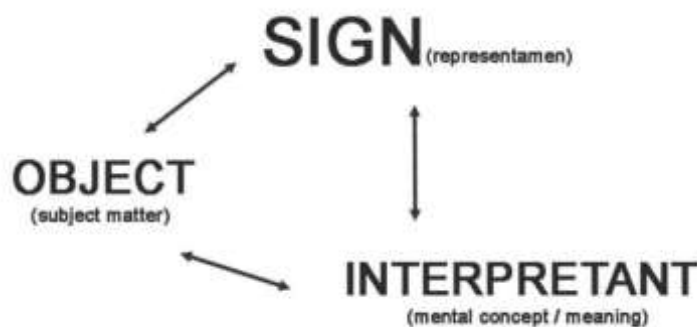
At the academic level, *Death Note* presents a discourse rich in symbolism that allows for the application of various theoretical perspectives in its analysis. One theory that is particularly relevant in this context is the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, which offers an approach to understanding how signs (both visual and narrative) within a text can construct broader meanings. Peirce's semiotics divides signs into three main components: representamen (the sign itself), object (the reference or concept represented by the sign), and interpretant (the meaning generated from the interaction between the sign and the object)[2]. In the context of *Death Note*, the representamen can be found in the visual symbols used in the manga, such as the design of the

notebook, the characters depicted, and the narrative elements that define each character's traits. The object consists of abstract concepts like absolute power, morality, and justice, while the interpretant encompasses the various meanings generated by the audience based on their interaction with these signs. However, while several studies have analyzed *Death Note* from various perspectives, such as psychology, philosophy, and ethics, there is still limited research that deeply applies Peirce's semiotic theory to examine how these visual and narrative elements contribute to the construction of discourses on power and morality. Some previous studies have focused more on the psychological aspects of the characters or the ideological battle between the protagonist and antagonist, but have paid less attention to how the symbols in the story shape larger representations of ideology regarding power and legitimacy. A more systematic and theoretical semiotic study is needed to explore how *Death Note* as a popular cultural text functions as an arena for the negotiation and representation of ideology, especially in the context of a contemporary society interconnected by digital media and global communication.[3]

Through Peirce's semiotic analysis, this study aims to make a significant contribution to understanding how the visual and narrative elements in *Death Note* function to articulate concepts such as power, justice, and morality. This research not only seeks to provide insights into the symbolism within the work but also hopes to enrich semiotic studies in popular culture, particularly in the analysis of visual and narrative texts that reflect the complex social, political, and ethical realities. Thus, this study strives to fill the gap in existing academic research and contribute to deepening our understanding of how popular texts function both as mirrors and as tools for shaping ideology in an increasingly interconnected global society[4].

II. DISCUSSION

This study reveals that *Death Note* represents the concepts of power and morality through various visual and narrative signs that can be deeply analyzed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework. By applying the three main components of Peirce's sign theory representamen (the physical form of the sign), object (the concept referred to by the sign), and interpretant (the meaning generated in the interpretation process)—this research successfully identifies and categorizes the key symbols that represent how power and morality are constructed, perceived, and contested within the *Death Note* narrative[5].



Charles Peirce's Triadic Model Of Signs

Peirce called the physical form of the sign the representamen. The sign represents its object, or meaning, and this might evoke some sort of mental concept, the interpretant. Or the viewer might have to interpret the sign before the subject matter becomes clear[6]. Or the sign could be determined by the object which leads to the mental concept. Or we have an idea in our heads and then we search for the right sign to perform an action. Through a thematic and contextual approach, this study analyzes key scenes in the manga and anime, which specifically highlight the shifting meanings of signs across different narrative and cultural situations. These shifts reflect how the meanings of power and morality can change depending on the interactions between characters, the dynamics of conflict, and the perspectives of the audience interpreting these symbols within a broader social,

political, and philosophical framework. Thus, the findings of this study not only uncover the semiotic structure that shapes the discourse on power and morality in *Death Note*, but also demonstrate how this anime serves as a medium for reflection on ethical, legal, and authoritarian issues in modern society.

1). Peirce's Semiotic Analysis of *Death Note*: Representation of Power, Morality, and Meaning Construction

The research findings show that *Death Note* functions not only as an entertainment narrative but also as a critical reflection on the dynamics of power and morality in contemporary society. The representation of power in *Death Note* is explicitly portrayed through the *Death Note* book itself and the character of Light Yagami as the holder of absolute power. In Peirce's semiotic context, the *Death Note* book serves as the representamen, a physical sign that symbolizes the ultimate authority over human life. Visually, the book is designed in a deep black color with "Death Note" written in Gothic letters, giving it a dark, mysterious appearance with a sacred and authoritative aura. As the object, the book refers to the concept of absolute power, enabling one to control life and death simply by writing someone's name. The book also symbolizes how power can be personified in a seemingly neutral medium, yet has significant implications for the social and moral order[7].

The interpretant of this sign is that the book is not merely a tool for killing but also a metaphor for how power can alter an individual's perception of justice, ethics, and morality. The concept of power in *Death Note* can be analyzed through the perspective of panopticism as articulated by Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault explains that power is not only coercive but also operates through mechanisms of surveillance and the internalization of norms. Light Yagami, as the holder of the *Death Note*, acts as an unseen entity of surveillance, possessing absolute control over the world. By merely knowing someone's name and face, he is able to determine their life or death without the public knowing his identity. This represents how power functions in a hidden form, yet still disciplines society through fear and control.



Picture 1. Light Yagami holds the Death Note.

As a symbol of biopolitical power, as proposed by Foucault (2003), Light's actions reflect how the regulation of life and death can be carried out by a certain authority that holds legitimacy. In this context, Light claims the role of the highest authority, entitled to determine who deserves to live and who deserves to die. He sees himself as the true representation of justice, while the conventional legal system is viewed as failing to maintain order. However, as the story progresses, the power he holds shifts from initial idealism to a form of authoritarianism, where Light begins to view himself as a "god" whose decisions cannot be questioned[8]. This reflects the concept of absolutism in power, where an individual with unlimited authority tends to become corrupt and loses their moral perspective. Morality in *Death Note* is constructed through the ideological conflict between Light Yagami and L, who each represent two different ethical paradigms: utilitarianism versus deontology. Light Yagami represents the utilitarian approach, as proposed by John Stuart Mill (1863), where an action is considered

right if it produces the greatest benefit for society. Light believes that killing criminals is justified as long as it creates a better and safer world for the majority of people. On the other hand, L represents the deontological approach, as outlined by Immanuel Kant (1785), which asserts that killing is wrong in any situation, regardless of the good intentions behind it[7].

In the context of Peirce's semiotics, this moral conflict can be analyzed through the visual signs and dialogue that appear in various scenes. The representamen in this conflict can be seen in the differences in facial expressions, body posture, and speaking styles between Light and L. Light is often depicted with a cold smile and sharp gaze, signaling his high self-confidence in his version of justice. In contrast, L is more frequently shown with unconventional body movements and a skeptical expression, indicating his rational approach to the concept of justice, which is not based on an individual's subjective morality but on objective law. The object in this conflict is the concept of morality being negotiated, where both Light and L have strong justifications for their approaches to justice. However, the interpretant of this conflict conveys to the audience that morality is not absolute; rather, it depends on the social context and the individual perspective interpreting it. Through its visual and narrative signs, *Death Note* offers a critique of corrupt legal systems, the failure of the state to uphold justice, and the dangers of extremism in applying moral concepts. The existence of the characters Near and Mello, as successors to L, illustrates that the legal system continues to evolve, and does not always rely on absolute moral principles, but rather on the negotiation of interests within a complex social context[9].

In the context of cultural semiotics, *Death Note* can be understood as part of a broader discourse on how society interprets power and morality in the modern era, where the boundary between truth and propaganda becomes increasingly blurred. This study demonstrates that through visual symbolism, character representation, and a complex narrative structure, *Death Note* not only reflects on moral dilemmas but also examines how authority and law can shift depending on the social conditions that underlie them.

2). Moral Dilemma and Ethical Reflection in *Death Note*: A Peirce's Semiotic Analysis

The moral dilemma presented in *Death Note* is one of the key aspects that build its narrative complexity, particularly in relation to the ethical boundaries of power usage. This study analyzes how the signs in *Death Note* contribute to the construction of broader meanings about moral conflict, subjective justice, and legal legitimacy in modern society. By applying the triadic relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant, this research examines how the symbolism in *Death Note* shapes the discourse on moral authority and how absolute power, without control, can lead to destructive moral deviation.



Picture 2. The Shinigami influences Light Yagami

In the context of representamen, the *Death Note* as a physical object functions as the primary sign representing the highest authority over human life. The book is depicted as a supernatural medium that

functionally replaces the conventional legal and judicial system with a faster and more efficient mechanism for executing criminals. Visually, the book is portrayed with a simple design but carries a mysterious aura, with the words "Death Note" in Gothic font, enhancing its authoritative and threatening impression. The book not only serves as a tool for killing but also as a symbol representing an individual's power to determine the fate of others without going through the legal mechanisms recognized in society.

As the object, the Death Note in this narrative refers to the concept of legality and the validity of justice outside the formal legal system. By granting absolute power to an individual to execute anyone deemed guilty, the Death Note implicitly critiques the incapacity of the legal system to enforce justice effectively. In several key scenes, the conventional justice system in the world of Death Note is portrayed as slow, vulnerable to corruption, and often failing to administer appropriate punishment for criminals[10]. This raises philosophical questions about whether formal law is truly the only legitimate mechanism for enforcing justice, or whether an individual with sufficient power can take over that role. However, as the interpretant, the meaning that arises from the interaction between the Death Note as a sign and its social context leads to critical questions about the moral limits of enforcing justice. As the story progresses, the Death Note no longer serves merely as a tool for punishing criminals but transforms into a weapon for Light Yagami to consolidate his power as Kira. Initially believing that he was acting for the good of humanity, Light gradually experiences a moral shift towards increasing extremism, where he begins to view anyone who opposes him as a threat worthy of elimination. This illustrates how unchecked power, without oversight and mechanisms of checks and balances, can lead to tyranny and systematic abuse of power.

From a Peircean semiotic perspective, Light's character transformation can be analyzed as a shift in meaning from a stable representamen, but with a contextually changing interpretant. In the early phase of the story, the Death Note holds the meaning of an alternative tool for justice, used to punish criminals who cannot be reached by conventional law. However, in the later phases, the meaning of the book shifts to become a tool of domination and oppression for anyone considered an enemy or a threat to Light's authority as Kira. This indicates that the meaning of a sign is not fixed, but can change depending on the use and interpretation given by the individual controlling it. Light's moral transition is reinforced through the use of visual signs that illustrate his changing perspective on justice. One example of this is the use of lighting changes and camera framing in scenes where Light begins to realize his power. When Light first discovers the Death Note, the lighting is bright with more natural colors, signifying that he is still in the stage of moral exploration. However, as time progresses, scenes involving Light are dominated by dim lighting with high contrast, emphasizing his psychological transformation into a more manipulative and less empathetic figure.

In addition, Light's facial expressions, which initially convey firmness and moral conviction, gradually shift to a cynical smile and a sharper gaze, indicating how the Death Note has transformed him from someone who believes he brings justice to someone who enjoys absolute, unchecked power. This demonstrates how non-verbal signs in visual narratives can serve as semiotic indicators in interpreting character transformation and the moral values held by a character within the story. The Death Note narrative also highlights how moral legitimacy can be subjective and contextual. One of the most intriguing aspects of the story is how society in the Death Note world responds to the existence of Kira. In several scenes, it is shown that a majority of the population supports Kira's actions, seeing him as a savior who brings justice more effectively than the conventional legal system. However, there is also a group that opposes Kira's actions, arguing that murder cannot be justified under any circumstances, regardless of the motives behind it.

From a semiotic perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates how a sign (in this case, Kira as a symbol of justice) can have diverse interpretations depending on the social experiences and values held by its audience[11]. In the real world, this can be compared to how a particular leader or ruler may be seen as a hero by one group but as a tyrant by another. Thus, Death Note serves as a reflection on how the concept of justice is

never absolute, but rather depends on how individuals or societies construct it based on their own experiences, cultures, and interests. This study reveals that the signs in *Death Note* not only function as aesthetic elements of the narrative but also as semiotic instruments that construct discourse around the ethical boundaries of power usage, the corruption of moral values, and the complexities of enforcing justice. In a cultural context, *Death Note* offers deeper insights into how fictional media can serve as a means of exploring complex social dilemmas, as well as how visual and textual narratives can shape the audience's understanding of concepts like power and morality in real life. Therefore, *Death Note* can be understood as a cultural text that opens up a space for discussion regarding the nature of justice, morality, and the dynamics of power within complex social systems.

3). Social and Philosophical Relevance in the Contemporary Context: A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of *Death Note*

In the landscape of popular culture, *Death Note* is not just an entertainment product that provides narrative tension but also a medium for critical reflection that stimulates deep discussions about social, political, and ethical issues in modern society. Within the framework of representamen, various visual elements and symbols in *Death Note* reflect the power structures in contemporary society. One of the most striking aspects is how the legal system is portrayed in the story, often failing to handle crime efficiently, thus giving rise to a character like Light Yagami, who attempts to create an alternative system of justice. This representation not only reflects distrust in the existing legal system but also highlights the gap between formal law and substantive justice. As an object, *Death Note* in the social context can be linked to the phenomenon of vigilantism, where individuals or certain groups take over the role of law enforcement due to the inability of official authorities to uphold justice. This phenomenon can be observed in various real-world cases, such as vigilante groups targeting criminals who are perceived to have escaped punishment in the legal system. Light Yagami, in his capacity as Kira, represents the paradigm of retributive justice, which argues that punishment should be proportionate to the crime committed. However, this concept faces conflict with the conventional legal system, which in many cases seeks to prioritize procedural justice rather than merely responding to crime with proportional punishment.

The series challenges the fundamental assumption of whether the law enforced by the state is always just, or whether it tends to favor certain interests. In several key scenes, it becomes apparent that the judicial system in the world of *Death Note* often fails to handle criminal cases effectively, while the presence of Kira presents a form of justice that is more immediate but highly controversial. This reflects the tension between positivist legal systems and natural law approaches, where justice is not only understood as something based on written laws but also involves a broader moral dimension. Furthermore, an analysis of *Death Note* reveals that the legal system in the story is criticized not only for its effectiveness but also from the perspective of legal politics and abuse of power. Characters on the side of authority, such as L, Near, and the police, strive to maintain the status quo by following existing legal procedures, while Light Yagami challenges the system by creating a new legal norm based on individual authority. In this context, *Death Note* reflects the debate about the concept of sovereignty in law, as proposed by Carl Schmitt (1922), who argued that true sovereignty lies with the entity that has the power to determine the state of emergency and establish laws outside of the established procedures[1].

The presence of Light as Kira not only changes the way society views justice, but also creates a new power structure that operates through mechanisms of surveillance and fear, similar to the concept of panopticism proposed by Foucault (1977). With the threat that anyone could be killed if their name is written in the *Death Note*, society in the world of *Death Note* begins to discipline itself and avoid criminal actions not out of moral reasons, but because of the fear of instant punishment from Kira. As a medium for social reflection, *Death Note* also portrays how ideology and propaganda can shape public perception of power. Throughout the story, it becomes apparent that much of society begins to support Kira's actions and sees him as a messianic figure creating a new and more just world. This support not only comes from individuals who feel that Kira is bringing justice, but also from groups who believe that Kira's presence is a solution to the state's failure in providing security and

social welfare. This phenomenon can be linked to how authoritarian figures in the real world often gain public support through narratives emphasizing their effectiveness in maintaining order, even through methods that violate law and ethics.



Picture 3. How the power of Death Note affects an individual.

In the context of political philosophy, Death Note can be linked to the concept of the legitimacy of power as discussed by Max Weber (1922), who categorized power into three types: legal-rational authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. Light Yagami, as Kira, gains his legitimacy not through the legal framework recognized by the state (legal-rational authority), but through charismatic authority, where he earns public support based on the perception that he is the only individual capable of effectively administering justice. Thus, Death Note illustrates how authority in modern society is not solely derived from legal institutions but also from social constructions shaped by narrative and propaganda[12].

Dalam dunia nyata, banyak pemimpin atau kelompok politik yang menggunakan retorika moralitas untuk membenarkan tindakan-tindakan koersif mereka, dengan dalih bahwa mereka bertindak untuk kebaikan yang lebih besar. Pola ini terlihat dalam bagaimana Light Yagami meyakinkan dirinya sendiri dan orang-orang di sekitarnya bahwa semua tindakannya sah karena tujuannya adalah menciptakan dunia yang lebih baik. Namun, pada akhirnya, Death Note juga memperlihatkan konsekuensi dari kekuasaan yang tidak memiliki mekanisme pengawasan, di mana Light semakin tersesat dalam paradigma absolutisme moral yang ia ciptakan sendiri, yang pada akhirnya menghancurkan dirinya.

4). Theoretical Contributions and Academic Implications: Peirce's Semiotic Analysis of Death Note

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to the fields of semiotics, popular culture studies, and media studies, particularly in analyzing how signs in fictional media function not only as narrative elements but also as instruments for shaping social, political, and ethical discourses. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, this research reveals how the triadic relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant plays a role in shaping deeper meanings of power, morality, and justice within the context of popular culture. Peirce's semiotic approach allows for a more complex exploration of how symbols in Death Note are not only constructed internally within the narrative but also interact with social experiences and audience perceptions in real life. One of the main contributions of this study is how Peirce's semiotics can be used to uncover the structure of signs in fictional texts and their impact on the formation of social understanding. In Death Note, the use of the Death Note book as a representamen, which refers to the concept of absolute power as the object, has led to varying interpretations among audiences. These interpretations are influenced by the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of the audience, thus demonstrating that popular cultural texts have a dynamic nature in their production of meaning[9].



Picture 4. Image of the Death Note Shinigami, Ryuk

This research also opens up space for further studies on how the representation of power and morality in other fictional works can be analyzed using a semiotic approach. For example, the use of symbolism in Death Note can be compared with the symbolism in other fictional narratives exploring the concept of justice, such as 1984 by George Orwell or V for Vendetta by Alan Moore. Therefore, the semiotic approach used in this study can be extended to understand how popular media, as a whole, shapes societal understanding of authority, law, and morality. This research also contributes to the academic world regarding the role of popular media as a medium for social reflection[13]. The study shows that visual products like Death Note not only function as entertainment but also have the potential to articulate and negotiate ideological discourse in modern society. In Peirce's semiotic analysis, the signs in Death Note not only build an immersive fictional world but also become part of a broader social construction, where the audience can derive meaning and connect it to more tangible social and political contexts.

In the context of media and communication studies, this research emphasizes that fictional media have a broader influence than merely serving as entertainment; they are tools that can be used to critique power structures, legal legitimacy, and moral dynamics in society[14]. By examining how Death Note constructs a narrative about the supremacy of law, vigilante justice, and the ethical limits of power usage, this study provides a broader understanding of how society forms and negotiates the concept of justice in popular culture. Practically, this research highlights the importance of understanding symbolism in popular media as a tool for social analysis, especially in critiquing various aspects of ethics, law, and politics that evolve within contemporary society. In the digital era, popular media play an increasingly significant role in shaping public opinion, making critical media literacy more important than ever. Death Note as a popular culture text exemplifies how fictional narratives can be used to spark critical debates about the ethical boundaries of justice enforcement and the use of power. The academic implications of this study also extend to the use of a semiotic approach in education and interdisciplinary research. This study demonstrates that Peirce's semiotic approach can be applied not only in literature and popular culture studies but also in fields such as legal philosophy, political studies, and media communication[15]. By understanding how symbols in popular media shape and direct public perception of social and ethical issues, this semiotic approach can be used to enhance critical awareness of how narratives circulating in the public sphere can influence public opinions and attitudes.

Additionally, this research has practical implications for educators, academics, and media practitioners in utilizing works of fiction as an effective learning resource for exploring moral and social concepts. By analyzing how Death Note constructs discourse around power and morality, this study can serve as a reference in broader academic discussions about the representation of ideologies in popular culture. In the realm of cultural studies and media studies, the findings of this research demonstrate that popular cultural products can reflect larger social structures while offering critique of existing systems. In a global context increasingly marked by social change,

legal inequities, and various forms of power abuse, this research provides a critical perspective on how fictional media can offer reflections on the real world.

5). Methodological Implications and In-Depth Analysis

The research method used in this study, namely Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis, has proven to be effective in uncovering the hidden meanings in fictional works like *Death Note*. By focusing on the three main components in Peirce's sign theory representamen (the physically visible sign), object (the concept or reference of the meaning indicated by the sign), and interpretant (the meaning derived from the interaction between the representamen and the object) this study successfully identified and interpreted the complex symbols of power and morality within the *Death Note* narrative. In the analytical process, this study classified the signs in *Death Note* into thematic categories such as justice, absolute power, and moral ambivalence [16]. Each category was analyzed in depth to understand how the narrative and symbolism in *Death Note* form broader social and philosophical meanings. To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed data triangulation, which involved comparing the results of the semiotic analysis with other theories in semiotics, popular culture studies, and moral philosophy. This approach enabled the research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning structure embedded in the work.

The research findings show that *Death Note* functions not only as a work of entertainment but also as a medium for critical reflection on social, political, and ethical issues in modern society. The narrative in this work challenges the audience to question the boundaries between justice and crime, as well as analyze the impact of absolute power on individual morality and social structure. The representation of the character Light Yagami as Kira, who gradually transforms from idealism to authoritarianism, serves as a concrete example of how the symbols in *Death Note* reflect the ethical dilemmas that often occur in the history of politics and legal systems in the real world. In a global context, this study also highlights that *Death Note* is relevant to contemporary social phenomena, especially in the context of rising social inequality, ethical crises, and abuse of power. In the modern era, where power is increasingly centralized in technology systems and digital surveillance, *Death Note* can be interpreted as a critique of how authority and control can be arbitrarily used by individuals or institutions with access to significant power. Therefore, this work can be understood as a narrative that portrays the consequences of possessing power without effective oversight mechanisms.

This research demonstrates that symbols in fictional media not only construct imaginary worlds but also influence how audiences understand fundamental concepts in ethics, law, and politics. By examining how visual and narrative signs in *Death Note* shape the discourse on power and morality, this study shows that popular media plays a significant role in building social and intellectual awareness. In a methodological context, this study also confirms that Peirce's semiotics is a highly relevant approach for analyzing works of fiction with deep symbolism. By applying the concepts of representamen, object, and interpretant, this approach enables the study to unravel how signs in popular media not only create internal meaning within the narrative but also impact broader social interpretations. Therefore, this method can serve as a useful approach for future studies focusing on how fictional texts reflect or even shape social and political realities in the real world.

III. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that *Death Note* is not just a work of fiction, but a cultural text that serves as a medium for reflection on the dynamics of power and morality in contemporary society. The key symbols in *Death Note*, such as the *Death Note* book, the character of Light Yagami, and the legal system within this fictional world, have strong relevance to the social and political realities of the real world. The representation of power in *Death Note* shows how individuals granted absolute authority can experience moral deviation, while the ideological conflict between Light and L reflects the dialectic between retributive and procedural justice in modern legal systems. From a semiotic perspective, this research illustrates how visual and narrative signs can shape the audience's understanding of power and morality concepts. Theoretically, this research contributes to semiotics

and popular culture studies by demonstrating how fictional media can be a tool for analyzing power discourse and ethics in real life. Practically, it affirms that popular media like Death Note can serve as a tool to facilitate critical discussions about the dynamics of power, legal legitimacy, and the moral dilemmas individuals face in complex social structures.

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