

ABSTRACT

A book cover is a visual medium that shapes readers' expectations about a story's content, themes, and tone through elements like imagery, color, typography, and composition. Babel by R.F. Kuang—a novel often associated with the Dark Academia (DA) subculture, which emphasizes academic life, classical intellectualism, and a somber, melancholic atmosphere—features two distinct cover designs that represent DA through contrasting visual approaches.

This study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework (denotation, connotation, myth) alongside Miles & Huberman's qualitative analysis model (data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing). In-depth interviews were conducted with the Indonesian cover illustrator, semiotics experts, and target readers, selected to reflect diverse age groups, familiarity with DA, and visual literacy levels. Findings reveal that the international cover leans into the dark, exclusive aesthetic of DA, while the Indonesian version adopts a warmer, more inclusive tone. These differences highlight a visual adaptation to local cultural contexts and audience sensibilities, and reveal a shift in meaning between the designer's intent and the viewer's interpretation. This research demonstrates how visual communication design is not merely about aesthetics, but serves as a cultural lens that shapes meaning and reader expectations across different contexts.

Keywords : Book Cover, *Babel*, Dark Academia, Roland Barthes Semiotics, Cultural Representation