Sensual Symbols and Social Confusion: Revealing the Expression of Love in 'Qoddukal Mayyās' Lyrics through Riffaterre's Semiotic Lens

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ABSTRACT

The increasing popularity of Arabic songs across Indonesian digital platforms has led to frequent misinterpretations, particularly when secular compositions are assumed to be religious expressions such as *shalawat*. This study responds to that cultural misconception by examining the lyrics of "Qoddukal Mayyās" by Mulla Uthman Al-Musili, a song often mistakenly regarded as devotional. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach based on library research, the analysis is framed through Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. The methodology involves a systematic progression through heuristic reading to identify literal meanings, hermeneutic reading to interpret symbolic and contextual layers, and the identification of matrices, models, and variants to uncover the internal structure of poetic meaning. The analysis reveals that the song articulates a deeply emotional and profane form of love, marked by symbolic imagery and figurative language. Expressions such as "your supple body," "O my moon," and "my heart is on fire" reflect themes of sensual longing and romantic idealization without any reference to spiritual devotion or religious content. These findings confirm that the lyrics align with the Arabic *ghazal* tradition, emphasizing aesthetic admiration and personal emotion rather than worship or prophetic reverence. The study contributes to the clarification of cultural misreadings in the Indonesian context and highlights the necessity for greater Arabic literary literacy. Its implications are particularly relevant for educational settings where semiotic analysis can help students and the wider public distinguish between artistic expression and religious discourse within the broader landscape of Arabic popular culture.

1. Introduction

Music has always transcended boundaries, serving as a powerful medium through which individuals express identity, emotion, and cultural belonging. Its integration of lyrical content and melodic composition allows listeners to interpret artistic messages in ways that are deeply personal yet shaped by cultural frameworks. In the Arabic tradition, music serves not merely as entertainment but as a channel for transmitting social, emotional, and philosophical values, providing a unique space for layered meaning and symbolic representation (Kholid & Ahmad, 2016; Jambak et al., 2024). The allure of Arabic songs, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings like Indonesia, invites listeners to engage with unfamiliar cultural codes while also risking misinterpretations when those codes are not fully understood.

In recent years, the digital landscape has reshaped the reach and influence of Arabic music in Indonesia, with platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Spotify making Arabic songs widely accessible, especially among younger audiences. These platforms have fueled the popularity of traditional religious genres such as shalawat and nasyid while broadening the musical scene to include secular pop and romantic ballads, reflecting how media environments shape cultural consumption (Özkent, 2022; Chanifudin et al., 2024). Chanifudin et al. (2024) emphasize that TikTok and Instagram are key to disseminating various Arabic musical genres, encouraging genre blending and expanding audience appeal. This accessibility fosters user interaction and cultural exchange beyond traditional boundaries. The interplay between social media and music also shapes youth identities and group affiliations, reinforcing the importance of digital literacy in engaging with diverse content (Syagif, 2023; Syarofi & Syuhadak, 2023).

Moreover, social media promotes Arabic music through artistic sharing and user-generated content, enhancing its visibility. The 'glocalization' of music, where global and local influences merge, further illustrates how Arabic music adapts to Indonesian contexts (Hebert & Williams, 2020). These songs frequently appear in public spaces and social events, often accompanied by mislabeling that frames secular content as religious. The linguistic exoticism of Arabic, coupled with its sonic associations with Islamic spirituality, has led to a phenomenon in which songs devoid of religious substance are nonetheless embraced as sacred expressions, particularly by youth audiences with limited Arabic literacy (Rafsanjani & Handican, 2023).

This cultural confusion is not isolated. Hadi et al. (2022) highlight a compelling case in West Sumatra, where over 90 percent of respondents assumed that Arabic songs contain Islamic values. However, detailed linguistic analyses revealed that approximately 17.75 percent of these songs contradicted Islamic teachings. Such findings illuminate the widespread semantic distortion driven by aesthetic familiarity rather than linguistic comprehension. Similarly, Amalia et al. (2024) noted that Arabic lyrics circulating in digital culture are often interpreted loosely and inaccurately, contributing to a growing disjunction between meaning and perception. These misreadings are further exacerbated when viral songs are integrated into religious events or framed as *shalawat*, reinforcing the false equivalence between Arabic language and religious sanctity without critical linguistic engagement.

One of the most illustrative examples of this phenomenon is the song *Qoddukal Mayyās* by Mulla Uthman Al-Musili, popularized by Sabah Fakhri. Frequently shared on digital platforms and tagged as *shalawat*, this song has generated debate among influencers and religious figures regarding its actual content (Rinjani, 2022; Alpian, 2022). The song in question has been variably described as devotional and secular, reflecting cultural tension in its reception. Some highlight its spiritual qualities, while others reject such labels due to its metaphors, sensual imagery, and romantic nuances, which diverge from traditional shalawat characteristics. This divergence reveals a deeper issue in understanding Arabic literary forms within Indonesian popular culture, pointing to the need for critical engagement with Arabic literary criticism. Rahmi and Busyrowi (2020) as well as Amalia et al. (2024) contend that such misunderstandings necessitate scholarly attention aimed at clarifying the delicate boundary between poetic admiration and authentic religious reverence. By addressing this distinction, academic discourse can contribute to a deeper cultural literacy concerning the role and meaning of devotional music within Indonesian society.

Furthermore, the historical context of Indonesian music is central to this discussion. Sosrowijaya (2023) notes that local traditions like gamelan and keroncong, shaped since the colonial era, influence contemporary interpretations of devotional songs.

These complex musical roots blur classifications, as tradition and modernity intersect without fully recognizing distinct spiritual or societal meanings. Consequently, the debate over the song's classification reflects broader cultural dynamics in Indonesia's music scene, where traditional forms are reimagined in modern contexts. This also raises concerns for music education and cultural preservation. Scholars emphasize the importance of revitalizing traditional music and fostering cultural awareness through education to guide future generations in understanding cultural identity amid globalization. Despite this, its persistent classification as religious points to a critical lack of Arabic literary literacy in Indonesian popular culture and underscores the urgency for scholarly intervention that can clarify the distinction between poetic admiration and religious reverence (Rahmi & Busyrowi, 2020; Amalia et al., 2024).

This study aims to address this gap by providing a detailed semiotic analysis of *Qoddukal Mayyās*, guided by the theoretical lens of Michael Riffaterre. Unlike previous research that has focused primarily on da'wah content (Alfalah et al., 2023), teacher-student relationships (Ukhrawiyah & Kurniawati, 2021), or political resistance (Jambak et al., 2024), this study explores the semiotic complexity of romantic expressions mistakenly perceived as religious. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on uncovering misclassifications in viral Arabic content and providing a structured analysis using heuristic, hermeneutic, and matrix-based reading stages to map the song's meaning. It offers a unique contribution by engaging critically with Arabic lyrics from a literary perspective rather than solely a linguistic or pedagogical one, distinguishing it from other works in the field.

The significance of this study lies in its dual aim: to enrich Arabic literary literacy and to provide critical tools for discerning the layered meanings of poetic texts in an increasingly digitized and globalized context. Through its analysis, the study sheds light on how indirect expressions in Arabic songs, such as metaphors, personifications, and symbolic language, can be misinterpreted when stripped from their literary context. The research aims to correct these misinterpretations by revealing the song's alignment with the *ghazal* tradition of profane love poetry, thereby clarifying its thematic content and distancing it from sacred categorization.

Last but not least, this study not only offers a corrective lens through which to interpret *Qoddukal Mayyās* but also presents a broader framework for evaluating the intersection between language, culture, and perception. For the fields of English language

teaching and linguistics, it underscores the importance of critical cultural literacy and the integration of semiotic analysis into pedagogical practice. By equipping learners and educators with interpretive tools, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language as both an artistic and ideological medium, fostering greater discernment in the consumption of global media texts.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the symbolic meaning embedded in the Arabic song *Qoddukal Mayyās* by Mulla Uthman Al-Musili. The purpose of this approach is to uncover the layers of figurative language and poetic imagery that are often misinterpreted by general audiences, particularly in the Indonesian context. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study because it facilitates an in-depth examination of linguistic signs and cultural contexts, which are essential in understanding the indirect nature of poetic texts (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2018; Pradopo, 2007). This design enables the researcher to interpret the song not merely at the surface level but through multiple layers of meaning that reflect both literary and cultural dimensions.

3.1 Data Collection and Source

The primary data for this research consist of the original Arabic lyrics of *Qoddukal Mayyās*. These lyrics were selected based on their high circulation on digital platforms in Indonesia and the widespread misinterpretation that they are religious in nature. Data were gathered through library research, which involved collecting relevant literary sources, interpretive studies, and scholarly works that contextualize the song's origin, structure, and thematic elements (Zed, 2004). Secondary data include references on Arabic literary traditions, poetic conventions, and semiotic theory. This collection strategy ensures that the interpretation is grounded not only in textual evidence but also in relevant scholarly discourse.

3.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The analytical framework is based on Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, which is particularly suited to interpreting poetic and symbolic texts. The data analysis was carried out through three key stages. The first is heuristic reading, which involves a literal interpretation of the text using standard linguistic conventions to establish its surface meaning. The second is hermeneutic reading, which focuses on deciphering symbolic meanings and identifying the cultural and emotional connotations of words and expressions. This stage allows for deeper insight into how metaphors, personifications, and symbolic imagery construct layers of indirect meaning (Ratih, 2016; Riffaterre, 1978).

The third stage involves the identification of matrices, models, and variants, which are fundamental elements in Riffaterre's semiotic system. The *matrix* represents the underlying idea that governs the structure of meaning. *Models* are repeated figurative or symbolic patterns that embody the matrix, while *variants* are linguistic deviations that reinforce or elaborate upon the model. This layered analysis allows for the reconstruction of meaning that is not immediately visible at the heuristic level. The integration of these stages ensures a comprehensive and coherent analysis of the song's figurative and thematic structure.

4. Result

This section presents the results of the semiotic analysis, structured into three core dimensions of the study: (1) the construction of sensual symbolism through figurative language, (2) the emotional and poetic articulation of love and longing, and (3) the cultural misreading that leads to social confusion regarding the song's meaning. This section highlights how meaning emerges through ungrammaticalities, displacement, and transformation while emphasizing the role of matrix, model, and hypogram in the semiotic reading of *Qoddukal Mayyās*. All original Arabic excerpts are preserved, tagged by stanza, and supported with deeper interpretation of the signs.

4.1 Sensual Symbols and Figurative Representations of the Beloved: A Semiotic Interpretation

The song *Qoddukal Mayyās* offers a layered poetic composition that conveys deep emotional intensity through an intricate system of symbolic representation. Rather than describing the beloved in direct or literal terms, the lyrics rely on metaphor, displacement, and personification, all of which reflect the conventions of classical Arabic poetry. This section employs Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory to illuminate how the song generates meaning through processes such as ungrammaticality, semiotic transformation, and intertextual resonance. According to this approach, the meaning of the text does not reside in the words themselves but emerges from the interpretive act triggered by the text's figurative disruptions and stylistic deviation.

In the opening stanza, the beloved's figure is introduced through arboreal imagery:

Excerpt 1 (Stanza 1)

قَدُّكَ الْمَيَّاسُ يَا عُمْرِي، يَا غُصَيْنَ الْبَانِ كَالْيُسْرِ

Qoddukal mayyās yā 'umrī, yā ghusayna al-bāni kal-yusrī

Your graceful figure, O my life, O slender branch of the al-ban tree, like the yasr tree.

This line functions as a figurative gateway, using metaphor to signal that the meaning cannot be accessed literally. The comparison of the beloved's body to

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delicate and swaying trees exemplifies the technique of displacement, where sensual appreciation is reframed in the language of nature. The term *qoddukal mayyās* implies elegant movement without revealing bodily detail, creating a poetic tension that calls for symbolic interpretation. The matrix underlying this imagery centers on graceful sensuality, while the model reflects long-standing literary conventions of arboreal beauty. The hypogram here likely derives from traditional Arabic poetic motifs of the lover as a swaying branch, suggesting fragility, youth, and elusive charm.

In the next stanza, the lyric introduces a celestial metaphor:

Excerpt 2 (Stanza 2)
جَلَّ مَنْ سَوَّاكَ يَا قَمَرِي
Jalla man sawwāk yā qamarī
Glory be to the One who created you, O my moon.

Though this line includes religious language, the context is aesthetic rather than spiritual. The speaker does not offer praise to the divine but instead uses divine reference as a rhetorical tool to elevate the beloved's beauty. The metaphor *yā qamarī* places the beloved among the stars, portraying her as pure, distant, and ideal. This semiotic transformation shifts the beloved from a physical presence to a metaphysical symbol. The ungrammaticality in this line lies in the use of divine language for secular praise, which prompts the reader to recognize the poem's reliance on poetic hyperbole. The matrix here reflects the theme of reverential admiration, while the model draws from celestial imagery in Arabic lyricism. The hypogram is the poetic trope of the moon as an unattainable beloved.

Emotional vulnerability deepens through personification:

Excerpt 3 (Stanza 2)
لَحْظُكِ الْفَتَّانُ قَتَّالٌ
Laḥẓuki al-fattān qattāl
Your enchanting gaze is deadly.

This line attributes agency to the beloved's eyes, which are portrayed not as passive features but as active forces capable of causing emotional harm. This personification reflects the transformation of emotion into symbol. The ungrammaticality emerges through the contradiction between a gaze and its lethal description, requiring the reader to interpret the hyperbolic impact of love. The matrix becomes emotional surrender, the model is the poetic tradition of destructive beauty, and the hypogram is the trope of fatal attraction, commonly found in ghazal poetry.

Vocative repetition reinforces symbolic layering:

Excerpt 4 (Stanza 2)
يَا قَمَرِي، يَا عُمْرِي
Yā qamarī, yā ʿumrī
O my moon, O my life.

Here, the beloved is simultaneously elevated and essentialized. The metaphor *my moon* conveys ethereal beauty, while *my life* asserts existential dependence. This dual invocation weaves together aesthetic longing and emotional necessity. The matrix here is romantic centrality, and the model is vocative intensification. The hypogram reflects poetic expressions of total emotional fusion with the beloved.

The symbolic landscape expands into a spatial metaphor:

Excerpt 5 (Stanza 3)
أَنَا وَحَبِيبِي فِي جَنِينَةٍ، وَالْوَرْدُ مُخَيَّمٌ عَلَيْنَا
Ana wa ḥabībī fī janīnatin, wa al-wardu mukhayyamun ʿalaynā
My lover and I are in a small garden, and the flowers are shading us.

The garden serves as a metaphorical sanctuary, a private space of affection and seclusion. Within Arabic literary culture, the garden often symbolizes both sensual pleasure and emotional shelter. Here, however, the shading flowers do not suggest mere beauty but a tender, protective cover that renders the love intimate and shielded. This spatial displacement from public to private parallels the emotional movement from longing to imagined fulfillment. The matrix centers on secluded desire, the model follows the romantic garden motif, and the hypogram stems from love poetry where gardens conceal lovers.

The emotional intensity transitions inward in the next line:

Excerpt 6 (Stanza 4)
قَلْبِي تَلَوَّعَ بِهَوَاهُمْ
Qalbī talawwaʿa bihawāhum
My heart is burning with their love.

The use of the verb *talawwaʿa* connotes intense, prolonged suffering. Love becomes a source of interior torment. The ungrammaticality here lies in the shift from singular to plural in the pronoun *hum*, which complicates the identity of the beloved and possibly signals ambiguity or emotional multiplicity. The matrix becomes anguished passion, the model is the burning heart metaphor, and the hypogram reflects poetic traditions of suffering as proof of love's authenticity.

A final return to ocular imagery reestablishes the visual as the core of desire:

Excerpt 7 (Stanza 4)
عُيُونُكِ سُودٌ، يَا مَحْلَاهُمْ
ʿUyūnuki sūd, yā maḥlāhum
Your eyes are black, how beautiful they are.

Black eyes symbolize mystery and allure. The exclamatory phrase *yā maḥlāhum* reflects a moment of suspended admiration, a lyrical pause that holds emotion in place. This moment exemplifies the semiotic strategy of poetic freezing, where movement

halts and aesthetic awe dominates. The matrix is wonder, the model is visual idealization, and the hypogram is the poetic catalogue of traits that define the ideal beloved.

In summary, the stanzas of *Qoddukal Mayyās* reveal a consistent semiotic structure built on metaphorical displacement, stylistic deviation, and symbolic saturation. Each line activates a system of signs that point to a deeper emotional and aesthetic narrative. The beloved is constructed not through explicit language but through symbols that align with classical Arabic love poetry. Through Riffaterre's theoretical lens, this section affirms that the song articulates secular longing through sophisticated poetic coding, rather than expressing religious devotion. The song's semiotic richness invites readers and listeners to uncover layers of meaning through interpretive engagement, offering insight into how language, emotion, and symbolism intersect in the lyrical tradition.

4.2 The Poetic Landscape of Love, Longing, and Emotional Vulnerability: A Semiotic Perspective

Following the symbolic construction of the beloved, the song *Qoddukal Mayyās* deepens its lyrical exploration by portraying a fragile emotional landscape shaped by longing, distance, and internal conflict. This section offers a semiotic reading that traces the transformation of linguistic signs into expressions of vulnerability. Using Riffaterre's framework, meaning emerges through symbolic displacement, syntactic deviation, and poetic transformation. The lyric voice does not merely reflect on beauty but is absorbed in the psychological intensity of unfulfilled love. Rather than following a straightforward romantic progression, the poem unfolds as a fragmented emotional narrative in which the speaker moves between hope, denial, and eventual disillusionment.

Excerpt 1 (Stanza 3)
أَنَا وَحَبِيبِي فِي جَنِينَةٍ، وَالْوَرْدُ مُخَيَّمٌ عَلَيْنَا

Ana wa ḥabībī fī janīnatin, wa al-wardu mukhayyamun 'alaynā
My lover and I are in a small garden, and the flowers are shading us.

This line constructs an imagined space of intimacy that acts as a symbolic retreat from the world. The garden is not a physical setting but a semiotic construct, evoking seclusion and serenity. Within Riffaterre's theory, this garden becomes a matrix for romantic fantasy, while the shading flowers represent protective affection. However, the ungrammaticality lies in the fantasy itself, which lacks grounding in any shared reality. The speaker fabricates this space not as memory but as an emotional refuge, revealing love that is internal, unreciprocated, and sustained by imagination.

Excerpt 2 (Stanza 3)
وَالدُّعَاءُ مُخَلِّي بيْنَا

Wa al-du'ā'u mukhallī baynā
And the prayer is what separates us.

The introduction of spiritual language destabilizes the prior imagery of romance. Here, prayer functions not as a bridge to intimacy but as a subtle boundary that reinforces emotional distance. The contrast between the romantic garden and the mention of prayer signals a disruption, which in semiotic terms is an ungrammatical element that invites interpretive reevaluation. The shift reveals an underlying conflict where religious or cultural norms interrupt the expression of personal longing. Through semiotic transformation, prayer becomes a signifier of emotional constraint rather than spiritual elevation.

Excerpt 3 (Stanza 4)
قَلْبِي تَلَوَّعَ بِهَوَاهُمْ

Qalbī talawwa'a bihawāhum
My heart is burning with their love.

Here, the metaphor of a burning heart intensifies emotional vulnerability. The verb *talawwa'a* conveys prolonged emotional suffering, placing the speaker in a state of existential distress. The pronoun *hum*, while grammatically plural, introduces ambiguity that complicates the referent. This deviation invites the reader to question the stability of desire, whether it is directed toward one person or idealized figures. The result is a symbolic transformation where love, once concentrated, is now dispersed, fractured, and emotionally overwhelming.

Excerpt 4 (Stanza 5)
قُلْتُ لَهَا وَاللهِ لَا أَهْوَاكِ، قَالَتْ وَعَيْنُ اللهِ تَرْعَاكَ

Qultu lahā wa-llāhi lā ahwākī, qālat wa 'aynu-llāhi tar'āk
I told her, by God, I do not love you. She said, may God's eye watch over you.

This exchange introduces direct speech, disrupting the earlier lyrical flow. The speaker's denial may be interpreted as an emotional defense rather than truth, while the beloved's response signals polite detachment. Riffaterre's model encourages us to see this moment as a transformation of communicative function: a religious expression becomes a social tool for emotional closure. The poetic system converts spiritual vocabulary into a cultural formula that expresses finality, indicating that emotional vulnerability is met not with reciprocity but with distance.

Excerpt 5 (Stanza 5)
قُلْتُ لَهَا وَاللَّيْلُ يَطْوِينِي، قَالَتْ دُخُولُكِ لِلْهَوَى نَفْيِي

Qultu lahā wa al-laylu yaṭwīnī, qālat dukhūluka li al-hawā nafyī
I told her, the night folds me in. She said, your entry into love is my negation.

The night, often associated with romantic solitude, becomes here a symbol of internal collapse. The speaker's vulnerability is expressed through metaphor, as he is enveloped by darkness and longing. The beloved's response, however, negates the entire premise of romantic connection. This opposition produces a semantic disruption: the speaker evokes emotional intensity, while the beloved delivers categorical denial. The semiotic interplay transforms night from a setting into a metaphor for isolation, and love from a shared space into a solitary condition.

Excerpt 6 (Stanza 6)
سِنِينِيْنْ وَأَنَا أَتْرَجَّاكِ، إِبْكِي عَلَى الْمَاضِيْ وَأَيَّامِكْ

Sinīnīn wa anā atarajjākī, ibkī 'ala al-māḍī wa ayyāmik

For years I have pleaded with you, now cry over your past and your days.

This final shift in tone introduces a rupture in the emotional arc. The speaker transitions from vulnerability to bitter release. The temporal marker *sinīnīn* establishes prolonged emotional labor, while the command *ibkī* transfers sorrow onto the beloved. In Riffaterre's terms, this line represents a final semantic transformation, where suffering is no longer inwardly absorbed but projected outward. Yet the rhetorical reversal does not grant emotional resolution; it underscores the irreversibility of emotional separation. The matrix is endurance, the model is poetic lamentation, and the hypogram is the persistent tension between idealized love and lived pain.

Taken collectively, these stanzas compose a poetic journey that begins in intimate imagination and ends in psychological fragmentation. Riffaterre's semiotic theory allows us to uncover how language resists transparency and constructs meaning through cultural, emotional, and symbolic shifts. *Qoddukal Mayyās* is not merely a celebration of beauty, but a textual record of longing, spiritual interference, and emotional solitude. The speaker's voice remains suspended between devotion and detachment, suggesting that love, in this context, is not a shared path but a solitary experience of poetic intensity.

4.3 Between Aesthetic Appreciation and Misinterpretation: Semiotic Shifts and Cultural Displacement

Despite the intricate symbolic layering and poetic sophistication of *Qoddukal Mayyās*, the song has often been misread by contemporary audiences, particularly within Indonesian digital culture. On social media platforms and video-sharing sites, the song is frequently circulated as a devotional chant or even a sacred expression. This misinterpretation is not embedded in the lyrics themselves but arises from the dislocation of cultural and literary context. When viewed through the lens of Riffaterre's semiotic theory, such a transformation in interpretation can be understood as a result of hypogrammatic distortion,

where the reader's matrix is shaped more by their cultural lens than the internal logic of the text. The sacred tone attributed to the song in some contexts reflects the power of perceived intertextuality, especially when Arabic language, poetic metaphor, and melodic ornamentation evoke religious associations for non-Arabic speakers.

Excerpt 1 (Stanza 2)
جَلَّ مَنْ سَوَّاكَ يَا قَمَرِي

Jalla man sawwāk yā qamarī

Glory be to the One who created you, O my moon.

This verse may seem devotional at first glance due to the invocation of divine creation. However, within the structure of Arabic ghazal poetry, such a phrase functions as poetic hyperbole rather than an act of religious veneration. The line intensifies admiration for the beloved by suggesting that their beauty could only be crafted by divine hands. The vocative *yā qamarī* (O my moon) reaffirms that the object of praise is the beloved, not the Creator. In Riffaterre's terms, the referential illusion is resolved not by theological meaning, but by the poetic system that prioritizes emotional astonishment over sacred intent. The reader who fails to activate this literary hypogram may interpret the sacred vocabulary at face value, overlooking its metaphorical function.

Excerpt 2 (Stanza 4)
عُيُونُكِ سُودٌّ، يَا مَحْلَاهُمْ

'Uyūnuki sūd, yā maḥlāhum

Your eyes are black, how beautiful they are.

This line offers a straightforward aesthetic appreciation of physical beauty, focusing on the beloved's eyes. The blackness of the eyes, a standard trope in Arabic poetry, signals depth, mystery, and allure. The interjection *yā maḥlāhum* conveys spontaneous admiration, akin to an unfiltered emotional response. Its inclusion further distances the line from any devotional framing. From a semiotic standpoint, this stanza lacks any displacement toward sacred meaning. It remains firmly embedded in a code of romantic desire and corporeal appreciation. Thus, it contradicts interpretations that position the song as religiously oriented.

The misreading of *Qoddukal Mayyās* as sacred is further complicated by the sonic texture of the song. The maqām melodic mode, characterized by vocal ornamentation and melodic minor intervals, resembles the tonal features of Islamic devotional recitation. In Indonesian cultural settings where Arabic is almost exclusively associated with religious practice, this musical resemblance can override the textual content in the listener's interpretive process. As a result, audiences who are unfamiliar with the rich traditions of Arabic literature may tend to recontextualize the song within a religious framework, thereby reshaping and often misinterpreting its intended genre classification.

This perceptual shift is also influenced by the repetition of vocative expressions such as *yā 'umrī* and *yā qamarī*, which may be read by some listeners as signs of mystical yearning. However, these are conventional poetic forms used extensively in Arabic secular love poetry. In their original context, they serve to intensify emotional presence and convey intimate longing. The semiotic system of the song operates within the symbolic economy of ghazal, not devotional literature. Misinterpretation arises when this system is not decoded according to its internal referents but reinterpreted through external cultural filters.

Furthermore, The song's narrative and themes clearly affirm its nature as a secular romantic work. It makes no appeal to divine judgment, expresses no repentance, and contains no spiritual or eschatological references. The speaker is not on a journey of faith but caught in personal and emotional turmoil. In *Qoddukal Mayyās*, love appears through motifs of desire, rejection, vulnerability, and solitude. These human experiences are conveyed with symbolic imagery meant to reveal emotional truth.

In conclusion, *Qoddukal Mayyās* shows how poetic meaning may shift across cultures and languages. Riffaterre's theory explains how meaning relies on displacement, intertextuality, and interpretive codes that may fade in translation. True appreciation of the song's aesthetic and emotional value comes from reading it within its literary tradition. Seen in this light, it stands as a secular expression of love and longing. Its misreading stems not from the text itself but from cultural assumptions shaped by the digital age.

5. Discussion

Qoddukal Mayyās through the lens of Riffaterre's semiotic theory, revealing how the lyrical structure encodes sensuality, longing, and misinterpreted devotion within a secular poetic tradition. The findings emphasize three major thematic domains: the sensual symbolism of the beloved, the emotional trajectory of longing and vulnerability, and the recurring misreading of the song as devotional in non-Arabic contexts. By revisiting these dimensions through scholarly analysis and cross-cultural comparison, the discussion articulates both the novelty and broader implications of the study.

4.1 Sensual Symbols and Figurative Representations of the Beloved

The aesthetic portrayal of the beloved in the poem *Qoddukal Mayyās* closely follows the enduring conventions of the Arabic ghazal, a tradition known for its intricate web of metaphors that evoke beauty through indirect references rather than explicit description. Phrases like *qoddukal mayyās* (your graceful figure) and *yā qamarī* (O my moon) construct an idealized image of the beloved by drawing on celestial and botanical symbols, transcending mere physicality to invite poetic abstraction.

This reflects the concept of the "hypogram," wherein underlying semantic sequences subtly guide the reader's interpretive journey (Allen, 2000). The ghazal tradition thus plays a critical role in shaping this construction of beauty, embedding layered meanings and emotional nuances within its poetic forms (Allen, 2000). Scholars have underscored how the ghazal encapsulates sensual longing by privileging aesthetic refinement over overt eroticism (Chittick, 2014). In this context, symbolic elevation serves as a central poetic strategy, with metaphors resonating on deep emotional levels and exemplifying how Arabic poetic language transforms semiotic elements to convey emotion with subtlety and depth (Chittick, 2014). Consequently, the poem operates not merely as an artistic expression but as a sophisticated semiotic system that offers multiple avenues for accessing emotional resonance while maintaining the decorum intrinsic to classical lyricism.

Furthermore, the dynamic interplay between figurative language and cultural context intensifies reader engagement with the text, as figurative expression often becomes a vital medium for articulating complex emotions in poetry (Ediwarman et al., 2023). This is especially evident within the Arabic ghazal tradition, where metaphor and cultural iconography intertwine, preserving their relevance in contemporary literary discourse. The poet's nuanced use of metaphor thus opens a rich emotional landscape, skillfully merging personal longing with universal aesthetics. Through this lens, *Qoddukal Mayyās* exemplifies how metaphoric constructions not only delineate the allure of the beloved but also elevate poetic expression into an art form capable of engaging profound emotional experiences. Such findings imply that representations of love and beauty in Arabic poetry transcend mere depictions of physical attributes or simplistic desires, emerging instead as complex interplays of cultural, emotional, and artistic elements that resist reductive interpretations (Amjad et al., 2021). This underscores the critical need for semiotic and figurative analysis to fully appreciate the intricate layers of meaning embedded within these literary works.

5.2 The Poetic Landscape of Love, Longing, and Emotional Vulnerability

The emotional progression of the lyrics moves from admiration toward disappointment and internal suffering, embodying the full psychological arc of unfulfilled love. Phrases such as *qalbī talawwa'a bihawāhum* (my heart is burning with their love) and *al-laylu yaṭwīnī* (the night folds me in) express emotional exhaustion and the isolating experience of one-sided affection. This thematic register is consistent with the Arabic literary tradition, where unreciprocated love becomes a site of existential reflection and emotional refinement.

As Khalidi (1994) suggests, the ghazal often features "the pain of distance and the impossibility of union" as its core emotional thrust, which is clearly visible in the speaker's introspective voice throughout the song . Moreover, the invocation of imagined spaces such as gardens (*janīnah*) and temporal motifs of waiting (*sinīnīn*) illustrate a poetic world structured by hope deferred. This confirms the applicability of Riffaterre's theory of "interpretive modeling," where surface structures guide readers toward latent emotional truths.

This emotional trajectory also deepens our understanding of the Arabic lyrical voice as not merely an observer of beauty but as an individual engulfed in affective struggle. Unlike mystical poetry, which frames longing as a path to divine union, *Qoddukal Mayyās* roots desire in the immediacy of human experience. This distinction is critical in differentiating secular love poetry from sacred genres such as *qasida* or *nasheed*, despite occasional lexical overlap.

4.3 Between Aesthetic Appreciation and Misinterpretation

The final theme concerns the persistent misinterpretation of the song in Indonesian digital culture, where Arabic is routinely linked with religious discourse. The presence of sacred-sounding expressions like *jalla man sawwāk* (Glory be to the One who created you) has led many listeners to categorize the song as devotional. However, as Riffaterre asserts, poetic language must be read within its genre and cultural context to avoid semantic distortion.

The rhetorical invocation of divine references in Arabic ghazals presents a complex interplay with secular themes, especially within the realm of romantic admiration. Scholars such as Sperl (2020) have observed that these references, rather than serving exclusively spiritual functions, often amplify aesthetic praise, enriching the poetic experience through their layered meanings. Sperl's analysis reveals an intertextual dialogue where Arabic poetry historically engages with Qur'anic motifs, reflecting the Arabic language's dual role as both a conduit of divine revelation and a medium of poetic artistry (Sperl, 2020). This duality underscores how secular love poetry can coexist with, and even be enhanced by, the subtle incorporation of divine language, challenging rigid categorizations between the sacred and the profane.

In the case of *Qoddukal Mayyās*, the fusion of divine references within a romantic context invites nuanced readings that are essential for a full appreciation of its literary artistry. However, when such poetry circulates in contemporary Indonesian online spaces, it often encounters reductive interpretations that ignore these cultural and literary subtleties.

This tendency arises from the inclination to associate certain linguistic features exclusively with religious discourse, overlooking their literary versatility and the aesthetic purposes they serve. As Mohamed-Sayidina (2010) and Mohamed and Omer (2000) have noted, cohesive devices like additive modes and repetition in Arabic poetry function beyond religious expression, contributing to the work's emotional depth and artistic coherence. Failing to recognize these rhetorical strategies often reflects a culturally biased reading rather than a grounded textual analysis. Ultimately, this discussion highlights the sophisticated interrelationship between the sacred and the secular in Arabic poetic traditions, affirming the importance of careful, context-aware interpretation that acknowledges how admiration and reverence intertwine within the poetic form. The study thus fills a critical gap in understanding how Arabic poetic forms are recontextualized in translingual and digital settings, where genre conventions are not always preserved.

4.4 Implications and Future Research

This study contributes meaningfully to the fields of Arabic literary criticism, applied semiotics, and intercultural discourse analysis. By demonstrating how lyrical poetry can be misinterpreted across linguistic and cultural contexts, it calls for greater attention to genre awareness in language education. In English language teaching, particularly in multicultural classrooms where Arabic is present, such texts can serve as tools for teaching metaphor, symbolism, and contextual interpretation. This supports pedagogical frameworks that advocate for culturally responsive instruction and critical language awareness .

Future research might extend this inquiry by conducting comparative studies between Arabic ghazals and their counterparts in Persian, Urdu, or Turkish traditions. Such analyses could reveal how shared poetic forms evolve across linguistic borders while retaining common emotional motifs. In addition, digital ethnography could be employed to trace how songs like *Qoddukal Mayyās* circulate within online spaces and how user interpretations reflect broader sociolinguistic patterns. Finally, the application of Riffaterre's semiotic theory could be expanded to other genres such as popular song lyrics, literary prose, and even film dialogue, offering a richer account of how symbolic meaning is constructed, displaced, and retrieved across texts.

In conclusion, *Qoddukal Mayyās* stands as a testament to the poetic elegance and emotional sophistication of secular Arabic lyricism. Through its symbolic language, emotional depth, and rhetorical artistry, it invites not only admiration but critical engagement. The study affirms the importance of interpretive literacy in multilingual contexts and encourages continued exploration of poetic meaning within and beyond linguistic boundaries.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed that Qoddukal Mayyās Mulla Uthman Al-Musili's work is a form of expression of profane love for a woman and is not a religious expression, as we know it, such as prayer or a form of praise to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The results of the analysis using Riffaterre's semiotic approach, which includes the analysis of heuristic reading, hermeneutics, as well as the identification of matrices, models, and variants, show that the entire structure of meaning in the lyrics of this song is built through body symbols, gazes, love gardens, and metaphors of waiting that are completely romantic and sensual. These results highlight the importance of enhancing Arabic literary literacy to effectively interpret Arabic-language works, particularly those widely utilized in the digital space. This research also highlights the importance of clarifying the trend of Arabic songs that go viral on social media so that there is no reduction in meaning that is detrimental to Arabic cultural and literary values. This type of study can be extended to other popular Arabic works that experience misunderstandings of meaning in society, especially in the digital era, when Arabic pop culture is increasingly popular, including Arabic songs that are often interpreted in a very free manner.

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