



Analysis Of The White Lily Metaphor As A Representation Of Inner Conflict In جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء Mahmoud Darwish's Poem

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Abstract

This article analyzes Mahmoud Darwish's poem جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء through Viktor Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization within the framework of Russian Formalist theory. The poem reveals the inner conflict of a weary soldier who dreams of peace symbolized by the white lily. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study explores how Darwish's poetic language—rich in metaphors, paradoxes, and imagery—transforms conventional meanings of purity and heroism into reflections on trauma, loss, and existential struggle. The white lily, which traditionally represents innocence and peace, becomes a contradictory symbol bridging beauty and suffering, life and death. The findings indicate that Darwish employs defamiliarization techniques to challenge familiar discourses of nationalism and war, compelling readers to reinterpret universal concepts such as “homeland” and “victory” in more personal and human terms. Ultimately, Darwish's aesthetic strategy not only deepens the reader's emotional engagement but also encourages critical reflection on the human condition amid conflict.

Keywords: *Mahmoud Darwish, defamiliarization, metaphor, Arabic poetry, inner conflict*

تحليل الاستعارة لزهرة الزنابق البيضاء بوصفها تمثيلاً

للصراع الداخلي في قصيدة جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء للشاعر محمود درويش

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الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل قصيدة محمود درويش جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء في ضوء نظرية التغريب (التغريب الفني) لفكتور شكوفسكي ضمن المدرسة الشكلانية الروسية. تكشف القصيدة عن الصراع الداخلي لجندي أنهكه الحرب ويحلم بالسلام الذي ترمز إليه الزنبقة البيضاء. اعتمد الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لاستكشاف كيفية توظيف درويش للغة الشعرية الغنية بالاستعارات والمفارقات والصور الفنية التي تحول المعاني التقليدية للنقاء والبطولة إلى تأملات في الألم والفقد والمعاناة الوجودية. فالزنبقة البيضاء التي ترمز عادة إلى البراءة والسلام تتحول في القصيدة إلى رمز متناقض يجمع بين الجمال والألم، والحياة والموت. وتبين نتائج البحث أن درويش يستخدم تقنية التغريب لتحدي الخطاب الوطني والحربي المألوف، مما يدفع القارئ إلى إعادة النظر في المفاهيم المعتادة مثل «الوطن» و«النصر» بطريقة إنسانية وشخصية. إن الاستراتيجية الجمالية التي يوظفها درويش تعمق ارتباط القارئ العاطفي وتدعوه إلى التأمل النقدي في الحالة الإنسانية وسط الصراع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: محمود درويش، التغريب، الاستعارة، الشعر العربي، الصراع الداخلي

Introduction

Poetry is one of the richest modes of expression used to convey inner emotions, critique social conditions, and express existential reflections¹. In the realm of Arabic poetry, Mahmoud Darwish—a modern Arab poet—is regarded as one of the most renowned figures in contemporary Arabic literature, particularly for how his personal and collective experiences of the Palestinian struggle are embedded and immortalized in his poems. One of his emotionally charged works,

¹ Salsabilah, H. (2024). Analisis Teori Semiotika Riffatere p ada Puisi “ Ma Huwa Illa Lahu Fidehi adhe thibila lila lilitch endisq “ am we lala hl bis “ biila saun madختسبا بيلاسلأا قيفصولا قيفيكلأ KNM BSA (Konferensi Nasional Mahasiswa Bahasa Dan Sastra Ara, 228–241. <http://ejournal.unwmataram.ac.id/trendi/article/view/208>

A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies, employs the image of the white lily, laden with symbolic meaning and existential irony, to portray the internal conflict of a soldier exhausted by war².

The white lily has often been associated with peace, purity, and innocence³. However, in Darwish's poem, it transforms into a reminder of trauma, despair, and loss. The tension or contestation between conventional and renewed meanings deepens the reader's sense of alienation. This forces readers to reconsider the symbolic meanings they once thought familiar. In literary theory, this effect is known as defamiliarization, a poetic technique that makes something ordinary or familiar seem strange or unfamiliar, thereby encouraging readers to reflect anew on its meaning.

Viktor Shklovsky, a central figure of Russian Formalism, conceptualizes literature as an autonomous aesthetic system governed by artistic devices (*priyom*). His theory of *defamiliarization* (*ostranenie*) emphasizes that the primary function of literary art is not representation or ornamentation, but the disruption of perceptual automatism. By rendering ordinary objects, actions, or experiences strange, literature prolongs perception and forces readers to re-experience reality in a heightened, reflective manner. This perspective foregrounds form over content, focusing on how narrative techniques, syntactic deviations, and stylistic estrangement function to slow down comprehension and resist habitual modes of reading. The defining characteristics of Shklovsky's theory lie in its emphasis on process rather than meaning, perception rather than symbolism, and technique rather than rhetorical classification. Defamiliarization operates as a dynamic mechanism that restructures the reader's cognitive engagement with the text,

² Langer, S. K. K. (1953). *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=tRsqAAAAYAAJ>

³ Widiastuti, S. (2024). "Makna Perdamaian di Balik Keindahan Bunga Lili." Radio Republik Indonesia. <https://www.rri.co.id/bukittinggi/lain-lain/1137049/makna-perdamaian-di-balik-keindahan-bunga-lili>

making literary interpretation an analysis of how formal strategies generate aesthetic effect. Consequently, literary value is measured by the degree to which a text successfully disrupts automatic perception and renews the act of seeing⁴.

By reading poetry from such an unfamiliar perspective, we see that Darwish not only crafts beautiful language but also creates an aesthetic experience capable of shaking the reader's emotional core. The image of the white lily embodies contradictions—between purity and destruction, hope and death. These symbols effectively create a sense of estrangement that departs from ordinary language and perception.

Despite the fact that several previous studies have examined Darwish's poetry, none of them have specifically focused on the technique of defamiliarization used in his works. For example, Emphasized the social themes and stylistic devices in Darwish's poems, such as hyperbole, paradox, and personification, to express profound meanings, but without discussing the alienation effect⁵. The present study identifies numerous symbols and metaphors that reflect Darwish's life experiences and explores how social and cultural contexts shape their meanings. This article employs hermeneutic and heuristic reading techniques. Meanwhile, Discussed the importance of defamiliarization in reading poetry but did not specifically apply it to Darwish's works⁶. Similarly, examined the use of metaphor in *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* by Ibn 'Arabi, showing how metaphor plays a

⁴ Kupchyshyna, Y., & Davydyuk, Y. (2017). From defamiliarization to foregrounding and defeated expectancy: Linguo-stylistic and cognitive sketch. *Lege Artis*, 2(2), 149–184. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lart-2017-0015>

⁵ Alandira, P. (2025). Analisis semiotika Riffatere pada Syi'ir كبحاً وأل كبحاً karya Mahmoud Darwish. *Ajamiy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab, January*. <https://doi.org/10.31314/ajamiy.13.2.482-500.2024>

⁶ Anderson, B. M., & Iversen, S. (2018). *This is the accepted version of the following article: Anderson, M., & Iversen, S. (2018). Immersion and defamiliarization: experiencing literature and world. 39, 1–22*

crucial role in shaping readers' spiritual and emotional experiences⁷. Symbols and metaphors in Abdullah Wong's poem *Penyatuan* through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, revealing the religious and existential dimensions of human experience through poetic language⁸. These studies demonstrate diverse approaches to symbolism and metaphor, yet none have explored defamiliarization as the main aesthetic strategy found in Darwish's poetry.

Hence, this study fills the existing gap by examining Darwish's poem جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء (*A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies*), focusing on the image of the white lily that shapes the emotions and inner struggles of the lyrical character. This study differs from previous ones by concentrating on a single poetic image the white lily and analyzing it through the lens of defamiliarization, a theory rarely applied to Darwish's works. Through this method, the research aims not only to enhance understanding of contemporary Arabic literature but also to demonstrate how poetic techniques like defamiliarization can create new, complex, and thought-provoking layers of meaning.

The literary criticism method known as Formalism centers on the internal aspects of a literary work its style, form, language, and structure of expression. It disregards the author's biography, political issues, or social context. This approach focuses on how these elements interact to create meaning and aesthetic experience⁹. Formalism posits that the meaning of a literary work can be discovered by examining its structure and techniques.

Within the Formalist framework, elements such as rhythm,

⁷ Akastangga, M. D. B. (2020). Metafora Dalam Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq Karya Ibnu 'Arabi (Kajian Semiotik-Pragmatik). *Jurnalistrendi : Jurnal Linguistik, Sastra, Dan Pendidikan*, 5(1), 27–46. <http://ejournal.unwmatarem.ac.id/trendi/article/view/208>

⁸ Prasetyo, E. Y., & Hermansah, T. (2023). Religiusitas Puisi Penyatuan Karya Abdullah Wong. *Komunika*, 10(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.22236/komunika.v10i1.10079>

⁹ Eagleton, T. (1996). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. University of Minnesota Press. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=QNmFm4M_RXkC

rhyme, imagery, and metaphor are seen as the core components that shape meaning. This approach believes that analyzing these elements can reveal the beauty and complexity of a literary work. For instance, the use of metaphor in poetry produces deeper layers of meaning that cannot be grasped solely through external context¹⁰. Thus, every linguistic element in a poem plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's experience of the work.

One of the central concepts in Formalism is defamiliarization, introduced by Viktor Shklovsky. Its primary goal is to alter readers' perceptions of ordinary objects, making them seem fresh and new through literary techniques. In poetry, this technique is used to surprise readers and compel them to reflect on hidden meanings. Art must disrupt everyday linguistic experience so that readers can appreciate the uniqueness and beauty of the objects described¹¹.

In the poem *جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء*, the use of the white lily metaphor, commonly associated with peace and hope, produces a powerful defamiliarization effect. Readers are forced to reconsider the meaning of the flower in the context of war—where flowers often represent violence and emptiness. The white lily becomes a poetic image that, through defamiliarization, transforms from a symbol of purity and innocence into one of trauma and internal conflict caused by war. This shift in meaning aligns with Shklovsky's idea that art makes the familiar strange so readers may reexamine reality.

The aesthetic function of language emphasizes the beauty and surprise inherent in the message itself. In Darwish's poem, the use of the white lily metaphor generates a defamiliarizing effect that compels readers to perceive the soldier's internal conflict more profoundly

¹⁰ Culler, J. (2011). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP Oxford. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=2lk7LH1_bjgC

¹¹ Shklovsky, V. (1998). *Theory of Prose*. Dalkey Archive Press. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=CI31iJEmuYoC>

and differently from conventional portrayals of soldiers. The poetic language serves as a medium to elevate ordinary inner experiences into something extraordinary through distinctive poetic structure¹²

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the linguistic and stylistic structures that shape the meaning of the soldier's internal conflict, emphasizing the poetic elements that create a profound aesthetic experience.
2. To apply the concept of defamiliarization to show how Darwish uses this technique to transform readers' perspectives on war and peace.

Who explored the psychological dynamics of the character Haia in Berliana Kimberly's novel *Laut Tengah* through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach. Their study revealed Haia's complex inner conflict resulting from past trauma, involving tension among the id, ego, and superego, and how she resolved it through defense mechanisms like rationalization and sublimation¹³.

The religiosity in Abdullah Wong's poem *Penyatuan* through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, finding that metaphors and symbols such as "clouds," "time," "night," and "promise" reflect human spirituality and the soul's journey toward fulfilling its divine covenant¹⁴.

Analysed *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* by Ibn 'Arabi using a semiotic-pragmatic framework, discovering two main types of metaphors: those based on linguistic codes and those on literary codes. The study emphasized the importance of understanding semiotic and

¹² Jakobson, R. (1960). Linguistics and Poetry. *English Journal*, 59(7), 947–953. <https://doi.org/10.58680/ej197019826>

¹³ Ramadhani, L., Hikam, A. I., & Husnawiyah, I. (2025). *Representasi Konflik Batin dan Identitas Diri dalam Tokoh Haia Novel Laut Tengah Melalui Pendekatan Psikologi Sastra Sigmund Freud*

¹⁴ Prasetyo, E. Y., & Hermansah, T. (2023). Religiusitas Puisi Penyatuan Karya Abdullah Wong. *Komunika*, 10(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.22236/komunika.v10i1.10079>

pragmatic aspects in poetry, showing how metaphor enriches readers' interpretive and emotional experiences¹⁵.

Lastly, in “*Stylistic Devices in Mahmoud Darwish’s Poem Aḥinnu ilā Khubzi Ummī*” examined how Darwish used personification, hyperbole, and paradox to express deep emotional longing for his mother and homeland. Using a stylistic approach, her study illustrated how Darwish’s language enhances emotional and aesthetic engagement, capturing profound feelings of love and nostalgia within the Palestinian struggle¹⁶.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze Mahmoud Darwish’s poem *Jundi Yaḥlam bi al-Zanābiq al-Bayḍā’*. The analysis focuses on the white lily metaphor as a representation of the lyrical subject’s inner conflict, using Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization as the main analytical framework. This theory is applied to examine how linguistic structure, imagery, and stylistic deviation create aesthetic estrangement and deepen readers’ perception of meaning.

The primary data consist of the original Arabic poem and its Indonesian and English translations, while secondary data are drawn from relevant literary theories, journal articles, and previous studies. Data were collected through literature review and close reading, followed by coding of poetic excerpts based on metaphorical elements and defamiliarization techniques. Data analysis involved examining formal estrangement strategies and interpreting their meanings within the poet’s social and psychological context. Data

¹⁵ Akastangga, M. D. B. (2020). Metafora Dalam Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq Karya Ibnu ‘Arabi (Kajian Semiotik-Pragmatik). *Jurnalistrendi : Jurnal Linguistik, Sastra, Dan Pendidikan*, 5(1), 27–46. <http://ejournal.unwmatarem.ac.id/trendi/article/view/208>

¹⁶ Salbiah, R. (2022). Gaya Bahasa dalam Puisi Aḥinnu ilā Khubzi Ummī Karya Mahmoud Darwish. *Al-Ma’rifah*, 19(1), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.21009/almakrifah.19.01.07>

validity was ensured through source triangulation and comparative reading of the original text and its translations.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Mahmoud Darwish constructs the inner conflict of the lyrical character primarily through formal and aesthetic mechanisms embedded within the poem's internal structure. Rather than explicitly narrating psychological turmoil, the poem allows inner conflict to emerge through linguistic choices, symbolic imagery, and paradoxical expressions that operate at the level of form. This confirms the formalist assumption that meaning in poetry is generated not through external references but through the interaction of signs within the text itself.

One of the most significant formal strategies identified in the poem is the deliberate absence of a specific personal identity. The lyrical subject is referred to only as **جندي** (a soldier), without a personal name or biographical background. This narrative choice produces a universalizing effect, allowing the figure of the soldier to transcend individuality and function as a collective symbol of human suffering caused by war. The soldier, therefore, is not presented as a heroic subject or a nationalist icon but as a representative of all individuals whose humanity is fractured by violence. This supports view of literary characters as signifying elements within a system of meaning rather than realistic individuals¹⁷.

The soldier's inner conflict becomes more explicit in the line "أنا لست محارباً حين أحلم" ("I am not a warrior when I dream"). Textually, this line establishes a clear division between social identity and personal identity. The term **محارب** (warrior) reflects an externally

¹⁷ Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1949). *Theory of Literature*. Cape. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=DuvYAAAAMAAJ>

imposed role rooted in military ideology, whereas the act of dreaming (أحلم) signifies an internal, subjective space free from institutional control. The findings suggest that dreaming functions as a symbolic refuge in which the soldier temporarily escapes the brutal reality of war and reclaims his suppressed humanity.

From a formalist perspective, the verb أحلم does not merely describe an action but performs a poetic function. It creates an atmosphere of estrangement by suspending the logic of war and introducing an alternative mode of existence. The soldier's identity thus becomes fragmented: physically bound to violence, yet psychologically oriented toward peace. This fragmentation reflects an existential conflict in which the subject is torn between obligation and desire, survival and humanity.

The image of the white lily (الزنابق البيضاء) emerges as the most significant structural metaphor articulating this conflict. The findings reveal that the white lily carries layered and evolving meanings that shift throughout the poem. At the beginning, as seen in “جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء”, the white lily appears within the dream space and symbolizes peace, purity, and escape. Its whiteness signifies moral clarity and emotional tranquility—qualities entirely absent from the soldier's lived reality. In this initial context, the flower functions as an imagined sanctuary, a symbolic counterworld opposed to violence.

As the poem progresses, the metaphor undergoes semantic expansion. In the line “أحمل زهرة كأنها طفل”, the white lily becomes associated with a child, thereby acquiring connotations of vulnerability, tenderness, and emotional attachment. This metaphor intensifies the soldier's longing for intimacy and care, suggesting a desire to protect rather than destroy. Formally, this shift creates tension between fragility and aggression, as the delicate image of a child-flower stands in stark contrast to the destructive environment of war.

The soldier's inner conflict deepens as love and gentleness emerge within a space dominated by death.

Toward the end of the poem, the white lily appears in the context of death, as expressed in "مشى في جنازته البيضاء". Here, the metaphor transforms into a symbol of mourning and mortality. The flower that once symbolized hope now accompanies a funeral procession, indicating the collapse of the dream world into tragic reality. From a formalist standpoint, this transformation illustrates the structural movement of the poem—from hope to disillusionment, from imagined peace to existential loss. The white lily thus functions as a narrative framework that traces the psychological trajectory of the soldier's inner conflict.

In addition to metaphor, Darwish employs paradox as a central defamiliarization strategy. The line "سيفه فوق وردة" presents a striking juxtaposition between the sword and the flower—symbols conventionally associated with violence and peace. This paradox disrupts habitual perception by placing contradictory images within a single poetic frame. The reader is forced to confront the coexistence of destruction and gentleness, raising questions about whether violence inevitably crushes humanity or whether humanity persists within violence. This ambiguity reflects the soldier's internal struggle between duty and conscience.

According to Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization, such paradoxical imagery functions to make the familiar strange, compelling readers to perceive reality in a renewed way. In this poem, war is no longer normalized as heroic action but is rendered morally unsettling through aesthetic contradiction. The paradox of the sword and the flower becomes a visual and semantic manifestation of the soldier's fractured psyche.

The poem further constructs estrangement through layered imagery, including funerals adorned with white flowers, hands lifting fragile objects, and bodies enveloped in silence. These images generate a flexible semantic field in which meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated. Depending on the reader's interpretive position, the same image may signify hope, grief, resistance, or resignation. Such ambiguity enriches the poetic texture while maintaining internal coherence¹⁸.

Repetition also plays a crucial role in reinforcing the poem's emotional intensity. The repeated use of expressions related to dreaming and longing emphasizes the soldier's persistent desire to escape the oppressive reality of war. From a formalist perspective, repetition foregrounds the poetic function of language, drawing attention to the emotional core of the message rather than its referential content¹⁹. Each repetition intensifies the sense of alienation and reinforces the psychological distance between the soldier's inner world and external reality.

Overall, the extended analysis confirms that Darwish's poem constructs inner conflict through a complex interplay of metaphor, paradox, and repetition, all functioning within a formalist framework of defamiliarization. The poem destabilizes conventional representations of war, homeland, and heroism by reconfiguring them through aesthetic estrangement. In doing so, it presents war not as a site of glory but as an existential condition that fragments identity and suppresses humanity.

¹⁸ Wimsatt, W. K., & Beardsley. (1954). *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Noonday Press. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=KmrUKcU2JUoC>

¹⁹ Jakobson, R. (1960). Linguistics and Poetry. *English Journal*, 59(7), 947–953. <https://doi.org/10.58680/ej197019826>

Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted, this study reflects that Mahmoud Darwish's poem *يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء* articulates the inner conflict of the lyrical persona through a carefully constructed formal system rather than through explicit ideological narration. The evolving metaphor of the white lily from an image of peace and imagined escape to a symbol of loss, mourning, and existential acceptance demonstrates how poetic meaning is generated through internal structural transformation. This study confirms that Darwish employs defamiliarization as a dominant aesthetic strategy, particularly through paradoxical imagery, repetition, and semantic tension, which collectively estrange familiar representations of war, love, and homeland. Methodologically, the application of Russian Formalist theory proves effective in uncovering how meaning emerges from the interaction of linguistic elements within the text, emphasizing form as a primary site of interpretation. At the same time, this research acknowledges its analytical limitation in focusing solely on internal textual mechanisms; therefore, future studies are recommended to triangulate formalist analysis with complementary approaches such as trauma theory, postcolonial criticism, or reader-response studies to further examine how poetic form interacts with historical memory, collective identity, and lived experience. Such interdisciplinary exploration may offer a more comprehensive understanding of how literary aesthetics not only reflect inner conflict but also participate in shaping ethical and humanistic reflections on war.

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