

**READING BOB MARLEY'S *I SHOT THE SHERIFF* LYRIC:**

**A SEMIOTICS OF POETRY ANALYSIS**

**A GRADUATING PAPER**

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## FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this research is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this research. Other researcher's opinions or findings included in the research are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

Yogyakarta, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019

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**READING BOB MARLEY'S *I SHOT THE SHERIFF* LYRIC:  
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Saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqosyah untuk memenuhi sebagian syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

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**READING BOB MARLEY'S *I SHOT THE SHERIFF* LYRIC:  
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**ABSTRACT**

The characteristic of poetry and lyric is its unity. Therefore, each element of poetry that refers to “other things” will be constant. The lyric’s significance can be discovered through the interrelation of its structure. This research uses Bob Marley’s *I Shot The Sheriff* lyric as the object. The structure of lyrics is main unit to find the significance, and the significance of the lyrics should be read intertextually. This research uses objective approach by applying Semiotics of Poetry theory by Michael Riffaterre. To collect the data this research uses close reading technique. By using heuristic and hermeneutic reading, this research shows the significance of Bob Marley’s *I Shot The Sheriff* lyrics. The meaning of lyric comes from matrix. This research finds (1) the fighting of narrator to government control and (2) that the hypogram of *I Shot The Sheriff* lyrics is the main song of Burnin’ Album, *burnin’ and Lotin’* lyrics.

**Keywords:** lyrics, lyric’s significance, *I Shot The Sheriff*, Semiotics of Poetry.

## READING BOB MARLEY'S *I SHOT THE SHERIFF* LYRIC: A SEMIOTICS OF POETRY ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRAK

Karakteristik puisi atau lirik adalah kesatuannya karenanya setiap elemen puisi atau lirik merujuk pada “hal-hal lain” akan konstan. Makna lirik dapat ditemukan melalui keterkaitan strukturnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan lirik *I Shot The Sheriff* karya Bob Marley. Struktur lirik adalah unit utama untuk menemukan makna lirik dan makna lirik harus dibaca secara intertekstual. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan objektif dengan menerapkan teori semiotika puisi oleh Michael Riffaterre. Untuk mengumpulkan data penelitian ini menggunakan teknik *close reading*. Dengan membaca secara heuristik dan hermeneutik, penelitian ini menunjukkan makna lirik *I Shot The Sheriff* karya Bob Marley. Makna lirik berasal dari matriks. Penelitian ini menemukan (1) pertempuran narator dengan kendali pemerintah mengenai kontrol kelahiran dan (2) hipogram dari lirik *I Shot The Sheriff* adalah lagu utama dari Album *Burnin'* yaitu lirik *Burnin' and Lotin* yang mengkritisi kebijakan pemerintah terkait kontrol kelahiran.

**Kata Kunci:** puisi, makna puisi, *I Shot The Sheriff*, Semiotika Puisi.

**MOTTO**

**Time is not our friend**

kingsman



**It is what it is**

Unknown

**What is to be must be**

Unknown



## **DEDICATION**



**For the creature of my life my father and my mother**

**My family,**

**And those who made me better and better**



**חוב**



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of Research

Literature emulated a fact as art within a language. Wellek and Austin (1948:4) say that literature is the attempt to emulate the general scientific ideals of objectivity, impersonality, and certainty, an attempt which on the whole supports the collecting of neutral facts. It means that the works of literature is records the facts of life in a particular time and place in a unique way. This unique way means, as Abrams (2009:177) say, is the way to experience the way of life through the form of writing. Literature is an artistic creation based on the situation made by language. It has been used to designate fictional and imaginative writings. Literature is different with history or journalistic writings in that way. So, fictional and imaginative writings to emulated a fact in literature is the advantages of literature to make the readers more interesting and thats why the researcher choose literature as research object.

Fictional and imaginative writings to emulated a fact in literature more visible in poetry than two other literary categories, namely prose and drama. In fictional and imaginative writing, poetry uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language to evoke meanings in addition to (or in place of) the prosaic ostensible meaning. And to emulated a fact, poetry is able to record and comment on events. It also helps to define our responses to them (Altenberd and Lewis, 1963: 1).

That's the characteristic of poetry in literature. Poetry can be explain, record, comment and respond a phenomena or event in specific time and place by perculiar way. That is why literature in the form of poetry is choosing as the object in this research.

Meanwhile, the characteristic of poetry is its unity, both formal and semantic. Therefore, each element of poetry that refers to "other things" will be constant, and therefore it can be distinguished very easily from mimesis. As Riffaterre (1978: 1) say says that what is a differentiating factor between poetry and not poetry is the way a text carries its meaning. From this understanding, Riffaterre further gave simpler information about the structure of the meaning of a poem. For Riffaterre, literary phenomena are the dialectic between text and readers. This concept provides more space for readers. Hoping, speaking, having the freedom to interpret and pour poetry without having to be approved by the author's intent. It can be conclude that poetry is aesthetic and rhythmic language not only to describe a fact but also emulated a fact by feeling and composed it in the most memorable form and the readers is free to interpret. That is why the researcher choose poetry as object.

The aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language in poetry mostly combined with music. It is because music can help the sense of the poetry for audience to feel more deep. The poetry that has music in it is called lyrics or song lyrics. Poetry and lyric are not much different. Abrams (2009:179) state lyric is any fairly short poem that expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought and feeling. While the characteristic of poetry and lyric remain in

narrative and descriptive text music come and merge into lyric as frame to embellish the poetry and lyrics as beautiful creation. That is why song lyrics will be the object of this research.

To describe a fact or emulated a fact, song lyric record and comment on events not only in narrator life, but also telling the social problems such as war, oppression, politics, or even racial issue. The poetry itself and music seems to be the tools or ways to an artist emulated a fact even as their way to fighting those issue. That phenomenon can be seen early 1970 on Reggae music and Rastafarian community. As Meng Ren (2016: 3) say, music and the cynical lyrics become alternative way to criticized and fighting for politics or racial. By cynical lyric faith and reality, belief and action, religion and politics are become realative.

Meng Ren (2016: 4) also explained that every cynical lyrics connected in Rastafari because Rastafari grew out of oppression and serves to transform oppression at heart and in the world. The strong racial connotation in Rastafari reflects the Rastas' struggle and fighting against racial discrimination and structural oppression, however, it is under the struggling condition the Rastas awaken from "Babylon," striving to leave its operation, temptation and deception for a better place to love and rejoice – a movement from darkness to light. So, in Rastafari, poetry not only telling a fact or emulated a fact by its own unique way, but also become the way to fighting this political and social problems. This is why the researcher choose Reggae song lyrics become object of this research: song lyrics became tools of fighting for the movement.

Reggae originally comes from Jamaica. Reggae was strong and became the regular style of music by the end of 1970. The most famous musician associated with Reggae is Bob Marley. With the music that has been composed by Bob Marley, Reggae became popular genre by the end of 1970 and grows up until now in many country. Bob Marley's life and work also served as an inspiration for millions people by displaying the power of music which is infused with passion and heart. What might be Marley's most amazing moment was when, in the middle of civil war in Jamaica, he played the One Love Peace Concert for the whole of the country for free, and gets the leaders of both factions to embrace on stage. Marley also popularize reggae music when the world was dominated by rock n' roll music either with the wailers band or solo career.

The most famous song by Bob Marley and the wailers is *I Shot The Sheriff*. This song became very popular when Eric Clapton, blues musician, recorded this song in 1974. His version was a #1 hit in the US, the only #1 of his career. Clapton's recording gave Marley a big boost, as it exposed him to a rock audience. (<https://www.songfacts.com/facts/bob-marley-the-wailers/i-shot-the-sheriff>). This was the last single Marley released with Peter Tosh and Bunny of the Wailer, who left to go solo. *I Shot the Sheriff* song tells about the narrator fighting against the sheriff by shooting him. In generally, that song also has a variable theme of lyric writing such judicial system, injustice and also fighting against authority. On the first stanza "*They say they want to bring me in guilty/ for the killing of a deputy*" shows that the speaker that murder the sheriff could not be blamed for killing deputy because the deputy is not in his league. In the middle of

the song “*So I shot, I shot, I shot him down/ and I say, if I am guilty I will pay.*” shows that the speaker did not believe to the judicial system and made concession against the corrupted government which can be paid by money.

Most of Bob Marley song is describing or telling something or fact as usual. Marley’s song tend to rise social problem on his country which is telling the fact of Marley’s government and political conditions such as “smile Jamaica”, “No more trouble” and many more. Marley also speak about love and unity among all mankind as seen in his 1977 song "One Love". He also spoke about the sufferings of the world in his songs. These include "So Much Trouble in the World", "Johnny Was" and "War". But in *I Shot the Sheriff*, the song lyrics is different with other Bob Marley song. For example in line 12-14:

*Every time I plant a seed,  
He said kill it before it grow -  
He said kill them before they grow.*

Those line cannot be understood in usual language or lexical meaning. The words *seed*, beside has multiple meaning, those words also telling something else or in literature terms is indirect expression. It can be understood by its unity with the whole song and also the setting of its culture. Literary works, including poetry, were not born in a cultural vacuum, including song lyric. A song is a response to previous song. This response contains irregularities or traditional settings. The song perceps, absorbs, and then transforms it into his song. Transform something

that is translated into another form or form, which is essentially the same. This response in Riffaterre's terms called as a hypogram.

Therefore, to understand the meaning of this song, the researcher use semiotics poetry theory by Riffaterre. Semiotics poetry is theory that uses to find the meaning of poetry by finding (1) indirect expression, (2) heuristic and hermeneutic reading, (3) matrix or varian and models, and 4) hypogram (hypogram relating to intertextual principles). So it can be seen that *I Shot the Sheriff* song lyric, as poetry itself, not only emulated the fact which happened to the narrator by rhythmic and unique language, but also, as Riffaterre say, telling something else and not born in cultural vacuum. That is why the researcher choose *I Shot the Sheriff* song lyrics as the material object of this research and analyze this song lyrics uses *semiotics poetry* theory by Riffaterre.

## **1.2. Research Question**

The researcher formulates the problem based on the limitation of the study: what is the significance of Bob Marley's *I Shoot The Sheriff* song?

## **1.3. Objective of Research**

According to the research problem above, the objective of this research is: to figure out the significance of Bob Marley's *I Shoot The Sheriff* song.



#### 1.4. Significances of Research

This research has two kinds of significances, theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the theory of Semiotics of Poetry is still relevant to find meanings of poetry, especially in the song lyric. Semiotics is the theory which is necessary to find the meaning through the structuralist paradigm. Semiotics of Poetry can be applied in poetry and prose by modifying the methods. Semiotics of poetry is used to find the meaning of the meaning from the lyric of *I Shoot the Sheriff*.

Practically, this research can enrich the discussion Bob Marley's *I Shoot The Sheriff* song. The song lyric may convey the fighting against the government. The song lyric can be also discussed about figurative language in the style of its song lyrics. The discussion of the song lyric can be the additional contribution in literature and academic research.

#### 1.5. Literature Review

The researcher finds four types of research about *I Shot the Sheriff* lyric by Bob Marley and the similar theory as the prior researches. First, a paper by W. Alan Smith, Ph.D. Florida Southern College, Lakeland, FL. His paper entitled *Songs Of Freedom: The Music Of Bob Marley As Transformative Education* describes that Bob Marley skillfully blended multiple cultures, syncretistic religious influences, and a commitment to freedom, justice, hope, and unity through the gift of his musical and lyrical genius. He never saw himself as anything other than a messenger of Jah and used his music as a device to empower persons toward personal and corporate transformation. His work on behalf of the Third World's poor and powerless led to impressive awards: the United Nations

awarded him the 1978 “Medal of Peace” and just a while before his death in 1982. Jamaica gave him its highest honor, the Order of Distinction.

Second, the article from Peterson entitled *Duppy Conqueror* in 2008. Peterson describes that I shot the sheriff song is Bob Marley criticism to the government about marijuana. In Jamaica, as in America, marijuana was (and still is) illegal (“Drugs (Jamaica)”). As one might guess, then, strict Rastafarians will come into conflict with the authorities quite a bit, specifically over the use of marijuana. This theme is common in a lot of Marley’s music (cf., again, “I Shot the Sheriff”). In addition to this, Marley would frequently include references to the major tenets of Rastafarianism in his music especially in the *I Shot the Sheriff* song.

Third, Anisah Haidaratul Hanifah graduating paper entitled *Reading the Meaning of War in Nathalie Handal’s “War”: A Semiotics of Poetry Analysis* from English Department of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. Anisa discussed the war in Handal’s War through Rifattere’s Semiotics of Poetry theory. To gain the significance of poetry, it is read through heuristic and hermeneutic reading; finding matrix, models, variant, and hypogram. The paper result was war in Palestine which related to the hypogram in the Qur’an AlMaidah: 21, Al-Maidah: 26 and Al-Hajj: 40.

Fourth, Hesti Rohmanasari graduating paper entitled *Reading Swinburne’s the garden of Proserpine: A semiotics of poetry analysis* from English Department of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. Hesti discussed the significance of Swinburne’s *the garden of Proserpine* poetry. To find the

significance, this poem should read intertextually. Hesti used semiotics of poetry theory by Michael Riffaterre to analyze the poem. The result of analysis is found the matrix is the lamentation from goddesses and the Hypogram are the poems entitled *Death* by George Herbert, Homer entitled *Hymn to Demeter*, *The world* by Henry Vaughan.

This research is different from the article or graduating paper above which used Bob Marley's song entitled *I Shot the Sheriff* as the object of research. Although the theory is similar, this research has a different object to be analyzed while two of graduating paper above using poetry as the object. This research also analyzes the lyric per stanza while the graduating paper above analyzed the poetry by line.

### **1.6. Theoretical Approach**

The researcher uses a *Semiotics of Poetry* theory by Michael Riffaterre to find the meaning of poetry. The theory uses an objective approach, specifically to find the poem's significance. This theory is within Structuralist paradigm which uses form and structure in creating a text. It uses signifier and signified as the variables of semiotics.

Riffaterre (1978: 1) says that a differentiating factor between poetry and not poetry is the way a poetic text carries its meaning. From that understanding, Riffaterre further gave a simpler understanding of the structure of the meaning of a poem. For Riffaterre, literary phenomena are a dialectic between text and readers. This concept provides more flexibility for readers. Hence, the reader has

the freedom to interpret and interpret poetry without having to feel bound by the author's intent.

Riffaterre, suggests four main things to produce poetry meaning/concretization, namely: (1) indirect of expression, (2) heuristic and retroactive reading or hermeneutic, (3) matrix or keywords, and 4) hypograms (hypograms pertaining to intertextual principles).

Riffaterre's notion about the poem that "a poem says one thing means another" (1978: 1). The transformation from one meaning to another meaning occurs indirectly and the poem expresses a concept indirectly. This concept makes the language of the poem has a different nature from daily language to convey the meaning: *displacing*, *distorting* and *creating* meaning that occurs semantic indirection. *Displacing*, when the sign is moved from one meaning to another, when one word "replaces" the word others, as happens in metaphor and metonymy. *Distortion*, when ambiguity arises, contradiction, or nonsense. *Creation*, when textual space is used as an organizational principle to create signs from linguistic units that might not be meaningful in other contexts (for example, symmetry, rhyme, or semantic equivalence between positional homologs in one verse).

In order to understand and uncover the "things" contained in literary works, there is a term known as a heuristic (heuristic) and hermeneutic (hermeneutic). The two terms, which are commonly referred to as heuristic readings and hermeneutic readings, are usually associated with the semiotic approach. The relationship between heuristics and hermeneutics can be seen as a gradual

relationship because reading and or hermeneutical work must be preceded by heuristic readings. Hermeneutic work, which Riffaterre also calls retroactive reading, requires repeated and critical reading (Nurgiyantoro, 2009: 33).

A poem starts with the existence of a matrix. Poetry is the result of the translation of a matrix. This matrix can be in the form of one word, a combination of words, parts of sentences or simple sentences, which are translated into a longer and more complex translation (Riffaterre, 1978: 25). That means the matrix gives the meaning of the unity of a poem so that by knowing the matrix in poetry, it can be said that the reader knows the theme of the poem.

Riffaterre says that a poem is like a donut. Donuts have two inseparable parts, one is donut and the second is empty space that supports the donut. Both parts support each other and give each other meaning, namely the empty space in the middle of the meat actually supports the meaning of the donut itself.

The model is the first actualization of the matrix. This model can be in the form of words or sentences contained in the verse of poetry, which can represent the core of the matrix. To find a model in poetry, it can be seen from the level of poetic words or sentences. The word or sentence that the model says has a high level of poetic quality. This means that the word or sentence is monumental, which can represent the entire meaning of the text and become the background for the creation of poetry. The matrices and models are then actualized into variants. You could say these variants are a form of translation of the models contained in each verse or line in poetry.

Literary works, including poetry and song lyric, were not born in a cultural vacuum, including literature. A poem is a response to previous poems. This response is in the form of irregularities or continuing its tradition. The poet perceives, absorbs, and then transforms it into his poems. Transforming is moving something in another form or form, which is essentially the same. Riffaterre called it a hypogram.

Hypogram is text that becomes the background for the creation of other texts or poems that on the other side are also the background for the creation of other poems. Often a new poem gets its essential meaning if it is contrasted (aligned) with the poem being its hypogram. Thus, the poem cannot be separated from the historical connection with the previous poem. The meaning of poetry is based on structural analysis for the first time, namely the analysis of its intrinsic structure. However, often this structural meaning does not include all the meanings contained in the poems analyzed. The new meaning is more perfect when contrasted with the hypogram.

### **1.7. Methods of Research**

To explain and to retain complexities which are occurred in research inquiry, the researcher needs a method of research. Methods of research will guide and make the foundation of research solid and comprehensive. Therefore, the research is accessible and easy to understand.

### 1.7.1. Type of Research

This research is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a study of the social problem and concluded by interpreting the meaning (Creswell, 2009: 1). This research therefore uses a qualitative method because it proposes the subjective interpretation as the type of qualitative itself. The subjective interpretation means that this research is done by some supporting opinion. The researcher uses *Semiotics of Poetry* which focuses on the text itself. Besides, this research is library research which focuses on the text as its subject. The text contained all data which this research needs to be analyzed.

### 1.7.2. Data Sources

Data used in this research is Bob Marley's *I Shot the Sheriff* song lyric. The data unit in this research is the whole lyric: the phrases, sentences, lines, and stanzas. This research also uses some books, a dictionary (Online or off-line), and Internet as the supporting information to make this research comprehensive.

### 1.7.3. Data Collection Technique

To collecting data, this research uses two steps: close reading and classifying data. Close reading is the analysis of work which includes multiple meaning and complex interrelationship that covers figurative and verbal components of its own into detail (Abrams, 2009: 217). Close reading in this research mean noted the detail on Bob Marley's *I Shot the Sheriff* song lyric as the main data of the research. Meanwhile, classifying the data based on the semiotics poetry theory: models, variants, hypograms.

#### 1.7.4. Data Analysis Technique

The researcher uses some steps to analyze data as Riffaterre's book *Semiotics of Poetry* (1984). Riffaterre suggests four main steps to produce poetry meaning/concretization, namely: (1) indirect of expression, (2) heuristic and retroactive reading or hermeneutic, (3) matrix or keywords, and 4) hypograms (hypograms pertaining to intertextual principles).

- 1) The indirect expression. An indirect expression consists of displacing, distorting, and creating meaning. Figurative language like metaphor and metonymy can displace the meaning. The data used by doing displacing meaning is a phrase. Ambiguity, contradiction and nonsense exclude Riffaterre's theory of distorting meaning. By doing distorting meaning, it uses the phrase. Rhyme, enjambment, and typography are kinds of creating meaning in the poem. To create meaning, the data used is a line.
- 2) Heuristics and hermeneutics reading. In heuristic reading, the researcher uses linguistic competence to find the song lyrics meaning. The researcher also focuses on ungrammatical aspects. The data used in heuristic reading is the phrases, line, and stanza that indicate ungrammaticalities. The ungrammaticalities should be solved by adding parts of speech or preposition to read into grammatical aspects. After heuristics reading is hermeneutic reading. In this step, the researcher uses literary competence to find the poem's significance. In search of poem's significance, the researcher focuses on stanzas. The stanzas may



contain data to gain complete meaning from the researcher's literary competence.

The meaning of meaning or the significance in the poem can be reached by this reading through the literary competence. Hermeneutic reading is required by the reader to read backward to understand the structure in its own function. The fourth step is finding matrix, models, and variants. Matrix is the core of a poem which does not exist textually but only the actualization called model. The matrix can appear as phrase or sentence. Therefore, the data used for models are a phrase in poem textually. Meanwhile, variants are the successive actualization from the model. By using the data of phrase, variants can be reached. After finding the matrix, the researcher should find hypogram that relates to the object. Thus, the plausible from hypogram is the previous works even poem, mythology or other literary works. The last step is taking the conclusion from the analysis. The researcher may get invention as the result of the analysis.

### **1.8. Paper Organization**

This paper divides into three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that consists of background of research, research question, the objective of research, the significance of research, literature review, theoretical approach, methods of research and paper organization. The second chapter elaborates the discussion and analysis from *I Shot the Sheriff* song lyrics to find the significance of song lyric. The last chapter is a conclusion which results in the invention from the analysis and suggestion for the next research in the same field.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 3.1. Conclusion

From the previous discussion, the conclusion can be drawn in this research. The conclusion is based on the research question before. It can be concluded that the significance of *I Shot The Sheriff* lyric is the fighting of narrator to government control. In this case, the fighting can refer to both killing or shooting. They are fighting because the narrator gets oppressed from the sheriff to plant a seed. The narrator is accused for killing the deputy, but the narrator pleads that the narrator only kills the sheriff. The narrator kills the sheriff because the sheriff wants to kill him first. Therefore, the narrator kills the sheriff because it is self-defence.

Meanwhile as human, it is a right to plant a seed. Seed in this song lyric means a man's semen. Then, it can be conclude that all *I Shot the Sheriff* Song significance is the fighting between the narrator and government in birth control case.

#### 3.2. Suggestion

This research is so far from perfect research. It causes the limitation of knowledge, data sources, and many more. The researcher hopes for the next research with same field will be better than it. The first suggestion, the next researcher should explore more about the meaning and the intertextual in the song

by Semiotics of Poetry. Second, the next researcher may find new invention about Bob Marley's song entitled *I Shot The Sheriff* by using another theory such as Stylistic or marxist theory.



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