

READING *CIVIL WAR* BY GUNS N' ROSES:

A SEMIOTICS OF POETRY ANALYSIS

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature



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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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Yogyakarta, 15 Agustus 2021



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A SEMIOTICS OF POETRY ANALYSIS**

Saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang munaqosyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

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**READING *CIVIL WAR* BY GUNS N' ROSES:
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ABSTRACT

Aside from poetry, song lyrics also has a lot of meaning to analyze. This research uses a song by Guns N' Roses entitled *Civil War*. *Civil War* talks about the American civil war that happened in 1861 until 1865, the assassination of black skin activist Martin Luther King Junior, the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and the America Vietnam War. From those tragedies that mention in the song, the researcher is interested to know what is the songwriters want to really talk about and what is the significance of the song. This research uses Semiotics of Poetry by Michael Riffaterre by using an objective approach to gain the significance of the song. In analyzing the data, the researcher uses a close reading technique. To gain the significance or the deep meaning in *Civil War* lyrics, indirection expression, heuristic and hermeneutic reading, matrix, models and variants, and hypogram are used to gain it. Meaning from song lyrics gained from the matrix. After searching the matrix, in Riffaterre's perspective can be concluded that *Civil War* is not a poem, however it is a verse. It because the matrix is not found. As Riffaterre states that poetry is development from the matrix that becomes the models and transformed to the variants. Hypogram from the song is *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* song, *Cool Hands Luke* (1967) movie, the speech by Peruvian Guerrilla, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* song, and the poem *Facing It* by Yusef Komunyakha who as the veteran soldier of America-Vietnam war.

Key Words: *poem, poem's meaning, Guns n' Roses, Civil War, Semiotic of Poetry.*

**READING CIVIL WAR BY GUNS N' ROSES:
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Oleh: Adam Nursyifa Fikri Firmansyah

ABSTRAK

Selain puisi, lirik lagu juga memiliki banyak makna untuk dianalisa. Penelitian ini menggunakan lagu dari Guns N' Roses yang berjudul *Civil War* sebagai objek penelitian. *Civil War* menceritakan tentang perang sipil Amerika yang terjadi pada tahun 1861 – 1865, pembunuhan aktivis kulit hitam Martin Luther King Junior, Pembunuhan Presiden John Fitzgerald Kennedy dan Perang Amerika-Vietnam. Dari beberapa tragedi yang diceritakan di lirik lagu, peneliti sangat tertarik untuk mengetahui lebih tentang apa yang sebenarnya ingin disampaikan dari penulis lagu dan makna terdalam pada lagu *Civil War*. Penelitian ini mengaplikasikan Semiotika Puisi dari Michael Riffaterre dengan pendekatan objektif. Dalam menganalisis data, peneliti menggunakan teknik *close reading*. Untuk mengungkapkan signifikansi atau makna terdalam pada lirik *Civil War*, ungkapan tidak langsung, pembacaan heuristik dan hermeneutika, *matrix*, *model*, *variant* dan *hypogram* digunakan untuk mengungkapkannya. Makna lirik lagu didapatkan dari sebuah *matrix*. Setelah melakukan penelusuran terhadap *matrix*, dalam perspektif Riffaterre *Civil War* bukan merupakan sebuah *poetry* melainkan *verse* karena *matrix* tidak berhasil ditemukan. Seperti yang Riffaterre katakan bahwa *poetry* adalah perkembangan dari *matrix* yang menjadi *model* dan ditransformasikan menjadi *variant*. *Hipogram* dari lirik *Civil War* adalah lagu *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, film *Cool Hands Luke* (1967), Pidato dari Gerilya Peru yang bernama Jorge, lagu *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, puisi *The Dead of Soldier* dari John Woods dan puisi *Facing it* dari Yusef Komunyakha selaku tantara veteran perang Amerika-Vietnam.

Kata Kunci: *puisi, makna puisi, Guns N' Roses, Civil War, Semiotika Puisi.*

MOTTO

“Menulis tentang musik adalah jalan yang sangat sunyi. Namun, sama seperti kebanyakan jalan sunyi yang lain, hanya di sinilah bisa ditemukan makna.”

– Idhar Resmadi (Indonesian Music Journalist)



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DEDICATION

For Grandfather and Grandmother in heaven, also my parents ...



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Assalamualaikum Wr. Wb.

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I consider that this research is not perfect, so I hope for much advice from all the readers in order to make this paper better. Hopefully, this graduating paper can be useful for education and can inspire everyone.

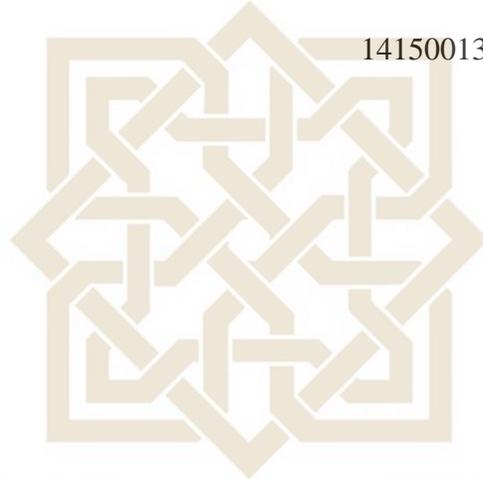
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background of Study

Literature is a beautiful artwork that uses language as a media and it has dominant aesthetic value. Thought, idea, emotion, form and author's messages, have an important place in aesthetics. According to Bennet, literature denotes the concept of special and privileged set of fictional, imaginative or creative forms of writing which, it is argued, exhibit certain specific properties that require special methods of analysis if they are to be properly understood (2003: 5).

There are several kinds of literary work such as prose, poem, and play. In this research, the researcher chooses a poem as the object of research. A poem as one of literary works is a media to express thought, ideas, feelings, and human life experience. According to Arnold, poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever sure stay (1909: 14). To create a poem, the poet uses words that have imagination about something to talk deeply. The words that are used in poem have a meaningful idea and represent their intention.

The researcher chooses a poem to analyze because a poem has special sides to be compared to other literary works. The poem is a creative expression of the poet's reflection on social life. The expression can be entertainment, enlightenment,

summary, portrait, symbolism, tragedy, or tragic expression. Words become models of human inner and personal lives as people are always sensitive to reality. In this research, the researcher uses song lyric as a material that will be analyzed. Song lyrics can be mentioned as a poem. It because song lyrics also have the author's imagination, portrait of social life, language of literature and contain author's expression. In some current usages, lyrics still retains the sense of a poem written to be set to music (Abrams, 2009:180). Poetic diction also contains in song lyrics. Poetic diction signifies the kind of words, phrases, and sentence structures, and sometimes signifies figurative language that constitutes any work of literature (Abrams, 2009:269). Figurative language is the words used by poets to describe something that is not usual, more effective, more suggestive in a poem. As Abrams states that figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what competent users of language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of word, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect (2009:118). Furthermore lyric is a type of poetry in which the voice of the poem records a specific feeling or attitude. According to Quinn (2006: 248,) the lyric was designed for musical accompaniment of a Lyre (Lyra) Song itself is a term for a type of lyric poem.

Song lyrics are also the result of imagination works by the author. Imagination is a power of thought in creating literary work that used the expression of thought, feeling, and experience of the author. In creating the expressions, the author uses intuition and manipulates the words to make beauty essence in literary work.

The background of the author's imagination in creating the literary works is closely related to their current happening and environment. In the twentieth century, war became something important idea for authors creating their works. One of the biggest wars in human civilization happen in that era. That is why many authors, artists, and musician made their works especially literary works in war themes.

The ninetieth and twentieth century was dominated by wars and conflicts which often altered the balance of power around the globe. Those century saw the emergence of "total wars," such as World War I and World War II, which were large enough to encompass nearly the entire world (<https://www.thoughtco.com/major-wars-and-conflicts-20th-century-1779967> accessed in May, 13 2021). War can happen because of different ideologies, desire to expand region authorization, and the weapons race between countries. Johnson and Tierney state:

War is result from a number of different events, including (1) choice—a freely made decision to initiate a war; (2) entrapment---the perception that one has been forced into war (e.g., by invasion, alliance obligations, or the belief that another state will shortly initiate conflict); or (3) turmoil---the perception that states in the system are losing control of the situation, and there is a "slide" into war (2011:20).

In Islam, war is allowed when a country gets attacked by the opposite and self-defense is necessary. They had to defense force the resist an attack or an effort to defend themselves. The discussion about civil war is also depicted in the Koran Surah al-Baqarah verse 216.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ
تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ^٤

Translation: Fighting has been ordained for you, though it is hard for you. But it may be that a thing is hard upon you though it is (really) good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is bad for you. Allah knows (all things) while you do not know.

The verse talks about Allah that ordered war for the Muslims. However, Muslims actually feel heavy and do not like war. The soul of the Prophet Muhammad has been educated to love peace so that when this verse was revealed, Allah added the sentence “wa huwa kurhullakum” even though war is something to hate. It means the verse was basically aimed at peace. Therefore, if there is a war between the Muslims and other people and then ask for peace. The Muslims must accept the invitation for peace.

One of the musicians or bands that convey war conflict themes is Guns N’ Roses. Guns N’ Roses is an American hard rock band from Los Angeles formed in 1985. It is consisted of Axl Rose, Paul Hudson (Slash), Duff McKagan, Izzy Stradlin, and Steven Adler. They made their album debut *Appetite for Destruction* in 1987. In September 1991, Guns N’ Roses released double albums *Use Your Illusion I* and *Use Your Illusion II* which make them known as one of the biggest rock bands in the world.

Use Your Illusion II album contains one song entitled *Civil War* that uses war as a theme of the song. *Civil War* reflects many issues about the war, social reality and criticism to the government. The topic of this song is more completely about the American civil war. However, the song is not only talking about American Civil War. Aside, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Junior assassination; American-Vietnam war, The Wall of D.C. are mentioned in the song. Then, the poetry's components are interrelated into that lyric.

Form and content are appeared in the *Civil War* song. Form of a work is the principle that determines how a work is ordered and organized (Abrams, 2009: 125). Form in poem can get the audience intention. Generally, the audience have their own feeling such as impressed, sad and happy through gesture language. Gesture language is the concept which makes the poetry signaled meaning by emphasizing word sound, rhythmical patterns or sequences (Wainwright, 2004: 3). There said in the lyrics of the song which a type of form can be found:

Look at the young men fighting
Look at the women crying
Look at the young men dying
The way they've always done before

Civil War is also load a content. To find the content, the researcher needs to solve the structure of the *Civil War*. The structure of the lyrics is intertextual with other texts. The literary work is always intertext into other texts because there is no original literary work (Eagleton, 2008: 119).

What we've got here is failure communicate

*Some men you just can't reach
 So, you get what we had here last week
 Which is the way he wants it!
 And I don't like it any more than you men*

Those lines of the song contain the structure of the intertextual with other text which defined as content. Those lines are from a conversation from a movie entitled *Cool Hand Luke* which released in 1967.

The lyrics also talks about humanism. How people get killed brutally by being themselves. For examples John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. It is portrayed in line 22-27. "D'you wear black armband; /When they shot the man; /Who said 'Peace could last forever?'" ; /And in my first memory they shot Kennedy; /And I went numb when I learned to see". "So I never fell for Vietnam; /We got the wall of D.C. to remain us all." Those lyrics are mentioning Vietnam and Wall of D.C. to remembering all the soldier who died in American-Vietnam War.

The researcher chooses *Civil War* for this research is because *Civil War* mention more complete and important events in the dark history of America. Such as American civil war, American Vietnam war, the assassination of black skin activist Martin Luther King Junior, the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and also about Wall of District of Columbia that shows the name of the soldiers who died in the Vietnam war. From those tragedies the researcher really interests to know about what is the songwriters really want to talk about and what is the main meaning when it comes to the readers. While, the others song that used war as the theme as *One* by Metallica,

Buffalo Soldier by Bob Marley and *Knocking on Heaven's Door* by Bob Dylan are only talk about one event.

The various meanings in *Civil War* song are obtained because literary work is intertextual. Therefore, the complexities in *Civil War* needs deep analysis to find out the certain meaning. The certain meaning in *Civil War* song emerges from the structure. Identification of the structure is necessary to find the significance in *Civil War* song. One's structure cannot be traced without the other structures (Culler, 1981: 112). So, reading intertextually to find the structure of the poem.

The significance of the song can be found through semiotic reading. Semiotic reading is one of methods to gain the deep meaning of song. In addition, the significance of the song can be found by relating the structure. A sign is only a relationship to something else. It will not make sense without a continuous translatability from component to component of a network (Riffaterre, 1984: 11). It means that sign is always connected to the system or structure, and cannot be isolated. Thus, why the researcher needs to find the significance of the *Civil War* song.

1. 2. Research Question

Based on the background of study, this research is intended to find the answer to the question: what is the significance of the *Civil War* by Guns N' Roses?

1. 3. Objective Of Research

Related to the research question, this research is to figure out the significance of *Civil War* by Guns N' Roses.

1. 4. Significances of Research

Theoretically, the researcher hopes that this research will contribute to give the readers an understanding of the meaning inside the lyrics as this research applies the semiotics approach concern to finding the meaning inside the lyrics. Specifically, the researcher hopes that this research can be an example of analyzing songs.

Practically, the researcher hopes that this research can contribute to all people who love songs and music. Especially for scholars and all readers, can produce a research about song while it is emerged continuously in lyrics.

1. 5. Literature Review

From the point of view of the subjects, the researcher has searched for other researches about *Civil War* songs by Guns N' Roses. In the digital library of UIN Sunan Kalijaga and the online library on the internet, there is no research about this song yet. For that reason, the researcher considers this research as the first research according to the aspect of subject and theory.

In the aspect of the author, the researcher finds other research in <http://id.portalgaruda.org/> about the Guns N' Roses band by I Made Putra Adnyana from Udayana University, entitle "*Types and Meanings of Idiom in The Song Albums of OASIS and Guns N' Roses.*" This research focused on the kinds of idioms and meanings of idioms contained in OASIS album song lyrics and Guns N' Roses. The data are taken from OASIS's album like "Definitely Maybe, (What's the Story) Morning Glory and Be Here Now" and the album of Guns N 'Roses as "Appetite for

Destruction, Use Your Illusion I and Use Your Illusion II.” These data are collected using the method by applying the qualitative recording technique. In the terms of analysis, there are two issues to be discussed including the kinds of idioms that explained the meaning of the first and subsequent idiom.

The researcher also finds the graduating paper entitled *Reading The Meaning of War in Nathalie Handal's "War": A Semiotics of Poetry Analysis* by Anisah Haidaratul Hanifah from the English Department of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The graduating paper discusses about the war in Handal's War through Semiotics of Poetry theory. To obtain the significance of poetry, it reads through heuristic and hermeneutic reading; finding matrix, models, variant, and hypogram. This research is different from Anisah's graduating paper which used Handal's poem entitled War as the object of the research. This research uses the *Civil War* song by Guns N' Roses. The theory is similar but the object is different to be analyzed.

The last, the researcher finds the graduating paper entitled *Reading Swinburne's The Garden of Proserpine: A Semiotic Of Poetry Analysis* by Hesti Rohmanasari from the English Department of State Islamic University, Yogyakarta. This graduating paper discusses *The Garden of Proserpine* through Semiotics of Poetry theory. To obtain the significance of poetry, it reads through heuristic and hermeneutic reading; finding matrix, models, variant, and hypogram. This research is different from Hesti's graduating paper which used Swinburne's poem entitled *The Garden of Proserpine* as

the object of the research. This research uses the *Civil War* song by Guns N' Roses. The theory is similar but the object is different to be analyzed.

1. 6. Theoretical Approach

Theory is a series of concepts that relate certain facts to other facts. It describes, identifies, classifies, analyzes, and evaluates works of something that will be analyzed. According to Ransom as cited in Davis and Womack (2002: 13), theory, which is an expectation, always determines criticism, and never more than when it is unconscious. The reputed condition of no theory in the critic's mind is illusory.

In this research, the researcher uses the theory of semiotics. Semiotics is a study about sign, the usage of sign, and all related to sign. Carter says (2006: 43) that semiotic are "referred to as a science of sign". The theory believes that every word in a poem is all about the sign. It can be a sign of social critics or phenomena, which the sign functions as the tool to convert a literary works into containing a meaning based on the components of the work. According to Preminger, semiotics occurs in social phenomena and also literary works as the signs (as cited in Dhiana, 2009: 17).

The researcher uses *Semiotics of Poetry* theory by Michael Riffaterre. The theory specifically used an objective approach to gain the significance of the poem. This theory is within the structuralist paradigm which uses form and structure in creating text. It uses signifiers and signified as the variables of semiotics.

According to Riffaterre, the poem expresses the concept and things by indirection. On other hand, a poem says one thing and means another (1984: 1). To find

the meaning of the poem, the researcher will analyze indirection expressions. Indirection is produced by displacing, distorting, and creating meaning. The researcher uses figurative language to displace the meaning in the poem such as metaphor. Ambiguity, contradiction, and nonsense are used to distort the meaning. While, the process of creating the meaning can be found by analyzing rhyme, enjambment, and typography.

Riffaterre states, there are two steps to create the poem's significance; heuristic and *retroactive* or hermeneutic reading. The heuristic is the first interpretation that takes place, since it is during this reading that meaning is apprehended (Riffaterre, 1984: 5). Heuristic constitutes the first place of interpretation to gain meaning. The linguistic competence is the input to attract the reader, which includes an assumption that language is referential. It also includes the reader's ability to perceive incompatibilities between words; for instance, to identify tropes and figures.

The second step is hermeneutic reading. Hermeneutic reading is used to give the literary meaning in the text of the poem. The base of hermeneutic reading is the convention of literature. In this step, the significance or meaning of meaning in the poem can be revealed. In hermeneutic reading, the poem should be reviewing, revising and comparing backward.

Heuristic and hermeneutic reading cannot be detached. Both will solve to reach significance and focuses on the intrinsic elements of the text. Meanwhile, literary competence emphasizes the intertextuality of the other text. By using it, the significance can be discovered.

The next stage is finding the matrix, model, and variant. Riffaterre states that every poem contains a matrix, model, and variants. The matrix is an abstract concept that is never actualized in the text. It makes the matrix is central of significance. The matrix is a minimal and literal sentence, into a longer, complex and non-literal periphrasis (Riffaterre, 1984: 19). Model is the actualization of the matrix that presents in text. The model can be such of certain words or phrases that have poetic character and reflect the matrix. Then variant is the transformation of the model that can be found in lines or stanza.

The last stage is finding the hypogram. Hypogram is the result of intertextual relations between texts. The text as a whole, however, evidence a humorous constant inseparable from intertextuality the sustained discrepancy between the expectations raised by the title and what is actually find in the text (Riffaterre, 1984: 127).

1.7. Method of Research

1.7.1. Type of Research

This research is qualitative research. This research is part of the literature research for this study based on the text. The text to be the source of the primary analysis is a *Civil War* song by Guns N' Roses.

1.7.2. Data Sources

There are two data sources used to perform the analysis of the text. First, lyrics *Civil War* by Guns N' Roses itself. The lyrics is divided into 61 lines.

Second, data sources include books that relate to the lyrics and the books which relate to the theory. Valid websites which relate to the theory and subjects also become the source of data for doing the analysis.

1.7.3. Data Collection Techniques

The data analysis technique in this research is by using close reading. According to Abrams (2009: 217) close reading is the analysis of work which is including multiple meaning and complex interrelationship that covers figurative and verbal components of its own into detail. The researcher read poetry repeatedly to picks certain aspects which are important in the research. When the data from the primary sources have been obtained, the researcher starts to explore other supporting data from other sources mentioned earlier. Such as classifying the data based on the theory. The classification covers the models, variants, and hypograms.

1.7.4. Data Analysis Technique

Data techniques analysis used in this research is focused on Semiotics of Poetry theory. There are six steps to analyze the data as Riffaterre suggests in Semiotics of Poetry (1984). The first is identifying the indirect expression. The indirect expression consists of displacing, distorting, and creating meaning.

The second is heuristic reading. In this step, the researcher uses linguistic competence to find the meaning of the poem. In search meaning of the poem, the researcher focuses on ungrammatical aspects. The phrase that indicates ungrammatical

are used in heuristic reading. By adding parts of speech or prepositions to read into grammatical aspects, the ungrammatical should be solved.

The third step is hermeneutic reading. In this step of the research is to find the significance of the poem by using literary competence. In search significance of the poem, the researcher focuses on stanzas of the lyrics. The stanzas may contain the data to obtain the complete meaning from literary competence. The significance in the poem can be gained by this reading through literary competence. Hermeneutic reading is required by the reader to read backward to understand the structure in its function.

The fourth step is finding the matrix, models, and variants. Matrix is the core of the poem which does not exist textually but only the actualization called model. The matrix can appear as a phrase or sentence. Therefore, the data used for the models are phrases in the poem textually. Meanwhile, variants are successive actualizations from the model. By using the data of the phrase, variants can be reached. After finding the matrix, model, and variant, the researcher can find the hypogram that is related to the object. So, the plausible from hypogram is the previous works even poem, song, and 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 research created in three chapters. The first chapter is the introduction where it is divided into the background of the study, objective of the study, significance

of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, method of research, and the paper organization. The second chapter is analysis of the poem which is conducted with the semiotics of poetry theory to find the significance of the lyrics. The third chapter is the conclusion and suggestion for further research which can be done for the subjects and semiotics of poetry theory.



CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

3.1. Conclusion

This research analyzes the *Civil War* song by Guns N' Roses by using semiotics of poetry theory by Michael Riffaterre. The researcher analyzes the data through indirection expression, heuristic and hermeneutic reading, matrix; model and variant, and hypogram. This research focuses to find the significance of the song. The significance of the song comes from the matrix and the models as the actualization. After searching the matrix, in Riffaterre's perspective, it can be concluded that *Civil War* is not a poem. However; it is a verse. It because the matrix is not found. As Riffaterre states that poetry, is the development from the matrix that becomes models and it is transformed to the variants. It states that this research did not fail. However, this research becomes the proof and the calibration that a literary works includes a verse or a poem. A verse is a collection of metrical lines of poetry. It also contains literature pattern, as rhyme and enjambment.

The hypograms from *Civil War* by Guns N' Roses are *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* song, the conversations in *Cool Hands Luke* movie, the speech by Jorge as Peruvian Guerilla, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* song, *Facing It* by Yusef Komunyakha.

3.2. Suggestions

This research is far from perfect and there is still a lot to explore in this song. Therefore, research with the same object using different analyzing theory is recommended by the researcher to find more meaning in *Civil War* song by Guns N' Roses. The next researcher should find more inventions in *Civil War* songs by using another theory such as New Criticism, Structuralism or Post-Colonialism theory. This song can be reference material to others similar research.

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