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RIFFATERRE'S SEMIOTIC READING OF *YĀ NAHḌAT AL-'ULAMĀ'*: IDEOLOGICAL REVERENCE AND SPIRITUAL LOYALTY IN PESANTREN POETRY

Imam Bonjol Juhari[1], **Sri Wahyuni**[2]*, **Fadiah Alfi Laila**[3], **Delfarianto**[4]

[1], [2], [3] Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq, Jember, Indonesia
[4] Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

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ABSTRACT

Although pesantren poetry occupies a distinctive place within Indonesian Islamic literary tradition, it remains largely overlooked in semiotic scholarship. The poem *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā',* composed by KH. Fuad Hasyim, as a devotional expression of Nahdlatul Ulama's religious identity, has received no sustained academic attention whatsoever in this context. This study fills that gap by examining how the poem constructs ideological meaning through Riffaterre's semiotic framework. Using a descriptive-qualitative approach, the analysis proceeds through heuristic and hermeneutic readings, identifies mechanisms of indirect expression, and reconstructs the poem's semiotic structures across its fifteen stanzas. The poem derives from a single matrix, Nahdlatul Ulama, as a source of light, protection, and supplication. This proposition is never stated outright but realized through imagery that moves steadily from the personal toward the cosmic and collective. Displacement and distortion draw on the conventions of the *ghazal* and the *madāḥ qaṣīdah* to legitimize institutional devotion, while recurring vocative formulas accumulate a performative weight comparable to *dhikr*. These findings demonstrate that ideological meaning in religious poetry operates through linguistic architecture rather than through explicit doctrinal statement. The study offers a replicable semiotic methodology for analyzing *pesantren* literature, and it illuminates how contemporary Indonesian Islamic organizations draw on poetic tradition to construct, reinforce, and sustain collective ideological identity. These findings also open productive directions for future research into the intersection of literary form, religious practice, and ideological production in Muslim societies more broadly.

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*Corresponding author. Email: sriwahyuni83558@gmail.com
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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren poetry occupies a distinct place in Nusantara Islamic literature, having emerged from the encounter between the Arabic poetic tradition and local cultural contexts (Muhammad, 2024). Literature reflects a society's value system and shapes cultural identity and social cohesion (Harahap & Br Karo Sekali, 2025; Syam et al., 2024). This function is visible across the Nusantara oral tradition, where studies consistently describe poetry as a guardian of identity, a vehicle for transmitting values between generations (Syam et al., 2024; Hajrah et al., 2019), and a form of cultural heritage that survives only through active preservation, re-enactment, and promotion (Burhanudin et al., 2024). Within the pesantren environment specifically, poetry conveys the teachings of monotheism, morality, and adab (Trianton, 2024). The syair form itself traces back to the Arab-Persian tradition that entered the archipelago through Aceh (Firmansyah et al., 2021; Laksana, 2016), and it adopted rhyme schemes and metrical patterns that set Nusantara syair apart from its Arabic source (Aritonang et al., 2020; Ma'mun & Ikhwan, 2020).

Among the works that grew out of this Arab-pesantren literary tradition is *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'*, a religious poem composed by KH. Fuad Hasyim in 1980 at Pesantren Buntet in Cirebon, one of the oldest and most influential pesantren in West Java, with a well-documented genealogy of kiai (Islamic clerics) and socio-political networks (Muhaimin, 2006). Recited at the 1990 West Java PWNU Regional Conference, the poem consists of fifteen stanzas expressing ideological reverence for NU as the world's largest Islamic organization and a standard-bearer of moderate Nusantara Islam (Nakamura, 2023). As a product of pesantren literature, it fuses the aesthetics of classical Arabic verse with the socio-religious context of NU, in which the kiai serves as a traditional authority who shapes and reinforces his community's religious moderation (Faisal et al., 2022). The poem's rich semiotic structure has drawn little scholarly attention, particularly regarding how its ideological meaning is constructed through the poetic mechanisms operating beneath the surface of the text, which makes it a compelling object of study here.

Grasping how such works construct ideological meaning calls for an approach that reaches beyond the surface of language to the mechanisms that generate meaning, and semiotics offers exactly that. Literary texts function as sign systems whose meaning is never given directly but is produced through the relation between signifier and signified (Mulyani, 2025; Panuluh et al., 2025). Riffaterre's own work (Margolis & Riffaterre, 1980; de Man & Riffaterre, 1981) treats intertextuality and interpretation as an ongoing, dynamic process. Riffaterre (1978) further holds that poetic meaning arises through three forms of indirect expression, namely displacement, distortion, and creation of meaning, a claim borne out across genres ranging from modern Western poetry (Sipahutar & Arianto, 2019) to archipelagic oral wisdom (Hajrah et al., 2019) and Indonesian religious poetry (Shiddiq & Thohir, 2020; Kartinasari et al., 2023). Reading poetry in this framework proceeds through retroactive heuristic and hermeneutic reading (Riffaterre, 1978, 1983) and through identifying the matrix, model, variants, and hypograms that organize the text (Riffaterre, 1978).

Riffaterre's framework has, in fact, already proven itself in the study of Arabic poetry. Al Abid & Roziki (2025) applied the heuristic-hermeneutic model to the poetry of Faruq Juwaidah. They identified a single matrix that unifies the text's overall meaning, a finding echoed by Latif & Sulista (2019) in a separate study of Juwaidah's verse and by Shiddiq & Rofiuddin (2024) in their reading of Tamim al-Borghouti's resistance poetry.

The same approach has been extended to Mahmoud Darwish (Faizun & Kawa, 2023) and to Nazik Al-Malaika's classical Arabic love poetry (Mushfiroh, 2023), while Asrina (2025) applied it to the religious verse of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, showing how religious hypograms shape the variants of spiritual meaning. Its cross-linguistic reach is further confirmed by Mokoginta et al. (2021), who placed J. E. Tatengkeng's poetry alongside Robert Frost's. Together, these studies establish that Riffaterre's framework travels well to Arabic religious poetry built on a formulaic, exclamatory structure, the very structure found in *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'.*

A complementary line of research approaches pesantren and the religious identity of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) from outside semiotics altogether. Niam (2017) reads the intellectual production of NU's ulama as a dynamic articulation of religious identity, and Pohl (2006) shows that pesantren function as spaces of negotiation between tradition and modernity. Faisal et al. (2022) foreground the role of traditional kiai authority in reinforcing religious moderation within pesantren, while Qorib & Umiarso (2025) examine religious moderation across pesantren affiliated with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, finding that poetry and religious texts carry much of the weight in transmitting these values. Fakhrurozi et al. (2025) extend the picture by showing how religious folk poetry in Lampung shapes local Islamic identity through comparable semiotic mechanisms, and Pujiati (2018) examines the literary representation of pesantren directly, arguing that pesantren texts consistently express ideological reverence for religious figures and institutions in ways that call for closer linguistic scrutiny.

Taken together, these two lines of scholarship establish the relevance of Riffaterre's theory to Arabic poetry on one hand and the literary study of pesantren and Nahdlatul Ulama on the other, yet no study has brought Riffaterre's semiotic framework to bear on pesantren poetry that openly expresses ideological reverence for NU. The gap matters because a poem like *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'* sits precisely at the intersection of Arab-pesantren literary genealogy and the institutional ideological interests of a modern religious organization. Yet, the linguistic construction of its meaning has never been examined through a semiotic lens. This study takes up that gap with a sharper question: how does *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'* construct ideological meaning within Riffaterre's semiotic framework, and through which language mechanisms does that construction operate? Working through heuristic reading, hermeneutic reading, indirect expression, and Riffaterre's semiotic structure, the analysis aims to contribute methodologically to the semiotic study of pesantren literature and to a fuller understanding of religious poetry as a medium through which contemporary Indonesian Islamic organizations articulate ideological identity.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical design to examine how *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'* by KH. Fuad Hasyim constructs ideological meaning, drawing on the contemporary framework for qualitative text and discourse analysis in applied linguistics (Rose et al., 2020). The object of study is the poem's fifteen stanzas, composed in 1980 and recited at the 1990 West Java PWNU Regional Conference, a genre of pesantren devotional verse comparable to the commemorative qaṣīdah that Riffaterre's framework has already been used to analyze for similar religious organizations (Lutfi et al., 2023; Faizun & Kawa, 2023). The data fall into two types. The primary data consist of the complete Arabic text of the poem and its translation, which together form the sole

unit of analysis. The primary text was cross-checked against documentation held by West Java PWNU to confirm its authenticity.

Meaning	Transliteration	Lyrics
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are my beloved, my love, my delight, and the source of my joy and contentment	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Maḥabbatī # wa-Mawaddatī wa-Masarratī wa-Riḍā'ī*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مَحَبَّتِيْ # وَمَوَدَّتِيْ وَمَسَرَّتِيْ وَرِضَائِي
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are the means of my happiness, my support, and my honor	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Wasīlatun # li-Sa'ādatī wa-Ma'ūnatī wa-Karāmī*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ وَسِيْلَةٌ # لِسَعَادَتِيْ وَمَعُوْنَتِيْ وَكَرَامِي
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are a radiant light in my life, in my death, and in my Hereafter	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Munīratun # fī Ḥayātī wa-Mamātī wa-Akhīratī*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مُنِيْرَةٌ # فِيْ حَيَاتِيْ وَمَمَاتِيْ وَأَخِيْرَتِيْ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are my guide; were it not for you, I would never have attained my self-exaltation	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Muwajjihatun # Lawlāki mā Niltu Istikbārī*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مُوَجِّهَةٌ # لَوْلَاكِ مَانِلْتُ اسْتِكْبَارِيْ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are resplendent like a radiant flower; were it not for your beauty, the nations would not be adorned	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Zahrā'u # Lawlā Ḥusniki mā Tajammalat al-Umamu*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ زَهْرَاءُ # لَوْلَا حُسْنِكِ مَا تَجَمَّلَتِيْ الْأُمَمِ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are luminous lamps; those who hold firmly to you shall surely attain success	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Maṣābīḥu # Inna al-Mustamsikīna 'Alayki Najāḥun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مَصَابِيْحُ # إِنَّ الْمُسْتَمْسِكِيْنَ عَلَيْكِ نَجَاحٌ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are beautiful, my love for you is ardent and profound	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Jamīlatun # bi-Maḥabbatī Ilayki Shaghīfun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ جَمِيْلَةٌ # بِمَحَبَّتِيْ إِلَيْكِ شَغِيْفٌ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are rosy-cheeked, out of longing for you, I remain awake throughout the nights	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Ḥumayrā'u # bi-Hawāki mā Numtu al-Layālī*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ حُمَيْرَاءُ # بِهَوَاكِ مَا نُمْتُ اللَّيَالِ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are like the sun, by your light, strangers and wayfarers are guided	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Shamsiyyatun # bi-Anwāriki Ihtadā al-Ghurabā'u*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ شَمْسِيَةٌ # بِنَنْوَارِكِ إِهْتَدَى الْغُرَبَاءُ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are captivating. Through loving you, I attain greatness.	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Mushghifatun # bi-Maḥabbatiki Ilayya 'Aẓīmun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مُشْغِفَةٌ # بِمَحَبَّتِكِ إِلَيَّ عَظِيْمٌ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you grant peace and security to those who follow your guidance.	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Musallimatun # Ilā man Ittaba'a Hudāki*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مُسَلِّمَةٌ # إِلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ هُدَاكَ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are gracious and charming; whoever gazes upon you becomes enamored.	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Malīḥatun # Yā man Naẓara Ilayki Gharīmun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مَلِيْحَةٌ # يَا مَنْ نَظَرَ إِلَيْكِ غَرِيْمٌ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are the refuge of the ummah; whoever relies upon you shall be honored.	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Ma'wā al-Ummati # fa-man I'tamada biki Karīmun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ مأْوَى الْأُمَّةِ # فَمَنْ اعْتَمَدَ بِكِ كَرِيْمٌ
O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are pure and sincere. By holding firmly to you, one remains safe and secure	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti Ṣafiyyatun # bi-Tamassukī Ilayki Salīmun*	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ صَفِيَّةٌ # بِتَمَسُّكِي إِلَيْكِ سَلِيْمٌ

يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَنْتِ الْمُشَفِّعَةُ # بِالنَّبِي وَالآلِ وَالصَّحْبِ الْغَرَّاءِ	*Yā Nahḍata al-'Ulamā' Anti al-Mushaffi'atu # bi-al-Nabī wa-al-Āli wa-al-Ṣaḥb al-Gharrā'*	O Nahdlatul Ulama, you are a means of intercession through the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*), his family, and his noble Companions

Following this design, data collection drew on library research techniques and textual documents as primary data sources in linguistic and literary research (Rose et al., 2020; Shapoval et al., 2022), proceeding through four sequential stages. First, the researcher gathered poetic texts from printed and digital sources and cross-checked them to rule out substantive differences in wording or stanza structure, a step that bolsters the credibility of interpretations drawn from religious texts across multiple sources (Akbar, 2021; Slater, 2020). Second, the Arabic text was transliterated into Latin script using the ALA-LC system and translated line by line into English, following a semiotic approach to literary translation that preserves equivalence of meaning across languages (Shapoval et al., 2022). Third, each stanza received a fixed sequential number from 1 to 15 as a consistent point of reference throughout the analysis. Fourth, the researcher gathered secondary literature through a search of academic databases.

The data were then analyzed through Riffaterre's (1978, 1983) four-stage poetic semiotics. The first stage, heuristic reading, identified lexical units and syntactic structures at the level of word, phrase, and hemistich in each stanza and classified them by predicative function, consistent with the systematic procedure for analyzing signs in poetry established in the study of Indonesian literary semiotics (Pradopo, 2012; Margolis & Riffaterre, 1980). The second stage, hermeneutic reading, retroactively reread all fifteen stanzas once the first reading was complete, following the logic of cyclical, contextual interpretation of religious texts (Akbar, 2021; Slater, 2020), to trace how the meaning of the earlier stanzas shifts when read through the meaning established by the later ones. The third stage identified the three mechanisms of indirect expression, displacement, distortion, and creation of meaning, and the fourth reconstructed the matrix, model, variants, and hypogram. The interpretation's consistency was benchmarked against Riffaterre's framework as applied in prior studies of comparable Arabic poetry (Mushfiroh, 2023; Sipahutar & Arianto, 2019).

RESULT

Applying Riffaterre's (1978, 1983) semiotic framework to KH. Fuad Hasyim's *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'* reveals that the poem builds its ideological meaning in layers, across four interconnected stages: heuristic reading, hermeneutic reading, indirect expression, and semiotic structure. None of these stages stands on its own; each lays the groundwork for the next stage. Heuristic reading maps the literal distribution of predicates; retroactive hermeneutic reading then transforms that literal meaning through the relations among stanzas; indirect expression identifies the concrete linguistic mechanisms that drive the transformation; and the semiotic structure reconstructs the single generative principle that holds the whole system together. The chain holds throughout: a finding at one stage becomes the precondition for analysis at the next, and the research questions can only be answered once the chain is followed to its end. Taken as a whole, the four stages show that ideological reverence and spiritual loyalty toward Nahdlatul Ulama are built into the language's architecture rather than stated outright.

Heuristic Reading

Heuristic reading is the first of the four stages. It operates on the first-level sign system, the level at which meaning is read off linguistic codes and conventional grammar without venturing beyond the literal reference. At this stage, each lexical unit is read according to its dictionary meaning and its place in Arabic grammar, which makes it possible to trace systematically how the exclamatory formula *yā nahḍat al-'ulamā'* relates to the predicates that accompany it. What matters at this stage is mapping how syntactic structure and predicate distribution build the literal framework on which every later symbolic reading depends; without that literal foundation, any deviation identified at the indirect-expression stage would lack a valid point of reference. Heuristic reading is therefore not a vocabulary inventory but a mapping of sign architecture, and it shows that the distribution of predicates across the poem follows a structured pattern rather than a random one. Table 1 below summarizes this heuristic reading across the fifteen stanzas.

Table 1. Representative Data from the Heuristic Reading

Stanza	Key Lexeme	Literal Meaning	Predicative Function
1	مَحَبَّتِيْ، وَمَوَدَّتِيْ، وَمَسَرَّتِيْ، وَرِضَائِي	my love, my affection, my joy, my contentment	Personal affection
2	وَسِيْلَةٌ، سَعَادَتِيْ، مَعُوْنَتِيْ، كَرَامِي	means, happiness, support, my honor	Instrumental
3	مُنِيْرَةٌ، حَيَاتِيْ، مَمَاتِيْ، أَخِيْرَتِيْ	illuminator; life, death, the afterlife	Existential illumination
4	مُوَجِّهَةٌ، اسْتِكْبَارِيْ	guide; my self-exaltation	Guidance/direction
5	زَهْرَاءُ، حُسْنِكِ، تَجَمَّلَتِ الْأُمَمِ	radiant flower; your beauty; the beauty of nations	Cosmopolitan aesthetics
6	مَصَابِيْحُ، الْمُسْتَمْسِكِيْنَ، نَجَاحٌ	luminous lamps; those who hold firm; success	Normative illumination
7	جَمِيْلَةٌ، مَحَبَّتِيْ، شَغِيْفٌ	the beautiful one; my love; ardent love	Intensified affection
8	حُمَيْرَاءُ، هَوَاكِ، اللَّيَالِ	rosy-cheeked; your love; the nights	Personal longing
9	شَمْسِيَةٌ، أَنْوَارِكِ، الْغُرَبَاءُ	like the sun; your light; the wayfarers	Cosmic illumination
10	مُشْغِفَةٌ، مَحَبَّتِكِ، عَظِيْمٌ	captivating one; your love; greatness	Transformative allure
11	مُسَلِّمَةٌ، اتَّبَعَ، هُدَاكَ	giver of safety; following; your guidance	Normative protection
12	مَلِيْحَةٌ، نَظَرَ إِلَيْكِ، غَرِيْمٌ	the comely one; gazing upon you; (becomes your) debtor	Visual allure
13	مأْوَى الْأُمَّةِ، اعْتَمَدَ، كَرِيْمٌ	refuge of the ummah; relying upon; honor	Collective protection
14	صَفِيَّةٌ، تَمَسُّكِيْ، سَلِيْمٌ	the pure one; my steadfastness; safety	Protective purity
15	الْمُشَفِّعَةٌ، النَّبِيْ، الْآلِ، الصَّحْبِ	mediator of intercession; the Prophet, his family, his companions	Prophetic legitimation

At the heuristic level, the poem builds its meaning through the exclamatory formula *yā nahḍata al-'ulamā' anti*, repeated consistently across all fifteen stanzas, so

that Nahdlatul Ulama becomes the sole syntactic referent receiving every predication in the text. This repetitive structure points the reader, quite literally, toward a single center: every attribute, whether affective, instrumental, normative, or existential, is anchored to the same reference point and never transferred elsewhere across the entire poem. Personal affection surfaces prominently in stanzas 1 and 7, the instrumental function in stanza 2, and the normative function across stanzas 6, 11, and 14. Stanza 3 occupies the most important literal position, since its predicate *munīratun* 'illuminator' gathers all three human existential realms, life, death, and the afterlife, into a single hemistich, an unusual grammatical move for describing a socio-religious organization.

Beneath this first layer lies a second, more striking lexical shift in stanzas 5, 8, 9, 10, and 12 that consistently draws on diction native to the ghazal genre, such as *zahrā', ḥumayrā', jamīlatun*, and *malīḥatun*, alongside romantic-affection lexemes such as *hawā* and *shaghīfun*, ordinarily found in love poetry. Applying such a register to a religious organization departs from neutral collocation, since these predicates are conventionally used for human lovers rather than institutions. Stanza 9 then carries this movement from the personal-romantic realm into the cosmic realm through the predicate *shamsiyyatun* 'sun-like', where the image of sunlight guiding *al-ghurabā'*, the wayfarers, gradually repositions Nahdlatul Ulama from an object of love to a source of universal illumination. At the heuristic stage, this predicative shift is registered only as a fact of sign distribution and has not yet been read symbolically.

The shift from the personal to the cosmic does not end with the second layer. A third layer, visible in stanzas 11, 13, and 15, extends the reference further still, from the poet's personal subject to a broader collective one. The phrase *man ittaba'a hudāka* in stanza 11, *ma'wā al-ummah* in stanza 13, and the chain of legitimation through *al-Nabī, al-āl*, and *al-ṣaḥb* in stanza 15 syntactically place the predicates of salvation and intercession on Nahdlatul Ulama as an institution sheltering the entire community, no longer merely the object of one person's affection. What this means for the research problem is that ideological construction does not begin from symbols but from syntactic architecture itself: the gradual movement of predicates from the affective-personal realm, through the aesthetic-erotic and the existential, into the collective-soteriological, points to a deliberate grammatical choice rather than a stylistic accident, suggesting that the poem was built from the outset on a conscious, structured logic of escalation.

Hermeneutic Reading

The predicate map built through heuristic reading discloses its full meaning only once it passes through the second stage, hermeneutic reading. Retroactive reading is the primary mechanism by which poetic meaning is transformed: signs that first appear independent are reread as part of an integrated symbolic system once the reader has taken in the whole text and returns to the earlier stanzas carrying a new frame of meaning. The point of this stage is not to import religious interpretations from outside the text but to show how the relations among stanzas, working from within the text itself, turn literal meaning into a unified symbolic system. Hermeneutic reading thus changes how textual memory operates: rather than moving in a straight line from the first stanza to the last, it moves in a spiral, where each pass deepens and revises what came before. As Table 2 below shows, this retroactive movement bridges the literal groundwork laid in the heuristic stage and the concrete linguistic mechanisms identified in the indirect-expression stage that follows.

Table 2. The Movement of Meaning from Heuristic to Hermeneutic Reading

Opening Stanza	Lexeme	Literal Meaning	Confirming Stanza	Symbolic Meaning (Retroactive)
1	مَحَبَّتِي	personal affection	15	Recognition of religious authority
2	وَسِيْلَةٌ	mediator of personal happiness	15	Mediator in the theological-soteriological sense
3	مُنِيْرَةٌ	physical illuminator	15	Cross-temporal spiritual enlightenment
5	زَهْرَاءُ	aesthetic beauty	9	Beauty as a theological appeal
6	مَصَابِيْحُ	normative illumination	14	Prerequisite for spiritual salvation
9	شَمْسِيَةٌ	cosmic illuminator for wayfarers	15	Universal guiding authority for the ummah
11	مُسَلِّمَةٌ	personal salvation of followers	13	Collective soteriological guarantee
13	مأْوَى الْأُمَّةِ	physical refuge	15	Guardian of collective Islamic identity
14	صَفِيَّةٌ	personal purity	15	Purity as legitimation of the chain of transmission
15	الْمُشَفِّعَةٌ بِالنَّبِيْ	mediator through the Prophet	-	Link in the chain of prophetic transmission

This retroactive movement becomes visible at stanza 15. Once *al-mushaffi'ah bi al-Nabī* is disclosed, the predicate *munīratun* in stanza 3 is no longer read as a generic metaphor of light but as a forerunner of the spiritual authority that the final stanza fully confirms. This act of rereading, rather than a one-way symbolic pass from beginning to end, sits at the heart of Riffaterre's hermeneutic method, setting it apart from ordinary thematic interpretation, which only accumulates meaning in a straight line. The same holds for *ma'wā al-ummah* in stanza 13, which heuristically denotes nothing more than physical shelter but is reread as the guardian of collective Islamic identity once the reader knows that the following stanza positions Nahdlatul Ulama within the chain of prophethood. Without this retroactive knowledge, all three lemmas would remain simple praise, their theological layer going unnoticed.

The same retroactive pattern recurs elsewhere in the text. In the pairing of stanzas 1 and 15, the predicate *maḥabbatī* in the opening stanza, which heuristically expresses nothing more than the poet's personal affection, is reread as an acknowledgment of religious authority once the reader discovers that the beloved of the closing stanza turns out to hold a place in the chain of prophetic transmission through *al-Nabī, al-āl*, and *al-ṣaḥb*. A parallel pattern links stanzas 5 and 9: *zahrā'*, which at first functions only as aesthetic praise of beauty, is transformed, once reread through the predicate *shamsiyyatun* in stanza 9 and the guiding authority attributed to *al-ghurabā'*, into a signifier of beauty carrying theological rather than merely aesthetic weight. Stanza 11, where *musallimatun* is predicated of *man ittaba'a hudāka*, likewise reads as a collective soteriological guarantee only once confirmed by *ma'wā al-ummah* in stanza 13, rather than standing as a fleeting personal assurance tied only to the poet's own relationship with the object of his praise.

Retroactivity reaches its most intricate point in the fourth layer, in the pairing of stanzas 6 and 14: the predicate *maṣābīḥu*, which on first reading describes only the normative enlightenment function for *al-mustamsikīna*, is reread through *ṣafiyyatun* in stanza 14, so that purity and steadfastness in holding to Nahdlatul Ulama emerge as the

prerequisites for the salvation, *salīmun*, that becomes fully meaningful only once the reader grasps the prophetic legitimacy established in stanza 15. Stanza 2 follows the same logic: *wasīlatun*, which originally means nothing more than a mediator of personal happiness, is reread in a theological sense once juxtaposed with *al-mushaffi'ah* in stanza 15, so that its instrumental sense shifts from the worldly to the far broader soteriological realm and is no longer confined to the poet's personal interest alone. None of this is visible on a first reading, before the whole text is in hand; it can only be grasped by readers who trace the relations among stanzas with care. This is exactly where hermeneutic reading shows its advantage over a linear, thematic reading.

Taken together, these retroactive layers converge on one central finding: the ideological construction of Nahdlatul Ulama is not static but cumulative, each section reinforcing the others across the text. Every new stanza not only adds fresh attributes but also actively revises how the attributes already present are read, building a network of meaning that continues to develop as the reading proceeds. This network works cumulatively and circularly: the more stanzas the reader takes in, the richer the layers of meaning that attach themselves to what came before, so that the closing stanza is reached with a far deeper understanding than the opening one offered. This mechanism explains how the poem raises affective-personal predicates from the opening stanza, such as *maḥabbatī* and *zahrā'*, to a statement of theological legitimacy by the closing stanza without that move ever feeling like an argumentative leap, since the reader arrives there through a gradual, continuous retroactive reconstruction rather than through any explicit ideological statement made at the outset.

Indirect Expression

If hermeneutic reading answers what happens to meaning, the third stage answers why. Indirect expression identifies the linguistic mechanisms that generate meaning beyond the literal statement, working through three pathways of displacement, distortion, and creation of meaning. What this stage needs to establish is that the shifts in meaning running through the poem do not occur at random but follow controlled patterns of linguistic deviation that can be traced empirically in the textual data; without that concrete grounding, any claim that the poem builds ideological meaning would remain a matter of interpretation rather than something demonstrable. The three mechanisms work together: displacement broadens the scale of reference from the personal to the cosmic; distortion bridges the semantic gap between conventional lexemes and the new meaning the poet intends; and the creation of meaning lends that meaning a performative force through repetition. Table 3 below summarizes the distribution of these three mechanisms across the textual data from the fifteen stanzas.

Table 3. Mechanisms of Indirect Expression

Mechanism	Stanza	Data	Meaning Produced
Displacement (light)	3, 6, 9	مُنِيْرَةٌ ← مَصَابِيْحُ ← شَمْسِيَةٌ	Escalation: personal → communal → cosmic
Displacement (personification)	7, 8	جَمِيْلَةٌ، حُمَيْرَاءُ	Formal relation → mystical love (ghazal)
Distortion (negative semantics)	4, 12	اسْتِكْبَارِيْ؛ غَرِيْمٌ	Negative meaning redirected into spiritual legitimacy/debt
Distortion (physical epithet)	8	حُمَيْرَاءُ	The beloved's physical attribute redirected into spiritual longing

Creation of meaning (lexical repetition)	1–15	أَنْتِ (×15)	Performative effect resembling dhikr
Creation of meaning (structural parallelism)	1–15	يَا نَهْضَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ (×15)	Mantra-like effect through repetition of the vocative formula

These three mechanisms operate distinctly yet complement one another, together producing meanings no literal statement could hold on its own. The displacement of light passes through three lemmas in a gradual, consistent escalation of scale, from *munīratun*, illuminating the individual in stanza 3, to *maṣābīḥu*, illuminating the community in stanza 6, to *shamsiyyatun*, illuminating the universe in stanza 9, an unlikely pattern to occur by chance given that all three move upward in strict hierarchy without ever reversing direction. The displacement of feminine personification in stanzas 7 and 8 activates the ghazal code openly: the predicates *jamīlatun* and *ḥumayrā'* belong to the diction of lovers in classical Arabic love poetry, so that the poet's organizational tie to Nahdlatul Ulama is recast as a personal, emotional love rather than a distant, formal institutional bond, the most far-reaching displacement the poem makes.

The distortion of the word *istikbārī*, which ordinarily denotes theologically reprehensible arrogance, in stanza 4, and *gharīmun*, which ordinarily denotes a debtor, in stanza 12, generates a semantic tension that forces the reader to actively reinterpret both lemmas, which can only be read positively once the reader brings the classical *madāḥ qaṣīdah* code to bear as the relevant interpretive frame. A comparable distortion operates in stanza 8 through *ḥumayrā'*, a physical epithet for the blushing cheeks of a lover in ghazal convention, whose meaning is here redirected toward the poet's spiritual longing for Nahdlatul Ulama rather than a literal, sensual, erotic longing for another human being. This redirection of meaning shows that the linguistic distortions running through the poem are systematic and controlled rather than a matter of stylistic looseness, each one ultimately serving the same end, the spiritual legitimacy of Nahdlatul Ulama as a religious authority.

With displacement opening up the scale of reference and distortion shifting semantic polarity, creation of meaning closes out the trio of mechanisms. Together, the three address the problem this study set out to answer: poetry builds ideological meaning not through direct statement but through controlled linguistic deviations that ask the reader to recognize classical Arabic literary codes, so that the deviations register as deliberate strategies rather than errors. The creation of meaning through the fifteenfold repetition of *anti* 'you' lends the poem a performative force that goes beyond mere rhetorical embellishment, closer to an act of dhikr in the pesantren Sufi tradition, where repetition is itself the practice of devotion rather than a statement made about it. The identical structural parallelism that opens every stanza, *yā nahḍata al-'ulamā'*, reinforces this mantra-like effect, so that the poem's form becomes part of how meaning is produced, working alongside its lexical content rather than merely carrying it. Poetry, on this evidence, does not simply contain ideology; it carries ideology through its very form.

Taken as a whole, the findings at this stage support one theoretical position: ideologization happens at the level of concrete linguistic mechanisms traceable in the textual data, not at the level of abstract themes that resist verification. The three mechanisms work as a system rather than in isolation. Displacement sets up the escalation of reference from the personal to the cosmic; distortion bridges the gap between conventional lexemes and the new meaning the poet aims at; and the creation

of meaning through repetition gives the whole structure a performative force that makes it feel natural to the reader rather than imposed. Beyond explaining how the text operates linguistically, these three mechanisms show that ideological construction is not a thematic phenomenon read into the text from outside but the outcome of identifiable linguistic choices. This finding sets the stage for reconstructing the semiotic system in the next stage.

Semiotic Structure

The reconstruction these three mechanisms have been preparing for is carried out in the fourth stage. The semiotic structure organizes the whole meaning-production system into four components: matrix, model, variant, and hypogram. The matrix is an abstract statement absent from the text that nonetheless generates every variant; the model is the first and fullest actualization of the matrix; the variant is a repeated transformation of the model; and the hypogram is the corpus of presuppositions that supplies the intertextual background against which the entire system makes sense. The task of this stage is to reconstruct a single generative principle, never stated outright in the text, that nevertheless gives rise to every image and predicate running through the poem. Doing so offers the fullest answer yet to the question of how the poem builds ideological meaning, since it shows that the construction takes place not on the textual surface but at the level of a generative system that only systematic semiotic analysis can bring to light. Table 4 below summarizes the four components together with their associated data.

Table 4. Components of the Semiotic Structure

Component	Data	Criteria/Function
Matrix	"NU as a source of light, protection, and intercession"	Not explicitly present; generates the entire text
Model	Stanza 3 (مُنِيْرَةٌ + three dimensions of existence)	First and most comprehensive actualization of the matrix
Variant I	Stanzas 3→6→9 (light)	Escalation: personal-communal-cosmic
Variant II	Stanzas 2→13→15 (protection-intercession)	Individual → collective → prophetic
Variant III	Stanzas 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 (ghazal register)	Parallel affective path: personification as beloved
Hypogram I	Madāḥ qaṣīdah	Presuppositional code legitimizing praise of authority.
Hypogram II	Sufi ghazal	Presuppositional code legitimizing mystical love as spiritual loyalty
Hypogram III	Pesantren dhikr/wirid	Presuppositional code legitimizing repetition as a devotional practice

Stanza 3 was chosen as the model not arbitrarily but because it meets three criteria at once: it actualizes the matrix most directly through the image of light, spans the broadest existential range the text allows, life, death, and the afterlife, and marks the point from which the three main variants branch out. Variant I escalates the dimension of light from the personal to the cosmic across stanzas 3, 6, and 9. Variant II, the most theologically significant, moves gradually from *wasīlatun* in stanza 2, through *ma'wā al-ummah* in stanza 13, where protection widens from the personal to the collective, to *al-*

mushaffi'ah in stanza 15. Variant III, built on the ghazal register in stanzas 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12, offers a separate affective path that personifies Nahdlatul Ulama as a beloved; rather than competing with the first two variants, this path strengthens the reader's emotional attachment to them. Together, the three variants form a system that reaches the reader on several fronts at once, cognitive, affective, and soteriological.

The three variants do not stand apart from one another; together they trace a single, steadily ascending argumentative path that runs from a personal function to the highest theological authority the poem reveals. The matrix itself, reverence and spiritual loyalty toward Nahdlatul Ulama, is never spelled out in any single line of the text, and its absence is, in fact, the measure of the system's success, working effectively beneath the awareness of readers untrained in literary codes. Variant II illustrates this well: the predicate *wasīlatun* in stanza 2 reads as the embryo of intercessory authority only once the reader has traced the path all the way to stanza 15. The matrix is therefore not located at any single point but distributed cumulatively across the entire variant structure, which is why a reader who stops halfway through the poem will find only praise and never the matrix; the matrix discloses itself solely to readers who complete the text.

The research problem now finds its fullest answer: the ideological meaning this poem builds is the product of a hierarchically organized system, not a collection of unrelated, free-floating symbols. The matrix accounts for why each image appears in the text, the model accounts for where the variants originate and how they develop across the poem's structure, and the hypogram accounts for why readers can take these shifts in meaning as culturally legitimate rather than as baseless linguistic oddities. The *madāḥ qaṣīdah* hypogram legitimizes praise as a recognized genre; the Sufi ghazal hypogram legitimizes love as the language of spiritual loyalty; and the pesantren dhikr hypogram legitimizes repetition as an act of worship rather than as empty rhetorical filler. None of these three hypograms is intertextual decoration; they are the conditions that make the poem's entire semiotic system possible, since without knowledge of these traditions, readers would have no framework for understanding why the linguistic deviations in this text feel legitimate rather than simply odd.

The hypograms deserve a closer look. Without them, the displacements and distortions traced at the previous stage would read as mere incongruities rather than as semiotic strategies justified intertextually. The pesantren dhikr hypogram, in particular, explains why the fifteenfold repetition of *anti* does not feel monotonous to readers steeped in the Sufi tradition: they already carry a receptive framework in which repetition signals spiritual appreciation rather than a purposeless structural tic. The semiotic structure as a whole thus confirms that each mechanism of indirectness traced at the earlier stage is not a separate element but a manifestation of a single, hierarchically organized generative system running from matrix to hypogram. This is what sets semiotic poetry apart from poetry that is merely image-rich: in semiotic poetry, every element can be accounted for by its function in the system, and removing even one would undo the coherence of the whole.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the heuristic and hermeneutic stages point to the same conclusion: the poem's ideological meaning originates not from symbols but from the syntactic architecture built on the repeated single referent *yā nahḍata al-'ulamā' anti*, which Riffaterre (1978) treats as the literal precondition for every symbolic reading that

follows in the text. Heuristic reading maps the distribution of predicates in a straight line, following conventional grammatical codes. In contrast, retroactive hermeneutic reading, as Riffaterre (1978, 1983) emphasizes, shows how the meaning of each stanza is continually revised once the reader has taken in the whole text and circles back to earlier stanzas, carrying a newly formed frame of meaning. This is why the move from the affective-personal predicate of the opening stanza to the theological legitimacy of the closing one never feels like an argumentative leap: it is the retroactively built network of meaning that holds the text's logic together and makes the shift feel organic rather than forced.

A related but distinct connection links the hermeneutic stage to indirect expression, since the retroactive process and the concrete linguistic mechanisms underlying it are mutually dependent. Riffaterre (1978) explains that the indirectness of expression, through displacement, distortion, and creation of meaning, is the very mechanism driving the transformation of meaning observed at the hermeneutic stage; without this controlled linguistic deviation, the retroactive movement from stanza 3 to stanza 15 would have no linguistic foothold from which to proceed coherently. The displacement of light, escalating from the personal to the cosmic, and the distortion of negative lemmas into spiritual legitimacy together supply the structural explanation for a shift in meaning that the hermeneutic stage had only identified retroactively. The two stages, therefore, reinforce each other: what looked like a shift in meaning at the hermeneutic stage can now be traced to its linguistic origin in indirect expression.

These findings can now be situated within a broader theoretical frame. Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, where ideology works by repeatedly addressing the subject until occupying a submissive position feels natural rather than imposed from outside, offers a way to explain the ideology at work in *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'.* The fifteen repetitions of *anti*, echoing dhikr in the Sufi tradition, give this mechanism concrete form: the reader is addressed again and again until a position of devoted subjecthood takes shape without ever registering as a construction. Eagleton (1990) sharpens this reading further by holding that ideology works best when it comes wrapped in aesthetics. Choosing the ghazal register and the *qaṣīdah madāḥ* form is therefore not a matter of style alone; it is a way of conveying institutional legitimacy through the experience of beauty, so that what is really ideological work reaches the reader as poetic pleasure. Reading Althusser alongside Eagleton in this way is what makes the ideological analysis of religious poetry more productive than a reading confined to theme.

These findings derive their legitimacy from their close alignment with prior scholarship that applies Riffaterre's framework to the corpus of religious Arabic poetry. Studies on the poetry of Faruq Juwaidah (Al Abid & Roziki, 2025), on Mahmoud Darwish (Faizun & Kawa, 2023), and on the classical love poem Qais wa Laila (Mushfiroh, 2023) all identify a single matrix unifying the whole of a text's meaning, where every predicate and image traces back to a generative principle the text never states outright. The present study confirms the same pattern. A second point of alignment concerns the role of religious hypograms in shaping variants of spiritual meaning, demonstrated by Asrina (2025) on the poetry of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, by Mokoginta et al. (2021) in their cross-linguistic study, and by Shiddiq & Thohir (2020) and Kartinasari et al. (2023) on Indonesian poetry. Together, these findings support the view that relevant hypograms legitimize linguistic deviation as a culturally valid semiotic strategy rather than a mere linguistic oddity.

This alignment, however, is not the whole story. A sharper contrast emerges against studies of pesantren and NU religious identity that take a sociological or

anthropological route. Niam (2017), Pohl (2006), and Faisal et al. (2022) approach NU and pesantren through the articulation of religious identity, the building of civil society, and the role of traditional kiai authority. Yet, none of the three reaches the internal textual mechanisms that generate these ideological meanings at the linguistic level. The present study also departs methodologically from Qorib & Umiarso (2025) and Fakhrurozi et al. (2025), who trace how religious poetry transmits values and shapes local Islamic identity without reconstructing the internal semiotic structure into matrix, model, variants, and hypogram. What this study adds, by contrast, is a demonstration that the ideological construction in question can be traced systematically at the linguistic level rather than inferred from the text's social function.

This contrast points to where the present study makes its contribution. On the theoretical side, it enriches literary semiotics by showing that Riffaterre's framework (Riffaterre, 1978; 1983) can be productively combined with Althusser's (1971) and Eagleton's (1990) theories of ideology to explain how poetic mechanisms such as formulaic repetition and register deviation work as vehicles for ideological interpellation in religious texts, a combination still uncommon in the semiotic study of pesantren poetry. On the practical side, the findings offer other pesantren literary scholars an analytical model for examining how religious organizations construct ideological identity through poetic texts, moving beyond the descriptive approach that has dominated the field. For the Nahdlatul Ulama community and pesantren more broadly, the study offers a critical awareness that devotional poetry, even as it serves social cohesion and the transmission of values, still works through language mechanisms open to objective analysis, so that appreciating such work can go hand in hand with a reflective sense of how it operates, a form of ideological literacy worth cultivating within the pesantren academic community.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how *Yā Nahḍat al-'Ulamā'* constructs ideological meaning, and the answer unfolds in stages through Riffaterre's semiotic system. Heuristic reading establishes a syntactic foundation built on a single referent that absorbs every predication; retroactive hermeneutic reading turns that literal predicate into a coherent network of symbolic meaning; indirect expression shows that this transformation works through the concrete linguistic mechanisms of displacement, distortion, and creation of meaning; and the semiotic structure reconstructs a single matrix that generates every variant of meaning across the text. The most important finding is that the poem's ideology never surfaces as an explicit statement but is built into the language's architecture, consistent with Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation and Eagleton's (1990) aesthetics of ideology. The text is structured to invite readers toward reverence for Nahdlatul Ulama as a natural aesthetic experience rather than as an externally imposed ideological construct, and this is the study's primary contribution to the semiotic study of pesantren literature.

Two limitations bear noting. First, the analysis rests on a single poetic text, so extending these findings to other pesantren poetry that carries similar ideological tribute calls for caution until comparative studies can confirm the pattern. Second, the study is purely textual and does not draw on empirical data about how readers or congregations actually receive the poem, which means any claim about the effects of ideological interpellation on real readers remains an inference from textual analysis rather than a finding from direct field research. Future work could compare similar

tribute poems written for other religious organizations in Indonesia using the same semiotic framework, testing whether the matrix-model-variant-hypogram pattern found here is specific to Nahdlatul Ulama or holds more broadly. Pairing this kind of textual analysis with empirical studies of reader reception and examining the performative dimensions of such poetry when recited within religious ritual would be a natural next step.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author contributed to the design and data analysis. The second and third authors contributed to data collection, data analysis, the development of research instruments, data processing, and manuscript preparation. The fourth author contributed substantially to the linguistic review of the manuscript, its translation, and the development of data analysis.

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AUTHORS' SHORT BIODATA

Imam Bonjol Juhari is a lecturer in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Humanities, State Islamic University Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq, Jember, Indonesia. His academic interests include linguistics, sociology, and the anthropology of religion. Email: imambonjoljuhari@uinkhas.ac.id.

Sri Wahyuni is an undergraduate student in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Humanities, State Islamic University Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq, Jember, Indonesia. Her research interests include linguistics and Arabic language education. Email: sriwahyuni83558@gmail.com.

Fadiah Alfi Laila is an undergraduate student in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab, and Humanities, State Islamic University Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq, Jember, Indonesia. Her research interests include linguistics. Email: fadiahalfi25@gmail.com.

Delfarianto is an undergraduate student in the Department of Ushuluddin at the Faculty of Law, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan. His research interests include Islamic studies, Qur'anic exegesis, and hadith studies. Email: 2023182181@ses.yu.edu.jo.