



A Semiotic Analysis of Meaning in Selected Poems by Langston Hughes Based on Peirce's Theory of Signs (*Analisis Semiotika Makna dalam Puisi-Puisi Terpilih Karya Langston Hughes Berdasarkan Teori Tanda Peirce*)

Insyari Mokoginta¹, Mery Balango², Adriansyah A. Katili³

^{1,2,3}English Language Education Department, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
insyarimokoginta@gmail.com¹, mery.balango211064@gmail.com², adriansyahkatili@ung.ac.id³

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 7 Januari 2026 Revised: 27 Januari 2026 Accepted: 28 Januari 2026	This study examines the implied meanings in three selected poems by Langston Hughes—"I, Too," "The Weary Blues," and "Harlem"—using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs. The study aims to identify how icons, indices, and symbols function in constructing meaning within the poems. A descriptive qualitative method with document analysis is employed to examine textual elements and semiotic relations. The findings reveal that <i>I, Too</i> predominantly utilizes indexical and symbolic signs to express racial exclusion, identity, and the demand for social recognition. <i>The Weary Blues</i> demonstrates the most complex semiotic structure, as it incorporates icons, indices, and symbols to convey musical expression, emotional suffering, and cultural resilience. In contrast, <i>Harlem</i> relies mainly on symbolic signs to represent the psychological tension and social implications of a deferred dream. Overall, this study confirms that Peirce's semiotic framework effectively uncovers the implied meanings in Hughes's poetry and illustrates how semiotic signs serve as a medium for articulating African American experiences and social criticism.
Keywords: Implied meaning Peirce's semiotic theory Langston Hughes African American poetry	
Kata Kunci: Makna tersirat Teori semiotika Peirce Langston Hughes Puisi Afrika-Amerika	Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji makna tersirat dalam tiga puisi pilihan karya Langston Hughes, yaitu <i>I, Too</i>, <i>The Weary Blues</i>, dan <i>Harlem</i>, dengan menggunakan teori tanda Charles Sanders Peirce. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana ikon, indeks, dan simbol berfungsi dalam membangun makna di dalam puisi-puisi tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik analisis dokumen, yang difokuskan pada unsur-unsur tekstual dan hubungan semiotik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa <i>I, Too</i> didominasi oleh penggunaan tanda indeks dan simbol yang merepresentasikan pengalaman eksklusi rasial, identitas, serta tuntutan akan pengakuan sosial. <i>The Weary Blues</i> memiliki struktur semiotik yang paling kompleks karena memadukan ikon, indeks, dan simbol untuk menyampaikan ekspresi musikal, penderitaan emosional, dan ketahanan budaya. Sementara itu, <i>Harlem</i> terutama menggunakan tanda simbolik untuk menggambarkan ketegangan psikologis dan implikasi sosial dari mimpi yang tertunda. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kerangka semiotik Peirce efektif dalam mengungkap makna tersirat dalam puisi Hughes serta menunjukkan bagaimana tanda-tanda semiotik berfungsi sebagai medium representasi pengalaman dan kritik sosial masyarakat Afrika-Amerika.

Corresponding Author:

Insyari Mokoginta
Faculty of letters and culture
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
insyarimokoginta@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the most expressive literary forms for communicating human experiences, emotions, and social realities. In modern literary studies, poetry is increasingly examined not only for its aesthetic value but also for its ability to reflect cultural, social, and political issues embedded within its linguistic signs. Recent scholarship emphasizes that literary texts often function as semiotic systems in which meaning is produced through complex interactions of symbols, images, and cultural references (Singh, 2021; Johnson, 2022). Johnson's emphasis on spoken word poetry as a participatory form of arts-based inquiry further strengthens this perspective, showing that poetic works, whether written or performed, can serve as a medium for generating new knowledge, fostering critical resilience, and articulating social critique. Thus, poetry emerges as a fertile ground for exploring deeper social and cultural meanings that extend beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. To systematically explore how poetry conveys these social and cultural meanings, semiotics provides a robust analytical framework.

Semiotics, particularly Charles Sanders Peirce's (1991) theory of signs, offers a systematic framework for understanding how meaning is constructed in language and literature. Peirce's triadic model, which distinguishes between the representamen, the object, and the interpretant, provides a clear structure for analyzing how signs function to represent objects and generate interpretations. This makes it particularly effective for literary analysis, allowing researchers to examine the ways in which poetic language conveys complex ideas and emotions (Lorino, 2014; Pietarinen, 2016).

Within this theoretical framework, semiotic approaches are increasingly applied to explore how poetry embodies social and cultural meaning. By tracing how linguistic signs operate as icons, indices, and symbols, researchers can uncover the ideational and affective messages embedded in poetic texts. Such analyses have proven especially relevant for examining themes of identity, resistance, and collective experience, highlighting how poetry negotiates social realities through its language (Yakin & Totu, 2014).

Recent studies demonstrate a growing scholarly interest in semiotics-based literary analysis. For instance, Dewi (2023) applied Peirce's theory to Robert Frost's symbolism, while Cahyani and Hasbi (2024) used the same framework to explore icons, indices, and symbols in Wordsworth's nature poetry. These studies show that Peirce's semiotics offers a systematic structure for identifying how signs construct meaning in poetic texts. However, prior research predominantly focuses on personal, romantic, or nature-based themes and has rarely examined poems that foreground racial, political, or socio-historical struggles. Moreover, many existing studies analyze only one poem rather than comparing multiple works in relation to broader cultural contexts. This gap indicates the need for research that applies Peircean semiotics to poetry with strong socio-political relevance, particularly poetry that represents racial identity and collective trauma.

Langston Hughes' (1951) works present such an opportunity. As a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes articulated the lived realities of African Americans through symbols, indices, and icons that reflect racial inequality, resistance, and deferred aspirations. Recent scholarship positions Hughes' poetry as a cultural archive that documents systemic oppression and Black resilience (Neupane, 2023; Al-Marwan, 2020). However, despite increasing attention to Hughes' socio-historical significance, semiotic analyses based on Peirce's theory remain limited, particularly those examining multiple poems to reveal how signs collectively construct interconnected ideological meanings. This gap is especially significant given the continued relevance of racial injustice in shaping global socio-political discourse, including in Indonesia.

Addressing this research gap, the present study undertakes a semiotic analysis of implied meanings in three of Hughes' most influential poems—*I, Too*, *The Weary Blues*, and *Harlem*. The analysis focuses on how icons, indices, and symbols collectively construct social messages related to racial identity, emotional exhaustion, and deferred dreams. The unit of analysis consists of signs embedded within the textual structures of each poem. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the semiotic signs contained in the poems; (2) classify them according to Peirce's triadic theory; and (3) interpret the meanings embedded in these signs in relation to the socio-historical realities of African-Americans.

Furthermore, this research aims to provide a theoretical contribution to the field of literary semiotics by demonstrating how signs function within poetic structures. It also enriches broader academic discussions on the role of poetry as a medium for articulating social struggle, cultural resistance, and the historical experiences of African Americans. At the same time, the study underscores the enduring relevance of Hughes' work in contemporary debates on race and culture.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to analyze literary texts, a method chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of textual data through the lens of Charles Sanders Peirce's (1991) semiotic theory while systematically and factually describing phenomena. By applying this approach, the researcher can interpret the meanings of the signs found in selected poems by Langston Hughes (1951). As Creswell (2017) explains, qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human issues; in the context of literary studies, this design allows researchers to uncover implicit meanings, cultural codes, and symbolic elements embedded within the text, thereby facilitating an interpretive understanding of how literary works convey layered social and cultural messages.

2.2 Approach

This research employs semiotic theory as the primary analytical approach, as semiotics provides a valuable framework for understanding the interaction between signs, meanings, and their cultural context (Chandler, 2007). This approach is particularly relevant for literary analysis because it reveals how meaning is constructed and interpreted through signs in texts. In poetry, semiotics enables readers to explore how symbols, indices, and icons implicitly convey profound social and cultural messages.

2.3 Data Source

The primary data for this study consisted of three poems: "I, Too," "The Weary Blues," and "Harlem"—selected purposively for their strong thematic connections to racial identity, struggle, and the African American experience during the Harlem Renaissance. The secondary data included books, journals, theses, and scholarly articles discussing semiotics, Peirce's theory of signs, and Hughes' literary works. Secondary sources supported the interpretation process and strengthened the theoretical and contextual foundation of the analysis.

2.4 Technique of Data Collection

Data was collected through document analysis, an approach suitable for qualitative literary research because it allows systematic, in-depth interpretation of written materials. According to Bowen, (2009), document analysis is "*a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents - both printed and electronic documents.*" This technique requires the researcher to examine and interpret data to gain meaning, understanding, and empirical knowledge. In this research, the analyzed data consist of written literary works, specifically poems by Langston Hughes. This technique enables researchers to collect data from existing documents that are relevant to the research focus.

The data collection in this study involves several systematic steps:

- **Finding:** The researcher searches for documents relevant to the research focus, including both printed and electronic materials. In the context of this research, the documents include poems by Langston Hughes on the official Poetry Foundation website, as well as books, articles, and digital archives.
- **Selecting:** Next, the researcher determines which documents can be used by establishing selection criteria to ensure data validity and support the research. Here, the researcher selects three poems by Langston Hughes: "I, Too," "The Weary Blues," and "Harlem."
- **Appraising:** The researcher reads and understands the poems in depth, then marks each line, stanza, word, or section of the poem that contains signs, according to Charles Sanders Peirce's sign theory.
- **Synthesizing:** The lines, stanzas, or sections of the poem that have been identified as containing signs are then presented in a table and analyzed.

2.5 Technique of Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study is the spiral model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Creswell (2016), which emphasizes that the analysis process is not linear but rather follows a circular or spiral pattern. This technique is suitable for analyzing literary texts because it enables researchers to conduct in-depth, interpretive analyses of the data. Then, the data is analyzed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which categorizes signs into three types: icons, indices, and symbols.

The analysis followed several stages. First, all signs were organized by poem title. Then, the poems were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with their content, structure, and thematic nuances, enabling the identification of textual patterns and symbolic expressions. The core analysis involved describing, classifying, and interpreting signs:

- **Describing:** Signs were explained in relation to social context, historical background, and the poet's life. The description not only covers the content of the poem but also explains why a word, phrase, or image is considered a sign, according to Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics.
- **Classifying:** Signs were categorized as **icons**, which are signs resembling their objects (e.g., "rocking back and forth" in *The Weary Blues*); **indices**, which show a direct or causal relation to their objects or cause-and-effect (e.g., "They send me to eat in the kitchen" in *I, Too*); and **symbols**, which derive meaning from social or cultural conventions (e.g., "darker brother" in *I, Too*).

- **Interpreting:** Signs were analyzed for literal and contextual meanings, with consideration of the poet's ideology and sociohistorical background. For instance, "a dream deferred" (Harlem) symbolizes the delayed hopes of the Black community due to systemic injustice.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing primary textual interpretations with secondary scholarly references. Theoretical triangulation was carried out through the consistent application of Peirce's triadic model during coding and interpretation. Prolonged engagement with the poems and repeated readings helped ensure accurate identification and interpretation of signs. These procedures strengthened the dependability and confirmability of the research findings.

Overall, this methodological design ensured coherence among the study's objectives, the descriptive-qualitative approach, the document analysis technique, and the use of Peirce's semiotic theory. This combination provided a rigorous and reliable foundation for identifying signs and uncovering the implied meanings present in Hughes' poetry.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the semiotic analysis of three poems by Langston Hughes—"I, Too," "The Weary Blues," and "Harlem"—using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs. The analysis focuses on the identification and classification of icons, indices, and symbols that shape the implicit meanings within the poems. The results indicate that these semiotic signs function not only to create poetic expression, but also to convey social, moral, and humanitarian messages related to African American identity, emotional experience, aspirations, and social critique. Through Peirce's triadic relationship, Hughes' poems reveal emotional truths and articulate social criticism, positioning them not merely as literary works but as semiotic representations of the lived realities of Black life in America.

Table 1. Identification and Classification of Signs in Langston Hughes' Poems

The Poem	Icon	Index	Symbol
I, Too	-	• They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes,	• I, too, sing America. • I am the darker brother. • But I laugh, / And eat well, / And grow strong. • I'll be sit at the table • I, too, am America.
The Weary Blues	• Rocking back and forth	• Coming from a Black man's soul • He played a few chords then he sang some more— / And I can't be satisfied. • I ain't happy no mo' / And I wish that I had died.	• Ebony hands on each ivory key • O Blues! • Rickety stool • The stars went out, and so did the moon
Harlem	-	-	• A dream deferred • Raisin in the sun • Fester like a sore • Rotten meat. • Syrupy sweet • Heavy load • Or does it explode?

In "I, Too," Langston Hughes presents the struggle for equality and the affirmation of Black identity through a series of interconnected symbols. The first line, "I, too, sing America," asserts African Americans' participation in national identity, while the second line, "I am the darker brother" symbolizes racial identity and shared belonging within the nation. The image of being sent to "They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes" represents racial segregation and social exclusion, positioning African Americans in marginalized spaces. In contrast, "But I laugh, / And eat well, / And grow strong" symbolizes resilience and moral endurance in the face of oppression. The future-oriented statement "Tomorrow, I'll be at the table" introduces the table as a symbol of equality and social inclusion, indicating the collapse of discriminatory practices. This progression culminates in "I, too, am America," which functions as the central symbol of recognition and legitimacy. Through these signs, Hughes conveys an optimistic vision in which dignity and self-awareness become powerful forms of resistance leading toward racial justice and social recognition.

Meanwhile, in "The Weary Blues," Langston Hughes represents African American sorrow and endurance through a sequence of symbols that unfold alongside the progression of the blues performance. The

image of “*rocking back and forth*” depicts the rhythmic immersion of the blues singer, reflecting emotional weariness and the repetitive cycle of suffering. This is reinforced by the expression “*coming from a Black man’s soul*,” which represents the depth and authenticity of the African American experience shaped by historical and social oppression. The lines “*He played a few chords then he sang some more— / And I can’t be satisfied*” symbolize unresolved longing, suggesting that music offers expression but cannot fully alleviate pain. The confession “*I ain’t happy no mo’ / And I wish that I had died*” represents profound despair and psychological exhaustion rather than a literal desire for death. The contrasting image of “*ebony hands on each ivory key*” functions as a symbol of racial identity and tension, positioning the piano as a space where Black expression emerges within a racially stratified society. The repeated invocation “*O Blues!*” symbolizes the blues as both a lament and a means of survival. Meanwhile, the image of the “*rickety stool*” signifies social and economic instability experienced by the performer. The poem concludes with “*The stars went out, and so did the moon*,” a symbol of fading hope and emotional exhaustion, emphasizing that while blues music offers momentary relief, the burden of suffering ultimately remains.

In contrast, “*Harlem*,” Langston Hughes explores the consequences of racial inequality through a series of clear and escalating symbols that follow the progression of a deferred dream. The opening question, “*What happens to a dream deferred?*” introduces the dream as a symbol of African American hopes for equality and social justice that are repeatedly postponed. The image “*dry up like a raisin in the sun*” symbolizes the gradual loss of vitality and opportunity caused by prolonged neglect. This deterioration intensifies in “*fester like a sore— / And then run?*” which represents the internalization of pain and the psychological damage produced by sustained oppression. The comparison “*stinks like rotten meat*” further clarifies the idea that unresolved injustice leads to moral decay and social harm. In contrast, “*crust and sugar over— / like a syrupy sweet*” symbolizes the false appearance of satisfaction that temporarily masks frustration without resolving it. The line “*sags like a heavy load*” explicitly conveys the emotional and physical burden carried by marginalized communities. The poem culminates in “*Or does it explode?*” which functions as a direct warning that denied dreams may result in social unrest and collective resistance. Through this sequence of symbols, Hughes makes it explicit that delaying justice does not eliminate inequality but instead intensifies its consequences.

3.1 Icon

In Peirce’s semiotics, an icon is defined as a sign that represents its object through a direct resemblance, allowing meaning to be apprehended through similarities in form, sound, or sensory experience. This representational relationship enables interpretation without reliance on social convention or causal connection. In the poems of Langston Hughes examined in this study, iconic signs are not as prevalent as indexical and symbolic signs; however, their presence is most explicit and functionally significant in *The Weary Blues*, particularly in the opening lines that establish a vivid sensory depiction of a blues performance. The phrase “*droning a drowsy syncopated tune*” operates iconically by imitating the slow, repetitive, and rhythmically syncopated qualities of blues music through its lexical choices and sound patterns, thereby producing an auditory effect that readers can imaginatively perceive. Similarly, the phrase “*rocking back and forth*” iconically represents the performer’s bodily movement as a direct physical response to the musical rhythm.

As an iconic sign, this bodily motion reflects performative practices commonly observed in blues performances, in which swaying movements function as spontaneous expressions of rhythm, emotional engagement, and musical immersion. Rather than operating as a purely symbolic or metaphorical reference, the description is grounded in a direct resemblance to the performative reality it depicts. Through this relationship of similarity, the iconic sign enables readers to visualize the performer’s physical state and to experience the atmosphere of the blues performance in a more concrete and embodied manner. Consequently, Hughes employs iconic signs to present the blues experience as immediate and multisensory, allowing the poem to be perceived not merely as a verbal or auditory text, but as a performative representation that is simultaneously visual, auditory, and affective.

3.2 Index

An index is a sign that has a causal relationship or a direct connection to the reality it refers to. Unlike an icon, which relies on resemblance, an index points to specific social, emotional, or historical conditions through factual and contextual clues. Within Peircean semiotics, indexical signs are particularly important because they ground meaning in real-world experience rather than abstract representation. In the poems by Langston Hughes analyzed in this study, indexical signs appear dominantly in *I, Too* and *The Weary Blues*, especially in relation to the lived experiences of African Americans under racial segregation and social oppression.

In *I, Too*, indexical meaning is most clearly articulated in the third and fourth lines, where the speaker describes being “sent to the kitchen” when company arrives. This action functions as an index of racial discrimination because it directly refers to an actual social practice of segregation in early twentieth-century American society. The “kitchen” operates as an index of enforced marginalization and exclusion from public

visibility, while the presence of “company” indexes the social pressure to maintain racial hierarchies for the comfort of white society. Through this seemingly ordinary domestic situation, Hughes indexes unequal power relations between white and Black Americans, revealing how systemic racism operates through everyday social practices rather than overt acts alone.

Similarly, in *The Weary Blues*, indexical signs emerge through emotional expressions and the psychological condition of the blues singer. The phrase appearing in the fifteenth line functions as an index of the collective suffering experienced by Black Americans. In this context, the term “soul” does not function merely as an abstract or symbolic concept; rather, it points directly to lived pain, historical memory, and the accumulated effects of racial oppression that shape the blues tradition. This indexical meaning is further reinforced in lines twenty-six and twenty-nine to thirty, which serve as indices of emotional exhaustion, despair, and psychological fatigue resulting from prolonged social and economic marginalization.

Overall, the indexical signs in *I, Too* and *The Weary Blues* function to firmly anchor Hughes’s poetic language in concrete social and emotional realities. These indices—such as acts of exclusion, physical positioning, and bodily or emotional responses—point directly to lived experiences shaped by racial segregation and discrimination. Through the use of indices, Hughes does not merely express individual feelings but exposes the structural and historical conditions that produce those emotions. By linking personal suffering to identifiable social causes, Hughes’s poetry demonstrates how individual experience is inseparable from the broader realities of racial oppression endured by African Americans.

3.3 Symbol

A symbol is a sign whose meaning is constructed through social, cultural, and historical conventions rather than through resemblance or direct physical connection. Symbols require shared understanding within a community, and their interpretation depends on collective knowledge shaped by ideology, tradition, and lived experience. Because of this conventional nature, symbols are particularly effective in conveying abstract ideas such as identity, power, oppression, and hope. In Langston Hughes’s poetry, symbolic signs are used deliberately to communicate these complex meanings, allowing personal expressions to resonate as collective and political statements within the African American experience.

In *I, Too*, the symbolic meaning is expressed in the first two lines and the last line. The word “America” functions as a symbol of national identity that has historically been constructed as exclusive to white Americans. By asserting that he also “sings” and “is” America, the speaker symbolically challenges this exclusion and claims belonging within the nation. The phrase “the darker brother” symbolizes both shared humanity and the socially imposed hierarchy that positions Black Americans as inferior. Meanwhile, in lines five to seven, symbolize resilience, optimism, and hope for equality. The table itself operates as a symbol of social inclusion and recognition, representing the speaker’s vision of a future without racial segregation.

In *The Weary Blues*, symbolic meanings emerge through musical and visual imagery that appear prominently in the ninth, eleventh, and twelfth lines of the poem. The contrast between the words “ebony” and “ivory” functions as a powerful racial symbol, representing Black and white identities within the context of American society. By associating these racial terms with the piano keys, Hughes transforms the simple act of playing music into a broader symbol of unequal racial relations, where harmony exists in art, but inequality persists in social reality. This symbolic contrast suggests that African Americans contribute significantly to American culture while remaining marginalized within the social structure. The exclamation “O Blues!” operates as a symbol of collective suffering and cultural endurance, as blues music is conventionally understood as an expressive medium through which African Americans articulate pain, resilience, and shared historical experience. Through this symbol, Hughes elevates personal emotion into a communal voice shaped by racial oppression. Additionally, the image of the “rickety stool” serves as a symbol of instability and fragility, reflecting the insecure social and economic conditions surrounding the blues performer. This symbol reinforces the vulnerability of Black artists who, despite their cultural contributions, exist within a precarious and unstable social position.

In *Harlem*, symbolic signs are employed to represent the psychological and social consequences of postponed dreams. The phrase “a dream deferred” functions as the central symbol of the poem, referring to the delayed aspirations of African Americans for freedom, equality, and social justice. This central symbol is further developed through a series of vivid images such as “a raisin in the sun,” “fester like a sore,” “rotten meat,” and “syrupy sweet,” each of which symbolically illustrates the gradual decay, distortion, and corruption of hope under prolonged oppression. Rather than fading quietly, these deferred dreams transform into sources of pain, discomfort, and moral decay. The symbol of a “heavy load” represents the accumulated psychological and social burden carried by oppressed individuals as a result of persistent inequality and unfulfilled promises. Finally, the question “Or does it explode?” functions as a symbolic warning, suggesting the potential for social unrest, resistance, or revolutionary change if injustice and systemic oppression continue without resolution. Through these symbolic signs, Hughes emphasizes that deferred dreams are not passive but carry dangerous consequences for both individuals and society.

Overall, the symbolic signs in *I, Too*, *The Weary Blues*, and *Harlem* function as powerful tools through which Hughes articulates social critique and constructs collective meaning. Through symbolism, Hughes moves beyond individual and personal expression to represent shared historical experiences, cultural identity, and the ongoing struggles of African Americans within a racially stratified society. These symbolic signs allow abstract social realities—such as racial injustice, marginalization, and deferred aspirations—to be condensed into concrete poetic images that are easily recognized and collectively interpreted by readers. Consequently, symbolic signs in Hughes’s poetry serve not only aesthetic purposes but also operate as ideological instruments that expose systems of oppression, affirm cultural resilience, and articulate a sustained hope for social change and racial equality across generations.

4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Langston Hughes consistently employs semiotic signs—icons, indices, and symbols—to construct meaning in the three selected poems: *I, Too*, *The Weary Blues*, and *Harlem*. The analysis reveals implicit meanings showing that *I, Too* predominantly employs symbolic signs to express identity, dignity, and hope amid racial segregation; *The Weary Blues* presents a complex semiotic structure through the interplay of musical icons, emotional indices, and racial symbols; while *Harlem* relies primarily on symbolic signs to portray the psychological and social consequences of deferred dreams. Through these varied semiotic strategies, Hughes transforms personal and emotional experiences into representations of collective African American realities, allowing individual voices to articulate broader historical and social conditions.

These findings indicate that Hughes’s semiotic signs function not merely as aesthetic devices, but also as powerful instruments of social critique, expressions of racial and cultural identity, and representations of African American collective experience. By situating icons, indices, and symbols within Peirce’s semiotic framework, this study demonstrates how poetic signs operate as cultural and political instruments that reflect historical conditions, challenge dominant narratives, and affirm marginalized identities. Overall, the research confirms that semiotic signs in Hughes’s poetry serve as tools of ideological resistance, historical reflection, and cultural affirmation, revealing how poetry can voice oppression while simultaneously expressing resilience, agency, and hope for social transformation within African American communities.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study suggests that future semiotic analyses of poetry be extended to other poets, both within African American literary traditions and in Indonesian literature, to enhance comparative and cross-cultural perspectives on meaning-making through signs. Further research may also elaborate Peirce’s concept of symbols by emphasizing their function as instruments of ideological resistance and social reflection. For educational practitioners, the findings of this study may serve as instructional material to develop students’ critical awareness in interpreting implicit meanings in poetry. More broadly, this research is expected to contribute to public appreciation of poetry as a medium that is not only aesthetically expressive but also deeply engaged with social critique, historical memory, and collective aspirations.

REFERENCES

- Al-Marwan, H. (2020). ‘*A Dream Deferred*’: A Study of The Poetry of Langston Hughes. 6(3).
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Cahyani, P., & Hasbi, M. (2024). The Semiotics of Luck: Interpreting Visual Metaphors in the Animated Film. *Innovations in Language Education and Literature*, 1(1), 9-19. <https://doi.org/10.31605/ilere.v1i1.3894>
- Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3rd edn). Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2017). Chapter 9 Qualitative Methods. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.
- Dewi, A. C. (2023). A Semiotic Analysis of Robert Frost’s Poem Love and A Question Based on Charles Sander Peirce’s Triangle Theory. *International Research Journal on Advanced Engineering Hub (IRJAEH)*, 1(01), 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.47392/IRJAEH.2023.002>
- Hughes, L. (1951). *Harlem (A Dream Deferred)*. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*.
- Johnson, H. F. (2022). Beyond Disciplines: Spoken Word as Participatory Arts-based Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 15(3), 363–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19408447211052667>

- Lorino, P. (2014). Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). In *The Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Organization Studies*.
- Neupane, K. (2023). The Intersection of Blues and Gospel in Langston Hughes's Poetry. *Cognition*, 5(1), 63–67. <https://doi.org/10.3126/cognition.v5i1.55409>
- Peirce, C. S. (1991). *Peirce on signs: Writings on semiotic*. UNC Press Books.
- Pietarinen, A.-V. (2016). H. Paul Grice's Lecture Notes on Charles S. Peirce's Theory of Signs. *International Review of Pragmatics*, 8(1), 82–129. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18773109-00701006>
- Singh, D. A. (2021). *Interpretation of Poetry is an Art or a Subject: In a True Present Sense*. 12(02).
- Yakin, H. S. M., & Totu, A. (2014). The semiotic perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A brief comparative study. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 4-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.247>