

## Semiotic Analysis of the Poem "If the People One Day Will to Live"

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### Abstract

This study is a semiotic analysis of the poem "If the People One Day Desire Life" by the poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi. The text is analyzed through the semiotic approach to examine its symbolic and semantic structure. The study aims to understand how al-Shabi uses linguistic signs and symbols to convey revolutionary and liberatory meanings, while also linking these symbols to their cultural, political, and social contexts.

The study addresses several semiotic factors that contribute to conveying the revolutionary message in the poem, including subjective factors (the poet himself), the main theme (freedom), and the desired theme (liberation from colonialism). The analysis also covers opposing factors such as tyranny, as well as supportive factors such as the people's will, which emerges as the driving force behind achieving social and political change.

The study reveals that the poet uses the poem as a tool to express the collective consciousness of the oppressed Arab people, relying on language as a means to convey liberatory ideas aimed at stimulating revolutionary action against tyranny and occupation. The study also highlights that the poem is not merely an expression of a specific political moment, but a symbolic text full of universal meanings that transcend time and place, requiring the reconstruction of the collective identity of the Arab nations in confronting political and social challenges.

The study concludes with several recommendations, the most important of which is expanding the use of the semiotic approach in Arabic literature.

**Keywords:** Semiotic Analysis, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi, "If the People One Day Desire Life" poem.

## Introduction

The poem "*If the People Will to Live One Day*" by the poet Aboul-Qacem Echebbi is considered one of the most prominent poetic works that transcend the boundaries of aesthetic expression into the realm of powerful symbols and connotations reflecting the collective Arab consciousness in opposing tyranny and occupation. This poem is not merely a reflection of a revolutionary moment or a specific political stance; rather, it has become a rhetorical icon embodying profound symbolic meanings that illustrate the values of liberation and resistance. Given this unique dimension, semiotic analysis contributes to an in-depth approach to the text, as it does not stop at the apparent meaning but delves into the symbolic structure of the discourse, revealing the relationships between the signs and symbols used, and their cultural and political connotations (Mousavi Panah, 2024).

Semiotic analysis in this context is based on several approaches, including that of Michael Riffaterre, which focuses on understanding the relationship between the sign and its meaning within the cultural and social context. This allows for a deeper understanding of the poem's role in shaping collective awareness and stimulating revolutionary action (Mousavi Panah, 2024).

In light of this perspective, the poem assumes multiple dimensions: it is, on the one hand, a political poem, and on the other, a symbolic text rich with universal connotations. It utilizes mythological and emotional expressions to evoke collective emotions. This is what has secured its presence in the cultural memory of Arab peoples, especially during pivotal historical moments that require the reconstruction of collective identity and the confrontation of exclusion and marginalization

(Echebbi, 1996; Mousavi Panah, 2024).

It is worth noting that semiotics draws its principles from various major fields of knowledge such as linguistics, logic, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. Its subject matter is not confined to a specific domain, as it concerns itself with all human activities—from simple emotions and social rituals to grand ideological systems (Sharshar, 2015). Semiotics does not focus on a specific subject, but rather encompasses all human experiences, provided that the subjects possess a semiotic process. It is not merely a theory but a continuous practice, where something stands for something else in a particular context (Benkrad, 2012).

Language, therefore, is a system of signs that parallels other systems such as written scripts, sign languages for the deaf, symbolic rituals, military signals, and codes of conduct (Ali, 2001). Semiotics concerns itself with the structure of signs and their interrelations within literary texts. It observes the distribution of these signs and their internal and external functions, regardless of their form or type (Fakhouri, 1990).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The poem “*If the People Will to Live One Day*” by Aboul-Qacem Echebbi stands as one of the most influential works linked to revolutionary and liberationist awareness in both Arab and global contexts. It carries a multitude of symbolic themes and dense poetic expressions that demand an in-depth analytical reading. Although it has been addressed in many literary studies, the application of a semiotic methodology to understand its symbolic and semantic structure has not received sufficient attention and analysis.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following primary question:

- What are the prominent semiotic meanings expressed in the poem “*If the People Will to Live One Day*”?

## Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify the semiotic structures that compose the poem's fabric.
2. Analyze the poet's use of symbols and linguistic signs to convey revolutionary messages.
3. Understand the relationship between signifiers and signifieds in the poetic context.
4. Highlight the role of symbolic language in stimulating collective awareness toward change and liberation.
5. Employ semiotic analysis as a tool to uncover the deeper layers of the poem beyond its surface meaning.

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the importance of the poem itself, as "*If the People Will to Live One Day*" is a literary and cultural icon that has inspired societies during critical historical moments. It also stems from the importance of the methodology adopted. The semiotic method offers a precise analytical tool for uncovering the internal relationships among the components of the text, enabling a novel reading that transcends traditional interpretation to explore symbolic and semantic structures. Consequently, this study contributes to enriching literary and critical studies by presenting an analytical approach based on the science of signs.

## Methodology

**Study Method:** This study employs the analytical (semiotic) approach, which is based on deconstructing the poetic text to identify its symbolic structures and linguistic expressions that encompass multiple layers of meaning.

**Study Tools:** The study involved textual analysis of the poem's linguistic and

semantic structure, focusing on identifying the most prominent symbols and signs. It also examined the connections between these signs and their cultural, political, and historical contexts.

## Presentation of Results

To answer the research question, the semiotic factors in the poem were analyzed as follows:

### 1. Subjective Factor: The Poet, Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi

In this poem, the poet is not merely a witness or narrator of reality; rather, he is an expressive voice for the collective consciousness of the oppressed Arab people. The poet uses language as a tool to convey his voice and thoughts to the people, blending his own subjectivity with the collective national consciousness of both the Tunisian and Arab peoples. Through the poem, we can see how al-Shabi expresses ideas of liberation and dignity by employing simple yet impactful vocabulary, saturating the text with national meanings.

Thus, al-Shabi in his poem becomes the spokesperson for the people, identifying with their struggles and desires. This is evident when he says: *"If the people one day desire life, destiny must respond."*

Here, the poet appears as the revolutionary agent, firmly believing that the people's will can confront the fate that seeks to impose injustice. The poet does not see himself merely as a speaker of liberation, but as part of the revolutionary movement itself. The subjectivity lies in al-Shabi's challenge against colonial forces.

### 2. Objective Factor: Freedom

Freedom is the central theme in the poem, but how can we examine it from a semiotic perspective? In this poem, freedom is not merely a call for liberation from colonialism, but rather a universal human value that transcends both time and place, linking directly to issues of justice and human dignity.

The poem presents freedom not only as an individual right but as a collective right, with the people's will being the primary factor in achieving liberation. In the Arab context, liberation is tied to the long struggle against colonialism and occupation. Freedom in this poem is not just a wish, but a goal pursued through collective revolutionary action.

Thus, freedom appears as a collective construct, not merely an individual right. The poet implies that social and political change is only possible if the people unite and desire life. Al-Shabi presents freedom as the reformation of the Arab society and its purification from the constraints imposed by colonial powers.

### **3. Desired Theme: Liberation from Colonialism**

Liberation from colonialism is not just about freeing oneself from foreign powers; it is about liberating the Arab person from forms of oppression and social tyranny. In the poem, colonialism is portrayed not only as an external force but also as a symbol of any oppressive power that imposes a way of life that does not align with human dignity and rights.

In this poem, colonialism manifests as an external force seeking to hinder the achievement of freedom. The Arab people are depicted as active agents capable of overcoming these oppressive forces. In the poem, liberation is not the result of improved circumstances but of an unyielding will that cannot be suppressed.

### **4. Desired Outcome and its Substitutions**

The substitutions of the desired outcome are linked to the social and political transformations that may occur after achieving freedom. In this context, freedom becomes a dynamic concept, opening up the possibility for change in the overall structure of society.

Liberation, in this context, represents a new system of living, and the poet expresses great hope that freedom will not be confined to political liberation alone, but will also encompass social justice and equality.

### 5. Opposing Factor: Tyranny and Injustice

Tyranny is the primary enemy that stands in the way of achieving freedom. It is not just an oppressive political force; it symbolizes all forms of injustice practiced against oppressed and subjugated peoples. In the poem, colonialism is depicted as an obstacle to freedom, obstructing the progress of society toward equality and justice. This tension between freedom and tyranny creates an invisible conflict between the people's will and repressive systems. The poem embodies the social and cultural struggles that emerge at every moment in history, and tyranny is not just foreign colonialism but an internal system based on oppression and intellectual suppression.

### 6. Facilitating Factor: Popular Will

The facilitating factor in this poem is the will of the people. Through this will, al-Shabi sees that liberation is not only a right but also a collective duty. The will of the people is the driving force behind change, giving the community the strength to move forward toward freedom.

In this poem, the will appears as a powerful force for change, acting as the driving power behind liberation from tyranny.

## Recommendations

According to the results of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. **Enhancing the use of the semiotic analytical approach in other literary texts** to gain a deeper understanding of symbolic structures.
2. **Organizing workshops for researchers in Arabic literature** to teach them semiotic analysis techniques.
3. **Expanding the applications of semiotic analysis** to include popular literature and cultural heritage.

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