



## Imagining Paradise in Ammar Al-Shukry's "Jannah": An Analysis of Religious Kinetic Poetry

Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah<sup>1✉</sup>, Amanda Ipni Firdanisa<sup>2</sup>, Ike Permatasari<sup>3</sup>, Nilunda Arsy<sup>4</sup>  
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>  
<sup>✉</sup>[sufiikrima@uinsby.ac.id](mailto:sufiikrima@uinsby.ac.id)

### Abstract:

This paper attempts a simple digital literary criticism of Ammar Alshukry's poem "Jannah." The poet presents his work in the form of a kinetic poem, making the readers need to focus not only on the words but also on the animation and the sound effects. The analysis follows Iskarna's (2023) argument on the alternative models of electronic literary criticism, emphasizing the poem's written words and the digital medium used to create and present the poem. The findings show that the poem provides a vivid image of a Muslim living in Jannah (Paradise). Furthermore, the social media site used provides the poem with a high degree of accessibility since the readers can easily find the poem on various devices and browsers. The poem, finally, reminds all Muslims always to be entirely devoted to Islam so that they can reach the Jannah.

**Keywords:** kinetic poetry; digital literature; digital literary criticism; Jannah

### INTRODUCTION

Poetry, said Wordsworth, is a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (Wordsworth, 1991). It is an expression or projection, as Abram elaborates, of the poet's feelings and thoughts (Abrams, 1971). Poetry differs from other kinds of writing because the language is arranged in a distinctive pattern to 'express and evoke' certain feelings or emotions (Mays, 2018). Such a pattern might be determined by the poem's rhymes or by the length of lines that form a specific image. This kind of poetry is called shaped poetry or pattern poetry (Barnet et al., 2008).

Associated with shaped poetry is concrete poetry (*Shape Poetry*, 2013). However, both are quite distinctive in providing a visual effect for the readers. Shaped poetry takes the form of the subject, while concrete poetry is more about enhancing the effect of the wording. Concerning the effect a concrete poem may enhance, Swiss (1976) distinguished concrete poetry into three types: visual, phonetic, and kinetic. The visual poem is optical, which is to be seen as a painting, while the phonetic one is music-like composed. On the



other hand, the kinetic poem is arranged as in a motion picture and is believed to be media-based.

Seiça (2021) elaborates on five media-specific forms of kinetic poetry: mechanical poetry, film poetry, videopoetry, holopoetry, and digital poetry. All the media utilized are 'to achieve literary and artistic expressiveness.' Furthermore, kinetic poetry becomes digital when written with the computer, either algorithmically programmed or involving any animation software in its creation, especially in the form of animated poetry or kinetic typography (Brownie, 2015).

Within the last half-decade, any discussions about digital poetry cover those about Instapoetry (Ekmark, 2022; Lorenzana, 2023; Misa, 2020), religious issues (Oumlil, 2021; Saeed et al., 2021), national or ethnic issues (Ajah, 2022; Naji, 2021; Noh et al., 2019), or particular themes like love, trauma, and death (Mani, 2022) or pandemic (Zaid, 2021). From several previous studies above, only Oumlil (2021) and Saeed et al. (2021) relate the discussion to Islam. Oumlil (2021) addresses the issue of Islamophobia in the poetry of Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian-American poet. On the other hand, Saeed et al. focus on the Sufi poetry of Khawaja Ghulam Fareed, the most famous and influential Sufi poet of the Saraiki language.

This article analyzes one example of a kinetic typographic poem, "Jannah," written by Ammar Al-Shukry. The analysis is not only about the poem but also about the technology used in the poem's creation and presentation and the impact. By doing this analysis, the researchers hope that this research can enrich the discussion about digital literature in general.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When a poet experiments with a computer in creating and publishing their poem, their work is born as digital poetry. The computer's involvement in creating the poem covers not only the literary art but also the visual and the sonic (Funkhouser, 2007; Rettberg, 2019). The experiments in computer-generated poetry were started in the 1960s. In the next two decades, the poets could present moving language on screen, indicating the later works reproduced in animated digital formats (Rosario et al., 2021).

One form of digital poetry is kinetic poetry, which is created and presented on a digital platform. Kinetic poetry's distinctive characteristic is that its texts change into animation,



which then conducts the meaning of the poem (Rettberg, 2019). Rettberg further explains that kinetic poetry is multimedial in nature. Its synesthetic effect comes from the complex interaction between sound, motion, text, and typography.

Conducting such literary criticism towards kinetic poetry or any other digital literature requires a different approach from the printed ones. Digital literary criticism sees not only the content of the text but also the medium to express the text, which is digital technology (Iskarna, 2023). By this approach, as Iskarna further details, the discussion on any digital literary work can include the technology used in creating and presenting the work, the text interactivity with and its accessibility for the readers, and its impact to the socio-cultural aspect besides discussing the type of the text itself.

## METHOD

This article falls under digital literary criticism since the discussed poem belongs to digital literature. Doing digital literary criticism, said Iskarna (2023), should not be merely a matter of what the words are said but also how they are expressed. Therefore, the data collection and analysis of this research include the text and the digital medium. The data were taken from the poetry "Jannah" in the form of the language used, including the figure of speech and the imagery. The digital presentation of the poem and the platform also became parts of the data. The researchers collected the data by watching the video of the poem uploaded on YouTube and then taking notes on the parts relevant to the topic of the discussion. The analysis was conducted based on Iskarna's concept of appreciative bases that refers to the digital literature's significant elements: the platform, the reader's involvement, the type, the wide range, and the impact.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ammar al-Shukry's "Jannah" is a poem that invites the readers to imagine how life will be in Paradise. The word '*jannah*' is Arabic for Paradise or Heaven. In Islam, the term refers to the eternal abode in the afterlife where the dwellers are given any type of pleasure for their righteous deeds (Huda, 2019).

The first line of the poem, "Close your eyes and imagine this" (Al-Shukry, 2012, line 1), gives the readers a clear clue that the rest of the poem will be abundant in the imagery. Baldick (2001) defines imagery as the uses of language in any literary works that elicit

impressions by the senses. In poetry, imagery is the mental picture a reader experiences from reading a poem, which includes visual, auditory, tactile, thermal, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic sense qualities (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Line 6 and 7 from the second stanza exemplifies the visual, auditory as well as tactile imageries, "Perched on a throne, near a stream / So serene, and exquisite a scene" (Al-Shukry, 2012, lines 6–7). The phrase 'perched on a throne' evokes the mental sight of someone who settles on a throne. The verb 'perched' implies that whoever sits at the throne does not sit temporarily but has comfortably occupied the seat since it belongs to them. Meanwhile, the word 'stream' might activate the reader's sense of hearing what a stream sounds like. It makes the reader mentally picture a body of water that runs or flows calmly. This portrayal, thus, creates such a peaceful feeling as the phrase in line 7 conveys, 'serene, and exquisite a scene' that implies the place's beauty and tranquility.

The first element of digital literature that Iskarna mentions in his concept of appreciative bases is the technology that refers to the platform used to create or publish the work. Written by Ammar al-Shukry, the poem "Jannah" was produced by Belal Khan in the form of kinetic typography, which is moving or changing text (Lee et al. in Brownie, 2015). The moving letters of the poem are presented in different colors and font sizes. Along with the voice-over, the presentation thus creates such a different experience in reading a poem. Further, Brownie (2015) elaborates that reading kinetic poetry is a hybrid between visual, verbal, and kinetic that expects the readers to have a holistic interpretation.

Ammar al-Shukry published his poem "Jannah" on YouTube in January 2012. The poem was uploaded to The Daily Reminder's channel and recently reached over 53 thousand views. The reader's engagement with the poem is seen through the comments after they watch, listen, and read it. The reading experience does not offer a high degree of interactivity because the readers were not given any choices to read the poem in multiple directions.

Published on YouTube enables Ammar Al-Shukry's "Jannah" a high level of accessibility since the platform is the second largest social media site after Facebook and the second largest search engine after Google (Lua, 2023). Due to this fact, the poem can be easily found on different devices and browsers. The poem's high accessibility, in turn, might positively impact Muslim readers since it serves as a reminder to be devoted to Islam



so that they can reach Jannah. The good impact can be represented by positive comments on the poems that the viewers wrote on the platform.

## CONCLUSION

Ammar Al-Shukry's poem "Jannah" imagines the situation in Paradise where all devout Muslims will go after life. The poem employs several imageries to create a substantial effect on the readers. Moreover, the poem provides a different experience in poem reading activity since it is created and published in the form of kinetic typography. The platform where the poem was uploaded also enables "Jannah" to be easily accessed worldwide from many devices and browsers. Any future research about this poem might focus on the readers' reception of the content and the digital presentation.

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