

## DEFAMILIARISING SUFISM IN THE ISLAMIC-MALAY TRADITION OF POETRY: A TEXTUAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS ON *SYAIR BURUNG PUNGGUK* THROUGH ISLAMIC REGIONAL STUDIES

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### ABSTRACT

*Syair Burung Pungguk* is one of the classical Malay poems depicting the spiritual and existential struggle of humanity through the symbolism of longing and solitude. Through the lens of Islamic World Area Studies, this text can be read as a representation of the transformation of Islamic values rooted in the local experiences of the Malay society in Southeast Asia. This study applies a hermeneutic-cultural approach with the principle of defamiliarization to reinterpret the poem within the Islamic cultural context of the region. The analysis was conducted on the translated version *Syair Burung Pungguk* by Arief Rahman and Didik Purwanto (2021, National Library Press) by considering the textual side through the concept of defamiliarization combined with the perspective of Islamic Regional Studies. The findings suggest that the symbolism of the owl and the moon reflects the unique Malay-Islamic religiosity centered on mystical longing for the Divine, reaffirming that literature serves as an arena where universal Islamic teachings are aesthetically and culturally localized. Thus, this poem is not merely a literary artifact but a site of encounter between the universal principles of Islam and the cultural expressions of the Malay world rooted in Sufi sensibility.

**Keywords:** *Syair Burung Pungguk*, Islamic Area Studies, Malay-Islamic literature, defamiliarization, Sufism

### INTRODUCTION

The regional study of the Islamic world is an interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and multidisciplinary field of study that seeks to understand the complexity of Islamic civilisation in various geographical regions by considering the interactions between social, political, cultural, economic, and religious dimensions. In general, regional studies can be understood as a scientific approach that uses 'regions' as the main unit of analysis in describing social and historical phenomena and explaining their place and role in the international community (Hidayat, 2023). In the context of the Islamic world, this term refers to efforts to understand the dynamics of Muslims in different geographical spaces, taking into account the specific historical and cultural contexts of each region (Hidayat, 2023). This approach emerged in response to the need to understand the diversity of Islamic practices, which are not always synonymous with the Middle East, but also develop in different forms and expressions in Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia (Lapidus, 2014). Thus, the study of the Islamic world does not only discuss Islamic doctrine or religious systems normatively, but also



how Islam is lived and articulated contextually by Muslim communities in various regions.

Historically, area studies emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to political and academic needs to understand regions outside the Western world (Wigen, 2019). In its subsequent development, Islamic world regional studies grew as a discipline that combines social science approaches with classical Islamic studies, with the aim of reading Islam as a socio-cultural and spiritual phenomenon. This means that Islam is not only viewed as a theological system, but also as a source of cultural inspiration that gives rise to various forms of expression, including literature, art, and knowledge systems. In line with this, Hidayat (2023) emphasises that the study of the Islamic world requires a balance between textual and contextual approaches, where understanding religious texts and cultural products must be accompanied by mapping the surrounding social and political structures. Furthermore, Hidayat (2023) reveals that there are four factors that shape cultural diversity, namely religious factors, ethnic and racial characteristics, historical experiences, and geographical-demographic factors. These factors, in their historical experience, never work alone. The combination of these factors is usually responsible for the creation of cultural diversity in Islamic civilisation. With this approach, each Islamic region can be seen as a unique mosaic, a place where dialogue between universal Islamic traditions and specific local conditions takes place.

The study of the Islamic world can also be understood as an epistemological attempt to reinterpret the concept of 'ummah' in a geographical and historical framework. In this perspective, the Islamic world is not a homogeneous entity, but rather a network of regions interconnected by a history of trade, migration of scholars, colonialism, and modernisation. Awareness of this diversity gives rise to a more open approach to variations in the interpretation and practice of Islam in different regions (Mandaville, 2019). Such an approach also rejects essentialist views that consider Islam to be centred only in the Middle East. Instead, regional studies open up space for reading Islam as a multicultural and multiregional experience that continues to transform according to local contexts. Therefore, the concept of the Islamic world in regional studies is more networked than hierarchical, with each region contributing to the dynamics of global Islamic civilisation (Hidayat, 2023; Esposito, 2018).

The scope of Islamic world regional studies is very broad and involves various dimensions. In general, it can be said that these studies cover geographical, historical, socio-political, cultural, and religious aspects. Geographically, regional studies seek to map the distribution of Muslims in various regions and the dynamics of their relationships with existing political powers (Esposito, 2018). Historically, this study traces the process of Islamisation and the formation of religious institutions, such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, zawiyyas, and Sufi orders, which have been the backbone of Islamic development at the local level (Lapidus, 2014). From a socio-political perspective, regional studies also examine how Muslim communities respond to issues of modernity, nationalism, colonialism, and globalisation (Mandaville, 2019). Meanwhile, from a cultural perspective, the scope includes analysis of Islamic aesthetic and symbolic expressions, such as fine arts, architecture, music, and literature.

A cross-disciplinary approach is a key feature of studies of the Islamic world. History, anthropology, politics and literature work synergistically to understand the

complex relationship between religion and culture in a particular geographical area. A researcher of the region, for example, may combine philological methods to study classical texts with an anthropological approach to understand the social practices that accompany them. In this context, the study of traditional Islamic literary texts is important because it records the historical and spiritual dynamics of Muslim societies in symbolic language (Braginsky, 1991). This approach emphasises that regional studies cannot be separated from the cultural dimension as the main medium for articulating Islamic values. In other words, understanding the Islamic world is not only through holy books and theological interpretations, but also through poetry, stories, and rhymes that are an integral part of the Muslim intellectual tradition in various regions.

The scope of regional studies of the Islamic world also includes studies on cultural encounters and exchanges between Muslim regions. Islamic history shows that from the beginning, Islamic civilisation was shaped by cross-border mobility: trade, pilgrimage, migration, and education. In the context of Southeast Asia, for example, Islam did not come through military conquest, but through peaceful interactions between traders and scholars from Gujarat, Hadramaut, and Aceh (Aljunied, 2022). This phenomenon shows that the Southeast Asian region has an important position in the study of the Islamic world because it represents an example of Islam that has developed culturally, dialogically, and adaptively to the local context. Therefore, regional studies in this region require an approach that is sensitive to cultural symbolism and literary expression (ethnolinguistics) that are part of the spirituality of the local community (Hidayat, 2023). In the context of Southeast Asia, the Malay world occupies a special position as a region that shapes Islamic identity with strong literary and linguistic characteristics. The Malay language is not only the lingua franca of trade and diplomacy, but also the main vehicle for the spread of Islamic teachings in written and oral form. Literary works such as poetry, tales, and rhymes became a medium for internalising Islamic values into Malay society. The tradition of Islamic literacy in the Malay world shows that literature is not merely entertainment, but an educational and spiritual instrument (Braginsky, 1991; Mohd, 2009).

In this context, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is an important object for analysis and can be used as an example of how Islamic moral, ethical, and spiritual values are articulated in a distinctive poetic form. This work, as republished by Arief Rahman and Didik Purwanto (2021) through Perpusnas Press, represents a form of Islamic-Malay aesthetics that emphasises themes of longing, separation, and the search for meaning in life. In the imagination of the Malay community, the pungguk bird is known as a night bird that is often said to long for the moon. This symbolism has long been a universal metaphor for describing impossible love, but in the context of Malay Sufism, it acquires a deeper spiritual meaning. The study of *Syair Burung Pungguk* not only reveals literary aspects, but also describes the dynamics of the Islamic world in Southeast Asia. As stated by Aljunied (2022), 'Islam in Southeast Asia is a living testimony of localisation — it breathes through language, literature, and collective memory.' Thus, this poem can be read as concrete evidence of the localisation process of Islam through the medium of language and art. In this case, Malay literature serves as a cultural space where Islamic values adapt and transform

*Syair Burung Pungguk* depicts a symbolic story about a pungguk bird's longing for the moon, which can be interpreted as an allegory of human spiritual longing for divine perfection. Through this symbolism, the poem reflects the Sufi spirit inherent in the Malay-Islamic literary tradition. Here, poetic form becomes a medium for conveying moral and religious messages in beautiful and figurative language. Within the framework of Islamic world studies, reading *Syair Burung Pungguk* can provide an understanding of how Islam is practised and interpreted by Malay communities, which place aesthetics and spirituality as a single entity (Aljunied, 2022). This poem also reflects the character of Islam in Southeast Asia, which emphasises a balance between moral teachings and cultural expression, and shows how Islamic values are creatively processed within the Malay local context. Analysis of *Syair Burung Pungguk* also shows the close relationship between the religious and social dimensions of Malay society. The pungguk bird, which always gazes at the moon, is a metaphor for humans who seek existential meaning amid worldly limitations. Thus, this poem not only reflects spiritual themes but also describes the social awareness of society regarding alienation, longing, and the search for identity. From a regional studies perspective, texts such as this can be viewed as 'cultural documents' that reflect the relationship between Islam and the social conditions of the author's community (Asep Achmad Hidayat, 2023). Therefore, reading Malay literature through a regional studies approach opens up a broad space for interpretation of the structure of meaning that transcends the aesthetic dimension alone.

The defamiliarisation approach is used in this study to re-read the symbolic meaning in the poem. The concept of defamiliarisation proposed by Viktor Shklovsky (1917 in Nurrachman, 2024) aims to make the familiar strange, so that readers can re-experience something familiar in a new form. In the context of *Syair Burung Pungguk*, defamiliarisation occurs when the experiences of longing and sorrow — which are humanly very close to feelings — are transformed into spiritual symbols. Through repetitive, metaphorical, and musical language, this poem presents a religious experience through aesthetics. In line with this approach, Hidayat (2023) mentions that Islam in the Malay region is 'transformative and aesthetic,' meaning that Islamic teachings adapt to the local system of symbols and aesthetic sensibilities. The form of poetry, which consists of four lines per stanza, with balanced rhyme and rhythm, not only serves as entertainment, but also as a means of cultural remembrance — reminding humans of Allah through beautiful language. Therefore, reading this poetry within the framework of Islamic World Studies allows for a broader understanding of the relationship between aesthetic form and religious values. Malay-Islamic literature has a long history of spreading spiritual values. Braginsky (1991) shows that Malay poems from the 18th to 19th centuries often combined elements of Sufism and Islamic morality with local sensibilities. In this context, *Syair Burung Pungguk* can be considered a reflection of the inner world of Malay-Islamic society, which internalised Sufi teachings such as divine love (mahabbah), longing (syauq), and surrender (tawakal). These themes are in line with the development of Islam in Southeast Asia, which was influenced by Sufi orders such as the Shattariyah, Qadiriyah, and Naqshbandiyah, which played a major role in shaping the spiritual ethos of society.

Furthermore, the regional approach to literary works such as *Syair Burung Pungguk* has the potential to link textual analysis with geopolitical and historical

dynamics. For example, the process of spreading this poem across various regions of the Malay Archipelago shows the existence of a network of manuscript and oral circulation that crossed the boundaries of traditional kingdoms. This phenomenon confirms that the Malay world was not a closed entity, but rather part of the wider network of the maritime Islamic world. It is in this context that works such as *Syair Burung Pungguk* can be read as symbolic representations of the encounter between global Islamic culture and local Malay identity (Braginsky, 1991; Aljunied, 2022). This approach enriches the study of the Islamic world because it shows how Islamic discourse was not only disseminated through formal religious institutions, but also through popular and communicative literary aesthetics. Referring to the thoughts of Asep Achmad Hidayat (2023), the study of the Islamic world should not stop at the descriptive stage, but should also be reflective and critical. In reading works such as *Syair Burung Pungguk*, regional researchers need to question how the text functions within the socio-cultural structure of its society, how it reflects power relations, and how it contributes to the construction of religious identity. This kind of reflective approach not only enriches our understanding of Malay literature, but also deepens our understanding of the dynamics of Islam in Southeast Asia as part of the global Islamic civilisation. Thus, regional studies can serve as an epistemological bridge between textual studies and contextual studies, between aesthetics and social reality.

Furthermore, it is important to note that *Syair Burung Pungguk* does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of a vast textual network within the Islamic world, where symbols such as birds, the moon, and night have long been used in Arabic-Persian poetry as metaphors for longing for God. However, in the Malay context, this symbolism has been reworked in accordance with local experiences. This is what Hidayat (2023) refers to as 'symbolic adaptation,' a process in which universal Islamic elements are localised into cultural forms that are alive in a particular region. Thus, this article aims to analyse *Syair Burung Pungguk* from the perspective of Islamic World Area Studies, emphasising three main aspects: (1) how this text reflects Malay-Islamic spirituality, (2) how defamiliarisation works in its symbolic structure, and (3) how area studies can explain the position of this poem as a cultural artefact of Southeast Asian Islam. Through this analysis, it is hoped that an understanding will emerge that Malay literature is not only an aesthetic heritage, but also an integral part of Islamic civilisation that continues to develop within a regional context.

Ultimately, regional studies of the Islamic world open up new possibilities for reading traditional Malay literature as an expression of complex and layered Islamic culture. Through this framework, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is not only seen as a beautiful work of literature, but also as a historical and spiritual document that records the collective experience of Malay Muslims in facing the dynamics of the times. Regional studies help us understand that the Islamic world in Southeast Asia is not a periphery of global Islam, but rather a vital centre that continues to produce knowledge, meaning, and culture in its own unique form. Therefore, reading Malay literature through the perspective of Islamic world regional studies is a strategic step in expanding the horizons of Islamic studies while enriching our understanding of the plurality of Islamic civilisation.

## METHOD

An interdisciplinary approach allows the study of poetry to examine texts from a literary perspective while also considering their historical context. A number of previous studies have emphasised the importance of poetry as a document of Malay culture and history. Hanafiah (2021), for example, notes that the study of poetry among Western scholars has continued into the contemporary era due to poetry's ability to record important events in the Malay world in an "evergreen" manner. In addition, O.C. Braginsky and W.M. Hadi classify classical Malay poetry, including *Syair Burung Pungguk*, as part of the literary wealth of Aceh and ancient Malay. Researchers of Malay language and culture, such as Al-Attas (1968) and Edwar Djamaris (1986), emphasise that poetry brings aesthetic intelligence and Islamic teachings into Malay literature. In the Malay oral tradition, poetry is also often studied in the context of Sufi teachings, political history, and folk art performances. Based on these various studies, *Syair Burung Pungguk* can be seen as a reflection of Malay social and literary life, whose philosophical and symbolic values remain relevant in contemporary studies.

It is in this interdisciplinary context that we adopt the theory of defamiliarisation (estrangement), first introduced by Viktor Shklovsky in his essay *Art as Technique* (1917; 2024), combined with the perspective of Islamic World Studies. Shklovsky argues that habitual perception causes objects to become automated, so that the purpose of art is to 'present difficult forms' so that readers see things as they feel them, not merely in the name of knowledge. In other words, 'the technique of art is to make objects foreign, to prolong perception because the process of perception is the aesthetic goal'. In poetic literature, defamiliarisation is realised through specially crafted language: the use of metaphors, comparisons, rhythm, and deviations from the usual discourse structure. Other formalists, such as Jakobson and Mukařovsky, emphasise the aspect of foregrounding poetic language, which makes readers pause at the strangeness of the language. The essence of this theory is that literature must strip words of their 'ordinary' nature and replace them with playful forms, so that readers are encouraged to absorb meaning in a new way.

In this study, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is analysed using a formalistic poetry criticism method that combines linguistic analysis and textual context. The main method is close reading, which involves examining every aspect of language (diction, syntax, rhythm, imagery, and figures of speech) in detail. In the initial stage, the manuscript is transcribed and the ancient Malay text is understood (Malay Jawi text, terminology, spelling). Then, the structure of the poem is observed: the number of stanzas, rhyme patterns, word repetitions, and archaic terms. Based on Shklovsky's theory, the analysis focuses on elements that 'alienate' ordinary perception, such as unusual imagery, unnatural style, and the use of metaphorical expressions. This approach is in line with the philological goal of explaining the content of the manuscript. Examples of linguistic engineering examined include the personification of the pungguk as a human being in love, the metaphor of the moon as a lover, and the choice of archaic words. Other techniques identified include the placement of emotional tones and religious elements (prayers to God) that do not appear in everyday conversation. Throughout the analysis, the researcher noted the phenomenon of the "de-automation" of everyday language into a new literary experience, as emphasised by Shklovsky. This method is combined with Islamic World

Studies: in addition to examining meaning, attention is given to Islamic moral values as an integral part of Islamic World Studies, particularly in Southeast Asia, where *Syair Burung Pungguk* is part of the Malay-Islamic literary tradition.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of *Syair Burung Pungguk* within the framework of defamiliarisation theory and Islamic World Studies reveals how this text combines two important layers: first, an aesthetic layer that works through the defamiliarisation of form and language as proposed by Viktor Shklovsky (1917; 2024); and second, a historical-religious layer that reflects the interaction between Islam and Malay culture in Southeast Asia. Through the combination of these two dimensions, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is not only a literary text, but also a cultural document that records the spiritual and social journey of the Malay-Islamic community. Defamiliarisation, as proposed by Shklovsky (1917; 2024), is an artistic technique that makes ordinary things seem unfamiliar in order to slow down and renew the reader's perception. In the context of *Syair Burung Pungguk*, this technique works through archaic diction, personification, visual metaphors, and repetitive rhyme structures. However, when we place this technique in the Malay-Islamic context, the function of defamiliarisation is not only aesthetic but also spiritual: it becomes a medium for zikir, contemplation, and a shift in attention from the physical world to inner consciousness. The alienated language is not merely to slow down perception but to guide the reader's consciousness towards something transcendent. Let us consider the following stanza:

*"Pungguk bercinta pagi dan petang,  
Melihat bulan di pagar bintang,  
Terselap rindu dendam pun datang,  
Dari saujana pungguk menentang."*

This verse demonstrates the use of language that slows down comprehension through indirect imagery. In this construction, the owl is not merely a bird, but a personification of the soul longing for divine light. The phrase 'moon on the fence of stars' presents a cosmological image that is characteristic of Islamic tradition—the moon as a symbol of the light of Muhammad surrounded by the light of the stars (Al-Jili, 1983). In Sufi interpretation, the moon is a mirror of God's light, while the stars symbolise the saints and prophets who mediate that light to humans (Nasr, 1987). Thus, when the owl 'sees the moon in the starry sky,' it is actually witnessing the cosmic hierarchy between creatures and God, between the mortal and the eternal.

If we read this verse from the perspective of the theory of defamiliarisation, its beauty emerges because it distances the reader from literal perception: the bird that loves the moon becomes a symbol of spiritual longing. However, if we read it from the perspective of Islamic World Studies, this verse reflects how Malay society internalised Islamic cosmology in a distinctive poetic form. Islam did not come as an abstract teaching, but was brought to life through language and symbols. As noted by Braginsky (1998), beauty in classical Malay literature is always combined with moral and spiritual functions. The following verse can help us understand what Braginsky is saying:

*"Pungguk menentang dari saujana,  
Di dalam hati gundah gulana,  
Jikalau ditolong Tuhan yang gana,  
Makanya pungguk boleh ke sana."*

The words 'saujana' and 'gundah gulana' display a strong archaism—a form of linguistic defamiliarisation. However, behind their ancient form lies a spiritual meaning: longing that cannot be fulfilled becomes a test of patience and submission to God's will. The phrase 'Tuhan yang gana' can be interpreted as a form of respect for God Almighty and Most Beautiful (al-Jamil). In the Malay-Islamic tradition, terms such as these not only serve to beautify the sound, but also contain theological value (Johns, 1957; Azra, 2017). At this level, language functions like zikir: each word contains an echo that brings awareness of the Divine presence. In the Islamic concept of aesthetics, true beauty is never separated from truth and goodness (Nasr, 1987). Thus, language that slows down understanding is not an obstacle, but a bridge to spiritual experience. Through the repetition of the rhyme a-a-a-a, the reading of the poem resembles a wirid that repeats the name of God, making poetry a ritual experience. The next stanza displays a more intense longing:

*"Di atas beraksa berapa lama,  
Gilakan cahaya bulan purnama,  
Jikalau bulan jatuh ke mana,  
Di manakan pungguk dapat bersama."*

The word 'beraksa', meaning high sky, rarely appears in modern Malay. The use of this word is a strategy of defamiliarisation: it transports the reader into the dimension of the sky, severing ties with the profane world. In classical Islamic cosmology, the sky is not merely a physical space, but a place of spiritual journey (mi'raj). A series of diction such as 'the madness of the full moon' transforms human love into mystical ecstasy. Love is no longer a feeling, but a path to spiritual union. From the perspective of Islamic World Studies, this phenomenon illustrates how Sufism is translated into Malay expression. The Sufi tradition rooted in Ibn 'Arabī, al-Ghazali, and Rumi entered the Malay world not in the form of abstract theological texts, but through poetic symbols (Al-Attas, 1970; Johns, 1975). In Syair Burung Pungguk, Sufism is present in the form of love that is fused with nature: the moon, stars, sky, and birds all become metaphors to describe the journey of the soul. Another verse shows extraordinary visual imagery:

*"Bulan purnama cahayanya terang,  
Bintang seperti intan dikarang,  
Rawananya pungguk bukan sembarang,  
Berahkan bulan di tanah seberang."*

The symbolism of light in this verse is in line with the concept of *nur* in Islamic theology. In Hamzah Fansuri's *Syair Perahu*, for example, the light of the sea and the

boat are likened to the journey of the spirit towards the source of eternal light. Fansuri writes, 'Seek God in the deep sea, not on the shallow shore' (Braginsky, 1998). Similarly, the owl in this poem strives to reach the distant moon, crossing the boundaries of the mundane world to find spiritual meaning. Thus, *Syair Burung Pungguk* shows the continuity of the Islamic-Malay symbolic tradition, in which the journey of love becomes an allegory for the search for God. In terms of the theory of defamiliarisation, the above verse works because it reverses everyday meanings: stars are not merely lights in the sky, but beautifully arranged divine jewels, 'intan dikarang'. This beauty forces the reader to slow down their perception, as Shklovsky intended. However, for 19th-century Malay Muslim readers, this image also serves as a spiritual reminder: the orderliness of the sky reflects the orderliness of Allah's creation, and the pungguk's love for the moon becomes a symbol of the servant's love for the Creator. This connection becomes even more apparent in the following stanza:

*"Gemerlapan cahaya bintang kartika,  
Beratur majelis bagai dijangka,  
Sekaliannya bintang terbit belaka,  
Pungguk melihat kalbunya duka."*

Here, the use of the word 'majelis' carries religious resonance. This word is reminiscent of majelis zikir or majelis ilmu in Islamic tradition, where seekers of knowledge gather to remember God. By describing the stars as 'majelis', the poet Islamises the cosmos: the sky becomes a gathering place for spiritual lights. The pungguk that 'sees with a sorrowful heart' is not merely a creature that wails, but a spiritual disciple who looks up at the sky with a heart thirsty for truth. If defamiliarisation makes readers aware of the form of language, then in the Islamic-Malay context, that form has an ethical and mystical function. The beauty of language is not only for aesthetics, but to remind humans of their limitations. In the Malay-Islamic tradition, aesthetics always go hand in hand with adab—manners and moral awareness (Al-Attas, 1990). Thus, *Syair Burung Pungguk* shows how beauty becomes a path to ethics, and language becomes a means of spiritual education. The last verse discussed here reinforces the theological dimension of this love story:

*"Bintang di langit berbagai rupa,  
Pungguk bercinta badan terlepa,  
Minta doa tiadalah lupa,  
Dengan bulan hendak berjumpa."*

The phrase 'asking for prayers is not forgetting' shows the transition from profane love to sacred love. After going through suffering and isolation, the pungguk finally prays. This is where the peak of defamiliarisation and spiritual transformation occurs: what initially appeared to be a romantic story turns into an existential prayer. In this case, the poem not only tells a story of longing, but also shows the path to self-discovery. This phenomenon is deeply consistent with Islamic aesthetic theory as explained by Burckhardt (1976) and Nasr (1987): Islamic art aims to remind humans of their divine origins. In *Syair Burung Pungguk*, this goal is achieved through a simple

yet symbolic poetic form. By reading the poem, readers are invited to undergo a process of *ta’ajjub*—holy wonder—that awakens spiritual awareness.

From the perspective of Islamic World Studies, the form and content of *Syair Burung Pungguk* also reflect the social and religious configuration of Malay society in the 18th to 19th centuries. This was an important period when Malay-Islamic manuscripts served as a means of transmitting knowledge and morality in the midst of colonialism (Chambert-Loir, 2020). Thus, the pungguk's longing is not only a spiritual symbol, but also an allegory of collective longing for the integrity of Islamic culture threatened by modernity. Furthermore, the pungguk, isolated from the moon, can be read as a symbol of the Malay Muslim community, isolated from the centres of Islamic power in the Arab world. It gazes at the 'moon' (the centre of Islamic civilisation) from 'across the sea' (the archipelago) with longing. However, this longing gives birth to creativity: it is from this geographical and cultural distance that unique forms of local Islam are born, including poetry as a vehicle for aesthetic interpretation. In Azra's view (2004), Islam in Southeast Asia developed through a network of scholars and Sufism that fostered 'spiritual cosmopolitanism'. *Syair Burung Pungguk* is one of the artefacts of this cosmopolitanism—a product of the localisation of Islam that remains universal in spirit.

Reading *Syair Burung Pungguk* in the context of defamiliarisation and the study of Islamic regions opens up a space for dialogue between Western theory and Islamic tradition. Shklovsky views defamiliarisation as an aesthetic attempt to enliven perception; Islam views it as a spiritual attempt to enliven consciousness. The two meet in the practice of Malay-Islamic literature, which makes beauty a bridge between reason and the heart. In this case, Malay poetry can be read as an Islamic version of Shklovsky's idea: 'alienating the world so that it appears meaningful again.' This awareness is also evident in the similarities between the structure of poetry and Islamic rituals. The a-a-a-a rhyme pattern, repetition of sounds, and slow rhythm create an auditory experience similar to zikr. Each repetition is not merely decoration, but a reminder. In Malay cultural practice, poetry is often recited at maulid, recitation, and religious celebrations (Akmal, 2015; Hanafiah, 2021). Thus, the aesthetics of defamiliarisation become a means of moral and spiritual education that is alive in the community.

On a philosophical level, *Syair Burung Pungguk* shows how Malay literature becomes a medium for theological contemplation. The pungguk, which continues to gaze at the moon, is a symbol of humans searching for the meaning of life amid limitations. It does not give up on distance but continues to gaze, because behind alienation there is hope. This is in line with the Sufi principle that true love is realised precisely in separation, because longing is proof of God's existence in the human heart (Rumi, 1997). Thus, this reading shows that defamiliarisation in *Syair Burung Pungguk* does not stop at its aesthetic function. It becomes a spiritual means that manifests the Islamic-Malay worldview: beauty as a path to truth. Foreign language is not merely a play on form, but an effort to awaken humans from their negligence. In the context of Islamic World Studies, this poem represents how Islam in Southeast Asia developed its own poetic epistemology, which combines emotion, imagination, and spirituality into a single entity.

Thus, reading *Syair Burung Pungguk* through the theory of defamiliarisation reinforces the view that Malay literature is at the heart of Islamic civilisation in Southeast Asia. It records the inner transformation of Muslim society, while also showing how Islamic teachings are brought to life through words. Ultimately, as Braginsky (1998) writes, classical Malay literature is not only 'beautiful' and "useful", but also 'kamal'—reflecting the spiritual perfection that is the main goal of Islamic culture.

## CONCLUSION

The study of *Syair Burung Pungguk* using the Islamic World Area Studies approach and the theory of defamiliarisation yielded several key findings. First, this poem contains social-religious themes typical of Malay Islam, such as metaphorical love and criticism of social status, which were obtained through mapping the regional context (using Hidayat's 2023 approach). Second, the poem presents a style of language that slows down the reader's perception, in line with Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation. Poetic techniques such as the use of natural metaphors, repetition of verses, and archaic diction make everyday things (bird sounds, moonlight, etc.) feel strange and have multiple meanings.

Theoretically, this article demonstrates that linking regional studies and formalistic criticism can enrich the analysis of literary texts. Methodologically, this research contributes by demonstrating the application of interdisciplinary studies: combining the history of the Islamic region with a detailed literary analysis approach. In the future, this kind of integration can be applied to other Malay manuscripts to reveal the hidden cultural and aesthetic dimensions in Southeast Asian Islamic literature. From the perspective of Islamic World Area Studies, this process demonstrates how Islam in Southeast Asia has always been present through the creative translation of universal values into local cosmologies. *Syair Burung Pungguk* confirms the thesis that Islam in the Malay region is not a phenomenon of imitation, but rather the result of a productive dialectic between sacred texts, mystical experiences, and the natural environment of the archipelago. The stages of the pungguk's spiritual journey—from distant awareness to enlightenment—reflect the epistemological dynamics of Malay-Islamic society, which understands the world through the principle of unity of being (tawhīd). Love and longing are not mere emotions, but paths to knowledge. This is what is referred to as the epistemology of taste (ma'rifat bi'l-żawq), which is a way of knowing that is rooted in aesthetic and emotional experiences. Through simple language and familiar symbolism, this poem successfully transforms religious experience into cultural consciousness. In the context of area studies, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is a concrete example of how a literary work can function as an archive of local Islamic identity. It preserves the collective memory of how Malay society views the relationship between humans, nature, and God. This confirms that research on the Islamic world does not only focus on politics or economics, but also on 'small texts' such as poems, stories, or proverbs that preserve the mindset of a civilisation. In this sense, *Syair Burung Pungguk* is an epistemic document of Islam in the archipelago that lives, moves, and shines through language.

Furthermore, a defamiliarisation reading of this poem reveals that Malay-Islamic literature has a dual function: aesthetic and spiritual. Aesthetically, it slows down the

reader's perception of reality by presenting the sacred in profane form; spiritually, it accelerates awareness of the divine presence behind every natural phenomenon. This poetic strategy is in line with the concept of *ta'ammul*—contemplation of the signs of Allah—which is at the core of the aesthetics of Islam Nusantara. The presence of defamiliarisation as a reading method also demonstrates the relevance of a cross-disciplinary approach in regional studies. Literature is not separated from history, anthropology, and theology; rather, it becomes a meeting ground for all of them. Thus, this analysis shows that *Hidayat*'s approach to the study of the Islamic world can be effectively applied to literary works to reveal the hidden meanings of Islamic culture in poetic form. Finally, *Syair Burung Pungguk* offers a vision of Malay spirituality that is subtle, contemplative, and universal. In it, love becomes knowledge, longing becomes a path, and silence becomes wisdom. This is the face of Southeast Asian Islam: Islam that permeates nature, softens language, and makes aesthetics a bridge to the divine. Thus, this study emphasises the importance of rereading Malay literary texts from the perspective of Islamic world studies so that we understand not only their teachings but also the intellectual and emotional dynamics of the society that gave birth to them.

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