



Moral Values in Short Story “Ad-Dunya Riwayah” by Taufiq Al-Hakim

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Abstract

The short story Ad-Dunya Riwayah by Taufiq al-Hakim depicts the transient nature of worldly life. The characters in this story are portrayed through the dynamics of life filled with inner conflicts, social interactions, and values that serve as life’s guiding principles. Through this narrative, Taufiq al-Hakim embeds moral messages related to human relationships with oneself and with others. Therefore, this study aims to describe the moral values contained in the short story Ad-Dunya Riwayah by Taufiq al-Hakim. These moral values are analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic theory, which views a text as a system of signs consisting of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method through several stages: reading the text, identifying data in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that contain moral values, and then classifying them according to semiotic theory. The findings show that the short story Ad-Dunya Riwayah contains five positive moral values self-confidence, responsibility, keeping promises, affection, and politeness and two negative moral values despair and bullying. Thus, the short story Ad-Dunya Riwayah by Taufiq al-Hakim conveys numerous moral lessons that serve as valuable guidance for everyday life.

Keywords: Arabic Short Story, Moral Values, Semiotics, Taufiq Al-Hakim,

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is increasingly confronted with a serious and multidimensional moral crisis, as reflected in the erosion of fundamental values such as honesty, responsibility, and social awareness. Empirical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2024) indicate a 15% increase in moral-related offenses in Indonesia, underscoring the growing prevalence of corruption, violence, abuse of power, family disintegration, and the rise of individualism and materialism (Asnanii & Pettalongi, 2025). These phenomena are no longer isolated occurrences but represent structural moral challenges that affect social cohesion and ethical stability.

The dynamics of moral development further reveal a decline in individual moral quality, particularly amid rapid technological advancement and the increasing visibility of deviant behaviors (Maulidyarsih et al., 2022). This condition has attracted growing scholarly attention, as recent studies consistently show that social deviations violating moral norms continue to intensify (Alfien et al., 2025). In this context, moral values emerge as a crucial foundation for social development, enabling individuals to live responsibly and harmoniously within multicultural societies (Musling et al., 2022). Beyond guiding individual behavior, moral values function as a social adhesive that sustains balance, mutual respect, and tolerance within society (Sa'diyah et al., 2023; Sauri et al., 2023).

One of the strategic efforts to cultivate moral awareness in society is through literary works. Literature inherently embodies moral values that serve educational and ethical functions, encouraging readers to reflect on human behavior and internalize ethical principles (Ahmad, 2021; Titin Setiartin & Casim, 2021). As a literary genre, short stories play a significant role in reflecting real-life experiences and social realities, offering readers a medium for moral reflection and ethical contemplation (Maulidyarsih et al., 2022). Through implicit narrative structures and character portrayals, authors convey moral messages that represent social norms and values while simultaneously shaping readers' moral sensitivity (Retiani & Erni, 2025).

Among literary works rich in moral representation is *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* by Taufiq al-Hakim, a short story that portrays life metaphorically as a theatrical stage. The narrative follows a protagonist who undergoes multiple reincarnations, experiencing different social roles that expose him to success, failure, love, betrayal, and existential despair. Through these life transitions, the story critiques human attachment to worldly pleasures and material fulfillment while highlighting the transience of worldly life and the neglect of spiritual meaning. Consequently, *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* offers a fertile ground for examining moral values that remain relevant to contemporary ethical challenges.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on analyzing the moral values embedded in *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*. The selection of this short story is grounded in the assumption that one of literature's essential roles is to elevate human dignity by promoting ethical reflection and moral awareness. By examining moral values through a semiotic lens, this study seeks to reveal how ethical meanings are constructed and communicated through narrative signs, thereby contributing to broader discussions on literature as a medium of moral education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies on *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*

Several studies have examined Taufiq al-Hakim's *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* from diverse theoretical perspectives. Femani (2005) analyzed the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the short story using a structural genetic approach, focusing on the relationship between textual structure and social context. Mubarok (2023) explored representations of human life events through a stylistic analysis, emphasizing grammatical and linguistic features. Meanwhile, Noriska (2025) investigated the protagonist's personality using a literary psychology framework, identifying psychological traits based on Carl Gustav Jung's typology.

Although these studies contribute valuable insights into the literary, stylistic, and psychological dimensions of *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*, none specifically address the moral value dimension through a semiotic analytical framework. This gap indicates the need for a study that integrates moral value theory with semiotic analysis to uncover how ethical meanings are systematically encoded within the narrative structure.

2.2 Semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems that shape meaning in human communication (Eka Pratiwi et al., 2021). Within semiotic theory, Ferdinand de Saussure conceptualizes language as a structured system of signs composed of the *signifier* (form) and the *signified* (concept), whose relationship is arbitrary and socially constructed (Saussure, 2022). In literary texts, signs function as vehicles of meaning that are inherently polysemous, allowing for multiple interpretations depending on cultural and contextual understanding (Amalia et al., 2022).

The relevance of Saussurean semiotics in literary analysis lies in its capacity to reveal how meaning is generated through linguistic structures. By examining the relationship between signifier and signified, researchers can uncover implicit moral meanings embedded in narrative discourse, character actions, and symbolic representations (Koswara & Hermawan, 2021).

2.3 Moral Values in Literary Studies

Moral values constitute a central element in literary creation, as literature serves as a medium for conveying ethical principles and guiding human behavior (Nurgiyantoro, 2018). Moral values in literary works may be classified into positive and negative categories, depending on whether the depicted behaviors align with or deviate from societal ethical norms (Atmaja et al., 2020). Positive moral values include responsibility, honesty, perseverance, and compassion, while negative moral values encompass behaviors such as dishonesty, immorality, and ethical transgression.

Furthermore, Nurgiyantoro (2018) categorizes moral values in literature into three relational domains: the relationship between humans and themselves, the relationship between humans and others, and the relationship between humans and God. A literary work may emphasize one or more of these dimensions depending on its thematic orientation. This framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining moral representations in *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*, particularly in relation to personal struggles, interpersonal conflicts, and ethical decision-making.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is considered appropriate for examining meanings, values, and interpretations embedded in literary texts. Qualitative research aims to understand social and cultural phenomena as they are experienced and interpreted through descriptive and interpretative analysis expressed in words and language within their natural context (Sukaesih et al., 2025; Sugiyono, as cited in Nuryadin & Nur, 2021). Accordingly, this approach emphasizes interpretative reasoning rather than numerical analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of moral meanings conveyed through textual signs (Rahmah & Syarifuddin, 2021).

The research design adopted in this study is descriptive qualitative. This design seeks to describe and interpret the object of study as it naturally appears, without manipulation or experimental intervention (Rifa'i, 2021; Semi, 2021). In literary research, the text itself functions as the primary unit of analysis, while the researcher assumes an interpretative role in constructing meaning based on established theoretical frameworks (Karim & Hartati, 2022). In line with this perspective, the present study focuses on Taufiq al-Hakim's short story *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* as the primary data source, with particular attention given to identifying and analyzing moral values embedded in the narrative through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, especially the relationship between signifier and signified.

Data collection was conducted using the reading and note-taking technique, which is commonly applied in qualitative literary studies to identify meaningful textual elements (Sanjaya et al., 2021). The researcher performed close and repeated readings of the entire short story to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative context. During this process, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that potentially represented moral values were carefully identified, marked, and recorded. The selected textual excerpts were then systematically organized and tabulated to facilitate further semiotic interpretation and moral classification.

Data analysis was carried out through a series of systematic and interrelated stages. Initially, data selection was undertaken to filter relevant and valid textual units based on predefined criteria, namely the presence of moral significance and semiotic relevance. Subsequently, the selected data were classified according to types of moral values, both positive and negative, as well as domains of moral relationships proposed by Nurgiyantoro. The analysis then proceeded with semiotic interpretation, focusing on the examination of signifier–signified relationships to uncover implicit moral meanings embedded in the narrative structure. The analytical findings were presented descriptively in coherent and detailed explanatory paragraphs, followed by the formulation of conclusions derived from the synthesis of the overall results. To ensure the credibility and validity of the analysis, this study applied theoretical triangulation by integrating Saussure's semiotic framework with moral value theory proposed by Nurgiyantoro. The researcher acknowledges her role as the primary interpretative instrument and strives to maintain analytical rigor by grounding all interpretations in explicit textual evidence and well-established theoretical concepts.

4. RESULTS

In this discussion, the researcher presents the findings of the study based on the data that have been collected and analyzed using the relevant theoretical framework. The analysis reveals the moral values identified by Nurgiyantoro that are embedded in Taufiq al-Hakim's short story *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*, examined through Saussure's semiotic approach.

In *Ad-Dunya Riwayah*, the researcher identifies two main categories of moral messages or values reflected through the story's characters: moral values concerning the relationship between humans and themselves, and moral values concerning the relationship between humans and others, each represented through both positive and negative forms.

4.1 Moral Values in the Relationship Between Humans and Themselves

According to Nurgiyantoro(as cited in Retiani & Erni, 2025), moral values concerning the relationship between humans and themselves refer to an individual's attitudes or actions in responding to personal challenges and internal conflicts. These values encompass aspects such as self-existence, self-esteem, self-confidence, and fear.

4.1.1 Manifestations of Positive Moral Values

1) Self-Confidence In Taufiq al-Hakim's short story Ad-Dunya Riwayah, there is a passage that illustrates the moral value of self-confidence, as shown in the following excerpt:

كان حسن المنظر لطيف المعشر يظفر بنظرات كل ممرضة وطالبة، لكنه كان يعتقد أن هناك امرأة واحدة لا بد أن تستحوذ على كل قلبه وفكره وجسمه، ولا بد لها أن تأتي يوماً، إنه أرادها ولا بد له أن ينالها (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 40)

"He was handsome, gentle, and kind, attracting the attention of every nurse and student. However, he believed that there was one woman who must capture his entire heart, mind, and soul, and that she would inevitably come one day. He desired her, and he was determined to have her."

Tabel 1. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
لكنه كان يعتقد أن هناك امرأة واحدة لا بد أن تستحوذ على كل قلبه وفكره وجسمه <i>"But he believed that there was one woman who must capture his entire heart, mind, and body."</i>	The doctor already had an image of the woman who would become his destined partner and receive his love.

The moral message is reflected in the phrase إنه أرادها ولا بد له أن ينالها (he desired her, and he was determined to have her), which clearly illustrates the doctor's attitude of self-confidence. He firmly believes in his own abilities without relying on others. In other words, the sentence emphasizes his conviction that he can attain his ideal partner through confidence and determination, free from hesitation. This conveys the lesson that self-belief can empower an individual to pursue goals or aspirations with certainty, provided that such actions remain positive and do not harm others. In relation to Nurgiyantoro's concept of moral values, self-confidence represents a moral value concerning the relationship between humans and themselves in the form of a positive moral trait.

2) Responsibility The moral value of responsibility can be observed in the following passage:

وجاء اليوم المشئوم فقد نهض على عادته في الصباح المبكر لإجراء عملية جراحية، ولكن زوجته أحسَّت في ذلك اليوم خطراً وتنبأت بكارثة، كما تتنبأ آلة الرصد بكسوف الشمس فتوسلت إليه أن يبقى معها ذلك النهار فأبى التقصير في واجبه إن مرضاه في انتظاره فادعت المر (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 41)

"The fateful day arrived. The doctor woke up early, as usual, to perform surgery, but his wife sensed impending danger and predicted a disaster, just as an instrument predicts an eclipse of the sun. She begged him to stay with her that day, but he refused to neglect his duty—his patients were waiting—so she pretended to be ill."

Tabel 2. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
وجاء اليوم المشئوم “The fateful day arrived”	The day of the doctor’s death

The moral meaning is found in the phrase فأبى التقصير في واجبه إن مرضاه في انتظاره (“He refused to neglect his duty; his patients were waiting”), which reveals the doctor’s strong sense of responsibility. Despite his wife’s persistent pleas and her foreboding sense of danger, he chose to fulfill his professional duty rather than abandon his patients. His decision demonstrates his integrity and accountability—both as a doctor and as a husband who comforts his wife before leaving for work. This attitude reflects wholehearted commitment to one’s responsibilities, whether personal or professional, even in the face of hardship or potential risk. In accordance with Nurgiyantoro’s classification, this moral message represents a positive moral value related to the relationship between humans and themselves.

3) Keeping Promises The moral value of keeping promises is reflected in the following passage:

فقال الملاك كالمخاطب لنفسه وهو يراجع سجله الضخم إني وعدت مع ذلك أن أجمعكما مرة أخرى في دورين يصلحان لذلك، فلتكن (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 44)

“The angel, speaking to himself while reviewing a large record before him, said: ‘Nevertheless, I have promised to reunite you both in two new roles, and so it shall be.’”

Tabel 3. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
في دورين يصلحان لذلك “In two new roles”	The doctor reincarnates as a pilot, and his wife as a fashionable woman.

The moral meaning of this passage lies in the statement إني وعدت مع ذلك أن أجمعكما مرة أخرى في دورين يصلحان لذلك (“I have promised to reunite you both in two new roles, and so it shall be”), which emphasizes the angel’s fulfillment of his promise to the souls of the doctor and his wife, allowing them to meet again in their next lives. This act symbolizes the moral virtue of keeping one’s word, signifying personal integrity and respect toward others. The passage highlights that honoring a promise builds trust and reflects moral strength. According to Nurgiyantoro’s framework, this moral lesson falls under the category of moral values concerning the relationship between humans and themselves, specifically representing a positive moral value.

4.1.2 Manifestations of Negatif Moral Values

1) Despair The following passage illustrates the moral value of despair:

وقالت روح الزوجة أه يا زوجي العزيز لم أستطع البقاء هناك بعدك، لقد كانت ليلة فظيعة تلك التي رأيت نفسي فيها وحيدة بدونك أناديك في الظلام ولم أتمالك نفسي عند الفجر، وأنا محطمة الأعصاب فتناولت كل ما كان بجواري من أقراص الأسبرين طالبة النوم الأبدي والراحة السرمدية، أو اللحاق بك (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 43)

“Oh, my beloved husband,’ said the wife’s soul. ‘I could not remain there after your death. It was a terrible night when I found myself alone without you, calling your name in the darkness. At dawn, I could no longer control myself. Nervous and broken, I swallowed all the aspirin tablets beside me, seeking eternal sleep and everlasting peace — to follow you.’”

Tabel 4. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
النوم الأبدي والراحة السرمدية “ <i>Eternal sleep and everlasting peace</i> ”	The wife’s desire for death

The moral meaning conveyed through the phrase وأنا محطمة الأعصاب فتناولت كل ما كان بجواري من أقراص الأسبرين طالبة النوم الأبدي والراحة السرمدية (“Nervous and broken, I swallowed all the aspirin tablets beside me, seeking eternal sleep and everlasting peace”) reveals the wife’s mental state of deep despair that ultimately leads her to wish for death, a reaction that violates moral and ethical norms. This passage demonstrates how unmanaged despair can drive an individual to harmful and self-destructive actions. In accordance with Nurgiyantoro’s framework of moral values, such behavior represents a moral value concerning the relationship between humans and themselves in the form of a negative moral value.

4.2 Moral Values in the Relationship Between Humans and Others

According to Nurgiyantoro (as cited in Retiani & Erni, 2025) the relationship between humans and others within the social sphere refers to the interactions and activities that occur among individuals in everyday life. Such relationships encompass various forms of social interaction, including familial bonds, friendship, betrayal, mutual assistance, compassion, emotional connection, support, politeness, and acts of bullying.

4.2.1 Manifestations of Positive Moral Values

1) Love and Affection The moral value of love and affection is reflected in the following passage:

ولم يحل ذلك دون تعلق أحدهما بالآخر بل لقد كرها الأطفال حتى لا يسمحا لغيمة أسف أن تخيم على حبهما إنهما هكذا (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 41) ناعمان، أحدهما يكمل الآخر ولا حاجة لهما بثالث

“That did not stop them from being deeply attached to one another. They even disliked having children so that no cloud of regret would overshadow their love. They were so harmonious, complementing each other completely. They had no need for a third.”

Tabel 5. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
ولا حاجة لهما بثالث “ <i>They had no need for a third</i> ”	The couple did not feel the need to have children.

Based on the passage above, the author narrates the life of a husband and wife who live happily together. The phrase إنهما هكذا ناعمان، أحدهما يكمل الآخر ولا حاجة لهما بثالث (“They were so harmonious, complementing each other completely. They had no need for a third”) expresses the couple’s deep and genuine affection, reflecting a love strong enough to sustain happiness without the presence of children. The moral message conveyed is that happiness in marriage is not solely determined by having children but rather by the quality of mutual understanding and the sincerity of love shared between partners. In accordance with Nurgiyantoro’s classification, this represents a positive moral value within the category of human relationships with others.

2) Politeness The moral value of politeness is illustrated in the following passage: هو يأتي من عمله متعبا فيجد المنزل يصخب بأنغام الرومبا والفوكس تروت والهوجي بوجي، فينبهها برفق أما تكفيني (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 45)

“He came home from work exhausted and found the house filled with the sounds of the Rumba, Fox Trot, and Hoagie Boogie. Gently, he reminded his wife, ‘Isn’t the noise of engines all day enough for me?’ She replied with annoyance, ‘Engines? Is that all you ever talk about? You’re not romantic at all!’

Tabel 6. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
أما تكفيني طول النهار ضوضاء المحركات؟ “Isn’t the noise of engines all day enough for me?”	The husband considers the dance music to be noisy and exhausting

The moral meaning is reflected in the phrase فينبهها برفق (“He gently reminded his wife”), which highlights the husband’s politeness in advising his wife. In this context, he perceives that his wife spends too much time listening to loud dance music, which he finds disturbing rather than entertaining. His gentle reminder shows his respect for his wife’s feelings and his choice to communicate his discomfort in a courteous and thoughtful manner. This interaction demonstrates that offering advice or criticism should be done with sensitivity and respect — in other words with politeness. This aligns with Nurgiyantoro’s classification, where politeness is categorized as a positive moral value within the domain of human relationships with others.

4.2.2 Manifestations of Negatif Moral Values

1) Bullying The moral value of bullying is depicted in the following passage:

أقسم إنك سخيف تطلق علي مسدسك لسبب تافه كهذا؟ إما أضيق ذهنك أيها الزوج المغفل! ولكن هل يُنتظر من مثلك أقسم إنك سخيف تطلق علي مسدسك لسبب تافه كهذا؟ (Al-Hakīm, 2023, p. 47)

“I swear, you are ridiculous—shooting me with your pistol for such a trivial reason! How narrow-minded you are, you foolish husband! But what else could be expected from someone like you? You have been a foolish husband your entire life!”

Tabel 7. Signifier and signified in the text above

Signifier	Signified
ما أضيق ذهنك “How narrow-minded you are”	The wife believes her husband acts without thinking carefully

The moral meaning is reflected in the sentence أيها الزوج المغفل! ولكن هل يُنتظر من مثلك تصرف غير هذا؟ (“You foolish husband! But what else could be expected from someone like you? You have been a foolish husband your entire life!”). This passage demonstrates the wife’s impolite behavior in verbally insulting her husband over his reckless actions. Her words constitute verbal bullying, intended to belittle and humiliate him. Such behavior violates social norms and represents moral misconduct through emotional and verbal aggression.

This incident conveys the lesson that criticism should be expressed with respect and constructive intent, rather than through harsh or demeaning language that damages relationships or undermines another’s dignity. In accordance with

Nurgiyantoro's framework, this moral message is classified as a negative moral value within the category of human relationships with others.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that Taufiq al-Hakim's short story *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* contains moral values as defined by Nurgiyantoro, analyzed through Saussure's semiotic theory. The moral values conveyed by Taufiq al-Hakim in *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* can be summarized as follows: First, moral values related to the relationship between humans and themselves include positive values such as self-confidence, responsibility, and keeping promises, while the negative value identified is despair. Second, moral values in the relationship between humans and others include positive values such as love and affection and politeness, whereas the negative moral value found is bullying.

This study is expected to serve as a reference and benchmark for future research to develop more critical and engaging analyses. The short story *Ad-Dunya Riwayah* still offers rich potential as an object of study in subsequent research, particularly when examined through alternative theoretical perspectives such as philosophical approaches or other semiotic frameworks, including Roland Barthes' semiotics.

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