

Simplicity as an Artistic Strategy: An Analysis of Sapardi Djoko Damono's Poem "Aku Ingin" in the Perspective of Russian Formalism

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to prove that the simplicity in the poem "Aku Ingin" by Sapardi Djoko Damono is not just an aesthetic choice, but an artistic strategy that is consciously and systematically designed. The study was conducted using the Russian Formalism approach which places the internal structure of the text as the center of the analysis, regardless of the biographical or social context of the author. With qualitative descriptive methods and close reading techniques, this study identifies the way formal devices work including repetition, defamiliarization, natural metaphors, typography, diction, and stanza symmetry in building poetry literariness. The results of the analysis show that simplicity is built through a number of devices that support each other: the repetition of the phrase "I want to love you simply" as the dominant device that creates parallel rhythms and binds the structure between verses; defamiliarization through the metaphors of "wood to fire" and "cloud to rain" that present love from a new point of view; as well as lowercase typography and the absence of punctuation that reinforce the subtle and contemplative impression. This organized structural simplicity is the dominant element that drives the entire aesthetic system of poetry. This research confirms that Russian Formalism is able to uncover how simplicity works not as a limitation, but as an artistic force that produces a profound aesthetic experience.

Keywords: russian formalism; defamiliarization, literariness; sapardi djoko damono; lyric poetry

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indonesian literary scholarship, the critical study of minimalist poetry remains significantly understudied when approached through formalistic perspectives. While simplicity in literature is often perceived as a formal limitation, Russian Formalism posits that simplicity, when consciously and systematically constructed through organized formal devices, becomes an extraordinarily powerful artistic strategy. Indonesian poet Sapardi Djoko Damono exemplifies this principle. Since the 1970s, Sapardi has introduced a deceptively simple yet artistically rich linguistic style; his poem "Aku Ingin", contained in the collection *Hujan Bulan Juni*, represents the clearest embodiment of this artistic principle (Namang & Oktaviani, 2024).

Consisting of merely two six-line stanzas, this poem generates extraordinarily broad emotional resonance and continues to resonate across generations of readers. The central research question what renders simplicity so aesthetically powerful? prompted this formalistic examination using Russian Formalism, a theoretical school affirming that literary strength resides not in linguistic complexity or length, but in how artistic devices are organized to produce specific aesthetic effects (Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024; Pomorska & Rudy, 1987).

Theoretically, the relevance of Russian Formalism to Indonesian minimalist poetry is very strong. Formalists affirm that literary works should be studied based on the internal structure of the text and the way literary language works (literariness), not the author's background or the social conditions that surround it (Berezhnaya, 2022; Pomorska & Rudy,

1987). The concept of the economy of artistic device discussed by Berezhnaya, (2022) emphasizes that the beauty of literature is found through a strict sorting of formal devices that are really important to the text. This principle is especially relevant for reading the poem “Aku Ingin” which consists of only two six-line stanzas, yet has an extraordinarily broad emotional resonance. Previous studies of Sapardi's poetry have tended to focus on thematic, psychological, or romanticistic aspects, so the formalistic dimension of this work has not been explored systematically.

This research specifically focuses on how the simplicity in the poem “Aku Ingin” works as a structured artistic strategy. The study includes four main formal devices: (1) repetition as the dominant device for forming rhythm and structure; (2) defamiliarization through the metaphor of nature; (3) typography and diction as a form of literariness; and (4) the symmetry of the verse as a lyrical *syuzhet*. The novelty of this research lies in an integrative reading that does not simply identify these elements, but shows how the whole works under a single organizing principle: simplicity as a deliberate artistic strategy. The urgency of this study is also driven by the fact that the poem “Aku Ingin” is one of the most taught works in schools and colleges, but so far it has been read more often thematically or romantically, so that its formalistic dimension is still neglected.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) describe the formal device that builds simplicity in the poem “Aku Ingin” ; (2) analyze how these devices, including repetition, defamiliarization, imagery, symbols, typography, and diction, work systematically as artistic strategies; and (3) prove that simplicity in this poem is the dominant element that organizes its overall aesthetic structure. The results of the research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of Indonesian literature through the Russian Formalism approach, as well as provide practical insight to students, educators, and general readers about how a poem that seems simple actually stores the intelligence of a highly structured form.

Russian Formalism is a school of literary theory that developed in Russia in the early 20th century through two main groups, namely the OPOJAZ in Saint Petersburg and the Moscow Linguistic Circle. This school emerged as a reaction to a literary approach that emphasizes the study of external aspects such as the author's background, social conditions, and psychology. Formalists affirm that literature must be studied based on the internal structure of the text and the way literary language works (Berezhnaya, 2022; Pomorska & Rudy, 1987). Its main characters, Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Boris Tomashevsky, and Boris Eichenbaum, view literary works as autonomous systems built through specific artistic techniques and devices (Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024; Maslov, 2023).

In the view of Russian Formalism, literary works are constructed by various devices such as repetition, metaphors, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, as well as syntactic and typography patterns. Berezhnaya, (2022) emphasized that these devices are not just ornaments, but fundamental elements that shape the structure and aesthetic effects of literary works. Artistic devices work systematically and interconnected to produce distinctive aesthetic experiences (Feigin et al., 2021).

Pomorska & Rudy, (1987) put forward the dominant concept, which is the most prominent element and functions as a regulator of the relationship between elements in a literary text. The dominant element determines the hierarchy of other artistic devices and directs the overall structure of the work so that it works coherently. Dominant identification is

important because it helps researchers understand the aesthetic focus of a text (Ajmal et al., 2025).

Maslov, (2023) distinguishes fablals as a series of chronological events and syuzhet as the way they are arranged in texts. In lyric poetry, syuzhet can be understood as an arrangement of ideas, imagery, and emotional movements that are presented artistically. This distinction emphasizes that the effect of literature is determined not only by what is presented, but also by how it is presented (Baldick, 2015).

The concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) was introduced by Viktor Shklovsky as a key principle in understanding the aesthetic function of literature. According to Bayraktar & Godioli, (2024), literature is tasked with "alienating" something familiar so that readers can re-experience reality more consciously and deeply. Literary language is not intended to facilitate understanding, but rather to slow down the process of perception so that the reader truly experiences an aesthetic experience. The value of literature lies in the way it is presented, not solely in the content or message conveyed (Selden et al., 2013).

METHOD

The data collection technique is carried out through intensive and repeated reading (close reading) which is carried out in stages: the first reading to get an overview of the structure, the second reading to identify formal elements, and the third reading to analyze the function of each element. The main instrument is the researcher himself, equipped with formalistic analysis guidelines compiled based on the concepts of Russian Formalism including defamiliarization, device, literariness, dominant, and lyrical syuzhet.

The data analysis strategy is carried out through five stages: (1) identification of formal devices in poetry; (2) classification into groups such as repetition, metaphors, typography, rhythm, and imagery; (3) simultaneous analysis of the relationship between devices; (4) the determination of the dominant element based on the ideas of Pomorska & Rudy, (1987); and (5) a final interpretation of how poetry works as a whole. The validity of the analysis is maintained through theoretical triangulation by comparing findings against the concepts of Shklovsky, Jakobson, Eichenbaum, and Tomashevsky, as well as through peer discussion in an academic context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Lyrics to the poem "Aku Ingin"

The analysis that follows employs an integrated approach that does not treat formal devices as isolated features but demonstrates their systematic coordination under the dominant organizing principle of structural simplicity. This approach distinguishes this study from purely descriptive analyses that enumerate formal features without explaining their synergistic relationships. Before elaborating on the formalistic analysis, the following is presented the complete text of the poem that is the object of study:

Aku Ingin

Karya: Sapardi Djoko Damono

*aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana
dengan kata yang tak sempat diucapkan
kayu kepada api yang menjadikannya abu*

*aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana
dengan isyarat yang tak sempat disampaikan
awan kepada hujan yang menjadikannya tiada*
(Damono, 2017)

Formal Structure and Repetition as the Dominant Device

The poem "Aku Ingin" shows a simple but highly controlled formal structure, consisting of two symmetrical stanzas that each contain three lines. This symmetry forms a visual and rhythmic balance that is an important feature in the analysis of Russian Formalism, since structure is understood as an integral part of the aesthetic effect of the text (Berezhnaya, 2022). The most prominent element of this poem is the repetition, which is the repetition of the phrase "I want to love you simply" that opens each stanza:

*aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana — [baris pembuka bait I]
aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana — [baris pembuka bait II]*
(Damono, 2017)

In the perspective of Russian Formalism, repetition is not just the repetition of meaning, but an artistic technique that highlights aspects of sound, rhythm, and structural patterns of language so as to increase the level of literariness of literary works (Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024). The repetition of the phrase creates a strong parallel pattern, slows down the reading process, and directs the reader's attention to the minimalistically presented form of expression of love. Pomorska & Rudy, (1987) emphasized that repetition can function as an organizing principle, which is an element that regulates the relationship between parts so that the structure of the poem works in harmony. Repetition also acts as a dominant element that controls the relationship between diction, imagery, and stanza structure. These dominant elements influence the way readers understand the meaning of love not as an outpouring of emotions, but as a controlled and reflective inner experience (Ajmal et al., 2025).

Defamiliarization through Natural Symbols and Imagery

According to Bayraktar & Godioli, (2024), the main function of literature is to make ordinary things seem new through the technique of defamiliarization (ostranenie), which is to complicate perception so that readers experience reality more consciously and reflectively. This principle is evident in the poem "Aku Ingin" through the use of symbols and images of nature as a medium of expression of love. Sapardi does not use the conventional expression of love, but instead uses a typical metaphor of nature:

*dengan kata yang tak sempat diucapkan
kayu kepada api yang menjadikannya abu*

*dengan isyarat yang tak sempat disampaikan
awan kepada hujan yang menjadikannya tiada
(Damono, 2017)*

The metaphor of “kayu kepada api” represents a love that is willing to give itself completely until it vanishes into ashes. Wood does not demand a reply from fire; It is present to burn and disappear. This depiction creates a distance from a sentimental understanding of love, so that the reader is forced to see love as a silent and selfless form of sacrifice (Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024; Selden et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the metaphor of "clouds to rain" presents an image of sincerity and mortality: the clouds do not retain their shape, but rather willingly change and disappear in order to give life. This imagery slows down the process of meaning because love is not presented as an explicit emotion, but rather as a calm and inevitable natural process. Within the framework of Russian Formalism, this technique shifts the reader's attention from direct meaning to the way poetic language is presented itself (Berezhnaya, 2022). Thus, the two metaphors of nature function effectively as a defamiliarization device that dilutes perceptions that have been frozen by clichéd expressions (Ajmal et al., 2025; Pomorska & Rudy, 1987).

Typography and Diction as Literariness Formation

In the perspective of Russian Formalism, typography and diction are part of the formal apparatus that directly contribute to the formation of the literariness of a literary text (Berezhnaya, 2022; Feigin et al., 2021). The poem “Aku Ingin” consistently uses lowercase letters throughout the text and omits punctuation. This can be observed in each line of the poem:

*aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana
dengan kata yang tak sempat diucapkan
kayu kepada api yang menjadikannya abu
(Damono, 2017)*

The use of lowercase letters creates the impression of humility, intimacy, and does not accentuate the lyrical ego. Within the framework of Formalism, this choice serves as a device that lowers visual and emotional tension, so that the reader is directed to a gentle and reflective reading experience (Ajmal et al., 2025). The absence of firm punctuation causes the rhythm of the poem to flow without a hard pause, creating a gentle and contemplative impression. Pomorska & Rudy, (1987) emphasized that the phonic and rhythmic aspects are part of the poetic function of language that directs the reader's attention to the message itself, not to external references.

Diction choices such as "didn't have time to say" and "didn't have time to deliver" reinforce the nuances of resignation, while creating a consistent parallelism effect. The dominance of the vowel sounds /a/ and /u/ in the lines of the poem creates a soft and open impression, so that the rhythm sounds smooth and soothing. In Pomorska & Rudy, (1987) view, the dominance of a particular sound is part of the phonic organization that contributes to the poetic function of language. Thus, the typography and diction in the poem "Aku Ingin" shape the literariness of the text as a whole, presenting an aesthetic experience that is not spectacular but profound (Ajmal et al., 2025).

Temple Symmetry as a Lyrical Shuzhet Structure

In the study of Russian Formalism, syuzhet in lyric poetry is understood as an arrangement of ideas, imagery, and emotional movements that are presented artistically. Maslov, (2023) emphasizes that syuzhet is not always concerned with the flow of events, but rather with the way poetic matter is organized to produce a certain aesthetic effect (Baldick, 2015). The poem "Aku Ingin" features a lyrical syuzhet built through two parallel stanzas with almost identical patterns: the intention of love → the explanation of the attitude of love → the metaphor of nature. This pattern can be visualized as follows:

*Bait I: aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana / dengan kata yang tak sempat
diucapkan / kayu kepada api yang menjadikannya abu*

*Bait II: aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana / dengan isyarat yang tak sempat
disampaikan / awan kepada hujan yang menjadikannya tiada*

(Damono, 2017)

Although the pattern of syuzhet in both stanzas appears similar, they are not meaningfully identical. The first verse emphasizes transformation through the metaphor "wood to ashes" which describes love as the process of giving oneself to change shape. The second verse emphasizes mortality through the metaphor of "clouds become rain" that leads to nothingness. This subtle shift in meaning from the act of giving to this act of letting go creates a subtle emotional journey without conflict or explicit climax (Ajmal et al., 2025; Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024). In the framework of Pomorska & Rudy, (1987), this kind of structure strengthens the poetic function because the reader's attention is directed to the relationship between parts of the text and the changes in meaning that arise from its formal arrangement. Overall, the lyrical syuzhet of this poem moves from giving to release, from presence to nothingness, which is presented in a calm and controlled manner. Its aesthetic strength lies in the careful organization of ideas and imagery (Berezhnaya, 2022; Maslov, 2023).

Dominant Element: Structural Moderation as an Organizing Principle

Based on a thorough analysis of the four aspects above, it can be concluded that the dominant element in the poem "Aku Ingin" is structural simplicity. This simplicity is not a coincidence, but is systematically built through line repetition, minimalist diction, calm nature symbols, and unobtrusive typography. In the framework of Russian Formalism, the dominant element is the element that regulates the relationship between the elements of the text so that

the entire structure works coherently and harmoniously (Ajmal et al., 2025; Pomorska & Rudy, 1987). This can be observed in the way each component supports each other:

- a. Repetition of key phrases maintains a gentle and steady rhythm, so that the reading experience takes place without sharp emotional tension.
- b. Simple and straightforward diction, without complex metaphors or layered symbols, allows meaning to flow naturally.
- c. Natural imagery (wood, fire, clouds, rain) is presented consistently without excessive elaboration, reinforcing emotional touch as the reader is directed to feel meaning through intimate but poetically presented natural experiences.
- d. Lowercase typography and minimal punctuation do not draw attention to itself, but rather serve as a backdrop that allows diction and imagery to work effectively.

In Pomorska & Rudy, (1987) view, when one element becomes dominant, the other elements will adjust and work to support that aesthetic focus. This principle is in line with the Formalist view that aesthetic effect lies in the way of presentation, not in the complexity of the theme (Bayraktar & Godioli, 2024). Thus, it is this dominant element of simplicity that explains why the poem "Aku Ingin" still has a high aesthetic power despite being very short textually. As Jakobson emphasized, dominance does not lie in the number of elements, but in its ability to organize all poetic devices into one consistent aesthetic principle (Pomorska & Rudy, 1987).

Study of the Poem "Aku Ingin" in the Context of Indonesian Literature Research

The poem "Aku Ingin" has become a very productive object of study in contemporary Indonesian literary research. Various researchers with various approaches have studied this poem, ranging from structuralism, stylistics, semiotics, to hermeneutics. This fact confirms the position of the poem as a canonical text that continues to be relevant to be studied from various theoretical perspectives. Namang and Oktaviani (2024) in an analysis of the intrinsic elements of this poem found that the meaning of love contained in the poem "Aku Ingin" goes beyond ordinary romantic expressions; it becomes a transcendent and selfless representation of love through the layers of meaning hidden behind the simplicity of its diction. This finding is in line with the formalistic analysis in this study, that simplicity is not a reduction in meaning, but rather a strengthening of meaning through a form economy.

Heryanti, S. P., & Agustiani, (2024) conducted a structural review of the poem "Aku Ingin" using a structuralism approach and found that the physical structure of the poem, including diction, imagery, typography, concrete words, rhyme, and majas, works in an integrated manner to build intact meaning. The study reinforces the findings of this study about the symmetry of the verse and the aesthetic effect it produces. Meanwhile, Mustika et al., (2021) analyzed Sapardi's poems using a semiotic approach and discovered how linguistic signs in poetry construct a layered system of meaning, in which each word functions not only as a linguistic unit but also as an interrelated aesthetic unit, emphasizing that the choice of natural symbols as a vehicle of meaning is a very effective poetic strategy in creating emotional resonance across readers.

Asriana and Sukenti (2024) in a stylistic study of another of Sapardi's literary works highlight how the author's language style, including metaphors, similes, and personifications, creates aesthetic beauty while significantly deepening the meaning. The study also emphasizes

the pedagogical implications of stylistic analysis, where language style-based reading can be an effective approach in literary learning in schools and colleges.

Linati and Wulandari (2022) broaden the reading of Sapardi's works more broadly by analyzing the romantic and emotional expressions scattered across Sapardi's love poems, including natural motifs used as representations of the spirituality of love. Their findings are relevant to enriching formalistic readings, as they show that the metaphor of nature in Sapardi's work is not just an aesthetic ornament, but rather a choice that contains structured philosophical and spiritual depth. Considering the overall map of this study, it can be affirmed that the Russian Formalism approach applied in this study fills a gap that has not been touched by much: a reading that places simplicity not as a theme or effect, but as a formally organized artistic strategy.

The Relevance of Stylistic Studies and Formal Approaches in Indonesian Literature Research

In the context of broader Indonesian literary research, formal approaches to poetry texts continue to evolve and receive increasingly significant attention. The study of stylistics as one of the approaches closest to Russian Formalism has been widely applied in the study of contemporary Indonesian poetry. Eti Hasanah, (2023) in a stylistic study of Sapardi's poetry emphasizes that the study of stylistics in Indonesian poetry has high relevance because language style is an element that forms meaning that is inseparable from the structure of the poem itself. This view is in line with the basic principle of Russian Formalism which states that the way of presentation is inseparable from what is presented. Sinaga, (2022) conducted a stylistic study of the collection of Paper Boat poems by Sapardi Djoko Damono and found that the use of language styles, especially metaphors and personifications, has consistently been an instrument of meaning formation in Sapardi's works. These findings reinforce the conclusion of this study that Sapardi's artistic strategy does not apply only to one poem, but is a pattern that is orchestrated throughout his poetic tradition.

Research on the investigation of the structure of repetition conducted by a number of Indonesian researchers shows how important repetition is as a formal device in Indonesian poetry. The investigation of structures in the form of anaphora and parallelism, which are forms of repetition identified in stylistic studies, has been shown to play a major role in shaping the rhythm, affirmation of meaning, and aesthetic integrity of a poem (Onoma, 2024). These findings directly reinforce the analysis of repetition as the dominant device in the poem "Aku Ingin" : the repetition of anaphorae in the opening phrase of the verse not only creates rhythm, but also serves as a reinforcement of meaning and a keeper of the overall coherence of the lyrical structure. In a more applicable perspective, Asriana & Sukenti, (2024) emphasized that comprehensive language style analysis can be an effective means of increasing understanding and appreciation of poetry, especially in the context of education. This has important implications for this study: the formalistic analysis of the poem "Aku Ingin" is not only theoretical but also has great pedagogical potential to be implemented in literary learning in schools and colleges in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the study of the representation of romanticism in the poem "Aku Ingin" with a stylistic approach conducted by several Indonesian researchers shows another dimension that is complementary to formalistic analysis. The stylistic approach identifies linguistic

elements such as diction, majas, and imagery as forming representations of romanticism in poetry, while Russian Formalism places the same elements as formal devices that build literariness (Pendas, 2025). The convergence of findings between these two approaches confirms that the artistic power of the poem “Aku Ingin” indeed comes from the way the formal devices are organized, not solely from the theme or content it conveys. Thus, this research makes a distinctive and non-redundant contribution to the map of the study of "Aku Ingin" poetry in Indonesia: it integrates the findings of various existing approaches by offering a more comprehensive explanatory framework through the perspective of Russian Formalism, namely that simplicity is an aesthetic principle that organizes the entire formal system of poetry coherently and deliberately.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, this study shows that Russian Formalism remains relevant and productive to be applied in the study of contemporary Indonesian poetry. The analytical framework offered by Russian Formalism, with key concepts such as literariness, defamiliarization, dominant, fabula-syuzhet, and device, proved to be able to systematically unravel how a poem builds its aesthetic effect from within the text itself. This is important because the study of Indonesian poetry is often still dominated by approaches that consider extratextual factors, so that the formal dimension of the text receives less proportionate attention (Ajmal et al., 2025). The purely Russian Formalism approach oriented to the internal structure of the text offers a different perspective and enriches the methodological treasure of Indonesian literary studies.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results of this research have significant implications for the teaching of poetry in schools and colleges. So far, the poem “Aku Ingin” is more often taught with an emphasis on the themes of love and romanticism, so that the artistic-formal dimension that is the foundation of the power of this poem is less revealed to students. By teaching poetry through formalistic readings, educators can guide learners to not only understand what the poem conveys, but also how the poem conveys it and why the way it is delivered creates such a powerful aesthetic experience. Linati et al., (2022) in a comparative analysis of Sapardi's poetry emphasize the importance of exploring emotional touch through the beauty of words as an effective and fun learning approach. This is in line with the principle of defamiliarization in Russian Formalism: when the reader is invited to see things that are already known in a new way, the resulting aesthetic experience becomes much more profound and meaningful. The integration of the Russian Formalism perspective in poetry learning in Indonesia thus not only enriches theoretical understanding but also has the potential to improve the quality of students' poetic appreciation and creativity.

This research also contributes to the development of a replicable analysis model. The analysis steps applied, ranging from the identification of formal devices, classification, relational analysis between components, determination of dominant elements, to comprehensive interpretation, can be used as an adaptable framework to study other minimalist Indonesian poems. The works of poets such as Chairil Anwar, W.S. Rendra, Goenawan Mohamad, and contemporary Indonesian poets who also rely on the simplicity of form as an artistic force can be studied using a similar framework. Thus, this research not only contributes to the understanding of one particular work, but also paves the way for the development of a

more systematic formal study of the Indonesian poetry tradition more broadly (Ajmal et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This research proves its central thesis: the simplicity in Sapardi Djoko Damono's poem "Aku Ingin" is a consciously designed and structured artistic strategy, not a limitation. The dominant element structural simplicity systematically coordinates all formal devices: the repetition of the phrase "aku ingin mencintaimu dengan sederhana" serves as a primary organizing device, creating a parallel rhythm and guiding the reader toward a controlled sense of love; defamiliarization through natural metaphors "kayu kepada api" dan "awan kepada hujan" forces the reader to re-experience the concept of love beyond sentimentality; the lowercase typography and low-key diction create an intimate literariness; and the symmetry of the stanzas constructs a lyrical syuzhet that moves from giving to letting go.

Theoretically, this research enriches the study of Indonesian literature by establishing Russian Formalism as a productive framework for analyzing minimalist works. Pedagogically, the formalistic approach offers a systematic method that guides students beyond thematic reading to appreciate how poetic form generates meaning and emotional resonance. Thus, "Aku Ingin" proves that literary beauty arises not from complexity, but from the poet's ability to organize simple forms into a profound and sustained aesthetic experience.

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