

An Analysis of Communication and Social Criticism in Emha Ainun Nadjib's Poem "God Is Already Very Popular"

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ABSTRACT

Poetry is not only an aesthetic medium, but also a means of communication capable of delivering social critique through symbolic language. This study aims to analyze the linguistic style in Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem "God Is Already Very Popular" and how its stylistic elements construct messages of social and religious criticism. The dynamics of modern religiosity filled with symbolism, fanaticism, and the commodification of faith serve as an essential context reflected in Cak Nun's work. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a stylistic analysis approach. The analysis was conducted through close reading of the poem, classification of stylistic devices, and interpretation of meaning based on the theoretical framework of social criticism and literary communication. The analysis consists of three stages: (1) identifying figures of speech and poetic structures, (2) categorizing linguistic styles related to communicative messages, and (3) interpreting the relationship between stylistic elements and the conveyed social criticism. The findings reveal that irony is used to highlight shallow religious practices, while metaphor and symbolism implicitly yet sharply portray social conditions. Simile is applied to make abstract concepts more communicative and concrete. Overall, the study demonstrates that Cak Nun's poem represents a form of indirect social critique, as its messages are delivered implicitly through figurative language. Thus, this research emphasizes that poetic language functions as an effective communication instrument in conveying social criticism while encouraging readers' spiritual reflection.

Keywords: Poetry, Communication, Social Criticism

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant forms of literary work within the corpus of literature is poetry. Poetry is not created merely as a medium of entertainment or a product of imagination, but as a means of delivering messages, ideas, and both intellectual and emotional reflections from the poet to the readers or the wider society. As an aesthetic product rich in meaning, poetry often represents life realities and social phenomena related to humanity, religiosity, morality, and socio-cultural issues that emerge within society. The presence of poetry originates from a contemplative process in which the poet reflects on

experiences, thoughts, and inner struggles, which are then transformed into dense, symbolic, and imaginative language. Thus, poetry does not only function as a medium of personal expression but also as a communicative platform capable of capturing attention, raising awareness, and inviting readers to reflect on various issues that persist over time and remain relevant to the dynamics of human life (Yadafle et al., 2020).

A poet's success in composing poetry cannot be separated from the diction they choose, as it enables the poem to become more vivid and impactful. The selection of diction in poetry requires careful consideration of appropriate linguistic choices that enhance the beauty of the poem and allow it to depict something in a way that evokes certain reactions and stimulates thought in the reader. Appropriate language use not only influences the meaning conveyed but also contributes to the aesthetic value of the poem. Every choice of diction used by the poet is the result of a contemplative process, ensuring that each word carries its own meaning and artistic value (Hasanah et al., 2019).

One of the poets who has contributed extensively to Indonesian poetry is Emha Ainun Nadjib, widely known as Cak Nun. He is not only a skilled poet; the man born in Jombang on May 27, 1953, has also been attributed with numerous roles, including cultural figure, intellectual, and even religious scholar. Although he frequently rejects these titles, various sources nevertheless describe him as an intellectual whose works and actions consistently champion marginalized communities. In addition to his prolific writing activity, he is also actively involved in various religious engagements. His da'wah-oriented performances are often presented in collaboration with the musical ensemble *Kiai Kajeng* within the Maiyah gatherings, which have garnered a large following in many cities across Indonesia (Rachman, 2018).

Previous studies have demonstrated that poetry is not only regarded as an aesthetic work, but also as a medium of communication that conveys social, moral, and ideological messages. Several studies on social criticism in poetry have emphasized that poets utilize symbols, metaphors, and rhetorical messages to convey social concerns indirectly. The first is a study by Anggraini and Falah, (2024) titled "Social Criticism in WS Rendra's Poem 'Aku Tulis Pamplet Ini' and Wiji Thukul's Poem 'Peringatan' (A Comparative Literature Approach)". The findings indicate that both poets employ poetry as a communicative instrument of protest to criticize injustice, political repression, and social inequality through simple yet persuasive and agitational diction. The study also reveals that poetry not only reflects social conditions but

also functions as a medium of resistance communication capable of fostering collective awareness within society.

The second is a study by Nurhayati and Nafisah, (2022) titled “Social Criticism in the Poetry Anthology ‘Negeri Daging’ by Mustofa Bisri”, which found that Bisri’s poems represent moral, political, and religious criticism, particularly toward the abuse of power, the degradation of human values, and religious issues that are symbolic and pragmatic in nature. The study affirms that social criticism in poetry functions as a reflective communication tool that not only describes reality but also encourages readers to engage in moral contemplation through strong figurative, satirical, and symbolic language.

The third is a study by Haslinda, (2023) titled “A Stylistic Analysis of the Poetry Collection ‘Nyanyian Akar Rumput’ by Wiji Thukul (Semiotic Study)”. The results show that Thukul’s stylistic choices tend to be direct, repetitive, and confrontational toward social issues he faced, particularly oppression, poverty, and political injustice. The study suggests that his use of simple and accessible diction is a deliberate communication strategy to ensure that messages of social protest are understood by a broad audience, not only academics or literary enthusiasts. Furthermore, the research highlights that the symbols and signs in his poetry carry strong ideological messages as a form of linguistic resistance, making poetry a collective communication tool for developing critical public awareness.

Based on these previous studies, it can be understood that research on poetry as a medium of social criticism has been widely conducted, particularly those focusing on elements of resistance, moral messages, and representations of social injustice conveyed through stylistic and symbolic language. However, these studies have not specifically examined poetry as a form of cultural communication practice that is not only understood as an aesthetic expression but also as a discourse operating within contemporary socio-religious spaces. In addition, no research has been found that analyzes Emha Ainun Nadjib’s poem “God Is Already Very Popular” through a stylistic lens as a communicative instrument that criticizes modern religiosity, the commodification of God, and the moral paradoxes that emerge within religious societies. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by employing Gorys Keraf’s stylistic approach combined with a communication perspective to reveal how social-religious critique is constructed, delivered, and interpreted in the poem as a form of literary communication that functions to foster awareness and encourage social reflection among its readers.

In analyzing poetry as a literary work rich in meaning, readers cannot conduct interpretation freely without theoretical grounding, as unstructured interpretation may obscure the message the poet intends to communicate. One relevant approach for understanding the meaning and messages within poetry is stylistic analysis, considering that poetry is an aesthetic form of communication that utilizes linguistic style to enhance the effects of meaning and message. Style is closely related to choices of diction, sentence structure, the use of figurative language, and the implicit discursive nuances that serve as the poet's communicative strategy in conveying specific ideas (Keraf, 2009). Nevertheless, this study positions Keraf's stylistics not merely as a linguistic tool, but as a communicative mechanism that bridges poetic form and social critique. This approach aligns with Stuart Hall's perspective, which views poetry as an open cultural text whose meaning is actively negotiated by readers. Within this framework, poetic language is understood as a form of symbolic communication that mediates social criticism and reflective engagement (Cabello, 2008).

Therefore, the study of style encompasses not only lexical and grammatical aspects but also contextual and rhetorical dimensions that contribute to shaping the meaning, function, and communicative purpose of the poem. Based on this framework, the present study focuses on communication analysis using a stylistic approach in Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem "God Is Already Very Popular" to reveal the forms of social criticism constructed through deliberate aesthetic and persuasive language choices.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a stylistic analysis design based on a communication perspective, aiming to reveal the meaning, communicative functions, and social criticism in Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem "God Is Already Very Popular." This approach refers to the view that language in literary works functions as a communicative tool that carries social, ideological, and cultural messages (Keraf, 2009). The study integrates textual analysis, close reading, and literature review to examine various stylistic features present in the poem.

Operationally, the concept of communication in this study is analyzed through three main dimensions: communicative functions, communicative messages, and meaning effects. Communicative functions are identified by examining how the poet employs diction choices, figures of speech, and rhetorical structures to perform expressive, critical, and reflective

functions. Communicative messages are analyzed through symbolic and contextual interpretations of themes, metaphors, and irony present in the poetic texts, particularly those related to human relations, divinity, and social reality. Meanwhile, meaning effects are understood as the potential cognitive and reflective responses elicited by the text in readers, which are traced through the intensity of critique, linguistic deviations, and the rhetorical strategies employed by the poet (Asiltürk, 2025).

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical design aimed at identifying, classifying, and analyzing stylistic features at various linguistic levels within the poem (Nurjanah et al., 2024). This approach utilizes relevant literature and examples of stylistic usage found in the poem to reveal the structure of meaning and communicative messages constructed by the poet (Suryaningsih, 2021). Through this approach, the analysis does not only focus on the aesthetic aspects of language but also on the dimensions of social communication and ideological criticism represented in the poem, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the function of poetic language as a medium for conveying social messages and critical reflections on societal realities.

The analysis in this study is based on three main components:

1. Textual Analysis

Conducting a systematic investigation of the linguistic elements in the poem, including diction, stylistic devices, language deviations, syntactic structures, and rhetorical features.

2. Close Reading

Performing a detailed, line-by-line examination of the poem to uncover layers of meaning, structural patterns, and communicative functions that construct the social messages within the work.

3. Theoretical Review

Reviewing academic literature from books, journals, and scholarly writings related to stylistics, discourse analysis, and communication theories in literary studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Communication Analysis in the Poem “God Is Already Very Popular”

According to Wicaksono, (2019), poetry is any form of spoken or written language arranged rhythmically and intended to tell a story or express various emotions, ideas, or

states of being. Poetry is also a form of literary work that has the power to convey messages or ideas effectively and emotionally. As an art and literary form, poetry possesses the ability to influence the emotions, thoughts, and actions of its readers or listeners. Poetry emerges when people seek to express themselves through a distinctive language that is concise, dense, expressive, and poetic. It serves as a medium of self-expression that reflects one's imagination, anxieties, critiques, thoughts, experiences, pleasures, or advice. Poetry is a type of literary work crafted with aesthetic language and imbued with profound meaning (Pitaloka & Sundari, 2020).

Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem "God Is Already Very Popular" illustrates that the communication process within poetry does not occur in a linear or denotative manner, but rather unfolds symbolically and reflectively through the use of linguistic style as a medium of symbolic communication (Beny, 2025). In this poem, Emha Ainun Nadjib known as Cak Nun constructs a communicative pattern that is neither authoritative nor instructive, but instead persuasive and contemplative. The reader is positioned as an interpretive subject invited into a dialogic space to reflect on the relationship between humans and God within the modern sociocultural context, which is marked by complex values and shifting spiritual orientations (Purnomo et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the communication in this poem underscores that religious messages are not conveyed directly through advice, commands, or dogmatic arguments, but rather through the stimulation of the reader's inner awareness by presenting cultural, religious, and social symbols of a reflective nature (Nurgiantoro, 2018). Thus, the poem functions as a medium of awareness communication, aiming to evoke a renewed understanding of religiosity rather than merely delivering moral doctrine (Durbin & Filer, 2021). The communicative effect produced is interpretive and dialogic, enabling the creation of an internal communicative space (intrapersonal communication) as well as a reflective form of public communication that sparks discourse on the meaning of spirituality amid the modern societal reality, which tends to be pragmatic and materialistic.

As evidence of the use of linguistic style that constructs this communicative meaning, the following excerpt illustrates the use of irony as a rhetorical strategy:

God is already very popular

His Name is memorized by heart

So that it is now very rare

To find people who truly remember Him

The excerpt from the stanza illustrates irony because it contains a meaning that contradicts its linguistic expression. Denotatively, the statement that God's name is "memorized by heart" suggests that people possess closeness to and deep understanding of the Divine. However, connotatively and implicitly, Cak Nun is in fact offering a critique: although people claim to know, memorize, and believe in God, their spiritual reality is not reflected in their behavior, contemplation, or everyday religious practices. This irony underscores that knowledge of God remains at the symbolic, cognitive, and verbal levels, rather than manifesting as inner awareness and authentic spiritual engagement. From a communication perspective, irony functions as a persuasive rhetorical strategy that mitigates resistance by avoiding direct moral instruction, thereby allowing readers to internalize meaning rather than being positioned as passive recipients of doctrine (Pfeifer & Pexman, 2024).

Moreover, the irony in this poem serves as an effective channel of communication for conveying messages implicitly. Literally, the phrase "God's name is memorized by heart" seems to indicate closeness and deep understanding, yet the communicative meaning that emerges is the opposite: verbal familiarity does not guarantee spiritual intimacy. Through this irony, the poet prompts readers to reflect on the discrepancy between utterance and inner conviction, while simultaneously delivering a religious message without appearing didactic. Irony also functions as a medium that allows internal critique to be expressed subtly, so that the message conveyed is not a direct reprimand but a contemplative invitation that encourages readers to reconsider the quality of their spiritual relationship.

In Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem "God Is Already Very Popular," the use of simile as a stylistic device appears in the following stanza:

God is already very popular

Like the sun that never ceases to shine

So that only from time to time

Do people realize His presence and His role

The excerpt in the second stanza demonstrates the use of simile through the word "like," which signals a process of comparison. Cak Nun likens God to the sun—always

shining, ever-present, continuously giving light, and never absent. However, because this presence is so constant and deeply embedded in human life, people often fail to recognize His role in a profound way. Thus, the simile subtly emphasizes the critique that God's existence is frequently perceived as something ordinary, no longer contemplated, and acknowledged only occasionally when humans feel the need for Him.

The use of the word “like” signals the employment of simile as a visual-imaginistic communication tool in this poem. God is likened to the sun always present and never ceasing to give light yet precisely because this presence is so constant, people often fail to recognize it deeply. Through this simile, the poet enables readers to comprehend the abstract concept of divinity through a concrete and familiar visual image from everyday life. This strategy communicates the idea of God's presence in a way that is familiar and sensory, allowing the message to appear not as rigid theological discourse but as an intuitive and gentle insight one that is easy to internalize and invites readers to contemplate it personally.

In Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem “God Is Already Very Popular,” the use of personification appears in the following stanza:

Power and grandeur

Money and all forms of smallness

Function as gods

Because they are placed first

The excerpt demonstrates personification through the attribution of “functioning as gods” to abstract concepts such as power, grandeur, money, and various forms of human “smallness.” By assigning divine qualities to these worldly entities, Cak Nun underscores that in modern social reality, material entities are often treated as new “gods” that are worshipped, exalted, and made the central orientation of life. This use of personification simultaneously conveys a critique that society has placed worldly values at the highest position, replacing genuine spiritual devotion with material priorities.

In Emha Ainun Nadjib's poem “God Is Already Very Popular,” depersonification is clearly reflected in the following stanzas:

God is reduced

To rows of wooden fences

Blocking the pathways to the horizon

The sky covered by soot-black clouds

*The concoctions of false gods are turned into lipstick
Applied to the lips
Peddled everywhere
So that worldly goods may sell well*

God is made into spare parts

To manufacture bullets and rifles

His name stamped onto official decrees

Confined within the cages of scapegoats

*People create their little gods
Like robots moved left and right
Buttons pressed, programs must be executed
And when the robot jams, it is no longer trusted and
thrown away*

These excerpts demonstrate depersonification through the process of “objectifying” God and divine values. Cak Nun portrays how modern society reduces God to physical objects (fence wood, lipstick, spare parts), instruments of legitimacy (in official decrees), and even mechanisms that can be operated like robots. This depersonification critiques the social phenomenon in which divine values are treated merely as commodities, political symbols, or pragmatic tools for worldly interests. By turning a transcendent entity into an object, Cak Nun underscores a serious spiritual degradation within society, where God is no longer understood as a living moral and spiritual reality, but rather as an instrumental object that can be manipulated according to human desires.

A paradox is a figure of speech that presents a contradiction between a statement and reality, yet contains a deeper truth that the poet intends to emphasize. Paradox is often used to reveal the fundamental irony in human behavior or in socio-religious realities.

In Emha Ainun Nadjib’s poem “God Is Already Very Popular”, the paradoxical style appears in the following lines:

Other people pray diligently

While belittling and defiling others

God is monopolized

Claimed as their own possession

Among the religious,

And even among those who claim to believe in Him,

God is involved with great clamor

Both longed for and reviled

The excerpt contains a paradox because it presents a contradiction between ritual piety and moral behavior. Outwardly, it depicts people who are diligent in worship, yet at the same time demean others as if they have the right to monopolize God. Such actions contradict the essence of religiosity, which teaches humility and compassion toward fellow human beings.

This paradox is also evident in the following stanza, where God is “involved” both to be longed for and to be reviled. On one hand, humans worship and call upon God in a form of spiritual romanticization; on the other hand, God’s name can be used as a justification for division, hatred, or particular interests. Cak Nun sharply criticizes this pattern of religiosity, in which God is no longer a source of moral values but becomes an object manipulated according to the interests of the believer whether to affirm one’s piety or to attack others.

The paradox highlights a social reality in which religiosity can present a double face: appearing sacred symbolically, yet ethically fragile. By presenting this contradiction, Cak Nun invites readers to see that devotion without moral integrity can lead to a hollow form of religiosity one that lacks genuine spiritual awareness and authenticity.

Climax comes from the Greek word *klimax*, meaning “ladder.” In stylistics, climax is a figure of speech in which expressions are arranged gradually in an increasing order of intensity. Each line or phrase in a climax carries a stronger emphasis than the one before it, creating a rhetorical effect that reinforces the message the poet seeks to convey.

In Emha Ainun Nadjib’s poem “God Is Already Very Popular”, the use of climax appears in the following lines:

God in His truest essence

Called Allah, glorified and exalted

The Supreme Being indescribable by any word

Beyond the grasp of every meaning

Through this climactic structure, Cak Nun communicates a theological message that God cannot be reduced to a single concept, name, or definition. This rhetorical effect invites readers to recognize the limitations of language and human consciousness in comprehending the essence of divinity, creating space for deeper spiritual contemplation.

2. Analysis of Social Critique in the Poem “God Is Already Very Popular”

Social critique serves as a communication tool to convey new ideas in evaluating existing ones as part of the social change process (Khasanah & Solichin, 2023). Its primary function is to act as a form of control over the operation of social systems within society. In practice, social critique is divided into two types: overt critique and covert critique. Overt social critique is delivered directly through research, analysis, or explicit studies of certain social conditions. Conversely, covert social critique is conveyed indirectly through symbolic actions that imply an evaluative stance toward social situations. Poetry belongs to the category of covert social critique because it communicates criticism through symbols, metaphors, and figurative language. In poetry, the object of critique is not confronted directly, but expressed through aesthetic elements such as comparison, figurative expressions, and imaginative imagery. Consequently, its message must be interpreted by the reader, rather than being stated explicitly as in opinion articles or speeches (Indrastuti, 2019).

The poem “God Is Already Very Popular” by Emha Ainun Nadjib presents a sharp social critique of contemporary religious phenomena in modern society. Through metaphor, satire, and paradox, Cak Nun reveals how divine values are often reduced or narrowed in meaning when confronted with materialistic culture and performative forms of religiosity. The critique raised is not directed at religious teachings themselves, but rather at the ways in which people treat and operate religious symbols within the social sphere.

One of the central critiques highlighted in the poem is the tendency of society to display religiosity symbolically without cultivating moral and spiritual depth. Ritual practices that appear only on the surface, the use of religious jargon, and the mastery of memorization are often regarded as measures of piety. This phenomenon reflects a reduction of religiosity into a performative identity, in which people are more concerned

with presenting a religious image than embodying the core values of empathy, honesty, and self-reflection that lie at the heart of religious teachings.

The next critique is directed at the emergence of “new gods” in social life, such as power, money, prestige, and worldly ambition. Through these metaphorical representations, Cak Nun emphasizes that society’s orientation has shifted from morality to materiality. Spiritual values no longer serve as guiding principles but merely as accessories to support social status. Consequently, divinity is positioned instrumentally rather than ethically, producing a shallow form of religiosity that is easily manipulated.

Furthermore, the poem exposes the process of commodifying religion, wherein divine symbols are treated as merchandise or tools of political legitimization. Phrases such as “the concoction of pseudo-gods turned into lipstick” and “God turned into spare parts” illustrate how religion is used for economic gain, political maneuvering, or even as justification for violence. The sanctity of religious symbols is replaced by symbolic exploitation aimed at securing worldly benefits. This phenomenon signifies the diminishing sacredness of religion in the public sphere.

In another section, Cak Nun critiques the practice of monopolizing truth by certain groups who claim God as their exclusive possession. Such claims foster fanaticism, judgment, and social division by marginalizing the religious perspectives and experiences of others. When religion is employed as a tool to assert moral superiority, it loses its fundamental function as a space for cultivating compassion, humility, and humanity. Thus, the poem not only delivers critique but also invites readers to reflect on the essence of divinity one that transcends formal symbols and superficial displays of piety.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Emha Ainun Nadjib’s poem “God Is Already Very Popular” is not merely a literary work that displays aesthetic beauty, but one that intensively embodies strong communicative functions and powerful social criticism. Through a stylistic analysis grounded in communication perspectives, the study finds that various linguistic devices such as irony, simile, personification, and depersonification are strategically employed to convey religious and social messages in an implicit yet incisive manner.

The use of irony highlights the phenomenon of symbolic and superficial religiosity, in which the mention and memorization of God’s name are not accompanied by genuine

spiritual internalization. Simile functions to help readers grasp abstract theological concepts through concrete imagery, while personification and depersonification illustrate how modern society often elevates power, money, and worldly interests as “little gods” that replace authentic spiritual values. Together, these stylistic devices construct a form of social critique that is reflective rather than confrontational, inviting readers to engage in a contemplative process regarding the meaning of religiosity.

Thus, this study affirms that Cak Nun’s poem is not solely an artistic reflection but also an effective medium of cultural communication in delivering critiques of the paradoxes of modern religiosity. Poetic language proves to be a communicative instrument capable of touching inner consciousness, awakening moral sensitivity, and reinforcing the role of literature as a space for social and spiritual reflection. These findings fill a gap in previous studies by demonstrating how stylistics functions communicatively in constructing social criticism within the context of contemporary religious life.

Summarize your key findings and restate the importance of your research in social humanities. Emphasize how your study contributes to the field and suggest potential areas for future exploration.

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