

## Suminto A. Sayuti *Menulis untuk Pulang: Creative process amid a departing literary field*

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### ABSTRACT

This study reveals that Suminto A. Sayuti's rural habitus functions not merely as a biographical backdrop, but as a strategy of differentiation that actively transforms crafted experiences, oral literacy, and *wayang* traditions into symbolic authority within the post-digital literary landscape. An analysis of the poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* (2023), in-depth interviews, and publisher statements indicates that the poet's liminal position—neither fully at the center nor the periphery—is not a sign of marginality, but rather a space of agency that enables a productive resistance to the logic of virality, instant poetry, and algorithmic simulation. Aesthetic strategies emphasizing lengthy processes, rigorous curation, and claims of a “human touch” are validated by non-platform institutions as “counterbalances” amidst the acceleration of digital content production. Theoretically, this study expands the Bourdieusian framework of the sociology of literature by demonstrating that habitus is not structural determinism, but rather a space of reflective negotiation capable of functioning as an epistemological filter against data colonization. Furthermore, these findings affirm that artistic autonomy need not arise from frontal resistance but can be constructed through the inhabitation of an in-between space that is both ethical and meditative. The research findings provide a cultural map for the sustainability of literary practices in the algorithmic era, while also offering an epistemological alternative for interpreting the creative process that is not confined to digital metrics or heroic narratives of resistance.

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## Introduction

Contemporary literary production does not emerge from a vacuum, but rather from the complex interplay between creative agency and the ever-changing structures of the field. From a sociological perspective on literature, the practice of poetry is shaped by the dynamics of habitus, capital, and interrelated social positions (Bourdieu, 1983, 1987; Ghica, 2013; Johnson, 2012). However, in the post-digital era, the Indonesian literary field is undergoing a structural shift: algorithmic logic, the speed of virality, and the commodification of attention are beginning to displace traditional aesthetic autonomy. This tension is exacerbated by the emergence of “digital capital” as a form of autonomous economic capital, where the “*power of disposa*” over data is distributed unequally: platform elites monopolize algorithms, while ordinary users become sources of “behavioral surplus” extraction (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). In this context, a crucial question arises: how can the creative process maintain meaning and integrity when the field structurally drives instant production and data extraction? It is precisely at this point that the study of Suminto A. Sayuti becomes problematic and urgent to explore. As an established poet and academic, he

rejects the binary dichotomy between direct resistance and market commodification. His poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* (2023) documents strategies for survival through the occupation of liminal spaces and a rejection of the logic of digital speed. This phenomenon is compelling because it challenges the assumption that artistic autonomy can only be claimed through confrontation or complete submission to market mechanisms, while simultaneously opening an analytical pathway to understanding how literary agents maintain symbolic authority without being trapped within the logic of platforms.

The application of the Bourdieusian framework in Indonesian literary studies has mapped the dynamics of the local field quite comprehensively, ranging from analyses of institutions and communities—such as the survival of *Majalah Pagagan* (Zamzuri, 2014) and the negotiation strategies of the Yogyakarta literary community (Salam & Anwar, 2015), to the role of Bengkel Sastra in the transfer of cultural capital (Zamzuri, 2016). At the individual level, research has traced the trajectory of Umbu Landu Paranggi's legitimation (Astika, 2013), the transformation of Emha Ainun Nadjib's social capital (Nugraha, 2015), and Iman Budhi Santosa's strategies of distinction (Zamzuri, 2016). Entering the digital era, studies have begun to address non-formal habitus and new media (Nilofar, 2020), including explorations of marginal poetry on social platforms (Saputra & Sudikan, 2025) and the formation of an aesthetic ethics rooted in pesantren habitus (Fatoni & Tjahjono, 2022). Although these studies have enriched our understanding of the accumulation and conversion of capital, the majority still focus on collective strategies or interpret marginality as a transitional phase toward the center of the field. Consequently, the complexity of individual agency—specifically that of individuals who choose to remain in the “interstitial space” without hegemonic aspirations—remains inadequately mapped.

Theoretically, the development of contemporary literary sociology has moved beyond the rigid dichotomy between structure and agency, offering a more dynamic perspective on the autonomy of fields and local experiences. Empirical evidence suggests that the heterogeneity of subfields challenges the simple polarization between commercial and autonomous poles (Franssen, 2015), while habitus is not deterministic but rather a space of agency that can be opened up through reflection and dialogue (Prodanović, 2023; Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). In the digital context, the symbolic capital of national literature is maintained through strategies by publishers and universities that invest in marginal writers (Sapiro, 2015), while platform users develop digital habitus through critical negotiations that affirm individual agency (Dai et al., 2025). Furthermore, readers' personal relationships with texts—based on *use-value* and genuine experience—can challenge the logic of symbolic exchange in the dominant field (Smith, 2024), while also confronting the threat of “data colonization” that reduces creativity to algorithmic commodities (Bender et al., 2021; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). It is also important to note that the mechanisms of literary consecration do not always flow from the center to the periphery; a study of the selection of Dylan Thomas's poetry translations in China demonstrates that legitimacy can be constructed through *inter-peripheral* flows, in which the integrated accumulation of linguistic, economic, and symbolic capital enables peripheral agents to establish alternative authority (Yu & Shen, 2024). However, these dynamics are not uniform: in peripheral contexts such as Norway during the occupation, class and educational structures tend to dictate aesthetic and political preferences in a more deterministic manner (Hjellbrekke et al., 2025). This study explicitly engages with that framework: it confirms the role of informal cultural capital in shaping aesthetic ethics, expands upon it by demonstrating the conversion of such capital into differentiation strategies that resist digital speed, and challenges the dichotomous “periphery versus center” narrative by demonstrating that liminal positions actually function as a stable and productive source of symbolic authority—even within peripheral contexts that are structurally prone to determinism.

In response to these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study aims to: (1) uncover how rural habitus and the accumulation of informal cultural capital shape Suminto A. Sayuti's aesthetic ethics; (2) map his liminal position within the contemporary literary field as a strategy for the reproduction of symbolic capital; and (3) identify how this strategy manifests in creative practices that reject the resistance-commodification dichotomy. Theoretically, this study expands the Bourdieusian framework of literary sociology by asserting that artistic autonomy can emerge not from confrontational resistance, but from inhabiting the reflective and ethical in-between space. Practically, these findings provide a relevant cultural map for understanding the sustainability of literary practices in the algorithmic era, while offering an epistemological alternative for interpreting creative processes that is not fixated on digital metrics or heroic narratives of resistance.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a single-case study design to analyze Suminto A. Sayuti's creative process in the poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* (2023).

This approach was chosen for its ability to describe individual phenomena in depth within their natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while the single-case study design allows for an intensive exploration of the trajectory of a unique cultural agent without sacrificing contextual depth (Hitchcock et al., 2010). The selection of the case was based on three unique aspects of Suminto: a rural habitus formed through the accumulation of informal cultural capital, a liminal position within the contemporary literary field, and aesthetic strategies that explicitly reject market logic and instant poetry.

Primary data was collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview with Suminto A. Sayuti on October 14, 2025, at the Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture, Yogyakarta State University (duration: 42 minutes), as well as a WhatsApp interview with Mawaidi (Founder & Editor, Cantrik Pustaka) on October 15, 2025. The interview guide was developed deductively based on three analytical dimensions: the formation of habitus, positioning within the literary field, and aesthetic strategies in addressing digital phenomena. As supporting data, this study also analyzes nine representative poems from the book, namely: "Ninabobo Lakon," "Ninabobo Kamar," "Rendezvous, 2," "Sura-Madu," "Hanya Gambar yang Bisa Bicara," "Penyair dan Puisi," "Puisi Sehari-hari," "Makrifat Puisi," and "Selemba Catatan Harian yang Hilang." These poems were selected based on strict operational criteria: the explicit presence of multilingualism or cultural lexicon as markers of habitus, the naming of real-life figures or locations reflecting the conversion of social capital, and implicit criticism of "uncurated poetry" prevalent on digital platforms.

The interpretive procedure is carried out through three interrelated analytical stages. The first stage involves an immanent reading to identify diction, narrative structure, ambiguities, and symbolic tensions within the poem. The second stage applies deductive-inductive thematic coding based on Bourdieusian concepts (*habitus, field, and modality*). The third stage is an interpretive synthesis that connects textual findings with interview statements and the post-digital literary context, ensuring that the interpretation does not stop at surface-level descriptions but delves into layers of meaning that reflect the tension between artistic autonomy and external logic. The validity of the findings is ensured through triangulation of sources (poets, publishers, poetry texts), triangulation of methods (interviews and text analysis), and rigorous methodological reflexivity. The research team acknowledges its relational position as institutional colleagues of the informants; this relationship is managed ethically through transcript verification, limiting interpretations to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, and cross-reading among researchers to ensure analytical consistency.

## Results and Discussion

This study explores the complex dynamics between rural habitus, liminal positions, and aesthetic strategies in Suminto A. Sayuti's creative process, as reflected in his poetry collection *Ketika Diri adalah Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan* (2023). Key findings indicate that the habitus—formed through the accumulation of informal cultural capital, structural experiences of poverty, oral literacy, and wayang traditions—not only serves as the foundation of the poet's aesthetic ethics but also functions as a critical filter against the dominance of market logic, social media virality, and the commodification of digital literature. An analysis of in-depth interviews, publisher statements, and nine representative poems reveals three interrelated patterns: (1) the internalization of local habitus as a source of authenticity; (2) the occupation of liminal spaces as a strategy for symbolic authority; and (3) the rejection of algorithms and artificial intelligence as a form of affirmation of artistic autonomy. These three patterns do not stand in isolation but mutually reinforce one another in shaping creative practices that are reflective, meditative, and ethical. A characteristic response of literary agents who endure not through frontal resistance, but through the full-conscious inhabitation of the in-between. This section will discuss these findings thematically, linking them to the Bourdieusian theoretical framework and recent studies on the post-digital literary field.

### Becoming *Profesor Ndesa*: Traces of Habitus and the Accumulation of Cultural Capital

Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu (1986, 1987, 2018), is a system of dispositions internalized through long-term social experience within a specific field, which shapes the way individuals perceive, evaluate, and act in the social world. Cultural capital in its *embodied* form—which cannot be instantly transferred like money but must be acquired through a lengthy process of acculturation—often develops outside formal institutions, including in rural contexts, where knowledge, tastes, and cultural practices are transmitted through daily life, oral traditions, and communal interactions. Rural habitus, though often overlooked in the dominant literary field centered on institutional cultural capital (such as academic degrees), is in fact a source of informal cultural capital that shapes the unique ways in which poets view the world, choose their diction, and express their experiences. This demonstrates that the accumulation of cultural capital is not

the exclusive domain of academic spaces but also emerges from local social structures that are internalized as aesthetic and ethical “sensibilities.”

The process of shaping Suminto’s habitus began with the structurally challenging conditions (marked by hardship and suffering) of his childhood—experiences that fostered his ability to be patient and cultivated a strong work ethic. He was one of nine siblings living in economic hardship, where his father’s salary as an elementary school teacher had to support eleven family members, creating financial pressures that led to extraordinary adaptation. These experiences of living in deprivation, including subsisting on meager meals such as corn rice, and even eating *bulgur*—a “livestock feed”—or Tekad rice (a mixture of cassava, beans, and corn from the Soekarno era), have shaped a deep sense of ethical values and authenticity.

This experience of structural hardship is then transformed into *embodied cultural capital*—knowledge and tastes acquired through a long and painful process, distinct from the capital obtained through academic credentials. This capital is internalized through informal activities in the grandparents’ (simbah) environment, such as drawing water, lighting oil lamps, and gathering grass (ngarit). These tasks demand extraordinary physical and mental discipline. Symbolically, this hard-earned experience is then transformed into a claim of authentic legitimacy: he proudly defines himself as a “wong ndesa” and “Profesor ndesa,” using these labels as a strategy of differentiation against intellectual arrogance.

The most dominant form of informal cultural capital he has internalized is the tradition of oral literacy and the wayang culture, which he poetically refers to as the “spiritual vitamins” that sustain his life. His involvement began with self-taught activities such as accompanying his grandfather (simbah) in playing the gamelan during wayang performances (ndhalang) from a young age, which unconsciously led him to memorize the musical pieces and various storylines. Literacy also accumulated through reading Javanese-language magazines such as *Jayabaya* and *Panebar Semangat*, which featured wayang stories, and the act of “stealing” novels forbidden for children to read, underscoring the acquisition of non-institutional cultural capital.

This deep attachment to the wayang culture is then explicitly manifested in the diction and structure of his poems, making them a tangible expression of his internalized agrarian-oral habitus. For example, in the poem below

#### **NINABOBO LAKON**

*Purbo Asmoro*

Seusai *patalon* aku bersiap dalam geges pentas. Hanya dalang yang tahu. Peran apa dalam lakon malam ini. Tanyaku tak henti. Cuma dalam hati.

Aku pun menunggu blencong menyala. Mencari pasangan buat bercinta. Sepanjang malam. Sepanjang lakon digelar. Dari pathet ke pathet. Dari sulukan ke sulukan. Dari *wulangan* sampai pun *wedharan*.

... (Sayuti, 2023)

Suminto realized that the use of Javanese wayang terms in the poem was an attempt to demonstrate mastery of the cultural landscape. For example, *patylon* (the instrumental opening song signaling the start of a wayang performance), *blencong* (the lamp that creates silhouette images in wayang), *pathet* (musical mode in wayang/gamelan), and *sulukan* (song) (see Puspitasari et al., 2025). However, a close reading of this fragment reveals that these terms do not merely function as cultural markers or nostalgic references. Moreover, there is an intentional symbolic tension: the wayang performance is reimagined as an existential allegory of the uncertainty of fate, where the puppeteer—and implicitly, the poet—awaits the “blencong lighting up” as a metaphor for the search for meaning amidst structural darkness. Local capital here is not passively reproduced but rather converted into a poetic language that speaks on a universal level, consistent with the finding that a non-formal background can actually serve as a stable aesthetic filter when filtered through long-term reflection (Fatoni & Tjahjono, 2022).

It is this rural sensibility that shapes the poet’s response to existential loss, particularly following his wife’s passing, which serves as the culmination of the themes of *Kepulangan dan Keberangkatan*. Suminto explains that his final realization of the nature of life—that *urip* (life) is nothing but *mangkat* (departure) and *mulih* (return)—reached its peak after his wife’s death and his own stroke three years later.

“That realization finally reached its peak when Mami (my wife) passed away. So, it turns out that life is just a cycle of coming and going—nothing but departures and returns. No matter where we go, we’re headed there (pointing upward); that was the ultimate realization when Mami (my wife) passed away.” (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025).

This experience of loss marked the *trajectory* of his life’s journey, transforming personal suffering into a universal spiritual awareness that serves as the driving force behind the themes of his entire poetry

collection. This awareness does not emerge as a deterministic resignation, but rather as the result of long-term reflection on an accumulation of experiences that eventually crystallized into a coherent worldview.

A profound reflection on this loss is embodied in the poem “*Ninabobo Kamar*,” a poetic ritual that seeks to combat absence through memory and intimate language. The poem uses the bedroom—a deeply personal and sacred space—to celebrate the spiritual presence of a figure who is no longer with us.

#### NINABOBO KAMAR

Aku dan kau berdua saja. Di pembaringan. Menghela napas. Melepas beban. Menyatukan rindu dan cinta.

Tidurlah kamar di antara dua tubuh satu jiwa. Biarkan tertutup daun-daun pintu dan jendela. Biarlah angin masuk lewat hati yang terbuka. Membawa lusa yang belum tiba.

Aku dan kau berdua saja. Bertegur sapa dalam diam. Tanpa suara. Sebelah menyeberlah. Masing-masing merenda kenangan. Menimang kamar agar bermimpi. Menyatukan kita kembali. Tidak hanya dalam larik puisi. Sebuah ruang abadi. (Sayuti, 2023)

The use of the phrases “*menyatukan kita kembali*” and “*sebuah ruang abadi*” reflects a poetic effort to transcend physical death, creating an “*ruang abadi*” through language. This is a poetic practice that embodies a habitus rooted in spirituality and traditions celebrating life after death. Interpretatively, this poem does not seek to “heal” grief, but rather to inhabit it meditatively: language becomes a medium to compensate for physical absence, while affirming that affective bonds are not severed by biological boundaries, but rather transformed into an eternal symbolic presence.

This sense of loss is amplified and deepened in the poem “*Selemba Catatan Harian yang Hilang*,” in which the figure of the deceased wife is elevated to a transcendent entity, “*titisan bidadari*.” This poem is not merely a lament, but a reaffirmation of the value and meaning of life through memory and prayer.

...

Engkaulah titisan bidadari. Tanpa sayap. Berhati malaikat tiap saat. Tanpa henti. Kau seduh diri dengan tetesan madu. Lewat canda dan tawa anak cucu. Kau timang dengan senandung ninabobo. Sebelum diri tidur panjang penuh kedamaian. Kau dekap dengan hangat cinta dan senyum para nabi.

Selemba catatan kubaca kembali. Larik-larik puisi abadi. Tercatat dalam hati. Potongan doa dan janji. Dulu kini juga nanti. (Sayuti, 2023)

The poem transforms memories of a beloved figure into “*larik-larik puisi abadi*” etched in the heart. This demonstrates that affective capital (love and memory) is transformed into poetic symbolic capital that overcomes existential fragility. In the context of a literary landscape that often idolizes the final product as a commodity, this transformation instead affirms that the highest value of poetry lies in its ability to archive human experiences that cannot be measured by the market. This strategy confirms the finding that experiences of poverty and marginalization can be converted into an aesthetic discourse that functions as both a space for advocacy and a source of inner authenticity (Saputra & Sudikan, 2025); however, in Suminto’s case, this conversion is more oriented toward spiritual consolation rather than direct social critique.

In addition to personal experience, Suminto’s habitus is also manifested through his strategy of using the names of people he mentions in his poems, a practice that constitutes a deliberate investment in social capital. Names such as Purbo Asmoro (puppeteer) in the poem “*Ninabono Lakon*,” D. Zawawi Imron (Poet) in the poem “*Hanya Gambar yang Bisa Bicara*,” and Mawaidi (Publisher/Former Student) in the poem “*Sura-Madu*” are listed under the poem’s title, not merely as dedications, but as sources of inspiration and social networks.

“Sometimes it’s the name at the bottom—that person becomes my source of inspiration because I met them... that’s the person who sparked my poetry.” (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025).

This quote demonstrates that Suminto’s poetic practice is relational; he converts social capital (relationships with artists and colleagues) into cultural capital (creative inspiration), which is then embodied in his work. The use of these famous figures’ names also serves to solidify the legitimacy of his work across various literary sub-fields (puppeteer circles, poet circles, and circles of young publishers and academics). This naming strategy also reveals his intuitive understanding of social dynamics and symbolic risks that can be leveraged as authority to generate awareness of the events surrounding his work.

Overall, Suminto’s rural habitus serves as a filter that screens out external influences and preserves artistic integrity. For example, although he reads translations of works by foreign poets (such as Robert Frost) and theoretical works like Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, he applies this knowledge through the concept of “the math of misreading.”

“... (regarding translated works and sources of inspiration) perhaps some of the expressions—I might have been referring to those. But well, since I’m Javanese, from the mountains, from the countryside, and not modern, it just doesn’t suit me. In the end, I expressed it (through poetry as well)—well, that’s a misreading, as a source of movement.” (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025).

This philosophy of the “math of misreading” is a concrete manifestation of a habitus that prioritizes locality: global knowledge must be subjected to the internal logic and unique identity of Javanese culture before it can be assimilated. This constitutes a cognitive resistance to the hegemony of Western theory and aesthetics, ensuring that his work remains rooted in his own experience (Bloom, 1997). More than just a creative strategy, this practice theoretically challenges deterministic readings of habitus. Rather than being imprisoned by the structures of his origins, Suminto demonstrates a high capacity to reflect, evaluate, and consciously convert external knowledge into authentic creative movement. This dynamic aligns with the concept of “*higher-order desires*,” which affirms the space for agency within habitus (Prodanović, 2023), as well as findings that dialogic interaction and critical reflection can break the cycle of rigid cultural reproduction, enabling individuals from non-elite backgrounds to autonomously access and reconfigure legitimate culture (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). Finally, Suminto’s consistency in upholding this honest and authentic habitus is also recognized by Cantrik Pustaka Publishers, who validate it by positioning this book as a “work that offers depth” and a “counterbalance” amidst the trend of instant literature.

These findings not only confirm local studies on the role of non-formal habitus in shaping aesthetic ethics (Fatoni & Tjahjono, 2022; Saputra & Sudikan, 2025), but also extend them into the global discourse. If Glaubitz (2021) emphasizes that cultural value is always determined through a contextual process of social valuation, then Suminto’s case demonstrates how crafted experiences are transformed into aesthetic capital that is valued precisely because of its non-commodified authenticity. Similarly, his explicit rejection of instant poetry engages in dialogue with Smith’s (2024) critique of the logic of symbolic exchange: for Suminto, poetry is not a commodity, but an intimate space grounded in *use-value* that safeguards personal meaning from algorithmic reduction. Thus, Suminto’s rural habitus is not merely a biographical backdrop, but a strategic foundation that enables him to occupy a liminal position: the space in between.

### Occupying the Spaces Between: Liminality and the Reproduction of Symbolic Capital

In a literary field governed by dominant logic—whether in terms of aesthetics, institutions, or access to symbolic capital—actors on the margins often adopt a liminal position not as a structural weakness, but as a practical strategy guided by their habitus. Bourdieu (1986, 2018) emphasizes that strategies within a social field are not conscious rational calculations, but rather intuitive responses to the field’s structure guided by a “*sense of investment*.” Liminal positions allow agents to avoid full domination by the main field while simultaneously exploiting its gaps to build alternative authority. This strategy is not merely a defensive tactic, but a form of covert symbolic capital reproduction, in which non-conformity with field norms is transformed into a new source of legitimacy through claims of authenticity and connection to “*cultural roots*” (Bourdieu, 1986). The liminal space is not a void, but a productive territory that allows subjects to reconfigure their identities beyond the control of dominant structures (Tereszewski, 2019). In a contemporary context, liminal space even triggers a sense of the *uncanny* that opens opportunities to expose the emptiness of consumer logic through critical nostalgia (Wiggins, 2025), or functions as a creative assemblage where meaning is constructed participatively amidst the pressures of both public and domestic spaces (Ward, 2025).

In the realm of contemporary Indonesian literature, this position is clearly evident in the aesthetic practice of Suminto A. Sayuti, who consistently occupies the threshold between the rural and urban worlds, the elite and the periphery, academics and artists, as well as print and digital media. Rather than attempting to “*enter*” the center of the field, he instead constructs his own spiritual and aesthetic locus in that in-between space. Suminto’s liminal position is the result of the internalization of two spatial and cultural worlds that are contradictory yet complementary. On one hand, he is a “*village professor*” proud of his Purbalingga roots; on the other, he is an institutionalized urban and global academic, engaged in research, teaching, and traveling across regions.

“With that liminal position, I’ve been able to get by. For instance, even though I’m a literary scholar, I’ve been entrusted with evaluating dissertations in the fields of the arts and education (at various universities across Indonesia) ...” (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025).

This statement underscores that liminality is not a lack of capital, but rather a strategic capital that grants him intellectual and artistic freedom. His ability to cross disciplinary boundaries allows him to

convert institutional capital (academic degrees) into artistic symbolic capital (an authentic poet) without having to submit to the logic of commercial aesthetics or an activism-oriented literary field.

The strategy of positioning oneself as *disinterested* is key to establishing symbolic authority amid this liminality. By defining his poetry-writing as merely “entertainment,” Suminto strategically declares that his work is not motivated by material gain, popularity, or political objectives. This declaration constitutes a highly effective “disguised reproduction strategy,” as within a constrained field of production, the highest symbolic value is accorded to works that successfully claim impartiality toward economic logic (Bourdieu, 1983, 1986). By refusing to assign an instrumental function to his poetry, Suminto embraces a “quivering” ontology: a state in which meaning is constantly being created and undone, thereby freeing it from the shackles of market and academic logic that demand clarity and finality (Carless-Frost, 2025). It is precisely within this uncertainty that he attains full aesthetic freedom—not out of indifference, but by refusing to be confined by the demands of fixed meaning.

This critical stance toward materialism and commodification is poetically manifested through spatial contradictions in his work, particularly in poems set in urban environments. He employs modern, profane spaces as poetic settings that paradoxically evoke an awareness of alienation and a profound longing to return to one’s origins. The clearest example of this spatial liminality is found in the poem “Rendezvous, 2,” which explicitly mentions a location laden with economic and social capital, yet narrates an experience of alienation.

### RENDEZVOUS, 2

*Sheraton, Surabaya*

Kita lanjutkan lagi. Di sini. Ruang besar buat omong kosong itu. Bukankah sudah terang. Kita cuma dongeng. Seperti kata kakek moyang. Engkau selalu percaya. Ketika membaca kisah dalam babad. Keburukan akan melahirkan kebaikan. Padahal keburukan akan melahirkan keburukan lain. Maka lihatlah langit sebelum senja. Yang ada cuma mega warna lembayung. Langkahmu pun terhuyung dan limbung.

Kita akhiri saja omong kosong itu. Kita tinggalkan gelas-gelas tanpa air. Kita masuk ke kamar masing-masing. Nonton sinetron melodrama. Atau komedi situasi. Sebelum diri dipeluk selimut sunyi. Tidur tanpa mimpi. Dan tak tahu. Apakah besok mengucapkan selamat pagi. Kepada matahari dan embun fitri. (Sayuti, 2023)

This poem poetically captures the essence of liminality: the self is physically present in a highly urban and luxurious space (the Sheraton), which represents global economic capital, yet is spiritually alienated and empty. The contrast between “*Ruang besar buat omong kosong itu*” and the need to “*masuk ke kamar masing-masing*” merely to watch a soap opera or sitcom before being “*dipeluk selimut sunyi*” reveals a rejection of the values offered by that luxurious space. Furthermore, the Sheraton transforms into a sort of *non-place*: a space that appears familiar yet feels alien precisely because it has lost its social meaning. The longing to “*mengucapkan selamat pagi kepada matahari dan embun fitri*” is not sentimental nostalgia, but rather a form of aesthetic resistance that affirms that symbolic authority is born precisely from the ability to read the gap between appearance and meaning—between the present space and the absent soul.

This critical distance is further reinforced by the choice of diction in the poem, which reflects authenticity and a rejection of superficial values. In the poem “*Puisi Sehari-hari*,” he chooses to celebrate the non-competitive qualities of nature, which are rooted in his rural upbringing.

### PUISI SEHARI-HARI

Negerimu memangku laut. Begitu dalam. Tapi tidak sombong. Gelombang dan ombak memecah di pantai. Membasah kaki-kakimu. Di atasnya ada pelabuhan. Dagang lelayaran dari mana-mana. Negeri para tetangga. Bongkar jangkar dan berlabuh. Dermaga pun riuh.

Negerimu dipayungi langit. Begitu tinggi. Mega putih dan biru. Tapi tidak sombong. Hujan pun diturunkan. Mendinginkan gerah sukmu. Sewaktu-waktu.

Negerimu menggendong gunung. Begitu tinggi. Tapi tidak sombong. Kehijauan yang jauh. Ngarai dan lembah. Mengalir sungai-sungai. Meredakan gaduh. Meredakan gelisah. Kemerick air di antara batu-batu. Senandung rindu yang lumutan. Itulah kehidupanmu. Kemarin, kini, dan esok. Terimalah salam alam. Lalu kita aminkan. (Sayuti, 2023)

In this poem, the aesthetic ethics born of rural habitus are embodied through the celebration of nature’s non-antagonistic and timeless qualities. The symbolism of the “*gunung yang tidak sombong*” reflects an ethic of humility internalized from the experience of rural life, which is ethically opposed to the competitive and recognition-seeking nature of the urban literary scene oriented toward engagement and virality. This aesthetic strategy aligns with Hwang’s (2017) findings regarding peripheral aesthetics, which

function as a postmodern ethical program: rejecting the narcissistic alienation of modernism and restoring art to its contemplative function and as a witness to concrete reality, rather than as a commodity oriented toward instant recognition in the global market.

This liminal position is then legitimized by the authority responsible for the reproduction of symbolic capital: the publisher. Mawaidi, Founder and Editor of Cantrik Pustaka, employs Suminto's concept of this "unique" position as a sophisticated market differentiation strategy.

"We view this book as a work that offers depth amid the trend of more instant and popular poetry on social media. This is not to disparage social media poetry, but rather to emphasize that poetry like Prof. Suminto's offers deeper layers of meaning and longer-lasting reflection. Furthermore, the seeds of the poems in this book were also born on social media, such as WhatsApp status updates."

"This book serves as a counterbalance—demonstrating that in the world of Indonesian literature, there is still room for poetry born of a lengthy process, life experience, and intellectual depth." (Interview with Mawaidi, private conversation, October 15, 2025).

This publisher's statement externally validates Suminto's rejection of commercial aesthetics, which was subsequently transformed into a selling point centered on authenticity and intellectual depth. This demonstrates that Suminto's marginality actually became an asset that legitimized his authority. Suminto's practical strategy in managing this liminal position was reinforced by the hidden social capital he possessed. Mawaidi—a publisher and former student of Suminto—acknowledged that the book's publication process was heavily influenced by the teacher-student relationship that had developed during his studies. The involvement of this hidden social capital constitutes a *disguised reproduction strategy* that ensures the poet's liminal aesthetic practices receive institutional legitimacy from the publisher.

This finding both expands and refines the narrative in Bourdieusian studies in Indonesia. While Hadi et al. (2022) depict Wiji Thukul as having "failed" in the literary field before shifting to the political arena, or Qadhafi et al. (2018) who emphasize the collective strategies of young Madurese writers through *srawung*, Suminto, on the other hand, rejects the dichotomy between "failure-success" or "periphery-center." He did not abandon the literary field, but rather inhabited its cracks. This aligns with Franssen's (2015) finding that the contemporary literary field is not homogeneous, but consists of subfields based on genre and language that challenge the commercial-autonomous polarization. Furthermore, his "non-partisan" stance is not passivity, but rather a form of active autonomy that enables critical intervention, as Ghica (2013) asserts: precisely because it is autonomous, literature can become a meaningful political space. This dynamic also engages with the mechanisms of consecration identified by Sapiro (2016, 2023), where legitimacy does not always flow from the center to the periphery, but can be constructed through independent networks that value the depth of the process over the speed of production. This finding is further reinforced by Yu & Shen's (2024) study on the consecration of literature within the inter-peripheral translation current, which demonstrates that legitimacy can be constructed through the integrated accumulation of linguistic, economic, and symbolic capital—not through central hegemony, but through networks of cultural agents who value the depth of the process over the speed of circulation. Thus, Suminto's marginality is not a sign of structural weakness, but rather strategic capital that enables him to assert symbolic authority without being trapped in the logic of co-opted resistance.

### Poetry Without Curation? A Strategy for Distinction in the Age of Algorithms

Within a Bourdieusian framework, resistance to market logic is often manifested through aesthetic strategies that consciously convert cultural capital into symbolic capital by claiming *disinterestedness* or impartiality toward economic exchange value (Bourdieu, 1986, 1987). In the context of the post-digital literary field, this strategy is no longer passive but functions as an active mechanism of distinction that limits the field from the invasion of platform logic prioritizing speed, virality, and the accumulation of attention. Suminto explicitly affirms this principle by rejecting the practice of instant publication, which he views as the removal of aesthetic filters:

"As for me, I just go with the flow. Let those who actually use social media do so. To me, those are uncurated poems. So today, they write poems on IG/FB and already consider themselves poets—well, that's certainly different from older people like me and my generation." (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025)

This statement makes it clear that his resistance is not directed at technology, but rather at the platform's architecture, which eliminates the stages of curation and reworking. This strict curation strategy serves as an ontological boundary that protects poetry from being reduced to instantly consumable content. This commitment manifests poetically through the selection of themes and diction that deliberately reject the aesthetics of digital vanity and competition.

Furthermore, the distribution infrastructure Suminto chooses to use reflects a strategy of measured resistance. The use of WhatsApp to circulate early drafts is not merely a technical habit, but a rejection of the platform's "seamlessness"—which aims to erase the boundaries between private and public spaces to facilitate the extraction of data (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). WhatsApp preserves privacy by limiting the audience to one's inner circle and refraining from transforming interactions into market metrics. By treating WhatsApp status as a private curated space, Suminto shields the creative process from commercial pressures and ensures that only works that have undergone a lengthy "battle" are worthy of entering the public sphere. This practice directly engages with the concept of "digital capital," which emphasizes that the "power of disposal" over data is unevenly distributed: platform elites monopolize algorithms, while ordinary users become sources of "behavioral surplus" extraction (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). By maintaining a distance from public metrics, Suminto effectively blocks the reduction of the poetic experience into an algorithmic commodity.

His rejection of algorithmic logic reached its peak in his critical stance toward artificial intelligence as a creator of literature. Suminto once tested AI to write poetry, but concluded that the results were aesthetically and ethically flawed due to the absence of a "human touch."

"It turns out there's no human touch to it for me. It's fast and very smart, sure. But it's still just a robot. It's not like a person." (Sayuti, personal interview, October 14, 2025).

This critique is not merely a generational preference, but an epistemological claim that aligns with warnings about the dangers of "stochastic parrots" in large language models (Bender et al., 2021). *Large Language Models* predict word sequences based on statistical patterns without access to meaning, communicative intent, or embodied experience. Consequently, the generated text may be superficially coherent but is, in essence, existentially empty. Suminto's claim that poetry requires a "human touch" affirms that the highest form of cultural capital within the autonomous literary field is existential capital: lived experience internalized within the habitus, which cannot be engineered or simulated by machines. By defining authenticity as something inherent to humanity, he effectively blocks AI from the autonomous literary field, asserting that a legitimate creative process must arise from a subjective struggle that cannot be automated.

This aesthetic strategy has been externally validated by the publisher, which positions Suminto's work as a counterbalance amid the acceleration of content production. The publisher's endorsement confirms that non-platform institutions still play a crucial role in challenging the monopoly on social judgment claimed by digital platforms. Thus, Suminto's aesthetic strategy is not merely a stylistic preference, but an ontological claim to literary value rooted in non-commodified experience, as well as a mechanism of differentiation that actively maintains the boundaries of the field against the logic of data extraction.

## Writing as a Mi'raj: The Creative Process of Resisting Mechanical Reduction

If aesthetic strategy focuses on *what is displayed and how the work is disseminated*, then the creative process refers to *how meaning is produced temporally and ontologically* by the creator. In a field driven by speed and automation, Suminto's creative process is instead maintained as a meditative practice that rejects the finality of commodification. This rejection is not reactive but rather a form of high-level agency that consciously converts existential struggles into an endless creative movement (Prodanović, 2023; Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). This commitment to a lengthy process is poetically manifested in "Makrifat Puisi," where poetic activity is narrated as a spiritual journey demanding a balance between the ascent of meaning and grounding in reality:

### MAKRIFAT PUISI

...

Kekasih, diri mesti mikraj melambung tinggi. Lanjutmu bersama tetes embun fitri. Menembus langit impian tak terbatas. Patahan-patahan mega cuma jalan untuk melintas. Sebiji puisi adalah ruang pembebasan bagi jiwa-jiwa terpenjara. Lihatlah canda handai dan tetangga. Juga para sahabat yang melempar senyum cinta.

Kekasih, diri tetaplah berpijak di tanah. Lanjutmu bersama salam matahari pagi. Di tengah samodra hidup tanpa tepi. Diri pun akan menjadi tanpa daya. Cuma percik ombak di buritan sampan. Lihat kembali diri. Ketika huruf-huruf alfabet saling bertaut dan berpeluk. Jadilah kata dan kata. Akhirnya frasa dan klausa. Membentuk alinea dan wacana. Jangan jadikan diri kuburan massal. Jadikan diri sebagai pangkal asal-muasal.

Kekasih, diri adalah seabait puisi. Akan kubaca dan terus kubaca. Sambil menanti bait-bait seterusnya. Pesemaian cinta di atas bumi. (Sayuti, 2023)

The metaphor of “*mikraj*” elevates the creative process to a transcendent realm, asserting that the crafting of words is not a linear production that can be optimized, but rather a struggle that demands a synthesis between “*melambung tinggi*” and “*berpijak di tanah*.” The claim “*diri adalah seabit puisi. Akan kubaca dan terus kubaca*” transforms creation into a practice that resists the closure of meaning. Here, there is a productive tension between the desire to achieve poetic perfection and the acceptance that the process itself is the goal. Rather than pursuing a finality ready for market consumption, Suminto instead inhabits the uncertainty of meaning on an ongoing basis. This dynamic engages directly with the concept of “quivering ontology,” which emphasizes that contemporary aesthetics finds its strength in the “quivering” state between being and non-being, finished and unfinished, thereby freeing itself from the shackles of logic that demands instant clarity (Carless-Frost, 2025).

This direct antithesis to algorithmic production is reinforced in “Penyair dan Puisi,” where the boundary between the creator and the work is deliberately blurred to emphasize their ontological unity:

#### **PENYAIR DAN PUISI**

Seperti harapanmu, nulis puisi tak boleh henti. Biar anak cucu ngerti. Puisi itu hidup abadi. Dalam jiwa sarat cinta.

Apa saja, katamu suatu waktu. Dulu. Dongeng masa lalu. Atau kisah-kisah para pahlawan. Juga cerita pengungsi Merapi. Dan anak-anak lahar. Aku pun tertawa. Tanpa komentar. Aku menjadi penyair lagi. Catatku dalam hati.

Hari ini pun kutulis puisi. Tapi tentang lambai tanganmu. Di tubir cakrawala ujung sana. Ketika gapaiku hampir sampai. Kau sambut hangat dengan canda. Ya ya. Penyair dan puisi. Tampak dua tapi tunggal jiwa. Ya ya. Aku dan kamu. Di sini dan di sana. Tapi tunggal jua. (Sayuti, 2023)

The statement “*Tampak dua tapi tunggal jiwa*” affirms that poetry is not a separate or mechanically producible output, but rather an essential manifestation of human destiny that is inseparable from the experience of life. The creative process here is not viewed as a transfer of ideas from subject to object, but rather as an internal dialogue that continually renews itself. This integration of structural awareness (the shifting field) and subjective perception (the soul united with the word) theoretically reinforces the argument that the study of the creative process cannot be separated from the phenomenology of the writer’s experience, where bodily perception and affective memory form the foundation of textual transformation (Tsang, 2025). By rejecting the creator–work dichotomy often exploited by the logic of mass production, Suminto asserts that the value of poetry lies precisely in the irreplicable traces of human presence.

Thus, Suminto’s creative process within the evolving literary landscape is not a passive adaptive response, but rather a conscious and sustained strategy of differentiation. While conventional Bourdieusian studies tend to interpret the creative process as a reflection of static structural positions, these findings expand upon that by demonstrating that, in a post-digital context, the process itself becomes a space for reflective agency. His emphasis on the “*pertarungan penyair melawan kata*,” his rejection of AI, and his claim of the unity of soul and work explicitly challenge the assumption that the digital field produces only aesthetic homogenization. Instead, it confirms that a habitus rooted in existential experience can function as an epistemological filter against algorithmic simulation, aligning with critiques of “stochastic parrots” (Bender et al., 2021). Furthermore, the practice of “*membaca dan terus membaca*” one’s own poetry expands our understanding of autonomy by demonstrating that creative freedom does not arise from a rejection of the field, but rather from inhabiting a space of process that is reflective, meditative, and ontologically resists market finality. Within this framework, creativity is no longer merely a product of the field, but a practice of survival that preserves the meaning of humanity amidst an unceasing flow of data.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Suminto A. Sayuti’s creative process is a dynamic interplay between rural habitus, liminal positions, and aesthetic strategies that reject the resistance–commodification dichotomy. The habitus, formed through structural experiences and the accumulation of informal cultural capital, not only serves as the foundation of his aesthetic ethics but also enables him to occupy the in-between spaces—between village and city, academia and the arts, print and digital—as a source of symbolic authority. His rejection of instant poetry and artificial intelligence is not a form of ideological resistance, but rather an affirmation of autonomy through a “human touch” rooted in existential experience. This finding enriches Bourdieusian studies in Indonesia by demonstrating that artistic autonomy can emerge precisely from the reflective inhabitation of liminal spaces. The study’s limitations lie in the limited access to the poets’

personal archives; therefore, further research is recommended to explore writing process notes or compare cross-generational creative practices within an increasingly fluid digital context.

## Declarations

- Author contribution** : Muhammad Rasyid Ridlo designed the research idea, conducted the main interviews, analyzed the data, and led the writing of the manuscript. Wiyatmi contributed to strengthening the theoretical framework, particularly the application of Bourdieusian concepts, and provided critical revisions. Awla Akbar Ilma assisted in data triangulation and manuscript editing. Arif Rohman Hakim supported the contextual analysis of the poetry texts and participated in the final proofreading. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.
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- Ethics Approval** : This research complies with research ethics principles. Verbal consent was obtained from all sources prior to data collection. Interviews with Suminto A. Sayuti and communication with Mawaidi (Cantrik Pustaka) were conducted transparently regarding the purpose of the research. All quotations from poetry texts and interview statements were used with permission from the relevant parties.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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