

Title: Light, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Form: Formalism's Quiet Revolution
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For the Russian Formalists, form was not a mere shell that kept content's shape, but a living "force" that acted upon and in conjunction with content to determine the course of a narrative. In re-conceiving the relationship between content and form as equally contentious and collaborative, Formalists were able to disrupt the traditionally harmonious correspondence between content and form, seen most explicitly in late nineteenth-century realism, and to rescue form from its undue inverse relationship to content, which, they argued, did nothing to capture its "dynamic," aggressive spirit. Form was valued at more than the sum of devices at work in a text; it was a battle cry against homogenizing poetics that collapsed form and content and thereby diminished their distinct qualities.

This brief discourse considers form as an emblem of liberty that breaks what was once the communal harmony between a text's content and its form. While the proposed antagonism between form and content falls in step with the modernist trends of the early twentieth century, Formalism's particular take on form as a declaration of independence betrays the influence of an earlier literary period, specifically, the late eighteenth-century French Enlightenment. In order to understand better the role the Enlightenment plays in Formalism's use and conception of form, I will contract these two critical discourses to their central metaphors—light and form. Specifically, I will match Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Héloïse* against Shklovsky's *Zoo, or Letters Not About Love*, a Third Eloise, assessing the use and frequency of the terms "light" and "form," in order to draw broader critical conclusions regarding the similarities between these two central conceits, and, most importantly, to consider what a comparison between light and form reveals about the relationship between form and liberty.