MODERNIST LITERARY-CRITICISM IN INDONESIA:
A STUDY ON THE PRACTICES OF MILLENNIAL DIGITAL LITERACY
ON THE YOUTUBE COMMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The research was focused on investigating the tradition of modernist literary criticism, which could be found in the audience’s comments under the video on the YouTube website. As the center of the digital literary paradigm, digital poetry in videography has become an object of criticism for the Indonesian millennial generation. As was known, one of the markers of digital literacy was proficiency in using digital media. One of these media was used to produce criticism by voicing non-text semiotics. Because of that, in this research, thousands of criticisms that appeared on the poetry websites “Aksara Betha” and “Rotasi” were analyzed by reviewing examples of the critics’ expressions of non-text elements that could be found in the constructs of the two digital poetry. The results of this research show that Indonesian millennials are digitally literate, and many explicitly mention digital art features that have attracted their interest. Some critics even express their subjective feelings about the show’s duration, which is considered too short. Such practice explains that the Indonesian millennial generation has felt the effect of one of the morphological elements of digital poetry, namely space and time. Furthermore, suppose it can be called a tradition; in that case, the honesty of the critics in collecting criticism of the work they prepare is the milestone of the new tradition in literary criticism. This tradition is rarely, if not never, to be found in the tradition of printed literary criticism.

Keywords: modernist literary criticism, Indonesian millennial generation, Youtube comments

INTRODUCTION

Apart from the revolution that occurred in the literary world described by Underwo (2019), the presence of new media, including social media such as YouTube, allows literary skills to be combined with digital skills. Digital literary, born in the early 1990s (O’Sullivan, 2019), comes from the same belief as contemporary literary, namely that no form can last forever. Ricardo (2009) has explained that, so far, there has been a kind of pride in maintaining endemic artistic positions, such as books, journals, and poetry in the printed literary tradition, which are separate from visual art forms such as painting, sculpture, photography, and drawing. According to him, literary non-digital art relies on static support from printed pages, sculpture objects, and canvases, so its stability does not bring about media changes. Even if there is, the change is on the horizon of a person’s imagination and visual perception who is trying to convince himself that a certain literary or aesthetic action is taking place in front of him. In digital literary, the audience can witness the horizon of the imagination in front of a screen displaying text enriched with other features.

Although considered an attribute of new media, interactivity is also found in older artistic media such as painting, film, and photography (Ambio, 2022). According to Gee (in Aguilera, 2020), the concept of interactivity is often identified as what separates “new” media, such as websites, mobile device applications,
and video games, from “nonresponsive” media, such as printed textbooks (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2022; Shih, Chen, & Wu, 2022; D’Armenio, 2022; Jeon et al., 2019). In the dynamic communication process, communication occurs between the sender and the receiver. This allows content creators to combine their skills in the arts and digital fields to be shown or even discussed in media channels with audiences from various circles to provide criticism or show their admiration (Sarkar, 2018).

Erstad et al. (2020) have stated that digital literacy refers to using digital tools to create meaning and communicate effectively with others, including the ability to use visual representations, integrate different digital texts, navigate non-linear digital texts, and evaluate digital information. That is why, whatever the purpose of having a Facebook account, with the skills to use the features provided on the Facebook page, Facebook users can be considered to have digital competence. Likewise, YouTube users who use the features on the video-sharing site, whether to watch, comment on, subscribe to, or upload their videos, indicate an effort to use digital media critically and creatively.

Along with the growth of technology, in terms of literary or literary criticism, the opportunity for YouTube viewers to comment on the show, or even just by pressing the like or dislike hand symbol, can be considered a modern criticism practice. According to Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2021), contemporary criticism is harmonious with post-modernism, so it can always be in symbiosis with literary modernism. This statement opens up opportunities for new forms of criticism that adapt to new forms of artistic practice. Suppose the poetry can be presented because the poetry text is enriched with visual, sonic, and performative features. In that case, the criticism should be able to touch the features outside the text but have been mixed into an inseparable part of the text.

Neumann in Erstad et al. (2020) has stated that digital literacy refers to the use of digital tools to create meaning and communicate effectively with others, including the ability to use visual representations, integrate different digital texts, navigate non-linear digital texts, and evaluate digital information.

Technological advances allow the creation of literary works beyond the presentation of printed texts because it is made possible by the support of visual, sonic, and performative features. Computer technology in the industrial era 4.0, marked by the use of applications, has enabled various features that support creators in editing video. All the necessary art forms can finally be worked out in one dynamic and poetic display space. According to Goicoechea and Salceda (2015), digital poetry is present as the center of a new paradigm in what he calls electronic literary. The terms “electronic literary” and “digital literary” can be used interchangeably to refer to the same tradition: constructing poetic texts with visual, sonic, and performative features.

In principle, the terms cyber, digital, and electronic are expected to have a historical influence on works of art because these terms are closely related to durable archives. That is what drives artists or content creators these days to rely heavily on digital technology. In connection with that, it seems works related to digital art today will influence each other with the development of the computer world itself. That is why research related to contemporary literary is also strongly related to the history of computer development.

In addition to being the center of the digital literary paradigm, as stated by Goicoechea and Salceda (2015) previously, there is one more reason why a review of digital poetry can represent discussions about digital literary. The reason that strengthens the feasibility of digital poetry to become the center of discussion of electronic literary is also the view of Spinelli (2006), i.e., creating poetry in a neutral space using technology provided by computers or creating poetry in space-time using camera recordings. According to him, this is a form of a modernist experiment that, in the audio poetry tradition, has involved recording and editing technology, making it possible to compile new poetry in the form of digital poetry. The involvement of digital technology in constructing various artistic achievements still targets the most basic goal of the effort to create a work of art, which is to provide inner satisfaction for those who know how to enjoy it (Herrmann et al., 2020).

It seems that awareness of this situation encourages Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2021), compared to Herrmann et al. (2020), to emphasize in their explanation that contemporary literary refers to how property outside the work (poetic text) is also included in the analysis of modernist criticism. This is under what literary critics believe: there are no eternal laws of aesthetics and no form that can last forever.

Based on that background, this research is focused on describing the model of response text given by the Indonesian millennial generation to digital poetry broadcasts on the YouTube site. The response texts in the context of this research are considered the practice of modernist criticism based on concepts of digital literacy. Reddy, Sharma, and Chaudhary (2020) have defined literacy as an individual’s ability to find and evaluate information, use this information effectively, create new content using this information, and share and communicate this newly created information using appropriate digital technologies.

Based on the definition, it can be inferred that the characteristics of the digital literacy generation are their ability to explore the semiotic technical effects of a show. The technique in question includes how animators have succeeded in using digital media to creatively bring objects closer to images, cropping images, fading and adjusting image paths, and adding extragynetic music. Attention to the ability to observe or evaluate images as a marker of digital literacy is also in line with Reddy, Sharma, and Chaudhary’s (2020) view, who explains that locating digital information using well-designed search strategies is
part of digital literacy skill, so the semiotic system in digital poetry in using images, videos, and sounds from various internet sites is parts of this. Thus, one technique to answer the question of whether the Indonesian millennial generation is digitally literate can be done by reviewing their responses to images, videos, and sounds that enrich the performance of criticized digital poetry.

Among the various social media platforms on the rise in Indonesia, YouTube is at the top of the list with the highest penetration rate, with users aged 16-64 years. YouTube users perceive the value of an impression by responding according to their cognition and affectation (Nainggolan, 2021). Thus, one technique to answer the question of whether Indonesia’s digitally literate generation is digitally literate can be done by reviewing their responses to images, videos, and sounds that enrich the performance of criticized digital poetry.

The research of digital literary has attracted the interest of many researchers worldwide. Abroad, studies related to digital literacy can be seen in what has been done by Bakar (2021) and Stanley (2021). Bakar (2021) has implemented Digital Storytelling (DST) to improve literary understanding among students in Malaysia during the pandemic. This experience causes students to have a fun learning experience and improve their digital literacy skills. Similarly, Stanley (2021) has applied a similar concept to poetry learning in elementary schools among African Americans. The results show that, in addition to stating the quality of students’ writing, the method can improve their digital skills (compared to Panko, 2022). The same concern can be seen in other countries, such as French (Brunel & Bouchardon, 2019) and South Korea (Koo, 2019).

In Indonesia, quantitatively, studies related to digital literary literacy have not been very encouraging. This is because this kind of research is still relatively new. However, similar to research conducted in several countries, research on digital literary literacy in Indonesia has much to do with the world of education, e.g., teaching improvements.

Although still in the scope of learning, research in Indonesia is more about an effort to understand conceptual digital literary literacy. Budiono (2020) has researched how to use media such as print media, television, magazines, newspapers, and others as a means of learning and the advantages and disadvantages of digital literary education. Wahyuni’s research (2020) leads to a description of today’s digital developments and their benefits for literary learning. The same thing is done by Firmansyah (2018), describing and explaining the basic principles and concepts of learning digital literature.

Other research that connects digital literature and digital literacy skills has been carried out by Lubis, Naelofaria, and Simere-mere (2020), Muthoharoh and Prastyaningsih (2020), Supiarza and Sarbeni (2021), and Artika, Purnamiati, and Wisudariani (2021). Lubis, Naelofaria, and Simere-mere (2020) associate it with teaching materials; Muthoharoh and Prastyaningsih (2020) associate it with hoaxes; Supiarza and Sarbeni (2021) associated it with teaching poetry, while Artika, Purnamiati, and Wisudariani (2021) link it with the ability to teach Keroncing.

Among the previous studies, no single research leads to the relationship between digital literacy and modernist literary criticism. Indeed, the research of Artika, Purnamiati, and Wisudariani (2021) can be said to be closely related to this research; they have researched digital poetry on YouTube from audio-visual elements. However, the results of their research lead to a comparison of the audio-visual features in some of the poems that he compares, not related to digital literary criticism or digital literary criticism among millennials. Meanwhile, this research aims to study the tradition of modernist literary criticism concerning digital literacy skills among millennials by taking the practice of digital poetry on the YouTube channel.

Therefore, based on the results of previous studies, this research can be said to be relatively new. Thus, the results of this research are expected to be used as a reference in researching or teaching digital literary skills among millennials as one of the practices of modernist literary criticism. In addition, this research is expected to encourage similar research on comments by connoisseurs of video graphics art shows on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, Telegram, and Twitter.

METHODS

The research uses a qualitative approach, which relies more on in-depth observation of phenomena. The results of these observations are then described based on what is seen. Specifically, this research is conducted under the principles of the literary semiotics research method. As explained by Milne (2007), semiotics as a method can be used to examine the idea of cultural transformation by using semiotics as a symbol system. Meaning and value, according to Milne (2007), are determined by what events have been chosen to be told. Therefore, the object of this research is in the form of netizen comments aimed at YouTube video shows that have been categorized as digital poetry.

Sequentially, data collection is carried out by (1) determining YouTube viewing as a form of digital poetry practice; (2) recording the number of netizens who have provided comments; (3) noting comments that contain three basic elements of Milne’s (2007) semiotic circle, namely events, texts, and interpretations and their reinterpretations.

Data analysis was carried out by (1) collecting netizens’ comments about YouTube videos outside of text (poetry); (2) classifying modern critics into three categories. The categories are (a) understanding digital literary related to visual art features; (b) understanding digital literary related to sound art features; (c) understanding digital literary related to the features of performative visual arts (Wanti, 2020).
Unlike the digital literary archive (Wanti, 2020), the concept of digital literary, as stated by Simanowski, Schäfer, and Gendolla (2010), is processed completely using digital technology so that the results can exceed ordinary text. Technological advances allow the creation of literary works beyond the presentation of printed texts because it is made possible by the support of visual, sonic, and performative features.

In this regard, two examples of digital poetry will be studied in this research, namely Aksara Betha and Rotasi. Several representative comments have been taken from the two examples of digital poetry. Due to the large number of comments related to the two digital poems, a sample of the comments to be analyzed is carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely by taking only words or sentences that contain judgments, both explicit and implicit expressions. Another consideration for taking the sample is the uniqueness of the assessment expression. Words or sentences that are considered to contain judgments with the same construction and meaning will be considered as just one form of criticism. These comments are then interpreted by researchers based on the concepts of modern literary criticism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the Indonesian millennial generation markers is that they have digital competence. They also have confidence in using digital media critically and creatively to participate in the art production of a digital society. The critical attitude of the millennial generation in this context is reviewed mainly to highlight how they express responses to features outside the text of poetry, as described by Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2021). Exposure to non-textual features is a characteristic of modernist criticism of one of the contemporary literary phenomena in the form of digital poetry.

One of the digital poetries chosen as an example to show the form of critical practice of Indonesian modernity is Aksara Betha poetry on YouTube Channel named Sholah Ayub in 2015. This poetry is selected because the creator and audience admit that the videography show is poetry. Briefly, this digital poetry describes an idealistic young man (student) who addresses reality critically and tries to provide awareness about life in his environment. Figures 1, 2, and 3 depict the conglomeration of visual, sonic, and performative features of Aksara Betha’s poetry.

Figure 1 shows the line from the poetry, /jasad-jasad tertindas di bawah betis kita sedang merana kesakitan (oppressed bodies under our calves are in pain) means how the creators of the Aksara Betha are very careful to create visualizations related to bodies buried underground which are represented by shoes.

The poetry line /menangis dan marahlah.. (cry and get angry…) shows in Figure 2, and line / kita adalah pemimpin orkestra.. (we are the orchestra leader …/) shows in Figure 3. In other words, the creators of Aksara Betha do not only have skills in literary arts (poetry) but also have skills in digital arts.

Non-text features that can be found in the digital poetry include the voice of the narrator by Sholah Ayub, the music from Light and Motion’s Album Chronicle entitled The Spectacular Quite, a video fragment featuring trees, and student activities on campus. In his publication notes, Sholah Ayub explains that script is a visual symbol system printed on paper or other media (stone, wood, cloth, etc.) to express expressive elements in a language. Another term for letters is the writing system. Betha, according to him, comes from the Irish language, which means life or struggle.

The videography has been shown 17.529 times (Ayub, 2015). In the endemic artistic world, it is not easy to reach that many poetry readers, especially poets not well-known by the public. Unfortunately,
only fourteen site visitors wrote comments during the three years of viewing on the YouTube site. Of the fourteen short comments, only five people provided non-text comments. Four of the five critics comment on the visual features, and one critic comments on the sound features.

The commentary on the voice features is written by Ridwan. According to him, Sholah Ayub’s poetry is musical and motivating. These brief comments have indicated that there is a modernist criticism practice that reveals that the show’s viewers have enjoyed the non-text features in the form of voice features that Sholah Ayub has constructed to enrich the digital poetry entitled *Aksara Betha*. Four other comments regarding visual features are made by M. Zillan Ghiffari, who has said, “my favorite visual poetry”; Maura Sultan explains that she has just made a videography and wants help so that it could produce the same good quality by writing, “Hii! I just made a very similar visual poetry like this, mid checking it out? It wouldn’t hurt to help a girl out.”

Putri Windiana Rahman also does the same thing as Maura Sultan, to give her appreciation and then ask for her visual poetry to be seen, as she has written, “Cool! if you do not mind, please check my visual poetry on my channel, xixi thankyou.” Visitors also comment about the visual features of the site labeled Late Production who asks, “What font is that? XD good, right?” This question in modernist criticism can be understood as a form of acknowledgment of the good quality that Sholah Ayub has achieved in enriching his digital poetry with visualization of letters that the audience appreciates. At least, those can be regarded as a form of appreciation (Kuijpers & Hakemulder, 2018).

Other modernist criticism of digital poetry can be found in the practice of critics of digital poetry called *Rotasi*. *Rotasi* or Rotation is the title of the videography published on the YouTube channel Rifky Bima Ramadhani in 2016. *Rotasi* describes the story of an adventure. Overall, the term *rotasi* (rotation) in this digital poetry can be interpreted as a form of the life cycle, just like the earth rotating; sometimes, people are above, and sometimes they are below. What distinguishes it from previous digital poetry, *Rotasi* presents conversations in the videography that is displayed. That is why, on his YouTube, Ramadhani calls it as a short movie.

The videography can be claimed as digital poetry, considering that the narration in the show is entirely expressions in language with strict diction. It is the use of words that are slick and evocative of feelings that makes *Rotasi* can be claimed as a form of digital poetry practice. During its two-year run, *Rotasi* poetries have been viewed 563,354 times (Ramadhani, 2016). As poetry constructed from various artistic features to become a cinematic show, *Rotasi* is produced by a group of artists with a division of labor, as found in film production. Figures 4, 5, and 6 are screenshots of the *Rotasi* digital poetry.

In this case, the creators of *Rotasi* are trying to weave a story into the digital poetry they created. First, there is a conflict or misunderstanding between two friends (Figure 4). The conflict causes disappointment in one of them (the leading actor) before one decides to go for a photo hunt by himself.

In the production notes, *Rotasi* is played by Denny Pradana, Eni W., Syahidan Z., Iqbal F., Sri Yuni; produced by Premy Bima K.; directed by Destian Rendra P.; the script is written by Ara Qodriyani; director of photography Vicky Martin O.; music director Ekki Darmawan; cameraman Rifky Bima R.; fashion stylists Rifky Bima R. and Vicky...
In particular, Jessica D. has expressed her appreciation for the music features used to conglomerate Rotasi, writing, “I’m impressed, nice job guys! It seems so professional, I love the music and the atmosphere! Congrats Ara.” Jessica D. thinks Rotasi is the result of perfect teamwork. The choice of music is considered appropriate to the atmosphere created. The Haniv Project account expresses another appreciation, “the video is cool... let me take the background sound, bro, inspired by this film.” Haniv Project’s expression of admiration, confirmed by the request for permission to use the same background sound product as Rotasi, further shows that in terms of sound features, Rotasi has achieved the achievements that animators crave. Another voice that also conglomerates Rotasi is the voice of the narrator. The millennial generation who explicitly criticizes the narrator’s performance is Muhammad Hamdani Azmi, who writes, “The film is really good, the landscape view angle and the colors are cool. The message of the story also reached the audience, but when I spoke to you, I knocked medok ee wkwkwk, Jawatimuran was crushed e ha ha. So I feel like the dialogue doesn’t animate. Just a suggestion, in my opinion, I think it’s better to just use the original accent so that it has more character and animates. No shame.. hehe. good luck, bro!” With a mixture of Javanese, Indonesian, and English, Muhammad Azmi describes his admiration for the work of the Rotasi production team. Then critically, he considers that he has caught the narrator’s thick Javanese accent and offered a certain accent that he calls more original to bring out the characterization of the narration.

In addition to the criticism of the two features described, the following two criticisms indicate that out of nearly fifteen hundred comments, there are also Rotasi poetry connoisseurs who write their appreciation of duration. According to Di Rosario (2011), one of digital poetry’s morphological elements is the existence of a sequence marked by space-time, as in the video. In a mixture of Javanese and Indonesian, Alfi Dwi Nur Kholis writes in his commentary, “The duration too short, Nicolas Christian, shit, frightening, the best 5 minutes in October this year.” Duration, one of the morphologies of digital poetry, is an important element to pay attention to. Long or short duration can affect audience appreciation (Di Rosario, 2011). In this case, the Rotasi duration is considered too short. The subjective perspective of space-time can lead a person to perceive time as too fast or too long due to being influenced by his inner experience. Five minutes of dull viewing can prompt someone to speed up the show or miss the opportunity to watch it. When a viewer thinks the show is too fast within five minutes, it can be claimed that the viewer has just had the opportunity to watch the video he likes.

As can be found in the comments on the Aksara Betha videography, Rotasi poetry also received comments that could be considered more of a request for comment because the account owner is also trying to experiment with the art of videography. An account called Blackstar Picture writes the following comment, “This channel is really cool! By the way, we are also making an inspirational video; if you are interested, you can check this channel, criticism & suggestions are really helpful.” The writing from Blackstar Picture
(in Ramadhani, 2016, September 30) shows that there is no longer an extreme view of attacking other parties as plagiarism in the digital tradition. Instead, openly, those who are inspired and those who are the motivators have a dialogue in the discussion space YouTube has provided. More than that, Blackstar Picture becomes the choice of more than a thousand comments to serve as the final quote. This is because he explicitly states his hopes for criticism and suggestions for the videography project he is working on in his comments.

The owner of the Blackstar Picture account has made it clear that he is looking forward to criticism and suggestions. These two things are expected to appear in the comments feature provided by the YouTube site as a video-sharing site. Considering that the criticism animators have been waiting for is facilitated by the YouTube site, such as the criticism also being made against Aksara Betha and Rotasi, Blackstar Picture—through its request for criticism—confirms the initial claim of this research, namely comments on videos shown on the YouTube site are a form of modernist criticism of millennials for the existence of digital poetry.

Thousands of comments on the existence of Rotasi, especially on comments related to non-textual features, increasingly signify what is called modernist critical analysis. In the commentary of Aksara Betha’s poetry, only five site visitors can be considered to have carried out modernist criticism; the other nine can only say one word to express their satisfaction without describing what aspect they considered successful.

In the two digital poems, the comments sometimes lead to criticism, which tends to be directed at the critic himself. This phenomenon is rarely found in the practice of printed literary criticism. Some critics who tend to show the hope of being criticized can easily be considered an attempt to popularize the account of the cryptic critic. Of course, there is no prohibition against such a practice because, in the tradition of digital criticism, there are no eternal laws of aesthetics and no form that can last forever. Perhaps even criticizing and promoting one’s own work is part of a digital tradition trend that has the potential to encourage someone not to stop being a consumer or producer but to move further into being a prosumer, namely a consumer as well as a producer or a producer as well as a consumer.

The fact that remains to be noticed and should begin to be pushed into the tradition of modernist criticism is the audience’s response. The response should not stop at the expression of liking without an additional explanation of what aspects they like. When they like the visual feature, there is an additional effort to explain how well the visualization achievement of the digital poetry is. A modernist critic in the digital age does not need a convoluted theory to measure the success of a show. The internet has made it easy for anyone to make a real-time videography comparison attempt when a critic is comparing two videos on the website of digital poetry.

CONCLUSIONS

Modernist literary criticism can be found in viewer comments under video views on the YouTube website. Thousands of criticisms that appear, in their simplest form, are written in the form of unclear comments about aspects of art that are admired or considered unsuccessful. Millennials who understand the artistic aspects of videography poetry explicitly mention certain features they find successful in attracting their interest. The millennials who are seen as successful are those who are taken as samples in the analysis. Some modernist critics even express their subjective feelings about how short the duration of their favorite shows is. This kind of criticism practice explains that the millennial generation has realized the effect of one of the morphological elements of digital poetry, namely about space and time. If it can be called a tradition, the honesty of the critics in collecting criticism of the works they prepare is a milestone of a new tradition in literary criticism, which rarely, if not never, can be found in the tradition of printed literary criticism.

This research contributes to developing videographic art research methods that are still related to literary production. At the same time, this has implications for the opening of research areas for various forms of art evaluation that have sprung up on social media. Nevertheless, this research still has limitations in terms of research objects. The object of this research only mentions two sites that present video graphics art: YouTube. In addition, this research can only show some expressions of the audience’s evaluation, not the whole. Future research would be better to use a mixed-method approach to get a more comprehensive picture. Because of that, it is necessary to have further research on videographic art, which can be found through internet networks and is starting to be known as digital art.

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