

***The Significance of Media in Literary Theory:
Shaping The Future of Literary Criticism of Electronic Literature***

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Abstract

Today, the development of digital media, which has influenced the world has greatly influenced the development of literature. The emergence of electronic literature is the product of digital media and technology. The emergence of electronic literature has become the fundamental drive to look into the importance of the media in literary studies specifically the need of literary theory and criticism that look into the effect of media on literature. Media plays an important role in literary studies. Nevertheless, the media has been neglected since the emergence of literary theories and criticism. The aim of this paper is to provide further insight into the need to have the fifth categories of literary theories and criticism. Using a cinematic approach which is media and technology-based, video poetry entitled “Aku” (Me) by Barlycine from Indonesia will be discussed. This video poetry is an adaptation of a written poetry by Chairil Anwar, an Indonesian poet with the same title. In this paper, only the aspect of the representation will be explored in detail and apply to the text studied. The method of textual analysis will be used to analyse the elements of audio, text and image in the context of cinematic approach that reflect a set of semantic meaningful representations of a video poetry. This paper shows important literary theory and criticism to incorporate the elements of media that will give a better understanding of reading, writing, authorship and meaning of literature in the different context of media usage.

Keywords: electronic literature, literary media approach, video poetry

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Introduction

Language is a human communication tool that has been established for centuries. Literature is an art that uses language as a means of communication. Literature is not only about language. It has much more than language. So, literary theory has been deployed as an analytical tool for understanding, explaining, and making predictions about literature. Since the published a book titled *Theory of Literature* (1956) by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, literary theory has developed into more systematic discourse with numerous definitions. For example, according to Roger Webster:

Literary theory, or rather theories, do offer various ways of defining literature, or least thinking about what the issues might be in attempting any kind of definition.

(Webster 1996: 5).

There are more than one category of literary theory and each of the theories try to answer the question, what is literature? The development of literary theory has the connection with the development of literature. Basically, there are four categories of literary theory and these categories have been accepted by scholars in literary studies. M.H. Abrams in his book titled *The Mirror and Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Theories* (1975) have introduced four categories of literary theory. The four categories are; mimetic theories, pragmatic theories, expressive theories and objective theories. Within these four categories, literary theories grow and expand from the classical tradition to the contemporary theory.

The arrival of electronic literature has given a new perspective of literature which has been ignored for decades. Electronic literature has revealed the medium of communication is not only about language, but other forms of communication. Multimedia or hypermedia become a part of electronic literature which can be identified as production, representation and reception or appreciation of the literary texts.

Media Theory As The Fith Categories of Literary Theories

Media theory organizes ideas about the relationship between media and society, specifically how media technology affects the society. Marshall McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media* (2001) traces the history of media technology and illustrated the ways. These innovations had changed both individual behaviour and the wider culture. McLuhan, who created the notion: "The medium is the message" works on the notion that regards media as instrumental in shaping human and cultural experience. In other words, media theory can give a great explanation about media technology and illustrates the ways how media technology changes both individual behaviour and the wider culture. In understanding electronic literature, it is important to comprehend how digital technology affects the production, representation and reception of the literary works. In the context literature, the creation of electronic literature in 1980s marked a new era in understanding literature and literary criticism.

What is electronic literature? According to Katherine Hayles (2008: 3):

Electronic literature, generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast "digital born", a first generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer.

In other words, Hayles defines electronic literature as a kind of literature created on a computer by using certain software and it is read on the computer only. Electronic literature cannot be printed because electronic elements such as sound cannot be printed. Electronic literature involves the development of the creation process, various presentation techniques and media used. In electronic literature, writing and materiality come together. Hayles (2002), considers that produce literary text like the computer is writing machine which produce technotext (hypertext) or cybertext (Aarseth, 1997, George Landow 1997 and 2006, Ladan 2015).

Besides the text, another aspect has been written is the aesthetic experience of the reader of electronic literature. Digital technology has revolutionised aesthetic experience. Interactive fiction is a genre of electronic literature which has the immersive spaces where the reader has an opportunity to interact with the text. It is an immersive literary genre that creates an unprecedented aesthetic experience known as an immersive experience (Monfort, 2007 and 2005).

The development of electronic literature is different from one country to another due to different environments. The history of electronic literature has proven the scenario Electronic literature started in Europe in 1980s (Rettberg, 2015). As an early genre of electronic literature, video poetry is very moderate in its structure. The lacking of interactivity has effected the appreciation of it. Eventually, no immersive aesthetic experience for the viewers as compared to interactive fiction. Video poetry is a kind of electronic poetry and there are a few terms associated with electronic poetry. In other words, video poetry is a kind of electronic poetry or digital poems. According to Christopher Funkhouser (2007: 319) the term digital poem refers to:

A poem is a digital poem if computer programming or processes (software, etc.) are distinctively used in the composition, generation or presentation of the text (or combinations of texts).

Funkhouser defines digital poetry as a poem produced by using a computer through certain software. This software is used for composition, generation and representation of text or a combination of any text. The creation of electronic poetry is the same as the digital poem. According to Funkhouser (2007), digital poem/poetry can be divided into several types such as; computer poetry, graphic poetry and hypertext poetry. In other words, electronic poetry is a computer generated poetry which is read on the computer screen.

Literary Criticism and Electronic Literature

Literary criticism is an effort to read, analyse and make judgments about any literary text and the assessment effort is based on literary criticism approaches used. The development of literary criticism approaches has its bearing with the development of

literary genres. The emergence of electronic poetry not only requires another category of literary theories but also an appropriate literary criticism. As stated earlier, electronic literature requires a media-based approach, especially in relation with digital technology. Thus, this paper will adapt a new approach in literary criticism that is, cinematic approach. The purpose of the cinematic approach is to analyse the representation of the video poetry .

Cinematic Approach

Cinematic approach is a media and technology based approach which is appropriate to study video presentation. According to Tom Konyves (2012: 5), a video poetry/video poem is:

Video poetry is a genre of poetry displayed on a screen, distinguished by its time-based, poetic, juxtaposition of images with text and sound. In the measured blending of these three elements, it produces in the viewer the realization of a poetic experience. Presented as a multimedia object of a fixed duration, the principal function of a videopoem is to demonstrate the process of thought and the simultaneity of experience, expressed in words - visible and / or audible - whose meaning is blended with, but not illustrated by, the images and the soundtrack.

A video poetry provides a 'verbal/visual' cluster, a complex, a nexus, a multiplicity composed of vectors that intersect. A video poetry is a hybrid with the cinematic elements. The video poetry casts moving images of poetry into a film stream in ways that enable it to become a visual poem. The main function of video poetry is to show the process of thought and experience expressed in the form of visible and/ or audible words. In order to communicate meaning and to evoke particular emotions in viewers, cinematic approach works on cinematic technique. Cinematic technique is a method or analytical tool that a director uses to communicate meaning and evoke particular emotions in viewers. Cinematic techniques consist of framing of the subject, camera movement, angle, sound and editing (Jackson 2010, Newman 2009). Generally, there are seven types of framing; pan, tracking, tilt, crane, handheld, zoom in and zoom out. There are three types of angle; high, low and normal. The three types of shot are; extreme wide, long/far, full, medium, close and extreme close shots.

i) Framing the Subject

A video consists of many frames and each frame is a still image like a photo. What is a video? According to Norazlin Mohammed (2007: 133) "Video is an electronic technology capable of recording, processing, storing and distributing a still image that produces an illusion of movement". Framing is a construction, composition and placement of visual elements to form a focussed image or subject. Framing creates a structure and shapes the video poetry. There are a few techniques to frame a shot such as, full shot/ long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, medium close shot, close up and extreme close up. Images are created to communicate meaning to viewers. Images can be understood by analysing the two levels; the connotative and denotative levels (Lacey, 1998). Today, digital images such as graphic and

animation are the product of the digital culture and it also representing meaning (Darley 2000).

ii) Shots and Framing

A shot in video/film making is a series of frames, that runs for uninterrupted period of time. In video production, a shot starts when the camera starts rolling and it stops. Usually, there are several shots to make a scene and every shot contain visual elements that communicate meaning to the viewers. Shot helps framing the subject, for example, long shot or wide shot, show the subject from a distance, emphasizing the location. While close shot shows details of the subject and highlight the emotions of the character.

iii) Camera Movement

Movement of the camera is important that contribute to the meaning and appreciation of the text. Camera movements might involve the moving of it from one angle to another or no physical movement but it moves on its axis. Basically, there are two types of camera movement; the machine movement (e.g.: pedestral, dolly and truck) and the human movement (e.g.: tilt, roll and pan). Zoom movement is most popular. Pan movement is moving the camera horizontally, either left or right and the camera remain firmly on its axis. Tilt movement is moving the camera vertically, up and down and, the camera remain firmly on its axis. Truck movement involves the moving of the camera to the left or right and dolly movement is the movement of the camera forward or backward, both involve the movement of the camera.

iv) Camera Angles

The camera angle is a place where the video/movie camera is placed to take a shot. Several angles can be used to take a scene and it invokes a different experience and emotion. In other words, the angle of a camera shot is important for shaping the meaning of the video or film. There are many types of camera angle such as; OTS (over the shoulder), up and down, work and bird views and Dutch angle. The function of the Dutch angle is to show weird or unstable character.

v) Lighting

Lighting is essential to videographers. Light can enhance a scene in a variety of ways to help tell the story and heighten its dramatic and emotional impact. Lighting has the power to enhance emotion, mood, and composition of the video. There are several kinds of lighting; high key, lower key, bottom or side, front and back and direct lightings.

vi) Sound/Audio

Basically, there are two kinds of sound/audio - diegetic and non-diegetic. First diegetic sound is the sound that be herd by the characters in the video or film. Non-diegetic sound is the type of sound which cannot be heard by the characters of the video. Sounds can be dialogue, music, and sound effects. According to Rozinah Jamaludin (2000: 74) "Audio is a sensational sound for multimedia presentations".

Audio is the key function to reinforce messages like animal sounds. Secondly, the audio can determine a person's mood or mood. According to Vaughan (1996: 234), there are three categories of audio; music, voice and sound effects. Each category has a function. In other words, audio is used for help in explaining something.

vii) Video Editing

Video editing is the process of manipulating and rearranging video shots to create a new work. This process involves the process of assembling shots into a coherent sequence. There several editing techniques such as, cut, fade, dissolve, wipe, flashback and cross cutting. Cut is the most common editing technique, where one shot is instantaneously replaced on screen by another.

iv) Text

Besides the cinematic techniques, cinematic approach also looks at the text. Analysing the text is important to depict meaning from it. In other words, the interpretation of the text goes along with the analysis of the cinematic techniques. In general, a text can be described as words formed into one sentence or one paragraph that will convey the message to generate a communication. According to Rozinah Jamaludin (2000: 42-43); "The text in multimedia presentations consists of two categories of texts; text as reading material and text as visual images". In video poetry there may be a text or not text. In film, the subtitle is not the text because it does not contribute in enhancing the communicating of meaning to the viewers.

The Analysis of Video Poetry - "Aku" (Me).

This paper will analyse a video poetry by Barlycine, titled "Aku" or "Me". This video poetry has three components of a video; images, text and audio. The moving images are the video clips which were taken or adapted from a Korean musical video titled "Heartbeat", performed by a popular group artists, known as 2MP. And these video clips need cinematic techniques as an analytical tool to understand it. The analysis of the video poetry will be divided into three parts.

Beginning

Comparatively, the video poetry entitled "Aku" by Barlycine has been adapted from a poetry with the same title by the famous Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar (1922-1949). The translation of the poetry is as follows:

"Me"

When my time comes
No one's going to cry for me,
And you won't, either

The hell will all those tears!

I'm a wild beast
Driven out of the herd

Bullets may pierce my skin

But I'll keep coming,

Carrying forward my wounds and my pain
Until sufferings disappears

And I won't give a damn

I want to live another thousand years

(Raffel, 1993:18-19)

Structurally, at the beginning, the aspect of exposition is important. This video poetry is exposing the background of the subject, a man who has been deprived from the humanity. He was mentally tortured and at last he made a decision to fight for freedom from any unjust deeds or humiliation. This poetry was created by Chairil Anwar in 1940s, exactly when Indonesia was occupied by the Japanese in the Second World War. The background or context of this poetry will help the reader to understand the theme and issues in this poetry.

The analysis of this video poetry starts from the beginning of the video. It starts with the images, music and sound effect. The movement of the frames is slow and this slow movement is perfectly presented to show the distorted and disturbed emotional male character or subject in the frames. The mind state of the character is not properly grounded.



Figure 1: The above print screen shows the extreme close up framing of the face of the male character in agony. The subject is properly framed. Viewers can see and feel the agony of the character. The Dutch angle captures the emotional expressions such as anger and frustration of the character as vividly depicted in his face.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

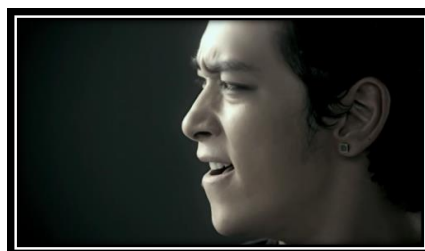


Figure 2: The above print screen shows another the extreme close up framing of the face of the male character in pain. Viewers can see and feel the agony of the character. The zoom in angle captures the emotional expressions such as anger and frustration of the character as vividly depicted in his face.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

These images are accompanied with the sound effect of monotonous sharp heartbeats which represent the agony of the character. He is not dying or giving up but he is going to fight for his dignity or humanity. The faces taken from a close-up shot have shown a clear emotional expression such as anger and frustration which come from a man who is depressed and mentally tortured. The sound effect of a sharp monotonous heart beat reveals the hardship experienced by the man.

Middle

At the mid-stage of this video poetry the audience/viewer is presented with an important still image that reflects the inner development of the character. At this stage, dramatic elements and tensions are presented to describe the character. He is having a conflict with the society. He is feeling the society doesn't care about humanity. Problems accumulate as days go by. Eventually, the conflict generates tension in this man.



Figure 3: The full shot framing of the subject, kneeling with the background and the lighting, supported by the audio and the text.
(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

The long shot framing creates a scene which not only show the subject in the center of the frame but also the background the subject. In analysing this middle stage of the video poetry, the man as the subject, background and lighting have to be observed in depth. The subject is kneeling, while his face is facing down. The position reflects the subject is emotionally down because as a human his humanity has been discarded by the authority. He is building his strength to resist the pressure or humiliation. The dark background reflects his life is full of darkness. Nevertheless, there is a hope for a better future when there is white lighting and the white smoke (from the smoke machine). The bright lighting together with the dark background form a message. It is a critical stage of the subject to make the decision to fight for his life and dignity. The life is dark and frightening, but there is hope.

In the context of the audio, the three types of audio are found in this episode. First, there are voices of hope though it is not clear. The unclear voices symbolise the uncertainty, and at the same time there is hope creeping out. Eventually, there is an emerging energy from the body of the subject for the next move. Second, music from the high-pitched violin shows how the subject feels at this particular moment. He feels furious, nervous and excited. Third, fast heart beat reflects the awakening moments on the subject to fight against the oppressors. There is a sound of lightning and this shows a sense of self-indulgence within the willing subject to be free and fight.

The last aspect of the content is the text. The main task of the text in this video poetry is to reveal the inner voice and spirit of the man. The subject has come to a point the he is determined to rise and fight and no single objection will be considered. The translation of the text is as follows:

When my time comes
No one's going to cry for me,
And you won't, either



Figure 4: The subject is framed at the center with clear background and the text.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

From the aspect of the static frame, it shows a momentary break in which the viewer has to concentrate on the subject and the moving text from the bottom to the top. This text acts as an interior monologue of the subject and reading text by the viewer is like exploring the mental state of the subject in. According to the text, the subject is going to make bold decision, that is, he is going to fight for his dignity. When the time comes he aspects nobody will stop him. He will rise and fight as a fighter and he doesn't care about the tough challenges ahead. All the pain and the sufferings will be ignored and he will reach to a level of a great fighter:

Bullets may pierce my skin
But I'll keep coming,

Carrying forward my wounds and my pain
Attacking
Attacking
Until sufferings disappears

And I won't give a damn

I want to live another thousand years



Figure 5: The subject has made the decision to stop all the humiliation and fight.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

The still image of a man is burning in himself as he decided to fight for his dignity. Although, the mental state of the subject is changing but background and the lighting have not changed. If the viewer keep watching the video, in the next frames, there is a change of visual. The subject is no more kneeling but lying down.

The tension grows bigger and at last he makes a decision. The third part of the video is the reflection of the mental state of the subject. As the frame moves slowly it comes to a moving image represents the spirit and determination of the subject to rise and fight the humiliation and oppressions of the oppressors. The first of the two print screens below show that the subject is lying down and the position of the man is well represented in the verse:

I'm a wild beast
Driven out of the herd

Bullets may pierce my skin
But I'll keep coming,

Carrying forward my wounds and my pain
Attacking
Attacking
Until sufferings disappears

And I won't give a damn

I want to live another thousand years

The man rises from the humiliations and oppressions by the oppressors and forever he will keep fighting the unjust deeds. The medium long shot framing of the subject allows the viewer to view closer but not too close. This shot provides viewer a scene where the subject is lying down and gradually awakening and start to rise. The camera position is relatively to the ground. It is the same level as the human eyes. The effect of this angle is to suggest the madness of humiliation and brutality which have inflicted on human. In the time of the war (The Second World War), the madness of human, killing each other is unberable. These people are, "... a wild beast/Driven out of the herd" as reflected in the text in the frame below:



Figure 6: The subject believes he is, “I’m a wild beast/Driven out of the Herd “,
And the shot reflects the agony.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=8y16q-zFgpo>)

From the eye level shot, the framing shot changes to a medium shot. The viewer can observe the rise of the subject. This medium shot will help the viewer to pick up on the subject movement and gestures. It shows the upper body of the subject and is interesting to observe the body language of the subject because it is conveying the message and emotion.



Figure 7: The medium shot is integrated with the text.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?V=8y16q-zFgpo>)

From a ‘wild animal thrown from the herd,’ the subject has a new proclamation to make. He wants another thousand years to live. The change does not take him away from his roots as reflected the grasp the soil in his hand as he rises. The integration between the image and the text is supported with the audio. Voices of people which acts as the background, helps to give an ambiance of the rise of a fighter. While the sound effect of the heartbeats, slow and then begin to accelerate fast, shows the energetic moments of a man who has decided to be a fighter. The man has decided to fight the mental torture of humiliation and nobody can stop him. He has gained a new energy, and he wants to fight and fight. The angle of the camera shot is at the lower angle and this angle reflects the strength or power of the man. This power which grow within his mind acts as an energy that has awakened him from all the sufferings and ready to fight for his freedom from any humiliation by the authority. These two print screens show the climax of the story of a man who wanted to be a fighter.

End

This video poetry ended with a frame with an image of fire. The fire is a symbol of courage that has awakened in this man. The symbol of this fire reinforces the spirit of the character who was sitting on his knees and gradually rise to fight and the fire of a fighter is burning in him. He is no longer the same person. He is new in spirit. This is the resolution of the conflict faced by the man.



Figure 8: An image of fire reflects the power in the man who has overcome his weaknesses and he ready to face all the challenges ahead.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y16q-zFgpo>)

The audience or viewers participation of this video poetry is discouraging because interactivity is minimum – play and pause. It is just a mechanical interactivity. This is because the user interface or the web-based application which respond to viewer's action was not applied in the video poetry. The viewers cannot control, response and manipulate the video. Consequently, the viewers are passive and will not experience the immersive experience from the video poetry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the new horizon created by electronic literature has become an eye opener for literary critics. The four categories of literary theories and criticism are not sufficient to indulge with this new horizon. Media theories and criticism are another category which discusses media and its impact on literature. The impact of media on literature can be analysed in three aspects: production, representation and appreciation. There are already written materials - articles, books and thesis on the aspects especially with regard to genres of electronic literature such as hypertext novel and video poetry. But there was no serious effort to establish the fifth category of literary theories and criticism. This paper has given a great emphasis to establish the fifth category. Cinematic approach deployed in this paper shows how media and technology have given an impact on the representation of the genre.

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