

Biographical Criticism Significance in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* for Literary Research Subject

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Abstract

Biographical criticism is easier to do to literary works that reflect the author's biography. This research used qualitative research. In this research, interview and *Inferno* were the data sources. Three lecturers of Pekalongan University are the interviewees of this research. The objective of this research is to find out the significance of biographical criticism analysis for Literary Research subject of Pekalongan University. The result showed that this research can enrich students understanding about biographical criticism. This research also can be an example or reference to introduce biographical criticism to students. However, the novel is quite old to be an example. Instead of using novel which written long time ago, the writer can choose latest novel which more related to the students. The presentation of the findings needs to be shortened to show a compacted and concise form to save students' time in reading this.

Keywords: Biographical Criticism, Literary Research Subject, *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri.

Abstrak

Kritik biografi lebih mudah dilakukan pada karya sastra yang mencerminkan biografi penulisnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif. Dalam penelitian ini, wawancara dan Inferno digunakan sebagai sumber data. Tiga dosen dari Universitas Pekalongan menjadi responden dalam penelitian ini. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui signifikansi analisis kritik biografi untuk mata kuliah Penelitian Sastra di Universitas Pekalongan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penelitian ini dapat memperkaya pemahaman mahasiswa tentang kritik biografi. Penelitian ini juga dapat menjadi contoh atau referensi untuk memperkenalkan kritik biografi kepada mahasiswa. Namun, novel yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini cukup tua untuk menjadi contoh. Sebagai gantinya, penulis dapat memilih novel terbaru yang lebih familier bagi mahasiswa. Penyajian temuan perlu disingkat menjadi bentuk yang ringkas dan padat untuk menghemat waktu mahasiswa dalam membacanya.

Kata kunci: Kritik Biografi, Mata Kuliah Penelitian Sastra, *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri.

INTRODUCTION

By those who divided the whole history into three great periods, medieval history has buried a lot of alliance, rivalry, vengeance, treason, victory, and war. One of the most famous rivalries during the medieval Italian era was The Guelph and The Ghibelline civil war. It was started from a long and complicated conflict between The House of Welf (Guelph) and The House of Hohenstaufen (Ghibelline) in Germany for political influence and power. The civil war was last long and around 1155, when Frederick I was crowned as the Roman

Emperor, he needed the support of the Italian people for his reign because his actions always received criticism and condemnation from the church. However, he needed the church as a cultural force to strengthen his influence. Triggered by his intense desire, The Guelph and The Ghibelline's influence was born in Florence, which at the time was on the verge of tremendous development. Florence was able to grow its political and economic influence more freely than other Italian cities because of its location far from Constantinople and England (Zulkifli,

2015).

The city of Florence was split in two by this small rivalry that grew into a fierce conflict: The Ghibellines, who backed Frederick I, and The Guelphs, who backed the Lombard League – a medieval alliance that was founded in 1167 and was backed by the pope. Even after Frederick I died and his reign was continued by Frederick II (1220–1250), there remained a conflict between these two groups. The goal of The Ghibellines' approach was to rally Roman conservatives to propagate a message about the church's refusal to express appreciation to the Roman Emperor Constantine for providing them with the freedom, opportunity, and protection to spread Christianity throughout Europe. However, The Guelphs insisted that Roman Emperor should alter to Roman Empire into Republic as a nation that idealized by Plato (Zulkifli, 2015).

In the world full of Ghibellines and Guelphs, there was Dante Alighieri who was part of The Guelph. For somebody who had lost too much, Dante lets history recorded his fictional-spiritual-journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise entitle *Commedia* (also known as *The Divine Comedy*). This narrative poetry is a trilogy which consists of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Dante's epic poetry was inspired by his journey through the blaze of The Ghibellines and Guelphs' civil war, the death of his lover (Beatrice), and even his beliefs.

According to Deyab (2022), *The Divine Comedy* is a Dante Alighieri's autobiography. Lauretis (2014) in Zulkifli (2015), states the same thing that *Commedia* is an autobiography of Dante Alighieri. In this way, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri can be analysed through biographical criticism. Purba (2018), determines biographical criticism involves the relation between a written work and the biographical experiences of the writer, in

which writer could explore the red thread between Dante and *Inferno* interestingly.

Susanto, one of the interviewees, states that when we learn about language we also learn about the culture. The way to understand the culture is through literature because literature reflect not just the way of people think but also reflect the life of people behaviours, the economy, the politic, even the historical situation. Today's curriculum, English teaching in school, aim not just developing the competent of the students but also the intercultural competence of the students. To tolerance of other culture, adapting, and open, but still understand their own culture. Here, literature playing important part in opening students' understanding about other culture without travel to other country.

In English Education Department of Pekalongan University, where the lecturer trains students to become a teacher, the aim of literary subject is to teach them about intercultural and give the knowledge regarding to open to other culture to avoid stereotypical. Through this subject, the students from English Education Department will studying about the approaches in Literary Research to find out that literature is not just a text with content, yet full of meaning.

Susanto, during the interview, adds that in Literary Research subject of Pekalongan University, the priority of analysis is lied on students' opinion. They will give a freedom to interpret the literary works according to their understanding. Yet, they have to find another voice to enrich their understanding towards particular literary works. It is where biographical criticism and other approaches can take part. It is important to let their own understanding interpret the meaning of literary works, but author's point of view ought to be considered as author is not only a writer, but also a person with background or culture.

Based on the concept of biographical

criticism in *Inferno*, the main focus of the analysis can be determined. It focuses on the analysis of biographical criticism in *Inferno*. As this approach is need to be considered and learnt in Literary Research subject to enrich and broaden students' understanding of analyzing a literary context, then the writer decided to do a Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* analysis through biographical criticism. The aim is to find the significance of this topic with Literary Research subject, especially in English Education Department of Pekalongan University.

METHODOLOGY

There are several research designs to conducting research. Yet, in this research, the writer was used descriptive with qualitative design and analysis. The process of analyzed the research involved analyzing the data from *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri and *A Biography of Dante Alighieri: Set Forth as His Life Journey* by Denton Jaques Snider to find out the biographical criticism of these literary works.

To collect the data, the writer was used content analysis and interview. The content analysis process was followed reading *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri and highlighted some lines that apparently refer to Dante's biography. After it was done, the writer read *A Biography of Dante Alighieri: Set Forth as His Life Journey* by Denton Jaques Snider and match it with some parts from *Inferno* that has been highlighted. Some biographical facts about Dante that missed in *Inferno* has been added to the list. Once the content analysis done, the writer was compiled questions based on the conclusion for the interview session. The interviewees are Susanto, S.S., M.Hum., Dwi Ario Fajar, S.S., M.Hum., and Dwi Agustina, S.Pd., M.Pd. B.I., Ph.D.

There are three steps on how to analyzed the data, whether it is content analysis or interview. They are data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. In content

analysis part, the writer was selected the data from Dante's *Inferno* and *A Biography of Dante Alighieri: Set Forth as His Life Journey* by Denton Jaques Snider which showed the biographical criticism and eliminate data that has no correlation to one and another. After reducing the data, all the main data was presented next to the interpretation of Dante's biography. In the last part of this analysis the writer was made conclusion about biographical criticism according to the data analysis and its interpretation.

Besides content analysis, the writer was also used interview. The questions for the interview were taken from the content analysis result. The steps for analyzing the interview data started from eliminated some parts of the answer which is not on point. Hence, the correct and on point answers can be decided. It was continued with displayed the selected answers according to the questions' number. In the final step, the writer was drawing conclusion from the interview result in order to find the correlation between biographical criticism and its significance for Literary Research subject

FINDING(S) AND DISCUSSION

1. The Biography of Dante Alighieri

Dante Alighieri was born in 1265. His father was Alighiero degli Alighieri and his mother was Bella. His father came from a prominent family that traditionally sided with The Guelph faction. Dante's birth years were the glory years of The Guelphs after conquering The Ghibellines in Florence in 1250.

Growing up, Dante enjoyed reading sonatas written by jurists, physicists, and nobles. Since then, he has started learning to write. He penned love poetry that praised the beauty of a woman he sometimes referred to as Donna Angelicata but elsewhere as Beatrice, who was described as a maiden so pure with beauty that no metaphor could

compare. By the age of nine, he had only met Beatrice briefly. Since then, he has regarded Beatrice as the ideal female figure. The death of emperor Charles of Anjou in 1284, changed the Roman political order. During the time of Charles I, The Ghibellines were not allowed to expand in The Guelph territories. However, under the empire of his son, Charles of Naple, The Ghibellines controlled many cities in Italy. The power of The Ghibellines grew until conquering Pisa and Verona. During this time, Dante proved that his family's political marriage did not change his fighting spirit to defend Guelph and challenge his father-in-law's family, Donati Ghibellines. In the second year Benedetto Caetani was elected Pope. Dante, who opposed Pope Boniface VIII's edict, met fierce resistance from his own clan. The Guelph faction split into two camps. Dante sided with The White Guelphs who opposed Boniface VIII's edict regarding the sale of indulgences. As a result of this feud, Dante was not allowed to enter Florence, after fulfilling an invitation as a delegate to meet Pope Boniface VIII in Rome.

Dante and Guido Cavalcanti traveled the region from one city to another on the time they were exiled. The first place he stopped was Verona and was a guest of Bartolomeo I Della Scala. In the other occasion, he met Emperor Henry VII who gave him protection and security during his life as an exile.

From 1208 to 1321 Dante wrote The Divine Comedy and completed it before his death on 13 or 14 September 1321. Besides documenting his tragic life story and romantic encounters with Beatrice in the afterlife, Dante also includes his commentary on the contemporary developments in philosophy, poetry, and religious thought of his time within The Divine Comedy. Dante not only was influenced by the ideas of Thomas Aquinas in his writings, but also influenced by Arabic

literature. In Dante's texts, there are resemblances in philosophical ideas, linguistic style, and religious temperament to Ibn Rushd.

Dante's Divine Comedy was recognized and honored without delay. As early as 1400, 12 comments had been written to provide extensive explanations of its significance. At 1373-1374, Giovanni Boccaccio produced a biography of the poet and gave the first public lectures on The Divine Comedy, establishing Dante as the first modern writer whose work was taught alongside ancient classics at universities. Dante became renowned as the "divino poeta" (divine poet), and in a splendid edition of his epic poem produced in Venice in 1555, the adjective "divina" (divine) was added to the title, changing the basic "Commedia" into "La Divina Commedia," or "The Divine Comedy."

2. Biographical Criticism in Inferno

Some examples of biographical criticism in Inferno are listed below:

Table 1:
Biographical Criticism in Inferno

Quote	Explanation	Page
Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself within a forest dark, For the straight-forward pathway had been lost.	These lines reflect Dante's life experiences as he faced political exile, turmoil, and personal struggle. The metaphorical "forest dark" symbolize his lost path literally and metaphorically.	1
"Thy city, which is full Of envy so that now	Dante's critique of Florence, a city plagued by excessive envy, is expressed	26

the sack runs over	through the line “Thy city, which is full of envy so that now the sack runs over.” The phrase signifies the city's moral and social decay, attributed to the sin of envy among its inhabitants.	
The city which once made the long resistance	This one refers to the Guelph and the Ghibelline war that they were against each other in a long period of time.	114

All of the biographical criticism data from *Inferno* and Dante's biography covered the themes of romance, empathy, history, theology, and politic.

3. Result of the Interview

1. In your opinion, is biographical criticism worth to be analysed in literature?

Table 2:

Answer of the First Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Agustin a M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
Yes, it is important to know about the author. Understanding the author is crucial, as works can evolve post-author's death and are subject to interpretation	Yes, all Literary Research has evolved to explore not only literary works but also their creation and external impacts. Biographica	I'm not sure.

by different people, especially in different eras. It's still essential to consider the author's interpretation of their work.	I criticism, such as Dante's <i>Inferno</i> , is intriguing subjects for analysis, especially when used in specific literary studies.	
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Biographical criticism is worth to be analysed because Literary Research has evolved to explore a lot of things in literature and It's still essential to consider the author's interpretation of their work.

2. Does the result of this research demonstrate concepts that are easy to understand biographical criticism?

Table 3:

Answer of the Second Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Agustin a M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
To help non-faculty students understand biographical criticism, we need simplify examples and simplify popular works of authors. For younger generations, understanding someone from a long time ago is harder, while understandin	Certainly, because upon reexamination, students will understand how biographical criticism critiques someone's biography or even critiques it from the perspective of the author. This is a good example, where there is a debate	I'm not sure either.

g someone from the present is easier. For example, in this era it will be easy to take Tere Liye.	about Dante as a persona or Dante as the author. It depends on which aspect we want to analyze.	
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This research is a good example to show whether Dante as a persona or Dante as the author but the novel to be analyzed better be from the present time such as Tere Liye's works.

3. If English Education Department students of Pekalongan University are unfamiliar with biographical criticism, can the findings of this research be used to introduce the concepts of biographical criticism to them?

Table 4:

Answer of the Third Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M. Hum.	Dwi Agustina M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
Yes, of course, you can but back again, sometime we need more familiar author, more familiar works to help them understand biography approach better.	Yes, it is possible because in English Education, there are many courses related to literary criticism, and explanations like these can certainly be included in those courses.	To ensure the effectiveness of your research, it is crucial to analyze whether the material presented is suitable for students' levels, interests, and needs. While other materials can be used, it is essential

		to match the work, students' needs, and the findings with the material.
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This research can be used to introduce author-oriented approach and biographical criticism but it needs more familiar author to find out whether the material presented is suitable for students' levels, interests, and needs.

4. In the research findings, several topics such as politics, history, and theology were discussed. In your opinion, are themes in literature related to the author's background necessary in teaching Literary Research subject?

Table 5:

Answer of the Fourth Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M. Hum.	Dwi Agustina M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
Yes of course. Understanding the works, era, and publication location is crucial. It's essential to consider the author's perspective, thinking, response, and writing style in that era, as different eras produce unique works.	Yes, it is very important because the creation of a work is closely tied to the author's life, social background, sociology, biography, experiences, politics, and political inclinations, as their surroundings and surrounding	Not really. When we are talking about theology then we are trying to touch the religious issues which approach by the author. And this is, I think we have many

	s significantly influence their work.	more to offer to the learner other than theology or religious aspect about the literary works.
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These topics are important in Literary Research to understanding social background, sociology, biography, experiences, politics but not with theology.

5. In your opinion, is this analysis interesting and capable of increasing students' interest in reading because biographical criticism uncovers the narrative of the author's life?

Table 6:
Answer of the Fifth Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M. Hum.	Dwi Agustina M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
Some students may not be interested in unfamiliar material or those distant from their life, and it requires hard work for lecturers or teachers to bring it to their	Exploring the author's issues or challenges in a work is interesting as it allows us to understand the author's ideology and intentions. Although we may not know the	Many students in the department dislike reading novels due to the time and difficulty involved. The author acknowledges that there are numerous topics available by authors, and each student

attention, except for those who are curious from the start.	intended meaning of the literary work, knowing their political preferences or ideological inclinations can help us better understand the meaning of the work.	has a different interest. To offer literary works, the author suggests allowing students to choose their own novels and topics of interest, rather than forcing them to read similar works at the same time.
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This research may not be increasing students' interest in reading because reading novels take a lot of time, especially when the novel is determined.

6. Can the results of this research be used as a reference or example for a biographical criticism analysis to students in Literary Research subject?

Table 7:
Answer of the Sixth Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M. Hum.	Dwi Agustina M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
Yes, of course, but the lecturer must familiarize the students with the concept of hell and its level in Islam, referencing	Yes, it is definitely possible because it falls under the diversity of approaches and theories in literary criticism.	Well as long as you are following the theory of doing the biographical criticism then I think, it can be used as an example.

Dante's work. By incorporating this concept into the discussion, the lecturer can create interest and encourage positive responses from the students. The lecturer must work hard to make the work interesting and engaging.	The point is, in literary criticism, we can critique the content and the social aspects within the work. We can also critically analyze the author themselves. So, there are three aspects: the work itself, the social context of the work, or the perspective of the author.	
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It can be a reference to introduce author-oriented approach and biographical criticism but the lecturer must familiarize the students with Inferno first.

7. What do you expect from the results/findings of this research for Literary Research subject and English Education Department itself?

Table 8:
Answer of the Seventh Question

Susanto, S.S., M.Hum.	Dwi Ario Fajar. S.S., M. Hum.	Dwi Agustina M.Pd. BI., Ph.D.
In this era, people	This rare and unique	I'm not sure if students

prioritize meaning over content. The research aims to develop the media and interesting parts of Divine Comedy, such as comics or short clips, to help students familiarize themselves with the work. The next research will focus on developing Dante's work in teaching media or materials.	theme could serve as a prototype, pilot project, pioneer, or continuation of previous research, providing valuable guidelines and bringing diversity to Literary Research, particularly in the context of a Literary Research subject.	will appreciate the lengthy explanation of materials, biographical criticism. I believe a concise and compact writing would be more effective. However, I acknowledge that students may not be able to read all the material in one session due to their different abilities and the heterogeneity of the class. Therefore, a better presentation of results is suggested.
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The actual research needs to be presented shortened, it needs to be developed into interesting things such as comics or short clips about Inferno, and it could serve as a prototype, pilot project, pioneer, or continuation of previous research.

CONCLUSION(S)

The writer examined the biographical criticism in Dante Alighieri's Inferno, a narrative poetry chosen for its interesting topic and resemblance to Alighieri's biography, to understand the significance of

these criticisms in the Literary Research subject of Pekalongan University, particularly for students unfamiliar with these approaches.

The writer through a quite long process on how to analyze the novel and interviewing the expert to find the significance of biographical criticism in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* in Literary Research subject of Pekalongan University. The findings showed several biographical aspects in *Inferno*.

From the analysis result, the writer continued to interviewing the expert about the findings. There are some pros and cons from this research significance for Literary Research subject in Pekalongan University, such as the findings of this research can enrich students understanding about biographical criticism. Even though the priority of the analysis is lied on students' opinion, author's point of view should be considered in an analysis because by understanding an author's life can help readers more thoroughly comprehend the work. This research also can be an example or reference to introduce biographical criticism. However, the novel is quite old to be an example. Instead of using novel which written long time ago, the writer can choose latest novel which more related to the students. The presentation of the findings needs to be shortened to show a compacted and concise form.

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