

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This section provides the background, the research question, and the aims of the study. The background of the study will outline the reasons for conducting this study and the research question that will guide the conduct of this study.

#### **1.1. Background**

As one of the most common literary works, poetry is often influenced by the issues happening around the world. It communicates messages through carefully arranged words and says more intensely than the ordinary language does (Perrine, cited in Arp & Johnson, 2002). Poem expresses emotions and ideas through written words to the readers or listeners. As the reflection of the poet's thought and contemplation, poetry uses words, imagery, even musical qualities, and other elements to evoke emotional responses. Readers might interpret poems differently based on their knowledge and background; thus, a poem may yield multiple meanings instead of a single meaning. The elements of poetry, such as the figurative language, tone and mood, are used to heighten, intensify, and give a pleasurable experience in both reading and feeling—then later become the devices to enhance the understanding of a poem.

There are several poems that take global issues as the theme, be it focusing on personal experiences, opinions, or hopeful messages. The latter can be found in Kitty O'Meara's poetry that takes up the current issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. O'Meara's "And the People Stayed Home" (2020) is considered to be one of many poetries that a lot of people who have suffered the same predicament can relate to. Many people share the same fear and overwhelming anxiety about what could go wrong (Krug, 2020). This poem became viral on social media, as—despite the difficult situation and the uncertainty people faced—it delivered and spread a positive attitude towards a new beginning and a hope for a better future. This poem has also opened the door to many deep and meaningful discussions about what is happening right now in the time of the pandemic.

In relation to this study, O'Meara's empowering and encouraging poem has been taken up as a basis for sharing one's experience during the pandemic. This

study selected the first semester students as participants since the research is particularly interested in exploring their emotions in facing the current state of ‘having to be stuck’ at home, taking online classes, which is far from what many had imagined being a university student was like. These students, who are studying at the English Language and Literature Program, read O’Meara’s poem and gave their responses to it in the form of a poem as well; this is because poetry has been considered as one of the best vehicles to express feelings and emotions by using language (Nemerov, 2020). In responding to the poem, a reader-response approach was adopted. The approach is deemed the most suitable for the purposes because it emphasizes the readers as playing an active role in the meaning-making or interpreting process.

Reader-response theory grows with the concern that reading is a process that involves both the reader and a text in a particular circumstance (Rosenblatt, 1982). It emphasizes the importance of readers’ emotions and knowledge in interpreting the text. In an academic setting, personal responses are often seen as being not ‘academic’, as students ought to be ‘objective’ in writing their papers. However, through reader-response theory, students are invited to explore their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences, while relating to the text being discussed. There may be different interpretations, but the purpose of this theory is to examine, explain, and justify their response to a text.

On the topic of reader-response theory and poem in the field of literature, there are quite a few studies that have been done in the area. For example, Febriani (2020) examined EFL readers’ comprehension of the poem to prove the use of the reader-response approach in understanding the poet’s intention. Another research using the reader-response approach is Totten’s (1998) study on students’ response notes of the poem about the Holocaust. Aside from poems, reader-response theory has also been employed in the analysis of a novel. For instance, in the study by Conklin and Mastropiero (2019), they found a transaction between the readers and the texts, in which different translation texts that had different words affected the readers’ understanding of the text. This study proved that the text does help the readers to shape their interpretation, as stated by Rosenblatt’s transactional theory.

While there are already some studies regarding interpretation of poems and other literary works using reader-response theory, limited research studies have involved students' responses in the form of poems and focused on the emotions of the readers. Therefore, to contribute to the literature in the area, this study aims to explore students' voices and delve into their emotions and feelings regarding the pandemic by way of reading O'Meara's poem. This research is particularly concerned with the tone, mood, emotion, and figurative language expressed in the students' response poems. By listening to the students' voices and conveying their emotions, it is hoped that better mutual understanding between the teacher and students can be established, thus making the classroom a more enjoyable place to learn.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following:

1. What kinds of emotions are conveyed in the students' response poems in regard to Kitty O'Meara's (2020) poem "And the People Stayed Home"?
2. How do these response poems relate to the students' lives?

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

This study aims to investigate the emotions conveyed through the response poems written by first semester students in regard to Kitty O'Meara's (2020) poem "And the People Stayed Home". This study also explores what can be inferred from the students' response poems about their lives.

## **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to contribute to the study of literature, especially the study which focuses on poetry analysis and reader-response theory in the English Language and Literature Program, Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education.

This study involves readers in making the meaning that is expected to raise awareness of critical reading and thinking and increase readers' participation in literary texts. Apart from providing readers with the space to express their feelings

and emotions, this research is also expected to lead to a more positive teaching and learning experiences for both the teacher and the students, as the research provides a path for mutual understanding to grow.

### **1.5. Organization of the Study**

This paper is organized as follows:

#### **Chapter I Introduction**

This chapter provides the background, the research question, and the aims of the study. The background of the study will outline the reasons for conducting this study and the research question that will guide the conduct of this study.

#### **Chapter II Literature Review**

This chapter discusses key concepts pertinent to the present study. It begins with reports on the current global pandemic, then it moves to the notion of poetry and elaborates its major elements relevant to the study, and closes with a discussion of reader-response theory. The chapter also provides a review of previous studies that have adopted reader-response theory and taken up the issue of the COVID-19 as their topic.

#### **Chapter III Methodology**

This chapter discusses the research methodology used in this study and is divided into four sub-chapters: research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **Chapter IV Findings and Discussions**

This chapter presents the analyses of the students' response poems and seeks to answer the research questions regarding the kinds of emotions conveyed in these poems and how their responses reflect their lives. There are fifteen poems altogether; to appreciate and preserve the poems in their entirety, the analyses of the poems are presented one by one, highlighting the aspects of tone, mood, and figurative language. Then, in the second part of the chapter, the collection of poems is compared and further discussed in light of reader-response theory and relevant studies.

## **Chapter V Conclusion and Suggestion**

This chapter provides the conclusion of this study and some suggestions for future studies. The findings discussed in the previous chapter are summarized in the conclusion part, and specific recommendations are outlined in the latter part of this chapter.