

Reader's Reception Toward Love Obsession In Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia": A Case Study of English Students At Andalas University

Nada Aprilia Febrin

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University

email: <http://nadaprilia.student.sasingunand@gmail.com>

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the readers' responses to the theme of obsession with love in "Ligeia," written by an American writer, Edgar Allan Poe. Through Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, this study analyzes readers' responses and the value of a literary work according to the readers of the literary works discussed, namely the short story "Ligeia," factors that form the background of the responses given by readers. The results of the analysis show that the reader's acceptance of the story is influenced by the reader's ability to understand the language elements of literary works and their knowledge of vocabulary and the reader's personal experience, especially the experience of love relationships. In terms of the effect that readers felt on "Ligeia," the results showed that readers received positive ratings. They rated this work as new and unique experiences.

Keywords: reader's response, factors, background, love obsession, unique

INTRODUCTION

Love is a human feeling that has been around for a long time. Love is one emotion that exists and develops. The feeling of love is one of the human feelings that is hard to explain. Simultaneously, feelings of love can make people feel happy, sad, hateful, and spiritfull. Klein (Johnson 2010) claims that the feeling of love has begun to be discussed since the relationship between a mother and a baby. There are many types of love in everyday human life.

John Lee (1973) categorizes kinds of love based on colors and meanings. First, Eros is the ideal type of love based on a sincere desire and commitment to both feelings and thoughts. The second type of love is Ludos, which interprets love like a game. This type of love is likened to a relationship that is not serious and is just for fun. Storge's last kind of love is referred to as the type of love, which, scientifically, is like the feeling of love between parent and child, sister,

or brother. Lee, then combines Ludos and Eros to make Mania. This combination is then known as obsessive love.

This love type is too deep and intimate. Up to a certain point, this type of love can curb the offender's feelings in the relationship. Anything excessive is not good. Obsessive love can change both the offender's behavior and thoughts in the relationship—many cases in the real world lead to harmful obsessive love relationships. This obsessive love behavior can also be found in literary works.

Edgar Allan Poe is one of writers who pays special attention to this theme. He makes use of this theme in his works, including "Ligeia" (1823). This short story tells about the love story of a husband and wife. The husband can not let his wife die, whom he loves so much that haunts his life. Trying to get out of his memories with his dead wife, the husband decides to marry another woman. While living this life with his second wife, the husband is still overshadowed by his first wife, his second wife's life did not last long, and he died like his first wife was. Suddenly, strangeness occurred when the corpse that laid on a mattress, which had been the corpse of his second wife, got up and stood before his husband as the figure of his first wife. This short story tells a story about an intense love for a partner that affects a person's thoughts and behavior. Besides, the ending of the story does not end with an author's stipulation but is an open conclusion so that the conclusion of the story can be different for each reader.

When reading a story, the opinions of readers may vary because of some factors. As put forward by Wolfgang Iser (1987: 21), two things can influence the Act of Reading. The first is the reader's opinion, which is influenced by the text he reads. Second, the reader's opinion can be influenced by the experience that the reader has experienced to realize that experience into the value-form of the literary work they read. Furthermore, Iser assumes that a literary work's value can be known if the reader has read it. It means that when the author conveys the message to the reader appropriately, the reader can express the value of the meaning that the writer wants to convey. However, the reader can also be influenced by the text he reads, and the reader's ability can also affect in understanding the existing text.

Besides, apart from the explanation above, this research held another critical reason to analyze English department students' analytical skills in understanding a literary work's values and ideas. This study also analyzes the different factors that the English department used in understanding a story. Then, this research should help both the researchers and the writer understand the reader's characters and adjust the intended values in the literary work with the intended readers. The reader's responses have two main kinds both positive responses or

negative responses. From the reader's responses, future writers of literary works will be able to move following the readers' dynamics and living environment intended by the author. This research plans to determine what the readers think about "Ligeia".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Klarer (2004: 92), the reception theory, or the most known as the reader-oriented approach, focuses on the reader's perspective towards the literary works. Some of these approaches do not postulate that a text-only has one of objective-value, but it can have more values than the readers who read the text. This statement implies that the text's value can evolve with the readers' reading process (92). This approach assumes that a text can make some of the reader's expectations towards content and continuation of a literary work.

Besides, Klarer re-paraphrases Iser's statement that the reader can fill in the "blanks" that exist in the literary work by the phenomenon of hope triggered by the literary works itself (92). Fill in the "blanks" can be affected by subjective-individual traits from readers and be affected by any general issues, like, education background, ages, gender, nationality, and reader's historical background (93). Thus, to make it more precise, the researcher explains more about the reader-response approach.

In his book *The Act of Reading*, Iser states that in a literary work, the author transmitted the focal point. The author's intent, contemporary, social, psychological, or even historical meaning of the text, can be understood through a process after the literary work has been read, and the literary works will only have meaning when they have been read (1987: 21). Interpreting literature is the result of a prerequisite reading. According to Iser, the message in literary works transmit in two ways, the reader "receive" by "arrange" it; this thing is not affected by any codes. Instead, this code appears in the process of "reading" itself (21). Besides, Iser states that reading is a "transaction" form between the text to a realization, which means literary works with the reader.

Iser (Selden 1997: 53-4) says that the reading process always go along with the readers. Iser separated two kinds of readers: implied reader and actual reader. The implied reader specifies as "the reader whom the text creates for itself and amounts to a network of response-inviting structures, which predispose us to read in certain ways." (53), while the actual or active reader specified as having several imagine or idea from the process of reading, but still can be affected by the experience from the reader itself. Reader-responses criticism deals with how the reader responds to literary works that can significantly impact humanity's reading habit. The readers could express themselves toward a literary work through the text. The readers could

give different perspectives back again on other ways they respond to literary works. The reception theory helps to understand well how the reader-response theory works and keeps affecting each other.

METHODS OF THE RESEARCH

This research uses a qualitative method and is proven by several data results in the form of numbers. The numbers obtained come from the questionnaire results from the readers' responses. The data obtained are also processed through data collection, data analysis, and presenting data to be written sequentially. The profile of respondents for this research represented 30 students of the English Department 2016. Besides, the questionnaire items are divided into two categories question, the first one is an open question, and the second is a closed question.

The work steps in this research are (1) determining the object to be studied, namely the story entitled "Ligeia" written by American writer Edgar Allan Poe, as the object under study; (2) sharing the short story to the selected subject for the research and for this time represented by English Department students; (3) determining the appropriate approach to analyze the data by classifying it according to the specified approach, the form of research data; (4) collecting the responses from the subjects about their opinions toward "Ligeia"; and (5) gathering the result from respondents and classifying it based on the categories that have been discussed in the theories.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results show that almost all readers are affected by the character's element in the story to help them choose the theme of "Ligeia." For their responses to the questionnaire, half of them do not support and accept the theme of obsession with love in their daily life. These responses are affected by their background and life experiences towards this love theme. On the other hand, readers believe that the theme feels new and rare. However, some readers think that "Ligeia" is more gothic rather than a horror genre. In a more detail, the results find the answers to four things as follows.

Factors that Influence the Readers' Reception Regarding Obsession with Love in "Ligeia"

This part is divided into two to analyze the factors for readers' acceptance. The discussion points are the reader's ability to understand the text and the reader's personal experience that supports understanding and realizing the value or meaning of a literary work into their respective understanding. This part discusses the reader's ability to understand and

interpret the author's values in "Ligeia." Besides, readers' personal experience counts as one indicator of the factors that support accepting this literary work's value. Moreover, the value in "Ligeia" is love obsession.

The Intellectual

Regarding the story's thematic values and factors that affected their responses, this analysis deals reader's reading ability. Based on the reader's answers, almost all the readers describe the story's theme through their perspective on the story's characters, especially the unnamed narrator. As shown in Diagram 1, the story's suitable theme is an obsession with love. The reader's responses indicate that the readers are implied readers. These readers derive the meaning of the story through their effect from the structure in the story. Several responses conclude that the structure has successfully affected the readers and their interpretation of the story. It was shown in some of their responses to the questionnaire. For example:

Respondent 4: "Overall the story, the male character married twice where the first wife (Ligeia) died of illness and started a new life again with the second wife (Rowena), but her wife also died of an illness which was almost the same as Ligeia's disease. Furthermore, half the story of the entire page contained how adored Ligeia was. In my opinion, it was because he glorified and praised Ligeia's perfection that it was what made him obsessed with her. Even though he has continued living with Rowena, he still compares her to Ligeia. At the end of the story, the male character still thinking and imagining the figure of his first wife even in front of Rowena's body."

Some respondents gave direct responses. **Respondent 17** thinks that the main character has a desire to have and protect his lover. He did not accept a failure or loss in his relationship, and it causes delusions. Meanwhile, **Respondent 19** thinks that the narrator always thought about Lady Ligeia even though he had a new wife and Lady Ligeia had already passed away, and the way the narrator describes Lady Ligeia clearly shows his obsession with a woman and the praises that he gives to Lady Ligeia.

However, to understand the story, half of the readers face difficulties. This matter comes up because, in the next question, the research asked, "what elements in the story can help you conclude the theme of the story?" The result shows four choices for setting and nine choices for plot elements. As was revealed, the researchers expected that all the readers choose the character's element as the supporting element since more than half answered in question number two that the presence of the narrator was the one that shows the meaning of the story's

theme. Some reasons given by readers for answering question number one have been answered in questionnaire question number two, and the results are more than half of the readers think of the narrator has a significant role in helping find the theme of the story.

This problem made it difficult to assess the reading abilities of the readers who filled out the questionnaire. As one should expect from readers' results, the readers' answers to these elements can select 100% character elements. Some readers who previously gave statements to the characters of the narrator chose other features. It seems that this is also an assessment point for the reader's ability to manage values in a literary work.

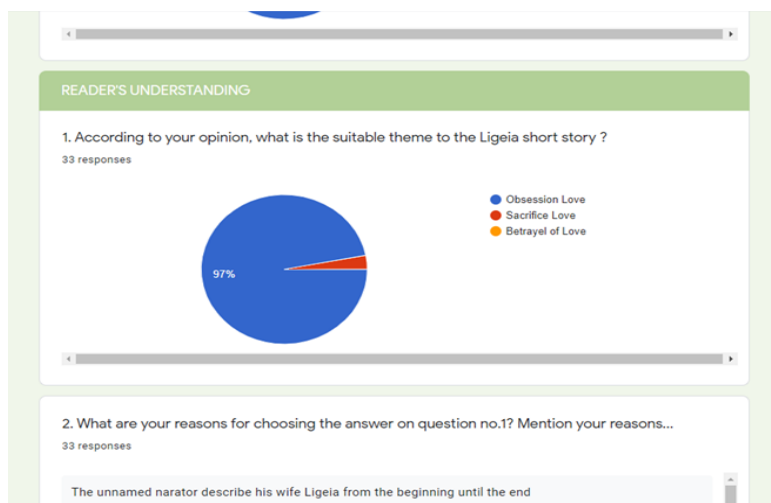


Diagram 1 Reader's Responses on the Theme

Almost all readers expressed their responses and focused more on the obsession with love, which belongs entirely to the narrator. This is because of the story structure, settings, characters, and plot. In the story, the characters play a big role in motivating the readers to understand the value of the existing theme. This statement is supported by the readers' answers to which elements help them conclude the theme (diagram 3).

However, none of the readers realized how Ligeia behaves towards her husband. As what happens at the end of the story, it can be seen that the corpse of the narrator's second wife suddenly rises and turns into the figure of Ligeia. This matter should be taken into consideration by the readers themselves. The story's structure seems to influence the reader's assessment of a literary work. The story structure dictates the reader to understand and focus only on the narrator without including other characters.

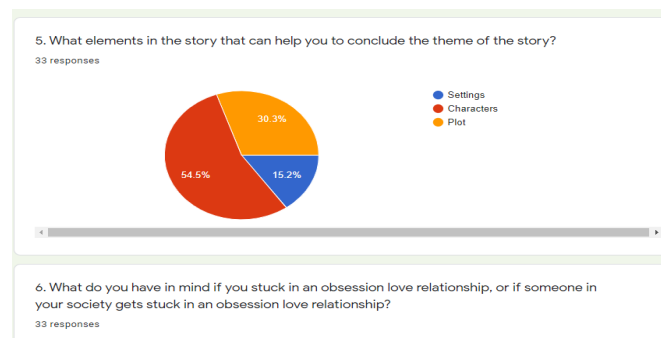


Diagram 2 Story Elements and the Theme

In question number 3, the researcher asks whether the theme of “Ligeia” can be easily found. 51.5% of the readers said that the theme was easy to find, 21.2% answered no, and the remaining 27.3% answered maybe (diagram 4). Some readers have difficulty in finding the meaning in “Ligeia.” Simultaneously, some are still unsure about the level of difficulty in finding the theme. For instance, **Respondent 28** said, “For me, it is just an ordinary story. However, for this short story, the figurative language that the narrator used is good.”

The author’s figurative language in the story has its unique impression and has a deep meaning. **Respondent 19** thought at first that the story was a love letter to Ligeia and caught on to the words that made the respondent feel a strong love for Ligeia. The respondent could feel the warmth of love tingling of her sense by the amount of massive adoration toward the character and almost felt like romanticism was the main theme of the story. Little did the respondent know that it was meant to be a horror story for some reason. The meaning and use of the author’s words seem to have two different effects on the readers.

For readers who have better analytical skills, intricate and wide vocabularies help them understand and provide a more precise realization than those who do not. Whereas for readers with lower analytical skills and reading skills, the use of intricate and deep vocabularies makes it difficult for them to understand the true meaning in the story and only deduce from the outer shell. From the data above, it can be representative that there are two categories of readers for the intellectual level of the reading process in this study.

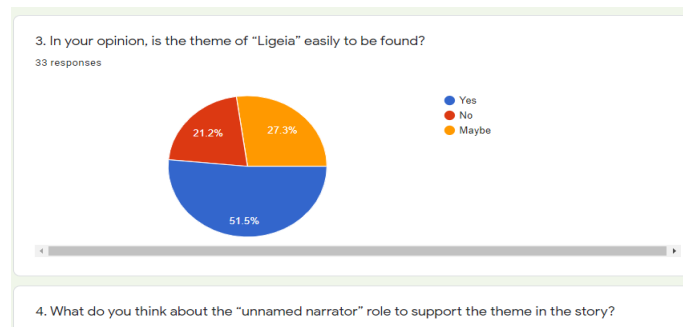


Diagram 3 Difficulty Level for Theme

The Personal Experience

The reader’s personal experience counted as one of the ideas to help the readers understand the story’s meaning. When asked what the readers think if they are stuck in a love obsession relationship, the result shows that 69,7% of the readers chose to be able to compromise with love obsession, 18,2% chose to be in the middle of this matter, and the rest of the readers (12,2%) chose to be okay to involve in-love obsession (diagram 5).

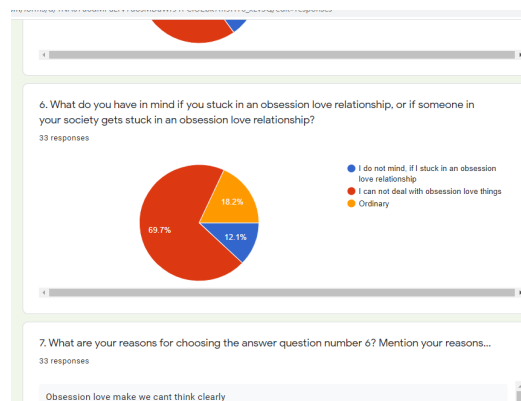


Diagram 4 Readers on Love Obsession

When asked, What do you have in your mind if you stuck in an obsession love relationship, or if someone in your society gets stuck in an obsession love relationship?, the personal experience of readers can affect their understanding of the process of reading. Through their experiences, the readers have background and imagination on the meaning of the theme. This was concluded from several responses.

Respondent 5 stated, “Obsessed relationship is not a healthy relationship. I do not encourage the act of love formed based on an obsession because it can lead to something extreme. In the novel, the narrator neglects everything after his wife’s death. He became an opium addict and ruined his life.”

Besides, **Respondent 20**, who gives a perspective about the question, states: “In my opinion, love speaks to the most significant one who creates perfection on the imperfections. I believe that falling in love deeply with the right person radiates inevitable, powerful, and enchanted beauty. One shall be stuck to one love at a time, and nothing is wrong with loving every part of your significant one. Though it might be visible as a rather lunatic image of crazy love, for me that shall be taken as the art of love.”

From two different answers above, one of the supporting indicators of the theme of obsession with love through the perspective of the readers’ personal experience is considered as the right choice because, through the readers’ personal experience, they can picture characters’ feelings and realize them into the value of the story. They show their perspectives on the obsession through their imagination and their knowledge to discover the meaning of the theme. The first statement from **respondent 5** shows that his perspective is related to an obsession with love, and his perspective is on things that happened in the story. Different from the previous respondent, **respondent 20** says something different about an obsession with love. She sees obsession as love as an art of loving. Respondent 20 realizes the meaning of the story and accepts it as a good thing. However, some readers might not be in the experience of love obsession itself, but still, they express themselves as good as the one who ever experienced it.

The Effect of Obsession with Love on the Reader’s Reception

“Ligeia” leaves a particular impression on its readers. It affects how they feel when reading the story and how they assess the theme of the story.

Impressive Impacts on the Readers

The main point here is that the impact of the story on the reader is acceptable in which the story leaves an impression on the reader. The initial question given was the reader’s responses to the romantic values in horror stories. When asked, what the respondents think about the story, the results show that 54,5% of the readers gave a “very good.” Meanwhile, 33,3% of the readers answered “good,” 9,1% of readers answered “ordinary,” and 3,1% of readers answered “not very good” (diagram 6). Besides, the readers were asked to give their opinion on this matter, and the result is that some of them did not realize that “Ligeia” has a horror genre.

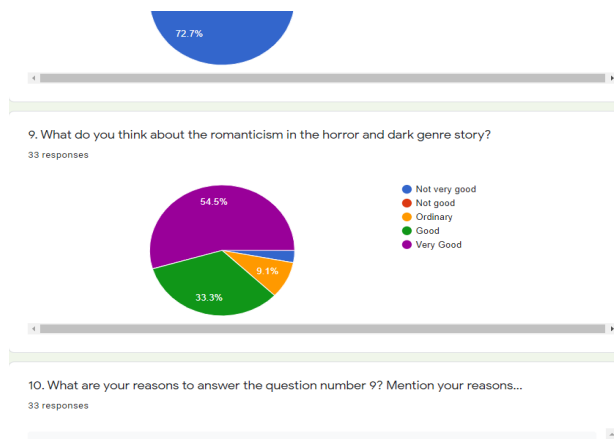


Diagram 5 Readers on Romanticism

Fourteen respondents write that the theme of this story is new and unique. Nine readers expressed that they felt a horror sensation and did not think that this story would be a horror story at the end. The thing discussed was that almost half of readers from the beginning only assumed that that the story was about the obsessive love between a husband and a wife. The impression they felt from the beginning of the story leads them to conclude that this story was only a horror genre.

When asked whether the story's theme is easy to discover. Half of them answered that they could quickly find the theme. However, the rest said that the theme could not be easily found, and they still doubt whether this theme is easy to find or not. It seems that the language used in this story also influences the readers' understanding of the story. The result is that the effect that should have been conveyed to the readers could not be conveyed.

The respondents' answers indicate that the readers feel a positive impression of "Ligeia." Some consider the story as something new and rarely found. A few said that the story is not too good but not too bad either. It seems that their impressions are influenced by their interests and opinions. **Respondent 8** said, "the author knows how to combine romance and horror theme in a story, so it is interesting for the reader." Meanwhile, **Respondent 10** said, "He feels the presents of a fictional story full of mysteries and gets the reader stuck in insatiable curiosity." Last but not least, **Respondent 14** stated, "the story is more to Gothic rather than horror. Also, love themes can absolutely spring from any genre. Thus, finding it in a bizarre genre usually becomes a treat for the reader as it is more anti-cliché."

The readers feel that "Ligeia" can be accepted and rated as quite an exciting work. Not only for the readers who have read many other literary works, but readers who are also new to Edgar Allan Poe's work would feel attracted to the plot of the story. The factors that make

readers interested in this story include the use of the low frequency words that becomes an attraction in this story. **Respondent 28** thought, “it is just an ordinary story.” However, the respondent thoughts the figurative language that the narrator used is good.

Apart from the factors above, the unpredictable storyline also supports this story and makes it more interesting because the readers feel that they cannot predict the theme of this story which can turn into something unexpected, namely a horror story, judging from some of the statements of these readers. **Respondent 19** said that she was surprised by the end of the story of “Ligeia.” At first, she thought that “Ligeia” has a romantic theme. She was caught by the words the writer uses in the story, yet at the end of the story, the story was meant to be a horror story for some reasons. On the other hand, **Respondent 18** writes, “from the beginning of the story, it is seen that it will tell about love, but the author turns the climax and resolution of the story with a horror element so that the genre itself is not faded.”

CONCLUSION

The riddle of the literary values represented by Edgar Allan Poe’s “Ligeia” can be solved one way through reader’s responses. The process of reception of a text written by the author through his literary work which can be assessed by the readers is the key to know whether a work is valuable or not. The process of solving problems is realized by the readers who have assessed and comprehended the work.

The results show that, first, the readers understand the theme of “Ligeia.” There are two factors that help the readers know the story’s theme: their comprehension and personal experiences about the obsession with love. For some readers, their ability to understand and interpret the meaning is hindered by several factors, such as the language used by the author and the readers’ personal experience.

Second, the reader’s efforts to understand the theme of love in “Ligeia” is also influenced by some factors, such as how the readers feel about themselves and how they evaluate this literary work. Although it is written in a complicated language, the story still has a positive impression on some the readers, especially the readers who have just read similar stories like “Ligeia.” The theme also influences the readers in understanding the story. It causes the readers to feel familiar with some readers and has become commonplace for all circles.

The results show that the students of English literature at Andalas University, who in fact have learned English and its culture still have some difficulty in understanding a literary work. The 30 students of the English Department who participated in this research show

different opinions, focuses, and ideas about the story. Their difficulties are influenced by their limited vocabularies.

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