

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The relationships between parents and children have always been affecting each other in various ways, especially parents, who take a more prominent role as an influencer and children as the influenced one. Children who have been influenced by their parents' relationships have every possibility to carry things that their parents usually do, including habit, behavior, and attitude. There are a lot of relationships that represent parents' relation and marriage plays an important role as the root of various relationships between a husband and a wife. *“Marriage is a legal bond between any two adults' individuals of the opposite sex who are not close relatives”* (Ponzetti, Czech Republic 2003, 414).

In religions, marriage has also been told as one of the things that a couple should cherish because they ascend to a higher level of being in relationship. For example, in Christians, marriage is the sacred relationship that was born from the love of a man and a woman that no human should separate them (Ponzetti, 2003, 108-110).

Throughout the years, marriage has become one of the essential things that many people pursue in their lives, one of dozens life goals that a person should achieve. Marriage is a foundation and a starting point to build a nuclear family

consisting of father, mother, and children. A husband and a wife who have been united usually live together and this is one of the relationships that marriage created. Children spend most of their time living in the same place as their parents, and it is inevitable to avoid or cease any communication between parents and children. Through communication, children will learn and inherit some knowledge, characteristics, and mental traits that parents may have. Once these children stepped into teenagers, these knowledge, characteristics, and things which they learned from their parents have a high possibility to dominate and create a child's behavior that may become the very foundation of 'self' when they turned teenagers. The emotion and response that parents showed in front of their such as acceptance, coldness, and rejection will set the standard on how to behave when they are old enough to make their own decision (John E. Gruesec and Tanya Danyliuk 2014)

Most of the studies that use family as their research object only focus on the relationship between father and son, father and daughter, mother and son, mother, and daughter. There is only a little number that discussed or revealed the significance of marriage in children' lives. *Father-son relationships and violent behavior* by David Brownfield highlights the aftermath of an abusive father towards his son's life. The development of a violent behavior from the son is the result of the relentlessly abusive actions that had occurred when he was a kid (Brownfield 1987). The article concerns about the relationships between father and son alone. Unfortunately, mother's role is absent on that article and different result if the research was focused

on the daughter instead of a son. The focus point in Brownfield's article is the same as this thesis—which is family. However, this thesis did not focus on the personal relationship between father and son or mother and daughter. Instead, this thesis will study the relationships between parents in interacting with each other and how do their relationships affect their children when they turn to teenagers. *The Parental Bonding in Father-Son Relationships* by Lauren B. Childers, an undergraduate thesis, centralizes the relationship between father and son. However, it also mentions the role of parents in building and shaping the mental emotion of a child. The showcase of parents' marriage will affect their children's lives in most of the aspects of their life (Childers 2010). Even though the marriage is not the central point, the explanation of how parents' marriage plays an integral part in directing children's lives is as the same as this thesis main problem. The only difference is this thesis focuses on a child who has grown into a teen and adult.

It is a less-known issue that some people might forget about this, that marriage itself has the power to change, turn, and shape people in a way that they might not even aware of it. Scientists believe that children will copy everything they see, especially those who live near them, and parents are the closest persons who live with children; thus, parent's behavior, attitudes, and even some trivial things about his parents might be copied inside children's mind. It is a topic that is worth to be analyzed because most of the time, people only highlighted how a father or a mother did something inappropriate to his/her child but forget about how the relationship

between father and mother itself could have a direct impact on a child's life. Many cases have shown how impactful marriage is in shaping a child's life when he turns teenager. The term "broken-home" is a title for children whose parents decided to divorce and live on their own. These children who are labeled as a "broken-home" kid may leave a wrong impression on people around them. Knowing that this child has a parent who had a divorce, people will usually justify their doings because of that reason only. By using that example, we can see that marriage itself has brought a significant impact on a child.

The issues between parents and teenagers have always been a frequently topic to be discussed and analyzed in literary works. However, the use of reader-response in analyze the literary works is less than other theories, especially in analyzing family issue in poem. This has convinced the writer of this thesis to investigate the impact of parents' relationships to the children as they grow to teenagers. The focus of this thesis centralizes on the children who turn to teenagers and how do these teenagers behave on people around them or how do they acknowledge there is a slight or a significant impact which they got from living together with their parents and seeing their parents communicate with each other.

Parenting and marital issues may have been often portrayed on literary works; some might be telling about how parents encourage their child to do a greater good like *Percy Jackson* by Rick Riordan. However, the likes of marital issue which Sharon Olds has brought to her poem might differ from the mainstream issue of

parenting and marital in literary works. Sharon Olds is the author of the poem “I Go Back to May 1937”. This poem is a part of collection poem entitled “Gold Cell” that had been released in 1988. Sharon Olds also won a Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2013 for her “Stag’s Leap” poem. Olds’s poems mainly talks about family, sexuality, and women. “I Go Back to May 1937” focuses on family’s issues. Back when she was a child, she experienced a rough childhood, whereas her father and mother did not function as they supposed to. These past traumatic experiences that she had; her journey of miserable life begins. “I Go Back to May 1937” is a guilty desire created by Sharon herself, telling that she does not want her parents to be united because they will hurt each other—even their child. The issues of bad parenting, especially parents’ relationships that affect children when they turned teenagers can be analyzed through Sharon’s poem.

Although “I Go Back to May 1937” cornered parents as the one who responsible for children’s behavior in days ahead; however, there is a little twist on the poem that may contradicts the whole idea of the poem itself—the further explanation will be given on different sections. On the release of her poem, people tend to see her poem as something bold because she uses words that describe her parents thoroughly. Her poem was also considered as revolutionary because there was less poem that brought up family topic. “Gold Cell” became a sensation after her first collection poem “The Dead and The Living” because “Gold Cell” explicitly used wild imageries.

The poem tells a story of younglings who fell in love with each other, narrated by a person who happened to be their child. This poem is explicitly exposing that the marriage of these younglings will bring nothing except horror. They hurt each other, do some terrible things to their child, and will be living a life full of misery for both of them. "I Go Back to May 1937" is a work based on Olds's childhood experience. She wrote "I Go Back to May 1937" to represent her life as the collection of failed parenting of which her parents had displayed in front of little Olds. Olds was the victim of her parents' marriage; thus, she expressed her anger by using poems as her mediator. Looking at her biography, Olds developed an attitude which was born from her hatred towards her parent's marriage. Her attitude could be the result of the mistreatment that she experienced from her parents and the identification of young Sharon, who identifies that their parents caught in an unhealthy and troubled marriage.

To understand the marital issue that may happen from a marriage couple, one should understand that the core of this issue has always been about the dysfunctional family. Dysfunctional family happened because family members do not act as they are supposed to, for example, when a father acted as if he was not a father could be proven fatal because the effect of his action will not be limited on his own but his family will feel it too (Ponzetti 2003).

Each of family members could have a different reaction depends on how do they experience the situation, some might hold a grudge against their father because of his inability to perform and act as a father for them, others might simply

choose to move on from the bad memories and forgive their father. The variety of possibilities in dysfunctional family are a lot, for instance, some marriage couple might have a same problem, but the solution of their problem most of the time are different than one another. As for marital issue—which is derived from dysfunctional family issue, marriage couple might be the spotlight of this issue, however, the effect of marital issue on other aspects such as in children's lives once they turned teenagers will be further analyze on this thesis. How marital issues have its way in children's lives when they turned teenager are getting less exposure since the most people tend to focus on parent-child relationship rather than husband and wife relationship.

There are several reasons why does marital issue is rather a less-known topic than parent-child topic; however, the primary reason is because some people thought that the biggest flop in marriage is only limited in husband and wife relationship that does not concern with other aspects. Another reason why the marital issue is not that famous than parent-child relationship because the notion of marital issue is considered as not-to-complex issue that should not be put up with much attention. Based on these reasons, this thesis is trying to reveal marriage how impactful marriage is in changing someone, especially children when they turned teenager. With an attempt to discover and revealed parents' relationships impact, this thesis has decided to use theory that is suitable, which is reader response.

Reader-response is suitable in creating new ideas from the readers, since this theory focuses the reader's respond or interpretation rather than text. Also, by using

reader-response, a new discovery of meaning will be found while analyzing respondent's response that relates with the main issue. Since this thesis is using reader-response, making the respond from respondent as primary data.

This thesis is using reader-response to get the responses on each of the respondents along with Olds's poem "I Go Back to May 1937" as the primary object. The responses of the respondents are important for this thesis because it corelates with the issue that this thesis formed as its main problem. Thus, making Rosenblatt's theory of transactional reader-response which focuses more on the response rather than the general meaning of the text itself is suitable since this thesis main concern is the respondent's response. The response of each respondent after reading Olds's poem will be used as primary data to analyze and will be discussed further to answer main problem of this thesis. By using reader-response, which heavily centralizes the response of respondents rather than the meaning that a text possesses, making the variety of the responses would not be limited by the text itself. As this thesis is trying to reveal the past experience and connect it to present while using an idea or a reference of Olds's poem, it means the response of respondents will be used effectively to use the response as its data.

As the aim of this thesis is to find the response of the chosen respondents referring to their childhood experience and its connection with their parents based on the Olds's poem, reader-response works the best to analyze those things. For reader-response itself is a mixed study that combines not just from the theory of literature,

but along with linguistics, psychology, and cognitive science (Whiteley and Canning 2017)

Hence, using Olds's poem as the object of study is a suitable choice because of the content of the poem, and the personal experience herself could lead to an understanding that marriage is also an impactful tool in shaping children's future. Therefore, this thesis uses this poem as an object to be investigated along with the respondents' responses and reader-response as its theory to help this thesis in revealing the impact of parents' relationships towards the children when they turned teenagers.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

How do the readers respond to parents' relationships depicted in Sharon Olds's "I Go Back to May 1937" in affecting children's behavior—when they turned teenagers?

## **1.3 Objectives of Study**

This study aims to reveal the respond of the respondents related to the significance of parents' relationships—marriage that is depicted in Sharon Olds's poem "I Go Back to May 1937".

## **1.4 Significance of Study**

The significance of this study is to analyze how a person perceive a common issue near them from a literary works; and how do they give a new interpretation of

that literary work with the use of reader-response. Also, to encourage other literature students to use reader-response in analyze literary works. Another reason is to raise awareness among people, especially for those who want to upgrade their relationship from boyfriend and girlfriend to husband and wife to always be careful in doing something—as husband and wife—in front of their child. Besides, this study is essential to be studied because some people are not aware that marriage can bring an impact on someone’s life—in this case, the child itself. This study can also educate the society about the importance of marriage, most likely the important of a good marriage to children’s lives, and to distinguish which is the good and bad marriage and how to recognize this type of marriage.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

Parenting: Parenting definition can be divided on two definitions, for parents parenting is practical skill parents should acquire to be better parents for children, while for children parenting is a way to educate children to understand basic moral value of life and some other things. (Ponzetti, Family, Definition of 2003)

Relationships: The state of being related or interrelated (Merriam Webster)

Respondent: A person who involves in an activity to responds or reacts something (Merriam Webster)

Interpretation: A particular adaptation or version of a work, method, or style  
(Merriam Webster)

Marriage: Marriage implies settled examples of standards and associated with values with the mutual relationship between husband and wife. It unites a man and a woman in a special kind of relationship that is legal by law and serves purpose for society. (Ponzetti, Family, Definition of 2003)