

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

This study is a New Criticism inquiry into three poems written by Lang Leav in her poetry volume entitled *Memories* published in 2015. This study focuses on the formal literary elements within those three poems. In relevance to the current study, contemporary poetry has a significant point in defining and making meaning of heartbreak. Because nowadays, the millennials are praising and agreeing with matters on heartbreak leading to new ways of appreciating the phenomena such as using social media platforms to share the similar meaning and understanding of the feeling and how they perceived it. This becomes the reason of creating of new trends in literature, for example, Instapoetry. This then is what differentiates the aspects of understanding heartbreak from the past and the modern era. Now, heartbreak in contemporary poetry is seen as somewhat more direct and straightforward in delivering the message to the reader, and the readers also feel a bond with the literary works itself.

The first literary work chosen by the writer is "After the Storm", a prose-poetry which consists of four stanzas. The first work tells about the story of loss and heartbreak that is felt by the speaker that uses storms and its aftermath as a symbolism of hope after a series of destruction.

The second literary work is entitled "A Love Story", a poem consisted of four stanzas. The poem tells the story of the search of memories through the past, the speaker in the poem here reminisces a particular past where she was once happily

in love. The poem has a melancholic undertone and atmosphere, which are a dominant literary characteristic in Leav's book.

The third work is entitled "Dead Poets", a prose-poetry which consist of seventeen short stanzas. The prose-poetry speaks of a girl who aspires to be a poet, unaware of the consequences that waited for her if she still chooses to be a poet, which is her heart that will never heal from the love that will never return.

Several previous studies have been conducted on the matters of contemporary poetry especially Lang Leav's works as written by Anisah Azmita's study entitled *Faithful Translation in Two of Lang Leav Poems Translated by Aan Mansyur* (2019) tells the importance of translation theories in creating a right translated product, in this case, using poems by Lang Leav. The result of her study is that the translation product that uses faithful translation is better than the translation product that uses semantics and a word-for-word method. The second study is entitled *Semantic Deviation in Lang Leav's Love and Misadventure: A Stylistic Study* written by Prima Lestari (2018). The study examines the usage of semantics deviation in Leav's poem expressions. The result of her study is that out of twelve types of semantic deviation, there are only ten found in Leav's *Love and Misadventures*, with metaphor as a prominent semantic deviation used by Leav because metaphor gives different reading experience to the readers. This study has successfully shown how Instapoetry is structured and the various selection of semantic deviations used in creating the works.

The third study conducted by Rina Gunawan (2017) entitled *An Analysis of Figurative Language in Five Selected Lang Leav's Poem* explores the many uses of

figurative language and the meaning of it in five of Lang Leav's poems. In her study, she used the method of qualitative approach, where she gathered data in the forms of figurative literary elements: metaphor, personification, hyperbole, simile, symbol, synecdoche, and paradox. In her study, Gunawan finds that personification to be the most prominent literary elements that are used by Leav. Gunawan's study has successfully promoted the interest of contemporary poetry, especially Leav's works and how Instapoetry can be seen as an alternative version to canon poetry.

From the studies that have been mentioned above, it can be inferred that New Criticism has not been used to analyze poetic elements within Lang Leav's poems. It is a prove that conducting a study of contemporary poetry by using New Criticism theory is essential to fill in the gap where Lang Leav's poems never been analyzed before by using the New Criticism approach with the issue of heartbreak.

Contemporary literature has become prominent over the years, with poetry become one of the outcomes of the matters, authors and poets such as Lang Leav gains more national and international recognition of their works due to the advantages that social media platform such as Instagram provides. Contemporary poetry such as works by Lang Leav has raised the issue of how heartbreak nowadays is formed due to contemporary issues such as abusive relationship, stuck in the past, loneliness, and regret.

Instapoetry is a distinctive style that emerges due to this phenomenon, where authors such as Lang Leav created her works using the platform, and gained recognition for her works, also introducing a new form of poetry into the public. Currently, this style of poetry is seen by many critics as a disgrace to the art of

writing literature. However, Instapoetry can still be seen as an example of how diverse contemporary literature is nowadays. Leav is one of the prominent pioneer figures in popularizing the style of Instapoetry, along with several others such as Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill, R.M. Drake, R.H Sin., and Atticus Poetry (Berens 2019). This trend in publishing poetry through social media and the rise of Instapoetry defines the importance and the need for further research into the field of contemporary literature (Berens 2018).

Recently, the trend of poetry in contemporary literature has seen a significant rise in attention. Leav's compilation of prose-poetry which was first published in her personal Instagram page is now turned into a book with the title *Memories*. In this book, Leav compiles her previous works from her previous books entitled *Lullabies* and *Love and Misadventures*, along with a new edition of her poems. The book itself captures special attention on the issue of heartbreak, sadness, and the journey of healing oneself from the pain of heartbreak, and ultimately through reading *Memories*, the feeling of self-exploration and rejuvenation can be attained, which is why this particular work is worth reviewing. The book itself is divided into two main chapters: part one *Here and Now* and part two *Remember When*.

The current literature on contemporary poetry has been wholly focusing on the issue of narrative in poetry for quite some time. One article was written by Brian McHale (2009) entitled *Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry* implore readers to focus on the importance of narrative aspects in poetry. McHale's intention to shed light on the narrative study is commendable; however, he lacks to incorporate formal elements and its role in analyzing poetry. The second work is a

book written by Mieke Bal (2017) entitled *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* is one of Bal's more critical works on the study of narrative. Similar to McHale's article, Bal has shown more tendency to put narrative study as the primary model of reading when it comes to understanding or analyzing poetry. Through these works, it can be inferred that the general school of thoughts and literature regarding contemporary poetry mainly focuses on the narrative study. There has been a lack of representation when it comes to the study of formalism and New Criticism in the realm of contemporary poetry, which is why a research gap of this nature should be fulfilled. The significance of conducting a study on contemporary poetry using the theory of New Criticism is because the theory itself is evolving along with the current trend of literature. Thus New Criticism can be seen as a theory that is still relevant in analyzing the current issue (Hickman and McIntyre 2012). If the study of New Criticism is not conducted, then it will eliminate the opportunity to understand the text as a whole unity.

The theory of New Criticism is one of the schools of thoughts within the study of formalism, where it explores a particular reading where meaning can be derived from the text exclusively, without any input from the extrinsic elements. The methodology that will be used in analyzing and collecting the data from the three poems is mainly derived from New Criticism perspective. By doing a close reading and examining the poems and its elements, the writer will analyze the structure of the poetry by taking a closer look to dictions, including connotation and denotation of the specific words, and examining the symbols which represent the general theme of the poetry. By doing so, the writer then has resolved any tensions and conflicts

that existed in the poetry. Furthermore, the relationship between those three elements will shape an organic unity to build the theme of this study. The writer then will gather the data from the three poems, and then with the collected data, the writer will have the answer to the question raised in the research.

Heartbreak is a phenomenon that is very close to most of us; it is a fundamental human experience where we can reflect one of the most hurtful yet expansive moments throughout our journey in life. This study raises the issue of heartbreak as depicted on Leav's book *Memories*, focusing especially on the elements of symbolism, irony, and metaphor of the three poems. The first poem entitled "After the Storm" tells about finding oneself after destruction, "In 1953, we began naming hurricanes so we could remember them beyond the wreckage. So we could try to make sense of the destruction. This is the way I remember you." (Leav 2015, 17). The second poem entitled "A Love Story" captures the atmosphere of longing and yearning a love that has left. Leav represents this beautifully, "We will remain unwritten through history, no X will mark us on the map; but in books of prose and poetry, you loved me once, in a paragraph" (Leav 2015, 23). Lastly, the third poem entitled "Dead Poets" illustrates the emotion of going through the realization that she will be forever in regrets of her wish. This exemplifies in "She learned too late that poets are among the damned, cursed to commiserate over their loss, to reach with outstretched hands— hands that will never know the weight of what they seek" (Leav 2015, 126-127).

Moving further into the discussion concerning heartbreak; the understanding of heartbreak can be derived from the three aspects of the works such as symbolism,

irony, and metaphor. One of Lang Leav's prominent aspect of symbolism is *storm* which serves as a force of destruction that leads to the aftermath of heartbreak. This aspect can be found in Leav's "After the Storm". Furthermore, the emphasis on metaphor usage is written by Leav in "A Love Story". The poem expresses the metaphor of heartbreak by comparing the feeling of heartbreak in search of a lost paragraph as if reading a book. Here, the word *paragraph* (Leav 2015, Stanza 3) serves as a metaphor for an unrepeatable moment in the past; when you flip a page, you often cannot repeat the first experience of reading. Lastly, on the matter of irony, one of the prominent use of irony can be seen in Leav's "Dead Poets" with the line "*to reach with outstretched hand— hands that will never know the weight of what they seek*" (Leav 2015, Stanza 17).

Memories is a piece of contemporary literary work which has successfully highlighted relevant issues that are fundamental to how we understand one of humanity most important value: love. Moreover, studies that use New Criticism as a model reading for this kind of literature has not been popular for quite some time. However, New Criticism being one of the ways to understand literature should not be overlooked (Brisman 2004). Thus, this study has proven its worth and should be deemed to conduct.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

This study attempts to answer several questions relating to the issue of contemporary poetry and New Criticism, as stated below:

1. How is the issue of heartbreak depicted through the symbolism, irony, and metaphor of “After the Storm”, “A Love Story”, and “Dead Poets”?
2. How is the interrelation of the three poems resolve in order to create an organic unity?

1.3. The Objective of the Study

This study attempts to reaffirm several of the questions that are raised by the researcher, and those are stated as follows:

1. Depiction of heartbreak as represented through symbolism, irony, and metaphor in “After the Storm”, “A Love Story”, and “Dead Poets”.
2. The creation of organic unity through how tensions are resolved within the three poems in building the theme.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Through conducting this study, the writer is trying to expand future research on the topic of contemporary poetry. This study also tries to fill the gap in the English department's internal repository, where Lang Leav's works have not been used as an object of research. This study also tries to assist undergraduate scholars who are also interested in studying the issue of contemporary poetry using the theory of New Criticism. Moreover, this study reveals the previously not so well

known topic of Instapoetry and the usage of social media, specifically Instagram, as a platform to introduce a new kind of contemporary literature.

Also, this study approaches the object through a holistic model reading of New Criticism where classic theoretical components are reevaluated and revised in order to make sure that New Criticism can be appropriately used to analyze a contemporary literary work. Hopefully, through reintroducing this model reading of New Criticism, future academics and undergraduate students can implement New Criticism in a fashion where is suited to the era to which their object of research belongs.

Finally, this study hopes to promote awareness and incite discussion on the topic of contemporary poetry and how it represents issues of humanity. Also, it strives to remind readers of the importance that literature has on the development of human culture.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

Symbolism: Can be defined as a combination of signs that consist of meaning, that meaning can be private or universal; usually, the meaning can be found implicitly (Cuddon 2013).

Irony: Claire Colebrook defines irony as a figure of speech and a perspective of life. Irony serves as a formal element that is used to refer to one thing but also has another more complex meaning attached to it (2004).

Metaphor: Meaning in metaphor can be associated with the cultural background and personal experiences of the reader itself. An understanding of

meaning when it comes to substantial, imaginary, real, literal, and figurative are essential in the production of meaning by the reader (Sobolev 2009).

Heartbreak: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), heartbreak is a feeling of crushing grief, anguish, or distress.

Prose-poetry: A form of poetry that shares both combination of prose and poetry, because of this distinctive combination, prose-poetry is unique because the diction is direct, but still has the element of figures of speech (Cuddon 2013).