

Reader Response Analysis in *A Little Life* Novel by Hanya Yanagihara

Adinda Dwi Putri Sihite¹✉, Desri Maria Sumbayak², Fikry Prastya Syahputra³

^{1,2,3,4}Department of English, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Article Info

Article History:

Received

24 February 2026

Approved

13 April 2026

Published

30 April 2026

Keywords: A Little Life, Reader Response, Stanley Fish, Torture Plot

Abstract

This research aims to analyze readers' reactions to the plot of the novel, sensitive topics in the novel, and the way the author evokes readers' imagination. The opportunity to analyze the novel from the viewpoint of the readers is presented by the positives and drawbacks noted by readers on social media. Fish's theory of reader-response analysis in an interpretive community is then applied in this research. The participants of this study were six readers that are actively joined a book discussion over social media. In conducting this study, qualitative research design with research instruments in the form of Google Form questionnaire were employed. The result of this study shows that, generally, the readers expect an emotional and sad story from the novel and their expectations of the plot is fulfilled by the author. These pros and cons opinion from the readers also represent the novel's discussion and reviews on social media. The result implies that the novel's tragic and melodrama story is the appeal of the novel itself, as the plot invites the readers to create mixed reactions that influence the novel's popularity on social media when they reviewed it.

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INTRODUCTION

Readers have always been an important part of literature. Some people find literature to be very entertaining and some people find it very advantageous too. Through literature, readers can experience the author's creativity and vision. According to Klarer (2004), literature is referred to as every form of written expression; however, not all written pieces of documents fall under the more precise definition of literature. One of the literary texts that often attract the attention of readers is a novel. According to Choeda (2019), a novel is described as "an imaginary prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity".

As for the data of this research, the researcher will use a novel that was written by American author, Hanya Yanagihara, back in

2015 with the title "*A Little Life*." *A Little Life* explores the ups and downs of adulthood in New York City through the eyes of four college friends. At the heart of the story is Jude, a complex and deeply troubled character with a traumatic past that he keeps hidden from his friends. The novel received 4.34 stars rating out of 5 on Goodreads with 92.696 reviews, all mixed good reviews and bad reviews regarding the novel. The novel also has 33.700 videos under the hashtags #alittlelife on TikTok, full of the novel reviews and reactions of the readers. Therefore, the popularity of the novel and various reviews of it became one of the factors that led the researcher to decide to use a reader-response oriented approach to examine the works. Using the reader-response criticism, this research aims to explain the readers' response concerning the novel's entire plot, and the way the author executes the story that emotionally connects with the readers.

✉ Corresponding author:

Email: desrimariasumbayak@usu.ac.id

All of the reader's ideas, experiences, and fantasy contribute to the meaning-creating process when the reader is directly emphasized as the primary source of interpretation. Readers are lured into Jude's terrifying events and their lasting effects on his relationships and sense of self as the story progresses. According to Fish's (1980) explanation of reader-response, a reader doesn't come up with an original response that is then modified by settling with the responses of others. Rather, the reader's response is the result of a larger community of readers who all have similar presumptions about how to read a text. Readers do not interpret a text in these terms, but instead, they construct it. The result of this study is expected to improve literature criticism and appreciation through reader response theory. This study also provides analysis on how readers act on text and how author's writing can captivate readers' emotions.

According to Mario Klarer (2004), the Latin word "litteratura" derives its etymology from "littera," or "letter," which is the smallest unit of alphabetical writing. Meanwhile, the word "text" itself is related to "textile" and signifies "fabric" in translation. It implies words and sentences come together to form a meaningful and cohesive text, just as individual threads do to form a fabric. Literature developed over many years and is divided into many genres, one of it is novel. The novel is a long fictional story written in prose, which evolved from the early forms of narrative, and is usually arranged under a plot or theme with a focus on character growth and action (Bonn, 2010). The novel as a fiction work is also a totality of a whole artistic form. Eventually, a novel consists of elements, or parts, that are interdependent and have a close relationship with one another, as stated by Nurgiyantoro (2018). If a novel is said to be a totality, then words and language, for instance, are one part of that totality, one of the elements in building a story. These elements of the novel are divided into two, intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements.

Intrinsic elements are the elements that build the literary work itself. These elements will be factually found if people read literary works. A novel's intrinsic elements are those that (directly) contribute to building the story. A few examples of the intrinsic elements of a novel are storylines or

plots, characterizations, themes, settings, points of view, language or linguistic style, and so on. Meanwhile, extrinsic elements are elements that are outside the literary work but indirectly affect the building of the literary work. The elements in question include the state of individual subjectivity of the author who has attitudes, beliefs, and views on life, all of which will affect the work he writes (Nurgiyantoro, 2018). In short, the author's biographical elements will also determine the pattern of the work he or she produces. Therefore, the extrinsic element of a novel must still be seen as something important.

Reader-response theory, according to Klarer (2004), holds that no meaning can be conducted in any text before it is captured by readers, readers are seen as being just as significant as writers in terms of providing meaning to a book. As stated by Pollingug & Williams (1995), reader-response criticism can be traced back to the 1930s when Rosenblatt wrote about her idea of "transactional theory" of reading, which at that time collided with the idea of formalist principles criticism. By the end of the 1960s, another reader-response theory is created by German critic Hans Robert Jauss with his famous 'reception theory.' According to Jauss (1985) from *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, readers from each historical era create the standards by which they will evaluate a text.

Later on, the reader-response criticism theory was developed by many experts in literature and linguistics, one of them being Stanley Fish. Fish went on to develop a theory that he labeled affective stylistic, according to which readers examine a text as they read it, sentence by sentence or word by word. Fish (1980) claims that because the text is autonomous, interpretation is a matter of perspective on the reality of particular social constructs. As Fish explained in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, interpretation is the product of interpretative communities, which is a group of readers who have similar presumptions, morals, and interpretation strategies. He stated that the meaning of a text is formed with the help of the interpretive community in which they belong to.

The reader-response criticism theory allows one to determine whether or not a text is effectively capturing the reader's imagination. For example, if reading a horror story can leave the reader feeling

nervous or hardly breathing as the eyes are fixed intently on each line in the book, then the story succeeds in stimulating the reader's imagination.

This research extends earlier studies on *A Little Life* by moving away from close analysis of the novel's themes, such as melodrama, self-harm, queerness, homosociality, and trauma, which were discussed by Huwe (2023), Rasikhah (2021), and Sittisak (2020). It also differs from earlier reader-response studies by Dzulhija (2019) and Mutmainnah (2019), which focused on other texts and examined how factors such as gender, education, and cultural background shaped readers' responses. In contrast, this research focuses on the emotional experiences of actual readers of *A Little Life* in digital and social media reading communities, especially on Goodreads, BookTwt, and Bookstagram. Hence, reader-response criticism is used in this study to fulfill the objective of this study as to examine how the novel's plot prompts the reader's feelings and interpretation.

METHODS

This study used the qualitative research approach in accordance with its objective. Qualitative research used to gain a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of social life, learn about social phenomena, and thoroughly examine the meanings that individuals assign to objects, events, people, and circumstances (Leavy, 2017). To do the analysis for this research, the researcher also applied the content analysis method. Furthermore, Google Form questionnaire surveys were used to complete the current research. Primary data was obtained by the researcher from the results of a survey on questionnaires distributed to respondents and in this research; the respondents are readers of *A Little Life* novel that is actively doing book reviews or discussions through social media. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various pre-existing sources or in other words, and in this study the data is the novel's quotation, critique and author's interview.

As for the sample of the data, the researcher applied a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, based on Arikunto (2010), is a sampling

approach in which the researcher selects a sample with a specific purpose in mind. The data were limited to a small, purposively selected group because of practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, the researcher had to consider limits of time and location, so purposive sampling was used to choose accessible participants. The respondents were also limited to readers aged 18–30 in order to reduce generational differences in interpretation, following Jauss (1985) idea that readers from different periods may have different horizons of expectation. In addition, the study only included readers who were active in online book communities such as Goodreads, BookTwt, and Bookstagram because this matched Fish's concept of interpretive communities, where shared reading practices help shape meaning. Finally, the data were limited to responses about the whole plot, sensitive issues such as sexual abuse and self-harm, and the author's writing style so the research could stay focused and address a clear gap in earlier studies.

The reader responses were analyzed using qualitative content analysis through a clear step-by-step process. First, the researcher read all questionnaire responses closely to understand the overall reader experience and selected units of analysis from the participants' answers and related quotations from the novel. Next, the responses were coded and grouped into five main categories based on Fish (1980) reader-response theory: expectation, recognition, reaction, emotion, and misinterpretation. In the coding stage, the researcher used literal codes by marking important words or phrases taken directly from the respondents' statements, then grouped similar ideas into broader themes. After that, the coded responses were interpreted by connecting the findings to reader-response theory and comparing them with secondary sources such as passages from *A Little Life*, literary reviews, and interviews with Hanya Yanagihara. To make the analysis more reliable, the researcher also used pseudonyms to track each respondent's background, cross-checked meanings with supporting sources, and organized the final discussion carefully so the interpretation stayed consistent with the research questions.

Table 1. The respondents' data

No	Name	Age	Gender	Community Joined on	Pseudonym
1	William	26	Male	Goodreads & X	WL
2	Ghalib	20	Male	X & Instagram	GH
3	Mino	26	Female	Goodreads & Instagram	MN
4	Wening	20	Female	X	WN
5	Jian	19	Female	Goodreads & Instagram	JN
6	Adinda	21	Female	Goodreads, X & Instagram	AD

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This sub-chapter provides the result and discussion of the research. It consists of six parts; expectation of the readers to the novel, reader's reaction & recognition of the plot, readers' reaction to the sensitive topics of the novel, author's way to evoke readers' emotions, reader's misinterpretations, and discussion.

Expectation of the Readers to the Novel

Upon introducing the study, the researcher will inquire of the respondents how they discovered the novel and what they expected while reading it. When the reader is seen as the main interpreter, they will add a wide range of particular qualities to a novel, including expectations, prejudices, presumptions, stereotypes, values, etc. Therefore, it's essential to evaluate reader expectations to demonstrate whether or not the writer has fulfilled the demands of the readers.

The first answer from the respondents about how they came across this novel is separated between a friend's recommendation and through social media book talks. Two respondents stated that they acknowledged this novel from a friend's recommendation, in which they stated "A friend of mine recommended this book to me" (WN). Meanwhile the rest four respondents said that they discovered this novel from social media.

"I was scrolling through Instagram when I saw someone posted ten best books worth to read, and one of the book is *A Little Life*. From the first I saw it, I was already interested because of the novel's cover." (Respondent MN's answer to question number 1).

This statement from the readers lends credibility to the assumption that the novel is popular on social media. In addition to what the respondent MN said, she highlights how the novel's cover piques a curious feeling as also stated

by the other respondent. The illustrations and colors on the book cover work together to express the ideological content of the book (O'Connell, 2010). Every book has a cover that portrays the main theme of the book while subtly influencing the reader's feelings upon first glance.

"The novel cover portrays, at least from my perception, an anxious and tortured man's face as I expected the novel to be emotionally sad" (Respondent AD's answer to question number 1).

Because of this, the novel's cover already gives away some hints about the theme from the image's expression to the color scheme, which is enhanced by a grey and blue filter that depicts a depressing and poignant story. Therefore, by properly illustrating the theme of the book, the cover is able to better pique a reader's interest in the book.

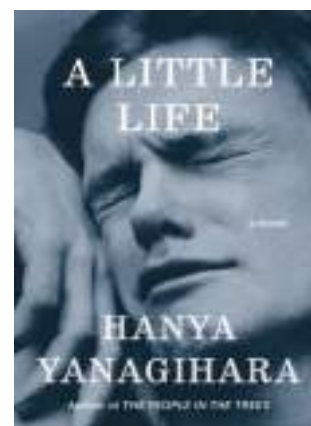


Figure 1. Novel's front cover

After an author's work is published, it becomes her responsibility, particularly to meet the expectations of the readers. A reader's expectations before beginning a novel might be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the reviews of the novel itself. In response to the questions about the novel's expectations, all of the respondents agreed that the author successfully met their expectations, or even went beyond their expectations.

"I did read some reviews before diving into the book and it met my already-high expectations." (Respondent WN's answer to question number 1).

"But I didn't read the review ... The story plot and ending were beyond my expectations. I thought it was just an ordinary friendship story, but it was more dreadful than that." (Respondent MN's answer to question number 1).

On the other side, there's a comparative answer from the other respondent, respondent MN, who admits that she has not read any reviews of the novel before. The novel then turned out to be beyond her expectations as it was more dreadful than a casual friendship story. The respondents' answers showed that the author successfully please the reader as her work met the expectation of readers.

Reader's Reaction & Recognition of the Plot

A plot as one of the text's empirical elements will assist in establishing a basic framework for some of the literary devices Yanagihara employs to lead the reader through the piece. To answer the first concern in this question, which is the reactions to the plot that Yanagihara created, the majority of the respondents agreed that indeed the plot itself is dull, emotional, or depressing.

"Actually, the story is simple but the conflict is heavy, but this is what makes *A Little Life* interesting." (Respondent GH's answer to question number 2).

The respondents can see that indeed the plot of the novel that Yanagihara built is simple, yet it is very repetitive. The repetition of the failure of the main character to resolve a problem in the plot can create mixed expressions from the reader. One respondent, for example, felt that the character lacked "character development," which hindered her ability to relate to the character and potentially also triggered an antipathy feeling of the reader to watch the character breakdown several times.

"This is a book that is quite emotional, in my case; I didn't really sympathize with Jude. It's just a pity. I'm not happy with characters that have no character development." (Respondent MN's answer to question number 2).

In contrast to respondent MN's opinion, the other respondents stated that the characters are unique because the reader is drawn in by the character's actions created by Yanagihara.

"The building of the plot itself is quite slow to get into the climax, but I adore how Yanagihara always reveal more about Jude's past along the way. It gives clarity of the character's behavior." (Respondent AD's answer to question number 2).

On the other hand, in terms of recognizing any patterns from *A Little Life* novel to any other literary works, four out of six respondents agreed that they indeed feel a similarity. Similar to Yanagihara's work, Palahniuk is known for using repetition in his sentences, yet changing little portions of them as the plot develops. But the way Yanagihara also explores a very American culture, especially in New York City where the story's setting is very similar to Vollman.

"I can see a little Palahniuk in it, just a bit more somber, some may say Vollman maybe, all in all it's very American." (Respondent WL's answer to question number 2).

"I rarely read fiction books, but I think if we're talking about psychological theme, there's Japanese author that also write his book with mostly psychological theme and his characters also has their own trauma, the book called *Nijigahara Holograph* by Asano Inio." (Respondent JN's answer to question number 2).

With the theme of tragedy, loss, and trauma then this novel very indistinguishable from other modern novels such as *All the Bright Places* and *The Heart's Invisible Furies* added by respondent WN and AD. In other literary works outside the novel, this story is also quite akin to a Japanese psychological manga with the title *Nijigahara Holograph* which was read by respondent JN.

Reader's Reaction to the Sensitive Topics of the Novel

In order to establish literary criticism, reader-response theory is utilized to gather reader reactions to literary works. In this study, the reader's reaction to the sensitive topic of the novel such as sexual abuse and self-harm is very important as to analyze how each reader proceeds

their unsettling feeling while reading, which also answers the second research problem. A reader's reaction to a literary work, especially a novel, can also be the main point to create a novel's popularity. *A Little Life* itself is focused on Jude's past and behavior which contains a graphic imagery of sexual abuse behavior and self-harm such as cutting which can trigger an emotion from the readers.

There are various specific parts that each reader feels to be very difficult to read. But, five of the respondents' answers are on chapter 4 of the novel, the Axiom of Equality. In chapter 4, Yanagihara started to reveal more about the relationship between Jude and Caleb, which is full of sexual and physical abuse. The graphic and detailed imagery of Jude doing a self-harm creates a very uncomfortable feeling for the readers to read.

"I feel very much uncomfortable when Yanagihara wrote a graphic description of doing a self-harm. It creates some sort of illusion of feelings that I'm doing it too at the time." (Respondent AD's answer to question number 3).

While some of the respondents agreed that the self-harm part of Jude is very discomfoting, for the rest of the respondents added that the sexual abuse that Jude always received from when he was a kid is way worse to read. As the most respondents agreed that whether in picturing self-harm or sexual abuse, Yanagihara described it using graphic imagery.

"Caleb might be very triggering for some. The self-harm parts are bad, I know, but the Caleb parts are much worse." (Respondent WL's answer to question number 3).

"For me personally, it was so hard to read the book because of multiple trigger warnings inside of it, but I got hooked up with the writing, the author wrote each circumstances and characters so well I feel like they were once alive" (Respondent JN's answer to question number 3).

In summary, all the respondents acknowledge that there are a lot of sensitive issues that the author chooses to write in the novel. Most of them also picked the chapter which is the longest chapter as the most unsettling part of the novel as

it contains a lot of sexual abuse scenes of the main character. The majority of them responded by stating that, yes, it was triggering and that it gave the reader the impression that they could actually see the character doing that.

Author's Way to Evoke Reader's Emotions

In order to make their writing appear more alive, authors have a great responsibility to arouse readers' emotions through their writing. There are many different ways for an author to evoke intense emotions in a reader, including through word choice or the development and description of a particular scenario. Through the questionnaire, readers were asked about their feelings about the author's writing style and whether they felt as the author intended.

"The writing style is detailed and can make readers wince when described scene by scene." (Respondent GH's answer to question number 4).

"I personally feel disturbed with the writing and not once nor twice I got triggered by the plot when Jude had a relapse. It was written so horrifically and I could feel myself shake a bit from the writing." (Respondent JN's answer to question number 4).

From a lot of different responses stated by each respondent, three out of six respondents stated that indeed the author successfully evoked the readers' emotions through her writing. It can be seen that the writing style of Yanagihara then can be seen as one of her strong aspects to awaken the readers' feelings, especially on her character. For instance, readers' earlier responses recognize that Yanagihara did create her main character with plenty of imagery and symbolism related to sexual abuse and self-harm. But, there are contrasting opinions from the two respondents; they stated that even though the author can evoke the reader's emotion, it was overly descriptive in some parts. It comes across as very lack of sympathy for the author to create a character in that way.

"It is unnecessarily overly descriptive in some parts of the book. I would say the author did evoke the reader's emotions successfully. But, I feel like her way of elaborating what happened to each of the character felt severely distant and cold that I, as a reader, feel that the author is lack of sympathy in writing this

book, in describing the pain the characters had to endure.” (Respondent WN’s answer to question number 4).

“However, her style of writing can either create a deep gloom emotion of the reader or failed to awaken any sympathy. Because there are some parts where I feel to be very touched, but on other parts I feel like Yanagihara really tried too hard to create emotional parts, that it comes off a bit too forced.” (Respondent AD’s answer to question number 4).

To add more response in contrast of the way Yanagihara wrote her melodrama story, respondent WL added the term ‘torture porn’ to his answer about Yanagihara’s writing style. The phrase “torture porn” was developed to describe how authors tend to give their characters a hard and bitter tragedy without providing a happy ending. The term has been used a lot in the reviews of this book on several social media, indicating that there have been a lot of discussions concerning Yanagihara’s writing style, which some people find harsh. Despite the pros and cons of her writing style, the majority of the respondents agreed that Yanagihara successfully evoked the readers’ emotions.

Reader’s Misinterpretation

As Stanley Fish stated that author’s writing style as they read it word by word and sentence by sentence can influence the reader’s reaction. Therefore, there could be an error in reading if the reader misread a passage such as a vocabulary mistake. Addressing the potential for reader misinterpretation, every respondent claimed certainty that the story and the author’s message are accepted clearly and unambiguous.

“The choice of words is good and easy to understand, but for an English novel, this is not suitable for beginners to read, because much of the language is foreign. I’m sure there’s no misreading, apart from reading the book, I also read the summary (searched on Google) so that I don’t misinterpret it.” (Respondent GH’s answer to question number 5).

“For someone who doesn’t have a big vocabulary in English, sometimes i found something that i didn’t understand but googling that up really helped me a lot.”

(Respondent JN’s answer to question number 5).

The respondents said that the vocabulary was highly clear because it was the English they were accustomed to encountering on a daily basis. Respondents GH and JN, on the other hand, continue to have some difficulty understanding some words and vocabulary because they feel a little foreign. However, after finishing the novel, they googled more information about it to make sure what they read was what the author intended to say.

Discussion

Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life* is a compelling and intense book that explores the complex lives of four New York City-based college friends. As Yanagihara explores deep into the melodrama and tragedy format in her magnum opus, *A Little Life*, it pushes the boundaries of what is typically considered the reader-text relationship. Additionally, a reader’s interpretation of a work’s meaning is always an interaction between them and the text itself. An overview of some of the text’s empirical elements will help create the groundwork for understanding some of Yanagihara’s literary devices that lead the reader through the entire work. *A Little Life* has a long and complex narrative plot with a repetitive climax. The author’s depictions of New York City give the city life and make it seem like a distinct character, which gives recognition to Vollman’s American style of writing.

“First there was the life of the office you saw: forty of them in the main room, each with their own desk, Rausch’s glass-walled room at one end, closest to Malcolm’s desk, Thomasson’s glass-walled room at the other. Between them: two walls of windows, one that looked over Fifth Avenue, toward Madison Square Park, the other of which peered over Broadway, at the glum, gray, gum-stamped sidewalk. That life existed officially from ten a.m. until seven p.m., Monday through Fri-day.” (p.55)

Nevertheless, *A Little Life* is more beautiful than just a well-written book. Readers are forced to confront the whole range of human existence in this work, from its most magnificent moments to its most terrible realities. Yanagihara crafts a

captivating story around Jude St. Francis, the protagonist, and his struggle to overcome childhood trauma that has plagued him throughout his life, even though he never receives a happy ending. Throughout the plot, the novel contains imagery that delicately portrays the struggles of a tortured man. The more aggressive parts of Jude's experiences, such as abuse and self-harm, are not brushed over in the book, making it very challenging to read as the respondents agreed that there are few unsettling parts from the novel.

"He sat in the shower area with his sleeves pushed up. He had a glass of scotch, which he sipped at to steady himself, and a box cutter, which he knew would be easier to hold than a razor. He knew what he needed to do: three straight vertical lines, as deep and long as he could make them, following the veins up both arms." (p.392)

The reader is compelled to engage themselves completely in Jude's self-destructive experience due to the vivid imagery used to describe it, which indeed creates an unsettling feeling for the readers. Yanagihara's examination of Jude's character goes remarkably deep; she creates a compelling portrait of a guy tormented by his past, battling feelings of self-worth, and unsaid grief. Besides using a lot of imagery to describe a self-harm action, Yanagihara also uses imagery to create a vivid portrayal of sexual abuse in the novel.

"But Caleb has already grabbed him by the back of his neck and is hurrying him, half dragging him, toward the front door. Into the elevator they go, and down the flights, and then he is being dragged out of the elevator and marched down the hallway toward the lobby. By now he is hysterical, pleading with Caleb, asking him again and again what he's doing, what he's going to do to him. At the front door, Caleb lifts him, and for a moment his face is fitted into the tiny dirty glass window that looks out onto Greene Street, and then Caleb is opening the door and he is being pushed out, naked, into the street." (p.338)

Yanagihara's writing style is very known to be detailed in creating a sensitive graphic description. It's drama for the sake of drama because so much suffering is piled on top of suffering in the novel. While the respondents

approved that this novel is very well written by the author, respondent WL added that this novel still counts as torture porn. The term torture porn itself is coined by a lot of readers on social media, as Yanagihara creates a character and then punishes them for hundreds of pages throughout the story. To add more contexts to respondent WL's answer, a literary critic, Mendelsohn, wrote a review of this book in *The New York Review of Books*.

"The abuse that Yanagihara heaps on her protagonist is neither just from a human point of view nor necessary from an artistic one... Yanagihara's novel has duped many into confusing anguish and ecstasy, pleasure and pain" (Mendelsohn, 2015).

"The story is built on the care and service that Jude elicits from a circle of supporters who fight to protect him from his self-destructive ways; truly, there are newborns envious of the devotion he inspires." (Sehgal, 2021)

The critique of this novel comes from the way Yanagihara, as a women author, creates a gay male character just to set him on a hundredth page of suffering without having any happy ending to his story. Another critique, Sehgal, refers to *A Little Life* as an "idealized manifestation" of trauma-related modern writing. Through his article published in *The New Yorker*, Sehgal suggesting about the current 'trend' in writing, either a novel or movie, to focus on elevating the trauma from the character. Sehgal's critique of this torture porn trend has also been supported by Hendy from *The Independent UK*. Hendy agreed that the genre some people called 'trauma porn' has turned into a profitable genre of marketing a novel.

"Call it misery lit, trauma porn or the trauma plot – it all flattens suffering, turning it into a lucrative genre rather than a specific condition of the human experience." (Hendy, 2023)

Understandably, critics have praised *A Little Life* as a violent, tragic masterpiece. It's a challenging but fascinating book that sticks in the reader's memory forever. Even all of the respondents of the research agreed that indeed this novel successfully filled their expectations of it. *A Little Life* itself has one of the lowest redemption rates of any book, which is why Yanagihara, in interviews, said she wanted to try something that

descended into darkness and stayed there, like a really unsettling fairy tale. She meant to be unabashed.

“What a reader can always tell is when you are holding back for fear of offending them. I wanted there to be something too much about the violence in the book, but I also wanted there to be an exaggeration of everything, an exaggeration of love, of empathy, of pity, of horror. I wanted everything turned up a little too high. I wanted it to feel a little bit vulgar in places. Or to be always walking that line between out and out sentimentality and the boundaries of good taste (Hanya Yanagihara interview with The Guardian)”

Despite the pros and cons reactions to how Yanagihara creates her character's tragic journey, all readers acknowledged that the work is still well-written. On another hand, the discussion of all the readers about Yanagihara's writing style also creates a popularity of the novel, especially on social media. Additionally, answers from respondents regarding how they came upon this novel—four out of six respondents said through book discussions on social media—provide evidence of the novel's popularity.

In the end, *A Little Life* is a novel that is widely suggested to readers who enjoy a very emotional, character-driven story, but with caution due to its powerful and potentially sensitive content. The buildup of the story, as well as Yanagihara's approach of creating a tragedy and drama using certain sensitive topics, draws the reader in, despite their diverse reactions. Nevertheless, it's not the reader's control to decide how the story going to end up, even though some of them are against the 'no happy ending' ending that Yanagihara gave. Yanagihara's ending of the story provides the reader with enlightenment about how human beings can yearn for a joyful ending only to be met with the harsh reality of life's intentions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher found that there are mixed and various reactions to *A Little Life* novel from the six readers' perspectives to answer the first research problem. *A Little Life* novel explores many sensitive topics,

including sexual assault and self-harm, and its tragic tragedy of Jude St. Francis evoked strong emotions in those who read it. Though indeed Yanagihara successfully created an emotional story for the readers, half of the respondent feels that the writer is quite brutal and unsympathetically tortured the main character. Although there are a lot of pros and cons opinion due to the way Yanagihara creates her character and uses a lot of sensitive imagery in the plot, all the readers still agree that the novel itself is still well-written. Yanagihara proved to be a success in arousing reader's imagination.

The author's choices of words also are well understood by the readers, except there are two readers that have a bit of difficulty but they are very keen that there is no misinterpretation of the story. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, all the readers' expectation is fully filled by the author, showing the novel's success in capturing the readers' attention. Despite of the critics Yanagihara gets about making her novel to be brutally sensitive and dramatic; Yanagihara herself stated that she wants this novel to be homage to a different type of adulthood, one that is not often shown in many fiction stories. Yanagihara stated, the way she created the character Jude that people thought to be tortured a lot, is to make the reader to feel like Jude is a self-taught human. As a result, the author chose to explore this characterization through the use of a lot of vivid imagery and symbolism combined with a repetitive storyline that effectively captures the interest and emotions of the readers. vivid imagery and symbolism combined with a repetitive storyline that effectively captures the interest and emotions of the readers.

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