

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introductory part of the research, which outlines the foundation and direction of the study. It consists of research background, statement of the problem, research objectives, research significance, and definition of key terms. Each section is constructed to provide a coherent explanation of the research focus, its relevance, and its contribution within the field of literary studies.

1.1 Research Background

Literature is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant forms of cultural expression, as it reflects and represents human life in its various dimensions. Through imaginative language, literary works are able to capture personal, social, and collective experiences that shape human existence. Literature does not merely function as a form of entertainment; rather, it serves as a medium through which readers can explore emotions, values, conflicts, and psychological conditions experienced by individuals or communities. In this sense, literary texts become a space where complex human experiences are articulated, interpreted, and reimagined.

In addition, literature possesses a unique capacity to express experiences that are often difficult to communicate directly. Through narrative structures, characterization, and symbolic representation, literary works can convey realities that exceed straightforward explanation. This expressive capacity makes literature an important field of study for examining phenomena that involve ambiguity,

emotional intensity, and psychological depth. One of such phenomena is trauma, which has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary literary studies.

In recent decades, trauma has emerged as a significant concept within literary criticism because it provides a theoretical framework for understanding experiences of suffering that resist direct representation. Trauma is not simply defined as a painful or shocking event; rather, it is understood as an experience that continues to affect the subject long after the event has occurred. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is characterized by its delayed and indirect nature, in which the event is not fully grasped at the moment of its occurrence but returns later through fragmented memories, repetition, and psychological disturbance. This condition suggests that trauma disrupts the normal process of memory and narration, making it difficult to articulate in a coherent and linear manner.

Because of its complex and disruptive nature, trauma in literary texts is often represented through narrative strategies that deviate from conventional storytelling. Instead of being conveyed through clear and chronological sequences, traumatic experiences frequently appear in fragmented plots, disrupted timelines, uncertain memories, and symbolic imagery. Silence, gaps in narration, and repetitive scenes also become important elements in representing trauma, as they reflect the difficulty of fully expressing or understanding the experience. Therefore, the study of trauma in literature requires not only an examination of thematic content, but also a careful analysis of narrative form and structure.

One literary work that exemplifies the representation of trauma through narrative complexity is *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman. The

novel integrates elements of fantasy with themes of childhood memory, fear, and emotional vulnerability. Through the perspective of an adult narrator who reflects upon his past, the narrative presents memories that are unstable, fragmented, and often ambiguous. The boundaries between reality and imagination become blurred, creating uncertainty in the reader's interpretation of events. As a result, trauma in this novel is primarily represented as an internal and psychological experience, shaped by memory, perception, and reflective consciousness.

In contrast, Eka Kurniawan's *Lelaki Harimau* presents trauma within a more socially grounded and realistic context, although it also incorporates symbolic and magical elements. The novel portrays experiences of domestic violence, family conflict, and social pressure that significantly influence the characters' behaviour and emotional development. Through a non-linear narrative structure and multiple perspectives, the text illustrates how past violence continues to shape present actions. In this work, trauma is more externally manifested through anger, aggression, silence, and destructive behaviour. Thus, trauma is not only depicted as an individual psychological condition, but also as a phenomenon shaped by social and familial structures.

Although both novels centre on traumatic experiences, they demonstrate different narrative tendencies in representing trauma. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* tends to internalize trauma through memory, uncertainty, and introspective narration, whereas *Lelaki Harimau* externalizes trauma through physical violence, behavioural expression, and social conflict. These differences indicate that trauma does not appear in a single, universal form; instead, it is influenced by cultural

background, narrative strategies, and literary aesthetics. At the same time, both novels reveal common characteristics of trauma, such as repetition, fragmentation, and the difficulty of articulation, which align with the theoretical framework proposed by Caruth.

Previous studies on trauma in literature have provided valuable insights into how traumatic experiences are represented in various texts. However, many of these studies tend to focus on a single literary work or approach trauma primarily as an individual psychological condition. Research on *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* often emphasizes themes of childhood trauma, memory, and fantasy symbolism, while studies on *Lelaki Harimau* frequently focus on domestic violence, masculinity, and social conflict. Although these studies contribute significantly to the understanding of each text, comparative research that examines how trauma is narratively constructed across both novels remains relatively limited.

In this regard, comparative literature offers an effective approach for analysing similarities and differences between literary works from different cultural backgrounds. Susan Bassnett (1993) argues that comparative literature enables scholars to study texts across national and cultural boundaries, thereby revealing broader patterns and meanings. Similarly, Sapardi Djoko Damono (2005) suggests that comparative literature allows for a deeper understanding of literary phenomena by placing texts within a wider cultural and contextual framework. Through this approach, trauma can be examined not only as an individual experience, but also as a cross-cultural narrative phenomenon shaped by diverse social and literary contexts.

The selection of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Lelaki Harimau* as the objects of this study is based on several considerations. First, both novels centre on traumatic experiences and their lasting effects on the characters. Second, both works employ non-linear and symbolic narrative techniques in representing trauma. Third, the novels originate from different cultural traditions, namely Western and Indonesian literature, making them particularly relevant for comparative analysis. These factors make the two texts suitable for exploring both the shared and distinct ways in which trauma is represented in literature.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to analyse the narrative representation of trauma in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Lelaki Harimau*, as well as to identify the similarities and differences in the manifestation of trauma in both novels. By applying Cathy Caruth's trauma theory within a descriptive-comparative framework, this research is expected to contribute to the development of trauma studies and comparative literary analysis, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Trauma has become a central issue in literary studies because it provides a means to examine how painful and disturbing experiences are represented within narrative forms. In literary texts, trauma is rarely presented in a direct or straightforward manner. Instead, it often emerges through fragmented memories, repetition, silence, emotional disruption, and symbolic expressions. These narrative characteristics reflect the difficulty of fully understanding and articulating traumatic experience. Therefore, analysing trauma in literature requires attention not only to

what is represented, but also to how it is represented through narrative structures and techniques.

Furthermore, different literary works may construct and represent trauma in distinct ways depending on their cultural context, thematic focus, and narrative strategies. Some texts portray trauma as an internal psychological experience associated with memory, fear, and repression, while others depict trauma as an external condition expressed through violence, behavioural transformation, and social conflict. These variations suggest that trauma is not a fixed or universal phenomenon in literature, but one that is shaped by the specific context and aesthetic choices of each work.

This issue is evident in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman and *Lelaki Harimau* by Eka Kurniawan. Although both novels centre on traumatic experiences and their continuing effects, they construct trauma through different narrative tendencies. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* represents trauma through unstable memory, childhood fear, and internal psychological reflection, whereas *Lelaki Harimau* portrays trauma through domestic violence, social tension, and destructive behavioural expression. At the same time, both texts demonstrate recurring characteristics of trauma, such as repetition, fragmentation, and the difficulty of articulation.

Considering these similarities and differences, a comparative study is necessary to understand how trauma is narratively represented and processed in both novels. Through such analysis, this research seeks to reveal both the shared

patterns and distinct manifestations of trauma across different cultural and literary contexts. Therefore, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How is trauma narratively represented in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman and *Lelaki Harimau* by Eka Kurniawan?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the manifestation of trauma as reflected through the narrative representation and processing of trauma in both novels?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research is conducted with the primary aim of examining how trauma is constructed and represented within literary narratives, particularly when such representations emerge from different cultural and aesthetic contexts. As previously discussed, trauma in literature does not always appear in explicit or direct forms. Instead, it is often mediated through narrative structures such as fragmented memory, repetition, silence, symbolic representation, and disruptions in temporal continuity. These narrative characteristics indicate that trauma cannot be fully understood solely through the identification of traumatic events, but must also be analysed through the ways in which those events are narrated and structured within the text.

In this regard, the objectives of this study are formulated not only to identify trauma as a thematic element, but also to explore the narrative mechanisms through which trauma is conveyed. This includes examining how memory operates within the narrative, how repetition functions as a sign of unresolved experience, and how silence or gaps in narration reflect the difficulty of articulating trauma. By focusing

on these aspects, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trauma as both an experiential and narrative phenomenon.

Furthermore, considering that literary works from different cultural backgrounds may represent trauma in distinct ways, this research also aims to apply a comparative perspective. Through comparison, the study attempts to identify patterns that may be shared across texts, as well as differences that are shaped by cultural, social, and literary contexts. This comparative dimension is essential in order to avoid viewing trauma as a homogeneous or universal experience, and instead to recognize its varied manifestations within different narrative traditions.

By focusing on *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman and *Lelaki Harimau* by Eka Kurniawan, this research aims to provide a broader and more nuanced understanding of trauma as a narrative phenomenon. Both novels offer rich and complex representations of trauma, yet they differ significantly in terms of narrative style, cultural background, and modes of expression. Therefore, analysing these texts comparatively allows the study to explore how trauma is shaped not only by individual experience, but also by narrative form and cultural context.

Based on these considerations, the specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To describe the narrative representation of trauma in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Lelaki Harimau*.
2. To identify and compare the similarities and differences in the manifestation of trauma through its narrative representation and processing of trauma in the two novels.

Through these objectives, the study ultimately seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of trauma in literature as a complex interplay between experience, memory, narrative structure, and cultural context.

1.4 Research Significances

This research is expected to provide meaningful contributions in several dimensions, including theoretical, practical, and academic aspects. By examining trauma through literary narratives, this study does not only focus on the depiction of painful experiences, but also emphasizes the importance of narrative form in shaping the representation and interpretation of trauma. In addition, by employing a comparative approach, the study offers a broader perspective on how trauma is constructed across different cultural and literary contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the development of trauma studies within literary criticism, particularly through the application of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Caruth's conceptualization of trauma as an experience characterized by belatedness, repetition, and the impossibility of full comprehension provides a useful framework for analysing literary texts that depict psychological disturbance and narrative disruption. By applying this theoretical perspective to two different novels, this study reinforces the idea that trauma should not be understood merely as a thematic issue, but as a narrative phenomenon that shapes the structure and form of literary texts.

Moreover, this research extends the application of trauma theory into the field of comparative literature. By analysing *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Lelaki Harimau* within the same analytical framework, the study demonstrates how

trauma can be examined across cultural boundaries. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of trauma as both a universal human experience and a culturally mediated phenomenon. In doing so, the research bridges theoretical approaches in trauma studies with methodologies in comparative literature, thereby enriching both fields.

From a practical perspective, this research is expected to provide insights for readers in understanding how literary works represent traumatic experiences through various narrative strategies. Readers may become more aware that trauma is not always expressed directly, but often appears through indirect and complex forms such as fragmented memory, silence, symbolic imagery, and behavioural patterns. This awareness can enhance readers' interpretative skills, enabling them to engage more critically and sensitively with literary texts.

In addition, the findings of this study may also encourage a deeper reflection on the ways trauma operates in real-life contexts. By recognizing how trauma is represented in literature, readers may develop a better understanding of psychological suffering, emotional repression, and social conflict that are not always visible or easily articulated. Thus, the research has the potential to contribute not only to literary appreciation, but also to broader discussions on human experience and emotional complexity.

From an academic perspective, this research is expected to serve as a useful reference for future studies, particularly in the areas of literary criticism, trauma studies, and comparative literature. By providing a detailed analysis of trauma representation in two different novels, this study opens opportunities for further

research on related topics, such as memory, violence, identity, and narrative form. Additionally, the comparative approach employed in this study may inspire other researchers to explore cross-cultural perspectives in literary analysis.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the academic development of literary studies by integrating theoretical frameworks, comparative methodologies, and close textual analysis. It demonstrates how literary texts can be examined through multiple analytical lenses, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena such as trauma. In this sense, the study not only adds to existing scholarship, but also encourages the continued exploration of literature as a field that engages deeply with human experience.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity and to ensure conceptual clarity throughout the analysis, several key terms used in this study are defined in this section. These definitions are intended to specify how each term is understood within the context of this research. Since some of these terms may carry broader or different meanings in other disciplines, the explanations provided here are limited to their relevance within literary studies and the analytical framework applied in this thesis.

1.5.1 Trauma

In this study, trauma refers to the concept developed by Cathy Caruth (1996), who defines trauma as an overwhelming experience that is not fully understood or consciously processed at the moment of its occurrence. Rather than being immediately integrated into memory, the traumatic event returns later in indirect and delayed forms, such as intrusive memories, emotional disturbance,

repetition, anxiety, and psychological disruption. This delayed return indicates that trauma is not experienced as a complete and coherent event, but as something that exceeds the subject's capacity to fully comprehend it.

A central characteristic of trauma in Caruth's theory is belatedness, which refers to the temporal delay between the occurrence of the event and its later realization or impact. Because of this delay, traumatic experiences are often remembered in fragmented, incomplete, or distorted ways. The past continues to intrude upon the present, demonstrating that trauma remains unresolved within the subject's consciousness.

In the context of literary studies, trauma in this research is not approached as a clinical or medical diagnosis, but as a narrative and representational phenomenon. It is analysed through the ways in which it appears in the text, including disrupted chronology, unstable memory, repetition, silence, symbolic imagery, and narrative gaps. Therefore, trauma in this study refers both to the disturbing experience itself and to the narrative consequences that arise from that experience within the literary work.

1.5.2 Narrative representation

Narrative representation refers to the way in which experiences, events, emotions, and meanings are conveyed through storytelling in a literary text. It involves not only what is narrated, but also how the narrative is structured, organized, and presented to the reader. In literary analysis, narrative representation plays a crucial role because meaning is often shaped as much by narrative form as by thematic content.

In this study, narrative representation specifically refers to how traumatic experiences are constructed and communicated within the selected novels. Since trauma is often difficult to articulate directly, it tends to appear through indirect narrative strategies rather than explicit explanation. These strategies may include fragmented chronology, flashbacks, repetition, shifts in narrative perspective, unreliable narration, symbolic imagery, silence, and discontinuity in plot development.

By focusing on narrative representation, this research examines how trauma is mediated through language and narrative form. It does not only identify traumatic events experienced by the characters, but also analyses how those experiences are transformed into narrative structures that convey psychological disturbance, fear, loss, repression, and emotional complexity.

1.5.3 Unclaimed experience

Unclaimed experience is a concept introduced by Cathy Caruth to describe traumatic events that cannot be fully known or possessed at the moment they occur. The experience is considered “unclaimed” because the subject is unable to immediately understand or process what has happened. As a result, the event remains unresolved and returns later in indirect and often disruptive ways.

These returns may manifest through fragmented memories, repetitive actions, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, or emotional reactions that appear disconnected from the present context. The subject is affected by the trauma without fully recognizing or articulating its origin. This condition reflects the paradox of

trauma, in which the experience is both present and absent—felt, yet not fully known.

In literary texts, unclaimed experience is often represented through characters who struggle to interpret their past, experience gaps in memory, or exhibit behaviours that suggest unresolved psychological disturbance. It may also appear through ambiguous narration, symbolic episodes, and unresolved narrative tensions. This concept is particularly relevant in this study, as both novels depict traumatic experiences that are not directly expressed, but instead emerge through narrative fragmentation, symbolic representation, and behavioural consequences.

1.5.4 Comparative Literature

Comparative literature in this study refers to an analytical approach that examines literary works from different cultural, national, or linguistic backgrounds in order to identify similarities, differences, and broader meanings. This approach enables researchers to move beyond the analysis of a single text and to explore how certain themes or experiences are represented across different literary traditions.

In this research, comparative literature is applied to analyse *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Lelaki Harimau*. Although both novels address trauma, they emerge from different cultural contexts and employ distinct narrative strategies. The comparative approach allows the study to investigate how trauma is constructed, represented, and manifested differently in each text.

This comparison is not limited to thematic similarities, but also includes differences in narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, memory construction, and socio-cultural background. Through this approach, trauma can be

understood both as a shared human experience and as a phenomenon shaped by specific cultural and literary conditions.

