

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the paper which consist of the background of research, statement of problems, the research objective, the research significance, and clarification of key terms.

1.1 Background

Literature is an integral part of human life. Literary works are the result of the author's imagination, conveyed to the reader. “Sastra dibedakan dari berbagai jenis tulisan lain seperti, berita, laporan perjalanan, sejarah, biografi, dan tesis, sebab jenis-jenis tulisan itu menyampaikan informasi yang berupa fakta. Dengan demikian menurut pandangan ini, jelas bahwa sastra adalah segala jenis karangan yang berisi dunia khayalan manusia, yang tidak bisa begitu saja dihubungkan dengan kenyataan.” (Djoko Damono, 2011, p. 23) Literary works play a very important role in our lives. Literature serves as a medium for self-expression, entertainment, social criticism, and the exploration of human issues. Literary works always have a message, whether implicit or explicit, conveyed by the author. These messages make literary works not only entertainment for the public but also a medium of communication and discussion that can influence society. Literary works always present interesting stories to attract people to enjoy them. There are several important elements required in literary works, such as style of language, theme, characters and characterization, and so on.

Literary works come in various forms, such as novels, short stories, plays, poetry, and so on. One form of literary work is comics, which will be the object of

this study. Comics are a combination of images and words that aim to tell a story or provide information from the author to the reader. Comics always utilize the layout of the images to create the appropriate mood and atmosphere and to shape a story. McCloud (1994) in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, stated that comic is “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence,” (McCloud, 1994, p. 12)

Comics are classified as literary works, as stated by Soedarsono: “Komik adalah sastra bergambar yang bukan hanya buku yang menampilkan visual menarik dan menjadi sebuah hiburan murahan, melainkan bentuk komunikasi visual intelektual yang memiliki kekuatan untuk menyampaikan sebuah pesan dengan bahasa yang universal, mudah dimengerti, dan selalu diingat” (Soedarso, 2015, p. 505) This definition confirms that comics are a storytelling medium that conveys information and aesthetics, two main characteristics that also form the basis of literary works such as novels, short stories, and poetry.

Comics come in a wide variety of genres, such as superhero, action, detective, horror, comedy, and so on. Superhero comics has a variety of unique themes that can be explored. Some of the superhero comics that the researcher has read are: *The Batman Who Laughs* (2019) by Scott Snyder, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) by Christon N. Gage, *The Incredible Hulk* (2000) by Paul Jenkins, *Batman: Dark Tomorrow* (2000) by Scott Peterson, *The Nightman v Wolverine* (1995) by Steve Englehart, and *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1986) by Alan Moore

In this research, the researcher uses the superhero comic titled *Batman: The Killing Joke* by Alan Moore, published in 1986. The reason is because this object is

unique compared to other works, it tells the story of the Joker's past, which is also relevant to the research question in this research. The researcher try analyze the character and madness of one of the characters named Joker. The Joker character in this comic story is the main villain who continuously terrorizes the city of Gotham. With inhuman and heartless actions, what Joker does in the comic is pure madness and chaos caused by his past.

According Michel Faucault in his book “madness existed in relation to reason, or at least in relation to the ‘others’ who, in their anonymous generality, were supposed to represent it and grant it the value of an exigence; and on the other hand it existed for reason, in that it appeared in the consideration of an ideal consciousness, which perceived it as difference from the others.” (Foucault, 2006, p. 182) This statement asserts that madness exists for a reason. Something can be called ‘mad’ if it differs from the rational norms that are considered to represent the general consciousness of society. The Joker in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke* is considered to not have a normal psychological state like the general public in Gotham City. The general public of Gotham City are just ordinary people trying to life, while the Joker commits acts that are outside the norm, such as murder, terror, and chaos.

Comics have various elements that make them up. The symbols of madness within the Joker himself can be seen from elements found in comics such as plot, panels, dialogue, setting, and characters. First, symbols of madness can be seen from the panels in the comic, because panels are part of the comic itself. According to McCloud, “such a single panel might be classified as ‘comic art’ in the sense that

they derive part of their visual vocabulary from comics.” (McCloud, 1994, p. 20)

Thus, panels are an important element to consider when analyzing comics. Panels are one of the most fundamental aspects of comics, as they are a visual medium for readers to receive information from comics. If panels are the visual medium for readers, then word balloons are usually an additional medium to bring the narrative in comics to life. With word balloons, readers can experience things that can be heard, such as dialogue, explosion effects, punch effects, and so on. This is also explained by McCloud in his book, where he says, “we represent sound through devices such as word balloons.” (McCloud, 1994, p. 89) Word balloons are another important element of comics to convey the story more deeply to readers and add mood and atmosphere to the reader.

The plot is also one of the most important elements to consider in this study. In the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*, there is a progressive plot, as well as a flashback plot. This is common, as stated by Sentosa, who said, “Dalam penyusunan alur cerita, digunakan alur maju atau progresif untuk plot utama, sedangkan pengisahan subplot menggunakan alur tarik balik atau backtracking, yang ditandai dengan perubahan warna panel dan halaman” (Sentosa, 2023, p. 37) This also occurs in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke* when the Joker's flashback features panels that are different in color from the progressive panels. The setting in this comic also contributes to the madness experienced by the Joker. "Environments are more than just an objective background, or a stage filled with things (landscapes, buildings, furniture, etc.) where characters act. At a fundamental level, environments are the meaningful entanglements of characters with their own world,

often represented in narrative as the subjective or psychological aspect of setting." (Ribó, 2019, p. 34) In this case, the setting is one of the factors that drives the psychological problems experienced by the Joker. Several places, such as the chemical factory, his residence, and Gotham City itself, are important factors in the Joker's psychological change.

Joker, who was originally an ordinary man with a wife and dreams, began to change. Joker is one of the characters in this comic, and characters are an important part of driving the story. "Dalam pengertiannya, karakter adalah pelukisan gambaran yang jelas tentang seseorang yang ditampilkan dalam sebuah cerita." (Aprilianda, 2021, p. 32) In this case, the Joker can be categorized as a person presented in the story. Within himself, the Joker has emotions, principles, and morals that are unique to him. These various elements then come together to form a medium known as comics. According to Gumelar "comics are a sequence of images arranged according to the creator's purpose and philosophy so that the message of the story is conveyed; comics tend to be accompanied by text as needed." (Gumelar, 2010, p. 1) Based on this definition, *Batman: The Killing Joke* can be categorized as a comic. This comic explores how the theme of madness becomes the main focus of how a person can act. This comic also tells the story of how the Joker lost his morals and conscience, causing him to start doing crazy things. In the story, Alan Moore even unhesitatingly depicts the Joker as someone who has completely lost his morals.

Morals and conscience are often very important issues for humans. This is part of life where humans always have trauma and wounds from their past. These

wounds and trauma are what usually cause someone to do crazy things that push the boundaries of normality. Apart from wounds and trauma, madness can also occur if someone grows up in a harsh and difficult environment. A combination of depression, anger, and inner pressure usually pushes human common sense away. In the story *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Joker's tragic past is revealed. Joker is described as an ordinary man with a pregnant wife named Jeannie. Joker always dreamed of becoming a comedian, but every time he tried, he failed to make people laugh at his jokes. At that time, his family was in a bad situation. The Joker needed money to get a better place to live for his wife and unborn child, so he was forced to take a criminal job infiltrating a restricted chemical area. However, on the day of the infiltration, the Joker found out that his wife had died. Having lost his motivation, the Joker wanted to abandon his plan to carry out the infiltration. However, his colleagues kept persuading him until he was forced to take the job. Unfortunately, the plan did not go smoothly. They were caught by the guards, and one by one, Joker's colleagues were shot dead, leaving Joker alone. That was when Batman appeared. With his principle of not killing anyone, Batman cornered Joker until he fell into the chemical liquid. From that moment on, his personality began to change, his madness began to grow, and his conscience began to disappear.

The researcher was also inspired after reading previous studies such as (Asri, 2020), from jurnal ilmu sastra which examined the construction of madness in female characters in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel *Lady Audley's Secret*. This study shows that the characters' behavior was considered madness because it did not conform to the social norms of the Victorian era and was constructed through

manipulative actions. This study also states that the character's behavior and ideas stemmed from twisted feelings. The pressure experienced by the main character caused her to lose her sanity, leading her to commit acts such as arson and murder. This is very relevant to what happened to the character Joker in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*, where the pressure experienced by Joker caused him to lose his sanity and drove him to commit criminal acts.

In addition, the researcher was also inspired by a study conducted by (Gagneret 2017) entitled “The Tangled Confluence: Hybrid Accounts of Madness in Will Self's *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* and Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*.” From The Society for Contemporary English Studies. The article shows that madness in fiction arises through the convergence of various factors such as identity instability, social tension, and narrative structures that consciously place characters in ambiguous and contradictory situations. The author asserts that madness in both works functions as a “catastrophe of identity,” namely the collapse of how characters understand themselves and the world, which is manifested through the narrator's point of view, plot tension, and subjective representations of reality. This finding is relevant to research on the Joker in *Batman: The Killing Joke*, as the Joker's madness is also constructed through a narrative structure that emphasizes ambiguity, identity fragmentation, and the interplay between reality and perception

This study also refers to the theory of comics proposed by Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics* (1994). McCloud defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence,” (McCloud, 1994, p. 12) which is a series of images and visual signs deliberately arranged to convey information

and elicit an aesthetic response from readers. Through this medium, meaning is formed not only by verbal text, but also by the relationship between panels, images, visual symbols. McCloud emphasizes that comics have a unique ability to represent abstract ideas, emotions, and psychological conditions through symbolic visualization.

(Brake, 2023), in his study entitled *The Joker as Philosopher: Killing Jokes*, examines the character of the Joker in Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *Batman: The Killing Joke* from a philosophical perspective. The study focuses on the Joker's attempt to demonstrate that the world is absurd and unjust through his psychological torture of Commissioner Gordon. Brake argues that the Joker challenges the value of reason and order by presenting irrationality, chaos, and madness as possible responses to an absurd world. The study also examines whether the Joker's belief that people should "go mad" can be considered a valid response to the absurdity of human existence. Although Brake's study discusses madness as an important aspect of the Joker's character, its primary concern is the philosophical ideas underlying the Joker's actions and worldview. In contrast, the present study focuses specifically on the representation of madness in the Joker character by examining how his madness is represented through the narrative and visual elements of the comic. Therefore, Brake's study provides a relevant foundation for understanding the Joker's connection with madness while leaving an opportunity for the present research to examine madness more specifically as a representation within the comic.

(Ewald, 2017) in his thesis entitled *The Joker: A Character Study of a Modern Madman*, examines the Joker as a complex comic book character through several perspectives, including his role as a supervillain, his relationship with the hero, and his representation as a mad figure. The study emphasizes that madness is one of the most prominent aspects of the Joker's character and that, in popular culture, madness is often associated with evil, criminality, and the perception of individuals as threats to society. Ewald also argues that the Joker's complexity makes him resistant to being explained through a single psychological diagnosis, suggesting that his madness is better understood as a broader characteristic of his identity and representation. Although Ewald's study is relevant to the present research because both examine madness in relation to the Joker character, his study approaches the Joker through broader character and psychological perspectives. In contrast, the present study specifically examines how madness is represented in *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1986) through the comic's narrative and visual elements and interprets the representation using Michel Foucault's concept of madness. Therefore, Ewald's research provides a foundation for understanding madness as a significant characteristic of the Joker while the present study focuses more specifically on its representation within the comic.

The researcher is also inspired by Aprilianda's thesis (2021) from Universitas Komputer Indonesia entitled *Tinjauan Visual Tokoh Miiko Yang Berjuang Dengan Gigih Menggunakan Teori Tokoh Dan Penokohan Dalam Komik 'Hai, Miiko!'*, which shows that characterization in comics is not only formed through dialogue

and storyline, but also through visual expressions, body gestures, and panel composition that consistently reinforce the characters' traits.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Based on the research background described above, the researcher attempts to analyze the madness that occurs in the character of the Joker in Alan Moore's comic book *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1986) through various elements such as plot, dialogue, panels, images, and setting that were found. The researcher then posed several research questions, including:

1. How do plot : panels, dialogue, and setting represent the theme of madness in the Joker character in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*?
2. What factors from the Joker's past influence contribute in shaping the Joker's madness in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*

1.3 Research Objective

1. To analyze how plot : panels, dialogue, and setting show the theme of madness in the Joker character in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*
2. To analyze factors from the Joker's past that influence and contribute in shaping his madness in the comic *Batman: The Killing Joke*

1.4 Research Significance

This research is expected to be beneficial. It can contribute to the development of literary studies by broadening the understanding of how madness is represented in visual literature. The analysis of *Batman: The Killing Joke* is expected to show that the intrinsic elements, narrative structure, and visual elements

in comics can form complex psychological meanings. This research can also serve as a reference for other researchers who wish to study comics from a literary perspective, as well as provide additional insight for readers about the deeper meaning behind the representation of the Joker character and the issue of madness that is raised.

