

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research. This chapter contains the Research Background, Statements of the Problem, Research Objectives, and Significance of Research.

1.1 Background of the research

In recent decades, television series have developed into one of the forms of popular narrative that function not only as entertainment, but also as a medium of complex social and cultural representation. Television narratives can no longer be viewed merely as light popular products because they also function as spaces where social meanings, cultural values, and human experiences are produced and represented. Mittell (2015) explains that contemporary television series have developed complex narrative structures that allow deeper character development, long-term conflict, and layered storytelling. In addition, Hutcheon (2006) emphasizes that stories can travel across media, which means that narrative is not limited to printed literary texts but can also appear in audiovisual forms. Therefore, television series can be understood as narrative texts that contain characterization, conflict, dialogue, setting, symbolism, and character development. In this context, the analysis of television series becomes relevant in literary studies, especially when the text presents complex characters and significant social issues.

The relevance of television series as an object of literary and cultural analysis is also related to the development of streaming platforms. Contemporary streaming platforms have changed the way audiences access and understand narrative texts. Netflix, for example, has become one of the major platforms that produces and distributes global audiovisual narratives. Pietarytė and Suzina (2023) explain that Netflix Global Original drama series have increasingly provided space for female representation, although gender imbalance and stereotypical representation still remain in several aspects. This shows that streaming series are not only popular entertainment but also important cultural texts for examining how gender, identity, and subjectivity are represented. Therefore, analyzing a Netflix series within feminist literary criticism is relevant because popular audiovisual

media can reflect and negotiate contemporary issues concerning women's representation and female subjectivity.

One of the popular audiovisual narratives that can be examined through this perspective is *Stranger Things*, a Netflix television series created by Matt and Ross Duffer. *Stranger Things* combines science fiction, horror, mystery, and teen drama within the cultural setting of the 1980s. The series follows supernatural events in the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, including the existence of an alternative dimension known as the Upside Down and scientific experiments conducted on children with extraordinary abilities. Although *Stranger Things* season 4 is presented as a popular television series, it contains narrative elements such as characterization, conflict, dialogue, setting, symbolism, and character development, which make it relevant to be analyzed as a narrative text within literary studies (Netflix, 2022; Mittell, 2015).

Among its seasons, *Stranger Things* Season 4 is selected as the object of this research because it provides a broader and deeper representation of the construction of Eleven's female subjectivity through her social, emotional, and personal experiences. The selection of Season 4 does not mean that Seasons 1, 2, and 3 have no influence on the development of Eleven's subjectivity. On the contrary, these seasons constitute important parts of Eleven's life journey by introducing experiences that shape her background, including her experiences of being controlled by Hawkins National Laboratory, her relationships with others, her past trauma, and her gradual process of understanding herself. However, Season 4 presents these experiences in a more complex manner, as Eleven is no longer only confronted with external threats but also with questions concerning her own identity and self-understanding. Her loss of powers, experiences of bullying and social rejection in California, feelings of alienation, emotional conflicts, and the return to her traumatic memories through Project Nina place her in a process of questioning, understanding, and reconstructing herself.

Therefore, Season 4 is significant because it brings together Eleven's past and present experiences and shows how these experiences contribute to her understanding of herself. Seasons 1, 2, and 3 are therefore regarded as the narrative

context that contributes to Eleven's development, while Season 4 is selected as the primary object of analysis to examine more closely how her experiences contribute to her self-recognition, identity formation, and development as an active subject. This limitation is also necessary because the present study does not aim to examine Eleven's subjectivity across all seasons, but specifically focuses on its construction in Season 4.

In this study, the name Eleven is used as the primary reference to the character being analyzed because the study does not focus on determining the character's name or legal identity, but rather on examining the process of female subjectivity experienced by the character. Jane Hopper and Eleven refer to the same character. In Season 4, the name Jane Hopper becomes more prominent because Eleven lives as Jane in California, particularly within her school and social environment. However, the use of the name Jane Hopper does not indicate that the character has become a different subject from Eleven. Instead, the distinction between Eleven and Jane Hopper can be understood as part of the identity issue that the character faces in Season 4. Eleven has to live with the identity given to her as Jane Hopper while simultaneously confronting the past experiences associated with her identity as Eleven, particularly her experiences of being raised and controlled in Hawkins National Laboratory.

This condition places Eleven in a process of understanding who she is among different identities, experiences, and meanings constructed both by herself and by others. This is relevant to the focus of the present study, which examines Eleven not only through her observable actions but also through her internal experiences, including emotional experiences, memory, self-recognition, identity formation, and her ability to act as an active subject. Therefore, the name Eleven is used as the primary term to refer to the female character who undergoes this process, while Jane Hopper is understood as one aspect of the identity that she negotiates throughout her process of subject formation. Thus, this study does not position Eleven and Jane Hopper as two separate identities, but examines how the same female character experiences the process of understanding, questioning, and

reconstructing her sense of self through the various experiences presented in Season 4.

Furthermore, Season 4 explicitly revisits Eleven's memories through Project Nina, a process that forces her to return to her past in Hawkins Laboratory. Through this process, Eleven does not only remember the past but also confronts traumatic experiences that have shaped her fear, guilt, and unstable self-understanding. Caruth (1996) explains that trauma often returns belatedly through fragmented memory and can influence how individuals understand themselves in the present. This concept is relevant to Eleven because her memories in Project Nina appear gradually, painfully, and incompletely. The memory of Hawkins Laboratory does not function merely as a background story, but becomes an important part of Eleven's process of self-recognition and identity formation. Thus, trauma and memory are central to understanding how Eleven's female subjectivity is constructed in Season 4.

In addition to trauma and memory, Eleven's social relationships also play an important role in shaping her self-understanding. Her relationships with Mike, Will, Dr. Brenner, Dr. Owens, and Henry/One are marked by affection, tension, control, dependence, conflict, and resistance. These relationships show that Eleven's identity is not formed in isolation, but through interaction with others and through the way she is positioned within social and institutional structures. Hall (1997) explains that identity is not fixed or complete, but is always in the process of becoming. In this sense, Eleven's identity in Season 4 is not presented as something stable. Instead, it develops through social experience, emotional conflict, traumatic memory, and the process of recognizing and redefining herself.

The concept of female subjectivity is used in this study to understand Eleven not merely as an object of representation, but as a female subject who interprets her experiences and develops self-awareness. Teresa de Lauretis (1984) explains that experience is the process through which subjectivity is constructed. This means that subjectivity is not a fixed identity that exists naturally, but a process formed through lived experiences and the meanings individuals give to those experiences. In *Technologies of Gender*, de Lauretis (1987) also argues that gender is constructed

through representation and self-representation. Therefore, female subjectivity can be understood as the process through which women understand themselves, interpret their experiences, and position themselves within social and cultural structures.

The use of female subjectivity is important because Eleven's narrative in Season 4 is not only about what happens to her, but also about how she understands and responds to those experiences. Eleven experiences bullying, alienation, loss of power, traumatic memory, guilt, identity crisis, and institutional control. However, she does not remain passive in relation to those experiences. She gradually remembers, interprets, rejects, reconstructs, and acts upon the experiences that shape her. However, this development does not mean that female representation is completely free from patriarchal values. Gill (2017) explains that contemporary media culture often presents women through postfeminist sensibility, in which women may appear independent and empowered but are still shaped by social expectations, emotional regulation, and cultural pressure. Therefore, the study of female subjectivity is important because it does not only ask whether a female character is strong or weak, but also examines how she negotiates her experiences, emotions, identity, and position within the narrative.

Several studies have shown the importance of examining women's representation and subjectivity in contemporary media. Manggarsari and Harsawibawa (2023), for example, explain that women's subjectivity in film can be understood through the effort to represent women as active subjects who possess autonomy and self-awareness. Their study is relevant because it emphasizes the importance of seeing women not only as objects of representation but also as subjects who are able to define themselves. In relation to *Stranger Things*, Nichols (2019) examines Eleven's gendered identity through appearance and visual transformation. Nichols's study shows that Eleven's identity is often constructed through visual ambiguity and the way her appearance is interpreted by others. However, Nichols focuses more on gendered appearance and visual identity, while the present research focuses on Eleven's female subjectivity through inner

experiences, especially social and emotional experiences, memory and self-recognition, identity formation, and agency.

Based on the explanation above, there is a gap that this study attempts to fill. Previous studies have discussed female representation in Netflix series, women's subjectivity in film, and Eleven's gendered identity through visual appearance. However, research that specifically examines the construction of Eleven's female subjectivity in *Stranger Things* Season 4 through her inner experiences is still limited. Most discussions of Eleven tend to emphasize her supernatural power, visual transformation, or role in the plot, while her internal process of experiencing, remembering, interpreting, rejecting, reconstructing, and acting has not been sufficiently analyzed through Teresa de Lauretis's concept of female subjectivity. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by focusing on how Eleven's subjectivity is constructed through the meanings she gives to her social experiences, emotional conflicts, traumatic memories, identity crisis, and agency.

The urgency of this research lies in its contribution to feminist literary criticism and the study of popular audiovisual narratives. By analyzing *Stranger Things* Season 4, this research shows that popular media can be examined as a serious narrative text that represents women's subjectivity and self-formation. The study also contributes to the application of Teresa de Lauretis's concept of female subjectivity in the analysis of television series. In this sense, female subjectivity is not only relevant to conventional literary texts such as novels or short stories, but also to contemporary audiovisual media. This research argues that Eleven's female subjectivity is constructed gradually through inner experiences that lead her from vulnerability, alienation, and trauma toward self-recognition, identity reconstruction, and agency.

Ultimately, this study aims to analyze how female subjectivity is constructed through Eleven's inner experiences in *Stranger Things* Season 4. The analysis focuses on the process through which Eleven experiences social rejection, confronts traumatic memory, reconstructs her identity, and develops agency as an active female subject. Therefore, this research does not only examine what Eleven experiences, but also how those experiences shape the way she understands herself.

1.2 Statement of the problems

The formulation of the research question in this study is based on the primary focus of analyzing the construction of female subjectivity as represented through the inner experiences of the character Eleven in *Stranger Things* Season 4. As one of the central female characters in the series, Eleven is portrayed not only through her actions and the events she experiences, but also through various internal experiences that shape the way she understands herself and the world around her. These experiences include past trauma, emotional experiences, memory, processes of self-recognition, identity formation, and the ability to make decisions and act as an active subject.

This study is grounded in Teresa de Lauretis's perspective, which views female subjectivity as a process shaped through experience and the meanings individuals assign to those experiences. Therefore, this study focuses not only on what Eleven experiences but also on how those experiences contribute to the formation of her subjectivity as a woman. Through an analysis of the inner experiences represented within the narrative of the series, this study seeks to reveal the process through which female subjectivity is constructed in the character of Eleven.

Based on this research focus, the research question of this study is formulated as follows: How is female subjectivity constructed through Eleven's inner experiences in *Stranger Things* Season 4?

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how female subjectivity is constructed through the inner experiences of the character Eleven in *Stranger Things* Season 4. To achieve this objective, the study seeks to identify and explain the various internal experiences undergone by Eleven and to analyze how these experiences contribute to the formation of her subjectivity as a woman.

More specifically, this study aims to analyze the construction of female subjectivity through Eleven's inner experiences based on Teresa de Lauretis's theory of female subjectivity. The analysis focuses on how internal experiences, traumatic and emotional experiences, memory and self-recognition, identity

formation, as well as agency and self-understanding, are represented in the character of Eleven and how they contribute to the process of constructing her subjectivity in *Stranger Things* Season 4.

1.4 Research Significances

This study contributes theoretically and academically to literary studies and feminist scholarship by examining female subjectivity through the narrative and dialogue of Eleven in *Stranger Things* Season 4. By foregrounding the inner experiences of a female character, this research enriches feminist literary discourse, particularly within a poststructuralist feminist framework. Theoretically, the study applies Teresa de Lauretis's concept of female subjectivity to an audiovisual text, demonstrating that women's subjectivity can be analyzed not only in conventional literary forms but also in popular cultural media such as television series. Academically, this research provides a reference for literature students and future studies on feminist literary criticism, women's representation, and subjectivity in literary and popular cultural texts, while reaffirming women's position as narrative subjects rather than mere objects of storytelling.

