



The Past Trauma of Gunarto in the Drama Script *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the past trauma experienced by the character Gunarto, specifically examining the symptoms and the process of trauma recovery as depicted in the play *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail. The character's trauma is analyzed because the play illustrates how childhood trauma influences an individual's psychological state into adulthood. The study employs a descriptive-analytical method using a literary psychology approach based on Herman's perspective. The data source is the script of *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail, accessed via Scribd. The research data consist of excerpts of dialogue, narration, and actions that depict Gunarto's trauma symptoms and recovery process. Data collection was conducted through reading and note-taking. Data analysis involved reading and comprehending the data, classifying it based on trauma symptoms and recovery stages, describing the findings, analyzing the data in relation to the research focus, interpreting the results, and drawing conclusions. The findings indicate that Gunarto experiences past trauma manifested through three symptoms: *intrusion*, *constriction*, and *hyperarousal*. Furthermore, the trauma recovery process comprises three stages: rebuilding a sense of safety, remembering and grieving, and reconnecting with life. This recovery process is evident through his display of independence, the disclosure of past suffering, and the emergence of remorse at the story's conclusion. The study demonstrates that literary works can be analyzed through the lens of the psychological issues experienced by their characters.

Keywords: past trauma, character Gunarto, drama script

Trauma Masa Lalu Tokoh Gunarto dalam Naskah Drama *Ayahku Pulang* Karya Usmar Ismail

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan trauma masa lalu tokoh Gunarto dalam hal gejala dan proses pemulihan trauma seperti yang digambarkan dalam drama *Ayahku Pulang* karya Usmar Ismail. Trauma tokoh tersebut diteliti karena drama ini menggambarkan bagaimana pengalaman traumatis masa kanak-kanak memengaruhi keadaan psikologis seseorang hingga dewasa. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif-analitis berdasarkan perspektif Herman tentang psikologi sastra. Sumber data adalah drama *Ayahku Pulang* karya Usmar Ismail, yang diakses melalui situs web Scribd. Data penelitian terdiri dari cuplikan dialog, narasi, dan tindakan yang menggambarkan gejala trauma dan proses pemulihan tokoh Gunarto. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui membaca dan mencatat. Analisis data dilakukan dengan membaca dan memahami data, kemudian mengklasifikasikan data berdasarkan gejala trauma dan proses pemulihan trauma. Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan data yang ditemukan, menganalisis data sesuai dengan fokus penelitian, menginterpretasikan data, dan menarik kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh Gunarto mengalami trauma masa lalu melalui tiga gejala: intrusi, konstiksi, dan hiperarousal. Selain itu, proses pemulihan trauma terdiri dari tiga tahap: membangun kembali rasa aman, mengingat dan berduka, serta membangun kembali hubungan dengan kehidupan. Proses pemulihan ini terlihat melalui kemandirian tokoh, pengungkapan penderitaan masa lalu, dan munculnya penyesalan di akhir cerita. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa karya sastra dapat dianalisis melalui masalah psikologis yang dialami oleh tokoh-tokohnya.

Kata kunci: trauma masa lalu, tokoh Gunarto, naskah drama

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INTRODUCTION

Drama is a form of literary work that depicts human life through the dialogue and actions of characters. Drama typically portrays various life conflicts related to social and psychological issues. Through the characters' dialogue and behavior, readers can understand the inner state of the characters in the story. Drama has key elements such as characters, dialogue, plot, setting, and conflict. Characters in drama play a vital role because it is through them that the author conveys the story and depicts various issues of human life. The conflicts experienced by the characters are often a central part of a play because these conflicts influence the development of the story and the characters' psychological states. In a play, a character's psychological issues are usually revealed through their actions, words, and relationships with other characters. Therefore, plays can be used to examine a character's psychological state, including any trauma the character experiences in the story. Through plays, readers can understand how life experiences influence a person's attitudes, emotions, and behavior.

Literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as a reflective medium that reveals the complexities of human inner reality, including psychological wounds and trauma. In line with Prameswari's perspective (in Dewi & Ahmadi, 2025: 436), literature serves as a vehicle for understanding an individual's psychological state, where the author strives to reveal the layers of a character's psyche that are often hidden behind the narrative. Through a literary psychology approach, researchers can explore how life experiences particularly traumatic events shape the characters' personalities, behaviors, and inner conflicts within the story. This aligns with the view that trauma in literature is not merely a memory of the past but an experience that remains alive and profoundly influences the characters' psychological dynamics.

Trauma is a psychological condition that arises from painful experiences that are difficult

for a person to forget. According to Herman (1992: 33), "trauma occurs when a person experiences an event that disrupts their sense of safety and leaves a profound psychological impact, causing the victim to lose the ability to integrate that experience into their normal consciousness." In line with this, Van der Kolk (in Firdaus & Hidayati, 2023: 21) emphasizes that "the body holds the record of trauma, and unresolved traumatic experiences will continue to influence the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves in daily life."

In line with this perspective, Dewi and Ahmadi (Prameswari & Yulianto, 2025: 133) explain that trauma is often rooted in a loss of safety resulting from emotional rejection or neglect, which subsequently shapes the characters' negative self-concept and feelings of worthlessness. This reinforces the relevance of the literary psychology approach in exploring how life experiences particularly traumatic events shape the characters' personalities, behaviors, and inner conflicts within a story. Furthermore, Ramadhini and Resmisari (in Dewi & Ahmadi, 2025: 184) emphasize that elements within literary works serve as effective communication tools for representing psychological states and the journey toward healing, thereby enabling the audience to understand the complexity of the characters' inner wounds. Thus, the literary psychology approach is highly relevant for exploring how traumatic experiences shape the characters' personalities and behaviors in the story.

Trauma does not only occur in real life, but is also often depicted in literary works through characters and plot conflicts. This aligns with the view of Wellek and Warren (as cited in Ramadhini & Resmisari, 2025: 94), who state that "literary works are depictions of human life in which various social and psychological issues are expressed through the medium of language in an imaginative and aesthetic manner." Through literary works, authors can deeply depict the inner state of characters, including traumatic experiences that affect their lives. In this context, according to Ratna (in Prameswari & Yulianto, 2009: 62), "the



literary psychology approach provides researchers with the opportunity to explore a character's psychological state through literary texts as representations of human psychological reality." One form of literary work that frequently depicts the conflicts of human life is drama. In line with the views of Firdaus and Hidayati (in Ramadhini & Resmisari, 2025: 214–216), trauma in literary works can be observed through the characters' psychological symptoms such as hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, and numbing which influence their behavior in the story. The study examines the characters' trauma in the play through a literary psychology approach. This research is relevant because it also discusses character trauma in drama, but it focuses more on the symptoms of trauma and the recovery process of the character Gunarto in the play. As stated by Aristotle (in Firdaus & Hidayati, 2023: 19), drama is defined as "an imitation of serious and complete human action, using captivating language, in various ways across its different parts." Drama presents events and dialogues that directly reveal the characters' emotions, attitudes, and relationships, making the characters' psychological issues easier for the The play *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail is a work that depicts family conflicts and the inner turmoil of the characters in their daily lives. According to Sumardjo and Saini, KM (in Dewi & Ahmadi, 2025: 31) argues that "a good drama is one that is able to portray a character's inner conflict in such depth that readers or viewers can feel the emotional truth of every event depicted." In the play, the character Gunarto exhibits a psychological state influenced by painful past experiences. The trauma he has experienced is evident through recurring memories of traumatic events, his efforts to avoid anything related to his past, and the fear and anxiety that affect his life.

According to Setiadi (as cited in Prihantoro, D. 2012: 11), trauma is a state in which an individual is thrust far from a state of equilibrium (comfort) into a state of disequilibrium (distress). The sufferer will feel extremely unsettled by such

a situation. Trauma is a psychological condition that arises as a result of a painful experience or an event that places severe stress on a person. Such experiences can leave emotional scars that affects a person's thoughts, feelings, and behavior in daily life. Trauma usually occurs when a person experiences an event that is difficult to accept, such as loss, violence, rejection, family conflict, or other experiences that cause deep emotional distress. Traumatic experiences are often difficult to forget, so victims continue to be haunted by fear, anxiety, and inner turmoil.

In literary works, trauma is often depicted through a character's inner conflict, changes in attitude, and actions influenced by their past experiences. Trauma is a common psychological theme in literature because authors strive to portray human life realistically. Therefore, trauma can serve as a lens for understanding a character's psychological state within a literary work. As explained by Herman (1992: 34), there are three main symptoms of trauma that indicate a person is still affected by a traumatic experience they have endured. Symptoms of trauma can manifest in the form of a person's thoughts, emotions, or behavior in daily life. (1) Intrusion is the recurrence of traumatic experiences in the victim's memory. This symptom can take the form of recurring distressing memories, nightmares, flashbacks of painful events, or the feeling as if That experience recurred. As Herman (1992: 35) notes, trauma survivors typically find it difficult to forget their past experiences because those traumatic moments are encoded as abnormal memories that spontaneously surface in consciousness either as flashbacks while awake or as nightmares during sleep. (2) Constriction is a state of numbness and withdrawal in response to unbearable pain. According to Herman (1992: 37), when a person is completely helpless and all forms of resistance are futile, they may enter a state of surrender, in which the self-defense system completely shuts down their consciousness. Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli occurs because the victim is unable to face the

emotional intensity of the event again. (3) Hyperarousal is a state in which the self-defense system appears to be in a constant state of alert, as if danger could return at any moment. As noted by Herman (1992: 34), after a traumatic experience, trauma survivors are easily startled, react with irritability to minor provocations, and have difficulty sleeping, because their physiological arousal continues unabated, leaving the body in a state of constant high alert.

According to Herman (1992: 155), the trauma recovery process occurs in three stages, each with its own primary task. In line with Herman's view (1992: 155), the recovery process unfolds in three stages, where the primary task of the first stage is to ensure safety, the primary task of the second stage is to remember and grieve, and the primary task of the third stage is the process of reconnecting with everyday life. (1) Rebuilding a sense of safety within oneself is the first stage and the foundation of the entire recovery process. According to Herman (1992: 158), building a sense of safety begins by focusing on bodily control and gradually expands to environmental control, encompassing attention to basic health needs, regulating bodily functions such as sleep, eating, and exercise, as well as managing post-traumatic symptoms and controlling self-destructive behaviors. At this stage, a person begins to relearn how to feel safe, both with regard to themselves and their surroundings. (2) Remembering and grieving are the second stage in the trauma recovery process. According to Herman (1992: 175), the primary task of this stage is to transform traumatic memories into a narrative that can be integrated into a person's life story, so that survivors can fully and completely recount the traumatic experiences they have endured. Through this stage, a person begins to find the courage to confront and express the burden that has long been buried within them, thereby freeing themselves from the grip of the past. (3) Rebuilding a connection with life is the third and final stage of trauma recovery. As Herman (1992: 196) explains, after coming to terms with a traumatic past,

survivors face the task of creating a future, developing a new sense of self, rebuilding relationships that have been shattered, and rediscovering the faith that gives meaning to their lives. At this stage, a person begins to reconnect with the world around them, form healthy relationships with others, and rediscover meaning in their life.

Based on this, this study aims to describe the past trauma experienced by the character Gunarto in the play, based on the symptoms of trauma outlined by Herman. This study is expected to help readers understand the character's psychological state and demonstrate that literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as a means of depicting the challenges of human life.

METHOD

The method used in this study is the descriptive-analytical method. Afifuddin & Saebani (2002:19), Razak (2017:176), Yuliani (2018:87) states that the analytical descriptive method is commonly used in various literary studies, including research on literature. This method was used to describe and analyze the past trauma of the character Gunarto in the play *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail. The approach used in this study is the literary psychology approach from Herman's perspective.

The data source for this study is the play *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail, accessed via the Scribd website at <https://share.google/wD7t740SLPVMBCvEY>. The research data consists of excerpts from dialogue, narration, and character actions that reveal symptoms of trauma as well as the trauma recovery process of the character Gunarto.

Data collection was conducted through reading and note-taking. Data analysis involved reading and understanding the data, classifying the data based on symptoms of trauma and the trauma recovery process, describing the findings, analyzing the data in accordance with the research focus, interpreting the data, and drawing



conclusions based on the analysis regarding the character Gunarto's past trauma..

RESULT

This section presents the results of an analysis of the past trauma experienced by the character Gunarto in the play *Ayahku Pulang* by Usmar Ismail. The analysis was conducted based on Herman's theory of trauma, which encompasses three main symptoms intrusion, constriction, and hyperarousal as well as the character's trauma recovery process. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of dialogue excerpts accompanied by descriptions of the findings for each aspect examined.

1. Gunarto's Past Trauma Examined Through Symptom Aspects in Usmar Ismail's Play *Ayahku Pulang*

The past trauma experienced by the character Gunarto in Usmar Ismail's play *Ayahku Pulang* is reflected through various psychological symptoms that arise as a result of his traumatic experiences. Based on Herman's theory, these trauma symptoms include intrusion marked by the recurrence of traumatic experiences in memory constriction marked by efforts to avoid things related to the trauma and hyperarousal marked by the emergence of excessive emotional responses. The results of the analysis of Gunarto's trauma symptoms are presented as follows.

1.1 Intrusion (The Resurgence of Traumatic Experiences)

The character Gunarto in the play *My Father Is Coming Home* exhibits symptoms of intrusion the resurgence of traumatic experiences in his memory. The past trauma he experienced continues to affect his psychological state, making it difficult for him to forget the terrible experiences that have occurred in his life. These experiences have left emotional scars that continue to weigh heavily on his thoughts and feelings. This can be seen in the following data.

Data 1

Mother : Gunarto! What did you just say! (Dialogue 101)

Gunarto : "We don't have a father," I said. If we had a father, then why would we have had to work so hard all this time? Just to be someone else's slaves! When I was eight years old, Mom and I almost jumped into the ocean; luckily, Mom came to her senses in time. And if we had a father, then why did I have to be a errand boy when I was ten years old? We don't have a father. We grew up in poverty. There wasn't even a shred of joy in our hearts. And you, Maimun.

Have you forgotten when you used to cry in elementary school Because you couldn't buy marbles like your other friends. And you went to school in clothes that were torn and patched here and there? All of that happened because we didn't have a father! If we had a father, then why have our lives been so miserable all this time! (Dialogue 102)

This quote shows that Gunarto's childhood experiences filled with suffering still leave a strong imprint on his memory. He is still able to recall his life experiences in detail, from nearly jumping into the sea with his mother to being an errand boy from a young age. These vivid, detailed memories of painful experiences indicate symptoms of intrusive thoughts resulting from prolonged trauma. The childhood trauma he experienced has left Gunarto haunted by feelings of loss and suffering well into adulthood.

Data 2

Maimun : Do you still remember what Dad looked like, Bro? (Dialogue 56)

Gunarto : (Quickly) I don't remember anymore. (Dialogue 57)

Maimun : You should remember, since you're already eight years old. Meanwhile, I still remember, even if it's only vaguely. (Dialogue 58)

The dialogue reveals that Gunarto actually still harbors deep memories of his father, even though

he tries hard to forget him. His attitude of denial and his efforts to suppress those memories indicate that the traumatic experience is still very much present in his mind. This situation shows that Gunarto's past trauma continues to weigh heavily on him.

1.2 Constriction (Avoiding Trauma Related Matters)

The next symptom of trauma experienced by the character Gunarto is constriction, or the effort to avoid matters related to his traumatic experience. His past trauma causes him to distance himself from conversations or situations that remind him of his father. This behavior serves as a form of self-protection to prevent him from reliving the emotional distress caused by his past experiences. This can be seen in the following data.

Data 1

Maimun : What was Dad really like, Mom? (Dialogue 46)

Mom : When he was young, he didn't like to study. Not like you. He preferred to live it up. Your father was highly respected back then. He lent money left and right. And that's why.... (Dialogue 47)

Gunarto : (Annoyed, then changing the subject) How many days off do you have during this holiday, Mun? (Dialogue 48)

This dialogue shows that Gunarto deliberately changed the subject when the conversation turned to his father. Instead of responding to his mother's story, Gunarto shifted the conversation to another topic unrelated to the current situation. This behavior reflects his avoidance of anything that might reawaken his traumatic memories of his father.

Data 2

Mother: (looking sad) On festive nights like this, he used to be here... (Lost in thought) Maybe... (Dialogue 75)

Gunarto: (somewhat annoyed) Oh, Mom, just forget about what's already in the past. (Dialogue 76)

This excerpt shows that Gunarto actively avoids conversations related to his father's past. The statement "just forget about it" reveals the character's desire to avoid the resurgence of pain caused by the traumatic experiences he has endured. This symptom of constriction indicates that Gunarto has not yet been able to fully confront the emotional wounds he has experienced.

1.3 Rebuilding a Connection with Life

The character Gunarto also exhibits symptoms of hyperarousal, such as emotional outbursts, excessive anger, and an inability to control his emotional responses due to his past trauma. This trauma has made Gunarto extremely sensitive and prone to overreacting when confronted with matters related to his father. This can be seen in the following data.

Data 1

Gunarto : Maimun! When did you ever have a father! (Dialogue 98)

Mother : Gunarto! (Sad, Anxious, and Beginning to Cry) (Dialogue 99)

Gunarto : (speaking slowly but bitterly) We don't have a father, Mom. When will we have a father? (Dialogue 100)

Mother : (somewhat harshly but restrained) Gunarto! What did you just say! (Dialogue 101)

Gunarto : I said we don't have a father. If we had a father, then why would we have had to work ourselves to the bone all this time? Living like slaves! When I was eight years old, Mom and I almost jumped into the ocean luckily, Mom came to her senses in time. And if we had a father, then why did I have to be a errand boy when I was ten years old? We don't have a father. We grew up in misery. There wasn't even a shred of joy in our hearts. And you, Maimun.

Have you forgotten when you used to cry in elementary school? Because you couldn't afford marbles like your other friends. And you go to school in clothes that are torn and patched here and there? It's all because we don't have a father! If we had a father, then why have we been living in poverty all this time! (Dialogue 102)

This dialogue reveals Gunarto's uncontrollable emotional outburst when his father's presence reawakens traumatic memories from the past. His rejection of his own biological father shows that the emotional wounds he has long suppressed still strongly influence his emotional state. This anger is not merely a form of hatred, but rather an emotional response stemming from unresolved childhood trauma.

Data 2

Maimun : But Narto, even Mom has forgiven him. Why can't we? (Dialogue 103)

Gunarto : (coldly, but firmly) Mom is a woman. When I was little, I used to cry in Mom's lap because I was hungry, cold, and sick, and Mom always said, "This is all your father's fault; your father is to blame."

Then I ended up as someone else's errand boy! And Mom became a maid, washing other people's dirty clothes! But I worked as hard as I possibly could! I proved that I could feed my family! I shouted to the world that I didn't need help from anyone else! Yeah... the man who abandoned his wife and child to suffer. But I can still be a person of worth, even though I've never known a father's love! When I was eighteen, the only thing that always flashed before my eyes was the image of my father, who had gone astray! He ran off with a strange woman who then dragged him into the depths of depravity! He forgot about his child and his wife! He also forgot his responsibilities because his lust had led him to the gates of hell! The debts he left behind for us piled up! To the point that my savings book, which was kept by

Mom, was also lost along with that runaway father! Yeah, our childhood was truly, truly torturous. So if we do have a father, then that father is my greatest enemy! (Dialogue 104)

This quote reveals the intense emotions Gunarto is experiencing. His description of his father as his "greatest enemy" reflects the accumulation of anger, pain, and disappointment that he has kept bottled up for years. This

suggests that Gunarto has not yet fully recovered from his trauma, making it difficult for him to control his emotions when recalling his past.

2. Gunarto's Past Trauma Examined from the Perspective of the Recovery Process in Usmar Ismail's Play *Ayahku Pulang*

2.1 Rebuilding a Sense of Security

The stage of rebuilding a sense of security in the play *Ayahku Pulang* is evident in Gunarto's efforts to take on the responsibility of acting as a father figure in his family. This is evident in the following dialogue between Mother and Gunarto.

Data 1

Mother :Where are we supposed to find her, Narto? Your younger sister, Mintarsih, is just an ordinary girl. Especially now that we're in such difficult circumstances? Don't we have any money at home?In just a few days,even my last savings will run out. (Dialogue 18)

Gunarto : (Silent, Thinking, Then Frustrated) "All of this is because of Dad! Now Mintarsih has to suffer too! Ever since she was little, Mintarsih has known the bitterness

of life. But we have to get through this, Mom! We have to! It's my duty as her older brother I have to try even harder!" (A brief silence. Then, speaking to himself) "If only I had just one million..." (Dialogue 19)

This quote shows that although Gunarto still harbors resentment toward his father, he is beginning to take control of his life by shouldering his responsibilities as the eldest brother in the family. His desire to work harder to overcome life's difficulties reflects his efforts to rebuild a sense of security for himself and his family.

The second sign becomes apparent when Gunarto asserts that he is capable of surviving without his father's help.

Data 2

Mother : (Confused, at a Loss) "Gunarto, how could you say such a thing to your father? Your biological father." (Dialogue 111)

Gunarto : (quickly) “My biological father? It’s true that the Gunarto of the past once had a father, but he passed away twenty years ago. And the Gunarto of today is the Gunarto that I’ve shaped myself! I’ve never been indebted to anyone in this world. I’m free as free as can be, Mom!” (Dialogue 112)

This quote shows that Gunarto is beginning to build an independent sense of self and feels capable of living life on his own terms.

2.2 Remembering and Grieving

The stage of remembering and grieving in the play *My Father Is Coming Home* is evident when Gunarto begins to recount his life experiences filled with suffering due to his father’s departure. This is evident in the following dialogue between Mother and Gunarto:

Data 1

Mother : (Somewhat Loud But Restrained) “Gunarto! What did you just say!” (Dialogue 101)

Gunarto : (Speaking Slowly But Bitterly) “I said we don’t have a father. If we had a father, then why would we have had to work so hard all this time? Just to be someone else’s slaves! When I was eight years old, Mom and I almost jumped into the sea luckily, Mom came to her senses in time. And if we had a father, then why would I have had to be a errand boy when I was ten years old?” (Dialogue 102)

This quote shows that Gunarto has begun to revisit the traumatic memories of his childhood in detail. He reveals the hardships he has endured since childhood as a result of losing his father. Sharing these bitter experiences serves as a form of release from the emotional pain and grief he has long kept buried within himself.

The second sign becomes apparent when Maimun tries to recall the figure of their father, but Gunarto shows that memories of his father still linger within him.

Data 2

Maimun: “Do you still remember what Dad looked like, Bro?” (Dialogue 56)

Gunarto: (quickly) “I don’t remember anymore.” (Dialogue 57)

Maimun : “You should remember, because you were already eight years old back then. Meanwhile, I still remember, even if it’s only vaguely.” (Dialogue 58)

Gunarto : (Somewhat annoyed) “I don’t remember anymore. I’ve been forcing myself to forget for a long time.” (Dialogue 59)

This quote shows that Gunarto actually still harbors deep memories of his father, even though he has tried hard to forget him. The statement “I’ve been forcing myself to forget him for a long time” reveals an inner struggle and a sadness that has not yet fully faded.

2.3 Rebuilding a Connection with Life

The stage of rebuilding a connection with life in the play *Ayahku Pulang* is represented through Gunarto’s emerging empathy toward his siblings and the deep regret that surfaces at the end of the story. This is evident in the play through the following dialogue between Mintarsih and Gunarto:

Data 1

Mintarsih: (Sobbing) “You’ve hurt Mom’s feelings, Big Brother.” (Dialogue 118)

Gunarto: “You’re taking his side too! As for you, I’m the one who’s been acting as your father all this time! Fine, take care of that man if you really love him! But enough of this for the sake of my siblings’ happiness, don’t let them suffer the way I have.” (Dialogue 119)

This quote shows that, despite his tough exterior, Gunarto is still capable of connecting emotionally with his loved ones and demonstrating empathy which serves as a bridge to reconnecting with human values. The remorse evident in Gunarto’s dialogue when he expresses his concern that his siblings might suffer as he has reveals a growing concern for the fate of those closest to him.

The second sign appears at the climax of the script when Gunarto realizes the consequences of his rejection of his father. This is evident in the



following dialogue between Gunarto and his mother:

Data 2

Gunarto: (Startled, Realizing) “So, so Dad jumped into the river!!” (Dialogue 138)

Mother: (Screaming) “Gunarto...!!!” (Dialogue 139)

Gunarto: (Speaking to Himself While Holding His Father’s Clothes and Cap, Looking Remorseful) “He couldn’t bear the humiliation I inflicted on him. He was someone people used to respect, and he was arrogant yes, arrogant just like me... My father. I have killed my father. My own father. My father is coming home, my father is coming home...” (Dialogue 140)

This quote represents the most crucial moment in Gunarto’s healing process. The confession and remorse that emerge mark a breakthrough in the character’s awareness that he still has an unbroken emotional bond with his father and his family.

DISCUSSION

Intrusion (The Resurgence of Traumatic Experiences)

The symptoms of intrusion experienced by the character Gunarto demonstrate the spontaneous and uncontrollable resurgence of traumatic experiences in his memory. This aligns with Herman’s (1992: 37) view that, in trauma survivors, traumatic memories can resurface spontaneously and uncontrollably, causing painful experiences to remain etched in the survivor’s memory. Gunarto can still recall in detail his childhood experiences filled with suffering from nearly falling into the sea with his mother to being treated as a servant from a young age. This is supported by Brewin (in Dewi & Ahmadi, 2025: 1), who explains that the characteristics often cited regarding traumatic flashbacks in PTSD are their involuntary and uncontrollable nature, intense sensory impressions, and the feeling that the event is happening in the present. In this context, Gunarto’s descriptions of past events so vivid and detailed reflect how these traumatic experiences remain ever-present, as if they were still happening

in the present, rather than as memories of a past that has passed. Furthermore, Gunarto’s efforts to suppress his memories of his father actually reveal that these traumatic experiences are still very much present in his mind. According to Herman (1992: 38), repressed traumatic memories often resurface and continue to affect the victim’s emotional state. Thus, the intrusive symptoms Gunarto experiences indicate that his past trauma continues to exert a strong psychological strain on him even into adulthood.

Constriction (Avoiding Trauma Related Matters)

The symptoms of constriction experienced by Gunarto are evident in his efforts to avoid conversations or situations that remind him of his father. This aligns with Herman’s (1992: 47) view that trauma survivors often try to avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations, or situations that might reawaken their traumatic experiences. Gunarto’s tendency to abruptly change the subject whenever the topic of his father came up is an example of this avoidance. This aligns with Siegel’s (in Ehlers & Clark, 2000: 225–228) view, which states that avoidance of trauma reminders actually perpetuates PTSD symptoms because it prevents the survivor from integrating traumatic memories into a coherent autobiographical context, thereby allowing feelings of threat to persist even after the traumatic event itself has passed. Thus, Gunarto’s sudden diversion of the conversation was not merely a sign of rudeness, but rather a psychological defense mechanism rooted in unresolved trauma. Gunarto’s refusal to discuss his father’s past as evidenced by his statement that the past should be forgotten further reinforces this point. This aligns with Herman’s (1992: 47) view that avoiding traumatic experiences is a form of self-defense used by victims to cope with emotional stress they are not yet able to face. This symptom of constriction indicates that Gunarto has not yet been able to fully confront the emotional wounds he has experienced.

Hyperarousal (Excessive Fear and Anxiety)

The symptoms of hyperarousal experienced by Gunarto manifested as emotional outbursts, excessive anger, and an inability to control his emotional responses when confronted with matters related to his father. This aligns with Herman's (1992: 86) view that, in a state of hyperarousal, trauma survivors are in a state of heightened alertness, making them prone to exhibiting excessive emotional responses. Gunarto's uncontrolled emotional outbursts triggered by his father's presence, which reawakened traumatic memories from the past demonstrate that the emotional wounds he has been suppressing remain deeply ingrained. This aligns with Van der Kolk's (in Firdaus & Hidayati, 2023: 9) view, which states that a state of hyperarousal causes individuals who have experienced trauma to be highly susceptible to being disturbed by unexpected stimuli, and their tendency to be triggered into reliving traumatic memories demonstrates how their perceptions are excessively focused on the similarities between current situations and their past traumatic experiences. Thus, Gunarto's outburst of anger was not a response born solely of hatred, but rather an expression of a state of hyperarousal rooted in unresolved childhood trauma. The intensity of these emotions became even more apparent when Gunarto referred to his father as his greatest enemy, revealing an accumulation of anger, pain, and disappointment over the years. According to Herman (1992: 87), trauma survivors tend to exhibit excessive emotional reactions when confronted with the source of their trauma. This indicates that Gunarto has not yet fully recovered from his trauma, making it difficult for him to control his emotions when recalling his past.

Gunarto's Past Trauma Examined from the Perspective of the Recovery Process in Usmar Ismail's Play *Ayahku Pulang*

In addition to experiencing symptoms of trauma, the character Gunarto also demonstrates a gradual recovery process. According to Herman's

theory, the trauma recovery process involves rebuilding a sense of safety, remembering and grieving, and rebuilding a connection with life. These three stages reflect the character's efforts to cope with his traumatic experience and restore his psychological well-being.

Rebuilding a Sense of Safety

The stage of rebuilding a sense of safety occurs when trauma survivors begin to regain control over their lives. According to Herman (1992: 160), this stage occurs when trauma survivors begin to regain control over their lives and feel capable of protecting themselves and those around them. In Gunarto's case, this stage is evident in his efforts to take on the role of a father figure in the family and his determination to work harder to overcome life's difficulties. This is also supported by Nygaard et al. (in Ramadhini & Resmisari, 2025: 1), who state that self-efficacy can promote recovery from post-traumatic stress reactions because individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to use more active and adaptive coping strategies and are less likely to become trapped in catastrophic or other dysfunctional thought patterns. Thus, Gunarto's determination to work harder to overcome his family's difficulties reflects a high level of self-efficacy, which serves as the foundation for rebuilding a sense of security and control over his life. Furthermore, Gunarto's assertion that he is capable of surviving without his father's help indicates that he is beginning to build an independent sense of self. This aligns with Herman's (1992: 162) view that a sense of security begins to form when trauma survivors are able to regain confidence in themselves.

Remembering and Grieving

The stage of remembering and grieving occurs when trauma survivors begin to find the courage to confront their painful past experiences again. According to Herman (1992: 175), this stage occurs when trauma survivors begin to find the courage to confront their painful past experiences by expressing the suffering and emotions they have



long suppressed. In Gunarto's case, this stage became evident when he began to revisit the traumatic memories of his childhood in detail and express the suffering he had endured since childhood due to the loss of his father figure. This is further supported by Selye (in Pennebaker & Beall, 1986: 275), who states that failing to discuss or confront major life shocks is viewed as a form of suppression; actively suppressing behavior, thoughts, and feelings over time places cumulative stress on the body, thereby increasing the likelihood of stress-related illnesses; conversely, providing individuals with the opportunity to express these experiences in a safe environment can have a positive effect in the form of long-term stress reduction. Thus, the moment when Gunarto finally speaks out about his suffering becomes a pivotal point in his journey toward recovery from the trauma he has long kept buried. Gunarto's inner struggle is also evident when he admits that all this time he has been forcing himself to forget his father, which shows that his grief has not yet fully subsided. This aligns with Herman's (1992: 176) view that the process of recalling traumatic experiences is a crucial part of the grieving process, as victims begin to confront the emotional wounds they have long suppressed.

Rebuilding a Connection with Life

The stage of rebuilding a connection with life occurs when trauma survivors begin to be able to reinvest their life energy into meaningful relationships. According to Herman (1992: 196), at the stage of rebuilding a connection with life, trauma survivors begin to be able to reinvest their life energy into meaningful relationships with the people around them. In Gunarto's case, this stage is represented by the emergence of empathy toward his siblings and the deep remorse present at the end of the story. This aligns with the perspective of Tangney and Fischer (in Scaffidi Abbate et al., 2022: 1), who state that guilt in interpersonal relationships has consistently been shown to motivate prosocial behavior and encourage individuals to take reparative actions to restore

affected relationships. Thus, Gunarto's expression of concern for the fate of his siblings is not merely an outpouring of emotion, but rather a psychological indicator that he is beginning to move toward a stage of emotional reconciliation. The culmination of this stage is evident in Gunarto's confession and remorse at the end of the story, which marks a breakthrough in his awareness that he still shares an unbroken emotional bond with his father and his family. This aligns with Herman's (1992: 202) view, which asserts that in the final stage of recovery, trauma survivors begin to integrate their traumatic experiences into their life narratives and rediscover their ability to feel sadness, remorse, and love.

CONCLUSION

The symptom of intrusion is evident in Gunarto's memories of the hardships he endured during his childhood as a result of being abandoned by his father. The symptom of constriction is evident in the character's efforts to avoid conversations and matters related to his past. Meanwhile, the symptom of hyperarousal is evident in the excessive anger, anxiety, and emotional distress the character experiences when confronted by his father.

In addition to experiencing trauma, the character Gunarto also demonstrates a process of trauma recovery that includes the stages of rebuilding a sense of security, remembering and grieving, and rebuilding his connection to life. The stage of rebuilding a sense of security is evident in Gunarto's efforts to take responsibility for his family and build independence in his life. The stage of remembering and grieving becomes apparent when he begins to revisit the painful experiences he had long kept buried. As for the stage of rebuilding a connection with life, this is evident through the emergence of empathy, concern for his family, and remorse that demonstrates self-awareness regarding his attitude toward his father. Through the character of Gunarto, Usmar Ismail's play *Ayahku Pulang* illustrates how past trauma can have a profound impact on a person's

psychological state. This study shows that literary works can serve as a medium for depicting human psychological issues through the conflicts and life experiences of their characters.

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