

**UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE BY THE MAIN CHARACTER IN
SAYAKA MURATA'S *EARTHLINGS***

THESIS

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM

MALANG

2026

**UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE BY THE MAIN CHARACTER IN
SAYAKA MURATA'S *EARTHLINGS*
THESIS**

Presented to
Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.)

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MALANG
2026**

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled “Unclaimed Experience by the Main Character in Sayaka Murata’s *Earthlings*” is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those ones that are cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is an objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

Malang, 3rd June 2026

The researcher



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APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that Hilwa Izmi Rumatiga's thesis entitled **Unclaimed Experience by the Main Character in Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings*** has been approved for thesis examination at the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Maliki Ibrahim Malang, as one of the requirements for the degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.).

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MOTTO

“Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.”

-Pope John Paul II-

“Allah will not burden anyone beyond their capacity.”

(Q.S Al-Baqarah: 286)

DEDICATION

This thesis is proudly dedicated to Allah SWT, who has given me pleasure, mercy, and blessings. I dedicate this to myself, who has worked hard and didn't wait for a miracle to come and complete this final project. To my parents, my beloved father, Dr. Muhammad Hanafi Rumatiga, M.Pd., and my beloved mother, Nunung Dwi Setyawati, S.P., M.Pd., who have supported me with prayers and financial assistance. My sweet little sister, Ikmaliah Rumatiga, has encouraged me and confronted me with reality to ignite my passion. To the Hans's Family, who have always encouraged me. To my best friends, whom I consider family (Aliefia, Alfian, and my friends from Lumen Maitri, whom I cannot name individually). Finally, the journey of life will serve as a foundation for my future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, the researcher expresses her gratitude to Allah SWT, the most beneficent and the most merciful, for the mercy and blessing, who has given me such power to accomplish this thesis, **“Unclaimed Experience by the Main Character in Sayaka Murata’s *Earthlings*”**. Secondly, *shalawat* and *salam* may always be delivered to the last Prophet Muhammad SAW, the real hero of Islam, who guided humanity from darkness into the right path, namely Islam.

It is a challenge to complete this thesis step by step, as the researcher has already completed this thesis. Without the assistance and support of the people who are close to me, it would not have been possible. The researcher hereby expresses her gratitude to.

1. My beloved father and mother, Dr. Muhammad Hanafi Rumatiga, M.Pd, and Nunung Dwi Setyawati, S.P., M.Pd, who have always given me boundless love, advice, prayers, support, as well as financial assistance and resources. For that reason, I feel very fortunate to have parents like them
2. Prof. Dr. Hj. Ilfi Nur Diana, M.Si., as the Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
3. Prof. Dr. M. Faisol, M.Ag., is the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
4. Dr. Agwin Degaf, M.A., as the Head of the English Literature Department of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

5. My thesis advisor, Dr. Ahmad Khozi, M.A., consistently guided me to complete this thesis, and my academic supervisor, the late Mrs. Rina Sari, M.Pd., supported me throughout my studies.
6. The Faculty of Humanities, particularly the Department of English Literature, for the knowledge, experience, teaching style, discussion topics, and valuable inspiration they have shared with me.
7. The Hans Family, who have always encouraged me and helped me to keep going.
8. My fellow researchers, Echa, Ima, Novia, and Laila, who have stood by me throughout the journey of completing this thesis.
9. My friends, whom I consider my own family, Lumen Maitri, who have grown alongside me and will continue to do so in the future.

Malang, 3rd June 2026



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ABSTRACT

Rumatiga, H. I. (2026) **Unclaimed Experience by the Main Character in Sayaka Murata's "Earthlings"**. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Dr. Ahmad Khozi, M.A.

Keywords: *Trauma, Unclaimed Experience, Psychology, Cathy Caruth, Earthlings.*

Trauma is a psychological experience resulting from shocking events the mind cannot fully process, often manifesting unconsciously. This study analyzes the unclaimed traumatic experiences of the main character in Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings* using Cathy Caruth's theory of Unclaimed Experience. The study aims to identify how unclaimed traumatic experiences are represented and to examine how trauma shapes the main character's mind, emotions, and behavior. The data consists of sentences, dialogues, and narratives that represent the main character's traumatic experiences in the novel. The results show that Natsuki's trauma manifests through five primary forms: dissociation, where her consciousness leaves her body during the abuse; emotional numbness, as she feels no pain during the repeated violence inflicted by her mother; sensory disturbances, marked by the loss of the sense of touch and partial hearing; inability to articulate, evidenced by her failure to verbally resist or coherently recount the abuse; and cognitive confusion, reflected in her inability to verify her own experiences without external evidence. Furthermore, the findings indicate that trauma significantly shapes the protagonist's psychological development, influencing her thoughts through internalized social pressure, her emotions through emotional flatness and a sense of emptiness, and her behavior through automatic compliance and the unconscious killing of Mr. Igasaki while in a dissociative state.

ABSTRAK

Rumatiga, H. I. (2026) **Unclaimed Experience by the Main Character in Sayaka Murata's "Earthlings"**. Skripsi. Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Dosen Pembimbing: Dr. Ahmad Ghazi, M.A.

Kata Kunci: Trauma, Unclaimed Experience, Psikologi, Cathy Caruth, *Earthlings*.

Trauma merupakan pengalaman psikologis akibat peristiwa yang mengejutkan dan tidak sepenuhnya dapat diproses oleh pikiran, sehingga sering muncul dalam bentuk yang tidak disadari. Penelitian ini menganalisis pengalaman traumatis yang belum diakui oleh tokoh utama dalam novel *Earthlings* karya Sayaka Murata dengan menggunakan teori Cathy Caruth dengan konsep Unclaimed Experience. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana pengalaman traumatis yang tidak diakui direpresentasikan dan untuk mengkaji bagaimana trauma membentuk pikiran, emosi, dan perilaku tokoh utama. Data terdiri dari kalimat, dialog, dan narasi yang merepresentasikan pengalaman traumatis tokoh utama dalam novel tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa trauma Natsuki terwujud melalui lima bentuk utama: disosiasi, di mana kesadarannya meninggalkan tubuhnya selama pelecehan; mati rasa emosional, karena ia tidak merasakan sakit selama kekerasan berulang yang dilakukan ibunya; gangguan sensorik, ditandai dengan hilangnya indra peraba dan pendengaran sebagian karena ketidakmampuan untuk mengartikulasikan, terbukti dari kegagalannya untuk melawan secara verbal atau menceritakan pelecehan tersebut secara koheren; dan kebingungan kognitif, tercermin dalam ketidakmampuannya untuk memverifikasi pengalamannya sendiri tanpa bukti eksternal. Selain itu, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa trauma secara signifikan membentuk perkembangan psikologis tokoh utama, memengaruhi pemikirannya melalui tekanan sosial yang terinternalisasi, emosinya melalui ekspresi emosi yang datar dan rasa hampa, serta perilakunya melalui kepatuhan otomatis dan pembunuhan tak sadar terhadap Mr. Igasaki saat berada dalam keadaan disosiatif.

مستخلص البحث

يُمزأ أوليه، اغيتامور (2026) التجربة غير المُدعاة لدى الشخصية الرئيسية في رواية "Earthlings" لسايكا مورانا. رسالة بكالوريوس. قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية مالانغ. المشرف الأكاديمي: د. أحمد غوزي، الماجستير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة النفسية، التجربة غير المُدعاة، علم النفس، كاثي كاروث، "Earthlings".

يُعدّ الصدمة النفسية تجربةً سيكولوجيةً ناجمةً عن أحداث مفاجئة لا تستطيع العقلُ معالجتها بصورة كاملة، مما يجعلها تتجلى في الغالب في أشكال لاواعية. تتناول هذه الدراسة بالتحليل التجارب الصادمة غير المُعترف بها لدى الشخصية الرئيسية في رواية "Earthlings" للروائية اليابانية سايكا مورانا، مستعينةً بنظرية كاثي كاروث وفق مفهوم "التجربة غير المُطالب بها". وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد كيفية تمثيل التجارب الصادمة غير المُعترف بها، والكشف عن الأثر الذي تتركه الصدمة على أفكار الشخصية الرئيسية وعواطفها وسلوكياتها. تتألف مادة البحث من الجمل والحوارات والمقاطع السردية التي تعكس التجارب الصادمة للشخصية الرئيسية داخل النص الروائي. وقد أسفرت نتائج الدراسة عن أن صدمة "ناتسوكي" تتجلى من خلال خمسة أشكال رئيسية: أولاً، التفارق، إذ تنفصل وعيها عن جسدها إبان تعرّضها للإيذاء؛ وثانياً، التخثر العاطفي، حيث لا تُحسن بالألم إزاء ما تمارسه عليها والنتها من عنف متكرر؛ وثالثاً، الاضطراب الحسي، الذي يتمثل في ضعف الإحساس اللمسي والسمعي جزئياً؛ ورابعاً، العجز عن التعبير، الذي يتضح في عجزها عن المقاومة اللفظية أو عن رواية ما تعرّضت له من إيذاء بصورة متماسكة؛ وخامساً، الارتباك المعرفي، الذي يتجلى في عدم قدرتها على التحقق من صحة تجاربها الذاتية دون الاستناد إلى شواهد خارجية. فضلاً عن ذلك، تُبين نتائج الدراسة أن الصدمة قد أسهمت إسهاماً بالغاً في تشكيل النمو النفسي للشخصية الرئيسية؛ إذ أثّرت في تفكيرها من خلال الضغوط الاجتماعية المُستبطنة، وفي عواطفها من خلال التعبير العاطفي المُسطح والشعور بالفراغ الداخلي، وفي سلوكياتها من خلال الطاعة الآلية وجريمة القتل غير الواعية التي ارتكبتها بحق السيد إيجاساكي حين كانت في حالة تفارقية.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the background of the study, problems of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and definition of key terms related to the research.

A. Background of the Study

In many parts of the world, violence against children, particularly sexual and domestic violence, still occurs frequently but is rarely reported. A study by Cagney et al. (2025) published in *The Lancet*, which examined 204 countries, found that in 2023, up to 18.9% of girls and 14.8% of boys had experienced sexual violence. According to the National Survey on the Life Experiences of Children and Adolescents (SNPHAR) conducted by KemenPPPA (2024), 50.78% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 had experienced violence at some point in their lives.

Furthermore, 70% of these cases involved the same victims who had experienced repeated violence. Nevertheless, KemenPPPA (2025) acknowledges that victims still struggle to speak out and feel threatened when attempting to report their experiences. The gap between actual prevalence and official reports reveals a deeply hidden social reality. These data represent more than just numbers; they symbolize children trapped by social expectations to follow the rules, lacking a safe space to express their trauma.

This situation aligns with Caruth's (1996) view that trauma is not fully understood at the time it occurs. Instead, trauma often resurfaces in fragmented, uncontrollable, and sometimes difficult-to-articulate forms. These manifestations

continue to influence the victim's thoughts, feelings, and actions long after the initial event has ended.

Trauma can also be likened to a wound that leaves a scar and takes a long time to heal. Traumatic experiences are not merely the enigma of the victim's repetitive and unconscious actions but also the enigma of the distorted human voice screaming from the wound, a voice that bears witness to a truth that cannot be fully known (Caruth, 1996).

A literary work demands that its characters come alive and feel convincing to the reader. When an author is able to bring a character to life through a strong and authentic portrayal, readers will more easily grasp the message, ideas, and human experiences intended to be conveyed (Khan, 2021). This process allows readers to honestly experience and immerse themselves in the story. Literature often explores this phenomenon to uncover deeper layers of human psychology (Azmi, 2023).

In Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings* (2020), the theme of psychological trauma is presented through the story of Natsuki, a woman who has experienced sexual abuse by her teacher since childhood and faced violence from her family. The novel was first published in Japanese in 2018 and translated into English by Ginny Tapley Takemori in 2020. Sayaka Murata was born in 1979. She has published several books, including *Earthlings* (2020). Murata is known for exploring social critiques of gender, reproductive norms, and dystopia through an absurd, horror-infused style. In *Earthlings*, Natsuki experiences trauma that is not

directly present but rather through mechanisms that cause her mind to avoid events too heavy to process.

The main character does not directly experience emotional trauma, but she creates her own world to avoid the pain she feels from violence and abuse. This reflects Caruth's (1996) view that trauma is not fully experienced by a person at the time of the event, but rather emphasizes its lingering impact on the victim.

Sayaka Murata wrote the novel *Earthlings* (2020) because she has long been interested in questioning the true nature of various phenomena, beginning in elementary school. She ponders why acts like murder are considered taboo yet can be accepted under certain conditions, such as self-defense or capital punishment. Murata is also intrigued by the fundamental understanding of the prohibition against cannibalism without a clear underlying rationale. This study uses the novel *Earthlings* as an object because it uniquely depicts traumatic experiences as understood by Cathy Caruth. This novel highlights social norms, violence, and abuse that can reshape a person's life by examining the trauma endured by the main character (Smid, 2020).

Several previous researchers have examined the novel *Earthlings* using different theoretical approaches. Among them is an article written by Hasnain & Hasnain (2025) titled *Bodies without Organs: A Deleuzian Exegesis of Earthlings* examined the construction of identity in *Earthlings* using a Deleuzian philosophical framework. Hasnain & Hasnain (2025) also analyzed the same novel through a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach titled *Selves Without Identities: Psychoanalytic Analysis of Earthlings*, focusing on the characters' inability to form stable identities.

Dalmi (2022) in *Voices of Abused Children in Contemporary Japanese Fiction: Sayaka Murata's Tadaima Tobira and Chikyūseijin*, highlighted the representation of children's experiences of violence in contemporary Japanese fiction using Judith Herman's approach, while Phan (2022) research titled *Becoming Popinobopian: Defining the Self Through Abjection, Metamorphosis, and (Re)Production in Earthlings* analyzed identity formation through the concepts of abjection and metamorphosis with an emphasis on reproduction.

In addition to studies of Sayaka Murata's works, several researchers have applied Cathy Caruth's trauma theory to analyze various literary works. Sartika (2020) analyzed trauma in the novel *Like Revenge, Miss Must Be Paid Thoroughly* by Eka Kurniawan; Lu & Zhang (2023) examined trauma and recovery in *Beloved*; Swarna & Karunambigai (2025) examined *Diary*, Dash & Sarangi (2025) explore trauma in *The Silent Patient*, Wajiran & Maslida (2025) examine *Never Let Me Go*, Namboodiripad (2025) trace trauma in *A Little Life* and *The Bell Jar*, while Hafeez & Akhter (2025) analyze unresolved trauma in *Elizabeth is Missing*. The commonality among these studies demonstrates that trauma can be represented through fragmented memories, repetition, and delayed understanding across various literary contexts.

Debates regarding how trauma manifests itself across different cultures and narratives have been extensively discussed, yet the debate over the universality of trauma persists. Researchers question whether trauma is experienced uniformly or whether social narratives and personal psychological issues have a significant impact. For example, Caruthian trauma emphasizes delay and a lack of

understanding regarding traumatic experiences. This differs from more conventional interpretations of trauma, which emphasize the direct causes and consequences of trauma. Amid these perspectives, there is an ongoing debate regarding how trauma can be theorized and assessed in literary studies (Haleshappa & Zaidi, 2024).

Based on the previous studies above, trauma studies on *Earthlings* have been conducted using various theoretical approaches. Several studies on Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings* mainly focus on identity crisis using Lacanian, abjection using Deleuzian, and the representation of abused children using Herman's frameworks. However, research that specifically applies Cathy Caruth's concept of Unclaimed Experience to analyze the protagonist's trauma in *Earthlings* remains absent. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by analyzing Natsuki's traumatic experiences through Caruth's theoretical framework.

Caruth's theory is chosen over other trauma theories because it is the most suitable framework for analyzing trauma that is never consciously acknowledged. Unlike Herman (1992), whose framework presupposes recovery through social support, and Lacan, whose approach focuses on identity formation through symbolic failure, Caruth specifically addresses how traumatic experiences resist consciousness altogether and resurface in indirect, uncontrollable forms, which precisely reflects Natsuki's condition throughout the narrative.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the background of this research, the research questions are as follows:

1. How does the main character represent the concept of Unclaimed Experience in the novel *Earthlings*?

2. How does this Unclaimed Experience influence the main character's mind, emotions, and behavior as depicted in the narrative of the novel *Earthlings*?

C. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this research is expected to broaden insight into literary psychology, particularly regarding trauma, with the concept of Unclaimed Experience from Cathy Caruth. By applying this concept to analyze Sayaka Murata's contemporary Japanese novel *Earthlings*, this research presents a new perspective on trauma that cannot be claimed by consciousness. Furthermore, the researcher provides a simple analytical framework for trauma that future researchers in literary studies can use. Practically, this research is expected to be a useful reference for researchers who study literary psychology, especially those who examine traumatic experiences through Cathy Caruth's theory.

D. Scope and Limitations

This study examines the psychological trauma of the main character in Murata's novel *Earthlings* (2020), focusing on trauma that cannot be claimed by consciousness, as described by Cathy Caruth. This study examines the trauma present in the novel's narrative, specifically through the dialogue and inner thoughts of the main character. The researcher also examines the influence of trauma on the main character's thoughts, feelings, and behavior in *Earthlings*.

This study focuses solely on the main character's traumatic experiences that cannot be claimed by consciousness, as depicted in the novel's narrative. The researcher does not examine symbolic or linguistic aspects, nor does she examine trauma from a clinical psychology perspective beyond Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Unclaimed Experience

Unclaimed Experience refers to a condition in which a traumatic event occurs too quickly and unexpectedly to be fully understood, leaving the individual unable to process it (Caruth, 1996).

2. Trauma

Trauma is characterized by an overwhelming experience that is too difficult for the person to cope with at the time it occurs (Caruth, 1996). This unprocessed experience leaves a wound in the mind, one that lingers and lingers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the theoretical foundations, including theories of psychological approach and Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma.

A. Psychological Approach

A psychological approach provides a useful framework for analyzing literary works, particularly those that depict characters experiencing profound inner turmoil. As a field of study, psychology aims to explain how humans think, act, influence one another, and form relationships with one another, encompassing both conscious and unconscious phenomena, including feelings, thoughts, desires, and emotional responses (Santos et al., 2018). This focus on the workings of the human mind makes the psychological approach highly relevant when applied to literary characters whose experiences are difficult to explain directly. Within this broad scope, psychological inquiry is increasingly focusing on the study of trauma—a condition in which shocking or threatening events exceed the mind's capacity to process them, resulting in long-term disturbances in a person's thoughts, emotions, and behavior that persist long after the triggering event has passed (Burke, 2024). Most importantly, traumatic experiences do not always manifest in immediately visible forms. These experiences tend to operate beneath the surface of consciousness, shaping how a person understands themselves and the world in indirect, fragmented, and difficult-to-articulate ways.

Literature, at its core, offers a space where such experiences can be explored and brought to life. Literature is a form of human creativity that reflects life through written works, expressed through language, which both enables and limits the ways in which human experience can be depicted and understood (Edgerlon, 1967). Through the construction of characters, plot, and narrative voice, literary works create a medium that allows even the most painful and difficult dimensions of human experience to be explored. Literary works can convey a realistic intent, a conventional semantic intent where the text serves as a narrative intermediary, or a simulative intent where meaning is always indirect (Santos et al., 2018). This indirectness is particularly significant in the representation of trauma, as traumatic experiences typically resist direct expression and instead find their way into the narrative through gaps, silences, repetitions, and fragmented memories, which are the very structural features that can be explored through literary analysis.

Because literary characters are created to represent authentic human experiences, including suffering, fear, loss, and psychological struggles, they are naturally suited for psychological analysis. Characters in literary works are created to convey messages in a more realistic and meaningful way, and it is through these characters that authors explore the deepest dimensions of human psychology (Santos et al., 2018). When a character behaves in a way that appears irrational, self-destructive, or incomprehensible from a purely logical perspective, psychological theories provide the necessary analytical tools to understand the mechanisms underlying such behavior. As noted by Rahayu (2022), psychological analysis in literary studies involves applying psychological theories and

perspectives to literary texts to examine the psychological dimensions of characters as constructed within the narrative. This form of analysis does not aim to reduce the complexity of literature to a set of clinical categories, but rather to illuminate the human truths embedded in the text through the lens of psychological understanding.

The fusion of psychology and literature has given rise to the field of literary psychology, which seeks to uncover the inner lives of characters, depict their mental states, and describe their thoughts and emotions through specific artistic and analytical tools (Rakhmatulloyevna & Uktamovna, 2024). Psychology seeks to understand how the mind responds to extraordinary experiences, particularly those that leave a deep imprint on a person's consciousness and behavior, thereby making it a highly relevant framework for interpreting the psychological dimensions of literary characters (Abdullah, 2019). Therefore, literature and psychology share a fundamental interest in the same questions: why people behave the way they do, what drives their desires and fears, how they cope with pain and loss, and how extraordinary experiences reshape them.

It is within this interdisciplinary framework that this study situates its analysis. By applying Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma to Sayaka Murata's novel, *Earthlings*, this study examines how the protagonist Natsuki's traumatic experiences rooted in sexual abuse and domestic violence manifest through the narrative as unacknowledged experiences that were never fully processed by her consciousness at the time of the events. The psychological approach adopted here does not aim to produce a clinical assessment of the character, but rather to interpret the ways in which the text encodes her inner life, emotional numbness, cognitive

confusion, and behavioral responses through language, dialogue, and narrative structure.

B. Cathy Caruth's Theory of Trauma

Cathy Caruth is a professor of literature and comparative studies, an author, and a researcher who explores psychological trauma through the lenses of literature, psychoanalysis, and history. She was born in New York City in 1955 and studied at Yale University, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1977 and a Ph.D. in comparative literature in 1986. Caruth has published her research book, *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, which deeply examines how trauma influences narrative and memory and its implications for historical experiences such as the Holocaust and terrorism. Caruth (1996) describes trauma as an extraordinary experience resulting from a sudden event or catastrophe, in which the response to the event takes the form of hallucinations and other disturbing phenomena, often delayed and uncontrollable.

Unlike various trauma theories, Caruth's theory offers a unique perspective for analyzing trauma in literary works. Judith Herman's (1992) framework, for example, focuses on the phases of trauma recovery, safety, recollection, and relationship restoration, which assumes that the individual has become aware of the traumatic incident to some extent. This focus on recovery does not align with the situation of the main character in the novel *Earthlings*, as the trauma remains unrecognized from the outset, making it impossible to follow Herman's recovery phases.

Similarly, Lacanian (1973) views trauma through the concept of the Real, addressing encounters with elements that resist symbolization, and emphasizes the disintegration of a stable identity. Although this perspective is useful for exploring identity fragmentation, researchers have focused more on specific physical and behavioral manifestations that occur when an experience has never been consciously acknowledged. In contrast, Caruth asserts that trauma is fundamentally unknowable even to the individual experiencing it, arguing that trauma is not merely repressed but is not fully experienced at all. This crucial distinction makes Caruth's concept of the Unclaimed Experience the most appropriate framework for examining the protagonist's trauma in *Earthlings*, where dissociation, emotional numbness, and sensory disturbances all point to an experience that was never present in consciousness from the very beginning.

Traumatic experiences do not merely resurface repeatedly in a way that is entirely unconscious to the individual, but rather as a voice stemming from a psychological wound within a person who longs to be heard (Caruth, 1996). Trauma is not fully understood at the time of the experience, but emerges later through various forms of psychological distress. Victims strive to interpret what has happened to them, while simultaneously seeking to be understood and acknowledged. This struggle demonstrates a broader dynamic that exists on both sides of the divide between avoiding trauma and seeking meaning from it. When suffering is both avoided and sought, the healing process becomes more complex (Laub & Auerhahn, 2015).

The concept of trauma described by Caruth is highly complex; the beginning of the chapter already illustrates how the trauma process unfolds. For example, in the story of Tancred, a man who repeatedly harms his lover Clorinda. He harms her while she is still in human form, and then Tancred kills her a second time when she has taken the form of a tree. Tancred kills the tree that holds Clorinda's soul without fully realizing it. Caruth defines trauma as something that recurs because a voice triggers it. It is these wounds and this voice that trigger his trauma, causing him to repeat the event (Caruth, 1996).

Caruth (1996) views trauma as a delayed and recurring experience, which typically manifests in the form of flashbacks and nightmares that are beyond the victim's control. Freud (in Caruth 1996) divides trauma symptoms into two categories: "positive symptoms" (flashbacks and hallucinations) and "negative symptoms" (numbness, amnesia, and avoidance of triggering stimuli). Traumatic reliving, such as the nightmares of accident victims, appears as a waking memory, yet it returns, repeatedly, only in the form of a dream (Caruth, 1995).

The concept of trauma is not merely about a concrete past but also relates to how that moment was delayed and not fully understood at the time. This allows for a broader definition of trauma, such that the experience itself connects to a universal concept of trauma. Thus, trauma can be considered an event that was not fully recognized or confronted at the time of the incident but continues to affect a person for a long time afterward (Olf et al., 2025).

This research analyzes Unclaimed Experience in the novel *Earthlings* by examining narratives that depict trauma stemming from experiences that have never been claimed. There are five representations of trauma in this novel, as follows.

1. Dissociation

Dissociation is a psychological condition in which thoughts, feelings, and memories detach from the self as a defense mechanism against trauma or stress. This condition occurs when a victim experiences stress that is too intense to process; consequently, the mind automatically creates a distance between the self and the traumatic experience. Dissociation is viewed as a reaction that helps the victim cope with threats that are too overwhelming to handle or cannot be avoided. The victim may cope by retreating into a hidden part of their mind (Kirmayer, 2016). Caruth's (1996) view of dissociation is that trauma can cause a split in the mind, where traumatic memories become separated from consciousness, leading to a lack of understanding of the event.

2. Emotional Numbness

Emotional numbness refers to a diminished ability to feel emotions after repeatedly experiencing painful events. This condition leads to alienation from one's surroundings and difficulty forming relationships. Repeated trauma can diminish a person's emotional response to their environment (Rocklage et al., 2021). Caruth (1996) argues that individuals who have experienced trauma often bury experiences that are impossible to own fully, or they themselves become symptoms of trauma that they cannot fully acknowledge. Caruth (1995) adds that a person may cope with traumatic experiences precisely by numbing their feelings.

The consequences of this action emerge later because the events are not stored as complete memories, leaving only an incomprehensible void. Thus, emotional numbness reflects trauma that is too severe to be processed consciously.

3. Sensory Disturbance

Sensory processing disorder is a condition associated with trauma that alters a person's response to physical stimuli. Trauma can change a person's sensitivity, making it difficult to respond to certain stimuli as a way to protect oneself from those painful memories. Kearney & Lanius (2022) explain that the brain blocks external signals, causing the victim to be unresponsive even though they have no physical sensory deficits. This reaction does not indicate weakness. On the contrary, it reflects the body's way of protecting itself from the trauma. The inability to feel, hear, or see demonstrates that trauma has a profound impact on a person's mind and body.

4. Unspeakability

Unspeakability arises when a person who has experienced trauma faces obstacles in articulating their experiences through language. The trauma they have experienced is often difficult to put into words that adequately describe what they went through. Busch & McNamara (2020) observe that, in institutional settings, victims fail to meet structured expectations because trauma impairs their ability to construct an acceptable narrative.

5. Cognitive Confusion

Cognitive confusion refers to disruptions in thinking processes and information processing experienced by someone who has undergone trauma. This

mental state arises from the impact of intense stress on the brain. Brewin (2018) explains that this phenomenon often leads victims to experience confusion about their memories of the event and makes it difficult for them to create a coherent narrative when recalling the experience. This cognitive confusion not only affects the daily life of a person who has experienced trauma but also hinders their ability to process the experience properly.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology applied in this research. The research methodology is divided into four main sections: research design, data sources, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures.

A. Research Design

This research employs literary criticism. The researcher aims to analyze the representation of unclaimed trauma experienced by the main character in the novel *Earthlings* using Cathy Caruth's concept of "Unclaimed Experience" as well as the reconfiguration of the character's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This research is analytical, focusing on how the main character in Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings* exhibits unacknowledged traumatic experiences.

The researcher employs literary criticism with a psychological approach, using Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory as the primary theoretical framework, specifically the concept of "Unclaimed Experience," which serves as an analytical tool to understand how trauma reshapes the main character's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors throughout the narrative. This research design was chosen as it is considered most suitable for examining traumatic experiences in literary texts and enables the researcher to analyze the meaning of trauma in depth.

B. Data Source

This research used Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings*, which has been translated into English for this research. The English translation was published by Grove Atlantic. The English version was translated from Japanese by Ginny Tapley Takemori and published by Grove Press in 2020. The novel has 247 pages. Data was extracted from every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph that reflects the main character's traumatic experiences.

C. Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher carefully read the novel using a close-reading approach. Second, the researcher identified information indicating the main character's unrecognized trauma and highlighted relevant details. Third, the researcher sought research references from various sources related to the analyzed research. The researcher then grouped the relationships between the research questions and the data used as a reference for information collection based on Cathy Caruth's theory. Finally, the researcher analyzed the research data using the information obtained to answer the research questions.

D. Data Analysis

The data obtained was then systematically analyzed using a narrative analysis approach, in which the researcher evaluated the plot and the main character at the level of each word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph to understand the impact of delayed trauma on the main character within the narrative context. The researcher

sought to unpack various elements of the *Earthlings* review by examining each paragraph that contained information related to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Furthermore, the researcher conducts a more comprehensive analysis by considering data consistent with previous research grounded in applied theory to achieve the expected results in line with the research problem and objectives, ultimately leading to conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher analyzed how the main character represented unconscious traumatic experiences in *Earthlings* through Cathy Caruth's concept of "Unclaimed Experience," and how the main character's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors were shaped by the trauma in Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings*. There were five points regarding the representation of trauma that were presented in this section: dissociation, emotional numbness, sensory disturbance, unspeakability, and cognitive confusion.

A. Representation of Unclaimed Experience

This section of the research focused on representations of trauma that the protagonist never explicitly acknowledged in the novel. In this context, the researcher sought to interpret the data using psychological theory. The novel followed the protagonist, Natsuki, who is still in elementary school. She is portrayed as a character who experienced sexual abuse by her cram school teacher and suffers violence from her family and community. All data findings are drawn from the novel *Earthlings* by Sayaka Murata.

1. Dissociation

Dissociation is a condition in which trauma causes a fragmentation of the mind, where traumatic memories become separated from consciousness, leading to a lack of understanding of the event. Caruth (1996) argues that such extreme

experiences can cause the victim to separate from their body and mind to protect themselves from the immense pressure resulting from the event. Within the framework of Unclaimed Experience, this representation vividly illustrates an experience that has never been acknowledged. Dissociation is a moment of consciousness leaving the body precisely as the traumatic event occurs, rendering that experience never truly present in the victim's consciousness.

The dissociation Natsuki experienced occurred precisely at the moment she was sexually abused by her private tutor. This moment represents an unexpected trauma. The trauma is not fully understood because, psychologically, she left her own body to protect herself from an event that was too overwhelming for her, so the incident never entered Natsuki's consciousness.

The findings below illustrate that Natsuki left her body using magical powers that prevented her from feeling what Mr. Igasaki was doing to her.

"Suddenly my vision crumpled. Before I knew it, I had left my body and was looking down from the ceiling at Mr. Igasaki holding my head. Wow, I must have summoned a super strong magical power. I had no idea how, since I hadn't used my wand or mirror. But despite this spectacular magic, I felt no emotion whatsoever and simply watched my own body in silence from the ceiling. Seeing Mr. Igasaki holding my skull and using my head as a tool, I vaguely understood. I'd thought I wasn't yet a fully fledged member of the Factory, but actually I was already one of its tools after all. Mr. Igasaki was talking to my body, which was now empty since I was up on the ceiling" (p. 50).

This quote describes the moment when Natsuki's mind undergoes dissociation as an unintentional coping mechanism. As a child, Natsuki describes the experience as a very powerful magical force. This demonstrates how the mind seeks to transform an experience the body cannot endure into something harmless. Natsuki experienced something psychologically excruciating, yet she was unable to acknowledge the event directly, so she interpreted it as magic. This quote describes

Caruth's (1996) view that the event occurred too quickly and unexpectedly, causing a dissociation of consciousness that left the experience never consciously possessed. Natsuki's consciousness was present enough to observe, but she could not feel it directly.

When Natsuki is in a dissociative state, and her psychological defenses begin to weaken, she is actually able to see the traumatic reality clearly. This awareness does not arise from her own reflection, but emerges from the cracks. While in her conscious state, Natsuki's mind protects her by hiding the trauma. However, when she experiences dissociation, that protection diminishes, allowing her to see the truth. Thus, the trauma does not simply fade away without leaving a mark on Natsuki's mind. The trauma leaves a crack that allows reality to seep in, not as a complete memory, but as something unexpected and unconscious.

The quote below describes how dissociation prevents Natsuki's body from returning to consciousness to protect her from the shock of the traumatic experience she has just undergone and allows her body to rest to create distance from that experience.

"Afterward I went straight home. Hovering overhead, I watched myself walking toward my house. I didn't know when I would be able to return to my physical self. All I could do was watch, not thinking about anything. I saw Mom speaking to me. "So you got lost again," she said, looking exasperated. I felt terribly sleepy and went straight to bed without replying. Still out of my body, I watched over myself as I took off my yukata, put on my pajamas, and went to sleep. The moment my physical body's cheek flopped onto the pillow and fell asleep, my hovering self lost consciousness" (p. 51).

The quote above indicates that the dissociative state persisted until she returned home and fell asleep. Sleep is a state in which the body no longer requires consciousness to function, and it is only in this state that Natsuki can return to her

body. This demonstrates how dissociation is not merely a reaction to a traumatic event, but also possesses its own survival mechanism.

Dissociation is not under Natsuki's voluntary control, as she cannot reinhabit her body at will. This observation aligns with Caruth's (1995) argument that trauma results in the individual being defined by the event. Thus, Natsuki is not in control of her traumatic experience; rather, it exerts control over her. Her body and mind function in divergent ways, uniting only when one ceases to operate.

Within the framework of Caruth's (1996) "Unclaimed Experience," the events that transpire in Natsuki's body during trauma are never fully acknowledged by her consciousness. While her body endures the event and her consciousness observes from a distance, no unified subject is present to claim the experience as a complete memory.

2. Emotional Numbness

Emotional numbness refers to a diminished ability to feel emotions after repeatedly experiencing painful events. Emotional numbness is not merely the absence of feeling, but also a reflection of the burden of trauma that is difficult to accept. In trauma, a major collision with reality manifests as numbness; its effects emerge belatedly, and this event leaves a void within a person's body (Caruth, 1995).

The emotional numbness experienced by Natsuki occurred when she faced harsh rejection from her mother after revealing the abuse she had suffered at the hands of Mr. Igasaki. Her mother's repeated denial of the truth Natsuki had revealed led her to simply agree, knowing that arguing or showing her emotions would not

change the reality that her mother never believed her and always viewed her as tainted.

"Mom had never hit me really seriously like that before. I felt a switch inside me click off. I couldn't feel anything in my heart. The pain had gone, as if I was under anesthetic.

"You totally flunked that last test of yours, didn't you? I swear that head of yours is empty. Isn't it? Isn't it?" She thwacked me on the head with the slipper again. "Yes, you're right. I'm sorry." My mouth kept repeating the words Mom wanted over and over like a spell" (p. 42).

Based on the data above, Natsuki imagined herself as if she were under the influence of anesthesia while experiencing abuse at the hands of her own mother. Anesthesia does not eliminate the medical procedure; it merely blocks the sensation of pain. In the same way, the numbness experienced by Natsuki did not eliminate the pain of the abuse she suffered at her mother's hands; rather, she simply stopped feeling the pain by shutting down her emotional response. Her body still felt the blows, but her consciousness refused to be present in that experience.

Within Caruth's (1996) framework, this condition serves as evidence that trauma manifests not only as a psychological wound but also as an epistemological one. This wound impairs Natsuki's ability to recognize her own experience as her own. Thus, Natsuki's numbness does not mean she cannot feel the physical violence perpetrated by her mother, but rather a response to an experience too overwhelming for her body or mind to grasp.

This experience is also referred to as an unclaimed experience, meaning one that was not fully experienced at the time of the incident. Natsuki did not process the physical violence she experienced because her consciousness was disconnected. The experience could not be integrated into her memory but remained as a buried

wound within her. All of this is stored within her, even though at the time of the incident, the wound seemed to have vanished from the experience itself.

In addition to the scenes of violence by her mother, there is also data indicating emotional numbness that emerged alongside dissociation during the sexual abuse perpetrated by Mr. Igasaki. Both of these instances represent emotional numbness, but in different contexts: the first is a response to repeated violence from someone who was supposed to protect her, while the second is a response to the first traumatic event, which was too shocking to process.

"I felt no emotion whatsoever and simply watched my own body in silence from the ceiling.

Seeing Mr. Igasaki holding my skull and using my head as a tool, I vaguely understood. I'd thought I wasn't yet a fully fledged member of the Factory, but actually I was already one of its tools after all" (p. 50).

The data above indicates that Natsuki did not feel the experience while being abused. Natsuki did not cry, did not get angry, and did not panic when Mr. Igasaki performed those actions. She merely watched from above as her body obediently carried out what Mr. Igasaki commanded. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is not merely a psychological wound, but an event that fundamentally refuses to enter consciousness at the time of the occurrence. Trauma is a crisis between experience and understanding, when an event is experienced but cannot be absorbed by the mind (Caruth, 1996). This doesn't mean Natsuki didn't experience anything, but the event was too traumatic to be directly felt.

Natsuki observed herself being abused by Mr. Igasaki, yet she remained emotionally detached from the experience. It appeared as though the event belonged to someone else rather than to herself.

Caruth (1996), in her interpretation of the story *Hiroshima mon amour*, argues that when the acts of “seeing” and “understanding” occur, the act of seeing actually erases the truth of the experience. The same thing happens to Natsuki when she consciously states that she has become a factory tool, yet her emotions do not participate in that understanding.

By dissociating from her body, Natsuki unconsciously refuses to acknowledge the abuse in her life because acknowledging that traumatic event would oversimplify and betray the true nature of her suffering. Within Caruth's (1996) framework, Natsuki's emotional numbness is an honest reaction to an event that leaves her with no room to feel.

3. Sensory Disturbance

Sensory disturbance affects the victim's reaction to physical stimuli following a traumatic experience. The incident leaves a mark on the victim's body, altering the body's sensitivity to surrounding stimuli. The victim may experience this condition as a self-protective reaction to intense pressure. Within Caruth's (1996) framework, these sensory symptoms represent the body's way of storing traumatic experiences that have never been acknowledged by consciousness. Wounds scream through the body because they have no space to be expressed through language.

In the findings below, Natsuki responds to an experience her mind is unable to acknowledge. Her mouth is the organ at the center of the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of Mr. Igasaki, and now that organ refuses to function normally.

“The moment I poured the lukewarm juice into my mouth, I felt something wasn’t quite right. It didn’t taste of anything. I thought maybe it had gone bad, but when I sniffed it, there was the usual sweet orange smell” (p. 51).

The quote above indicates that Natsuki cannot taste the juice she is drinking. She rationally dismisses the possibility that the drink might be spoiled, but when she smells it, the sweet scent of citrus still wafts up as usual. This illustrates the concept of “Unclaimed Experience” through her body’s response to the trauma she has faced, which her mind has not yet acknowledged.

This is a very clear example of what Caruth (1996) refers to as the inability of trauma to be claimed by consciousness. Natsuki lacks the understanding to recognize the abuse; she cannot connect what she feels to the incident, so she seeks another, more acceptable explanation, namely, assuming that the drink itself is at fault. The denial she exhibits is not a lie, but rather the only narrative available in her mind that has not yet processed her own experience.

Researcher found similar data where Natsuki did not taste the bitterness of sunflower seeds after experiencing the abuse.

“I put one of the seeds in my mouth. “It’s still a bit green.” I still couldn’t taste anything. I couldn’t detect even a hint of the fragrance I always smelled when eating sunflower seeds. I could tell just from the feel in my mouth that the seeds weren’t yet dry” (p. 58).

The data above indicate that this is no longer a temporary condition but a persistent traumatic symptom. Natsuki relies solely on her feelings rather than the actual taste of the sunflower seeds. This illustrates how trauma reprograms the body's perception of sensations. From Caruth's (1996) perspective, this is a wound that continuously signals that the experience stored in her mind has not yet been healed.

Caruth (1995) asserts that trauma is a wound that is not only painful but also persistently attempts to convey something that has not yet been fully understood. Natsuki's sense of taste tries to make her aware of an experience she hasn't fully realized by ceasing to function. Thus, the loss of taste isn't merely a common symptom, but a lingering proof for Natsuki to understand what's happening without forcing her to bear the burden of fully comprehending everything.

There is also evidence showing that Natsuki asked Yuu not to kiss her because her lips no longer belonged to her, yet in other ways, they still did.

"Well, you see, my mouth was destroyed recently. So I can't taste anything, and it doesn't belong to me anymore. But everywhere else is still okay. My hands and feet and belly button are all still mine, so I want to touch you with them" (p. 65).

The quote above illustrates how Natsuki directly identifies which parts of her body still belong to her and which no longer do. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is not merely a physical wound but also a psychological one. Natsuki instinctively knows that there is a part of her that no longer belongs to her, but she doesn't know why. This happens because the event that caused that loss of ownership was never consciously acknowledged as an experience that actually happened to her. Natsuki cannot connect her physical condition to the specific event

that caused it. The trauma has created a condition in her body, but there is no clear narrative about how that condition came to be.

In the excerpt below, Natsuki realizes that it's not just her sense of touch that's impaired; her ears also begin to malfunction when she hears Mr. Igasaki's voice.

"Mom practically forced me to take the receiver. I held it to my right ear. 'I'm here waiting for you,' Mr. Igasaki said cheerfully. His breath passed through the receiver and stuck fast to my ear. I couldn't move. From that day, it wasn't just my mouth that was broken but my right ear too. It wasn't completely broken like my mouth was, but sometimes I couldn't hear what was happening right in front of me and instead heard a sound like waves or a continuous buzzing" (p. 110).

Natsuki's ear damage symptoms didn't arise from a new event, but rather from hearing the perpetrator's voice again. The damage occurred not from physical contact or face-to-face interaction, but simply from hearing a sound that activated her sensory triggers. This is a form of stimulation associated with the traumatic experience that reactivates the same defensive response, albeit in a different form. Caruth (1996) states that trauma is a wound screaming, demanding to be heard. Her body tried to signal to Natsuki that Mr. Igasaki was a threat. However, because Natsuki never had the space to consciously claim the experience and no adult could validate it, there was no language available to describe what had happened to her, so her body took over the task on its own.

4. Unspeakability

Unspeakability is a condition where victims struggle to find words to describe the events they have experienced. Trauma victims often fail to meet expectations to provide information because the experience interferes with their ability to construct a coherent narrative.

The research findings indicate the absence of language as a foundational structure of the Unclaimed Experience. Natsuki struggles to make sense of the events she has just experienced; this situation leaves her inarticulate.

“It’s really hard to put into words things that are just a little bit not okay” (p. 34).

The data above illustrates Natsuki’s confusion in interpreting Mr. Igasaki’s behavior. She perceived her teacher’s behavior as slightly off. Natsuki struggled to acknowledge that experience as something that actually happened to her. The discomfort she feels is beyond her comprehension because she has not yet been able to process Mr. Igasaki’s strange actions.

Caruth (1996) asserts that trauma is not merely a psychological event but also an epistemological one, a condition in which the victim does not understand whether the event that occurred is real or merely a figment of their imagination. Natsuki seemed not to understand her situation, so she could only assume that Mr. Igasaki was a bit strange, as there was no more accurate word for it.

Within the framework of Unclaimed Experience, this is one of the conditions that perpetuates the state of Unclaimed. As long as she does not know what happened, that experience can never be acknowledged as something that truly occurred. Natsuki knows that something is wrong, but if she cannot comprehend the event, then it cannot become her own experience.

The researcher also found evidence that Natsuki was unable to verbally resist Mr. Igasaki’s actions during the incident in which she was harassed.

“Yes, you have a fresh one with you, don’t you? Change the one you’re wearing. I stood there unable to speak” (p. 40).

That quote suggests that Natsuki's silence was not a failure to resist Mr. Igasaki's harassment, but rather proof that the words to refuse simply weren't available in her mind. Natsuki found herself in a situation she had never experienced before. The event Natsuki experienced was too threatening to be put into words. This happened not because she couldn't refuse Mr. Igasaki's orders, but because the trauma itself refused to be absorbed into linguistic structures. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is an event that fundamentally refuses to enter consciousness at the time of the incident.

There is other evidence showing how the adult Natsuki still cannot forget that past incident. She tried to recount her traumatic experience to her college friend, but she struggled to find the words to describe what she had gone through. This led her friend, who only heard part of the story, to suspect that she, too, had enjoyed Mr. Igasaki's treatment.

"What? No! That's not what I meant . . . I mean, he was a pervert."
Kanae burst out laughing. "No way! Are you sure you didn't just dream it all? After all, you were only in elementary school back then. From what I saw of his photo on the news, he must have been really popular. Sounds like a fantasy to me."
"No, you've got it all wrong. I hated him."
"Well no, but—"
"No, you're wrong. It wasn't like that at all" (p. 139).

The failure of the narrative occurs not only within Natsuki herself but also in the space between the victim and her listener. In the excerpt above, Natsuki attempts to recount the traumatic experience she endured as a child to her friend Kanae. She tries to correct Kanae's misunderstanding, but this fails to establish a convincing narrative structure. Natsuki knew what she felt, but she lacked the language to bridge the gap between her own experience and others' understanding.

Caruth (1995) argued that trauma occurs when an individual faces an event so profound and frightening that it transcends ordinary comprehension. Consequently, Kanae, who had not faced the event, interpreted Natsuki's story through her own eyes, assuming that Natsuki was deliberately portraying herself as a victim to be pitied.

Kanae couldn't accept Natsuki's testimony not because she lacked empathy for her, but simply because Natsuki's experience didn't align with her understanding of Mr. Igasaki. Her understanding is that a popular and respected man could not possibly be a perpetrator of harassment. Consequently, Kanae instinctively replaces Natsuki's truth with a narrative that is socially acceptable. She consciously reversed the roles of victim and perpetrator by saying that Natsuki should have refused if she didn't like it, and that if she remained silent, it meant Natsuki consented to it. Caruth (1995) explains that the inability to speak about trauma is not the victim's fault, but rather a failure of the surrounding social system to create a safe space where traumatic truths can be accepted and acknowledged.

5. Cognitive Confusion

The cognitive confusion depicted in this novel refers to the disruption in Natsuki's thought processes. Within Caruth's (1996) framework, cognitive confusion is an inevitable consequence of events that have never been acknowledged. Traumatic experiences that never fully entered consciousness at the time they occurred result in no coherent memory that can be logically understood later on. Trauma can shatter a victim's ability to discern the truth of what happened, creating a "crisis of truth" or a crisis in the relationship between experience and

understanding (Caruth, 1996). The confusion felt by Natsuki is a manifestation of this crisis, a state where reality cannot be understood or logically reconciled.

The researcher found data indicating Natsuki's confusion after returning from Mr. Igasaki's house.

"Back in my room, I looked around feeling disorientated. My yukata and obi were neatly folded, and my pajama buttons done all the way up. It was just as my hovering self had observed yesterday" (p. 51).

The data above illustrates Natsuki's disorientation upon waking. Natsuki had to verify her experience not through her own memory, but through tangible evidence such as the neatly folded yukata and obi and the fully buttoned pajamas. This is because the experience that occurred the previous night was not claimed by her consciousness; thus, even upon waking, she could not claim her experience as a definite memory.

In the quote above, Natsuki knows what happened while she was experiencing dissociation, but she does not feel that she knows it. The experience that occurred is actually reality, but Natsuki has not yet fully realized or understood that she truly experienced it. Caruth (1996) argues that a crisis is characterized not merely by a lack of basic understanding, but by the ways in which the crisis simultaneously tests and demands our acknowledgment. This explains that it is not that the facts do not exist, but rather that Natsuki cannot claim them as her own. The fact that Natsuki must look to external evidence to validate her experience represents an "Unclaimed Experience," an experience occurring outside of self-awareness.

The researcher found data revealing Natsuki's confusion after hearing a fact from her sibling, who turned out to be a witness to the abuse she had endured.

"Back when you were in cram school, the teacher fiddled with you, didn't he?" My throat constricted and I couldn't breathe. "Why . . . How . . . ?" "I saw you. The day of the festival, you were late so I went to find you, and I saw you being taken by a man into a house. I was worried, so I went into the garden and looked inside. And you and your teacher were kissing." Had we kissed? My memory of that time was hazy, and I couldn't say for certain that we hadn't" (p. 158).

The excerpt above illustrates Natsuki's confusion upon learning of something she has no memory of. The sexual abuse occurred at the same time her mind left her body. This means that while the incident was taking place, Natsuki was not consciously present and therefore did not fully witness it. She was unable to refute her brother's statement because she herself did not know the truth; she had no memory to rely on. As Caruth (1996) argues, in trauma, a traumatic experience is first encountered through the amnesia embedded within it. Natsuki's confusion aligns with the representation of that experience not as a present reality, but as an unfilled void.

The data above reveals a truth about the past that does not originate within her but rather from others. Caruth (1996) explains this in Tancred's trauma: she did not hear her own wound until a second blow forced her back to the scene. Her older sister was that second blow, reawakening the old experience. Natsuki's body reacts first before her mind can process the situation. This is a sign that something unclaimed and unexpected forces her to confront the possibility first. The event that occurred is real, and she was there, only she has no memory to prove it.

B. The Influence of Trauma on the Mind, Emotions, and Behavior of the Main Character

This section of the research analyzes how trauma shapes the main character's thoughts, emotions, and actions in the novel *Earthlings*. The trauma

Natsuki experienced influences the formation of her way of thinking, her emotions, and her behavior.

1. The Influence of Trauma on the Mind

This section examines the influence of trauma on the mind of the main character in Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings*. The influence of trauma on the mind is divided into three main aspects: social pressure, justification for survival, and dissociation as a cognitive pattern.

a. Social Pressure

The social pressure felt by someone from childhood, especially from family and society that place high expectations on them, is a form of trauma that is subtle but slowly damaging. Unlike physical violence, which leaves visible scars, social pressure inflicts deep wounds by forcing someone to accept an identity against their will. This illustrates how Natsuki sees herself in relation to the town she lives in.

“My town was a collection of nests, a factory for manufacturing babies. I was a tool for the town's good, in two senses. Firstly, I had to study hard to become a work tool. Secondly, I had to be a good girl, so that I could become a reproductive organ for the town. I would probably be a failure on both counts, I thought” (p.32).

This quote demonstrates a social system that shapes individuals into tools of labor, from academic achievement to reproduction. Natsuki is not only pressured by her mother, but the social structure also measures women solely based on their productivity and obedience. This is clearly illustrated by how young Natsuki already understands her own city.

The quote above reveals that Natsuki has internalized these expectations so deeply that she evaluates herself using standards that are not her own. This is a clear

sign of Natsuki's negative self-appraisal. Within Caruth's (1996) framework, this is a distinctly different form of unclaimed experience, but an identity that is never truly hers because it is predetermined by others.

b. Justification for Survival

Verbal and physical abuse perpetrated by parents against children is a particularly dangerous form of environmental trauma because it occurs in a place that should be the safest for a child. In the novel *Earthlings*, Natsuki repeatedly becomes a victim of abuse by her mother, ranging from physical blows to hurtful words that deeply wound Natsuki's feelings.

When Natsuki tried to tell her mother about the abuse she suffered at the hands of Mr. Igasaki, her mother didn't believe her and considered her dirty for even thinking such a thing. Natsuki faced violence from her mother after the latter learned of the incident and discovered that Natsuki had failed an exam. It is clearly evident in the excerpt below that Natsuki simply endured all the treatment she received from her biological mother.

"She thwacked me on the head with the slipper again. "Yes, you're right. I'm sorry." My mouth kept repeating the words Mom wanted over and over like a spell. Yes, you're right. I'm sorry. Yes, you're right. I'm sorry. Yes, you're right. I'm sorry. Please don't throw me out. I'll listen and obey whatever you say, just please don't throw me out. A child thrown out by adults will die. Please don't kill me" (p.43).

The quote above shows how Natsuki responds to her mother's violence not by fighting back, but by justifying all the treatment she receives. She repeatedly says the words her mother wants to hear, not because she believes she is at fault. What she does serves as a survival mechanism because she is still a vulnerable

child. The phrases Natsuki keeps repeating like a mantra indicate that she is trying to be obedient to avoid the possibility of being abandoned by her mother.

The data above illustrates that Natsuki's fear is not merely an emotional one, but a fear for her very survival. In this situation, it is evident that Natsuki has faced the threat of parental neglect, which is equivalent to a threat of death. This indicates that the source of her trauma stems from her immediate environment, her own family. This helplessness forces her to accept a negative narrative about herself that she is stupid, dirty, and deserving of punishment merely as a means to maintain her relationship with her family. This phenomenon is the source of Natsuki's prolonged trauma. She views herself negatively, not as a choice she can make, but as a necessity for survival.

c. Dissociation as a Cognitive Pattern

One such extreme psychological response is dissociation, where the mind leaves the body to escape. This phenomenon occurs involuntarily and is not a conscious choice; rather, it is a last-ditch survival mechanism. It is activated when there are no other ways to escape a dangerous situation. This is clearly evident in Natsuki's experience when she once again faced violence from her mother.

"The out-of-body magical power: I had to summon the out-of-body magical power. If I used that, then I wouldn't have to feel anything. "Really, you only ever think of yourself. Even just yesterday, we thought you were lost but you came home as if nothing had happened and went straight to sleep. You're such a dead loss, you really are." She kicked my back. She kicked me just the same way my sister did. However hard I chanted incantations to myself, today I couldn't manage to leave my body" (p.52).

The quote above shows that Natsuki refers to dissociation as a "magical power," much like a child's imagination. A child's mind, lacking the psychological vocabulary to understand their experience, resorts to a framework within their

grasp. Natsuki tries to summon this power because it has become a sort of survival ritual to avoid new traumatic experiences. In the data above, the solution to the problem isn't to construct a new narrative, but rather to actively avoid producing experiences that must be claimed.

This lack of safety forces Natsuki to create her own safe space within herself through dissociation. When that safe space also collapses, all that remains is a child bearing the pain with no one to defend her. This condition further deepens Natsuki's trauma, while simultaneously becoming the foundation for the formation of her psychological wounds as she grows into adulthood.

2. The Influence of Trauma on Emotions

This section examines the influence of trauma on the emotions of the main character in Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings*. The discussion covers two main aspects: flat affect and the emptiness of food.

a. Flat Affect

When physical violence occurs repeatedly with no escape, the human body and mind eventually create a defense mechanism that operates outside of consciousness. This reaction is not a sign of weakness, but rather evidence of how difficult it is for someone to adapt to a situation that should never have happened. This condition is evident again in the traumatic moments experienced by Natsuki.

"Mom had gotten herself so worked up she kept hitting me with the slipper, on my face, on my head, on my neck, on my back. The switch in my heart was off, so I didn't feel anything. I held my breath waiting for time to pass. I shut myself up in a pod, like a time capsule in the earth, and held myself absolutely still, barely managing to take my life forward into the future" (p. 43).

The quote above illustrates how Natsuki feels no pain from the violence her mother inflicts upon her. She has switched off the emotional switch in her heart, so she feels no emotions at all despite being treated unjustly. Natsuki also describes herself as something buried in the ground, remaining still until she can no longer move forward. It is evident that while Natsuki successfully shields herself from immediate pain, she simultaneously isolates herself from the outside world.

Natsuki is not only a victim of trauma, but she has become trauma herself. She kept everything she couldn't express, everything she never felt, and everything she couldn't leave behind. This condition reveals how trauma shapes a person's emotions through the way they imagine or fail to imagine their future.

b. The Emptiness of Food

Prolonged trauma not only leaves scars on the sufferer's mind but also changes how they perceive the world around them. One of the most obvious effects of such profound trauma is when emotions become numb. Victims continue their daily lives as usual, but lose the ability to be present and feel the meaning of what they are doing. This is the condition Natsuki demonstrates in the quote below.

"I sat at the table to eat the soba noodles I'd made from my uncle's memories and my imagination. They didn't taste of anything" (p.78).

The data above highlights the discrepancy between the process of making noodles and the resulting experience. The soba noodles she made, based on her memory and imagination, tasted like nothing. The impression she felt wasn't just about the food, but also about Natsuki's overall psychological state. When trauma is endured alone for too long, it can lead to numbness. This demonstrates that

trauma not only damages survivors' pasts and present but also overwhelms their ability to experience even the smallest moments that are crucial for their survival.

3. The Influence of Trauma on Behavior

This section analyzes how unclaimed trauma reflects in the action of the main character in Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings*. It is divided into two main aspects: compliance for survival and the murder of Mr. Igasaki.

a. Compliance for Survival

When children grow up in an environment where any form of defiance toward adults is always met with consequences, the body then learns to act before thinking, to obey first and understand later. This pattern not only shapes how trauma victims respond to threats but also changes how they view their own choices. This is evident in Natsuki's narrative, which deals with threats directly from Mr. Igasaki.

"I nodded desperately, my mouth still open. If I defied an adult, I would be killed. If the adults threw me out, I would die. Survive, whatever it takes. The pledge I'd made with Yuu coiled itself around my body like a talisman" (p. 49).

Natsuki's compliance is not a conscious decision made after weighing her options, but rather an automatic response ingrained in her own consciousness. Trauma had trained her body to obey faster than her mind. The trauma Natsuki experienced repeatedly, without recognition or support, narrowed her ability to respond to situations. There was no choice but to obey, because the alternative to obedience was total destruction.

Natsuki grew up without any adults around to keep her safe. Compliance was not a choice she considered; rather, it was the only successful survival strategy,

especially when her mother abused her. Natsuki did not have a set of life rules she had deliberately chosen. Natsuki had only the mantra Yuu gave her, “survive, whatever it takes,” which kept her alive. She was never allowed to even ask about the order and was even forbidden to disobey orders. She adhered to this belief throughout her adulthood, conforming to society's expectations. Natsuki's body even learned that the sooner she obeyed orders, the better her survival would be.

b. The Murder of Mr. Igasaki

Unacknowledged and untreated trauma can ultimately drive an individual to engage in behavior that transcends the boundaries between reality and the world their mind has created. When that boundary collapses, the resulting behavior is no longer a response to the trauma but the trauma itself taking control of a person's actions. This condition is reflected in an extreme way in the scene of Mr. Igasaki's murder, committed by an unconscious Natsuki.

“Mr. Igasaki was asleep on the bed. For some reason, I no longer felt any fear. My body slowly approached his sleeping form. The next moment, my vision crumpled, and the sensation of smashing something soft came through my palms. Before me was a blue lump, and I was raining down blows on that lump with the small grass-cutting scythe... A golden liquid was spurting from the blue lump. What was this? It must be the pupa of the Wicked Witch, my intuition told me... Mr. Igasaki was nowhere in the room, so he must have already been eaten by the Witch” (p. 194-195).

The above quote depicts the novel's climax, when the trauma implanted in Natsuki's mind finally explodes in her extreme actions. Natsuki didn't kill Mr. Igasaki while conscious, but she did so in a state of dissociation, preventing her from truly claiming the incident as her own. She doesn't view Mr. Igasaki as a human being, but rather as an unknown object. Most significant in this narrative is Natsuki's unconsciously constructed explanation for her own actions.

In her memory, she never killed Mr. Igasaki out of revenge for the understanding she suffered. From Natsuki's perspective, Mr. Igasaki wasn't in the room because he had already been devoured by the Evil Witch, and Natsuki killed the Evil Witch to save the world. This statement isn't a summary of her consciousness, but rather a final way to connect her incomprehensible actions to a more comprehensible reality.

Caruth (1996) explains that trauma returns to haunt its victims through repetition. This recurrence does not manifest in nightmares or flashbacks, but in the form of unconscious physical actions. Just as Tancred repeatedly injured Clorinda without realizing what he was doing, Natsuki killed Mr. Igasaki while in a state of complete dissociation.

The data above demonstrates how unacknowledged trauma reshapes behavior to the most extreme degree. Natsuki did not kill out of hatred for Mr. Igasaki, but as a means of survival, no matter what happened. This extreme behavior is the end result of a child who never received help and was never heard, to the point where the only way she could survive was by destroying the source of the threat.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

After analyzing Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings* using Cathy Caruth's theory of Unclaimed Experience, the researcher has reached the stage of drawing and reviewing conclusions. In this chapter, the researcher aims to present conclusions regarding the overall analysis from the previous chapter. Additionally, the researcher offers suggestions to readers and future researchers who will analyze the same literary work or use the same theory and approach to analyze other literary works.

A. Conclusion

Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings* tells the story of the protagonist, Natsuki, who has experienced sexual abuse and violence from her own family since childhood. This research seeks to explore the representation of Unclaimed Experience and the trauma that shapes the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of the protagonist, Natsuki, in Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings*, based on the researcher's interpretation of the entire narrative through Cathy Caruth's theoretical framework (1996).

This research found that the protagonist exhibits five forms of Unclaimed Experience, namely: dissociation, emotional numbness, sensory disturbance, unspeakability, and cognitive confusion. The second analysis identified three effects of trauma on Natsuki: 1) thoughts, in the form of social pressure; 2)

emotions, in the form of flat affect and a sense of emptiness; and 3) behavior, in the form of automatic compliance for survival and the killing of Mr. Igasaki while in a dissociative state. The absence of a safe space for Natsuki's experiences exacerbates her trauma, impacting every aspect of her life. This unclaimed trauma, which can never be fully owned, continues to recur and dominate her. Rather than being consciously processed, it eventually erupts into extreme actions as her sole means of survival.

B. Suggestion

This research is expected to be beneficial for all readers and researchers who want to examine Caruth's theory and Sayaka Murata's novel *Earthlings*. For researchers interested in researching the *Earthlings* novel, it is recommended to explore aspects not yet discussed in this study, such as discussing Japanese culture and society. As depicted by the main character, when the people around her failed to protect Natsuki. It is hoped that this research can foster a sense of concern for victims who experience trauma in real life.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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