

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN *BEAUTY IS A WOUND*: AN ENCODING-
DECODING ANALYSIS OF GOODREADS READER RECEPTION**

THESIS

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM
MALANG
2026**

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DECODING ANALYSIS OF GOODREADS READER RECEPTION**

THESIS

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled *Sexual Violence in Beauty Is a Wound: An Encoding-Decoding Analysis of Goodreads Reader Reception* is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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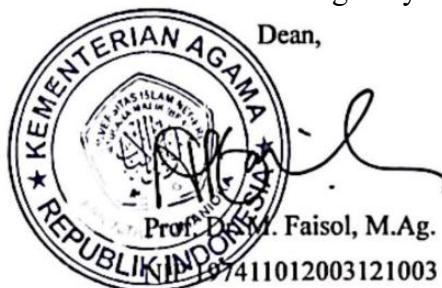


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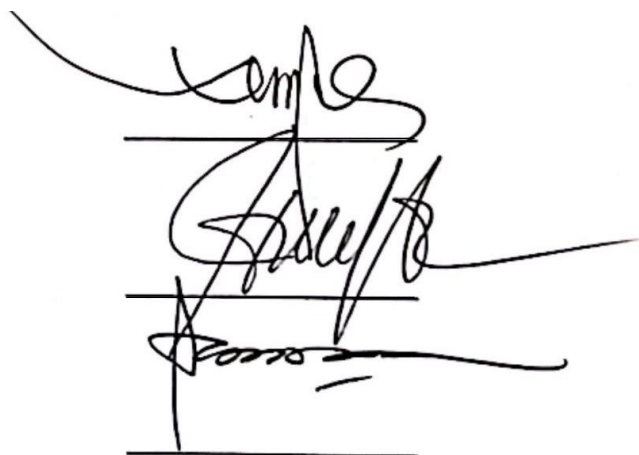
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MOTTO

“My Lord, increase me in knowledge.”

(Q.S. Thaha, 20:114)

“Perhaps Allah will bring them all back to me. Indeed, He is the Knowing, the Wise.”

(Q.S. Yusuf, 12:83)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents, Taufik and Nurhaedah, whose love, prayers, and sacrifices have been the greatest strength throughout my journey. Thank you for every silent effort, every prayer, and every form of support given wholeheartedly, even during difficult times. Thank you for giving me the space to grow, choose my own path, and become myself. May Allah reward both of you with endless blessings, health, peace, and happiness.

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This thesis, entitled *Sexual Violence in Beauty Is a Wound: An Encoding-Decoding Analysis of Goodreads Reader Reception*, is written as one of the requirements for obtaining the degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.) in the Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

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Malang, 10 May 2026

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ABSTRACT

Syakinah, Putri. (2026). *Sexual Violence in Beauty Is a Wound: An Encoding-Decoding Analysis of Goodreads Reader Reception*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Miftahul Huda, M.Pd., Ph.D.

Keywords: *Sexual violence, reader reception, encoding-decoding, goodreads*

This study examines the representation of sexual violence in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Beauty Is a Wound* and Goodreads readers' reception of this representation using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. This study focuses on two research questions: how sexual violence is encoded in the novel and how Goodreads readers decode the representation of sexual violence. This study uses a qualitative method with a cultural studies approach. The novel data are analyzed through close reading to find the encoding patterns of sexual violence, while the Goodreads reviews are analyzed based on Stuart Hall's three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. The results of the study show that sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* is encoded as a form of repeated domination of women's bodies through two main patterns: sexual violence as colonial and militaristic domination and sexual violence as patriarchal domination. The first pattern shows that women's bodies are represented as objects of conquest, exchange, and exploitation in the context of colonialism, war, military power, guerrillas, and forced prostitution. The second pattern suggests that women's bodies are controlled through male desire, marital power, coercion, and violation of consent in patriarchal relationships. The results of the decoding analysis showed that Goodreads readers did not interpret this preferred meaning uniformly. Out of the sixteen reviews, six readers were in the dominant-hegemonic position, four were in the negotiated position, and six were in the oppositional position. These findings suggest that the meanings encoded in literary texts are not always accepted equally by reader because readers can accept, negotiate, or reject preferred meaning based on their respective experiences, values, and interpretive positions.

الملخص

سياكينه، بوتري (2026)، العنف الجنسي في الجمال هو جرح: تحليل ترميز وفك الترميز لاستقبال قراء جودريدز. أطروحة البكالوريوس. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الدولة الإسلامية مولانا مالك إبراهيم، مالانغ. المستشار: مفتاح الهدى، ماجستير في البدالة ودرجة الدكتوراه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنف الجنسي، استقبال القراء، الترميز وفك الترميز، جودريدز

فحصت هذه الدراسة تمثيل العنف الجنسي في رواية إيكّا كورنياوان "كانتلك إيتو لوكا" وقبول قراء جودريدز لهذا التمثيل باستخدام نموذج الترميز-فك الترميز لستيوارت هول. ركزت الدراسة على سؤالين بحثيين: كيف يتم ترميز العنف الجنسي في الروايات وكيف يفك قراء جودريدز تمثيلات مثل هذا العنف الجنسي. تستخدم هذه الدراسة منهجا نوعيا مع نهج دراسة ثقافية. تم تحليل بيانات جديدة من خلال القراءة الدقيقة للعثور على أنماط ترميز العنف الجنسي، بينما تم تحليل مراجعات جودريدز بناء على مواقف ستيوارت هول الثلاثة في فك الشيفرة: المهيمنة، القابلة للتفاوض، والمعارضة. تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن العنف الجنسي في كانتلك إيتو لوكا يرمز كشكل من أشكال الهيمنة المتكررة على أجساد النساء من خلال نمطين رئيسيين: العنف الجنسي كهيمنة استعمارية وعسكرية، والعنف الجنسي كهيمنة أبوية. يظهر النمط الأول أن أجساد النساء تمثل كموضوعات للغزو والتبادل والاستغلال في سياق الاستعمار والحرب والقوة العسكرية وحرب العصابات والدعارة القسرية. النمط الثاني يظهر أن أجساد النساء تتحكم بها رغبة الذكور، والقوة الزوجية، والإكراه، وانتهاك الموافقة في العلاقات الأبوية. تظهر نتائج تحليل فك الترميز أن قراء جودريدز لا يفسرون المعنى المفضل بشكل موحد. من بين الستة عشر مراجعة، كان ستة قراء في موقع هيمنة مهيمنة، وأربعة في موقف تفاوض، وستة في موقف معارض. تشير هذه النتائج إلى أن المعاني المشفرة في النصوص الأدبية لا تقبل دائما بالتساوي من قبل القارئ لأن القراء يمكنهم قبول أو تفاوض أو رفض المعاني المفضلة بناء على تجاربهم وقيمهم ومواقفهم التفسيرية.

ABSTRAK

Syakinah, Putri. (2026). *Kekerasan Seksual dalam Novel Cantik Itu Luka: Analisis Encoding-Decoding terhadap Resepsi Pembaca Goodreads*. Skripsi. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing: Miftahul Huda, M.Pd., Ph.D.

Keywords: Kekerasan seksual, resepsi pembaca, *encoding-decoding*, goodreads

Studi ini meneliti representasi kekerasan seksual dalam novel Eka Kurniawan *Cantik Itu Luka* dan penerimaan pembaca Goodreads terhadap representasi ini dengan menggunakan model *encoding-decoding* milik Stuart Hall. Studi ini berfokus pada dua pertanyaan penelitian: bagaimana kekerasan seksual dikodekan dalam novel dan bagaimana pembaca Goodreads mendekode representasi kekerasan seksual tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi budaya. Data novel dianalisis melalui *close reading* untuk menemukan pola pengkodean kekerasan seksual, sedangkan ulasan Goodreads dianalisis berdasarkan tiga posisi decoding Stuart Hall: dominan-hegemonik, negosiasi, dan oposisi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan seksual dalam *Cantik Itu Luka* dikodekan sebagai bentuk dominasi berulang terhadap tubuh perempuan melalui dua pola utama: kekerasan seksual sebagai dominasi kolonial dan militeristik dan kekerasan seksual sebagai dominasi patriarki. Pola pertama menunjukkan bahwa tubuh perempuan direpresentasikan sebagai objek penaklukan, pertukaran, dan eksploitasi dalam konteks kolonialisme, perang, kekuatan militer, gerilya, dan prostitusi paksa. Pola kedua menunjukkan bahwa tubuh perempuan dikendalikan melalui hasrat laki-laki, kuasa pernikahan, paksaan, dan pelanggaran persetujuan dalam hubungan patriarki. Hasil analisis decoding menunjukkan bahwa pembaca Goodreads tidak menafsirkan *preferred meaning* tersebut secara seragam. Dari enam belas ulasan, enam pembaca berada dalam posisi dominan-hegemonik, empat berada dalam posisi negosiasi, dan enam berada di posisi oposisi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa makna yang dikodekan dalam teks sastra tidak selalu diterima secara merata oleh pembaca karena pembaca dapat menerima, menegosiasikan, atau menolak *preferred meaning* berdasarkan pengalaman, nilai, dan posisi interpretatif masing-masing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study. It consists of the background of the study, problems of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and definition of key terms. This chapter explains the issue of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*, the relevance of Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model, and the use of Goodreads reviews as reader reception data.

A. Background of the Study

Sexual violence remains a serious global problem that continues to affect women and girls in a variety of social and cultural contexts. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025), nearly one in three women worldwide, or an estimated 840 million women globally, has experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. These figures show that sexual violence should not be understood as an isolated personal incident, but as a recurring social problem with long-term consequences that affect the victim's life. Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2024) reports that more than 370 million girls and women globally experience rape or sexual violence before the age of eighteen. Sexual violence can be understood as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of the relationship to the victim, and in any setting (WHO, 2025). In this study, sexual violence is not only

understood as forced sexual acts, but also as a violation of a person's body, consent, dignity, and autonomy that often operates through unequal power relations (Irianto, 2021). These findings suggest that sexual violence is a structural problem that needs critical attention. Therefore, the discussion of sexual violence is important in any field of study, including in literary work, where such violence can be depicted, questioned, and critically interpreted.

Literary works often serve as a medium to represent social realities, including violence experienced by women. Instead of simply presenting fictional events, literature can reflect, question, and shape how society understands social issues (Tanjung & Hayati, 2025). In literary works, sexual violence can be read not only as a narrative event, but also as part of the text's construction of social criticism, trauma, and conflict in power relations. Therefore, scenes of sexual violence need to be examined by considering how the narrative positions women's bodies, perpetrators, victims, and the social structures surrounding the violence. In this sense, literary texts can become sites of discourse where dominant values, marginalized experiences, and forms of resistance are brought into dialogue (Harahap et al., 2025). Through narratives, characterizations, and conflicts, literature can describe how women are placed in vulnerable positions while also revealing the social structures that generate those vulnerabilities. Therefore, the representation of sexual violence in literature is crucial because it allows readers to examine how violence against women is constructed, normalized, or challenged.

Beauty Is a Wound (in Bahasa Indonesia version: *Cantik Itu Luka*) by Eka Kurniawan is a literary work that presents women's experiences of violence in the

context of colonial and postcolonial Indonesian history. The novel tells the dynamic and tragic lives of Dewi Ayu, her daughter, and other women, whose bodies and lives are repeatedly shaped by colonial violence, patriarchal domination, and social oppression. Rahayu and Aurita (2020) note that the female characters in the novel experience various forms of sexual harassment during the Dutch and Japanese colonial periods, the early years of Indonesian independence, and the New Order era. In this context, sexual violence in the novel is not portrayed as a single incident, but as a recurring pattern connected to broader historical and gender power relations. In colonial and military contexts, women's bodies can be positioned as objects of conquest, exchange, or exploitation. This perspective is relevant because the novel repeatedly places women in situations where their bodies are affected by war, imprisonment, military authority, and forced sexual access. This helps explain why sexual violence in wartime narratives is often connected to domination, fear, and the control of communities through women's bodies (Baaz & Stern, 2013).

Juniardi and Nafisah (2021) show that female subordination in *Beauty Is a Wound* appears in the production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization sectors, with sexuality becoming the most dominant sector. Similarly, Tanjung and Hayati (2025) argue that violence against women in *Cantik Itu Luka*, both physical and symbolic, is represented in patriarchal and militaristic structures. This study suggests that the novel is important for examining how sexual violence is encoded as part of a broader critique of historical violence, patriarchal domination, and power relations during the colonial and postcolonial periods in Indonesia.

The representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* can be seen as a sensitive issue because of its close relationship with women's bodies, trauma, and unequal power relations. In the novel, women are often placed in vulnerable positions and treated as objects of male desire. Shofa and Istiani (2025) explain that Dewi Ayu is positioned as a sexual object whose existence is often seen through the desires of men. This shows that sexual violence in the novel is not only about individual acts of violence, but also about how women's bodies are controlled in patriarchal societies.

However, the aforementioned kind of representation may lead to different readers' reception. Some readers may see explicit representation of sexual violence as a critique of patriarchy and historical oppression, while others may feel that the representation is disturbing or problematic. Tanjung and Hayati (2025) argue that Eka Kurniawan presents violence against women with strong historical and social weight. Therefore, the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* not only invites textual analysis but also raises questions about how readers receive and interpret the representation.

In the context of contemporary reading practice, reader reception can be observed through digital reading platforms that allow readers to publicly share their opinions or interpretations of literary works. At this point, Goodreads provides an important space for observing how readers receive and interpret literary works. Goodreads is not only a platform for ratings, but also a social space where readers write reviews, express opinions, and share their reading experiences.

Harlina et al. (2024) explain that Goodreads supports the social dimension of reading and evaluating literature. Similarly, Doche and Ross (2023) state that Goodreads reinforces reading as a social practice because readers can share their views, emotions, and interpretations with others. Therefore, Goodreads reviews can provide useful data for examining readers' reception of the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. Since ratings alone cannot fully explain readers' interpretations, written reviews are more useful for understanding how readers accept, question, or reject the meanings presented in the novel.

To understand readers' reception of the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*, this study requires an approach that views readers as active meaning-makers. Reader reception is relevant because readers do not simply receive the meaning of a literary text in the same way. Dzulhija (2019) explains that readers actively construct meaning based on their experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and purposes in reading. Therefore, different readers may produce different interpretations of the same issue, including the representation of sexual violence in the novel.

Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model is useful for examining variations of reader reception because it explains how meanings encoded in a text may be decoded differently by audiences. In this model, readers' reception is categorized into three positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional (Hall, 1980). In the dominant-hegemonic position, readers accept the preferred meaning of the text. In the negotiated position, readers partly accept the meaning but also question certain aspects. In the oppositional position, readers reject the preferred meaning and interpret the text

from a different perspective. Thus, Hall's model may be applied to analyze how Goodreads readers decode the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*.

Several studies have examined *Beauty Is a Wound* through textual approaches, especially in relation to women, gender injustice, patriarchy, and historical violence. Juniardi and Nafisah (2021) analyze women's subordination in the novel through four sectors: production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization. Their study shows that these sectors are interconnected and that the sexuality sector appears most frequently, indicating that women's oppression in the novel is strongly related to the control of women's bodies and sexuality. Similarly, Tanjung and Hayati (2025) examine gender inequality through stereotyping, violence, double burden, marginalization, and subordination. Their study shows that the novel represents general injustice as a part of a patriarchal structure that limits women's agency and positions women as objects within social and sexual relations. These previous studies are relevant to this study because they show that the representation of sexual violence in the novel is closely related to the broader system of women's oppression.

Other studies also discuss *Beauty Is a Wound* through postcolonial, feminist, and historical perspectives. Shofa and Istiani (2025) examine patriarchal hegemony in the novel and show that subaltern women experience objectification, subordination, and marginalization, while also demonstrating forms of resistance against patriarchal power. Rahayu and Aurita (2020) focus on Dewi Ayu's feminist consciousness and argue that she is not merely represented as a passive victim but as a female figure who challenges traditional stereotypes through her rebellious spirit, self-reliance, bravery,

determination, and leadership. Meanwhile, Harahap et al. (2025) read the novel as representing historical trauma, collective memory, and marginalized identity in Indonesian history. These studies show that *Beauty Is a Wound* has been widely examined as a text that represents women's oppression, patriarchal domination, resistance, and trauma.

In addition to textual studies on *Beauty Is a Wound*, several studies have explored reader reception, Goodreads, and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. Adhitya (2023) analyzed readers' reception of the *Djokolelo Disaster on Planet Poa* on Goodreads using Stuart Hall's theory and found that readers occupied positions of dominance, negotiation, and opposition, with negotiated acceptance emerging as the most frequent category. Harlina et al. (2024) also used Goodreads reviews to examine how readers engage with Howl's *Moving Castle*, showing that online reading communities allow readers to express different forms of interpretation and engagement with literary texts. Doche and Ross (2023) further show that Goodreads serves as a social reading space where readers share their views, emotions, and interpretations, making written reviews useful for understanding the reader's experience beyond rankings. These studies support the use of Goodreads as a relevant platform to examine readers' reception in contemporary literary studies.

Furthermore, Dzulhija (2019) emphasizes that readers do not passively accept meaning from literary texts but actively construct meaning through their own understanding, knowledge, and reading experience. This idea is useful for explaining why readers may produce different interpretations of the same literary issue.

Simorangkir (2025) also demonstrates the relevance of Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory in analyzing audience reception, showing that audiences may interpret the same message differently and may occupy negotiated positions rather than fully accepting or rejecting the intended message.

The above previous studies imply two main research tendencies. The first group focuses on textual analysis of *Beauty Is a Wound*, especially on women's subordination, gender inequality, patriarchal hegemony, resistance, and trauma. The second group focuses on readers' reception, Goodreads reviews, and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. However, they have not specifically combined these two areas to examine how sexual violence is encoded in *Beauty Is a Wound* and how Goodreads readers decode this meaning through dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the encoded representation of sexual violence in the novel and the decoding positions of Goodreads readers.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the background described above, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is sexual violence encoded in Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound*?
2. How do Goodreads readers decode the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* based on Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model?

C. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to literary studies, especially to reader reception studies on the representation of sexual violence in literary works. This study also expands the use of Hall's model in literary studies by examining both the encoded representation of sexual violence in a literary text and the decoding positions of readers, i.e., dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions. In addition, the study supports the relevance of Goodreads as a digital reading platform that can be used to examine contemporary reader reception through written reviews.

Practically, this study provides insight into how readers interpret sensitive issues such as sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. The findings of this study can help students, researchers, and literary critics understand how literary representations of sexual violence can be accepted, questioned, or rejected by readers from different social and cultural backgrounds. This study may serve as a reference for future research on reader reception, digital literary platforms, and controversial themes in literary texts.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study is limited to the analysis of sexual violence in Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound*, the English translation of *Cantik Itu Luka* translated by Annie Tucker, and Goodreads readers' reception of its representation. The first scope of this study is the textual analysis of the novel, which focuses on how sexual violence is encoded through narrative, characterization, conflict, and the positioning of women characters. The analysis is directed toward identifying the encoded or preferred

meaning of sexual violence in the novel. Therefore, this study does not examine all aspects or issues in *Beauty Is a Wound*, such as historical and political issues or gender inequality in general, except when those aspects or issues are directly related to the representation of sexual violence.

The second scope of this study is the analysis of Goodreads reviews. The reviews are used to examine how readers decode the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. This study is limited to selected English-language Goodreads reviews that discuss or respond to the issue of sexual violence in the novel and provide interpretive commentary rather than only ratings. The analysis uses Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model to categorize readers' decoding positions into dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions. These limitations are applied to maintain a clear focus on how sexual violence in the novel is encoded and how Goodreads readers decode its representation through dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. *Sexual Violence* refers to acts of sexual harassment, coercion, exploitation, or offense committed against a person without consent and is often associated with unequal gender relations and control of women's bodies (Tanjung & Hayati, 2025).
2. *Reader reception* refers to the way readers receive, interpret, and give meaning to literary texts. This emphasizes that readers are not passive recipients of meaning, but active interpreters whose understanding is shaped by their reading experience,

knowledge, and purpose (Dzulhija, 2019). In this study, reader reception refers to Goodreads readers' reception of the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*.

3. *Encoding-Decoding*, as proposed by Stuart Hall, is a model of interpreting the meaning in media messages by focusing on the producer's encoding and the audiences' decoding. Hall (1980) divides audience reception into three positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. In this study, Hall's model is adapted to literary reception by treating *Beauty Is a Wound* as a cultural text whose representation of sexual violence can be decoded by Goodreads readers.
4. *Goodreads* is a digital platform where readers are allowed to share reviews, ratings, and interpretations of literary works. It also functions as a social reading space where readers express views, emotions, and interpretations about the texts they read (Doche & Ross, 2023). In this study, Goodreads is used as the source of reader reception data, focusing on selected written reviews that discuss or respond to the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the concepts and theories used in this research. The discussion begins with cultural studies. After that, this chapter explains Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model as the main theoretical framework for analyzing how meaning is encoded in a text and decoded by readers. Finally, this chapter discusses Goodreads as a digital reader reception platform, which is used as the source of reader review data in this study.

A. Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is an approach that examines culture as a site where meaning, identity, ideology, and power are produced and negotiated. Hermes et al. (2017) explain that cultural studies is concerned with how the world is made meaningful through media texts and through cultural, social, and political practices of everyday life. In this perspective, culture is not limited to artistic works, literary texts, or aesthetic objects. Culture is also understood as everyday practices, social relations, media texts, popular narratives, and symbolic systems through which people make sense of their lives. Therefore, cultural studies not only asks what a text means but also how meaning is produced, what cultural codes shape that meaning, and how meaning is connected to broader social and historical conditions.

Stuart Hall is one of the most influential figures in the development of cultural studies. Curthoys and Docker (2017) explain that Hall played an important role in developing cultural studies as an interdisciplinary field. His work connects cultural analysis with theoretical debates on ideology, class, race, colonialism, social structure, and power. This shows that cultural studies are not limited to one academic discipline, but moves across literary studies, media studies, sociology, history, politics, and other fields. Through this interdisciplinary approach, cultural studies allows researchers to examine cultural texts as part of wider social processes rather than as isolated aesthetic objects.

In cultural studies, culture is understood as something closely related to social practice and representation. Culture does not only refer to high art, but also to the ways people live, communicate, interpret, and organize meaning in everyday life. Kaszynska (2025) explains that culture can be understood through the relationship between objectified forms of cultural expression and culture as identity. This view suggests that cultural objects, including literary works, are not separated from everyday values and social identities. Instead, cultural expressions participate in shaping how individuals and communities understand themselves and the world around them.

Based on this perspective, a literary work can be understood as a cultural text. A novel is not only read as an imaginative story, but also as a space where social meanings, ideological positions, identities, and power relations are represented. As a cultural text, literature may contain signs, symbols, conflicts, and narrative patterns that reflect broader cultural meanings. It may represent dominant values, expose social

problems, question existing ideologies, or provide alternative ways of understanding social reality. Therefore, cultural studies enables literary research to connect textual representation with social, historical, and political contexts.

Cultural studies are also concerned with the relationship between meaning and power. Hermes et al. (2017) emphasize that cultural studies pays attention to how the world is made meaningful while also challenging the reproduction of power relations. Therefore, meaning in a cultural text cannot be treated as neutral. Meaning is shaped by social values, ideological structures, historical contexts, and unequal relations of power. This perspective allows researchers to examine how cultural texts construct issues related to identity, gender, the body, violence, history, and social domination.

In literary studies, this perspective positions literary works as cultural texts rather than purely aesthetic objects. A literary text does not only present a story, but also produces cultural meanings through language, characterization, conflict, setting, symbols, and repeated patterns of representation. Through this view, issues such as gender domination, bodily control, violence, colonial memory, and social inequality can be read as cultural signs that reveal how power operates in particular social and historical contexts. Instead of separating literature from society, cultural studies reads literary representation as part of broader discourses that shape and contest social meaning.

Cultural studies also understands meaning as something that is not fixed or singular. Meaning is constructed through social and cultural processes. Li, Adnan, and Gong (2023) explain that Hall's encoding-decoding model rejects communication

models in which audiences passively receive encoded meanings in a direct and uniform way. Instead, meaning is created through the interaction between the encoder as the producer of information and the decoder as the audience. From this perspective, meaning is not simply given by the text. It is produced through signs, cultural codes, social contexts, and interpretive practices.

This view is closely related to the concept of meaning-making. Kaszynska (2025) argues that cultural value is constituted through meaning-making and is shaped by norms, interpretation, and collective validation. This means that cultural meaning is not only produced by the text itself, but also by the values, beliefs, experiences, and interpretive frameworks that surround it. In the context of literary studies, readers do not approach a text from an empty position. They bring their cultural backgrounds, moral values, reading experiences, and social perspectives into the process of interpretation.

For that reason, audiences or readers in cultural studies are understood as active subjects. They do not simply receive the meaning provided by a text. Instead, they may accept, negotiate, or reject the meanings encoded in the text. Hall (1980) in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, explains that a message must first be understood as meaningful discourse before it can produce certain effects. This means that the encoded meaning of a text does not automatically determine how audiences will interpret it. The relationship between encoding and decoding is not always symmetrical because audiences interpret texts from different cultural, social, and ideological positions.

The idea of active readers can also be connected to literary reception, but in this study, it is placed within the broader framework of cultural studies. Dzulhija (2019) explains that readers construct meaning based on their experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and purposes in reading. Similarly, Azzahra (2025) argues that audience reception is influenced by cultural background and life experience. These ideas support the view that readers are not passive recipients of textual meaning. However, this study does not use reader reception as the main theoretical framework. Instead, reader interpretation is understood as part of cultural studies because readers are cultural subjects who participate in producing and negotiating meaning.

This framework becomes important when a cultural text presents sensitive or controversial issues. Such issues may not be decoded in the same way by all readers because every reader brings different values, experiences, and interpretive positions. Some readers may accept the preferred meaning constructed by the text, while others may partly accept it but also question certain parts of the representation. Other readers may reject the preferred meaning and create an alternative interpretation. Therefore, cultural studies help explain why one cultural text can generate different reception among readers.

The development of digital media has made the process of meaning-making more complex. Li, Adnan, and Gong (2023) argue that Hall's encoding-decoding model remains relevant in the era of social media because digital platforms allow individuals to share personal experiences and create new cultural narratives. Social media also makes decoding more complex because audiences increasingly play an active role in

cultural construction. In digital spaces, readers not only read texts privately. They can also write reviews, share opinions, respond to other readers, and participate in public discussions about literary works.

Hermes (2020) explains that participatory media platforms have become spaces for exchange, sharing, and discussion. These platforms allow audiences to gather, express emotions, build communities, and participate in public meaning-making. In this sense, digital audiences can be understood as a new kind of public. This idea is relevant to contemporary literary studies because readers' interpretations are now often visible through digital platforms. Online reviews, comments, and discussions show how readers respond to cultural texts and how meanings circulate beyond the text itself.

In this study, Goodreads reviews are treated as traces of digital meaning-making. The reviews are not viewed merely as personal opinions about whether readers like or dislike a novel. Rather, they are considered cultural responses that show how readers decode meanings produced by a literary text. Through their reviews, readers may express agreement, doubt, discomfort, criticism, or rejection toward the meanings constructed in the text. Therefore, Goodreads can be understood as a digital cultural space where literary meaning is shared, negotiated, and contested by readers.

Based on this explanation, cultural studies provides the main perspective for this research. In this study, *Beauty Is a Wound* is positioned as a cultural text that encodes meanings about sexual violence. Goodreads readers are positioned as active digital audiences who decode those meanings through dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions. Therefore, cultural studies functions as the

theoretical foundation that connects the encoding of sexual violence in the novel with the decoding of that representation by Goodreads readers.

B. Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Model

Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Model is one of the most important frameworks in cultural and media studies that explains how meaning is produced and interpreted in communication. Unlike traditional communication models that assume meaning moves in a direct and linear way from sender to receiver, Hall argues that communication should be understood as a complex process where meaning is actively produced, circulated, and interpreted within different social contexts. In this sense, meaning is not fixed at the point of production, but continues to be shaped through audience interpretation and social negotiation.

Hall (1980) explains that communication consists of several interconnected moments, including production, circulation, distribution or consumption, and reproduction. These moments indicate that meaning is not only created by the producer of a message, but also shaped during its movement across different cultural and social spaces. Therefore, meaning is always in process and can never be fully controlled by the producer of the message. This idea becomes the foundation of encoding and decoding theory, which emphasizes that communication involves both the construction of meaning by producers and the interpretation of meaning by audiences.

Encoding refers to the process in which meaning is constructed and embedded into a message through language, signs, narrative structures, and cultural codes. These

codes are influenced by social values, ideological positions, and institutional frameworks that shape how a message is presented. However, Hall emphasizes that encoded meaning does not guarantee identical interpretation from audiences. This is because audiences are not passive receivers, but active interpreters who bring their own social background, cultural understanding, and lived experience into the process of interpretation.

Decoding, on the other hand, refers to how audiences interpret and make sense of the encoded message. Hall (1980) explains that a message must first be recognized as meaningful discourse before it can be interpreted. This means that audiences actively construct meaning rather than simply absorbing it. As a result, decoding becomes a process where meaning can shift depending on how audiences position themselves toward the text. Because of this, the same message can produce different interpretations among different readers.

Hall further argues that encoding and decoding are not necessarily symmetrical. This lack of symmetry creates space for multiple meanings to emerge from a single text. The difference between preferred meaning and interpreted meaning is not considered a communication failure, but rather a natural condition of meaning-making in cultural and literary texts. This is why audience interpretation becomes an important area of study in reception analysis, as it allows researchers to see how meaning is produced in different reading contexts.

In order to explain how audiences interpret messages, Hall introduces three main positions of decoding. These positions are not fixed categories of readers, but

rather interpretive positions that readers may adopt depending on how they engage with a text:

1. Dominant–Hegemonic Position

In this position, audiences interpret the message in line with the preferred meaning encoded in the text. This means that readers fully accept the intended meaning without significant resistance or reinterpretation. The dominant reading occurs when the audience shares the same ideological framework as the producer of the message, allowing the encoded meaning to be understood in the way it was originally constructed. In this case, there is a high level of agreement between encoding and decoding, so the message is received as intended.

2. Negotiated Position

The negotiated position occurs when audiences partially accept the preferred meaning but also adapt or modify it based on their personal experiences, social context, or cultural background. In this position, readers do not completely reject the encoded message, but they also do not fully accept it. Instead, they combine elements of acceptance and resistance in their interpretation. This position shows that readers may agree with the general idea of a text but still question certain parts of its representation based on their own understanding.

3. Oppositional Position

In the oppositional position, audiences understand the preferred meaning encoded in the text but choose to reject it and construct an alternative interpretation. This rejection does not come from misunderstanding but from a different ideological

or cultural standpoint. Readers in this position actively reinterpret the message in a way that contradicts the intended meaning. As a result, the oppositional reading shows the strongest form of resistance toward the encoded message.

These three positions demonstrate that meaning is not simply contained within a text, but is continuously shaped through the interaction between text and reader. Therefore, reception is an active process where readers position themselves differently toward the same message depending on their interpretive frameworks. This makes Hall's model particularly useful in analyzing literary and digital texts where audience interpretation plays a significant role.

Several studies have applied Hall's framework in analyzing reader reception in digital environments. Rohmah (2023) shows that reader reception in digital literary platforms can be categorized into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings, where readers actively interpret and respond to narrative meanings in different ways. Similarly, Adhitya (2023) demonstrates that Goodreads reviews can be analyzed using Hall's model to identify how readers decode literary texts differently based on personal and contextual factors in the space of digital platforms. These studies confirm that Hall's theory is widely used in reception analysis to understand how meaning is interpreted in online reading communities.

In addition, Azzahra (2025) explains that reception analysis is closely related to how readers receive messages based on cultural background and life experiences, which influence how meaning is interpreted in reading activities. Rahman (2024) also highlights that audience interpretation varies depending on social context, personal

experience, and reader positioning, which results in different forms of meaning-making in reception studies. These perspectives strengthen Hall's argument that meaning is not fixed but shaped through interaction between text and audience.

Based on these theoretical foundations, Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model is used in this study to analyze how readers interpret representations in literary texts. The model allows the researcher to identify how meaning is encoded in the text and how it is decoded by readers into dominant, negotiated, or oppositional positions. Through this framework, reception analysis can capture the complexity of reader interpretation as an active and context-dependent process of meaning construction.

C. Goodreads as a Digital Reader Reception Platform

Goodreads is a digital platform that allows readers to rate books, write reviews, and share their reading experiences with others. Goodreads should be understood not only as a book ranking site, but also as a space for reader reception. Through written reviews, readers can express their reception, doubts, criticisms, or rejections of the problems they encounter in a literary work. In this sense, Goodreads reviews can be understood as written traces of how readers interpret and evaluate literary texts in a digital reading environment.

Goodreads is relevant to reader reception studies because it provides visible records of readers' interpretations. Azzahra (2025) explains that Goodreads is a social networking platform focusing on books and literature, where users can display books they have read, are reading, and want to read, as well as share recommendations

through reviews and comments. This shows that Goodreads is not only used to record reading activity, but also to make readers' interpretations publicly available. Through reviews, readers can explain how they understand certain themes, characters, conflicts, or issues in a literary work.

Goodreads is important for this study because the decoding data are taken from the readers' reviews of *Beauty Is a Wound*. Ratings alone are not enough to understand how readers interpret sexual violence in the novel because ratings only represent numerical assessments. Written reviews are more useful because they can show the reasons behind readers' reception, including why they accept, question, or reject the representation of sexual violence. Holur et al. (2021) explain that social reading sites provide an opportunity to capture readers' responses to literature through online book reviews. This supports the use of Goodreads reviews as reception data because they contain readers' interpretations of the literary work.

Doche and Ross (2023) explain that Goodreads strengthens the practice of reading as a social activity because readers can share their views, emotions, and interpretations with the public. Harlina et al. (2024) also demonstrate that online platforms enable readers from diverse cultural and national backgrounds to convey their interpretations and evaluations of literary works. Therefore, Goodreads can be used as a relevant data source in reader reception research, particularly to examine how readers understand sensitive issues such as sexual violence in literature.

Based on this explanation, Goodreads is used in this study not merely as a source of ratings, but as a platform that provides written reception data. The reviews

selected in this study are not treated as simple opinions about whether readers like or dislike the novel. Instead, they are treated as data that show how readers receive, negotiate, or reject the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. Therefore, Goodreads becomes an important digital platform for connecting Stuart Hall's decoding positions with readers' interpretations in contemporary literary reception.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter explains the method used in this study. It consists of research design, data and data source, data collection, and data analysis. The method is arranged to show how the researcher analyzes the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* and how Goodreads readers decode that representation through Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model.

A. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative method because the data used in this research are in the form of words, sentences, narrative descriptions, and written texts that require interpretation rather than numerical measurement. The qualitative method is appropriate because this study focuses on understanding how meaning is constructed in a literary text and how that meaning is interpreted by readers through written reviews. Therefore, the analysis is not intended to quantify data, but to interpret and explain the representation of sexual violence in the novel and the reception of that representation by readers on Goodreads.

This research is conducted within the field of literary studies because the main object of analysis is a literary work. However, the study also applies a cultural studies approach as an analytical perspective. This approach is used because Goodreads functions as a social reading space where readers actively produce, share, and negotiate

meanings through written reviews. In this sense, reading is not only an individual activity, but also a social practice in which meaning is constructed through interaction among readers within a digital community.

The relationship between literary studies and cultural studies in this research lies in the way the literary text is understood as a cultural text that reflects and produces meaning within social contexts. Literary studies provides the object of analysis, namely the novel *Beauty Is a Wound*, while cultural studies provides the perspective that meaning is constructed through social interaction, cultural codes, and power relations. Through this combination, the novel is not only analyzed as a narrative work, but also as a site where cultural meanings about sexual violence are produced and represented.

Reader reception is an important part of this study because readers are understood as active meaning-makers. Meaning is not considered fixed inside the text, but is produced through the interaction between the text and the reader. In this study, Goodreads readers are positioned as cultural subjects who interpret the representation of sexual violence based on their social background, reading experience, and interpretive position. Therefore, reader reception becomes a way to understand how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and sometimes rejected by readers in a social context.

To analyze this process, Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding Model is used as the main theoretical framework. This model explains that meaning is constructed through two interconnected processes, namely encoding and decoding. Encoding refers to how meaning is constructed in the novel through narrative structures, language, and cultural

codes. Decoding refers to how readers interpret and respond to that meaning based on their social and cultural background. In this study, decoding is categorized into three positions, namely dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings, which are used to understand variations in reader interpretation.

B. Data and Data Source

This study uses two types of data: primary data and secondary data. The primary data are textual passages from Eka Kurniawan's novel *Beauty Is a Wound* that depict or indicate sexual violence. These passages include scenes of rape, sexual coercion, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, and violation. The primary data are used in the encoding stage to analyze how sexual violence is constructed in the novel through narrative, characterization, conflict, and recurring patterns.

The primary data source of this study is Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound*. This study uses the English edition of *Cantik Itu Luka*, translated by Annie Tucker and published by Pushkin Press in 2016. The novel tells the story of Dewi Ayu, a woman who rises from the grave after twenty-one years, and the lives of her daughters and descendants in the fictional town of Halimunda. Through Dewi Ayu and other female characters, the novel presents various experiences of violence. This novel is selected because it repeatedly represents sexual violence against women in different contexts, especially in public or private places.

The secondary data in this study consists of sixteen Goodreads reviews of *Beauty Is a Wound*. These reviews are used in the decoding stage to analyze how

readers receive the representation of sexual violence in the novel. The selected reviews discuss or respond to issues of sexual violence in the novel. These reviews are treated as secondary data because they function to support the analysis of how the preferred meaning encoded in a novel is decoded by readers.

Goodreads is a digital reading platform where readers can give ratings, write reviews, and share their interpretations of literary works. Goodreads reviews were accessed and collected from April 1 to May 24, 2026, from the Goodreads page of *Beauty Is a Wound*. As of this period, the Goodreads page of *Beauty Is a Wound* contained approximately 19,003 ratings and 3,584 reviews, with 1,455 reviews written in English. From these reviews, the researcher selected sixteen reviews that were most relevant to the focus of the study using purposive sampling.

C. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in two stages based on the two data sources. First, the researcher collected data for the encoding stage through a close reading of the novel. At this stage, the researcher read the novel thoroughly, identified sections of the text that indicated sexual violence, and noted relevant textual passages. Data selection was based on the presence of elements of sexual violence, such as rape, sexual coercion, forced prostitution, violation of consent, bodily control, and other forms of sexual violence represented in different narrative contexts.

After collecting the data on sexual violence in the novel, the researcher marked and examined the context, position of characters, and narrative patterns that appeared

repeatedly in the data. In the second stage, the researcher collected data for the decoding stage by accessing the Goodreads page of *Beauty Is a Wound* from April 1 to May 24, 2026. Since the novel has a large number of reviews on Goodreads, the researcher did not analyze all available reviews. Instead, the researcher used purposive selection to choose sixteen reviews relevant to the research focus. Purposive selection was used because this study does not aim to measure the statistical distribution of readers' reception, but to analyze how selected readers decode the representation of sexual violence in the novel.

The selection of Goodreads reviews was conducted by reading reviews that contained explicit or implicit references to sexual violence. The researcher used several keywords and issue-based indicators to identify relevant reviews. The explicit keywords included rape, violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse, women, and women's bodies. The researcher also considered implicit references, such as comments discussing women's suffering, objectification, colonialism, war, patriarchy, marriage, marital rape, or the novel's portrayal of female characters.

The reviews were selected based on several criteria. First, the reviews were written in English. Second, the reviews discussed or responded to the issue of sexual violence in the novel, either explicitly or implicitly. Third, the reviews provided interpretive commentary, not only ratings or short emotional reactions. Fourth, the reviews demonstrated a tendency toward one of the decoding positions of the preferred encoded meaning. Based on these criteria, sixteen reviews were selected because they

were the most relevant to the two research questions and represented the three decoding positions used in this study: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional.

Because the reviews analyzed in this study were publicly available on Goodreads, the researcher did not interact directly with the reviewers and did not collect personal or confidential information.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two main stages based on Stuart Hall's model: the encoding stage and the decoding stage.

1. Encoding Stage: Novel Analysis

The first stage of analysis focuses on encoding, which refers to the process through which meaning is constructed within the novel. In this stage, the researcher conducts a close reading of *Beauty Is a Wound* to examine how sexual violence is represented through narrative events, character interactions, descriptions, settings, and broader social contexts. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the ways in which the novel constructs meaning about sexual violence.

The analysis begins by identifying scenes, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that depict or imply sexual violence. These textual elements are then examined in relation to the circumstances surrounding the events, including the characters involved, the power relations between them, and the social conditions that shape the occurrence of violence. Rather than treating incidents of sexual violence as isolated events, the analysis considers how they function within the broader narrative structure of the novel.

To guide the analysis, several analytical codes are used. These codes emerge from recurring patterns found in the text and help organize the representation of sexual violence across different narrative situations. The codes include coercion, violation of consent, bodily control, sexual objectification, unequal power relations, spatial context, historical context, and repetition patterns.

Coercion refers to situations in which a character is pressured, threatened, manipulated, or forced into sexual acts against their will. Violation of consent refers to sexual acts that occur without voluntary agreement from the victim. Bodily control refers to attempts by individuals or institutions to regulate, exploit, or dominate women's bodies. Sexual objectification refers to representations that reduce women to sexual objects or treat their bodies as commodities. Unequal power relations refer to imbalances of authority, status, gender, or social position that enable acts of sexual violence. Spatial context refers to the locations in which violence occurs and how those spaces contribute to the meaning of the event. Historical context refers to the broader political and social conditions represented in the novel, such as colonialism, war, military occupation, and social instability. Repetition patterns refer to recurring forms of violence that appear throughout the narrative and contribute to the novel's overall representation of gendered oppression.

The researcher then analyzes how these codes operate within different narrative contexts. In public and historical contexts, the analysis focuses on representations of sexual violence connected to colonial rule, military authority, imprisonment, forced prostitution, political conflict, and the exploitation of women during periods of social

upheaval. These contexts are examined to understand how sexual violence is represented as part of larger systems of power and domination.

In private and relational contexts, the analysis focuses on interactions between individual characters, particularly those involving intimate relationships, marriage, family dynamics, desire, coercion, and control over women's bodies. Through this analysis, the researcher examines how sexual violence is represented not only as a public or institutional issue but also as a form of violence embedded within everyday social and interpersonal relationships.

After identifying and categorizing the relevant data, the researcher interprets how these recurring representations contribute to the novel's construction of meaning. Particular attention is given to patterns that appear repeatedly throughout the narrative, as these patterns reveal how sexual violence is framed, normalized, criticized, or connected to broader social structures. Through this process, the encoding analysis identifies the preferred meanings about sexual violence that are constructed within *Beauty Is a Wound* and later become the basis for examining reader interpretations.

2. Decoding Stage: Goodreads Reviews Analysis

The second stage of analysis focuses on decoding, which refers to the process through which readers interpret the meanings encoded in the novel. In this stage, the researcher analyzes selected Goodreads reviews to examine how readers understand the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. Because Goodreads reviews contain readers' reflections, evaluations, and interpretations, they provide valuable data for understanding how meaning is negotiated within a digital reading community.

The analysis begins by reading each selected review carefully and identifying statements related to sexual violence, gender relations, power, historical representation, or the overall portrayal of violence in the novel. The researcher then examines how readers interpret these representations and whether their interpretations accept, partially accept, or reject the meanings identified in the encoding stage. Following Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding Model, reader receptions are categorized into three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings. These categories are used as analytical tools to understand variations in reader interpretation.

After all selected reviews have been categorized, the researcher compares the different decoding positions to identify patterns in reader reception. This comparison allows the researcher to examine how readers from different interpretive positions respond to the same textual representations. The analysis also highlights areas where readers agree, negotiate, or disagree with the meanings encoded in the novel.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of how sexual violence is encoded in *Beauty Is a Wound* and how Goodreads readers decode this representation. The analysis is conducted in two stages based on Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. The first stage examines how the novel constructs sexual violence as a meaningful discourse through narrative codes, characterization, conflict, spatial setting, and power relations. The second stage examines how Goodreads readers interpret the encoded meaning through dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions.

A. Encoding of Sexual Violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*

Within Stuart Hall's framework, meaning does not move in a simple linear process from sender to receiver. A message is produced, circulated, consumed, and reproduced through different but connected moments. Therefore, sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* is not treated in this study as a raw event that directly produces meaning. Rather, it is read as a narrative event that has been signified through language, characterization, conflict, and social relations. In other words, sexual violence becomes meaningful in the novel because it is coded within specific narrative and ideological structures.

In this study, the researcher identifies the encoding of sexual violence by examining several narrative codes. These codes include coercion, bodily control, violation of consent, spatial context, power relation, and repetition. Coercion is used to identify moments where sexual acts occur under force, threat, pressure, or unequal circumstances. Bodily control is used to examine how women's bodies are positioned as objects to be accessed, owned, exchanged, or dominated. Violation of consent is used to mark scenes where women's refusal, fear, silence, or inability to resist indicates the absence of free consent. Spatial context is used to identify the space in which sexual violence occurs, whether in public and historical spaces or in private and relational spaces. Power relation is used to identify the figures or structures that control women's bodies. Repetition is used to determine whether similar representations recur and form a dominant pattern in the novel.

Based on these codes, the researcher finds that sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* does not appear as isolated individual incidents. The selected data show that sexual violence repeatedly appears in two broader narrative spaces. The first space is public and historical, where women's bodies are placed within situations of war, colonial occupation, armed conflict, imprisonment, and forced prostitution. The second space is private and relational, where women's bodies are placed within intimate relationships, male desire, marital authority, coercion, and the violation of consent. These two narrative spaces become the basis for tracing how the novel constructs the preferred meaning of sexual violence.

The preferred meaning in this study does not refer to the author's personal intention, but to the dominant meaning constructed through repeated narrative patterns. Following Hall's idea that an event must first be signified within discourse before it can become a communicative event, this study reads sexual violence in the novel as a coded representation rather than a raw event. Therefore, the analysis first examines how sexual violence is represented in public-historical spaces and private-relational spaces. After these patterns are examined, the researcher identifies the dominant forms of domination encoded through those representations.

1. Sexual Violence in Public and Historical Spaces

This section discusses sexual violence that appears in public and historical spaces in *Beauty Is a Wound*. In this part, the researcher first examines how the selected data are coded through the setting of war, imprisonment, military occupation, armed conflict, and forced prostitution. The data are identified through several narrative codes, namely coercion, bodily control, violation of consent, unequal power relations, wartime setting, and repetition. These codes are used to trace how sexual violence becomes meaningful in the narrative.

Datum 1

Then, without beating around the bush, the Japanese man set upon her fiercely. Dewi Ayu closed her eyes, because whatever the circumstances, this was still the first time a man had taken her: she trembled a little bit, but she survived the horror. Then she couldn't really keep her eyes closed, the commandant was shaking her body so wildly, pounding her without pause, and rocking her from left to right (p. 69).

This scene occurs when Dewi Ayu is in a prison camp and tries to obtain medical help for Ola's mother. The researcher reads this scene through the codes of

coercion, unequal power relations, and bodily control. Dewi Ayu's sexual encounter with the commandant cannot be understood as free consent because it takes place under pressure. She is not in an equal position with the commandant. He has access to medicine, doctors, and authority over the prisoners, while Dewi Ayu is placed in a desperate situation where another person's life depends on his decision.

The sexual violence in this scene is therefore not only represented through the physical act, but also through the condition that makes Dewi Ayu's body become a means of exchange. Her body is used as a requirement for obtaining medical assistance. The narrative codes this scene through fear and suffering, especially through the description of Dewi Ayu's trembling body and her attempt to survive the horror of the situation. These details show that the sexual act is not framed as mutual intimacy, but as an act produced by pressure, vulnerability, and unequal authority.

Datum 2

Then the soldiers began to capture the girls one by one, in a battle they won with ease, gripping the girls in their hands like sick kittens thrashing about futilely as they were being taken away. That night Dewi Ayu heard hysterical screams coming from their rooms as the battle continued. A number of the girls even succeeded in running out into the hall stark naked, before the soldiers recaptured them and threw them back on top of their beds (p.88).

In this datum, the researcher identifies the codes of forced sexual access, collective violence, bodily control, and absence of escape. The women are not presented as subjects who can choose or refuse. They are captured, separated into rooms, and forced into sexual service for Japanese soldiers. The phrase describing the girls as being captured "one by one" emphasizes that their bodies are taken by force.

Their screams and attempts to run away show that the situation is built on fear, resistance, and the violation of consent.

This scene also expands sexual violence from an individual act into a collective system. The violence does not happen only to one woman, but to many women at the same time. The house becomes a controlled space where women's bodies are organized, guarded, and made available for soldiers. Therefore, the researcher reads this datum as a representation of sexual violence in a public-historical setting, where women's bodies are placed under the control of wartime power.

Datum 3

There were more than ten guerrillas, and they gathered all the prisoners. When they discovered that all of them were women and all of them were Dutch, the men grew even more violent. They tied up some of the women in the kitchen, and the others were dragged off to the bedrooms to be raped. Their cries were even more heartbreaking than when the Japanese had turned them into whores, and even Dewi Ayu had to fight more than ever before, fending off a guerrilla who seized her baby and slashed her arm with a knife (p.98).

In this scene, the researcher identifies the codes of armed power, revenge, and sexual domination. The women become targets not only because they are women, but also because they are identified as Dutch prisoners. Their bodies are placed in a vulnerable position within armed conflict. The guerrillas' violence shows that sexual violence in the novel is not limited to one side of power. It can be committed by different armed groups when women's bodies are positioned as accessible targets during war.

The act of dragging women into bedrooms to be raped shows that the violence is not accidental. It is represented as a deliberate act of domination in a situation where

the perpetrators have weapons, numbers, and physical power. The women's cries also mark the scene as one of suffering rather than consent. Through this datum, the novel codes sexual violence as part of a broader public and historical condition in which women's bodies are exposed to violence from armed men.

Based on the three data above, the researcher finds a repeated pattern. Sexual violence in these public and historical spaces is coded through coercion, bodily control, violation of consent, unequal power relations, and wartime settings. Dewi Ayu's body is exchanged for medical assistance, women prisoners are forced into sexual service for soldiers, and Dutch women are raped by guerrillas during armed conflict. These scenes show that sexual violence in the novel is not represented as isolated personal violence. It is repeatedly connected to public and historical situations in which women's bodies are controlled by men who hold military, colonial, or armed power.

Through this repeated pattern, the researcher identifies that sexual violence in public and historical spaces is encoded as colonial and militaristic domination. This category emerges from the recurring codes found in the selected data. The novel constructs women's bodies as sites where historical violence, wartime authority, and armed domination are exercised. In this sense, the preferred meaning produced by this pattern is that sexual violence functions as a form of domination over women's bodies within colonial and militarized structures. This reading is also in line with the broader view that violence against women in *Cantik Itu Luka* is connected to historical, patriarchal, and militaristic structures (Tanjung & Hayati, 2025).

2. Sexual Violence in Private and Relational Spaces

This section discusses sexual violence that appears in private and relational spaces in *Beauty Is a Wound*. Unlike the previous section, the violence discussed here does not happen in war, prison, or military spaces. Instead, it happens in a closer and more personal relationship, especially in the relationship between Alamanda and Shodancho. Through this relationship, the novel shows that sexual violence can also happen in a private space, including marriage.

The data in this section are read through several repeated signs, such as male desire, coercion, violation of consent, control over women's bodies, and marital power. These signs are used to see how Alamanda's body is treated in her relationship with Shodancho. The focus of this section is not only on the sexual acts themselves, but also on the situation around them, especially how Alamanda's refusal is ignored and how Shodancho uses his position to control her body.

In this part, private space is not presented as a safe space for women. Although marriage is usually understood as an intimate and legitimate relationship, the novel shows that marriage can also become a place where violence is hidden. Alamanda's experience is important because it shows that sexual violence does not always appear through public force or armed power. It can also appear in a domestic relationship when a man treats a woman's body as something he has the right to own.

Datum 4

For a moment, the man still kneaded her chest before throwing his body on top of her; kissing her lips with revolting little nibbles, and without wasting much more time, he penetrated her. Alamanda could still see his face that looked like a white blob very close to her eyes, feeling her vagina torn apart by his savagery. She

began to cry, but she didn't even know whether her body still had the capacity to make tears. It seemed to be going on endlessly, for an additional eight whole centuries. No longer having the strength to open her eyes, she only felt her body being treated so filthily (p.214).

This datum shows that Shodancho's attraction to Alamanda is not only presented as love or admiration. His desire slowly becomes a wish to possess her. Alamanda is seen more as an object of desire than as a woman with her own feelings, thoughts, and choices. This is important because the problem begins when Shodancho thinks that Alamanda is someone he can have and control.

In this scene, Alamanda's body becomes the center of Shodancho's attention. The novel does not simply show romantic interest, but also shows how male desire can become controlling. Shodancho does not only want Alamanda emotionally. He also wants access to her body. This datum also shows that the violence does not begin only when physical force happens. Before the act of violence appears clearly, the narrative already shows a pattern of possession. Alamanda is positioned as someone to be desired and obtained. Her own will becomes less important than Shodancho's desire. Through this representation, the novel begins to show how sexual violence in private relationships can grow from the idea that a woman's body can be claimed by a man.

Datum 5

Before Alamanda could react, Shodancho had already pushed her down onto the bed, taken off his own clothes and quickly jumped on top of her. Alamanda resisted, pushing his body away with all her power, but Shodancho was holding her tightly, kissing her wildly, and squeezing her breasts, full of desire. "You are raping me, Shodancho!" screamed Alamanda, trying to roll away. But Shodancho kept after her, exploring and squeezing every region of her body. "Shodancho, you accursed satan, you devil, you asshole, try to rape me and your spear will break against my iron shield!" Alamanda said finally, no longer resisting and letting Shodancho fondle her in vain (p.229).

This datum shows that Alamanda does not freely accept Shodancho's action. Her refusal is important because it shows that there is no clear consent from her. However, Shodancho ignores her rejection and continues to force her. Because of this, the scene cannot be read as a normal intimate relationship. It is shown as an act of force.

The violence in this scene appears through the way Alamanda's choice is ignored. She refuses, but her refusal does not stop Shodancho. This shows an unequal relationship between them. Shodancho has more physical power and uses it to control the situation. Meanwhile, Alamanda is placed in a powerless position because her voice and resistance do not change what happens to her body.

This scene is important because it shows that consent is not only about the presence of marriage or relationship status. Even when two characters are connected in an intimate relationship, consent still matters. Alamanda's refusal makes it clear that the act is not based on mutual willingness. The narrative presents her as someone whose body is forced into a situation she does not choose. Through this scene, the novel shows that sexual violence can happen when a woman's refusal is not respected.

Datum 6

"How dare you rape your own wife!" Shodancho didn't reply, just took off his clothes and faced Alamanda with the look of a horny dog. Seeing him like that, her instinct told her she was in danger and Alamanda squeezed herself even closer against the wall, but Shodancho quickly caught her, threw her down onto the bed, and then threw himself down on top of her. Minute by minute they stayed locked in battle, the battle of a man who needs release for his lust and a woman who claws and screams to protect herself from a love that she in no way wants to consummate. Alamanda closed her thighs tightly, but Shodancho forcefully broke through her last defense with his mighty knee, and whatever was going to happen happened. Shodancho raped his own wife, until the end of the exhausting battle, when Alamanda sobbed, "Fuck you, you raping satan!" and fainted. Shodancho ended up with two scratches on his face and Alamanda with an extraordinary pain in her crotch (p.231).

This datum shows that marriage does not always mean safety for women. Although Alamanda and Shodancho are husband and wife, the sexual act is still violent because Alamanda does not give consent. Her body is treated as something that Shodancho can access because he is her husband. This shows how marriage can become a space where women's bodies are controlled.

The important point in this scene is that Shodancho uses his position as a husband to claim Alamanda's body. However, the novel does not present this as a healthy marital relationship. Alamanda's fear, resistance, and inability to refuse show that the relationship is built through force. Therefore, this scene can be understood as sexual violence within marriage.

In this datum, the private space becomes important. The violence happens inside marriage, a space that is often considered personal and closed from public judgment. Because of that, the violence can be hidden behind the idea of marital rights. However, the novel shows that the existence of marriage does not make forced sexual access acceptable. Alamanda's body remains her own, and the absence of her consent makes the act violent.

Data 7: Alamanda Is Tied and Raped Repeatedly

"So, the whole day long Alamanda was tied up on top of the bed, raped over and over again." (p.232)

This datum shows the clearest form of sexual violence in Alamanda and Shodancho's relationship. Alamanda is tied to the bed and raped repeatedly. The act of tying her body shows that she has no freedom to move, refuse, or protect herself. Her body is fully controlled by Shodancho.

The phrase “raped over and over again” also shows that the violence is not only one incident. It happens repeatedly. This repetition makes the scene more disturbing because Alamanda is not only violated once, but again and again. Her body becomes a place where Shodancho exercises power. She is not treated as a partner, but as someone who can be controlled physically and sexually.

This scene also shows that small acts of care do not remove the violence. Even if Shodancho sometimes treats Alamanda gently, those actions do not change the main problem. Alamanda is still forced, tied, and raped without consent. Therefore, the violence cannot be softened by moments of care or affection. The main meaning of the scene remains the same: Alamanda’s body is controlled by Shodancho’s desire and power.

From the data above, sexual violence in private and relational spaces is shown through the repeated control of Alamanda’s body. Shodancho’s desire turns into possession, his position as a husband gives him power, and Alamanda’s refusal is ignored. The violence does not happen in a public space, but inside a private relationship. This shows that private space, including marriage, can also become unsafe for women.

The repeated signs in these data show a clear pattern. Male desire is presented not only as attraction, but as a desire to possess. Marriage is presented not only as a relationship, but also as a space where male authority can be used to control a woman’s body. Alamanda’s refusal appears several times, but it is repeatedly ignored. Because of this, the sexual violence in this section is not only about physical force, but also

about the power relation that allows Shodancho to treat Alamanda's body as if it belongs to him.

Based on the repeated signs of male desire, coercion, violation of consent, control over women's bodies, marital power, and repetition, this pattern can be identified as sexual violence as patriarchal domination. This category appears from the way the data repeatedly show male power over a woman's body in an intimate relationship. Through Alamanda's experience, the novel constructs sexual violence not only as a personal problem between husband and wife, but also as a form of domination over women's bodies in patriarchal relations.

After examining the selected data, it can be seen that sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* is not presented as separate or random incidents. The data show repeated signs of coercion, violation of consent, control over women's bodies, unequal power relations, and repetition. These signs appear in different narrative spaces, both in public-historical spaces and private-relational spaces. Through these repeated signs, the novel builds a preferred meaning about sexual violence as a form of control over women's bodies.

In the first pattern, sexual violence appears in public and historical spaces, such as prison camps, wartime houses, Japanese occupation, and armed conflict. In these scenes, women's bodies are controlled by men who hold military or armed power. Dewi Ayu's body is exchanged for medical help, women prisoners are forced into sexual service, and Dutch women are raped by guerrillas. Based on these repeated

signs, the researcher identifies this pattern as sexual violence as colonial and militaristic domination.

In the second pattern, sexual violence appears in private and relational spaces, especially through Alamanda and Shodancho's relationship. In this pattern, violence happens within desire, marriage, coercion, and the violation of consent. Alamanda's body is treated as something that Shodancho can possess and control. Based on these repeated signs, the researcher identifies this pattern as sexual violence as patriarchal domination.

Therefore, the encoding of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* produces a preferred meaning that women's bodies are repeatedly placed under domination. This domination appears in two different but connected forms: domination through colonial and militaristic power, and domination through patriarchal power. The preferred meaning in this study does not refer to the author's personal intention, but to the preferred meaning constructed by the novel through repeated narrative patterns. In this way, the novel encodes sexual violence as a structural problem rather than merely a personal or individual act.

However, this preferred meaning does not automatically determine how readers will understand the novel. Following Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model, encoded meaning may be accepted, negotiated, or rejected by readers. Therefore, after identifying the preferred meaning in the encoding stage, the next section discusses how Goodreads readers decode the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*.

B. Goodreads Readers' Decoding of Sexual Violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*

After identifying the preferred meaning in the encoding stage, this section discusses how Goodreads readers decoded the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*. In the encoding section, the novel demonstrates that sexual violence is encoded as a form of domination over women's bodies, particularly through colonial and militaristic domination and patriarchal domination. However, according to Hall (1980), encoding and decoding are not always identical. Encoded meaning can establish boundaries and direction for reading, but it cannot fully guarantee how the audience will interpret the message. Therefore, readers may accept, negotiate, or reject the preferred meaning constructed by the text.

Azzahra (2025) also explains that Stuart Hall's reception theory focuses on how readers or audiences receive a message, not only on the sender of the message. Therefore, Goodreads comments in this study are used as a source of decoding data because they demonstrate how readers interpret the representation of sexual violence in the novel. Readers who view sexual violence as part of a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy can be categorized as dominant-hegemonic readers. Readers who understand the function of criticism but still question the amount, form, or manner of its representation can be categorized as negotiated readers. Meanwhile, readers who reject the novel's representation of sexual violence as exploitative or excessive can be categorized as oppositional readers.

The selected reviews show the readers occupy three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. The distribution of the decoding positions can be seen in the table below:

No	Decoding Position	Number of Reviews
1	Dominant-Hegemonic	6
2	Negotiated	4
3	Oppositional	6
Total		16

As shown in the table, Goodreads readers decode the representation of sexual violence in different ways. Dominant-hegemonic and oppositional positions appear in equal numbers, with six reviews each, while negotiated reading appears in four reviews. This distribution suggests that the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* produces diverse reader receptions. Some readers accept the novel as a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy, while others partially question or reject the representation of sexual violence in the novel.

1. Dominant-Hegemonic Reading

According to Hall (1980), a dominant-hegemonic position occurs when the audience fully and directly accepts the encoded meaning according to the preferred meaning used in the encoding process. In this position, the reader understands the text's message within a framework that aligns with the preferred meaning. This means that the reader does not reject or change the preferred meaning constructed by the text, but accepts the message as natural and understandable.

Rohmah and Kusumawati (2023) also explain that in a dominant-hegemonic position, the reader accepts the message conveyed by the text and interprets it according to the preferred meaning constructed in the text. In this study, dominant-hegemonic readers are Goodreads readers who accept the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* as part of a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy.

"We know women and children are always the biggest victims in war, and this book at least lends some warmth and a richer narrative to the stories that aren't often mentioned, those that are seen as peripheral to the war. ... reminds us of how women are used in times of war."
 — Rowena, April 1, 2016

Rowena reads *Beauty Is a Wound* as a novel that presents Indonesian history through the experiences of women. In her commentary, she discusses Dutch colonialism, the Japanese occupation, the war, and how women are often victims who are not considered central to the story. She also said that women's bodies are used in times of war. This comment indicates that Rowena understands the sexual violence in the novel as part of women's suffering in wartime situations.

Rowena occupies a dominant-hegemonic position because she accepts the preferred meaning encoded by the text. At the encoding stage, the novel shows that women's bodies are objects of power in colonial and military contexts. Rowena sees this pattern as a critique of the history of war that often ignores women's experiences. Thus, she does not reject the representation of sexual violence, but sees it as an important part of the historical narrative and women's suffering.

"While the novel contains some scenes of the grotesque and of rapes, they did not seem gratuitous or unnecessary to reflect the tragedies befallen Indonesia and its residents."
 — Perry, February 10, 2017

Perry reads the novel as a socio-political allegory of Indonesian history, starting from Dutch colonialism, Japanese occupation, political massacres, to the Suharto regime. She admits that the novel contains rape and bizarre scenes, but she does not see it as futile. According to her, these scenes are not unnecessary because they reflect the tragedies experienced by Indonesia and its people.

Perry's comment shows a reception that aligns with the novel's preferred meaning. She understands sexual violence in the novel as connected to historical tragedy and collective suffering. Therefore, Perry can be categorized as a dominant-hegemonic reader. She accepts that sexual violence in the novel functions as a representation of historical violence, not merely as the exploitation of women's bodies.

"Indonesian history is permeated with sexual violence. ... The reader is outraged, angry, and frustrated with the many rapes and how women are merely treated as sex objects. But that's what we should feel. When we are enraged by these actions, it proves that we are still human and sane. Most of these horrific crimes were never recognized and will probably go unpunished. The eerie thing is that many Indonesians stay mum about this part of history. Most people want to move on, because it's too painful to talk about the past and most victims are ashamed. I don't know what term psychologists use, but it's important to talk about this so that the oppressors won't oppress again. So, I thank Kurniawan for writing this novel."

— Missy J, April 24, 2022

Missy J explicitly connects sexual violence in the novel to Indonesian history. He mentions Dutch colonialism, comfort women during the Japanese occupation, violence in 1965, East Timor, and violence against ethnic Chinese in 1998. He also states that the reader's anger toward the repeated rapes scenes actually shows their sense of humanity.

This comment suggests a dominant-hegemonic position because Missy J accepts sexual violence as part of painful historical memory. She does not read rape in the novel as a completely vain thing, but as a way for the novel to force readers to confront a history of violence that is often silenced. This reading is in line with the preferred meaning that sexual violence in the novel represents domination over women's bodies within historical and political violence.

"There is quite a lot of violence, again an accurate reflection of life in those times in that country: rapes, massacres, murders, and beatings are described in a very matter-of-fact style."

— *Marianne, August 26, 2015*

Marianne reads the violence in the novel as a reflection of Indonesian life and history during the colonial period, the Japanese occupation, independence, and modern times. She mentions rape, massacre, murder, and beatings as part of the violence depicted in a matter-of-fact style.

Marianne's comment can be categorized as dominant-hegemonic because she accepts sexual violence as part of a brutal historical context. She does not reject the presence of rape in the novel, but understands it as part of the representation of life during the conflict. Thus, she reads sexual violence according to the preferred meaning encoded by the text.

"Perhaps the lives of the characters are themselves allegorical of the nation's history. A nation with immense beauty and youthful positivity, like the generations of beautiful women in the book, quickly marred by weak men with outsized lusts for them..."

— *Sebastian Ku, March 3, 2018*

Sebastian Ku reads the lives of the female characters as allegories of Indonesian history. He connects the women in the novel to a beautiful nation damaged by lustful

and powerful men. He also connects violence against women to Indonesia's history of being destroyed by internal and external oppressors.

Sebastian Ku's comment can be categorized as dominant-hegemonic because he accepts and reinforces the novel's representation of women as victims of domination and violence. His interpretation aligns with the preferred meaning encoded in the novel, which links violence against women to broader systems of power.

"All are infantile in different ways in their behavior and need to fight, have sex, be in charge, be the alpha male and all of them (in fact all of the male characters in this book) have conflated visions of love which they confuse with lust, obsession and enslavement. The sole purpose of a wife is to fulfill sexual lust and propagate the species."

— **Monica, June 21, 2016**

Monica reads this novel as a satire that exposes the male mindset in a patriarchal society. She states that the men in the novel confuse love with lust, obsession, and enslavement. She also describes the female characters in the novel as *"long-suffering, beautiful, objects to be possessed."* Monica's comments here are relevant to the second encoding category, namely patriarchal domination. She accepts that the novel exposes how men treat women as objects of possession. Therefore, Monica can be categorized as a dominant-hegemonic reader. She accepts the preferred meaning that the sexual violence in the novel is a critique of patriarchal domination over women's bodies.

Based on the comments of Rowena, Perry, Missy J, Marianne, Sebastian Ku, and Monica, readers in the dominant-hegemonic position accept the selected meanings encoded by the novel. They read sexual violence as part of a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy. Rowena, Perry, Missy J, Marianne, and Sebastian Ku accept sexual violence as part of the novel's representation of history, colonialism, and

militarism, while Monica strongly accepts sexual violence as a critique of patriarchal domination over women's bodies. Thus, dominant-hegemonic readers decode the representation of sexual violence according to the preferred meanings that have been encoded at the encoding stage. This is in line with Hall (1980), who explains that the dominant-hegemonic position occurs when the audience accepts the encoded meaning fully and directly within the framework of the preferred meaning.

2. Negotiated Reading

According to Hall (1980), a negotiated position occurs when the audience accepts part of the preferred meaning but still makes exceptions, adjustments, or objections based on their own experiences and judgments. In this position, readers do not completely reject the preferred meaning, but also do not accept it in its entirety. They understand the meaning encoded by the text, but still criticize certain parts of the way that meaning is represented.

Patma and Prihatin (2025) explain that in Stuart Hall's reception analysis, the decoding process is influenced by the audience's framework of knowledge, experience, and position, so that the audience can produce a reception that does not always align with the encoded meaning. In this study, negotiated readers are Goodreads readers who understand that *Beauty Is a Wound* represents sexual violence as a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy, but still question the intensity, repetition, or manner of its representation.

"There is so much rape in this book. I'm not necessarily averse to that, but I have questions about how and why sexual violence functions as both a plot point and a constantly revisited method of characterization... I did not buy the ending nor the

message the author seemed to underline as the moral heart of the story. It rang false to me, and, considering the amount of sexual violence and the emphasis on a certain type of femininity, left me somewhat disturbed."

— **Brianna, November 27, 2015**

Brianna does not completely reject the presence of sexual violence in the novel. She even states that she is not necessarily against the theme. However, she questions the function of sexual violence in the novel, particularly because it continually appears as a plot point and method of characterization. According to her, almost all of the women in the novel are defined by brutal and repeated sexual violations.

Brianna's comment demonstrates a negotiated reading because she still acknowledges the novel's literary qualities. She notes that the novel often feels beautiful and well-written. However, she remains troubled by the way sexual violence is used to shape the female characters. Thus, Brianna partially accepts that the novel addresses an important issue, but she negotiates the preferred meaning by questioning the function and repetition of representing rape.

"500 pages and a week later I feel like I have a better understanding of the history of Indonesia, the impact of colonial powers on the nation and the warring militias that came afterwards. It was a hard book to put down but that said, it was a full on read and I'm now feeling quite overwhelmed. I don't know if I would recommend it to many due to the extremely high levels of sexual violence. I wonder if it was necessary and wasn't convinced by the women=nation thing that seemed to be going on."

— **Monique, January 20, 2016**

Monique acknowledges that the novel is epic and helps her understand Indonesian history, colonialism, and military conflict. However, she feels overwhelmed by the high level of sexual violence. She also questions whether all the violence is necessary and is not entirely convinced by the idea of women as symbols of the nation.

Monique's comment can be categorized as a negotiated reading because she understands the historical function of the novel but still questions the way in which women's bodies are used as symbols of national suffering. He does not completely reject the preferred meaning, but she also does not fully accept it. Monique's position shows an ambivalence between appreciating the novel's historical context and criticizing way women are represented.

"The author is clearly saying something about the poor treatment of women in Indonesia (and presumably their abuse serves as an allegory for the abuse of Indonesia itself), but at times it all feels a bit too light-hearted and shallow."
 — **Michael Livingston, August 21, 2016**

Michael Livingston understands that the novel may be criticizing the poor treatment of women in Indonesia. He also recognizes the possibility that violence against women is being used as an allegory for the violence experienced in Indonesia. However, he feels that this representation sometimes seems too light-hearted and shallow.

This comment clearly represents a negotiated reading. Michael understands the preferred meaning encoded by the text, namely the connection between violence against women and violence against the nation. However, he cannot fully accept the success of this representation. He believes that the novel's representation of violence is sometimes not serious or profound enough. Thus, he accepts some of the preferred message but negotiates it through a critique of the form of its presentation.

"While the women were subjected to horrific violence (accurately to the periods being described), they often felt further objectified and voiceless in the narrative. We had fascinating extensive discussions... about whether this tone is an intentional decision by Kurniawan that serves to emphasize deeper points about Indonesia's history with colonization and violence."

— *Becky, July 8, 2020*

Becky understands that the violence against women in the novel may be appropriate to the historical period represented. However, she feels frustrated because the female characters often seem increasingly objectified and deprived of voice in the narrative. She also states that her discussion with other readers lead her to question whether this tone is indeed a deliberate narrative decision to emphasize colonial history and violence.

Becky's comment demonstrates a negotiated reading because she does not reject the possibility that the novel criticizes colonial history and patriarchal violence. However, she remains critical of the effect of this representation on the female characters. She accepts some of the preferred meaning, but refuses to fully accept the way the novel presents women as victims of repeated violence with insufficient voice.

Based on the comments of Brianna, Monique, Michael Livingston, and Becky, readers in the negotiated position do not completely reject the novel's preferred meaning, but they also do not fully accept it. They understand that *Beauty Is a Wound* may be criticizing history, colonialism, patriarchy, and power over women's bodies. However, they still question the way sexual violence is represented, particularly through the repetition of rape, the use of women's bodies as national allegory, and the limited voice given to female characters.

Thus, negotiated readers accept some of the preferred meaning but adjust it to their ethical and aesthetic objections to the representation of sexual violence. This is in line with Hall (1980), who explains that the negotiated position involves a mixture of

acceptance of the dominant preferred meaning and objections to certain aspects of the message.

3. Oppositional Reading

According to Hall (1980), an oppositional reading occurs when audiences understand the literal and connotative meaning of the message but reinterprets it through an alternative framework that contradicts the preferred meaning. In other words, oppositional readers are not readers who fail to understand the message of the text. Instead, they understand the possibility of the preferred meaning encoded but reject that meaning and construct a different interpretation.

Rahman (2024) also uses Hall's concept of oppositional reading to show that audiences can reject the preferred reading when they construct a meaning that differs from the main message encoded in the text. In this study, oppositional readers are Goodreads readers who understand the possibility that sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* is intended as a critique of colonialism, militarism, or patriarchy, but reject this representation as exploitative, sexist, or problematic.

"I understand that colonization—the occupation and forcible exploitation of a region by a foreign power—is a kind of rape, although I take issue with the old-hat analogy of colonial occupation to the actual rape of the female body."
— Karen, March 5, 2016

Karen understands that the novel may use rape as an allegory of colonialism. She also acknowledges that the section about women forced to become comfort women by Japanese soldiers can be understood as a war crime. However, she rejects the novel's

use of the women's bodies as an analogy for colonialism. For her, the analogy between colonialism and the rape of the women's bodies is problematic.

Karen's comment exemplifies an oppositional reading because she doesn't fail to understand the preferred meaning. Instead, she understands that the novel may intend to link colonialism to sexual violence. However, she rejects this framework and reads the representation as ethically problematic. Thus, Karen rejects the preferred meaning and replaces it with an alternative reading: rape in the novel does not succeed as historical criticism, but instead becomes an exploitative representation.

*"I appreciate that Kurniawan wrote about the effects of Dutch colonization and of Japanese occupation during WWII...
I don't think Kurniawan is capable of writing women without his misogynistic baggage coloring the narrative. And that's why I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone.
This was my first venture into Indonesian literature, and it pains me that it wasn't a successful undertaking.
It's not that I think rape shouldn't be portrayed, but how it's portrayed is crucial, especially when the writer is a man writing about women."
— Meg, December 30, 2018*

Meg does not deny that rape can be represented in literature. What she questions is the way it is portrayed. She criticizes the position of male authors writing about women's experiences and states that Kurniawan is unable to write about women without "*misogynistic baggage*." She also questions whether certain scenes are truly satire or simply a form of misogyny.

Meg's comment exemplifies an oppositional reading because she rejects the preferred meaning that sexual violence in the novel functions as a critique of patriarchy. Instead, she reads the representation as evidence of the male gaze and the failure of a male author to represent women's experiences critically. Within Hall's framework,

Meg understands the possible intended message of the text, but reinterprets it in the opposing way.

*“One can read it as actual magic or an epic metaphor for the trauma of colonialism. But what sinks the novel for me is the joy in which it dives into sexual violence. Yes, these tales are always abundant with passion and sex, and rarely does a story of war go without depictions of rape, but *Beauty Is a Wound* places its female characters as sets of breasts and vaginas, always devastatingly, shockingly beautiful, delightfully swaying and alluring (some as young as 8 years old! yay) and the novel’s men do unspeakable things to obtain these breasts and vaginas -- all of which are depicted in excruciating, numerous accounts.”*
— **Paulina, August 9, 2020**

Paulina rejects the novel’s representation of women. She believes that female characters are reduced to sexual bodies, especially “*breasts and vaginas*,” while the men in the novel commit violence to obtain these bodies. She also describes the representation of sexual violence in the novel obscene, exploitative, and abundant.

Paulina’s comment represents an oppositional reading because she does not accept rape as an allegory or a successful social critique. Instead, she reads the representation as a form of exploitation of women’s bodies. In her reading, sexual violence does not strengthen the narrative, but undermines the complexity that the novel seeks to convey.

“That is the tale of a woman who was raped and a girl who was married off to an adult man when she was a child. It’s not a tale about loving fathers. There is so much rape, and for some reason we’re supposed to move past the brutality (as all the characters find it so easy to do) and continue to follow the male characters with empathy.”
— **Jules, September 4, 2023**

Jules specifically objects to the way the novel frames sexual violence within domestic and marital relationships. She discusses the repeated rape of one of the female characters by her husband and the relationship between adult men and child brides.

Jules rejects a narrative that seems to shift the focus from female victims to a story about men or fathers.

Jules' comment represents an oppositional reading because she rejects the way the novel asks readers to move past violence against women and remain within the male perspective. In her reading, marital rape and child marriage should not be framed as part of a story about family or love, but rather should be seen as forms of violence. Therefore, she rejects the preferred meaning and reads the novel as a text that does not treat sexual violence critically enough.

"However, over the course of the novel, the endless parade of rapes and violence grows wearying and the narrative ultimately fractures into a series of confused and scattershot vignettes of ever-increasing repetition and dullness. The symbolism is meaningless if the symbols that carry it are so insufferable, misogynistic, and clumsy that the text drowns out the subtext."
 — **B Rule, February 6, 2016**

B Rule understands that the novel attempts to use symbolism to tell the story of Indonesia through a supernatural curse and the history of one family. However, he rejects the success of this symbolism because, in his opinion, the symbols used are too misogynistic and careless. He feels that the repeated violence and rape drown out the novel's subtext.

B Rule's comment constitutes an oppositional reading because he not only rejects the amount of sexual violence but also rejects the success of the novel's symbolic structure. For him, sexual violence fails to serve as a tool of critique or allegory, but instead destroys the meaning the text seeks to construct.

"In parts, the book seemed to me to be overwhelmingly sexist and disturbingly peppered with male sexual fantasies."
 — **Azita Rassi, February 22, 2018**

Azita Rassi acknowledges the novel's historical and allegorical elements. However, she argues that the novel becomes overly sexist and filled with male sexual fantasies. She also states that the repeated representations of sex and violence eventually become monotonous and exhausting.

Azita's comments fall under oppositional reading because she rejects the novel's representation of women and sexuality. Rather than interpreting these representations as a critique of patriarchal oppression, she views them as expressions of sexism and male sexual fantasies. Therefore, she opposes the preferred meaning encoded in the text and constructs an alternative interpretation of the novel.

Based on the comments of Karen, Meg, Paulina, Jules, B Rule, and Azita Rassi, readers in the oppositional position understand the possibility of the preferred meaning constructed by the novel, but they reject the way it is represented. They are not only disturbed by sexual violence, but also read the representation as a form of exploitation of the women's body, misogyny, sexism, the male gaze, or a failure of symbolism. Karen rejects the use of the women's body as an analogy for colonialism, Meg rejects the way rape is written by male authors, Paulina considers women reduced to sexual bodies, Jules rejects the framing of marital rape, B Rule rejects the symbolism considered misogynistic, and Azita Rassi reads the novel as a text filled with male sexual fantasies.

Thus, oppositional readers do not decode sexual violence as a successful critique, but rather as a problematic representation. This is in accordance with Hall

(1980), who explains that the oppositional position occurs when the audience understands the literal and preferred meaning of the message, but reinterprets it through an alternative framework that contradicts the preferred meaning.

Following the above discussion, the classification of Goodreads readers can be summarized as follows. The table shows each readers' position based on how they decode the novel's encoded representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound*.

No	Reader	Position
1	Rowena	Dominant-Hegemonic
2	Perry	Dominant-Hegemonic
3	Missy J	Dominant-Hegemonic
4	Marianne	Dominant-Hegemonic
5	Sebastian Ku	Dominant-Hegemonic
6	Monica	Dominant-Hegemonic
7	Brianna	Negotiated
8	Monique	Negotiated
9	Michael Livingston	Negotiated
10	Becky	Negotiated
11	Karen	Oppositional
12	Meg	Oppositional
13	Paulina	Oppositional
14	Jules	Oppositional
15	B Rule	Oppositional
16	Azita Rassi	Oppositional

The table shows that Goodreads readers' reception indicates that the preferred meaning encoded in the novel was not uniformly decoded. Six readers occupy a dominant-hegemonic position, accepting the sexual violence in the novel as part of a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy. Four readers occupy a negotiated position, understanding the potential critical function of the sexual violence but

questioning its intensity, repetition, or narrative function. Meanwhile, six readers take an oppositional position, rejecting the novel's representation of sexual violence and reading it as exploitative, misogynistic, sexist, or influenced by the male gaze.

The results of the decoding analysis show a clear relationship between the meaning encoded in the novel and the readers' reception on Goodreads. In the encoding stage, *Beauty Is a Wound* constructs sexual violence as a form of repeated domination over women's bodies. This preferred meaning emerged through two main patterns: colonial and militaristic domination and patriarchal domination. Through these two patterns, this novel encodes sexual violence as control over women's bodies.

However, the decoding stage shows that the preferred meaning is not accepted in one way. The dominant-hegemonic readers accept the encoded meaning by reading sexual violence as a critique of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy. The negotiated readers accept part of the meaning but question the excessive use of rape as a narrative device in the novel. Meanwhile, oppositional readers reject the preferred meaning because they see the representation of sexual violence not as a successful critique, but as a problematic, exploitative, or misogynistic representation of women's bodies.

To sum up, the relationship between encoding and decoding in this study shows that the meaning is not fixed. The novel may encode sexual violence as a critique of the domination of women's bodies, but Goodreads readers decode this meaning through a different interpretive position. These findings support Hall's idea that encoded meanings do not guarantee uniform decoding. Readers are active subjects who can accept, negotiate, or reject the preferred meaning constructed by the text.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations based on the analysis discussed in the previous chapter. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the study according to the two research problems: how sexual violence is encoded in *Beauty Is a Wound* and how Goodreads readers decode these representations. The suggestion section provides recommendations for further research that may expand the study of *Beauty Is a Wound*, the representation of sexual violence, and readers' reception on digital platforms.

A. Conclusion

This study examines the representation of sexual violence in Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound* and Goodreads readers' reception of this representation by using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model. Based on the two research questions, this study focuses on how sexual violence is encoded in the novel and how Goodreads readers decode the meaning constructed in the text. The analysis shows that sexual violence in the novel is not presented as random or isolated incidents, but as a recurring representation that is connected to women's bodies, power relations, historical violence, and patriarchal domination.

The first finding shows that sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* is encoded through repeated narrative codes such as coercion, bodily control, violation of consent,

unequal power relations, spatial context, historical context, and repetition. Through these codes, the novel constructs sexual violence as a form of domination over women's bodies. The encoding analysis shows two main patterns. The first pattern is sexual violence as colonial and militaristic domination. This pattern appears in public and historical spaces, especially in the context of colonialism, war, military occupation, imprisonment, guerrilla violence, and forced prostitution. In this pattern, women's bodies are represented as objects of conquest, exchange, and exploitation by men who hold colonial, military, or armed power.

The second pattern is sexual violence as patriarchal domination. This pattern appears in private and relational spaces, especially through the relationship between Alamanda and Shodancho. In this pattern, sexual violence is constructed through male desire, marital power, coercion, violation of consent, and repeated control over women's bodies. The analysis shows that private space, including marriage, is not always represented as a safe space for women. Instead, the novel shows that patriarchal relations can make women's bodies vulnerable to control, possession, and sexual violence. Therefore, the preferred meaning encoded in the novel is that sexual violence is a structural problem that operates through both historical domination and patriarchal relations.

The second finding shows that Goodreads readers do not decode the representation of sexual violence in *Beauty Is a Wound* in the same way. Based on Stuart Hall's decoding positions, the sixteen selected Goodreads reviews are divided into three positions: six dominant-hegemonic readings, four negotiated readings, and

six oppositional readings. Dominant-hegemonic readers accept the preferred meaning by understanding sexual violence as part of the novel's critique of colonial-militaristic and patriarchal domination. Negotiated readers partly accept this meaning but still question the repetition, intensity, explicitness, or narrative function of sexual violence in the novel. Meanwhile, oppositional readers reject the preferred meaning and interpret the representation as excessive, disturbing, problematic, misogynistic, or influenced by the male gaze.

This finding shows that the meaning encoded in the novel is not decoded uniformly by readers. Although the novel constructs sexual violence as a critique of domination over women's bodies, Goodreads readers' reception to this representation varies through different interpretive positions. Therefore, the decoding analysis confirms Hall's idea that readers may accept, negotiate, or reject the preferred meaning based on their values, reading experiences, and interpretive positions.

B. Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, future researchers can examine other aspects of *Beauty Is a Wound*, such as magical realism, historical trauma, motherhood, beauty standards, or female resistance. These topics can broaden the understanding of how the novel represents Indonesian history, gender, and power relations.

Further research can also expand reader reception studies by using more Goodreads reviews or comparing them with reader reception from other digital platforms, such as blogs, Threads, or online literary forums. These comparisons may

reveal how different reader communities interpret literary works and issues of sexual violence in different ways.

In addition, future research may use other theories, such as feminist literary criticism, trauma theory, postcolonial theory, or affect theory, to analyze the representation and reception of sexual violence in literature. These approaches may provide different perspectives on how sexual violence is represented, understood, and debated by readers.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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