

DARK TRIAD PERSONALITY IN EKA KURNIAWAN'S NOVEL *LELAKI HARIMAU*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the Dark Triad personality in Margio's character in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Lelaki Harimau*. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology with document analysis, this research systematically examines the intricate manifestations of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy within the protagonist's psychological profile and investigates how this specific personality configuration fundamentally drives the narrative trajectory. The findings demonstrate that Margio exhibits a pronounced and comprehensive constellation of all three dark personality traits: strategic manipulation and social duplicity characteristic of Machiavellianism, grandiose self-concept and supernatural tiger spirit belief reflective of Narcissism, and impulsive aggression coupled with complete absence of remorse indicative of Psychopathy. These traits operate synergistically rather than in isolation - his Machiavellian cunning enables the violence, his Psychopathic affect permits its execution without emotional consequence, and his Narcissistic grandiosity provides psychological justification for his actions. The study concludes that Margio represents a compelling literary representation of the Dark Triad personality, developed through traumatic environmental circumstances and childhood adversity. This research contributes significantly to psychological literary criticism within Indonesian fiction by providing a nuanced framework for understanding complex character motivations and the psychological underpinnings of literary violence.

Keywords: *Dark Triad; Eka Kurniawan; Lelaki Harimau; psychological criticism; character analysis*

1. Introduction

Literature serves as a profound medium for human expression, transcending mere written text to reflect societal realities and critique life's complexities. As a creative art form, it uses language to portray human experiences and feelings (Lianawati, 2019), often functioning as a "portrait" of life that encapsulates significant social values and invites discourse on human conditions (Sitorus, 2021; Wicaksono, 2017). The novel, as a primary object of literary study, provides fertile ground for such

exploration by depicting complex human interactions within specific social environments (Hidayat, 2021).

Eka Kurniawan's acclaimed novel *Lelaki Harimau* centers on Margio, a young man from a dysfunctional family who perpetrates a brutal murder. The narrative unravels the psychological complexities behind his actions, tracing them to a childhood marred by paternal abuse and neglect. This toxic environment fosters a fractured personality in Margio, who believes a supernatural tiger spirit inhabits him, ultimately driving him to violence. As Wahyuningsih, Manugeren, & Pardi (2024) note in their analysis of literary characters, "social rejection often triggers psychological deterioration", a phenomenon clearly manifested in Margio's character development.

This study examines Margio through the lens of the Dark Triad personality, a psychological framework comprising Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits characterize individuals with self-centeredness, emotional coldness, and duplicity. Machiavellianism involves strategic manipulation and deception (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), Narcissism entails grandiosity and lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), while Psychopathy features disinhibition and antisocial behavior (Hare, 1999).

Recent research confirms that individuals high on the Dark Triad are prone to aggressive and exploitative behaviors (Furnham et al., 2013). Analyzing Margio through this framework allows for a nuanced deconstruction of his malevolence beyond simplistic labels. His calculated actions, lack of remorse, and grandiose self-perception as a tiger vessel manifest these dark traits.

Therefore, this research aims to conduct a psychological analysis of Margio's character, with objectives to identify manifestations of Dark Triad traits and analyze how this personality configuration drives the narrative. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into literary characters' psychological dimensions while fostering societal awareness of such harmful personality structures in real-life interactions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychology of Literature

The disciplines of literature and psychology share a profound and symbiotic relationship, as both are fundamentally concerned with the human condition—exploring motivations, emotions, conflicts, and the intricacies of existence (Kern, 2020). This intersection has given rise to the field of psychological criticism, which utilizes psychological theories to understand the creation, content, and reception of literary works. While early approaches, notably Freudian psychoanalysis, focused heavily on the author's psyche, contemporary criticism often centers on the textual world and the reader's response (Bernaerts et al., 2014).

A primary focus within this domain is character analysis. Fictional characters function as symbolic representations of human archetypes and psychological realities, allowing readers to identify, empathize, or recoil, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of human nature (Hogan, 2013). As Jajja (2021) notes, the analysis of literary characters can be seen as a form of psychological case study, where unique personalities and individual differences are brought to the fore. The creation of "psychologically true" characters remains a hallmark of impactful literature, as these figures model complex human behaviors and internal states that resonate with readers' own experiences (Klarer, 2017).

2.2 Dark Triad Personality

Personality psychology seeks to identify and understand the relatively enduring patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that differentiate individuals. Within this field, the Dark Triad has emerged as a significant construct describing a constellation of three socially aversive, yet subclinical, personality traits: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy (Furnham et al., 2013). The term “subclinical” indicates that these traits exist on a spectrum and do not necessarily constitute a formal personality disorder, but they nonetheless predispose individuals to interpersonally toxic and exploitative behaviors (Muris et al., 2017). This aligns with findings in literary studies, where researchers similarly analyze “behavioral patterns that lead to interpersonal conflicts” (Pardi et al., 2024) in character analysis.

Collectively, these traits represent a disposition toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggression, enabling individuals to pursue their goals with little regard for the well-being of others (Jonason & Webster, 2010). As Kajonius et al. (2021) summarize, the Dark Triad encapsulates a “darker side” of human personality characterized by a callous-manipulative interpersonal style.

2.3 The Constructs of the Dark Triad

Machiavellianism is characterized by a cynical worldview, strategic manipulation, and a pragmatic, amoral approach to social interactions (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Individuals high in Machiavellianism (often termed “High Machs”) are masterful tacticians of interpersonal influence; they are adept at deception, flattery, and exploiting others for personal gain. They exhibit a cold and calculating demeanor, lacking genuine empathy and viewing social conventions and morality as obstacles to be circumvented rather than rules to be followed (Kaufman et al., 2019). Their core motivation is the attainment of power and control, justifying any means necessary to achieve their ends.

Narcissism, in the context of the Dark Triad, refers to a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, a pervasive need for admiration, and a pronounced lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is a pathological form of self-love where the individual possesses an inflated sense of self-importance and entitlement (Vrabel et al., 2018). Narcissists are often preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, and brilliance, and they believe they are “special” and can only be understood by other high-status people. They require excessive admiration, exploit relationships, and often display arrogant behaviors or attitudes (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2020). When their ego is threatened, they can react with rage or contempt.

Psychopathy is the most malevolent of the triad traits and is defined by a constellation of affective, interpersonal, and lifestyle deficits (LeBreton et al., 2018). The core features include a profound lack of empathy, guilt, or remorse, coupled with shallow emotions, impulsivity, and a tendency toward sensation-seeking (Hare, 1999). Unlike Machiavellianism, which is strategic, psychopathy is often associated with reckless and impulsive behavior. Individuals with high levels of this trait are prone to antisocial behavior, are emotionally callous, and fail to form genuine emotional attachments with others (O’Boyle et al., 2015). They are characterized by high disinhibition and boldness, which can manifest as a fearless dominance in social situations but also a propensity for cruelty and aggression.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to analyze the Dark Triad personality in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Lelaki Harimau*. The qualitative approach was selected for its strength in examining phenomena within their natural context and interpreting meanings in textual data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), allowing for deep exploration of psychological characteristics in literary works. The research utilized document analysis as the primary data collection method. This involved meticulous close reading of the novel to identify manifestations of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy in the main character Margio. The process followed established literary analysis methods, similar to Pohan & Pardi's (2022, p.56) approach in their study of *Purple Hearts*, where they "collected data by reading the novel thoroughly and identifying relevant data". Secondary sources including psychological theories and literary criticism provided the theoretical framework for analysis.

Data analysis followed an interactive model comprising data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. After compiling relevant textual evidence, the researcher reduced and categorized data into the three Dark Triad themes. This systematic categorization aligns with established qualitative methods that "classify data based on research questions" (Pohan & Pardi, 2022, p.57). The final stage involved interpreting the categorized data against theoretical frameworks and verifying conclusions through continuous reference to textual evidence, ensuring analytical validity and providing comprehensive understanding of dark personality dimensions in the literary character.

4. Discussion

This part presents the analysis and discussion of the findings derived from the data collected in response to the research objectives. The primary objective is to describe the manifestations of the Dark Triad personality - Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy - in the main character, Margio, from Eka Kurniawan's novel *Lelaki Harimau*. The analysis is structured around the key traits of the Dark Triad, with supporting excerpts from the novel and interpretation through the lens of contemporary psychological theory. The findings are systematically presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these malevolent personality dimensions are portrayed and interrelate within the character.

4.1 Machiavellianism

Margio demonstrates sophisticated Machiavellian traits through strategic manipulation of social perceptions. His ability to maintain a benevolent persona while harboring violent intentions reveals profound social deception.

"But of course nobody who hadn't been there would believe these words came from Margio. He was the sweetest and the most polite of his peers (Kurniawan, 2015, p.25)."

This calculated self-presentation exemplifies what Jones and Paulhus (2014) identify as strategic social charm - Margio cultivates his "sweetest and most polite" image precisely to create a shield that makes his violent capabilities inconceivable to others. The community's blind trust in this facade enables his predatory plans to proceed undetected. His manipulative prowess extends to active surveillance:

“The people at the soccer field saw him for sure, but they knew Margio too well to be suspicious (Kurniawan, 2015, p.30).”

This demonstrates the success of his long-term social engineering. As Kaufman et al. (2019) note, high-Mach individuals become “social chameleons” who exploit earned trust. Margio’s ability to stalk his prey openly, protected by his manufactured reputation, shows mastery of Machiavellian manipulation.

4.2 Psychopathy

Margio’s psychopathic traits manifest through emotional detachment and brutal violence.

“Margio’s teeth sank into his neck, tearing through flesh and sinew with animalistic fury (Kurniawan, 2015, p.35).”

The graphic violence demonstrates core psychopathic features of callousness and predatory aggression (Hare, 1999). The “animalistic fury” highlights complete emotional disengagement from killing, while the method suggests sensation-seeking behavior characteristic of psychopathy (O’Boyle et al., 2015). His emotional poverty extends to familial relationships:

“Agung Yuda was one of those who witnessed how exceedingly happy the young man was when he came home to find his father dead (Kurniawan, 2015, p.28).”

This inappropriate effect demonstrates what LeBreton et al. (2018) term affective deficit - the absence of normal emotional responses to significant events. Margio’s happiness at his father’s death reveals profound disturbance in emotional bonding capacity.

4.3 Narcissism

Margio’s narcissism centers on grandiose self-concept as a supernatural vessel.

“He felt that the tiger that used to belong to his grandfather had moved to him. It wasn’t just an inheritance; it was a transformation (Kurniawan, 2015, p.47).”

This belief in special transformation reflects narcissistic grandiosity and uniqueness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Margio’s perception of himself as a chosen vessel represents what Vrabel et al. (2018) identify as foundational narcissistic myths that support elevated self-worth. His relational dynamics further reveal narcissistic traits:

“He had lied about his nerves. The problem had a different complexion (Kurniawan, 2015, p.162).”

This deception stems from what Kernberg (2020) describes as the narcissistic paradox - the coexistence of inflated self-concept with profound insecurity. Rather than confess his true shame, Margio constructs fictions that preserve his specialness while avoiding vulnerability.

The interaction of these three traits creates Margio as what Paulhus and Williams (2002) term the “subclinical predator.” His Machiavellian manipulation

enables his violence, his psychopathy makes it possible, and his narcissism justifies it. The tiger metaphor powerfully represents this Dark Triad constellation - a savage potential awakened by traumatic circumstances.

Through Margio, Kurniawan explores what Muris et al. (2017) identify as the “adaptive maladaptation” of dark traits - psychological defenses that ensure survival at the cost of humanity. The novel presents a disturbing portrait of how monstrous environments can breed monstrous personalities. Regarding the types of Dark Triad personality present, the analysis confirms that Margio embodies all three components. His Machiavellianism is evidenced through strategic deception and manipulation, particularly through his maintenance of a “sweet and polite” public persona that effectively conceals his predatory intentions. His Psychopathy is manifested in the callous, impulsive, and remorseless nature of his violence, most starkly illustrated by the brutal killing of Anwar Sadat. Finally, his Narcissism is displayed through a grandiose self-concept, most notably his belief in being a vessel for a supernatural tiger spirit, which grants him a sense of unique entitlement and superiority. The analysis of these traits reveals that they do not operate in isolation but interact synergistically to form a coherent, albeit destructive, psychological profile. Margio's Machiavellian cunning enables his violence, his psychopathic affect allows him to execute it without remorse, and his narcissistic grandiosity provides a justifying narrative for his actions. The central metaphor of the internal “tiger” serves as a powerful literary representation of this fused Dark Triad personality—a latent, savage potential that is awakened and shaped by the trauma of his abusive upbringing.

5. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the manifestation of Dark Triad personality traits in Margio, the main character of Eka Kurniawan's *Lelaki Harimau*. Through a qualitative descriptive analysis, it can be concluded that Margio exhibits a pronounced constellation of these socially malevolent traits, which collectively drive the novel's central narrative of violence and psychological disintegration.

In conclusion, Eka Kurniawan's *Lelaki Harimau* offers a profound literary case study of the Dark Triad. The character of Margio demonstrates how these subclinical malevolent traits can be forged in a crucible of domestic trauma, leading to catastrophic outcomes. This analysis not only provides a deeper understanding of the novel's protagonist but also underscores the value of psychological frameworks in illuminating the complex motivations of literary characters. For society, it serves as a stark reminder of the potential consequences of untreated childhood trauma and the disturbing reality of dark personality traits that can lurk beneath a conventional exterior. Future research could fruitfully explore the Dark Triad in other characters within the Indonesian literary canon or investigate the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the development of such personalities.

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