

**THE DISORIENTATION OF THE SUBJECT'S NARRATIVE MEMORY AS A  
CONSEQUENCE OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION DEAR SCARLET: MY  
STORY TO POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION**

**A THESIS**



**Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah**

**21/490534/PSA/20068**

**FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES**

**UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA**

**YOGYAKARTA**

**2025**

**APPROVAL OF THE ADVISOR TEAM**

**THE DISORIENTATION OF THE SUBJECT'S NARRATIVE MEMORY AS THE  
EFFECT OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION IN DEAR SCARLET: MY STORY TO  
POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION**

Thesis Summary

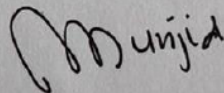
By:

**Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah**

**21/490534/PSA/20068**

Has been approved by the principal supervisor on July 24, 2025

Approved by  
Supervisor



Achmad Munjid, M.A., Ph.D.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Childbirth is a transformative journey marked by physical, hormonal, and psychological changes. As women embrace their new role as mothers, many of them experience postpartum depression (PPD). According to Cheryl Tatano Beck (1993), PPD is a mental health disorder caused by biological, psychological, and social factors, such as depression, traumatic childbirth experiences, or lack of support from people around. The symptoms of PPD include prolonged sadness, loss of self-identity, feelings of isolation, and suicidal thoughts.

The issue of PPD is clearly depicted in Teresa Wong's graphic memoir, *Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression* (2019), which recounts Wong's life story as she experiences severe bleeding, leading to trauma and triggering postpartum depression which manifests in anxiety, isolation, and suicidal thoughts. Thus, this research focuses on how postpartum depression, subject's narrative memory disorientation & social relation are caused by traumatized brain and also the effort of the subject to reconcile her postpartum depression.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is to construct a theoretical framework and identify the novelty of previous research.

First, the study by Dorothee Marx (2022), entitled “Don’t Worry. It’s Just the Baby Blues: Representation of New Motherhood in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs,” examines how the body is governed by principles of temporality, yet in relation to their role as (expectant) mothers, women’s bodies are tightly regulated. Marx explores how the graphic narratives of Lucy Knisley’s *Kid Gloves* (2019) and Teresa Wong’s *Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression* create alternative representations of bodily experiences in the postpartum period, offering social commentary on the discursive constraints of motherhood and the underrepresentation of women’s lived time. Marx argues that the power of graphics can serve as a strategy to uncover the implicit impact of temporal regimes governing pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period on mothers. According to Marx, Knisley and Wong employ different aesthetic means to depict experiences that deviate from the positive portrayals of easy childbirth, quick recovery, and blissful postpartum life perpetuated in contemporary discourse. Marx contends that graphic media are particularly well-suited for illustrating the shifts in the subjective experiences of these two authors.

Second, Petr Vinklárek’s 2012 analyzes Will Eisner’s graphic novel *A Contract with God* (1978), focuses on the interaction between text and images in comics, demonstrating that intertextuality helps unravel meaning derived from both text and visuals. The analysis proves that the interplay of text and images plays a crucial role in the reading and interpretation of a graphic novel. In graphic novels, elements are often presented independently—such as a panel displaying only a symbol without accompanying text or text without accompanying illustrations. While this is a common practice among

illustrators, the researcher (who also acts as a literary reader) attempts to view these independent elements as a unified whole to create a more informative interpretation.

Third, Katie Dunlop's 2017 dissertation, "Shaping the Way You Think: How Panel Shapes in Graphic Novels Manipulate and Engage the Reader," explores reader engagement, encouraging readers to experience something beyond merely absorbing the information or story conveyed by the illustrator—whether through emotional, sensory, or intuitive responses. One way readers can better understand the story or information is through the manipulation of panel shapes. Although panels are often underestimated, they play a significant role in helping readers interpret graphic novels in line with the illustrator's intent. In this study, Dunlop seeks to refine readers' understanding and interpretation of graphic novels by applying theories from McCloud, Eisner, Abel, and Madden.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### **Research Type**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, as the data collected consists of phrases or sentences and does not require numerical or statistical data. Creswell (1994) states that qualitative research is an evolving model that takes place in a natural setting, allowing researchers to develop a high level of detailed engagement with actual experiences. The qualitative descriptive method prioritizes the depiction of data through words to understand phenomena within the formal object of research (Sukmadinata, 2006).

##### **Data Sources**

The primary data source for this research is the graphic novel *Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression*, which includes phrases, words, sentences, and images or illustrations. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from other sources related to the study, such as articles, journals, websites, and supporting books.

## **Research Object**

This study uses the graphic novel *Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression* (2019) as its material object. The formal object of this research consists of writings published in journals and books discussing postpartum depression trauma, narrative memory, and reconciliation from the perspective of Bessel van der Kolk, as well as Will Eisner's visual narrative theory.

## **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection techniques are a set of methods for gathering empirical facts related to the research problem (Faruk, 2017). The steps taken by the researcher in the data collection process are as follows:

1. The researcher reads the graphic novel *Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression*, then examines the selection of phrases, words, sentences, or images related to the research focus.
2. The researcher reviews by highlighting phrases, words, sentences, dialogues, or images.
3. The researcher categorizes the collected data—phrases, words, sentences, or images—based on the research focus.

## **Data Analysis Techniques**

In this study, the author tries to identify causal relationships—specifically how postpartum depression affects the subject's narrative memory disorientation, subsequently affecting her personal and social life, thus to establish the connections between data, the following steps are taken:

1. The author interprets and analyzes the graphic novel by examining each element, including panel size, symbols or icons used, font choice, character expressions and gestures, etc.
2. Data analysis employs Cheryl Tatano Beck's postpartum depression theory to identify symptoms or sensations experienced by Wong, while Bessel van der Kolk's trauma and narrative memory theory is used to explore the consequences of PPD on the subject's life.

- The author analyzes the subject's efforts to reconcile with her PPD using Bessel van der Kolk's theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

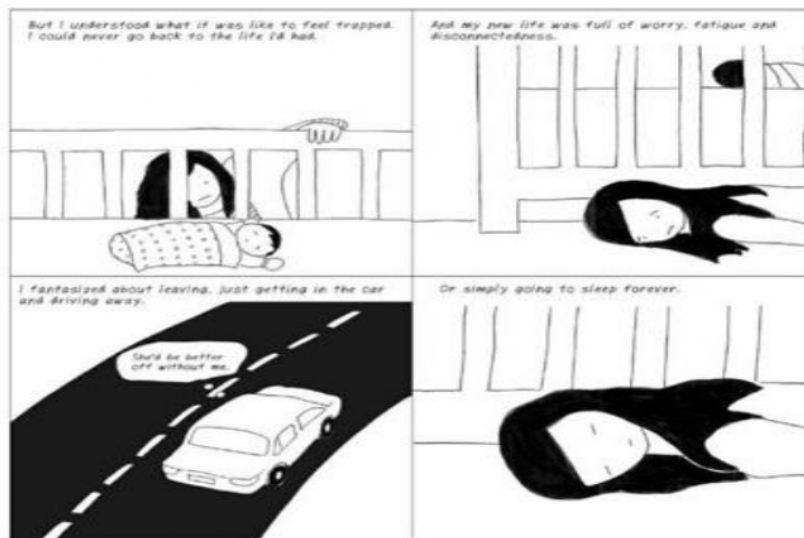
### The Symptoms of Postpartum Depression and How It Impacts on Wong's Life

Women who are suffering from postpartum depression (PPD) often experience characteristic symptoms that gradually disrupt their daily lives. The symptoms Wong experienced will be examined in detail in this chapter.

#### Persistent Fatigue

On page 55, Wong illustrates her novel across four panels with minimal written narration.

The page captures her emotional state after becoming a mother.



*Image 3. Wong's Condition and Her Emotional State. Taken from Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression (p. 55), by Wong, T. 2019. Copyright 2019 by Arsenal Pulp Press.*

Overall, in these four panels, Wong intends to express how drastically her life changed after becoming a mother. Feelings of fear, constant exhaustion, and isolation often surrounded her. She felt trapped, having to take care of her baby 24/7. This understandably led her to feel worn out, even to the point where she

thought about “disappearing” for a while, believing her child might be better off without her. At the extreme, she even briefly considered leaving her child forever.

According to Will Eisner’s theory on graphic novels, visuals play a crucial role in narrating objects or experiences. The lack of written narration also actively involves the reader in interpreting the sequence of images presented. In the illustration above, Wong’s lowered eyebrows and flat mouth line more effectively convey her sense of exhaustion to the reader. Through this graphic novel, we can see that Wong experiences ongoing fatigue after stepping into her new role as a mother. In her study, Beck (1996) defines persistent fatigue not just as ordinary tiredness but as extreme exhaustion that makes even simple tasks feel impossible to accomplish. From the perspective of van der Kolk’s narrative memory theory, even though subjects physically and mentally experience exhaustion, they lose the ability to express what they are feeling—this is a consequence or effect of PPD.

### **Alienation from the Society**

The subject’s alienation starts from a feeling of isolation from herself, which then transforms into alienation from those closest to her and eventually the world around her. This alienation begins within Wong’s immediate environment—specifically her husband. On page 104, she illustrates a moment where she and her husband are talking in bed.



*Image 9. Alienation from Husband. Taken from Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression (p. 104), by Wong, T. 2019. Copyright 2019 by Arsenal Pulp Press.*

In the illustration above, Wong includes a time indicator in the top left corner—“Later on that night”—along with a black background to show that she and her husband are talking in bed with the lights off. Wong initiates the conversation with a worried and confused expression, indicated by her lowered eyebrows and an

“O”-shaped mouth. She tries to share her anxiety about becoming a mother: “I’m so stupid. I don’t know what happened. I’m really, really sorry.” Wong apologizes to her husband for forgetting that she only opened the garage door halfway, which caused the back of the car to crash into it.

This alienation caused by PPD naturally affects the subject’s social life, since from the beginning Wong already felt alienated from herself, which in turn affects how she interacts with others. Van der Kolk (2014), in his book on narrative memory, describes it as a fundamental element of social behavior that allows an individual to understand themselves in relation to their environment. So, if a person’s narrative memory is disrupted, they will fail to connect and process memories using linguistic tools, significantly impacting their thoughts and behaviors—especially in how they view and interact with the world around them.

### **Consulting to a Psychologist and Hiring a Doula as Initial Steps to Overcome Postpartum Depression**

The first step Wong took to deal with her PPD was seeing a psychologist. As seen on page 79 below, Wong presents a diagnosis from the psychologist that lists several common symptoms she experienced during her PPD.



*Image 11. Symptoms of Postpartum Depression. Taken from Dear Scarlet: The Story of My Postpartum Depression (p. 79), by Wong, T. 2019. Copyright 2019 by Arsenal Pulp Press.*

These symptoms are listed in sequence, and Wong experienced seven symptoms indicating she had PPD. These symptoms include: frequent crying for no clear reason, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, recurring thoughts of suicide, loss

of appetite, disrupted sleep patterns, persistent fatigue, and fear of not being a good enough mother. Based on this data, it is clear that during her psychological consultation, Wong went through a narrative process that required her to integrate memories. Even though the previous chapter discussed Wong's disorientation regarding her narrative memory, visiting a psychologist was a good first step. During the sessions, Wong was asked to recount events that had overwhelmed her, made her feel guilty, and even suicidal. This process required retelling, which helped Wong begin to open up and tell her story, despite having to recall painful and traumatic experiences. Although the graphic novel does not explicitly show the consultation sessions, this act of storytelling is itself a form of therapy—an acceptance of past events beyond her control.

## **CHAPTER V CONCLUSION**

The results of the research show that Wong found herself feeling isolated, exhausted, struggling to sleep, losing her appetite, experiencing fear, feeling inadequate as a mother, and having suicidal thoughts while going through postpartum depression (PPD). These symptoms were validated by a psychologist, which then paved the way for Wong to begin reconciling with her PPD. This process started with consulting a psychologist, hiring a doula, and even joining a "Mom and Baby Strollercize" program. However, these efforts did not yield significant results. Wong then resolved to illustrate all the distress and sensations she experienced during her PPD. She began illustrating every fragment of memory that suddenly emerged without any clear trigger. Some of these memory fragments that she illustrated were later arranged into a coherent narrative—she organized them according to the timeline of events and further developed and clarified them with additional written narration to make it easier for readers to understand.

**DISORIENTASI MEMORI NARATIF SUBJEK SEBAGAI AKIBAT DARI**

***POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION DALAM DEAR SCARLET: THE STORY OF  
MY POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION***

**TESIS**



**Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah**

**21/490534/PSA/20068**

**FAKULTAS ILMU BUDAYA  
UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA  
YOGYAKARTA**

**2025**



**Disorientasi Memori Naratif Subjek Sebagai Akibat Dari Postpartum Depression Dalam Dear Scarlet:  
The  
Story Of My Postpartum Depression**  
Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah, Achmad Munjid, M.A., Ph.D.  
Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2025 | Diunduh dari <http://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/>

**THE DISORIENTATION OF THE SUBJECT'S NARRATIVE MEMORY AS A  
CONSEQUENCE OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION DEAR SCARLET: THE STORY OF  
MY POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION**

**A THESIS**



**Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah**  
**21/490534/PSA/20068**

**FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA  
YOGYAKARTA  
2025**

HALAMAN PENGESAHAN

DISORIENTASI MEMORI NARATIF SUBJEK SEBAGAI AKIBAT DARI *POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION*  
DALAM *DEAR SCARLET: MY STORY*

*TO POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION*

Sebuah Tesis

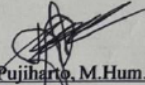
Yang diajukan dan disusun oleh:

**Naafi'atun Nur Lathifah**

**21/490534/PSA/20068**

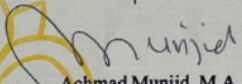
Telah dipertahankan di hadapan Dewan Penguji

Pada tanggal 13 Juni 2025



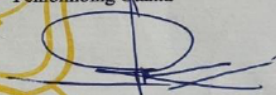
Dr. Pujiharto, M.Hum.

Ketua Penguji



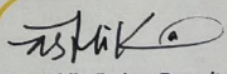
Achmad Munjid, M.A., Ph.D.

Pembimbing Utama



Dr. Nur Saktiningrum, M.Hum.

Anggota Penguji



Dr. Ashika Prajnya Paramita, S.S., M.A.

Anggota Penguji

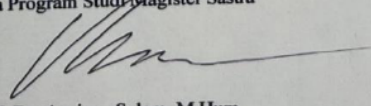
Tesis ini telah diterima sebagai satu persyaratan untuk memperoleh gelar

*Master of Arts (M.A.)*

Yogyakarta, 13 Juni 2025

Mengetahui,

Ketua Program Studi Magister Sastra



Prof. Dr. Aprinus Salam, M.Hum.