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Remembering the disappeared: A Ricoeurian-Gadamerian hermeneutic reading of Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* in the Indonesian post-reformasi context

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an original hermeneutic reading of Leila S. Chudori's modern Indonesian novel *Laut Bercerita* (Chudori, 2017), which narrates the abduction, torture, disappearance, and familial afterlife of pro-democracy activists around the end of Indonesia's New Order. Existing scholarship has productively examined the novel through new historicism, sociology of literature, education, discourse analysis and representations of violence. This paper contributes a different argument: *Laut Bercerita* is not only a fictional representation of political repression but also a hermeneutic event that trains readers to interpret absence, testimonies, and historical responsibility. Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's concepts of historically affected understanding and fusion of horizons and Paul Ricoeur's theories of distanciation, the world of the text, narrative identity, and memory, the study applies a qualitative interpretive design to the Indonesian edition of the novel. The analysis identifies five interlocking interpretive structures: the sea as a counter-archive, torture as coercive state interpretation, the family table as everyday witness, Asmara Jati's testimony as a bridge from private mourning to public memory, and the novel's split temporal narration as an ethical refusal of closure. The findings suggest that the novel converts historical trauma into a demand for interpretation. In the Indonesian context, where enforced disappearances and debates over national history remain unresolved, *Laut Bercerita* positions literature as a civic medium through which readers encounter the disappeared not as victims of the past but as persistent claims on democratic memory.

Keywords: Indonesian literature; hermeneutics; *Laut Bercerita*; Leila S. Chudori; Ricoeur; Gadamer; reformasi; collective memory

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

Modern Indonesian literature has repeatedly returned to the question of how a nation reads what its official narratives are unable, unwilling, or politically unprepared to say (Aspinall, 2005; Heryanto, 2014). The issue is not merely that literary works contain historical information. Literature often becomes an interpretive field in which readers confront the broken relationship between public history, personal memory, state violence, and moral responsibility. This problem is especially important in post-Reformasi Indonesia. The political transition that followed Soeharto's fall in 1998 opened public space for testimony, journalism, activism, and artistic experimentation, yet it did not fully settle the unresolved injuries of authoritarian rule. Enforced disappearances, the continuing search by victims' families, and recurring disputes over how the New Order should be remembered remain part of Indonesia's civic and cultural landscape.

Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita*, first published by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia in 2017, is one of the most significant recent Indonesian novels to engage with this landscape (Chudori, 2017). The novel centers on Biru Laut, a student activist abducted with friends in March 1998, and the family members who must live with the uncertainty produced by disappearance. Its narrative moves between the clandestine life of activists, scenes of detention and torture, the longing of parents who continue to wait for their son, and the work of Asmara Jati, Laut's sister, who helps transform private loss into public testimony. Rather than presenting history as a finished background, the novel makes history felt as a wound that continues to organize domestic rituals, political activism and the reader's own imagination. In this sense, the novel is particularly suitable for hermeneutic analysis because it asks not only what happened but also how people learn to understand what remains deliberately obscured in the narrative.

The historical problem represented by the novel is not fictional in its ethical implications. Human rights organizations have long recorded that pro-democracy activists were forcibly disappeared in 1997 and 1998 and that families have continued to demand the truth and accountability. Amnesty International (2012) called attention to 13 pro-democracy activists who disappeared during the 1997-1998 period, while Human Rights Watch (1998) had already argued in June 1998 that several activists were unaccounted for and that evidence of military involvement had become overwhelming. The International Center for Transitional Justice and KontraS (2011) similarly framed post-Soeharto Indonesia as a society whose transition remained incomplete because truth, justice, reparations, and security sector reform were unevenly addressed. These materials matter for literary analysis not because the novel should be reduced to documentary evidence, but because the novel enters a public world in which disappearance is a continuing interpretive problem.

The present article argues that *Laut Bercerita* should be read as a hermeneutic novel of unfinished mourning. Its central achievement lies in converting the absence of the disappeared into a narrative structure that compels interpretation and action. The sea, family dining table, torture room, activist safe house, and archive of testimony are not merely settings; they are symbolic sites where meaning is contested. The state attempts to impose a violent interpretation of activism as subversion. Families interpret silence as hope, denial, grief, or political demand. Survivors interpret their memories through feelings of guilt and obligation. Readers interpret a past that is both distant and present. Through this process, the novel generates what Gadamer (2004) calls a fusion of horizons: a meeting between the historical world of the text and the historically situated world of the reader. Simultaneously, the idea that narrative gives form to time, action, and identity without dissolving the conflicts that make interpretation necessary (Ricoeur, 1976; Ricoeur, 1984).

This article addresses the following research question: How does *Laut Bercerita* use narrative form, symbols, and testimonies to transform the historical experience of disappearance into an ethical hermeneutic demand within the Indonesian post-Reformasi context? Three subsidiary questions guided the analysis. First, how do recurring symbols such as the sea and family tables mediate absence and remembrance? Second, how does the novel oppose the coercive state interpretation with testimonial and familial interpretations? Third, how does a reader's encounter with the novel produce a renewed understanding of Indonesia's unresolved democratic memory?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly work on *Laut Bercerita* has recognized the novel as a major literary intervention in Indonesia's late New Order and Reformasi memory. Riana's (2021) new historicist reading treats the novel as a literary reconstruction of 1998, connecting Chudori's fictional narrative to social, economic, and political contexts surrounding state power, student movements, and authoritarian repression. This approach is valuable because it situates the novel within the historical conditions that make its narrative intelligible to readers. It also shows that the novel participates in the broader cultural labor of reconstructing events that official accounts often narrow or obscure.

Other studies foreground the novel's pedagogical and social dimensions. Idrus (2022) argues that *Laut Bercerita* plays an educational role by introducing younger generations to the student movement and the dark experiences of the New Order. Such research is important because novels circulate not only as literary art but also as a medium of historical literacy. In this view, Chudori's fiction becomes a bridge between generations who directly experienced authoritarianism and those who encountered it through stories, classrooms, social media, and commemorative practices.

Critical discourse and conflict-oriented studies further demonstrate that the novel represents political conflict, human rights violations and authoritarian control (Permatasari et al., 2022). These studies tend to emphasize what the novel depicts: the regime's violence, activists' vulnerability, ideological pressure on dissent, and the social consequences of repression. Research on violence in the novel also highlights the physical and structural dimensions of state power. Together, these approaches establish that *Laut Bercerita* is deeply embedded in Indonesia's political history and that its fictional world cannot be separated from the historical problem of impunity.

Yet a gap remains. Although memory and trauma studies show why cultural forms matter for collective remembrance (Assmann, 2011; Caruth, 1996; Halbwachs, 1992; LaCapra, 2001), many studies of this novel ask how it represents history, violence, or student movements, while fewer ask how it produces understanding as an event of interpretation. A hermeneutic reading shifts attention from representation alone to the process through which meaning emerges between the text, history, and the reader. In this reading, the novel is not simply a source of information about 1998. It is a world that readers enter, a narrative configuration that reorganizes time, and a symbolic structure that exposes the limits of ordinary historical explanation. The question is not only whether the novel is historically accurate but also how it makes readers confront the difficulty of interpreting a past in which bodies are missing, legal closure is absent, and families continue to wait.

Therefore, this article builds on existing scholarship while redirecting the analytical lens. The novel is read as a hermeneutic counter-archive, a literary form that preserves what official archives cannot fully stabilize. Such a counter-archive is not an alternative file of facts; it is a structured invitation to understand why the facts remain morally incomplete. This paper's intervention is to show that *Laut Bercerita* creates meaning through interpretive tension between state secrecy and testimony, personal grief and public action, past violence and present responsibility, and the reader's historical distance and the text's ethical immediacy.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HERMENEUTICS, NARRATIVE, AND MEMORY

In its philosophical sense, hermeneutics is not simply a technique for extracting meaning from a text. It is a theory of understanding events shaped by history, language, prejudice, dialogue, and self-transformation. Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics is especially relevant for literary works that address contested history. For Gadamer, understanding is always historically affected. Readers do not approach a text from nowhere; they bring prior assumptions, social locations, inherited vocabularies, and political horizons to the text. These prejudices are not merely errors that can be removed. They are starting points that can be tested, revised, and expanded through dialogue with the text.

The concept of the fusion of horizons is central to this study. The horizon is the range of vision within which something becomes meaningful. When readers encounter a historically distant or politically

difficult text, understanding occurs not by reproducing the past exactly, but by allowing the horizons of the text and the present reader to interact. Applied to *Laut Bercerita*, this means that the novel does not transport readers neutrally to 1998. Rather, it creates a dialogue between the violence of the late New Order and the reader's contemporary Indonesian or transnational horizon. The question is: What does the past ask of the present, and how does the present risk misunderstanding the past?

Ricoeur's hermeneutics complements Gadamer's by offering a more explicit theory of text, narrative, and memory (Ricoeur, 1976; Ricoeur, 1984; Ricoeur, 2004). In Interpretation Theory, Ricoeur argues that written discourse becomes distant from the original event of speech. This distancing grants the text autonomy. Therefore, a literary text can speak beyond the author's immediate intention and the original historical context of its production. It opens what Ricoeur calls a world of the text: a possible way of being in the world that readers may appropriate through their own interpretations. Appropriation does not mean subjective possession of the text; it means allowing the projected world of the text to refigure the reader's understanding of the self and society.

Ricoeur's (1984) narrative theory is equally important. In Time and Narrative, narrative emplotment configures events into meaningful temporal relationships. Human action becomes intelligible because narratives are organized before and after, intention and consequence, loss and expectation. In a novel about disappearance, this function becomes complicated. The disappearance damages ordinary narratives because it interrupts the relationship between the event and the conclusion. A person is taken, the family waits, the state withholds the truth, and the ending is suspended. *Laut Bercerita* makes this suspension part of its form. It narrates not closure but the impossibility of closure, thereby producing an ethical temporality in which the past continues to demand a response.

Ricoeur's (1991) notion of narrative identity also helps explain the novel's characterization. Identity is not a fixed essence but a story through which people and communities interpret continuity and change. Biru Laut, Asmara Jati, the parents, the activists, and the families of the disappeared are not defined only by psychological traits. They are constituted by stories told, withheld, repeated, doubted, and institutionalized. Disappearance attempts to destroy narrative identity by removing a person from the public world and leaving no accountable account of what happened to them. The novel resists this destruction by narrating the lives of those whom political violence attempted to erase.

Ricoeur's (2004) work on memory and forgetting is crucial in the Indonesian context. Memory can be faithful, wounded, manipulated and/or obligated. Forgetting can be natural, but it can also be imposed by external factors. A society emerging from authoritarian rule may be tempted to stabilize itself by limiting what can be remembered. In such a society, literature may act as a reminder that memory is not only a private psychological act, but also a public ethical practice. *Laut Bercerita* stages this practice through the labour of testimony, family ritual, and narrative return.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative hermeneutic textual analysis. The primary data source is Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* in its Indonesian edition (Chudori, 2017). The study treats the novel as a literary text with its own narrative autonomy while also reading it in relation to Indonesia's post-Reformasi context of unresolved disappearances, public memory, and transitional justice. The object of analysis is not the historical event itself or the biography of the author but the interpretive work performed by the novel's narrative form, symbols, character relations, and temporal organization.

The research design was interpretive rather than positivist. It does not seek to measure reader responses statistically or verify fictional scenes against documentary archives. Instead, it asks how meaning is created through textual structures. This is consistent with Gadamerian hermeneutics, which understands reading as dialogue, and with Ricoeurian hermeneutics, which understands narratives as a configuration of action and time (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1984). To strengthen analytical transparency, this study adapted procedures commonly associated with thematic analysis while retaining a hermeneutic orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not used as a mechanical coding tool but as a way to make patterns of interpretation visible.

The analysis was conducted in five stages. First, a holistic reading identified the novel's major narrative movements: activist life before abduction, detention and torture, disappearance, familial waiting, survivor testimony and public memory work. Second, recurring symbols and spaces were coded, including the sea, body, interrogation room, dining table, food, photographs, testimony, and bureaucratic records. Third, these codes were grouped into interpretive themes that connected textual patterning with theoretical concepts: counter-archive, coercive interpretation, domestic witnessing, testimonial translation and suspended closure. Fourth, the themes were reread in relation to selected historical and scholarly sources on Indonesia's post-authoritarian memory, enforced disappearances and transitional justice. Fifth, the interpretation was revised through a reflexive check: each claim had to be supported by a recurring textual pattern and avoid reducing the novel to a single political message.

The study's corpus was purposively limited to one novel. This limitation is methodologically appropriate because hermeneutic reading values depth, density, and the layered relationship between part and whole. Gadamer's hermeneutic circle is relevant here: individual scenes are interpreted in relation to the whole novel, while the meaning of the whole novel is revised through attention to individual scenes. For example, the sea cannot be interpreted only from the title; its significance emerges through its relation to Laut's name, the imagery of disappearance, the question of burial, and the narrative need to give voice to what the state has submerged in silence.

No human participants were involved, and no private data were collected in this study. The ethical issue in this research lies in the interpretation of politically sensitive trauma. Therefore, this study avoids treating victims as symbols. Its guiding assumption is that literary form matters because it protects the complexity of suffering from being reduced to either spectacle or abstract political argument.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Results

The analysis identifies five interlocking hermeneutic structures through which *Laut Bercerita* transforms disappearance into a continuous demand for interpretation. These structures are not separate motifs but mutually reinforcing dimensions of the novel's meaning: the sea as counter-archive, torture as coercive state interpretation, the family table as everyday witness, Asmara Jati's testimony as public translation of private grief, and split temporal narration as ethical refusal of closure.

5.1.1. The Sea as Counter-Archive

The title *Laut Bercerita* establishes the central hermeneutic paradox of the novel: the sea tells a story precisely because human institutions fail or refuse to tell it adequately (Chudori, 2017). The Indonesian word laut means sea, and Biru Laut is also the name of the disappeared activist. This double signification fuses person and element, body and memory, and individual victim and vast historical depth. In ordinary political violence, disappearance is designed to remove bodies from the evidentiary space. Without a body, there is no funeral, no clear legal conclusion, and no stable narrative. The sea in Chudori's (2017) novel reverses this logic. It becomes an imagined archive of what the state attempts to sink into oblivion.

Archives usually imply documents, files, and institutional custody. The sea is the opposite: fluid, immeasurable, and resistant to classification. Yet, this is precisely why it becomes a powerful counter-archive. It holds what cannot be filed. This suggests that memory exceeds the administrative categories through which the state manages violence. When the sea "speaks" in the novel's symbolic economy, it does not provide a courtroom confession or historical report. It offers a different kind of truth: that absence itself has meaning and that the disappeared continue to inhabit the moral imagination of the living.

Ricoeur's (1976) idea of the world of the text clarifies this symbolic operation. The novel projects a world in which nature, names, and memory converge. Readers are invited to inhabit a reality in which the sea is not passive scenery but a witness. This does not mean that the sea literally testifies. Rather, the symbol expands the reader's horizon, so that testimony is no longer limited to official documents. The sea's interpretive function is to keep the story open-ended. It refuses the state's desire for the disappeared

to vanish into silence. It also refuses the reader's desire for a simple closure. The sea does not solve disappearance; it makes disappearance impossible to forget.

5.1.2. Torture as Coercive State Interpretation

The interrogation and torture scenes in *Laut Bercerita* are often read as representations of violence, and they are certainly that (Chudori, 2017; Permatasari et al., 2022). Hermeneutically, however, they also represent a perverse form of interpretation. The captors do not merely injure bodies; they demand that activists fit into an imposed narrative. The repeated demand to identify the hidden force behind student movements shows that the state's violence is driven by suspicion of student activists. It cannot accept activism as an ethical conviction, civic agency, or democratic dissent. It must interpret activism as a conspiracy.

This is where Ricoeur's (1976) distinction between interpretation and reduction becomes useful for this study. A hermeneutic of suspicion can expose hidden power, ideologies, or deception. However, in the hands of an authoritarian state, suspicion becomes totalizing. It assumes guilt before understanding and converts every answer into evidence of a pre-determined plot. Therefore, the interrogation room is an anti-hermeneutic space. It destroys dialogue. Questions are not asked to understand; they are asked to force the victim into the state's script.

The body becomes the medium through which the script is imposed. Torture attempts to collapse meaning into pain itself. It seeks to break the activist's narrative identity by separating the body from the ideals, friendships, and commitments that give activism meaning. However, the novel resists this collapse by narrating the activists' inner worlds, relationships, humor, fear, and loyalty. They are not only presented as bodies in pain. They are people with a history. This narrative restoration is crucial: the novel interprets the activists beyond the state's violent interpretation.

Gadamer's (2004) notion of dialogue highlights the ethical contrast. Genuine understanding requires openness to others' claims. The state's interrogation is closed; it hears only what confirms it. In contrast, the novel opens up space for readers to encounter activists as complex subjects. It does not romanticize them as flawless heroes, but it refuses the authoritarian reduction of dissent into a threat. The hermeneutic struggle in the novel is, therefore, a struggle over who has the authority to interpret political action.

5.1.3. The Family Table as Everyday Witness

One of the novel's most powerful hermeneutic spaces is not the prison cell or protest site but the family dining table. The table is where absence becomes visible through the repetition. Families of the disappeared often live with a peculiar temporality: the missing person is gone yet not dead in any socially or legally settled sense. This has resulted in a suspended domestic life. In the novel, meals, waiting, parental gestures, and the hope that Laut might return to sit with his family again, become everyday rituals of witness.

The family table functions as a counter-space for disappearance. Disappearance attempts to remove victims from public and domestic recognition. The table is set for him. This place is not merely sentimental in nature. This is an interpretive act. Each meal asks what it means to live as if the absent person still belongs. The family's refusal to let absence become erasure challenges this logic. The state may withhold the body, but it cannot fully control the meanings generated by love, memory, and rituals.

Ricoeur's (1991) narrative identity helps to explain this point. Families maintain their identity through stories and rituals that connect the past, present, and expectations. Disappearance attacks this narrative's continuity. The missing person's story cannot be concluded; the family's story cannot move forward without betrayal; the future remains hostage to an unknown past. The dining table mediates this fractured temporality in the film. It allows the family to continue telling Laut into existence, even when the state's silence attempts to un-tell him.

5.1.4. Asmara Jati and the Translation of Mourning into Testimony

The second major movement of the novel shifts attention to Asmara Jati and the families who search for answers. This shift is central to the novel's hermeneutics. The first-person or victim-centered horizon

of Laut's story is followed by the survivor's horizon of interpretation in the next chapter. Asmara must learn to read traces: returned survivors, rumors, official evasions, testimonies, photographs, memories, and the emotional states of her parents. Her work is both emotional and epistemological. She must ask how one knows anything when the state makes truth inaccessible.

Asmara's role shows that testimony is a translation of mourning into the public language. Private grief can remain isolated. Public testimony risks exposure, frustration, and political disappointment, but it also creates a shared space in which loss can be claimed. The families' search for missing activists, therefore, becomes a hermeneutic community. They interpret together because no single person possesses the entire truth. Each fragment matters: a survivor's memory, a date, a location, a name, a gesture, a refusal by an official, a mother's insistence.

Ricoeur's (2004) account of testimony illuminates these ethical stakes. Testimony asks to be believed, but it also enters a world of verification, doubt, transmission and institutional response. The witness says, in effect, "I was there" or "this happened," and the listener must decide how to receive the claim made by the witness. In *Laut Bercerita*, testimony is fragile because the violence it addresses is designed to eliminate evidence. However, fragility does not weaken the testimony. On the contrary, it reveals the moral failure of institutions that demand impossible proof from those whom violence has already deprived of it.

5.1.5. Split Temporality and the Refusal of Closure

The novel's structure creates a split temporality between the world of the abducted activists and that of those left behind. This structure is not merely chronological in nature. It is hermeneutic. The reader first enters a horizon in which activism, friendship, danger, and abduction unfold immediately. Later, the reader inhabits a horizon in which the event has already occurred but remains unresolved. The same disappearance is therefore interpreted from two sides: the side of experience and the side of the aftermath.

This split exemplifies Ricoeur's (1984) theory of narrative configuration. A novel organizes time but does not close it. It produces intelligibility without finality. Readers understand more than any single character can, yet they still do not receive the kind of closure that a conventional plot might provide. The missing body, incomplete accountability, and continuing grief keep the narrative ethically open. This structure mirrors the historical condition of enforced disappearance: the event is in the past, but its meaning remains present.

The refusal of closure also protects the novel from becoming propaganda for the author. A propagandistic narrative often resolves ambiguity into a single, clear lesson. *Laut Bercerita* is politically clear in its opposition to repression, but it is aesthetically and ethically complex in its treatment of grief. It does not offer justice as a completed accomplishment. It does not allow testimony to magically restore the dead or the disappeared. It does not present memory as being painless. Instead, it provides readers with a disciplined experience of incompleteness. This is the novel's most important hermeneutic achievement: it makes incompleteness meaningful without making it acceptable to the reader.

5.2. Discussion

The findings suggest that *Laut Bercerita* should be understood as a hermeneutic counter-archive in post-Reformasi Indonesia. It does not replace historical research, legal investigations, or human rights advocacy. Rather, it sustains the conditions under which such practices are morally intelligible. By giving narrative form to absence, the novel prevents disappearance from becoming a mere statistic or an exhausted historical topic. This reopens the question of what Indonesia owes those who were removed from the public world and families who continue to wait.

This argument refines the existing scholarship on the novel. New historicist, sociological, and discourse readings rightly emphasize that Chudori's text reconstructs the political atmosphere of 1998 and represents state power (Idrus, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2022; Riana, 2021). A hermeneutic reading adds that the novel also dramatizes the struggle over interpretation itself. Authoritarian states are not only violent; they are interpretively violent. It imposes suspicion, controls archives, withholds bodies, and attempts to determine which narratives are considered truth. In contrast, the novel mobilizes symbolic,

domestic, and testimonial forms of interpretation. The sea speaks, the table remembers, Asmara records, and the reader listens.

The novel's hermeneutic power lies in its movement between the intimate and the national spheres. Disappearance is a state crime, but the novel shows that its consequences unfold in the smallest spaces of ordinary life. This movement is significant for Indonesian literary studies because it challenges the narrow separation between political history and domestic affect. Family meals, parents' hopes, siblings' searches, and survivors' guilt are not secondary to politics. They are places where political violence has become an enduring historical consciousness.

The contemporary relevance of this reading is strengthened by recurring public debates on how Indonesia's past should be written. Recent concerns among historians and activists about the possible rewriting or softening of dark chapters in national history show that the politics of memory did not end with Reformasi (Teresia & Suroyo, 2025). In this context, novels like *Laut Bercerita* are not marginal cultural artifacts. These are part of the public ecology of remembrance. They provide readers with a language to recognize when history is being simplified, depoliticized, or made falsely positive.

The argument of this paper should not be misunderstood as claiming that literature solves impunity. A novel cannot prosecute perpetrators, produce official truths, or grant reparations. However, the literature can resist the cultural normalization of impunity. It can remain hidden within the public meaning. It teaches readers that absence is not emptiness, silence can be imposed, and memory requires interpretive labor. This is why a hermeneutic reading is valuable: it shows that the novel's politics are inseparable from its theory of understanding.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* is best understood not only as a historical-political novel about the end of the New Order but also as a hermeneutic event that transforms disappearance into an enduring ethical demand (Chudori, 2017). Through a Ricoeurian-Gadamerian framework, the analysis shows that the novel produces meaning through symbols, spaces, and narrative structures that keep absence active. The sea becomes a counter-archive, torture becomes a scene of coercive interpretation, the family table becomes an everyday witness, Asmara Jati's work transforms mourning into testimony, and the split temporal structure refuses the false comfort of closure.

The main research question asked how novels use narrative form, symbol, and testimony to transform historical disappearance into an ethical hermeneutic demand in the Indonesian post-Reformasi context. *Laut Bercerita* teaches readers to interpret what authoritarian violence attempts to make uninterpretable. It does not provide full knowledge because the historical condition it represents is defined by the withheld truth. Instead, it creates a disciplined encounter with incomplete information. This encounter is ethical because it asks readers to remain responsible for the disappeared, even when closure is unavailable.

This study contributes to Indonesian literary scholarship by extending the analysis of *Laut Bercerita* beyond the representation of political conflict toward the interpretive processes through which literature sustains public memory. This study contributes to hermeneutic theory by demonstrating how Gadamer's fusion of horizons and Ricoeur's world of the text can be applied to a Southeast Asian post-authoritarian novel. It also contributes to memory studies by showing that literary symbols and domestic rituals are not ornamental but are central to the cultural survival of contested histories.

This study is limited by its focus on a single novel and its reliance on scene-based analysis rather than extensive page-specific quotations. Future research could compare *Laut Bercerita* with Chudori's *Pulang* or *Namaku Alam*, with Ayu Utami's *Saman*, or with films and digital memory projects that address related histories. Further reader-response research could examine how Indonesian students interpret novels across different regions and generations. Nevertheless, the present analysis demonstrates that *Laut Bercerita* remains a crucial modern Indonesian novel because it refuses to let the disappeared disappear from the interpretation.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

Not Applicable

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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