

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Trauma has been a significant part of human lives. The first idea of the trauma that is introduced by Freud, in *Studies in Hysteria*, is how a powerful event can be forgotten but return again in the form of “somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors” (Berger et al. 1997, 570). People who have encountered a natural disaster, near-death experience, loss of loved ones, rape, domestic abuse, et cetera are most likely to develop trauma. Even though the traumatic event happened years ago, the trauma victims can still develop post-traumatic stress disorder. In which, the events will keep haunting them through sudden flashbacks or dreams, or they will feel angry, sad, or scared towards something that may remind them of the events.

On the other hand, 9/11 survivors are still coping with their trauma after the accident. When four jets hit the twin towers, almost three thousand people are killed while approximately thirty-three thousand people survived. Those who survive still bear memories and are living differently than how they used to be. Taken from *Times of Israel*, Désirée Bouchat, one of the survivors claims that she is “a walking zombie”, she is unable to multitask and the memories of her lost colleague still haunt her (Peltz 2021). Different than Bouchat, Lanski, 51, said that the one good thing about surviving from a tragedy is it makes her more resilient. Some of the

victims say the trauma makes them more resilient, while some cannot function well anymore. Although the victims have been told to get over it, they are traumatized, and it is not something to be gotten over, but to be addressed (Peltz 2021).

According to *therecoveryvillage.com*, 32% of people who has suffered from severe physical assault, 15.4% of victims of being shot and stabbed, 14.3% of people who experienced the sudden death of loved ones, and 7.3% of murder witnesses develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (“PTSD Facts and Statistics | The Recovery Village” 2021). However, during the 24th APS Annual Convention, George A. Bonanno from Columbia University revealed that approximately 35% to 65% of people who had experienced traumatic disasters are able to go back to their usual routine shortly after the events. Bonanno also said that approximately 7% of war veterans developed PTSD, although 83% demonstrated praiseworthy mental health while facing “potentially traumatic combat situations.” Those statistics show that although some people faced the same kind of traumatic events, some people recover and some do not. Considering the issue, how people react differently towards the same kind of traumatic events, many authors have tried to illustrate how people try to survive and live despite their traumas.

Trauma has always been illustrated in literature through the earliest time. It is proven by how Abubakar states that traumatic experience appears in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in The Garden of Eden (2017, 120). After eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, then Adam wept for seventy years. Adam’s reaction, according to Abubakar, is a sign that Adam experienced trauma. As time goes by, the concept of trauma that is

introduced in the literature becomes more varied. When humans are, or after experiencing world wars, the victims usually encountered traumatic events and suffer for them. This trauma caused by the after-effect of wars is extensively portrayed in large numbers of literature in the twentieth century (2017, 121).

Explaining about trauma, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud explains how a traumatic scene can be forgotten, but it can come back again when triggered with a similar event (Berger et al. 1997, 570). Cathy Caruth analysed Freud's theory of trauma, by saying that the sickness of the traumatized individual is due to an event that they cannot control, that makes the individual to repeat the traumatic experience again and again through hallucinations or nightmares (Gumb 2017, 235). The individual experiences a delay between the experience and the conscious understanding of the traumatic event, therefore "a moment of shock" or "a moment of not-knowing" occurs. The moment of shock, thus, is something that is unexpected from the individual, and those shocking and unexpected experience is what drive the groundwork of trauma stories, as Caruth suggests (Gumb 2017, 238).

In Caruth's work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and The Possibility of History*, after investigating *Moses and Monotheism*, states that narratives that talk about history are created from traumatic repetitions (1991, 189). Zept (2008, 89) states that in Freud's concept of trauma, the trauma relates to experiences mixed between an external event and its effects on an individual's psychological state. Zept explains further that the vital thing which causes trauma is the way an individual experiences it.

In the *Art as Narrative: Recounting Traumas through Literature* (Abubakar 2017, 120), it is stated that the concept of trauma has been told numerous times in all forms of literature. Trauma is a significant part of human life, and literature has the ability to portray how humans deal with trauma over time. Cathy Caruth says that literature allows people to “witness events that cannot be completely known and open our ears to experiences that might have otherwise remained unspoken and unheard” (Marder 2006, 3). From literature, Caruth believes that the stories of traumatic events which are hard to be understood can become easier to understand and more meaningful since they are told to others (2006, 3).

Despite the fact that many trauma survivors try to recover, the portrayal of traumas in literature is often related to the characters who fall into madness, to illness, or revenge narratives (Gumb 2018, 461). Gumb argues that writings and analyses of trauma representation in fiction are based on traditional psychoanalytic theories as the foundation (Gumb 2017, 256). That explains how there are not many kinds of literature that illustrate the survival and recovery of trauma victims. From how Cathy Caruth gains her trauma narrative theory from Freud, Gumb points that Caruth’s theory only highlights “the collective response” to a traumatic experience, as it is told to others. Meanwhile, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory only offers the causes of traumas by analyzing the individual’s unconscious. Thus, Gumb develops recovery narrative theory, to focus on the individual’s experience and survival of trauma and the birth of an ordinary hero (Gumb 2017, 238).

According to Gumb, there are three elements that can indicate the process of recovery: resilience (adapting well despite having traumas), reconciliation (visiting

the past and accepting the experience), and resistance (resisting to be defined by their trauma and reclaiming agency over self) towards their traumas. Later, when the characters demonstrate resilience, reconciliation, and resistance, or as they survive through their traumas, reclaiming agency over themselves, the characters will emerge to become “ordinary heroes”(Gumb 2018, 464). Hence, in this study, the writer tries to analyze literature that is depicting trauma victims who are in their journey to survive and recover from their traumas. The writer chose Brian K. Vaughan’s *Saga* comic as the fitting object which is venturing about the characters who are trying to survive in a never-ending space war, thus encountering many traumatic events during their journey.

Brian K. Vaughan has created a comic series entitled *Saga*, with the help of an illustrator named Fiona Staples. *Saga* has been published since October 10, 2012; however, it has been put on hiatus since 2018, with Volume nine, covering chapter 49 to 54 as the latest. Vaughan also has written *Y: The Last Man* (2002-2008), *Ex Machina* (2004-2010), *Runaways* (2017-present), *Pride of Baghdad* (2006), and *Paper Girls* (2015-2019). From 2013 to 2018, *Saga* has been nominated and won many awards, such as Best Graphic Story in 2013 from Hugo Awards and Best Continuing Series in 2017 from Eisner Awards.

Saga is a comic book that centers around the life of a couple of different species in space, Alana, the winged woman, and a horned wizard man named Marko, with their lovechild, Hazel. The story begins with Alana giving birth, which leads to many catastrophes as the child is a mix of two different species that are sworn enemies. Hazel and her parents then start an adventure to survive in many

life-threatening situations of wartime with the help of creatures they just met during their journey. At first, the war is only between Wreath, Marko's home planet, and Landfall, Alana's planet, but it spreads to the planets around them since the respective species force other planets to take sides, or they will be terminated.

As *Saga* delves into the lives of a family trying to stay alive, albeit the death threats from many characters, there are many of these characters who, consequently, suffers through traumas. Marko, Prince Robot IV, and The Will/Bill are selected to be the main focus of this study, for they depict the sufferings and consequences of traumas the most. Although, regardless of their traumas, the three characters still try to survive in the universe. With recovery narrative theory, this study will focus on how the characters live despite their traumas by demonstrating resilience, reconciliation, and resistance, also whether they recover and become ordinary heroes. Through this study, the writer hopes to shift society's thinking to not always associate trauma victims as someone with intense suffering and a strong desire for revenge, but to a more positive side of survival and recovery.

In the previous study, Pallares (2015) describes how *Saga* represents the relationship between mothers' bodies with their children. The mother-daughter relationship of Alana and Hazel is highlighted the most in the story. The comic shows how Alana, despite being hunted down by people, is breastfeeding Hazel explicitly. This shows the interdependent relationship between Alana and Hazel (2015, 5). Marko's mother, Klara, is also examined in the study. Klara injects the feeling of terror and trauma to young Marko, in which Landfallians murdered many Wreath soldiers. Klara's attitude towards war and her child is different from Alana

and Marko himself, as Alana and Marko are willing to throw away their hatred and find love, even having a daughter.

The other previous study focuses on the childhood struggles that are experienced by Hazel. The portrayal of childhood in the comic gives a perspective of what childhood should be and how the children react to certain circumstances (Sojot 2019). Sojot argues that *Saga* could interact with the readers through the materiality of the comic that can make the readers feel discomfort, whether physically or emotionally (2019, 130).

The readers are also introduced to unique kinds of “bad-ass” women characters in *Saga*. *Saga* successfully brings many female characters that act resisting the patriarchal culture. However, unlike other comics that usually depict “bad girl” images, Precup and Manea (2017, 278) argue that *Saga* provides female characters that shift gender paradigms, resist traditional patriarchal culture, heteronormative sexuality, and beauty standards.

The previous studies mainly focus on female characters with feminism theories. Meanwhile, this study focuses on the male characters and their traumas, also their will to survive despite their traumas. Marko, Prince Robot IV, and The Will/Bill are the main characters which drive most of the plot of *Saga*. They are illustrated as the “strong” war mercenaries, although, they have a traumatizing background behind them. It is interesting to highlight and analyze the survival of those characters towards their trauma, in which they have their own different ways to cope during the war era.

The writer proposes that though the three main characters experience similar kinds of traumatizing events, the three characters' ways of coping are varied and their process to recover differ, too. Through this study, the topic of dealing with and surviving from traumas are examined from the comic's narrative, the plot of the comic, and non-narrative aspects, consisting of the speech bubble, mise en page of the comic, the facial expressions, and the dominance between the foreground and the background.

1.2 Statement of the Problem(s)

Considering the background of the study, the writer proposes two problems that will be answered in this study. Thus, the statements of problems are composed as below:

1. How do the characters of Brian K. Vaughan's *Saga* demonstrate resilience, reconciliation, and resistance towards their traumas?
2. How is the process of the characters of Brian K. Vaughan's *Saga* to recover from their traumas and become ordinary heroes?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Considering the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study that the writer aims to get are as below:

1. To find out how the characters of Brian K. Vaughan's *Saga* demonstrate resilience, reconciliation, and resistance towards their traumas.

2. To find out the process of the characters of Brian K. Vaughan's *Saga* to recover from their traumas and become ordinary heroes.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the three main characters of *Saga*, Marko, Prince Robot IV, and The Will/Bill, which are mercenaries of war. They show different reactions towards traumatic experiences and behave differently in their daily lives after experiencing traumatic events. With those three characters, the writer discusses the causes of their traumas and how they live despite their traumas. Hence, the writer hopes that through this study, society start to shift their way of thinking that trauma victims will not have the same reaction even if they experience the same event. The writer also suggests the idea to society that trauma is not something to be neglected easily and that some trauma victims recover, and some victims do not. As there is still not much research which uses the recovery narrative theory, this study can be a small contribution to enrich the literature about trauma and its victims.

1.5 Definition of Key-terms

Trauma: A powerful event that can be forgotten but return again in the form of “somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors” (Berger et al. 1997)

Resilience: The ability of a trauma victim to adapt well in their current life, despite having traumas (Gumb 2018).

Reconciliation: The ability of a trauma victim to revisit the past, regarding the traumatic event and accepting the experience (Gumb 2018).

Resistance: The ability of a trauma victim to resist to be defined by their trauma or as someone having trauma and reclaiming agency over self (Gumb 2018).

Ordinary Hero: A person who does not fall into “madness/illness/revenge” after having experienced traumatic events (Gumb 2018).