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# Narrating the Unspeakable: Order, Mood, and Voice in Indonesia Queer Novel: A Narratological Queer Study

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the narrative structure of *Lelaki Terindah* (2004) by Andrei Aksana through the framework of Gérard Genette's classical narratology—focusing on the elements of order, mood, and voice—while also incorporating postclassical insights from queer perspective. By analyzing how the novel organizes time (order), filters perception (mood), and positions the narrative voice, this study reveals how those narrative forms serve as reflection to the representation of a queer experience in contemporary Indonesia popular literature. Rather than merely identifying structural features, the study interrogates cultural and ideological implications, arguing that the manipulation of narrative time reflect the traumatic experience around homophobia, then mood and also voice reflects the silencing and negotiation of queer identity within a heteronormative society. The novel's use of shifts in focalization, and narrative distance, and multiple narrative levels, not only structure the story of same-sex love but also mirror the challenges of visibility and repression faced by queer individuals in a context where such identities remain socially marginalized. Through this approach, the paper positions *Lelaki Terindah* as a site where narrative technique becomes a mode of cultural resistance and personal expression of one's queerness.

**Keywords:** Queer Narratology, Queer Narrative, *Lelaki Terindah*

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## 1. Introduction

Firstly published in 2004 by a major house publishing in Indonesia, Gramedia Pustaka Utama, *Lelaki Terindah,* a novel by Andrei Aksana still stands as a rare and daring milestone in Indonesian popular literature for its portrayal mainly of a romantic and sexual relationship between two men. At a time when homosexuality remained a taboo subject in mainstream discourse, even until now, Aksana's novel offered readers a deeply emotional narrative centered on queer love, desire, and loss. While its poetic prose and passionate tone captured the hearts of many readers, the novel also sparked controversy and discussion, reflecting the ongoing cultural resistance to queer visibility in Indonesia. Despite its popularity and the critics surround it, *Lelaki Terindah,* remains one of the few Indonesian novels that openly centers queer subjectivity, making it a crucial text for understanding the intersection of literature, identity, and social discourse in the country.

> *…Ketika cinta tak memilih jenis kelamin,*
> *Cinta pun menjadi terlarang…* (2015: 11)
> (...When love doesn't see sexes,
> Love then becomes forbidden...)
> — Andrei Aksana, Lelaki Terindah

In Indonesia, the landscape of its literature has been shaped by current dominant cultural values rooted in heteronormativity, religion, and traditional family structures, that queer narratives have often been marginalized, censored, or rendered invisible. Even the

prequel of the book, *Setelah: Lelaki Terindah*, takes nearly about 2 decades later in 2024, to be published, under different publisher, that is with less coverage. With this lack of progress, queer representation remains highly precarious. Homosexuality is still widely stigmatized and often condemned in public discourse, particularly in the name of morality or religious values. Queer works are frequently subjected to scrutiny, and queer-themed works risk being erased from bookstores and libraries. Amid rising intolerance toward non-heterosexuality fueled by religious hardliners, literature still serves as a potential 'safe space' for open discussions on sexuality despite the threat of censorship from the ambiguous anti-pornography bill, yet this apparent openness is challenged by the growing visibility of anti-LGBT narratives that align with conservative religious values, indicating that ongoing conflicts over gender and sexuality will continue to shape the sociocultural landscape of modern Indonesia (Yulius, 2016). Within this climate, the presence of a novel like *Lelaki Terindah*—which unapologetically centers male-male love—becomes all the more significant. It stands not only as a work of fiction but also as a bold act of visibility and resistance in a society that continues to regulate and suppress expressions of queer desire, which is why it is an interesting object to be examined.

In examining queer literature, much scholarly attention has been devoted to what is represented—identities, relationships, and desires that challenge heteronormative norms. However, it is just as equally significant how these stories are told. Narrative structure—the arrangement of time, perspective, and voice—plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's experience of a queer text. The form of a narrative can enact or mirror the tensions, disruptions, and resistances that define queer lives, especially in societies where such identities are repressed.

The narrative structure of *Lelaki Terindah* is particularly compelling, especially in the way it organizes order, mood, and voice. These elements are not only stylistic choices but serve as powerful tools through which the novel navigates and negotiates queer desire within a conservative Indonesian cultural landscape. In this sense, narrative form becomes deeply political—it does more than simply tell a story; it expresses, conceals, and ultimately asserts queer subjectivity. This paper, therefore, focuses on examining how *Lelaki Terindah* constructs a fragmented yet intimate narrative of queer experience, highlighting how its narrative strategies both reflect and resist the cultural marginalization of queer identities in Indonesia.

**Literature Review**

Several studies have examined *Lelaki Terindah* by Andrei Aksana, offering valuable insights that support the foundation of this research. These studies primarily focus on thematic and sociocultural aspects of the novel, particularly in its portrayal of queer identities within the context of Indonesian conservatism. Below are selected studies that inform and contextualize this current work:

First is *Pemaknaan Homoseksual dalam Novel Lelaki Terindah (Analisis Wacana Kritis Teun A. Van Dijk)* (2013) by Saripah Nurhayati. This study uses Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the construction of homosexuality in *Lelaki Terindah*. It focuses on three analytical dimensions: textual, social cognition, and social context. The textual analysis reveals that the language choices in the novel depict homosexuality as a social deviance that violates Indonesian norms. The social cognition dimension reflects Andrei Aksana's background in a religiously conservative society, which influences discriminatory portrayals of homosexuality. The social context highlights how dominant societal discourses reinforce the taboo surrounding homosexuality in Indonesia. The study concludes that homosexual identity is still largely framed negatively—as deviant, taboo, and norm-violating—within both the literary and social spheres.

Second is *Symbolic Violence Against Homosexuality in Andrei Aksana's Novel Lelaki Terindah* (2017) by Desca Angelianawati. This study analyzes the representation of homosexuality in contemporary Indonesian literature and how such representations confront dominant cultural norms. In a predominantly conservative society like Indonesia,

heterosexuality remains the socially sanctioned standard, marginalizing non-heteronormative identities. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic violence and Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Angelianawati explores how *Lelaki Terindah* exposes and resists the symbolic violence experienced by queer individuals. Her analysis focuses on how ideological forces—such as religion, family honor, and societal morality—operate within the narrative, reinforcing marginalization while simultaneously allowing resistance through literary representation.

Third is *Homosexual Responses in Semarang City towards Andrei Aksana's Lelaki Terindah* by Rokhmansyah, A., & Nuryatin, A. (2020). This research investigates the reception of *Lelaki Terindah* among readers in Semarang, Indonesia, highlighting the public's responses to its portrayal of same-sex relationships. The novel challenges dominant narratives that silence or stigmatize queer desire by centering the romantic relationship between two men. The study demonstrates how the novel acts as a site of resistance, articulating queer subjectivities and confronting institutional and societal pressures. Through its depiction of the emotional and psychological experiences of queer characters, the novel not only asserts visibility but also critiques the socio-cultural costs of deviating from heteronormativity.

These previous studies on *Lelaki Terindah* have largely focused on external themes such as symbolic oppression, societal reception, and the cultural stigmatization of homosexuality. While these discussions are crucial, they often overlook the narrative mechanics through which queer experience is mediated. Elements such as narrative time, focalization, and voice remain underexplored in these analyses, despite their centrality in shaping the reader's understanding of a queer experience.

Therefore this paper seeks to fill that gap by employing Gérard Genette's classical narratological framework—particularly the concepts of order, mood, and voice—alongside postclassical and queer theoretical perspectives. It argues that narrative form in *Lelaki Terindah* is not merely stylistic but ideologically significant, revealing the fragmented, silenced, and negotiated space of queer identity within a heteronormative Indonesian context.

**Theoretical Framework**

To analyze how *Lelaki Terindah* constructs queer narrative through its narrative form and its implication, firstly, this study draws on Gérard Genette's classical narratology, particularly his framework of order, mood, and voice. These categories enable a systematic analysis of how time, perspective, and voice function in a literary text.

**Order** refers to how events in a story are arranged in the narrative compared to how they would happen in real chronological time. Genette (1980) calls this a "*pseudo-temporal* arrangement" (35), meaning that the way events are told in the narrative may not follow the actual sequence they would occur in the fictional world. It further explains that the story's timeline is the natural order of events as they happen, while the narrative timeline is how those events are presented to the reader. In a straightforward story, events usually follow their real order. However, in most narratives, it's not possible to recount every event exactly as it happens, so the order in which events are told often changes. This means there isn't always a perfect match between the story's actual timeline and how it's presented in the narrative.

**Mood** in narrative, according to Genette, refers to how the story is told and from what point of view. He explains it using the *Littré* dictionary, which defines mood as "the name given to the different forms of the verb that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express… the different points of view from which the life or the action is looked at" (161). Genette argues that all narrative is essentially telling (diegesis), and even when it seems realistic, it only creates an illusion of showing (mimesis). A narrative can't truly imitate reality—it's always a fictional act of storytelling. As he puts it, "one can tell more or tell less what one tells, and can tell it according to one point of view or another; and this capacity, and the modalities of its use are precisely what our category of narrative mood aims at" (161–162). Mood deals with how close or distant the narrator seems from

the events being told. The narrator can give more or less detail, speak more directly or indirectly, and can present the story from the point of view (or "vision") of one or more characters. Genette continues: "the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way… [and] adopt what we ordinarily call the participant's 'vision' or 'point of view'" (162).

Since mood is about the relationship between the narrator and the information given to the reader. Genette also says it's important to distinguish between Voice (who speaks) and Mood (who sees). **Voice,** in Narrative Discourse (1980), Gérard Genette defines it as the narrative instance, focusing on the instance of the narrating, and its two major questions: the 'who is the narrator?' and the 'where is he? What is the relation between narrator, time of narrating, narrating levels and person (217). He distinguishes between intradiegetic narrators, who exist within the story world, and extradiegetic narrators, who stand outside it (228), as well as between homodiegetic narrators, who are characters in the story, and heterodiegetic narrators, who are not (244). These distinctions allow Genette to classify narratives based on the narrator's position relative to the story events, emphasizing that the temporal placement of narration—whether prior, simultaneous, or subsequent—also shapes the narrative's structure and authority.

While Genette's model offers precision in analyzing narrative technique, postclassical narratology—especially queer narratology—extends these tools into interpretive and ideological territory. This study of gender and narrative started from examining how sex, gender, and sexuality—understood as historically contingent constructs—shape both narrative texts and the interpretive frameworks applied to them. Within this broad inquiry, queer narratology has emerged as a field concerned with the implications of these identity categories for understanding the "nature, form, and functioning of narrative" (Prince, 2003: 65). Rather than treating narrative structure as a neutral vessel, queer narratology invites us to see form itself as ideologically and culturally embedded, capable of revealing how narratives are shaped by—and respond to—normative pressures surrounding identity. This approach allows scholars to explore not only what stories are told, but how they are constructed in relation to systems of power and cultural expectations.

Queer narratology, which has its roots in feminist narratology, particularly in the work of Susan Lanser. In her essay "Queering Narrative Voice", Lanser (2021) revisits the relationship between narrative voice and the body. She engages with all three senses of the verb "to queer": challenging normative sexualities, breaking down fixed sexual identities, and questioning all forms of rigidity. Her goal is to explore what each of these meanings can reveal when applied to fictional narrators. Lanser's work in gender and sexuality studies has long aimed to establish a feminist narratology, followed by a queer one.

Also by Susan Lanser, in her essay, " Toward (a queerer and) more (feminist) narratology" (2015) proposes expanding narratology to better serve queer intellectual goals. She argues that queer narratologies have often been limited to narrow canons, and emphasizes the need to broaden their historical and geographical scope. Lanser also suggests that adopting an intersectional narratology can help achieve this expansion, while pushing the field beyond literary studies into broader feminist and queer discourses. Central to her argument is the idea that questions of queer representation are not only about what is told, but how it is told—meaning narrative form is just as crucial as content. According to Lanser, fully understanding the potential and limitations of queer narratives requires a deep engagement with narrative structure.

Building on Lanser's framework, by analyzing the Indonesian novel *Lelaki Terindah* to explore how its narrative form reflects and responds to the cultural and ideological context of Indonesia. By examining the novel's use of certain narrrative forms, arguing that these formal strategies mirror the tensions of expressing queer identity in a society shaped by conservative moral and cultural norms. In this way, the analysis supports Lanser's

claim that narrative form is central to understanding how queer stories are shaped by and push back against their cultural surroundings.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study takes *Lelaki Terindah* (2004) by Andrei Aksana as its primary object of analysis—a pioneering and controversial novel that centers a romantic relationship between two Indonesian men. While the novel has drawn attention for its bold thematic content, its narrative form remains underexplored. This research addresses that gap by conducting a queer narratological analysis focused on order, mood, and voice.

Adopting a text-based analysis grounded in queer narratology approach. According to Lanser (2013), the term "queer" has been applied in narrative studies in at least three distinct ways: to refer to non-heteronormative sexual identities, to challenge and break down fixed categories of sexuality and gender, and to describe any practice that crosses or deconstructs established categories and binaries. Its central aim is to investigate how the narrative structure of *Lelaki Terindah* by Andrei Aksana—particularly through the lenses of order, mood, and voice—shapes and expresses queer subjectivity within the constraints of Indonesia's predominantly heteronormative cultural context.

This study primarily draws on Gérard Genette's narratological framework, particularly his three core categories: 1) Order, the relationship between story time and narrative time, including mainly focus the use of analepsis (flashbacks); 2) Mood, especially focalization, examining how events are perceived or filtered through different narrative perspectives; 3) Voice, analyzing narrative levels (who speaks and from where) and narrative distance (how close or far the narrator is from the events or characters), and person. These tools provide a systematic way to identify how the novel organizes and delivers its narrative, which is essential for understanding how form shapes meaning.

By combining Genette's structural analysis with queer lens, this study seeks to understand how the form of *Lelaki Terindah* contributes to representing queer experience. This method provides a bridge between structural analysis and interpretive insight, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how *Lelaki Terindah* not only tells a queer story, but tells it queerly—that is, in a way that challenges dominant norms and reflects the complexities of queer life in Indonesia..

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 1) Order

This table below presents the general events in the novel. It's important to note that there are frequent jumps and other forms of anachrony throughout the text. However, for the purpose of this paper—which focuses specifically on analepsis and is limited in length—the discussion will highlight the order of dominant narrative structures. These include the frame story between *Aku and Rafky*, and the main story between *Rafky and Valent*. Here is the outline of narrative order:

**Table 1.** Narrative Event Sequence.

| No. | Narrative Position / Event | Order Type |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Aku meets Rafky at the airport, Rafky request to write his story with Valent. | Present |
| 2 | Aku reflects on Rafky's request to write the story | Present |
| 3 | Rafky and Valent meet on the flight and decide to stay together | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 4 | Aku and Rafky discuss more about the storytelling | Present |
| 5 | Rafky and Valent's Traveling in Thailand begins | Flashback |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | Back to Aku dan Rafky's in the writing process | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 7 | More traveling scenes with Rafky and Valent | Flashback |
| 8 | Hotel scene, Rafky learns about Valent's health condition | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 9 | Aku hesitates writing the explicit scene | Present |
| 10 | The night Rafky and Valent have sex | Flashback |
| 11 | Rafky's inner turmoil, blames Valent of what happen the night before | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 12 | Valent's background explained | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 13 | Valent tries to leave; Rafky reconciles | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 14 | Rafky and Valent to stay together for the rest of the time they have left in Thailand | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 15 | Aku and Rafky decide to go on a trip to Thailand for detail purposes | Present |
| 16 | Parallel narrative: Aku–Rafky & Rafky–Valent in Thailand | Back and forth (Present time and Flashback) |
| 17 | Rafky and Valent returns to Indonesia, maintains secret relationships. | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 18 | Rafky forcely confesses to Rhea, family finds out. | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 19 | Aku feels emotional burden of writing the story almost not be able to finished it, but Rafky conviced him back. | Present |
| 20 | Valent's wedding preparation; coming out to Kinan; Conflict with his Valent's mom. | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 21 | Valent and Rafky try to flee together but fail because Valent cannot leave his mom alone; but his health declines, Valent is hospitalized. | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 22 | Valent's health temporarily improves, then declines again after wedding plan pressures from his Mom. | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 23 | Aku reflects on Rafky's and Valent experiences. | Present |
| 24 | Valent dies | Flashback (Analepsis) |
| 25 | Aku and Rafky visit Valent's grave; Aku refuses to stay with Rafky as his job writing the story is done; ends story | Present |

It becomes evident that the chronological story time—or what Genette refers to as the *histoire*—places the love story between Rafky and Valent as the foundational narrative. This love story unfolds first in the timeline of events. However, in terms of narrative time—or the *récit*, the order in which the story is presented to the reader—the narrative begins with Aku meeting Rafky, which frames the story as a retrospective account. Rafky asks Aku to write the story of his past love, and from there, the story shifts back and forth between the present (Aku and Rafky's interactions) and the past (Rafky and Valent's relationship).

This structure creates what Gérard Genette classifies as an anachrony, or a divergence between the chronological sequence of events and their narrated order (35). The dominant technique used here is analepsis, or flashback, in which past events are recalled after the narrative has already begun. Most of these analepses are external

analepses—they refer to events that occurred before the start of the present narrative situation (the meeting between Aku and Rafky) (49). However, there is a critical ambiguity here: while structurally, Aku's perspective appears to be the narrative frame, emotionally, the story of Rafky and Valent serves as the main narrative. Therefore, one could argue that what appears to be "external" analepsis is, in fact, internal to the true center of the story.

More specifically, these flashbacks function as completing analepses, meaning they fill in gaps in the narrative that were skipped over initially (51). For example, after Rafky introduces Valent, the narrative does not proceed linearly but instead jumps around to earlier key moments in their relationship—meeting on the plane, early travels in Thailand, their emotional and physical intimacy, conflicts, and eventual tragic separation. These non-linear insertions serve not to create confusion but to layer emotional context and gradually deepen the reader's understanding of Rafky's turmoil and loss.

While analepsis is the dominant form of anachrony in the novel, there are traces of other types worth mentioning. Some moments in the narrative include prolepsis—brief anticipations of what will happen in the future (67), such as hints at the outcome of Valent's death or illness, or the eventual impossibility of their union. There are also moments of ellipsis, where certain events or time spans are omitted, especially between emotionally or narratively dense chapters. Retrospective narration is a constant feature, and sometimes the narrator hints at antecedents—events prior even to the events shown in the flashbacks, such as the familial or psychological backgrounds of the characters. However, discussing all these forms in full detail would require a much longer analysis and is thus beyond the scope of this discussion.

At last, while a full narratological mapping would explore multiple layers of Genette's anachronic typologies—prolepsis, ellipsis, iterative, singulative narration, and others—this analysis focuses on the core narrative strategy: completing analepsis. This allows us to understand how *Lelaki Terindah* uses time not just as structure but as meaning—where memory is called upon to reconstruct, and in doing so, re-valorize, a queer love that was once lived and now must be grieved.

**2) Mood**

Mood in Genette's narratology consists of two primary components: distance—how the story is rendered (e.g., directly or indirectly, showing vs. telling), and focalization (30)—who perceives the events, and how much narrative information is filtered through that character's perspective. In the previous discussion on narrative order, we noted the presence of two interwoven storylines, each with its own distinct mood. The following section will explore the dominant mood within one of these strands, focusing on an excerpt that centers on the characters Aku and Rafky, then Rafky and Valent.

Excerpt 1 (Aku & Rafky):

*"Hanya kau yang bisa menuliskan kisah ini…," pintanya parau.*

…

*"Aku mencintai seorang laki-laki… lelaki terindah…"*

*Aku tercengang, seperti ditampar hujan topan…* (17)

["Only you can write this story…," he pleaded hoarsely.

…

"I loved a man… the most beautiful man…"

I was stunned, as if slapped by a raging storm…]

As for the distance of the narration in this excerpt, it is highly mimetic, creating an immediate and emotionally charged scene. The use of stylized dialogue and vivid metaphors draws the reader into the moment, enhancing the sense of presence. Speech is rendered as transposed discourse—for example, *"'Aku mencintai seorang laki-laki,' sahutnya pedih..."*—which suggests narrated rather than direct speech, yet retains emotional weight. In addition, the character Aku's reactions are narratized, not quoted: "Aku tercengang... kulepaskan tangannya..." This approach does not offer complete immersion like interior monologue, but it achieves a medium-close distance, effectively blurring the line between

telling and showing. The result is a dramatized and emotionally resonant mood that amplifies the scene's tension and intimacy.

As for perspective, this passage is clearly an instance of internal focalization, fixed through the character Aku. The narrative unfolds entirely from Aku's point of view, focusing on his perceptions, bodily responses, and emotional reactions. We experience the scene through his internal lens, with no direct access to the thoughts or inner world of the other character. Everything the reader learns about the situation is filtered through Aku's consciousness—what he sees, hears, and feels. This creates a subjective and emotionally intimate narrative perspective, grounding the scene in Aku's personal experience.

Summary for Excerpt 1 (Aku & Rafky):

**Table 2.** Focalization and Narrative Distance.

| Aspect | Analysis |
|---|---|
| Distance | Medium-close; reported speech and mimetic narration evoke a vivid scene |
| Focalization | Internal (fixed on Aku); all emotions and perceptions are Aku's |

Excerpt 2 (Rafky & Valent):

*Rafky dan Valent diantar dari bandara menuju hotel… Rafky terperanjat dan gemas… "Bangkok berkembang pesat…" kata Valent…* (47)

[Rafky and Valent were escorted from the airport to the hotel… Rafky was startled and amused… "Bangkok has developed so fast…" said Valent…]

As for the distance, this passage is primarily narrated in style, yet it carries a clear internal inflection. For example, the line *"Rafky terperanjat dan gemas… Protes sudah menyerbu…"* reflects transposed thought—we are not given direct access to Rafky's inner monologue, nor are his reactions fully summarized. Instead, his emotional state is conveyed through a blend of narrated consciousness and narrative commentary, capturing his subjective response in a mediated way. Although dialogue is present, lending a sense of realism and immediacy, the narrator's voice remains evident. The result is a medium distance: the reader is aware of Rafky's emotions, but not immersed in them through unfiltered interiority.

And for the focalization / perspective, this scene is clearly internally focalized through Rafky. The reader gains insight into Rafky's feelings—such as surprise, irritation, and suppressed protest—while Valent's internal world remains inaccessible. Despite being told in the third person, the narrative consistently answers the question "Who sees?" with Rafky. The external narration is thus tightly bound to his perspective, shaping the reader's understanding of events through his emotional and perceptual lens.

Summary for excerpt 2 (Rafky & Valent)

**Table 3.** Rafky's Narrative Perspective.

| Aspect | Analysis |
|---|---|
| Distance | Medium; we know what Rafky feels, but it's mediated through narration |
| Focalization | Internal (fixed on Rafky); limited to Rafky's consciousness |

**3) Voice**

Focusing on four main aspects: the narrating instances that frame the storytelling, the time of narrating in relation to the events narrated, the shifts across narrative levels, and the narrator type and person used throughout the novel. These elements together reveal how the story is structured and how the narrator's position shapes the emotional and temporal flow of the narrative:

1. Narrating Instance

In Lelaki Terindah, the narrative operates on two stories, each with a different narrating instance. In the scenes involving Aku and Rafky, the narrator is "Aku" himself—a participant in the events, engaging in both dialogue and action. This makes Aku a homodiegetic narrator, as he narrates from within the story he inhabits. In contrast, the

story of Rafky and Valent, which shifts to a more detached mode. Here, the narration becomes heterodiegetic, recounting events in which Aku is not present. Though Rafky's emotional journey is central, he never directly narrates his own story. Instead, his life is filtered through Aku's framing, potentially based on Rafky's own retellings, but not voiced in Rafky's own narrative instance. This layering creates a complex narrative dynamic, where Aku mediates the core emotional narrative of Rafky without becoming its central subject.

2. Time of Narration

The dominant mode of narration throughout the text is subsequent narration, where events are recounted after they have taken place (216). This applies to both narrative layers: Aku is reflecting on his past interactions with Rafky, and Rafky's relationship with Valent is also rendered retrospectively. However, moments of interpolated or seemingly simultaneous narration emerge, especially in emotionally charged or dialogue-driven scenes. These moments mimic real-time unfolding through heightened dramatic immediacy, giving the impression of "narration in action," despite being structurally retrospective. While further analysis may be required to determine whether genuine simultaneous narration is at play, the stylistic effect strongly suggests an attempt to collapse narrative distance in key moments.

3. Narrative Levels

Genette's model of narrative levels—extradiegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic—is also applicable in the structure of Lelaki Terindah. The extradiegetic level consists of the framing narrative, where Aku recounts his personal encounters with Rafky. The intradiegetic level contains the embedded story of Rafky's past relationship with Valent. There may be brief instances of metadiegetic narration, such as when Rafky shares memories that involve other characters' stories (e.g., Valent's childhood), but these are minimal and not the focus of the current analysis. For clarity, the primary analytical framework centers on the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels, which structure the majority of the novel's voice dynamics.

4. Narrator Type (Person and Position)

In Genette's typology, narrators are further categorized by their position relative to the story world, which is term as person come about (244). In the Aku–Rafky narrative, Aku is a homodiegetic narrator, involved in the story though not its central figure. When the narrative shifts to Rafky and Valent, the narration becomes heterodiegetic, as the narrator does not appear as a character and simply reports the events. Notably, Rafky does not tell his own story directly, so this cannot be classified as autodiegetic narration. Instead, Rafky's narrative is mediated through Aku, who serves as a narrative conduit rather than a direct witness or subject. This separation highlights the emotional and structural layering of voice in the novel, underscoring how personal narratives are often refracted through the perspectives of others.

Summary Table for Voice

**Table 4.** Summary of Narrative Voice.

| Aspect | Aku dan Valent's | Rafky & Valent's |
|---|---|---|
| Narrating Instance | Involved narrator (Aku) | Observing narrator (not present) |
| Time of Narration | Subsequent | Subsequent (recounted) |
| Narrative Level | Extradiegetic | Intradiegetic |
| Narrator Type | Homodiegetic | Heterodiegetic |
| Person | Aku (not central in story) | Rafky (but not the narrator himself) |

## 4. Discussion

The narrative structure of Lelaki Terindah—marked by its layered storytelling, shifting moods, and complex narrator positioning—cannot be read as merely stylistic

choices. Rather, these formal features reflect the deep social and psychological implications of being queer in a predominantly heteronormative and often homophobic Indonesian context. The narrative's form mirrors the very conditions under which queer lives are lived, remembered, and voiced: displaced, mediated, fragmented, and often unspeakable.

One of the most significant narrative decisions is that Rafky does not directly narrate his own story. Despite being the central figure in the romantic and tragic relationship with Valent, he is not the narrator. His voice is mediated through Aku, a secondary character, who acts as a kind of witness, listener, and finally narrator. This is not just a formal choice—it is a reflection of the silencing of queer voices in Indonesian society. In a culture where same-sex desire is stigmatized, marginalized, and often violently denied legitimacy, queer individuals may lack the safe space, power, or social legitimacy to speak their truth directly. Rafky's inability or unwillingness to tell his own story becomes a narrative symptom of his repression and trauma.

The narrative order, dominated by analepsis (flashbacks), further reflects this queer disorientation. The story is not told linearly. Instead, it unfolds in back-and-forth movements, often hesitantly, suggestively, and incompletely, could related to his traumatic experiences. Rafky's memories return not as a clear and coherent autobiography, but as emotional fragments recalled by Aku—highlighting the incomplete, disjointed, and mediated way trauma enters narrative.

Moreover, the changes in mood and voice across the novel serve to amplify the emotional and social contradictions queer individuals must navigate. The confessional scenes are narrated with intense emotional closeness, mimicking dramatic immediacy. These moments reflect a longing for intimacy and recognition. In contrast, scenes from Rafky's relationship with Valent are often recounted through a more distanced voice and external focalization, suggesting emotional repression, social concealment, and narrative control. This fluctuation between closeness and distance can be interpreted as a formal response to living in the closet: the narrative is always negotiating what can be said, how it can be said, and who is allowed to say it.

The extradiegetic-intradiegetic narrative level division also reinforces the theme of queer disempowerment. While Rafky's life story is the emotional heart of the novel, it is embedded within another's voice. He becomes the subject of a story, rather than its teller. In a context of institutional and cultural homophobia—where homosexuality may be met with public shame, familial rejection, or forced conformity—this displacement reflects the real-world impossibility for many queer Indonesians to claim authorship over their own narratives.

In this way, *Lelaki Terindah* can be read as an act of queer witnessing. Aku, the narrator, becomes the one who not only listens to Rafky's story but assumes the responsibility of telling it. This mirrors broader activist or literary strategies in queer communities: when direct speech is unsafe or inaccessible, stories are passed through others, not to erase the original voice, but to preserve it in the only way possible under hostile conditions.

Ultimately, the narrative form—the shifts in voice, the recursive order, the emotional registers—all enact what we might call a queer narratology of trauma and silencing. The novel does not just tell a story about homophobia—it performs it through form. Rafky's inability to speak directly, the fragmentation of his memories, the oscillation between emotional exposure and narrative restraint—all of these techniques convey not only personal struggle but also a larger cultural condition in which queer experience must always negotiate visibility, safety, and expression.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of *Lelaki Terindah* through Genette's narratological lens—particularly focusing on narrative order, mood, and voice—reveals how formal narrative strategies are deeply entangled with the representation of queer experience under social constraint. The

novel's fragmented temporal structure, shifting focalization, and layered narrative levels reflect more than literary technique; they perform the instability, silence, and trauma that often characterize queer life in a heteronormative and homophobic culture such as Indonesia's.

The choice to frame Rafky's life through the voice of Aku, and to rely on back-and-forth analepses rather than a linear chronology, highlights a fundamental inaccessibility to narrative ownership—a condition familiar to many queer individuals whose stories are suppressed, delayed, or only ever told indirectly. The novel's mood transitions, oscillating between emotional intimacy and detached reporting, further reinforce the difficulty of navigating personal truth in a world that demands silence or shame.

For queer narratives, storytelling often becomes a space of negotiation. Fragmented timelines, shifts in perspective, unreliable narrators, or the use of indirect or poetic language can reflect the complex realities of queer existence—experiences of erasure, longing, fear, or disidentification. These formal strategies are not merely aesthetic choices; they can function as narrative enactments of marginality, conveying the silences, discontinuities, or hidden codes necessitated by living outside normative frameworks.

Such narrative techniques do not simply reflect trauma—they become narrative symptoms of it, where telling becomes fragmented, displaced, or impossible. In this way, Lelaki Terindah does not merely represent queerness; it queers narrative itself, bending voice, time, and structure to mirror the complexity of queer survival and memory within a repressive cultural environment.

**Suggestions for Further Study**

While this study has focused on narrative order, mood, and voice, future research could expand to include all of Genette's narratological categories to deepen the analysis of queer storytelling. Further distinctions in order—such as types of analepsis and prolepsis—could illuminate how queer memory resists linear time. Examining duration might reveal how moments of intimacy or trauma are stretched, rushed, or omitted. A study of frequency—iterative vs. singulative narration—could expose patterns of repetition or erasure in queer narratives. In terms of mood, a more detailed focalization analysis might reflect how shame, resistance, or authority shape narrative perspective. Exploring voice, particularly metadiegetic levels, could show how queer testimony is mediated or displaced, especially through figures like Aku. Integrating interdisciplinary approaches, such as queer theory, trauma studies, and Indonesian socio-political frameworks, would further highlight how queer narratives are not only crafted by authors but also shaped—and often constrained—by the cultures in which they are told.

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