

CHAPTER II

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Character and Characterization

A character is one of the most basic aspects of fiction. A character in a novel is a representation of a human being in a narrative, by which an author gives voice to human experience, desire, and conflict. E.M. Forster on his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) does not offer a direct definition of character, however, he writes “people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed” (Forster, 1927, p. 74). This could be considered a working definition of literary character: fictional person whose inner life; thoughts, desires, motivations, and contradictions, is fully accessible to the reader, in a way that real people never are. The characters are the main way that readers interact with a story. It is in their speech, their decisions and reactions to pressure that they demonstrate what they are like and what they value.

There are two types of characters in fiction. Forster divides it by: flat and round. He claims that flat characters are created on one basis and quality: “In their purest state, they are built around a single quality or idea” (Forster, 1927. P. 103). They are not developed or changed throughout the story, and often can be expressed in one sentence. In terms of their role in the story, they function as practical, are easily identifiable and do not need to be introduced, and they offer contrast that enhances the characterization of more complex characters. Round characters, on the

other hand, are much more complex. Forster suggest the following simple but effective test for round characters: The test of a round character is whether it can surprise in a believable manner. If a character never supprises, he is flat” (Forster, 1927, p. 118). They have internal conflicts and they have the power to change. Fishelov also provides a general definition of round characters as “figures that can be seen from many angles. They are not only easy to relate but also to feel compassion for” (p. 426).

An author builds and portrays these characters to the reader through the process of characterization. It is not just a technical or stylistic choice, but also a thematic one, that is, it is related to what the character represents in the whole book. Characterization, according to Schwarz, is “a trope, a figure or vehicle for a character formally realized by an author in an aesthetic culture” (p. 90). He also claims that characterization is a dialogue; it is a process in which the author, narrator, and reader take part in building meaning about a character. Charcaterization is the process of making the writer’s fictional characters seem like real people and at the same time symbolizing them as representing social and/or psychological issues (Schwarz, p. 91).

2.2 Setting

Setting is an essential element of fiction. William Kenney in his book with a titled *How to Analyze Fiction* (1966) describes setting as “that element of fiction which tells us when and where the events of the plot occur” (Kenney, 1966, p, 38). In other words, setting “is the time and place in which the events of the plot take

place. However setting is not a simple background or backdrop against which action takes place. Kenney believes that the setting “may thrust itself dynamically into the action, affecting events and being in turn affected by them, until setting seems to assume the role of a major character” (Kenney, 1966, p. 40). In this sense, setting is shaping characters, limiting their options, and influencing the pressure they encounter.

Kenney specifies four aspects of setting: the geographical location, what people do in their daily lives, when the story takes place (historical period) and the religious, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional world of the character (Kenney, p. 41). These four elements work together to construct the world the character inhabit. Characters have to deal with social rules and cultural assumptions which are specific to the historical period in which they are set. The social and moral environment, on the other hand, determines what is suitable and what is not. In addition to these, Kenney also differentiates neutral and spiritual settings. In a neutral setting, the author’s focus is on plot or character, and the setting is sketched in just enough to make setting believable to the reader. The values that the physical embodies are alternatively defines as “spiritual setting”. The more physical setting is detailed and vividly drawn, the more vivid are the values it represents.

2.3 Conflict

Conflict is the power that drives the story. Conflict is necessary for a story, since there is no story without conflict; conflict is what makes things interesting and raises the stakes and provides for characters to struggle against. As opposed to a fight, which is the engagement of opposing forces, conflict is a fight in which

something is being threatened (Perrine, 2009, p. 42); it is what keeps readers turning pages and making it their mission to find out how the opposition will be settled and what it will do to the characters themselves. There are two types of conflict, which literary scholars generally classify.

Internal conflict is the internal friction that occurs when a character is torn between competing thoughts, feelings, or desires, and has to make choices about their personality and what is important to them. External conflict, however, is conflict between a character and an outside force, whether a character or an outside force such as social norms or institutions, natural forces, or fate or circumstance. In reality, these two types of conflict are seldom distinct. A character who must resist the expectations of her society is also, at the same time, fighting their own battle over whether or not they should conform to those expectations, what is right, and what they are willing to sacrifice to gain their own independence. That makes conflict a truly dynamic and fruitful component of fiction. It is not just a device to drive the story. It shows character, points out values and paradoxes of the story's world, and creates the sort of dramatic tension that makes a story emotionally charged. Thus, the kinds and purpose of conflict are vital to the analysis of character development and meaning of a narrative.

2.4 The Mother as a Trigger of Matrophobia

Oppression is not just on the outside for women in patriarchal societies. From an early age, they are also socialized into patriarchy. This is the process of internalizing misogyny, when the negative values that society holds about women enter into women's own minds and are accepted as "the way things are," rather than as a product of a particular social system. This is a slow process, and it makes women unable to recognize that their own thoughts have been shaped by a misogynistic system, since these thoughts feel entirely natural. In the context of motherhood, this process becomes the mechanism through which a mother transmits patriarchal values to her daughter, often without realizing it. Rich describes patriarchy as something far more pervasive than laws or force. Regardless of her class or circumstances, regardless of her sexual orientation, a woman is "under the power of the fathers" and can enjoy privilege or influence "only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval" (Rich, 1976, p. 58). Rich's point is that women cannot simply step outside of patriarchal power through individual choices. It sets the framework by which women learn about themselves, what they value, and the way they raise their daughters. A mother who is born into this system will pass its values on to her daughter not as ideology, but because it is normal to her that she does not even recognize it as ideology (Rich, 1976, p. 26). Her love for her daughter is genuine, but it has been shaped by a blueprint that dictates what her daughter's life should look like, and that is what makes the transmission difficult to see and so difficult to resist.

2.4.1 Patriarchal Values in Patriarchal Motherhood

Before one can come to an understanding of how a mother becomes a transmitter of patriarchal values, one must first understand what the institution of motherhood demands of women. In patriarchal societies, motherhood is not left undefined. It is constructed with great intention: a clear image is built of what a good mother is supposed to be. Over time, these constructions become so embedded in culture, religion, and daily social life that women raised within them come to internalize them as their own values. This is the mechanism through which patriarchal motherhood operates: the system's demands become the mother's own beliefs. Rich is specific about what the institution requires of women. It demands "maternal instinct" over "intelligence", "selflessness" over "self realization" and "relation to others" over the creation of self (Rich, p. 42). Rich's point is that the institution does not simply ask mothers to care for their children. It requires them to sacrifice their own thinking, their own personality, and their own aspirations in order to become a caregiver. A mother who has learned to be selfless in this way will then pass the same understanding on to her daughter, not as ideology, but as the natural meaning of what it is to be a woman.

There is also an emotional toll that comes with this, Rich argues. She writes that "love and anger can coexist in the mother, anger at the circumstances of being a mother can be translated into anger at the child," and that "grief at what a mother cannot provide becomes translated into guilt and self-laceration" (Rich, p. 52). Rich is articulating the effect of the institution on mothers, how it keeps them in a state

of emotional contradiction. They feel genuine love and responsibility toward their children, but they also carry resentment about their own lives, resentment they were never empowered or acknowledge. This unexamined tension is then passed on to the daughter, not through deliberate cruelty but through the emotional environment of the family, what the mother takes for granted, and what she allows her daughter to take for granted.

2.4.2 Construction of Ideal Womanhood

In every patriarchal society, an image is formed of what the ideal woman looks like. This image is not neutral. It is designed to make women useful to a system that needs their cooperation. The ideal woman in a male-dominated world is outward-directed, content to serve rather than to be served, and measures her own worth by her ability to fulfill the roles assigned to her as wife and mother. Women who do not fit this image, those who pursue careers or strive toward other goals, have traditionally been treated as problems to be managed rather than as free agents.

This vision of ideal womanhood is not handed down explicitly. It is absorbed over years through the examples set by the women in a daughter's life, primarily her mother, and through social pressure and observation. Rich notes that throughout history women have been told to "stick to motherhood" (Rich, p. 40) and that intellectual or creative ambitions have been deemed inappropriate, inconsequential, or an attempt to become "like men" (Rich, p. 40). Rich is pointing to a long and deliberate history of discouraging women from developing their own intellectual and creative capacities, framing such development as unnatural or threatening. A mother who has absorbed these messages will pass them on to her daughter,

typically not through direct prohibition, but through quieter signals, about what is realistic, what is appropriate, and what kind of life woman can reasonably hope to have.

What makes this construction so effective is that it rarely comes through explicit teaching. It comes through experience, through the daughter watching her mother over many years of shared life. She sees what her mother praises, what she discourages, and what she never speaks about at all. The deepest influence is not what is said but what is assumed: that limitation is natural, inevitable, and simply part of what it means to be a woman. This imprinting happens within the mother-daughter relationship, transmitted not through force but through love and trust, and not as ideology but as the shape of a woman's life.

2.4.3 Regulation of Female Behavior and Sexuality

Control of female sexuality is one of the central mechanisms through which patriarchy perpetuates itself. An independent woman who acts on her own desires is a direct threat to a system that depends on male control and ownership of women. Every patriarchal society has invested energy in defining what is considered "normal" and "abnormal" in female sexuality, and the family with mother as its primary transmitter, is frequently the first and most important site where these boundaries are enforced. Rich argues that "behaviour which threatens the institution is always defined as as deviant criminal" (Rich, p. 42). The institution of motherhood and the system of patriarchy actively monitor women's behaviour, treating anything outside the approved model as a form of failure or danger. A mother who absorbed these definition will monitor her daughter's conduct

accordingly, not to control her, but because she has been taught that this is what responsible motherhood looks like.

Rich also identifies something more nuanced operating beneath the explicit rules. Mothers can pass their own shame and self-doubt on to their daughters without ever speaking it aloud. Rich writes that a mother “can also transmit her own guilt and self-hatred to her daughter’s life” (Rich, p. 244). This transmission happens without words, through discomfort, through avoided subjects, and through unspoken messages about what feelings and choices are acceptable for a woman. The daughter absorbs all of this without being explicitly taught, and it becomes the foundation of how she feels about her own body and her own desires.

2.4.4 Transmission of Patriarchal Values

All of the characteristics described above share one defining quality: the mother does not need to be aware of what she is doing in order to do it. This is what makes the transmission of patriarchal values so persistent and so difficult to disrupt. The mother is not imposing a system she consciously endorses. She is doing what she was raised to do, loving her daughter in the only way she knows, and passing on values that feel to her like common sense rather than ideology. The harm she causes is real, but it is entirely compatible with genuine love and that is what makes it so difficult to see and resist. Rich addresses this paradox directly when she writes that “the anxious pressure of one female upon another to play a degrading and dispiriting role can hardly be called mothering, though she does it in the hope that it will make her daughter’s life easier” (Rich, p. 243). Rich’s observation is uncomfortable but precise: a mother’s sincere belief that she is helping her daughter

does not neutralize the harm of what she is passing on. Her intentions cannot be blamed, but neither can they erase the effect.

The Mother's "and low expectations are the binding-rags for the psyche of the daughter," Rich (1976, p. 243) continues. It is significant that this image of binding-rags exists. Rich is not claiming that the mother just discourages her daughter clearly. She is implying that the mother's perception of her own limitations encases the daughter's own sense of self within it and that this sense of limitation is self-imposed. This is not oppression that the daughter feels from the outside. She feels it is hers and hers alone; its nature is her very own sense of who she is and who she can be, given to her by the one person she trusts best, in the form of love. This is why it is so difficult to break the patriarchy, and so difficult to undo its effects on society.

2.5 Matrophobia and Its Impact

The daughter's value and behavior are not the only things shaped by growing up within this dynamic. As the daughter matures and begins to assert her own identity, a particular psychological emerges, one that Rich drawing on a term coined by the poet Lynn Sukenick, calls "matrophobia." Rich develops this concept in *Of Woman Born* to describe what happens to daughters who grow up within a patriarchal family structure. It is important to understand this fear clearly. Rich defines matrophobia as "the fear not of one's mother, or of motherhood, but becoming one's mother" (Rich, p. 235). The daughter does not fear her mother as a

person. She fears being trapped in the same circumstances if she does not fight against them.

Rich discusses the split in the self as the psychological component of this in her own words. Matrophobia is defined by her as “a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (Rich, 1976: 235-236); the mother represents the “unfree woman, the martyr” (Rich, 1976: 236). When Rich says this, she really means the daughter sees the mother as a person, and as the symbol of all she does not want to be. “Patriarchy prepared the mother for all women,” says Rich, and the daughter feels her identity is uncomfortably close to her mother, so she does what Rich calls “radical surgery” to try and see where one ends and the other begins (Rich, 1976, p. 236). Rich knows that matrophobia is nothing to be embarrassed of or that it is a failure on the part of the child or the relationship. The mother’s guilt about being a mother is a structural response to the situation in which the patriarchy has placed her and the daughter in, and a structural response to the situation in which the patriarchy has placed the daughter in is not a structural response to the patriarchy. It shows itself as her mother.

2.5.1 Maternal Influence in Female Identity Formation

One of the most lasting effects of growing up with a mother who transmits patriarchal values is the way it shapes how the daughter forms her sense of identity and her understanding of what kind of life is available to her. Identity formation is not something that happens in isolation. It happens through relationships, through observation, and through the slow process of absorbing the values and assumptions

of the people closest to us. The mother will typically be the strongest model that a daughter has for what it looks like to be a woman. The daughter will internalize the limits imposed upon the mother, not just by what she says, but it will be the way she says it, the things she takes for granted, the things she resigns herself to, the things she never asks for herself.

Rich states that the mother's own self-perception is one factor which directly influences the developing sense of self in her daughter. She writes that the mother's "self-hatred and low expectations are the binding-rags for the psyche of the daughter" (Rich, 1976, p. 243), which means that a mother who has learned not to trust her own abilities or to see her own ambitions as inappropriate will communicate this to her daughter in quiet and persistent ways, through the hesitation she shows when her daughter reaches for something bigger, or through the way she frames ambition as impractical without ever saying directly that women should not have ambitions.

Rich also calls attention to a particular pattern, the double messages. According to her, the motto, "You can be anything you really want to be, is a 'half-truth', and what daughters really need is 'the truth: what lies ahead is difficult if not impossible' rather than 'the fearful subliminal message: Don't go too far'" (Rich, 1976, p. 248). Rich is referring to one of the things that well-meaning moms sometimes say to daughters, such as: "The world is yours to explore." Then they give them just a small taste of what is out there. But she also comments that mothers who are otherwise open and communicative "leave their daughters in the dark as to

the expectations and stereotypes, false promises and ill-faith, awaiting them in the world” (Rich, 1976, p. 248). The daughter becomes a girl who was told she can do anything but has not been taught the mechanisms that work against her, and the conflict between what she was promised and what she experiences is one of the pivotal issues in her self-definition.

2.5.2 Psychological Impact of Matrophobia

The daughter cannot be passive or unaffected when growing up with an unknowing mother who is a transmitter of patriarchy. As she grows older and begins to form a sense of her own life goals, she experiences the conflict between what she is expected, as opposed to what she wants for herself. Under these conditions, there are two reactions; resistance and anxiety, which run concurrently and mutually reinforce. This is because her mother’s image of a woman is one she has become more aware of and cannot live without without losing something crucial about herself. The anxiety is caused by the person who has her anxiety is the person she loves the most and who she has relied on her all her life. These feelings do not negate one another. Sitting side-by-side, they make everything more complicated.

The daughter is more likely to be able to “hate and reject a mother outright”, notes Rich (1976, p. 235), because it is “easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her.” What Rich is saying here is that it is quite hard for the daughter’s resistance to focus on the system, since the system does not present itself to her as a system. It manifests in her mother, in one who loves her and attempts to help her. This is that nearly always the daughter’s resistance is accompanied by guilt. To defy her mother is not a matter of self-

determination but a betrayal of someone deserving of no betrayal. Rich also points out that the daughter's separations are always partial. This means they have too much history, they have similar social statuses, and they have had a lot of the same formative experiences for the separation to feel clean or final. This ongoing confusion between her mother and herself produces a longing to feel anxious about the kind of woman she is becoming.

2.6 Matrophobia as Rejection of Patriarchal Reproduction

As the daughter's resistance and anxiety become more physical, she becomes a mother. The daughter's resistance and anxiety become more tangible and she becomes a mother. Where there is a conflict, there is a rejection. This rejection is not a rejection of the rules of her parents, nor a mere judgment by the mother as a person. It is, in essence, a structural response to the recognition of her mother's life as a pattern set up by patriarchy for all women, irrespective of what anyone wishes or is able to do. The daughter observes her mother's passive compromises, unfulfilled dreams, and relentless subservient role in all aspects of life, and she knows it is a life that awaits her as well if she does not fight back. Rich is referring to the fact that the daughter's rejection of the mother represents her "rejection of victimhood, the unfree woman, the martyr" (Rich, 1976, p. 236). She does not mean to reject her mother as a person. She is not passing on the silent expenses.

But this rejection is not just ideological, it is complicated: it is not possible to reject from a distance. The daughter must say no to the life that her mother is willing to give, but live in the relationship anyway, still desire the person she says no to. Rich admits that this is painful, that there is a mixture of love and resistance in matrophobia, and a lack of resolution between these two forces. Rich also notes that “daughters in this situation are confronted with two unfinished possibilities, they struggle to transcend the existing possibilities and they will do so only so far, “because nobody has told her how far there is to go” (Rich, 1976, p. 248). As there is no blueprint of the depth of the system nor of what resistance is truly possible, the daughter is caught between a life she is denying and a freedom she cannot yet envision.

However, matrophobia is not just about what the daughter is rejecting. It is as much as what she is reaching for. As the daughter is able to perceive the price the mother has paid, the matrophobic impulse becomes more intense: “I want to be rid of my mother’s bondage forever and to become individuated and free” (Rich, 1976, p. 235). Rich believes that if this transmission of “love, confirmation and example” is not received from mother to daughter over the generations that “women will still be wandering in the wilderness” (Rich, 1976, p. 246). When mother cannot provide this affirmation, which mother never had, the daughter’s need to be her own self and her yearning for a different life merge into one: the yearning for a life that is also hers and the fear of being her mother.

2.7 Method of Data Collection

This research uses library research as its method of data collection. The primary source is Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), and the writer gathers quotes from the text, making careful close readings of relevant passages. This close reading will concentrate on scenes and moments that shed light on the relationship between Esther and Mrs. Greenwood, and what is going on psychologically with Esther as she is a conduit for transmitting patriarchal values to her. Passages are chosen because they are relevant to the two research questions that guide this research.

The secondary data are the theoretical works and scholarly works which give conceptual framework for analysis. The major theoretical basis comes from Adrienne Rich's 1976 work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, which offers the ideas of matrophobia and the institution of motherhood. Other secondary sources include scholarly articles about feminist literary criticism, as well as previous research on *The Bell Jar*. The analytical approach that is used in this study is the method of Feminist literary criticism, which will be carried out by reading a novel with a critical approach that is close to the text, examining the characters, conflicts and themes in the novel in relation to the patriarchal structure that has influenced the novel.