

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

2.1.1.1 Character and Characterization

As defined by Holman (1972, pp. 90), character most often refers to a person represented in a literary work, but the term also denotes a literary form that flourished in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and France: a brief sketch portraying not an individualized personality, but a recognizable type embodying a particular virtue or vice, such as a busybody, a country bumpkin, or a garrulous old man.

Holman (1972, pp. 90-93) further explains that the creation of believable images of imaginary persons, credible enough that they exist for the reader within the limits of the fiction, is called characterization, and identifies three fundamental methods authors use to achieve it: (1) explicit presentation, in which the author directly describes the character's attributes through exposition, either in a single introductory passage or in pieces throughout the work; (2) presentation through action, in which the author offers little or no explicit comment, expecting the reader to deduce the character's attributes from what the character does; and (3) presentation through inner consciousness, in which a character's attributes are revealed from within, through their thoughts and emotions, without authorial comment. He notes that these methods are difficult to separate from the question of

narrative point of view, since the explicit method is most effective when paired with a first-person or omniscient narrator, while the second and third methods rely on dramatic or psychological technique rather than direct narration.

2.1.1.2 Conflict

Holman (1972, pp. 118-119) explains that conflict arises from the interplay of two opposing forces within a plot, providing the element of interest and suspense found in any work of fiction, whether drama, novel, or short story. He identifies four basic kinds of conflict a protagonist may face: a struggle against the forces of nature, a struggle against another person or antagonist, and a struggle against society as a collective force—each representing a form of external conflict, in which the protagonist contends with forces outside himself—as well as a struggle between two elements within the protagonist for mastery, representing internal conflict. Holman notes that a single, simple conflict is rare in a plot; more often a work contains a complex interplay of two or more of these elements at once, and that conflict is inseparable from the existence of some motivation driving the protagonist toward a goal.

2.1.1.3 Setting

As explained by Holman (1972, p. 491), setting refers to “the physical, and sometimes spiritual, background against which the action of a narrative takes place.” The elements that constitute a setting include the actual geographical location with its topography, scenery, and physical arrangements such as the location of windows and doors in a room; the occupations and daily manner of living of the characters; the time or period in which the action takes place, such as

a specific epoch in history or season of the year; and the general environment of the characters, including religious, mental, moral, social, and emotional conditions through which the people in the narrative move. Setting can dominate a narrative when a piece of fiction is written largely to present the manners and customs of a locality, in which case the writing may be called local color writing or regionalism.

2.1.2 Related Extrinsic Element Theories

According to Walby (1990, p. 20), patriarchy “can be defined as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.” Walby emphasizes that the term social structure is deliberately used to reject both biological determinism and the assumption that every individual man holds a dominant position while every individual woman holds a subordinate one; rather, patriarchy operates at the level of systemic social relations rather than simply individual interactions. Walby further argues that patriarchy can “be conceptualized at different levels of abstraction: at the most abstract level, it exists as a system of social relations, while at a less abstract level, it is composed of six distinct structures, namely the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (Walby, 1990, p. 20). This structural approach allows patriarchy to be understood not as a fixed form of domination, but as a system that manifests differently across various aspects of social life, while still functioning collectively to maintain men's power over women.

2.1.2.1 Forms of Patriarchal Structures

2.1.2.1.1 Marriage and Patriarchal Institution

According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, marriage has historically functioned as an institution that subordinates women to men. De Beauvoir argues that “marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 502) and that woman becomes “his vassal” through the marriage contract (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 506). This means that although marriage may appear to be an equal partnership, it is in reality a system that strips women of their independence and places them under the authority of their husbands—making it one of the most fundamental ways in which patriarchy maintains its hold over women’s lives.

2.1.2.1.2 Traditional Gender Role Expectations

According to de Beauvoir, traditional gender roles are not naturally given but socially constructed and imposed upon women through civilization. She famously asserts that “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330). This means that femininity and the domestic, submissive roles attached to it is a product of social conditioning, not of nature.

De Beauvoir further argues that marriage institutionalizes these expectations by imprisoning women to a role of *immanence*—the repetitive, static labor of maintaining the home and family—while men are permitted *transcendence*,

the ability to reach beyond themselves through work, creation, and public life. She writes that “woman is destined to maintain the species and care for the home, which is to say, to immanence,” while her husband “embodies transcendence” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 506). Domestic labor, in de Beauvoir’s view, “locks her into repetition and immanence; day after day it repeats itself in identical form from century to century; it produces nothing new” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 98). Traditional gender role expectations thus demand that women confine themselves to domestic and reproductive functions that prevent them from developing autonomous selfhood.

2.1.2.1.3 Social Scrutiny and Judgment

De Beauvoir argues that women are subjected to a disproportionate and unequal level of social surveillance compared to men, particularly within the context of marriage and community life. She observes that “the control imposed by her social environment—in particular in ‘small towns’ in the Old as well as the New World—is far more severe for her than for her husband: he goes out more, he travels, and his dalliances are more indulgently tolerated; she risks losing her reputation and her situation as a married woman” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 676). This strong social judgment reflects the broader patriarchal logic in which a woman’s value is tied to her conformity to social norms, while men enjoy considerably more freedom from communal inspection. De Beauvoir further notes that even when a woman succeeds professionally or socially, she remains “severely scrutinized, especially in the provinces”, and that at minimum “a burdensome hypocrisy is demanded of her” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 819) as the price of social acceptance.

Women thus live under a constant gaze that monitors their behavior, appearance, and compliance with feminine norms—a gaze from which men are largely immune to.

2.1.2.2 Patriarchal Subversion

2.1.2.2.1 Performance of Idealized Femininity

Beauvoir explains the theatrical element in relation to women who have been denied the right to engage directly in public action. In her view, women who have been denied meaningful participation in the public sphere resort to the performing arts in place of action. For them, the stage, both literally and metaphorically, becomes the only space in which their presence is felt (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 766). In this context, women stop communicating in a genuine way and instead recite to an unseen audience, and thus she becomes the actress of her life, not the author (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 770). Performing idealized femininity as a form of patriarchal subversion shows that a woman has constructed her performance to fit within patriarchal expectations of the ideal woman, who is always compliant, pleasant, and gracious, as well as readily available sexually and non-threatening, as a way to acquire an indirect form of power that is otherwise unavailable to her. Conformity becomes a tool of her design in that she is so accommodating to the patriarchal system that she is able to control, from within, the social and ideological constraints which were intended to restrict her.

2.1.2.2 Manipulation of Patriarchal Narratives and Strategic Use of Victimhood

De Beauvoir states that women in patriarchal systems are forced to invent indirect and hidden strategies to gain access to power, as they do not have direct access. As she argues, women “were only able to intervene in a negative or indirect way. It is forbidden for a woman to participate in positive construction; at best she will manage to insinuate herself into masculine enterprises by indirect means” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 183). Thus, the women’s resort to manipulation and deception is not inherent. It is the only option that remains for them when the patriarchal society blocks access to all the direct paths to power.

Working a patriarchal marriage involves manipulation. De Beauvoir discusses the far worse circumstances women find themselves in when stuck in a patriarchal marriage. She explains “Dissimulate, trick, hate and fear in silence, bet on the vanity and weakness of a man, learn how to foil him, play him, manipulate him. It is all quite a sad science” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 573). As she explains, the situation women find themselves in is so dire that she justifies such manipulation as a way of surviving. She claims “the wife’s great excuse is that she is forced to involve her whole self in marriage: she has no profession, no skills, no personal relations, even her name is not her own; she is nothing but her husband’s ‘other half’” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 573). Manipulating narratives and ‘playing the victim’ are not inherent to who the women are flaws but rational responses to structural exclusion.

2.1.2.2.3 Reversal of Power Dynamics and Exposure of Hypocrisy

De Beauvoir exposes the inherent contradictions in patriarchal systems of oppression where men traditionally formulate moral frameworks that they circumstantially transgress and place women under the same codes of morality. According to de Beauvoir, a patriarchal man “preaches population growth: but he is clever at not having more children than are convenient for him. He praises chaste and faithful wives: but he invites his neighbor’s wife to commit adultery” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 739). The male-centric moral frameworks are essentially self-sustaining codes of ethics that arise from the demand for moral virtue from women while excluding men from those same moral absolutes.

De Beauvoir highlights that women are the Other—that is, they are not self-founded individuals but are relative to and defined by men: “He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 26). It is not possible for women within this patriarchal configuration to attain equal positionality to men, and therefore, equal power. Nevertheless, de Beauvoir argues that when women, inverting such patriarchal double standards, utilize the patriarchal expectations placed upon women and turn them against men, they decouple the essence of the patriarchal male privilege and demonstrate that it is only contingent “power” and “authority”. Ultimately, this ends the facade of patriarchal “authority” and proves that patriarchal systems are built on arbitrary power inequalities, which can be manipulated to favor women once the women learn how to.

2.1.2.3 The Reasons for Patriarchal Subversion

2.1.2.3.1 Affair

De Beauvoir stated that one of the clearest expressions of the double standard that built into patriarchal marriage is a husband's infidelity. She observes that "marital infidelity is still more serious for the woman than for the man" (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 675), and that the patriarchal husband "praises chaste and faithful wives: but he invites his neighbor's wife to commit adultery" (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 739). While men are permitted such behavior, it is prohibited for their wives. Male infidelity has become so normalized that it operates as a structural feature of the institution rather than an individual act.

2.1.2.3.2 Progressive Loss of Autonomy and Identity

De Beauvoir argues that marriage as a patriarchal institution systematically weakens women's autonomous selfhood. Upon marriage, "she takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world... she breaks with her past more or less brutally, she is annexed to her husband's universe" (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 506). This process is not merely logistical but existential—the woman ceases to be a subject in her own right and becomes an extension of her husband's identity.

De Beauvoir describes this as progressive: a woman "little by little loses herself; all reality is in the other" (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 782), gradually surrendering her independent existence as marriage demands increasing conformity to her husband's world. This loss is deepened by the absence of economic independence—a woman with "no economic autonomy, no social dignity" (de

Beauvoir, 2011, p. 294) has no material foundation from which to sustain a self of her own.

2.1.2.3.3 Resentment

For de Beauvoir, resentment is one of the most subtle and lasting consequences of patriarchy within marriage. It increases slowly, as the wife learns to accept the inequalities around her without being able to challenge them. A marriage that appears loving on the surface can carry significant hostility beneath it—a feeling that may never be openly acknowledged. Citing Chardonne, de Beauvoir observes that “an aversion for the dear husband will go unnoticed for a whole life: it is called melancholia or some other name” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 564). The aversion is real, it is disguised as sadness or moodiness—so that the woman herself, and those around her, may never identify it as resentment.

Concealing the feeling does not make it any less real. As de Beauvoir insists, “the hostility is no less felt even though it is not named” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 564), and she identifies it as the force behind the wife’s eventual effort “to refuse her husband’s domination” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 564). Resentment, in this view, is not a personal weakness but the predictable result of a marriage built on inequality. Once the resentment piles up beyond a certain point, it becomes a powerful motivation for resistance.

2.1.2.4 The Effects of Patriarchal Subversion

2.1.2.4.1 Dismantling of Patriarchal Privilege

According to de Beauvoir, patriarchal power still exists due to its naturalness. However, the naturalness of this power stems from the carefully

constructed system of male dominance. In challenging this system, women are not simply changing one marriage but uncovering the very artificiality of that system. In that sense, the woman is the other, “He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 26), but this inequality does not come out of an actual male dominance but out of social-economic institutions.

2.1.2.4.2 Replacement of One Toxic Dynamic with Another

De Beauvoir argues that resistance to patriarchy does not automatically lead to liberation. When a woman trapped in marriage finally pushes back against her husband’s authority, the form her uprising takes is often shaped by the very system she is rejecting. Trapped in the home with no proper outlet for self-expression, some wives “are puffed up with importance and become tyrannical matrons and shrews” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 583), while others retreat into manipulation or weaponized victimhood. The structure of dominance does not disappear; the woman simply begins to occupy the dominant position herself.

This is the central flaw of resistance that operates only within patriarchal logic. As de Beauvoir observes, “two transcendences confront each other; instead of mutually recognizing each other, each freedom wants to dominate the other” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 849). Genuine equality requires that both partners recognize each other as peers, but a victory built on fear or revenge cannot produce that recognition—it only reverses who holds the upper hand. De Beauvoir warns that “the vicious circle is so difficult to break here because each sex is victim both of the other and of itself” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 851). One toxic dynamic is therefore replaced by another, and the underlying logic of domination remains intact.

2.1.2.4.3 Performance and Façade

De Beauvoir posits that marriages in a patriarchal society remain intact not due to actual closeness, but due to a performance of closeness. When a marriage develops a mutual feeling of resentment, letdowns, or even animosity, it is not uncommon for that marriage to remain intact. Rather, the couple pretends to be in a loving relationship to retain social respect and for the preservation of the marriage. To De Beauvoir, what society deems to be “conjugal love” is more accurately “a complex mixture of attachment, resentment, hatred, rules, resignation, laziness, and hypocrisy ... only because it serves as an alibi” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 579). In De Beauvoir’s analysis, marriages become a sham, a public display that remains intact to disguise the true state of the relationship.

2.2 Research Method

2.2.1 Research Approach

This study uses method of feminist literary criticism to analyze Amy Dunne’s character in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, with especial attention to her subversion of patriarchal structures. The analysis merges close reading of the novel with theoretical interpretation, focusing on some of the text’s intrinsic features which includes character, conflict, and setting—and the extrinsic features which includes aspects in *Gone Girl*: the patriarchal structures, the patriarchal subversion, how Amy subvert the patriarchal, and how it affect Amy’s marriage.

The analysis is based on Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (2011), in particular, the chapter dealing with patriarchal structures that subjugates women

and societal roles, which demands women to be judged perpetually. De Beauvoir's theories of immanence and transcendence, the making of the Other in women, and indirect means women use to resist their suppression, provide the lens through which Amy's character is analyzed. Altogether, the theories provide the analysis a basis to interpret her victimization of the "Cool Girl" character, and the careful manipulation that led to the collapse of Nick.

2.2.2 Method of Data Collection

The primary data for this study consists of close reading and textual analysis of key passages from *Gone Girl* that demonstrate Amy's subversive behaviors and motivations. Secondary sources include theoretical works on feminist literary criticism, marriage as a patriarchal institution, particularly de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

The analysis will focus on:

1. Amy's diary entries revealing her conscious performance of femininity
2. Her manipulation of her marriage
3. The contrast between her performed identity and her actual motivations
4. Her strategic use of victimhood and feminine stereotypes as weapons against patriarchal power

This methodological approach will illuminate how Flynn's characterization of Amy represents a contemporary exploration of women's complex relationship with patriarchal marriage structures and the potential for subversive resistance within these constraints.