

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In life, individuals inevitably encounter a wide range of experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant. How a person responds to these experiences can influence the events that follow (McCullough et al., 2000). A negative experience often acts as a conflict, with the individual's response influencing the direction of future events. Common unpleasant experiences include physical altercations, disagreements, bullying, and workplace conflicts. People's responses to such experiences differ significantly (McCullough et al., 2000). Some individuals may choose to forgive and move on, others may dwell on the emotional pain, while some may hold a grudge and seek to inflict a similar or greater harm on the offender. This act of "hitting back" to cause the offender to experience the same or worse suffering, is commonly referred to as revenge.

Revenge has always been a popular subject in literature, theater and film due to its compelling nature (Lim, 2022). Revenge is a theme that still resonates with audiences, from ancient tragedies to modern works. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599-1601) is a well-known example of a revenge story. This play is about Prince Hamlet who wants revenge for his father's murder by his uncle (Thorndike, 1902). The theme of revenge in literature has changed over time with modern works exploring it with more nuanced psychological and emotional perspectives.

One such modern work is Paula Hawkins's short novel *Blind Spot* (2022), a psychological mystery that explores the themes of pain, memory and revenge. This is the story of Edie, whose husband Jake is murdered and Ryan, their long-time friend, who is initially accused of the crime. However, it later turns out that there is a different culprit, a woman named Lara, formerly Louise Grant. Many years earlier, Louise had been bullied in school for her appearance and poverty background. Even though Edie, Ryan, and Jake did not initially participate in the bullying, a party one night changed everything. Ryan and Jake assaulted Louise and took compromising photos of her. Edie, who was unaware of the truth, supported their alibi. As a result, no one believed Louise, and the photos began circulating. Louise tried to take her own life but survived, and was filled with shame and despair. Later on, she moved away, changed her name, went to therapy and continued her education, as she was determined to make a new life for herself.

Years later when Lara sees Jake, Ryan and Edie happily living together, the anger she has long buried comes bubbling to the surface. She carefully draws up a plan. She takes on a new identity, befriends Jake and Edie, murders Jake and frames Ryan for the murder. As Edie was finally left alone, Lara finally confronts her. Through a story she makes about a character named Rosie, she tells her own story from the past, her struggles, and her eventual course to get back on them. However, the confrontation turns violent when Edie refuses to apologize for her role in the past which ends up with her losing her life.

It is apparent that Lara's story in *Blind Spot* experiences a significant character development, where she goes from the victim of bullying to a manipulative avenger. Her development involves psychological processes, which are rooted in her past and influence her change emotionally. This makes *Blind Spot* not only a revenge story on the surface but also one that explores the mental growth and psychological changes in the process. Moreover, knowledge of these changes, motivations, and struggles of a character is very helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the character and the nature of revenge.

1.2 Research Questions

Revenge stories are more about the psychology of revenge than the revenge itself. In Lara's case, the mental disruption she experiences after the assault shows how negative experiences can cause shifts in one's thoughts and behavior. Though she eventually manages to deal with the pain and get on with her life, meeting those who inflicted the assault on her awakens a need for revenge. This is particularly interesting in light of the long time gap between the original offence and the encounter.

Interested in these psychological processes, this study tries to understand Lara's revenge in Paula Hawkins' short novel *Blind Spot* by focusing on the following research questions.

1. How does Lara's past experience of bullying serve as the source of her motivation to seek revenge in Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot*?
2. How does Lara's journey unfold from her painful past to her pursuit of revenge?

3. What factors influence Lara's decision-making in her journey from her past pain to revenge?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

To answer the research questions, this study proposes the following objectives.

1. To examine how Lara's past experiences of bullying function as her motivation to seek revenge in Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot*.
2. To analyze Lara's journey and processes from her painful past toward her eventual pursuit of revenge.
3. To identify and explain the psychological factors that shape Lara's response to pain, with particular attention to the role of these factors in the delay between the initial harm and her eventual decision to take revenge.

1.4 Previous Studies

As of 2026, there are several discussions on Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot* which can be found online. However, these discussions cannot be considered as academic but rather casual commentaries and reader reviews published on various websites. Most online reviews of *Blind Spot* focus on its plot, genre classification, and characterization. As an example, Ortiz (n.d.), who writes in *Actualidad Literatura*, describes the story as “domestic noir,” as it revolves around conflicts and mystery between close people in home or family. Ortiz also argues that this story functions more as light entertainment when compared to the complexity of

Hawkins' debut novel *The Girl on the Train* (2015). Likewise, Cobain (2024) commends the novel as a thrilling example of contemporary thriller fiction and highlights Hawkins' talent in blending the present and the past stories. Meanwhile, some reviewers point to the friendship between Edie, Jake, and Ryan as the central plot (Higgy88, 2022; Gallagher, 2023). Some others also speculate on the meaning behind the title, *Blind Spot*, such as The Writing Garnet (2022) who interprets that it is about the unexpected return of some characters. Outside of those websites, however, based on the research conducted, there were no scholarly analyses of *Blind Spot* (2022) that have been identified in academic journals to date. Moreover, despite these observations, none of the existing reviews provide an in-depth analysis of revenge as a theme, nor do they examine Lara's character in detail, even though both are integral to the narrative.

Regarding the supporting psychological theories, some previous studies citing them can be found. Citing Fried and Sosland's bullying theory, several studies discuss the bullying experience, either in school or workplace. Bayar et al. (2024), for instance, examine bullying experienced by gifted or intelligent students and how it impacts them. Meanwhile, Harber et al. (2013) address workplace bullying in higher educational institutions and use an administrative perspective in handling it. With similar focus, Klein and Lester (2013) discuss the awareness needed to manage and apply policies to prevent bullying in higher educational workplace environments. Whereas, from Hansjorg Znoj's study, several studies can be found citing his topic on embitterment, such as Linden (2020) which discusses embitterment as a psychological disorder resulting from

injustice and humiliation, along with its symptoms and treatment. In relation to Linden and Znoj's study, Muschalla and Grove (2024) address how the perception of injustice influences the feeling of embitterment.

However, based on the research conducted, there were no studies which further discuss Fried and Sosland's cycles of pain leading to revenge. The studies citing Znoj's theory also focus mainly on embitterment rather than changeability and control as the factors behind the feeling. Moreover, those theories are still discussed separately rather than used together to explain the overall process of pain to revenge. Furthermore, no studies were found using theories from Fried and Sosland (2009) and Znoj (2011) to analyze literary works. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing Lara's pursuit of revenge in *Blind Spot* (2022), offering a fresh perspective and encouraging further academic engagement with Hawkins' story.

1.5 Research Methods

This study employs three interconnected methods, namely library research, qualitative research, and psychological criticism. Firstly, library research serves as the foundation of the study. According to George (2008), library research is "a research design that relies on existing sources of information, such as books, journal articles, and other documents, to generate data for analysis" (p. 6). In this study, library research is used to gather and review relevant theories on intrinsic elements, revenge, psychological processes and the factors behind it. These

theories are then applied to frame the character development of Lara in Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot* and her psychological journey in relation to revenge.

Secondly, due to its goal to understand Lara's psychological experience through her narrative and context, this study can be categorized as qualitative research. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences rather than statistical measurement. It is "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 4). Furthermore, literature is recognized as a valid source within qualitative research. As the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods notes, short stories, novels, poetry, and drama can all serve as data sources or representations for qualitative inquiry (Given, 2008). Therefore, analyzing a character in a literary work can be considered as a qualitative research in literature.

Finally, this study applies psychological criticism to analyze the story. Psychological criticism is defined as "a critical approach to literature that employs psychological theories to examine aspects of a literary work as a way to better understand both the author's mind and the characters, themes, and other elements of the text" (Long, 2018, p. 417). In this case, the criticism is directed toward understanding Lara's psychological processes as she moves from the experience of victimization to her decision to seek revenge. To achieve this, the study draws on SuEllen Fried and Blanche Sosland's (2009) theory of the two cycles of pain and revenge, as well as Hansjörg Znoj's (2011) concepts of changeability and control, which explain the psychological conditions that influence Lara's process

towards revenge. These theories are applied to examine the cycles in Lara's journey, the temporal gap in between both cycles, and the factors of control and changeability ultimately shape her decision to act.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is dedicated to some intrinsic parts of Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot*, characters and characterization, setting, point of view and conflict. By analyzing the characters and their characterizations, it is possible to better understand the characters' backgrounds and the motives behind their feelings and thoughts, which are revealed by their appearance, actions and dialogue. Analysis of point of view focuses on the perspective of the narrator and the ways in which the characters judge others. The study also looks at setting as a way to explore how atmosphere, place, and the interplay of past and present influence the narrative. Finally, the analysis takes into account the fact that conflict is a critical element because the characters' reactions to conflict often reveal their motives, perspectives, and relationships with others.

These intrinsic elements are interpreted in the context of revenge with the help of two theoretical perspectives. The first perspective uses the concept of bullying and the two cycles of pain by Fried and Sosland (2009), which assists in recognizing Lara's past experience as bullying and how her character development undergoes both cycles of pain. The second perspective uses Hansjorg Znoj's (2011) theory of appraisal, especially the dimensions of changeability and locus of control to explain the psychological factors influencing

Lara's decision to take revenge. By using those theories, this study demonstrates that Lara's psychological journey is not static but dynamic and marked by complex interplay between her past experiences, emotional responses and the changing perspective towards revenge.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The discussion in this study is divided into four chapters, which are organized as follows:

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives, previous studies, research methods, scope of the study, and the overall organization of the writing.

CHAPTER II – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical basis of the analysis is discussed in this chapter. It includes theories of intrinsic elements such as character and characterization, point of view, setting and conflict, as well as psychological theories. Fried and Sosland's concepts of bullying and cycles of pain, together with Znoj's theory of changeability and control, offer a psychological framework for understanding Lara's quest for revenge in Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot*.

CHAPTER III – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present chapter discusses the findings and analysis of the intrinsic elements that support the exploration of Lara's psychological journey. The paper discusses her motivation for revenge, the stages of her psychological development and factors influencing her behavior.

CHAPTER IV – CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of the overall findings and aligns them with the objectives of the study.

