

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents several theories and concepts that provide a basic theoretical framework for the understanding of Paula Hawkins' *Blind Spot* in the context of revenge. The study aims to analyze the dynamic nature of Lara's revenge by examining the intrinsic elements of the narrative through a psychological lens, focusing on the process of revenge. The following sections discuss characters and characterizations, point of view, conflicts and settings, combining relevant theories on the causes and dynamic processes of revenge in order to sort out the understanding.

2.1 Characters and Characterizations

Characters are the key players in a story. They act out the things and embody the reasons that propel the plot. According to Kelly J. Mays, a character is a “personage in a literary work who acts, appears, or is referred to as playing a part” (2019, p. 211). Mays's use of the word personage highlights the fact that characters do not have to be human beings but may also be animals, objects, or abstract entities endowed with human qualities. This definition emphasizes the diversity of characters in literature as narrative constructs that explore human-like qualities.

Mays categorizes characters into flat and round as well as static and dynamic. Flat characters are “simple, one-dimensional characters that behave and speak in predictable or repetitive ways,” while round characters are those who act

from “varied, often conflicting motives, impulses, and desires, and who seem to have psychological complexity” (Mays, 2019, p. 212). In terms of development, a character that changes as a result of events in the story is dynamic, whereas a character that does not change is static (Mays, 2019, p. 212). Round characters are often dynamic, while flat ones are generally static.

Closely tied to the concept of character is characterization, which refers to the way authors present and construct these figures. According to Mays, characterization is “the art and technique of representing fictional personages” (2019, p. 214). Similarly, William P. Kenney outlines three primary methods of presenting characters: the discursive, the dramatic, and the contextual. Kenney explains that in the discursive method, “the author ... simply tells us about his characters” (1966, p. 34). This might include the character’s personality or the writer’s stance toward the character. According to him, this method of presenting the characters has the advantage of “simplicity and economy” as it can quickly convey necessary traits, but it may appear straightforward and leave little room for the reader’s imagination (Kenney, 1966, p. 34). In contrast, the dramatic method is “the method of showing rather than telling” (Kenney, 1966, p. 35). In this method, a character’s trait is shown through his/her own words and action. This technique mirrors the way people reveal themselves in real life and allows readers to draw their own conclusions about a character, although it is less concise and carries the risk of readers misjudging characters (Kenney, 1966, p. 35).

Finally, the contextual method refers to “the device of suggesting character by the verbal context that surrounds the character” (Kenney, 1966, p. 36). For

example, if a character is repeatedly described using imagery related to a brain, such as intelligence and logic, readers may infer that the writer wants to emphasize that the character is defined by reason and thought. Moreover, Kenney notes that writers rarely use only one method of characterization (1966, p. 36). Instead, authors typically blend these approaches depending on the narrative's design. This study adopts these three methods as analytical tools in order to trace Lara's motives, interactions, and development throughout the story.

2.2 Point of View

Kelly J. Mays (2019) defines the concept of point of view as the combination of both focus and voice. Focus is "a distinct angle of vision or perspective from which the characters, events, and other aspects are viewed", while voice is "someone else" who mediates and represents the story to the readers (Mays, 2019, p. 169). To analyze point of view is "to identify the narrator of a story, describing any part he or she plays in the events and any limits placed upon his knowledge" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2010, p. 20). In this study, the analysis of point of view is necessary to understand the character of Lara seen through the narrator and Edie's mind.

In consideration, there are three types of narration: first person, second person, and third person. In first person point of view, the narrator uses the pronoun "I", plays a role as someone in the story, either major or minor character, and tells about other characters or his/her own experiences (Mays, 2019, p. 170). The second person narrator, on the other hand, uses the pronoun "we" to refer to

him/herself (Mays, 2019, p. 171). Whereas, the third person narrator uses the pronoun "he, she, or they" in telling "an unidentified listener or reader what happened" and does not play as a character in the story (Mays, 2019, p. 170).

In this point of view, the limitation of the narrator's vision can either be limited or unlimited. According to Mays (2019), what is meant by limited narrator is "an external, third-person narrator who tells the story from a distinct point of view, usually that of a single character, revealing that character's thoughts and relating the action exclusively from his or her perspective" (p. 170). On the other hand, an unlimited narrator, or also called omniscient narrator, is the narrator who "has access to the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of more than one character (often of several)" (Mays, 2019, p. 170). Simply put, a limited narrator focuses only on what revolves around a chosen character, seeing and thinking through their eyes and mind, while an omniscient narrator plays God's eyes, given that they are also the creator of the story.

2.3 Setting

Every story happens in a setting. According to William P. Kenney (1966), setting is the "element of fiction which reveals to us the where and when of events" (p. 38). In addition to this definition, Kenney explains that setting "refers to the point in time and space at which the events of the plot occur" (p. 38). Relating to this concept, other than place and time, Kelly J. Mays (2019) mentions that weather and other factors within the story can also be seen as setting depending on the "traditional associations" and "unconscious assumptions" about

the events or the context of the story (p. 285). Other than its function as a space and time where the story happens, Kenney suggests that setting can also function as a metaphor and atmosphere. Setting is seen as metaphor when it provides "a projection or objectification of the internal states of the characters or of a pervasive spiritual condition", implying a deeper context of the setting and its rather symbolic presence (Kenney, 1966, p. 41). Further, setting can function as atmosphere when it is described to create "mood or emotional aura" to help build reader's expectations of the story (Kenney, 1966, p. 41).

Ignasi Ribó (2019) mentioned two aspects of setting, namely events (temporal) and environment (spatial) (p. 33). The temporal aspect is closely related to the plot as the arrangement of events in it keeps the story going (Ribó, 2019, p. 33). Environment, on the other hand, is described as everything around the characters, including landscape, buildings, furniture, etc. (Ribó, 2019, p. 34). This way, the environment can be seen from its purposes as a topographical layout of things or as atmospheric in its relations to the characters (Ribó, 2019, p. 34). Other than time and space mentioned in Ribó's theory, or what Kenney calls as time and "geographical", he also suggests two more elements of setting, namely "the occupations and modes of day-to-day existence of the characters" and "the religious, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional environment of the characters" (p. 40). Through this, it can be seen that Kenney does not only consider setting only as time and space, but also as the other conditions helping to build the characters and the story.

2.4 Conflict

Another intrinsic element discussed in this study is conflict. Kelly J. Mays (2019) refers to conflict simply as "some sort of struggle" within the story (p. 76). Conflict, as a part of the plot, plays an important role in the story as a story without one wouldn't be interesting. Conflicts within a story are also what makes it relate to human experience and life in general.

According to Mays, conflicts can be divided into two: internal and external. Internal conflicts are those when "a character struggles to reconcile two competing desires, needs, or duties, or two parts or aspects of himself", meaning that the conflicts happen within the character himself (Mays, 2019, p. 77). In contrast, external conflicts are the conflicts "arise between characters and something or someone outside themselves" (Mays, 2019, p. 76). In relation to this, William P. Kenney (1966) suggests that the external conflicts may include "a conflict between men, a conflict between man and society, between man and nature, and so on" (p. 19). Both types of conflicts may also happen simultaneously within the story.

2.5 The Concept of Revenge

Before moving towards the connection between revenge and its psychological processes, it is best to give an explanation on the definition and concept of revenge. According to Gabler and Maercker (2011), revenge is "as a destructive response to a real or perceived injustice or serious injury, which is usually disproportionate to the severity of the offense" (p. 47). This concept

highlights the perceiving process or the way someone evaluates the experience as negative and sees themselves as the victim of the situation. Aquino (2001) and Stuckless and Goranson (1992), as quoted in Gabler and Maercker (2011), state that the purpose of revenge is to inflict discomfort or damage to the initial offender and bring relief to the victim (p. 48). Furthermore, Gabler and Maercker (2011) also propose the process model of revenge which is “mediated by various emotions and cognitions” (p. 48). This shows that revenge is not a mere state of act or emotion but rather interconnected in a complex process.

2.6 Fried and Sosland's Theory of Bullying and the Cycle of Revenge

Fried and Sosland (2009) define bullying, or “peer abuse,” as a situation “where one person does all the giving and the other does all the taking” (p. 25). Bullying and teasing are often used interchangeably, but the difference lies in reciprocity. Teasing is “mutual give and take” while bullying is persistent harm and an imbalance of power (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 25). According to their framework, bullying is present when three conditions are present: (1) the acts are intended to harm, (2) the acts are intense and persistent, and (3) there is an abuse of power by the offender (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 21). The victims are often more vulnerable when they lack social support, are more sensitive to abuse or have physical or psychological characteristics that make them likely to be targeted repeatedly.

Different forms of bullying are also identified by Fried and Sosland (2009), several of which are pertinent to Lara’s experiences in *Blind Spot*. Verbal

bullying includes “name-calling, put-downs, making up stories, gossiping, spreading rumors,” and generally any use of language intended to harm (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 43). Emotional bullying refers to non-physical and non-verbal abuse, and can be divided into two categories: nonverbal behaviors (e.g., “pointing, staring, laughing, rolling eyes, making faces, sticking out the tongue, writing notes, drawing pictures”) and psychological abuse (e.g., exclusion, rejection, or deliberate isolation) (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 45). Sexual bullying includes inappropriate touching, harassment, or coercive sexual behavior (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 47). These forms of bullying are an important framework in understanding Lara’s experiences in *Blind Spot* as they demonstrate the different types of mistreatment that contribute to her psychological suffering and eventually lead to her desire for revenge.

Beyond these definitions, Fried and Sosland propose a dynamic model describing the consequences of bullying, which unfolds in two possible cycles (2009, p. 1-3). Both cycles begin with the infliction of pain through peer abuse. In the first cycle, pain develops into anger and eventually escalates into rage. As the anger escalates, victims can become “consumed with thoughts of revenge” and engage in retaliatory violence (Fried & Sosland, 2009, p. 2). In the second cycle, pain is turned inward and causes psychological distress, namely depression. Chronic depression is often associated with thoughts of suicide and in severe cases, self-destructive behavior. Importantly, these cycles are not exclusive, people can swing between the two, having both urges to harm themselves and to harm others.

2.7 Hansjorg Znoj's Theory of Changeability and Locus of Control

Hansjörg Znoj (2011) emphasizes that “serious life events or enduring stressors trigger coping mechanisms to secure an emotional balance despite inconsistencies between expected and actually experienced perceptions” (p. 5). More than motivation itself, however, “it is the attribution or perceived change that makes us feel and behave in certain ways” (Znoj, 2011, p. 6). This suggests that emotions and responses to such events are less about the events per se than about how individuals appraise their changeability and control. Within this framework, he introduces two critical axes for understanding emotions: the dimension of hope versus hopelessness and the locus of control (internal versus external). When individuals see themselves as the source of change, they “exert control over [their] environment and feel powerful and responsible,” while perceiving no control produces “powerless and helpless” states (p. 6). These appraisals determine whether a person responds with emotions such as guilt, shame, desperation, or—critically for this study—revenge.

Znoj (2011, p. 8) describes these dynamics in a circular model of four possible emotional outcomes: (1) “major depression” and “suicide”, that occurs when individuals experience hopelessness with an internal locus of control that they cannot manage effectively; (2) “personal growth”, that occurs when individuals are hopeful but see control as internal; (3) “revolution” with aggression, which occurs when an individual attributes control to external agents but retains hope for change; and (4) “self-destruction” through embitterment,

which occurs when control is attributed externally, combined with hopelessness, resulting in destructive feelings of hatred, despair, or revenge.

This conceptualization can be visualized in Znoj's circular model of emotional outcomes (see Figure 1), which maps the interplay between hope/hopelessness and internal/external control to explain how individuals may move between constructive and destructive psychological states.

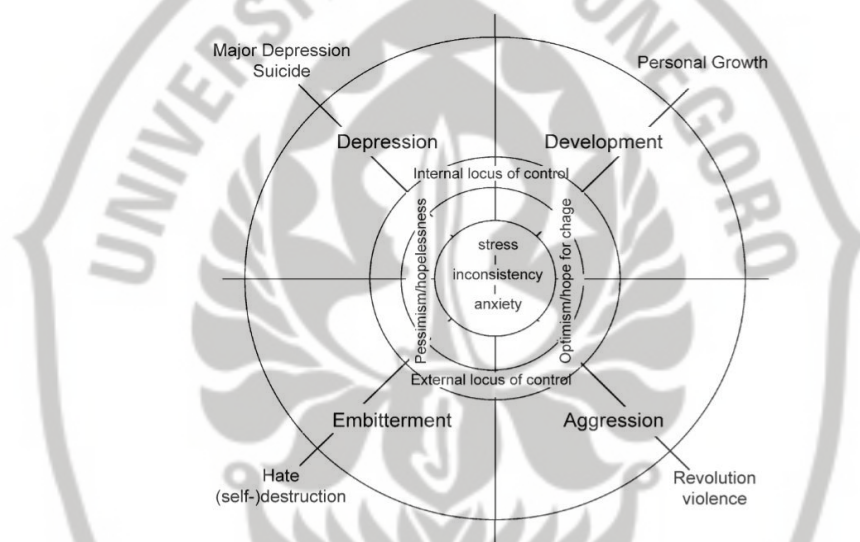


Figure 1. Znoj's circular model of emotional states based on locus of control and perceived changeability (Znoj, 2011, p. 8).

Although Znoj's study primarily focuses on embitterment, his model connects directly to the psychology of revenge. He defines embitterment as "the result of (a) injustice and a conflict perceived as a threat, and (b) loss of resources, loss of persons, loss of important goals, or bodily functions" (p. 6). Unlike depression, which is caused by emotions turned inward, embitterment represents a "missing link between aggression and depression" (p. 7). Because embittered

individuals attribute blame outwardly, the state easily escalates into hatred, rage, and the pursuit of retribution. As Znoj notes, “the bitter person may seek revenge as a remedy to cure his or her hatred” (p. 10). In this sense, revenge emerges when appraisals of injustice combine with hopelessness and a perceived lack of control—yet are reignited once the possibility of change or restored control appears.

