

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents five sub chapters that consist of background of study, research question, objectives of the study, significance of the study and scope and limitation.

1.1 Background of the Study

Thurer (1994) argue that cultural narratives have long constructed an ideal image of the “good mother,” portraying motherhood as a natural and fulfilling destiny for women. Motherhood is often associated with unconditional love, care, and selflessness. However, behind these expectations, many mothers also experience emotional and psychological struggles that are often overlooked. In many cultural narratives, motherhood is portrayed as fulfilling and natural destiny for women, but this idealized image can obscure the complex realities that many women experience in their daily lives. Rich (1986) define that motherhood functions as a patriarchal institution that controls women's bodies and limits their autonomy. Suggesting that motherhood as an institution often silences women's inner conflicts and limits their ability to express personal struggles. Similarly, Kristeva (1986) argues that women, particularly mothers, exist between biological and symbolic dimensions of experience. As a result, female identity is not fixed but remains fluid, fragmented, and continuously negotiated.

Trilling (1951) define that the literature has long functioned as a medium for exploring the complexities of human identity and its constant negotiation with social expectations. Through such engagement literary narratives reveal the depth of human consciousness and the psychological tensions that shape individual experience. Literature plays a crucial role in reflecting and understanding the dynamics of society, culture, and human psychology. Literary works serve not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a vital mirror that reflects experiences,

fears, and deep psychological conflicts that are often suppressed or unspoken in everyday discourse.

Psychoanalytic criticism examines literary texts through psychological perspectives, particularly by exploring unconscious motives, emotions, and conflicts reflected in characters and narratives. Barry (2009) explain that, Freudian criticism emphasizes the distinction between the conscious and unconscious mind and seeks to uncover underlying psychological meanings within literary texts. In literary studies, psychoanalysis provides a framework for interpreting how repressed desires and internal conflicts are represented through characters and narrative forms (Tyson, 2006). This approach allows readers to uncover symbolic meanings “that express unconscious fears and anxieties” embedded within literary texts and characterizations. While in his argument Barry (2009) proposed that psychoanalytic criticism approaches literary texts in a manner similar to dream interpretation, examining imagery, symbolism, and displacement to uncover hidden meanings and unconscious desires. Therefore, psychoanalysis functions as both a psychological theory and a critical method that bridges human emotions, culture, and artistic expression.

Kristeva (1982) explain that abjection is the process through which individuals establish a sense of self by rejecting what is considered impure, disturbing, or threatening to identity. This process of rejection plays a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive boundaries between themselves and what they define as the other. In this sense, the formation of identity is closely linked to the act of excluding elements that are seen as incompatible with the self. Abject refers to things that disrupt boundaries—such as bodily fluids, corpses, or waste—which evoke both disgust and fascination at the same time. In literature, abjection appears through scenes of horror, decay, or transgression that reflect crises of identity and meaning in various narrative forms. These representations often emphasize moments where boundaries are broken or established. As Kristeva (1982) states, “The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even

before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language” (p. 13). This concept helps explain how feelings of horror and disgust arise when the boundaries between self and other become unstable, revealing the fragility of human identity.

Carroll (1990) define that horror often emerges from encounters with entities that violate established categories and challenge cultural norms. This theory highlights how the body becomes a central site of fear, particularly when it undergoes changes that challenge its normal form and function. Body horror emphasizes gruesome and abnormal things such as mutations, decay, or hybrid forms—which blur the boundaries between humans and nonhumans. These representations often disturb audiences because they present the body in ways that are unfamiliar and difficult to categorize. The horrific body becomes a metaphor for psychological disintegration and social anxiety. Carroll (1990) explains “horror involves not only disgust but a fascination with the impossible and the impure” (p. 22). This combination of disgust and fascination produces the emotional effect of horror, attracting audiences to what is perceived as both threatening and compelling. These depictions often serve as a way to externalize internal conflicts in a visible and tangible form. This framework provides an important tool for examining the depiction of maternal transformation in *Nightbitch* as something that is both abject and terrifying.

One example of this kind of literary exploration is Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* (2021), a contemporary novel that boldly reveals the inner turmoil of motherhood through physical transformation. The novel tells the story of a housewife who is depressed by domestic routines and alienation, and begins to physically transform into a dog. This unusual transformation serves as a central element in the narrative, drawing attention to the connection between the body and emotional experience. This transformation, though absurd, is metaphorical in nature as it can be seen to show how repressed emotions manifest through the body and how identity can collapse under social pressure. This transformation indicates how the boundaries between stability and instability can become increasingly blurred. Thus, *Nightbitch*

is a powerful text for examining the intersection of the body, identity, and psychological horror.

Building on this psychoanalytic foundation, Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection provides a lens for analyzing the horror that arises when the boundaries between self and other collapse in psychological and symbolic contexts. Abjection refers to things that must be discarded in order for identity to remain intact—bodily fluids, corpses, or other impure matter—things that evoke both disgust and attraction in the process of identity formation. Meanwhile, Carroll's (1990) concept of body horror serves as another primary analytical lens for examining how fear emerges through the violation, distortion, or transformation of the human body in literary texts. Therefore, Kristeva's (1982) abjection and Carroll's (1990) theory of body horror function as the primary analytical tools through which the representation of the maternal body, identity dissolution, and monstrous transformation in *Nightbitch* are examined.

Previous research has analyzed *Nightbitch* primarily from feminist and cultural perspectives. Elena (2021) interprets the transformation of the main character as a rebellion against patriarchal motherhood, while Trigo (2022) discusses maternal anxiety and artistic identity. However, although these studies make valuable contributions, there remains limited research that combines Kristeva's (1982) abjection with Carroll's (1990) body horror to analyze how physical horror represents the psychological collapse of motherhood. This study attempts to fill that gap by highlighting the relationship between bodily metamorphosis and maternal subjectivity.

Therefore, this study aims to fill that research gap by analyzing how *Nightbitch* represents maternal identity crisis through abjection and body horror. The analysis focuses on how abjection operates within the protagonist's bodily transformation and how the transformation functions as a manifestation of her internal conflict. By combining Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection and Carroll's (1990) body horror. This study of body horror is manifestation of abjection in the novel *Nightbitch*.

1.2 Research Questions

This section formulated the key questions that became the main focus of this analysis. These questions served as guidelines used to direct the entire research process in order to obtain comprehensive answers.

1. What forms of body horror are represented in the novel *Nightbitch*?
2. How do these forms of body horror reflect the abjection in the psychological experience of the main character?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This section explained specifically what this study aimed to achieve. The objectives listed here are in line with the research questions that have been established, and serve as targets to be proven or discovered through the analysis process.

1. To identify the representations of body horror in Rachel Yoder's novel *Nightbitch* as a reflection of the inner struggles and psychological conflicts experienced by the main character.
2. To analyze how the forms of body horror reflect abjection in the psychological experience of the main character.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute academically to literary studies and critical theory.

Applying psychoanalytic theory, particularly Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, this study enriches the interpretation of the novel *Nightbitch* and the body horror genre in general. This research brings imagination and reality together to explore complex psychological issues, especially those related to female identity and motherhood.

In practical terms, the results of this research can be useful for students, academics, and general readers who are interested in the fields of literature, gender and psychoanalysis. This research contributes to the understanding of socio-cultural issues surrounding motherhood, maternal mental health, and the representation of women's bodies in literary works.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study using Carroll's (1990) theory of body horror and Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection also this study examines how bodily transformation reflects the main character's experience of abjection. The limitation of this study focuses on the forms of body horror and their relation to abjection in the main character in Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* as source of data. The data consist of mother's utterances and narrator's words related to the mother's bodily transformation and psychological experiences. The analysis focuses exclusively on the mother as the main character and does not examine other characters, feminist issues, social criticism, cultural aspects, or other literary approaches presented in the novel.