

The Displeasing Character Development of the Weak Patriarchal Figure in “The Apple Tree” by Daphne du Maurier

Ratna Asmarani^{1*}, *Amalia Nurul Khusnah*¹

¹Linguistic Department, Faculty Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to analyze the patriarchal figure in the long short story entitled “The Apple Tree” written by Daphne du Maurier. The focus of analysis is on the development of the patriarchal figure before and after the death of his wife. The analysis is supported by several concepts; namely, the concepts of character and conflicts, as well as the concepts of patriarchy and patriarchal characteristics. The methods used are qualitative research, library research, and contextual research. The results show that the patriarchal figure develops from the ignorant patriarchal husband into an awkward patriarchal figure after the death of his wife. As an ignorant husband, he always finds fault with his wife’s actions in handling the household. As an awkward patriarchal figure, his craving for control results in the bad relationship with the house helpers. He gets attention and admiration in the local pub after giving the lady owner the logs of apple tree that he chop down by himself as firewood in the dead of the winter. However, his desire to prolong the exciting feeling of being a hero result in a disaster in which he has to face a slow and lonely death.

¹ Corresponding author: ratnaasmarani@lecturer.undip.ac.id

1 Introduction

The long short story entitled “The Apple Tree” written by Daphne du Maurier [1] talks about a patriarchal figure, Buzz the husband of Midge, who wanted to show his power in the domestic and public sphere. Buzz tended to be ignorant about his wife and the domestic affairs. It was after the death of his wife that he began to notice a thin old apple tree. A combination of an intense dislike to the old apple tree, a desire to be considered as a hero, and a craving for control triggered the patriarchal Buzz to cut the old apple tree by himself and gave the logs for firewood to the lady owner of the local pub who needed firewood in the dead of winter. However, the ending is so unexpected for the exhausted Buzz. Based on the brief summary, the aim of this article is to analyse the displeasing character development of the weak patriarchal husband who is silently craving for power.

A relevant concept to support the analysis is the concept of patriarchy. A concise definition of patriarchy is stated by Guy-Evans as follows: “Patriarchy is a social system in which men are thought to hold the positions of power in both the public and private sphere” [2]. In line with Guy-Evans, Gilligan & Snider [3] stated that “Patriarchy is a social system that elevates some men over other men and all men over women” [4]. It can be summed up that patriarchy especially positions men over women and competes men with other men to fight for the position of power whether in public or domestic area. Gray (n.d) mentioned four characteristics of patriarchy; namely, “Male Domination, Male Identification, Male Centeredness, and Obsession with Control” [5]. In short, Johnson [6] stated “Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control” [7]. To support the academic analysis, several research methods are used in combination. Library research method is used to gather relevant data [8]. To select the relevant data, the library research method is supported by close reading technique [9]. Qualitative research method [10] is used as the general analysis of the data. Meanwhile, a contextual research method is applied for the literary analysis [11].

2 Result and Discussion

The analysis will focus on Buzz, the husband of Midge, who represents the patriarchal figure. To follow his development as the patriarchal figure, the analysis is divided into two part, Buzz before the death of his wife and Buzz after the death of his wife.

2.1 Buzz as an Ignorant Patriarchal Figure when his Wife is still Alive

Buzz and Midge has married for a long time, around 25 years, and the story begins when Buzz has retired from his job. Being at home much of the time, Buzz does not realize that domestic chores are endless daily activities that must be handled. He is not aware that his wife expects him to help a little to show mutual participation even in the domestic area. Buzz feels that his wife criticizes him unreasonably and it makes him uncomfortable [1]. Another Buzz's ignorance is that instead of helping his wife carrying the heavy tray holding the dirty dishes of their breakfast, Buzz only open the door [1] while thinking that they have paid a maid to do that. His action can be easily understood because he has a patriarchal perspective in which he thinks that as a man he has no responsibility to help trivial domestic work such as helping to clear the breakfast table. To ease his uncomfortable feeling, Buzz tries to scavenge a shred of control in the limited area called a study room [1].

Another sign of Buzz's ignorance is his inability to understand the thorough house cleaning done by his wife and maid regularly [1]. Buzz's insensitiveness to the domestic work is also reflected in his response to his wife's question hiding her annoyance of his being relaxed in the study room or enjoying the sunshine doing nothing whereas there are so many things to do [1]. Egoistically, Buzz thinks that his free time is his right to be spent in whatever ways he wants. He never thinks that his wife also wants to relax in the garden doing nothing just enjoying the sun and fresh. To avoid the situation that he considers unpleasant, Buzz makes excuses of going to London again and again to settle trivial things that seem important [1].

Buzz's ignorance to his wife is also indicated when he does not pay any attention to what his wife silently wants. It happens when they are still newlywed and invited to a party thrown for them by their close friends. After the party, the wife is still influenced by the happy and romantic

atmosphere and want to continue the romanticism at home [1]. The wife's subtle invitation of a romantic action is, sadly, not realized by the ignorant husband. Buzz also has a fleeting affair with the temporary young female helper during the war that forces him to help with the farm work during the weekends [1]. Although his wife does not see the kissing, the unexpected intimacy between her husband and the farm girl is detected by her. His wife does not say anything, however, unconsciously Buzz is comparing his wife with the young girl.

On "a bitter December day" [1], Buzz escapes to London all day doing nothing important not realizing that the furnace is broken down so the house is so freezing cold. Buzz discovers that his wife "began to cough, and as she did so winced with pain" [1]. The sad thing is that the cough leads to pneumonia and after five days in the hospital she passes away [1]. Midge, Buzz's wife does not exist anymore in Buzz's life.

2.2 Buzz as an Awkward Patriarchal Figure after the Death of his Wife

For a period of time, Buzz enjoys his being the only master in the house. After the death of his wife, Buzz decides to take long holidays. What is so specific in Buzz's holiday is his relationship with other holiday takers he meets at the hotel. Buzz, again, tends to keep his distance from other holiday takers [1]. Buzz does not want to socialize because he wants to feel that he is in charge of everything. If he opens his small world by doing socialization, there is a big possibility that he cannot be in charge anymore.

Identifying himself as the master of the house, Buzz cannot build a nice relationship with the servants like what his wife did. His awkward relationship with the cook eventually leads to the cook's decision to resign [1]. The cook feels that now she is just considered as a cook who does her job and paid for it. This incidence implies that Buzz is an awkward master due to his patriarchal perspective in which he unconsciously wants to show that he is the dominant person in the house that can behave and comments as he pleases without considering the feeling of others, especially those he pays for to do the housework. Feeling bothered and also annoyed by the cook's decision to resign, Buzz then justifies the story of a white male living in the East who has a native wife for convenience [1]. Buzz's opinion clearly indicates his patriarchal perspective focusing on his own comfort. Buzz's preference on such kind of relationship in the marriage

also indicates his obsession with control as a patriarchal person. Buzz's patriarchal attitude is also reflected in his hierarchical relationship with the gardener concerning a certain apple tree in the garden that in his perspective, resembles his late wife [1]. All the features reflected by the apple tree, such as, emaciated, sacrificial, drab, and exhausted are all like his wife's accusing attitudes directed to him. Buzz orders Willis, the gardener to cut it. The master's order is rejected outright by the gardener who has shown to Buzz that the apple tree which usually looks barren and hopeless suddenly has produced lots of buds [1].

However, Buzz never gives up his purpose of showing who has the power to be obeyed in the house. He orders the gardener to cut as many branches as he wants when the gardener says that the broken branch of that apple tree smells so nice. However, again the gardener refuses Buzz's idea [1]. Buzz still harbors the idea to get rid of the apple tree that is now bearing an over-abundance of fruits that he detests so much. Not only does he dislike the taste, but he also hates the sight of the apple fruits almost covering the thin and stooping apple tree. Thus, he awkwardly orders the gardener to pick all the fruits, ripe or not although the gardener is reluctant to do that [1]. In this case Buzz clearly represents the characteristic of patriarchal obsession with control. Buzz's craving for control is emphasized by the following quotation: "As for Willis being upset about the apples, what infernal impudence. Hadn't he a right to do what he liked with his own tree?" [1]. He underestimates Willis, the gardener, because in his eyes, the gardener is just a paid person who has to follow his order without questions all the more rejection.

Not only does Buzz awkwardly crave for control in his own house, but he also tries to expand his control outside the house. The new domain where he feels he has comfortable position is in the near local old pub called "the Green Man" [1]. As an awkward person he likes to be in the crowd without being involved in the conversation: "Nobody bothered him there. He would sit in a corner, having said good evening to genial Mrs. Hill, the proprietress" [1]. He does not want to be alone but he does not want to have a real socialization. However, deep in his heart Buzz still wants to have control outside the house.

The chance to be appreciated emerges when Buzz accidentally hears Mrs. Hill's talking on the phone about the firewood she needs so much that now in the dead of winter becomes very expensive. Buzz quickly snatches the opportunity by offering her the much needed firewood [1]. In

this occasion, Buzz feels like he is killing two birds with one stone. He can realize his plan to get rid of the old apple tree that he hates so much and at the same he can get grateful appreciation from the owner of the Green Man. Buzz in his excitement prolongs his being noticed and appreciated by telling her that his firewood is not just a common firewood [1]. Buzz knows that people like the smell of firewood from the apple tree. As expected, Mrs. Hill is so surprised and grateful. In his awkwardness in the social life, Buzz feels that there is a secret camaraderie between him and Mrs. Hill. The awkward Buzz enjoys so much what he feels a secret closeness and he is so enthusiastic to do what he considered as the secret task.

The awkward Buzz prepares his going to cut the old apple tree, the next day. However, his imagination about himself is so funnily awkward: “As he shouldered his tools and walked back to the front garden he laughed to himself thinking that he must resemble an executioner of old days, setting forth to behead some wretched victim in the Tower [1]. Buzz feels like a powerful but terrifying figure, an assassin, and he enjoys his self-constructed image. He really identifies the old apple tree with his late wife. Buzz’s imagination of “beheading” implies his deep hatred, cruelty, and craving for power. Awkward hunger for control is deeply represented by Buzz. At the same time, Buzz also represents the “male identification” in which what he is going to do clearly depicts the male identities of being strong, confident, and decisive.

Buzz tries to justify his plan to cut down the old apple tree as his generous action for the miserable apple tree [1]. In Buzz’s perspective, the old tree like, his late wife, is useless, lifeless, and unsightly that has the potential to destroy the beautiful garden he owns. As an awkward and less sociable male who wants to exert control, Buzz feels that now he is in control and can do whatever he wants to the things he owns. Again, Buzz’s hidden cruelty triggered by such a strong abhorrence is clearly reflected in his words directed at the old apple tree that he has succeeded to chop down with great difficulty.

However, Buzz thinks that all the difficulties that he has faced during his cutting the tree are worth the deep satisfaction he gets from Mrs. Hill and all the pub goers [1]. Proudly, Buzz informs, loud and clear, to Mrs. Hill about the firewood from the apple tree he has chopped down by himself as he promises before. The reactions of all the people in the Green Man are as he is expected. Amazement, admiration, and salute are like

nectars to his hunger for attention. He feels so proud of himself and he enjoys every second of it.

The proud but awkward Buzz does not want to lose the highest moment in his life when he becomes the center of admiration in the Green Man:

"this is my party. Rounds one and two to me. Come on, you chaps."

It was festive, warm, jolly, and good-luck to them all, he kept saying, good luck to Mrs. Hill, and to himself, and to the whole world [1]. This situation is what he dreams of all along his life, that is, he becomes the "hero". The hero for Mrs. Hill, the old lady in distress due to the scarcity of firewood in the dead of winter. He also indirectly becomes the hero for all the pub goers because he can keep the place warm with the firewood from the old apple tree that he chops down by himself. In Buzz's mind, this heroism must be celebrated with great fanfare. This clearly indicate Buzz's strong desire for domination and control as a patriarchal male.

2.3 The End of the Development of Buzz, the Patriarchal Figure

In the high festive spirit, something mars Buzz's happiness. His sudden memory of the female helper he has kissed once triggers him to ask the people in the Green Man local pub about her existence [1]. The unexpected information shakes Buzz's sociable life that has just started: "He was on his own again, silent, in his corner. Dead. That poor, pretty girl was dead" [1]. Buzz's awkwardness returns, he is like a turtle hiding in its shell again. He has no common topic to talk with the people in the Green Man pub anymore.

Deciding to return home, Buzz begins to feel the loneliness that he does not realize before:

This was the moment when there should be someone waiting, someone to come running through from the living-room to the hall, opening the front-door, flooding the hall with light. "Are you all right, darling? I was getting anxious" [1].

Unconsciously, he misses his late wife who is always at home, always waiting for his return. Buzz never lets himself acknowledge that his late wife's presence in his life is significant because he always takes for granted her presence.

Buzz mistakenly interprets the longing for somebody in his life as the longing for the dead young female helper that he identifies as the young apple tree standing next to the old tree he has cut previously.

He wanted to stand beside the little tree and touch the branches, to make certain she was still alive, that the snow had not harmed her, so that in the spring she would blossom once again.

She was almost within his reach when he stumbled and fell, his foot twisted underneath him, caught in some obstacle hidden by the snow. He tried to move his foot but it was jammed, and he knew suddenly, by the sharpness of the pain biting his ankle, that what had trapped him was the jagged split stump of the old apple-tree he had felled that afternoon [1].

In his confused thinking, Buzz longs to be near his idealized representation of the late young female helper; namely, the young apple tree. It is the last thing that he cares, that he feels he is close to, the young apple tree, the representation of his fleeting passionate love that he longs for so much. Buzz puts so many hopes to the young apple tree and he wants to make sure that this young apple tree is safe and sound in the long winter. However, when he physically wants to be close and to touch the young apple tree, unexpected event occurs to him. Buzz does not realize that under the thick pile of snow there is the remnant of his previous action he considers heroic: the apple tree stump which is spiky, cracked, and serrated. He accidentally steps on this abandoned stump and cannot release his entrapped foot from it. Alone, dark, and cold, Buzz is waiting for the end of his life since it seems that nobody will realize his present helplessness in the dead of winter soon.

3 Conclusion

Buzz, the male patriarchal figure in the long short story entitled “The Apple Tree” by Daphne du Maurier, basically craves for the patriarchal characteristics of “Male Domination, Male Identification, Male Centeredness, and Obsession with Control” (Gray, n.d.) whether while his wife is still alive or after her death. As an ignorant patriarchal husband, he almost has no power in the house which he resents so much after his retirement. Without realizing his wife skillfulness in handling the household while working side by side harmoniously with the helpers without degrading her position as the hostess, Buzz continues his

patriarchal ignorance in the domestic areas after the death of his wife. The awkwardness in his relation to helpers can be seen in the resignation of the cook and the strong objection of the gardener to follow his orders. Buzz awkwardness is also portrayed in his aloofness in his holiday and in the local pub after the death of his wife. His craving for patriarchal power and admiration is realized in his action of chopping down the old apple tree that he detests so much by himself and offers the logs as firewood to the lady owner of the local pub. Becoming the center of attention and admiration in the local pub, Buzz feels like a hero and he enjoys this situation so much. However, when he wants to prolong this sense of being important and in control, by acting as the protector of the young tree apple, his feet is entrapped in the remains of the felled stump of the apple tree hidden by the thick snow resulting in the apparent slow and lonely death. Thus, it can be concluded that acting as a dominant patriarchal figure who is in control of everything, is not easy even for a male figure as represented by Buzz. Wanting for more will result in personal disaster. It means that patriarchal characteristics must be realized properly and measured in suitable context to yield good benefit for males and females.

References

1. Maurier, D. du. *Apple Tree: a short novel and several long stories*. (n.d.).
2. Guy-Evans, O. "Patriarchal Ideology Explained." (2022). <https://simplysociology.com/patriarchal-ideology.html>
3. Gilligan, C. & Snider, N. *Why does patriarchy persist?* Polity Press. (2018).
4. Petrucelli, Jean; Schoen, Sarah; and Snider, N. (Ed.). *Patriarchy and Its Discontents*. Routledge. (2023).
5. Gray, J. "Overview and Examples of a Patriarchal System." (n.d.). Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://study.com/learn/lesson/patriarchy-overview-examples-system.html#:~:text=The patriarchal culture has four,centeredness%2C and obsession with control.>
6. Johnson, A. G. "The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy." *Temple*, 3(23). (1997).
7. Becker, M. "Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(3). (1999).

8. George, M. W. *The Elements of Library Research. What Every Student Needs To Know*. Princeton University Press. (2008).
9. Phelan, J. W. *Literature and Understanding. The Value of a Close Reading of Literary Texts*. Routledge. (2021).
10. Creswell, J. W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications. Inc. (2009).
11. Beard, A. *Texts and Contexts. Introducing literature and language study*. Routledge. (2004).