



## Conflicts Experienced by Nella That Influenced Her Decisions in *The Lost Apothecary*

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### Abstract:

*The Lost Apothecary* by Sarah Penner represents the life of a female apothecary, Nella. The story takes place in London in the 18th century. Nella dedicates herself and her apothecary to healing and helping women against the immoral men in their lives. This study aims to examine the conflicts Nella experienced that influenced the decisions she made during her life. This study uses the theory of new criticism by profoundly analyzing the text of *The Lost Apothecary* through a qualitative descriptive method. The data collection of this study is done by reading the novel closely and repeatedly to get a complete understanding of the whole story. After that, the researchers highlight essential things from the novel, such as phrases, sentences, dialogues, and monologues to be analyzed. Based on the analysis, it finds that two conflicts influenced Nella's decisions in her life. First, the internal conflicts between Nella and her feelings are represented by sadness and caring. Second, the external conflicts between Nella and other characters, her lover Frederick and Lady Clarence are shown as betrayal and disagreement.

**Keywords:** Internal Conflicts; External Conflicts; Apothecary.

### Abstrak:

*The Lost Apothecary* merupakan sebuah novel karya Sarah Penner. Dengan latar tempat berada di London, novel ini menceritakan kehidupan dari apoteker wanita pada abad ke-18 yang mendedikasikan dirinya serta apoteknya sebagai tempat berobat dan perlindungan bagi para wanita untuk melawan laki-laki tidak bermoral yang merusak hidup mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi konflik-konflik yang dialami Nella yang mempengaruhi keputusan yang dia ambil selama hidupnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori *new criticism* dengan menganalisis secara mendalam pada teks novel *The Lost Apothecary* melalui metode deskriptif kualitatif. Pengumpulan data penelitian dilakukan dengan membaca novel secara cermat dan berulang kali untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lengkap tentang keseluruhan cerita. Setelahnya, para peneliti menyoroti hal-hal penting dalam novel, seperti frasa, kalimat, dialog, dan monolog untuk dianalisis. Berdasarkan hasil analisis, ada dua konflik yang dialami dan mempengaruhi keputusan-keputusan Nella dalam hidupnya. Pertama, konflik internal antara Nella dan perasaannya digambarkan oleh kesedihan dan kepedulian. Kedua, konflik eksternal anatara Nella dengan karakter lain, yaitu kekasihnya Frederick dan Lady Clarence yang direpresentasikan dengan pengkhianatan dan perselisihan.

**Kata kunci:** Konflik Internal; Konflik Eksternal; Apoteker.



## INTRODUCTION

In human life, conflict is one of the things that cannot be separated and will always be tied to it. It happens because conflict is one of the manifestations of the dynamic and different lives between humans (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019, p. 10). Conflict is also described as an aspect of life that plays a role in influencing decisions made by humans; it underlines that without conflict, there would be no urge or necessity to decide by determining the option that best suits the situation. It also happens in a literary work, considering that Literary works are like a reflection of human life because they are born from human thoughts and experiences in each generation.

Moreover, according to Fernanda and Nugroho (2022, p. 46), *literary works* are also defined as a form of expression of feelings written by humans with a specific purpose. Thus, it is clear that literary works and human life are closely related. However, in literary works, conflict is a clash or resistance between two or more forces. It usually occurs in the characters, so conflicts are central to building the storyline. Conflict is divided into two parts: Internal conflict is the conflict that occurs between the character and himself, usually manifested through his feelings and thoughts. In contrast, external conflict is the conflict that occurs between the character and others. It can be other characters, society, and nature (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007).

Novel *The Lost Apothecary* by Sarah Penner tells the story of three female characters: Nella Clavinger, Eliza Fanning, and Caroline Parcewell. Two characters, Nella and Eliza, are set in the same time setting, namely in the 18th century, while Caroline is in the 21st century but in the same place, London. However, this research only focus on Nella because Nella gets more attention than the other two characters in the novel. Nella is a 41-year-old female apothecary. Nella is described as a pharmacist who takes care of her apothecary in a narrow alley in the corner of the city without the help of others. Similar to human life in the real world, which is inseparable from conflict, in the novel, Nela is also represented as a person who has endured a lot of bitterness and sweetness (Penner, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to explore what conflicts Nella experienced and how these conflicts influence Nella's decisions in her life.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*The Lost Apothecary* is Sarah Penner's debut novel, published in 2021. The novel has attracted much interest from readers and book critics. However, academic research on



this novel is still limited. Therefore, this research was carried out to fill the gap. Several reviews from book critics provide valuable insight into the conduct of this research.

In her novel review blog, Rae (2023) gave a review of Nella's character: "Nella is a complex character, and through the book, we find out what drives her actions AND the story behind the apothecary." The review is in line with the focus of this research, which is to delve into Nella's character to uncover the conflicts she experiences and find out how these conflicts affect Nella's decisions. This research uses a new criticism theory that emphasizes an in-depth analysis of literary texts to uncover how Nella's conflicts are represented in the novel *The Lost Apothecary* and conflict theory to identify and categorize the conflicts Nella experiences.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a qualitative descriptive method, which fully and profoundly explained and described the data obtained. Besides, a qualitative approach is very suitable, considering this study presents the data using words or written text (Dawson, 2009, pp. 14-16). This research's primary data source is the novel *The Lost Apothecary* by Sarah Penner (2021). The data is in the form of written text from the novel. This research collected the data by reading the novel closely and repeatedly to understand the story fully. Then, highlighted essential things from the novel, such as phrases, sentences, dialogues, and monologues, which represent the conflicts experienced by Nella's character to be analyzed. Afterward, the data are categorized according to the type of conflict: internal or external. Then, further analysis was conducted to determine the decisions influenced by these conflicts she experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers found several data that describe the conflicts experienced by the main character in the novel *The Lost Apothecary*, Nella. In the novel, Nella experiences two types of internal and external conflicts. Therefore, in this section, the researchers analyze the data to identify the manifestations of internal and external conflicts experienced by Nella and discover Nella's decisions are influenced by the conflicts.

### Internal Conflicts

In the novel *The Lost Apothecary*, the internal conflicts that Nella experiences are manifested through her feelings.



## ***Sadness***

Sadness is a manifestation of Nella's internal conflict. It is triggered by a miscarriage that causes Nella to lose the child in her womb.

'It happened very late at night... He fixed us supper... Hours later, the cramping began, and I lost my child. No words can describe the pain... I saw that the motherwort was not at its recorded level... I realized, then, that he had used my own tinctures against me. Against our child.'  
(Penner, 2021, p.143)

The miscarriage occurs when her boyfriend leaves after preparing and spending dinner with Nella. The sentence '*No words can describe the pain*' represents that Nella feels infinite sadness and pain over the miscarriage she experiences. The feeling of sadness intensifies after Nella realizes that her boyfriend is the perpetrator of her miscarriage; he uses one of Nella's medicines at a deadly dose level and mixes it into Nella's dinner.

'This was merely four weeks after I had lost the baby. I was still bleeding, still in a great deal of heartache, ... Rissa asked for nux vomica, which can be used in very small doses to treat fever, even plague. Upon her asking, I hesitated but a moment, then dispensed her a deadly quantity, free of charge, and advised her how to best disguise the flavor. Just as Frederick had slipped a poison to me, I instructed Rissa how to do the same..  
(Penner, 2021, pp. 144-145)

The internal conflict Nella experiences compromises her deep sadness after losing her baby. The phrase '*still in a great deal of heartache*' in the quotation above supports that Nella is still profoundly saddened even though four weeks have passed. The arrival of Rissa, whom she initially knew as the sister of her lover, Frederick, but who turned out to be his wife, adds to the sadness she experiences. This conflict then influences Nella to make a destructive decision. With hesitation but certainty in the end, Nella gives the drug that Rissa initially asked for to treat her pain, a lethal dose of the drug. Nella instructs Rissa to do the same thing that Frederik did to her: poison him by mixing the poison into the food he eats. Therefore, Nella teaches Rissa how to disguise the taste of the poison in the food.

## ***Caring***

The following internal conflict Nella experiences is manifested through her feelings of caring. At the story's beginning, Nella is described as an apothecary who has minimal interaction with others. However, that changes when she meets Eliza Fanning, a 12-year-old teenage girl. Her employer sends Eliza to buy poison from Nella's pharmacy. However,



their relationship continues after the transaction ends. Eliza reminds Nella of her child. As time passes, their bond grows stronger, resulting in a feeling of caring for Eliza.

'She laughed in disbelief. 'You want to be an apprentice, an assistant, and learn to brew poisons so middling women can kill their husbands?...This is not a shop of sweets, girl. These are not vials of chocolate into which we place crushed raspberries.' (Penner, 2021, pp. 96-97)

The quote above shows Nella's care for Eliza. When Eliza volunteers to help her make poison, Nella refuses because, for Nella, her apothecary is not a place for good children like Eliza.

'I do not wish you a life of goodbyes, as the one I have lived.' She brushed away my stray hair with the back of her hand. 'But you are unspoiled, child, and I am not the kind of company you want to keep. Go on now, please.' (Penner, 2021, p. 165)

'And I prayed Eliza woke this morning anew, never to think of me again. For as much as I missed her pleasant chatter, longing was something with which I was well acquainted. I would manage just fine.' (Penner, 2021, p. 185)

Nella's feelings of care for Eliza grow, so the urge to protect Eliza also grows more assertive. Nella understands very well that her life as a poison maker is not a safe life for Eliza. If Eliza remains involved with her, then it is likely that Eliza can also be in danger, as well as the darkness that has been haunting Nella. It makes Nella realize that if she cares about Eliza, she has to let her go. So, in the end, Nella decides to ask Eliza to leave Nella's life and apothecary. Even though it devastates her emotionally, Nella is sure she can handle it.

### **External Conflicts**

The external conflict Nella experiences in *The Lost Apothecary* occurs between Nella and other characters in the novel. The conflict is represented through betrayal and disagreement.

#### ***Nella vs Her Lover Frederick (Betrayal)***

In *The Lost Apothecary*, Frederick comes into Nella's life when she is grieving her mother's death. Frederick comes to Nella's pharmacy to buy the medicine his sister needs. As time goes by, the relationship between the two grows closer. Frederick manages to make Nella comfortable around him and makes Nella fall in love with him.

'With each passing day, each promise, something in my heart came back to life. He promised me a house full of children and a beautiful shop with pink glass windows to carry on the memory of my mother. Imagine how that made me feel... What could I call it other than love?' 'I soon became pregnant... 'And



when i told frederick about our baby..., he seemed overjoyed. He said we would get married..' (Penner, 2021, p. 142)

At first, Nella and Frederick's relationship is full of love and romance. Frederick manages to make Nella excited to live again after losing her mother. With the sweet promise that he would marry Nella and build a happy household, Nella feels lucky to have a love like Frederick. Even when she tells Frederick about her pregnancy, he is delighted and wants to speed up their marriage. However, all of this is inversely proportional to the fact that Frederick is the one who poisons Nella until she miscarries and loses her child.

'... His sister, Rissa. Except...she was not his sister. She told me, without hesitation, that she was his wife... 'Afterward, she told me that I was not his first mistress,' (Penner, 2021, p. 144)

Not only does he betray Nella by becoming the perpetrator of Nella's miscarriage. Rissa, whom Frederick tells Nella is his sister, is his wife. Nella also discovers that she is Frederick's mistress but is also not his first mistress.

'I know what it is to watch my child fall from my body at the hands of a man. And while my story is terrible, every woman has faced a man's wickedness to some degree... 'I am an apothecary, and it is my duty to dispense remedies to women... Perhaps if I had bled again after the loss, if my womb were not scarred, I would have stopped long ago. But the absence of bleeding has been a constant reminder of Frederick's betrayal and what he took from me.' (Penner, 2021, p. 145)

The external conflict between Nella and Frederick is represented through Frederick's betrayal of her. Nella understands the pain of being betrayed by the man she loves and realizes that all women experience the same thing. Her uterus, which is not functioning perfectly after her miscarriage, is a reminder of Frederick's betrayal. Thus, this betrayal influences Nella's decision to become a poison maker to help women who are betrayed or hurt by the men in their lives.

### ***Nella vs Lady Clarence (Disagreement)***

The disagreement manifests how the external conflict between Nella and Lady Clarence occurs. The dispute occurs when Lady Clarence comes to Nella's apothecary to pick up a poison that she orders from Nella.

She raised her hand to stop me. 'You misunderstand me. I do, indeed, seek a deadly poison. I only mean to say, it is not him I want to kill. It is her.'(Penner, 2021, p. 112)

Instead of wanting to use the poison on a man, Lady Clarence wants to use it to harm a woman, which is against Nella's principles.



‘I appreciate your efforts in seeking me out, but I cannot agree to this. I cannot send you away with this powder, if you mean to kill a woman. This shop is meant to help and heal women, not harm them. That remains the cornerstone. I won’t dislodge it.’ (Penner, 2021, p. 113)

From the moment she decides to make poisons and change her apothecary to sell not only medicines but poisons, Nella has the principle that she is doing it all to help and treat women and that she will never use her skills, her apothecary and her poisons to harm women. Lady Clarence’s request is so contrary to Nella’s principles that she refuses to give her poison to Lady Clarence and chooses to dispose of it.

Lady Clarence said. ‘I will return tomorrow... ‘If you do not have the powders ready for me as I’ve asked, Lady Clarence continued... ‘I will go straight to the authorities and tell them all about your little shop, full of cobwebs and rat poison. And when I speak to them, I’ll make special note to proceed through the storage room and check behind the wall at the back. Every secret within this squalid hole will come to light.’ She pulled her shawl tightly around her. ‘I’m the wife of a lord. Don’t try any tricks on me.’ (Penner, 2021, 116-117)

Lady Clarence is furious and threatens to report Nella and the buyers in her register if Nella does not prepare the poison she orders the next day. The disagreement between Nella and Lady Clarence ends with a threat that leaves Nella helpless. The next day, Lady Clarence returns to Nella’s apothecary to ask for the poison she orders.

‘You have it ready?’ she asked.... ‘Yes,’ she said,.. passed the jar into the care of Lady Clarence... ‘Lady Clarence passed a banknote to Nella.’ (Penner, 2021, 162)

This external conflict between Nella and Lady Clarence then influences Nella’s decision to violate her principles by allowing her poison to be used to harm women for the first time. Nevertheless, she does so to protect the names of the women in her registers who seek her help to escape the immorality and betrayal of men.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it concludes that in the novel *The Lost Apothecary* by Sarah Penner, Nella experiences two conflicts that also influence her decisions in life. First, the internal conflict manifests through sadness, which makes Nella decide to avenge Frederick with the same thing: poisoning him. The internal conflict Nella experiences is also manifested through her caring for Eliza, so she asks Eliza to leave and not see her again. Second, the external conflict between Nella and Frederick manifests through betrayal, leading to Nella’s decision to become a Poison Maker. The external conflict between Nella and Lady



Clarence is manifested by a disagreement that makes Nella decide for the first time that she let her poison hurt women.

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