Men Don't Cry, Women Do?
A Myth Exploration of the Archetypes
of Contemporary American Novel Grieving Characters

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Abstract

The examination of grieving archetypes in contemporary American novels is crucial for understanding the cultural myths surrounding emotional expression, particularly the stereotype that "men don't cry, women do." This study addresses the gap in literature regarding the portrayal of gendered grief by analysing Alice Sebold's "The Lovely Bones." This research uses a descriptive analysis method and semiotic approach to investigate how characters' grieving processes reflect and challenge traditional gender norms. The findings indicate that male and female characters exhibit intuitive, instrumental, and blended grief patterns, thus subverting the conventional stereotypes. This study concludes that literary depictions of grief contribute to the broader cultural narrative and influence perceptions of gendered emotional expression, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding beyond simplistic stereotypes.

Keywords: Archetype, characters, gender norms, grief, myth, The Lovely Bones

Introduction

As a painful human experience, grief is present in the oldest narratives and mythologies across cultures, proving its timelessness and universality (Sadak & Weiser, 2017). Even though academic research on grief has advanced, gender-based stereotypes and myths about how grief manifests persist in American society (Sadak & Weiser, 2017). This study critically examines recent American novels' archetypal grieving characters to disprove the myth that "men don't cry". To emphasise that grieving is gender-neutral (Lister, 1991). Unfortunately, existing literature often ignores the complex ways men grieve, marginalising their experiences (Matthews, 2021; Gold, 2020). This study examines characters' emotional responses to loss, highlighting their struggles to balance masculinity with grief's vulnerability. In a society that values men's strength and resilience, crying is taboo, reinforcing the idea that "men don't cry; women do." This paper will deconstruct this universal view to reveal the complex emotional landscapes of male grief in contemporary American literature entitled *The Lovely Bones*.

It is an interesting and unusual story theme of grief experienced by a family due to the death of a family member. The death of a family member always leaves a deep sadness and grief for the family left behind. The processes of grief experienced by the characters are clearly described by the author because in writing a novel, the author has the freedom to describe the characters more clearly, give them inherent traits, create gestures, and make the characters behave according to the storyline (Forster, 1970). The characters in the novel are faced with difficult circumstances to overcome their grief due to the tragedy of the death of the main character, Sussie, especially for her parents, Jack and Abigail, and her siblings, Lindsey and Buckley.

Susie's family is immersed in deep grief and sorrow and goes through various stages of grief. Jack's obsession with finding and catching Susie's killer prevents him from fulfilling the

role of husband to his wife and father to his other children. Abigail runs away from the fact that she has lost one of her daughters and is unable to acknowledge her surviving family and the role of mother at home; she tries to cope with grief by leaving her family for California, although eventually, she returns. Lindsey is the only character who can overcome the horror of Susie's murder and slowly move on with her life, acting as a surrogate parent to her younger brother Buckley, who is too young to understand the tragedy.

The sadness of the character shown by the author can be accepted as a truth by the reader because the values shown are considered universal values in society. Values that can be said to be universal are referred to as archetypes. According to Cawelti (1976, and in Adi, 2011), archetypes are story patterns not limited by a particular culture or time and are defined as a combination of specific cultural conventions between one culture and another.

Archetypes are closely related to myths. Authors cannot create fictional stories based on something outside the prevailing values in human life. Authors will also not be separated from the values that apply in human life in general and certain cultures in particular (Adi, 2011). Therefore, this research examines the myths behind things that interest society because myths grow from society; as Frye said, "... myths grow from society and transmit the cultural heritage of shared reference" (in Adi, 2011).

The myth transmits the author's values, perspectives, worldviews and beliefs to society. The values contained in a work can be conveyed to the community, which will happen if the community knows these values. This is per Caute's opinion that "... the real potentialities and limitations of literature as an expression of socio-political commitment can be achieved only if the writer and reader alike understand what writing is" (in Adi, 2014, p. 32). This means that if the author and reader understand the value in a work, then the work has a value understood and believed to be true by both parties.

Thus, the characters in the story represent the author to convey the values understood and owned by the author. Therefore, not only aims to (1) reveal what myths underlie archetypes of grieving characters in the novel, this study also aims to (2) reveal what values, perspectives and beliefs the characters have towards myths in the grieving process in the novel..

Theory and Method

To uncover how myths underlie character archetypes and characterisations, as well as reveal the values, perspectives and beliefs held by the characters towards myths in the grief process, the method used in this research is the descriptive analysis method. This method is done by describing the facts in the novel followed by analysis (Ratna, 2004).

The data collected in the descriptive method are words, phrases, or sentences (Ratna, 2004) obtained from primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources are received from the novel *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. Secondary data sources in the form of reference books, magazines, and other research results related to this research problem are fully obtained from the library corpus. Thus, this research includes library research, which is a data collection technique by conducting a study of books, records, and reports related to the problem being solved (Nazir, 2005, p. 111).

This research uses a semiotic approach to sharpen the analysis of the archetypes of the characters in the novel, which are closely related to myth. As an analytical tool, semiotics can not only be applied to language but can also be applied to all forms of cultural expression (Noor, 2005). The argument put forward in semiotic theory is the assumption that the work of art is a communication process, the work of art can be understood solely in relation to the sender and receiver (Ratna, 2015), so the use of semiotics in literary analysis makes myths can be read easily and ideology can be read (Adi, 2008).

The semiotic approach used in the analysis of this research is a combination of Saussure's semiotic approach with its dyadic model and Pierce's semiotic approach with its

triadic model, which consists of analysing the type of sign that is the main marker and analysing the syntagmatic and paradigmatic of a prose text (Wardoyo, 2005). This semiotic approach takes several parts of the semiotic theory initiated by the two semiotic figures above, consisting of an analysis of the basic narrative scheme to find the main marker, an analysis of the main marker in the novel, and a syntagmatic-paradigmatic analysis of the meaning of the main marker. The last step in this analysis is to find the relationship of the main signifier with other signifiers in the novel.

Findings and Discussion

Archetypes the Grieving Characters in *The Lovely Bones*

At the age of 14, Susie Salmon was tragically murdered after being raped, "My name is Salmon, like the fish; first name is Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973" (p.5). Her killer was a man from her own neighbourhood, "My murder was a man from our neighbourhood" (p.6). The murder tragedy left her family with deep sadness and grief. They must go through a grief process that, although different, has archetypes or universal and common patterns in the depiction of the characters' grief process in the story.

Stages of Grief

There are five stages of grief commonly experienced by grieving individuals (Kubler-Ross, 2009), in the form of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. Each stage experienced by individuals is also different in each individual. Here are the different stages of grief experienced by Jack, Abigail, and Lindsey.

The first stage in the grief process is denial. Susie's family refused to believe in Susie's death, "the evidence was mounting, but they refused to believe" (p. 25). Denial is an individual defense mechanism that is usually temporary, and it'll soon be replaced by a stage of partial acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 2009). Each character's defense mechanism works to overcome the fear that they will lose a beloved family member. Jack expresses denial by saying that, "nothing is ever certain" (p. 20). Although he is told by the police about the discovery of evidence of an elbow and a novel believed to be Susie's, and that it could possibly lead to a murder with Susie as the victim, Jack still rejects the evidence, "but it could be anyone's" (p. 25).

Anger is the second important stage in the healing process. At this stage, the individual's denial that cannot continue begins to be expressed through feelings such as rage and jealousy to cover up the disappointment. This is a manifestation of the individual's anxiety in the face of loss. Individual phrases at this stage of anger such as, "Why me?" or "Why wasn't it me?" (Kubler-Ross, 2009). Lindsey continues to blame herself for Susie's death. She was angry and frustrated with herself. She could not have done anything to prevent the tragedy. She also feels angry that it was not her who died. "At times [Lindsey] wished it would have been her" (p. 47). Jack Salmon, on the other hand, was angry about losing his daughter. Even though all the evidence shows that his daughter has died, he still temporally denies it and turns into anger. Jack expresses his anger by destroying the miniature ship he built with Susie.

"I watched him as he lined up the ships in the bottles on his desk... some were perfect, but their sails browned; some had sagged or toppled over after years. The there was the one that burst into flames in the week before my death. He smashed that one first" (p.46).

In the bargaining stage, the individual creates the possibility and hope of delaying the loss, hoping to a "higher power" to delay the loss. This stage usually involves promises of better behavior or significant life changes that will be made in exchange for the loss. At this bargaining stage, individuals often seek the opinions of others (Kubler-Ross, 2009). Jack began questioning neighbors one by one in the hope that there was someone who knew the circumstances of his daughter. The results of Jack's investigation left suspicion on one name,

Mr. Harvey. Jack felt that Mr. Harvey knew something about Susie. He then urged him to confess. "You know something," my father said. "Go home, I can't help you" (p.57).

The fourth stage is depression. This is the stage where the individual is in a low mental state. However, depression can make individuals begin to understand the certainty of loss (Kubler-Ross, 2009). Lindsey feels depressed because she is often seen as Susie, "Walking Dead Syndrome" (p. 59), so she avoids looking in the mirror. "She would leave the dark shower and feel her way over to the towel rack. She would be safe in the dark - the moist steam from the shower still rising off the tiles encased her" (p.59). Jack experiences tragic emotions that turn his anger into deep depression expressed through a heightened sense of uselessness, frustration, mourning the loss as well as hopes, dreams and plans for the future (Kubler-Ross, 2009). "The guilt was on him, the hand of God pressing down on him, saying, You were not there when your daughter needed you" (p. 58). Abigail begins to feel depressed and tries to push away her thoughts of Susie and runs away to California. "She packed her bags for California and sent cards to my brother and sister from every town she stopped in" (p. 220). He felt that if he was away from his family then the grief healing process would be easier. However, his deep depression made him unable to forget Susie. Wherever she went and tried to avoid, she always saw Susie everywhere. "I see her everywhere," she said, breathing out her relief. "Even in California she was everywhere" (p. 281).

The acceptance stage is that they have to accept the loss and should not hold back the sadness. They realize that the loss is not their fault and they finally find the good in suffering (Kubler-Ross, 2009). The Salmon family was finally able to get back together again with Abigail returning after leaving them for eight years. "My mother, for her part, was thinking moment by moment that she might be able to survive being home again" (p. 316). She was able to accept Susie's departure and tried to start a new life again with the other surviving family members, Jack, Lindsey, and Buckley. Jack also finally realized and accepted after recovering from his heart disease. His attitude of acceptance can occur because he is finally able to face reality. He said that,

"She's never coming home." A clear and easy piece of truth that everyone who had ever known me had accepted. But he needed to say it, and she needed to hear him say it" (p. 289).

Patterns of Grieving Expressions

The Salmon family in the story is described as experiencing grief due to Susie's death. The character's grief reactions described in the story by the author can be said to fulfill certain patterns that can be identified and grouped into three, (1) intuitive, (2) instrumental, and (3) blended (Martin and Doka, 2000). This pattern of depiction is used in the depiction of the grief process in the story characters, because the characters presented in the story can be considered as a representation of individuals in society.

The intuitive pattern in the grief process is depicted through the character Abigail. She is self-destructive, easily giving in to circumstances. She feels unable to deal with the circumstances resulting from the tragedy of Susie's death. She often daydreams about the way things used to be, her life used to be very beautiful, different from now. She often thinks about her past as a free person. "What she wanted most was to be that free girl again" (p. 207). In addition, Abigail also eventually withdrew from her family and left her husband and children after her communication with Jack was disrupted.

Abigail needed to express her grief. She couldn't rely on her husband, who was obsessed with murder and ignored her. As a result, Abigail looks for someone else to express her grief. She has an affair with Detective Len Fenerman, who handles the case. Susie considers the relationship to be "merciful adultery" (p. 197). Abigail needed it as a way to cope with her grief. "She needed Len to drive the dead daughter out" (p.152).

Lindsey can be seen as having an instrumental pattern. She reacts to the tragedy of Susie's death by not showing any expression of grief. She repressed her grief for herself and

did not let others know about it. She feels no need to talk about her sadness to others, especially her parents because she knows that her parents are also experiencing the same sadness. She prefers to express her sadness by being alone in the dark bathroom, without turning on the light, "...letting her tears roll down her already damp cheeks, knowing no one would see her" (p. 60). She is free to cry in the dark bathroom, knowing no one would see her. To cope with her grief, Lindsey implemented an adaptive strategy of distraction. Her passion for sports meant giving more time to physical activity. She did a lot of physical activities to reduce the burden on her mind. "After she did ten push-ups, she went to her shelf and chose the two heaviest books - her dictionary and a World Almanac. She did biceps curls until her arms arched. She focused only on her breathing. Then in. Then out" (p.34).

The blended pattern itself applies two patterns into one. This means that someone with one pattern (instrumental) can change to another (intuitive), and vice versa. Jack can be seen as having a blended pattern. He has both instrumental and intuitive patterns. The instrumental pattern always emphasizes control over actions, while the intuitive pattern has a desire to discuss feelings (Martin and Doka, 2000). Jack may react very emotionally to Susie's death. However, he does not want to show his sadness because he feels that it is shameful for men to show their sadness. To show that he has an instrumental pattern, Jack never talks about his grief with others even his wife. He doesn't even know how to communicate with his wife anymore, mainly because men are not considered to have the "language" to express their sadness.

Jack's instrumental pattern is also shown by his strategy in dealing with grief. Jack creates a mission for himself. This mission is an adaptive strategy in dealing with grief. He exerted all his strength and devoted all his thoughts to finding evidence of Susie's murder. Levang (1998) states that men rarely look emotional in the face of grief because they rely on their minds as a guide.

Jack then became depressed. He needed to discuss and express his sadness so Jack could also be seen as having an intuitive pattern. He chooses to discuss his sadness by writing in a personal journal. He also expresses his sadness by crying when alone, "Into the deep ruff of fur surrounding the dog's neck, my father would let himself cry" (p. 29). He initially did not want to show his expression of sadness. However, later he finally showed his expression of sadness. He was found crying when he had to answer Buckley's question about Susie, because Jack could not hold back his sadness anymore and let it out. He cried when he told Buckley that Susie was gone for good and would not be coming back.

"Susie is dead," he said now, unable to make it fit in the rules of any game. "Do you know what that means?"

Buckley reached over with his hand and covered the shoe. He looked up to see if his answer was right.

"My father nodded. "You won't see Susie anymore, honey. None of us will."

My father cried" (p. 70).

It is unusual to find a man crying in front of others. For men, crying and tears are considered a sign of weakness.

The pattern of depiction as used and presented in the depiction of the grief process in the characters can be considered as a representation of individuals in society. The pattern of depicting the characters' expression of grief in the novel is embodied in a gender stereotype, namely, "men don't cry, women do" when facing the process of grief (Martin and Doka, 2000). Society believes that men should not show the same expression of grief as women do.

Gender Construction in the Myth of Grieving Characters Archetype

The gender-differentiated pattern of grief in the archetype of the characters in *The Lovely Bones* reinforces a stereotype between men and women when viewed from a gender perspective. Although Martin and Doka (2000) in describing the pattern of individual grief

expression use three terms, namely (1) intuitive (2) instrumental, and (3) blended, aiming to avoid gender stereotypes between masculine and feminine, strong cultural constructions reinforce this. The existence of gender stereotypes is strongly influenced by gender norms that prevail in society. Gender norms are one way that culture influences patterns of grief and grief expression (Martin and Doka, 2000). Culture also influences other aspects of the grief process.

At a very basic level, individuals experience grief experiences and expressions of grief that are shaped by culture. The system of gender values, norms, stereotypes and ideologies has long been considered as one of the factors that influence the position and relationship between men and women or with the environment in the construction of society. The concept of gender is a trait attached to men and women that is socially and culturally constructed. For example, that women are known as gentle, beautiful, emotional, or motherly. While men are considered strong, rational, mighty males (Fakih, 1999, p. 8). Through a long process, gender socialisation is finally considered a necessity - as if it is biological and irreversible, so that gender differences are considered and understood as the nature of men and women (Fakih, 1999), which results in gender inequality (gender gap) and explains the various kinds of subordination of women in all lines of life (Hollows, 2010).

This patriarchal culture has, for generations, shaped differences in behaviour, status, and authority between men and women in society. This culture is formed, socialised, reinforced, and even constructed socially or culturally through the smallest unit of patriarchy, namely the family (Fakih, 1999), and religious and state teachings (Abdullah, 2006). The behaviour taught to children is differentiated between how to behave as a man and a woman. Patriarchal ideology categorises a person's personality based on the needs and values of the dominant group (men) and is dictated by what is glorified by members of this group and considered appropriate to the lower group: aggression, intelligence, power, and righteousness in men; passivity, neglect, obedience, and inappropriateness in women (in Hollows, 2010).

In other words, gender is one of the main ways in which differentiation between men and women is made, even in the process of grief. When that distinction is unequal and heavy towards masculinity, we are talking about patriarchal ideology (Thwaites et.al., 2011). In this ideology, social and personal success tends to be defined differently for each gender. When the entire realm of gender difference becomes represented with a single point of view, and the only form of relation is comparison with the masculine, then here myth is at work. Patriarchy functions ideologically through and as myth. The gendered patterns of grief in the novel are a form of patriarchal ideology.

Character's Values, Perspectives and Beliefs Towards Myth

Gender Reversal in The Lovely Bones

The pattern of depicting the grief process for men is identical to the masculine instrumental pattern; looking strong, not expressing and discussing sadness, and having strategies to divert their sadness. Meanwhile, the intuitive pattern is synonymous with feminine women; often dissolved in feelings, need to express and discuss grief, and self-destructive is a social construction when viewed from a gender perspective. Therefore, Fakih (1999, p. 9) considers, "... the concept of gender concerns all things that are interchangeable between female and male traits, can change over time, from one place to another, and from one class to another." Through Lindsey's character, the author shows that masculine traits that are identical to instrumental patterns (Martin and Doka, 2000) are not always given to men.

The traits inherent in this grief process by the author are placed in reverse between the female Lindsey and the male Jack. The first discussion is of Jack's character. He is described as having two patterns of grief expression: instrumental and intuitive. Jack faces the tragedy of Susie's death by prioritising control over his actions. He does not want to show his sadness and never talks about his sadness with others, even his wife. Jack feels that showing grief is a

shameful thing for men. Jack also created a mission for himself to find evidence of Susie's murder. This mission can be seen as an adaptive strategy in dealing with grief. However, Jack then became depressed. He needed to discuss and express his grief. He chose to discuss his grief by writing in a personal journal. He also eventually showed his expression of grief when he had to tell Buckley the reality of Susie's death. The desire to discuss and express Jack's great grief can be seen that Jack also has an intuitive pattern.

Meanwhile, Lindsey can be seen as having an instrumental pattern because she does not express her sadness. Lindsey represses her sadness to herself and does not allow others to know about it and prefers to express her sadness by being alone in a dark bathroom without turning on the lights. No one knows about it, so she is free to cry there. Lindsey, who loves sports, uses it as an adaptive strategy. Lindsey does a lot of physical activity to reduce the burden on her mind. That way, she will not get too lost in her sadness.

When viewed from a gender perspective, Jack and Lindsey show a gender reversal. Lindsey, a woman, is given different character qualities from the prevailing gender stereotypes by the author. The instrumental pattern (Martin and Doka, 2000), with characteristics that are often attributed to men by the author, is given to Lindsey. Lindsey is described as not showing her sadness, she chooses to express her sadness with silence, represses her sadness for herself, and has adaptive strategies as a distraction. In depicting grief patterns, Lindsey is not given the character quality of being feminine but rather masculine. This portrayal is in contrast to Jack, the father and head of the family. Although Jack is initially portrayed with character qualities following gender stereotypes for men, namely masculine. However, Jack's character quality eventually changes to feminine.

Gender Subversion in The Lovely Bones

Lindsey's character in The Lovely Bones differs from the dominant view in the story. Lindsey, who is a woman in the depiction of grief, is given character qualities following gender stereotypes that are different from other women. The instrumental pattern (Martin and Doka, 2000) with characteristics and traits that are often identified with men by the author is given to Lindsey.

Through the character Lindsey, the author presents the subversion of the discourse of the myth of patriarchal ideology in the grief process. This subversion is in the form of Jack and Mr. Caden's failure to maintain ideological dominance over Lindsey. The petulant attitude shown by Lindsey is indeed considered negative by Jack and Mr. Caden. However, this attitude can be understood as a sign that Jack and Mr. Caden failed to establish dominance over Lindsey. Due to Lindsey's attitude, Jack and Mr. Caden also gave up on defending their beliefs based on gender myths. The belief that men are more dominant than women does not apply to Lindsey.

Neither Jack nor Mr. Caden can convince Lindsey of her position as myth feminine as they believe. Both Jack and Mr. Caden fail to maintain their dominance over Lindsey. They could do nothing and simply gave in to Lindsey's declaration to leave her alone. Lindsey did not want to be disturbed, and she felt she could deal with her grief alone. Jack could have ignored Lindsey's statement and still forced her to follow him. But Jack didn't. He obeyed Lindsey. "He could have broken the code and said, 'I'm not, I can't, don't make me,' but he stood there for a second and then retreated. "I understand," he said first, though he didn't" (p. 61). Mr. Caden was also dumbfounded by Lindsey's attitude. "Score! Mr. Caden's mouth opened, and he stared at her" (p. 33).

Jack's failure to convince Lindsey makes him sad. Jack's inability is narrated by Susie through her sympathy for Jack. Susie wants to help and encourage him. This kind of help Susie thinks comes from the opposite direction, the help of a daughter to her father. "I wanted to lift him, like statues I'd seen in art history books. A woman lifting up a man" (p. 61). Meanwhile, Lindsey's argumentative victory over Mr. Caden is narrated by Susie like a cowboy in a western movie who after successfully eliminating his enemy with a gun, brings the muzzle of the gun

to his lips and blows the muzzle of the barrel. "There was always a man who, after he shot his gun, raised the gun to his lips and blew air across the opening" (p. 33).

Lindsey deconstructs the existence of patriarchal ideological discourse established through the myth. In gender relations, a man is, in some ways, not always dominant. There are times when he is weak. He is just ashamed to admit it. In the expression of sadness, it is okay for men to cry in sorrow. In the process of sadness there is no right or wrong way because there are many different processes and ways in the process of sadness (Levang, 1998). Lindsey also indirectly confirms the author's ideological position that rejects the ideological discourse of gender and patriarchal culture that subordinates women, both in all lines of life in general and in the process of grief in particular.

Conclusion

The death of Susie in *The Lovely Bones* leaves deep sadness and grief for the Salmon family, Jack, Abigail, and Lindsey. The characters have to go through several stages of grief, as expressed by Kubler-Ross (1969), in the form of rejection, anger, bargaining, and depression before acceptance finally occurs.

The characters' expressions in going through the grief process are also different. The expression of grief is identified into (1) intuitive, (2) instrumental, and (3) blended (Martin and Doka, 2000). The intuitive pattern in the grief process is depicted through Abigail. Lindsey can be identified as having an instrumental pattern. Jack, who has both instrumental and intuitive patterns, determines the blended pattern.

The pattern of depiction as used and presented in the character's expression of sadness in the novel is different based on gender differences. When viewed from a gender perspective, the patterns of depiction of characters' expressions of grief in the story can show a value (norm) as one of the ways culture influences patterns of grief and expressions of grief.

Through the character Lindsey, the author presents a counter-myth to the myth. First, Lindsey as the gender reversal of Jack. Lindsey, who is a woman, is given a different character quality by the author from the prevailing gender stereotypes. Lindsey is not given the character quality of being feminine but rather masculine. This portrayal is the opposite of Jack. Jack is initially portrayed with character quality, but eventually changes to feminine. Secondly, Lindsey is also presented by the author as a form of subversion of the myth. This subversion is in the form of Jack and Mr. Caden's failure to maintain ideological dominance over Lindsey. The -petulant- attitude shown by Lindsey is indeed considered negative by Jack and Mr. Caden. However, this attitude can be understood that there are times when men are weak too. They are just ashamed to admit it.

Lindsey is an affirmation of the author's ideological position that rejects the discourse of gender ideology and patriarchal culture. Through Lindsey, the author rejects the subordination and negative stereotyping of women, both in all lines of life in general and in the grief process in particular.

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