Life Is Narrative: Narratives as Behavioral Models for Adults Suffering from Grief

CASSIOPEIA FLETCHER

From whichever culture they originate, community rituals can help those in the midst of grief find closure. They offer a sense of structure and can create moments of focus or control for those who are not yet able to metabolize their grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler). However, as such rituals become less and less "mythical" in nature (Campbell), they turn into yet another duty to fill, which can sap any useful contribution the ritual may have otherwise made toward metabolizing grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler). Because of this demythologizing, the rituals themselves are not necessarily ways of experiencing grief as much as they are socially acceptable ways of expressing grief to one's family and friends. This can create unrealistic expectations of grief and grieving both for those who have lost and those who know someone who has lost, especially in societies where "being strong" in the face of trial is the social norm (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 101-105).

Because many of these grieving rituals are religious in nature, society has set them aside and instead adopted more secular views on grief and grieving. This supplanting of established rituals, however, can leave many who have not yet been touched by grief – either personally or vicariously – to flounder when faced with such a sudden and unfamiliar emotion. Modern grief rituals, particularly in the case of fractured romance, is often soothed by fiction – typically in the form of drama or romantic comedy films. While mocked as a cliché, this socially acceptable model could easily be expanded beyond tissue-flicks and broken hearts to create a new foundation for grieving rituals and behavioral modeling at large.

CASSIOPEIA FLETCHER is a second year communications Ph.D. student at the Regent University with her primary research field being narrative communication with an emphasis on parasocial relationships, normative social behavior, and entertainment education. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Creighton University and an MA in Mass Communications from Brigham Young University where she completed a 180,000-word novel utilizing behavioral changing communications theories. In 2021, she presented the paper Truth in Fanfiction: Using Parasocial Relationships to Promote Awareness of Sensitive Social Issues at the MPCA-APA conference in Minneapolis.

This article looks at five creative narratives – *The Illness Lesson* (Beams), *Beloved* (Morrison), *The Kissing Bug* (Hernandez), *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner), and *Parable of the Sower* (Butler) – and how their portrayals of the five stages of grief, as described by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and, later, David Kessler, can create positive behavioral changes related to grief and grieving in readers through the impact of Narrative transportation theory (NTT). The narratives chosen for this article present stark examples of how grief can create a lasting impact on the lives of both the person suffering and those for whom they care.

Literature Review

Stories are the blueprints for life. They create and maintain sociocultural perimeters for acceptable behaviors through various mediums and can provide behavioral models for consumers who may not have access to other behavioral support models, such as family, friends, or mentors (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Brown; Singhal and Rogers). Additionally, narratives can delve deeply into behaviors that are commonly considered social taboos or dangerous to an individual's physical or mental health to introduce warning signs for those who may not realize they are struggling (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Brown; Singhal and Rogers). In cases where the reader is deeply immersed in a narrative, permanent behavioral and ideological changes can occur (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green). This phenomenon has become known as narrative transportation.

Narrative Transportation Theory. Narrative transportation theory (NTT) was created to explain why people enjoy narratives and how enjoyment of narratives can affect consumers long-term. Green, Brock, and Kaufman suggest that the more deeply transported a person becomes, the more likely they are to be permanently changed by the ideas and behaviors experienced through the narrative (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green). Because of this pattern of change through narrative, many authors, screenwriters, and playwrights, as well as advertisement professionals, have intentionally and increasingly inserted educational content into their narratives (Brown; Singhal and Rogers). However, even unintentional applications of NTT can be effective, often more so, as intentional NTT use may come off as contrived (Green and Brock).

One of most interesting aspects of NTT is just how difficult it can be to purposely utilize it (Green and Brock). The reason for this is that transportation into any type of narrative is a subjective experience. What one may believe to be the

greatest book ever written may not do anything for their best friend, lover, or neighbor. Because of this, entertainment often becomes the focus of a narrative with any educational benefits being secondary and often subtle enough for laymen to overlook (Singhal and Rogers). For example, in their 2016 study, Lindebaum and Gabriel looked at the structure and effects of diverse types of anger using the play Twelve Angry Men as an emotion-study lens. In particular, the authors were interested in the concept of moral anger and how it can benefit others by having a focused, equalizing, and even diffusive effect on other types of anger, such as personal or societal anger.

While some scholars consider anger a destructive and unrestrainable emotion, the authors seek to use the narrative elements of this play – which illustrates various types of and responses to anger from towering rage and intimidation to the quiet, simmering need to address and correct injustice – to establish moral anger as a construction process for societal harmony (Lindebaum and Gabriel). In other words, Lindebaum and Gabriel indicated that Twelve Angry Men shows that, while anger can be destructive, it is sometimes needed to break down dangerous or unnecessary walls to reveal the greater structure behind or even to destroy a structure entirely to make way for a new one. In this way, moral anger can break down the unhealthy societal walls behind which lie worse emotions and responses that could, potentially, "poison the well" of society.

Most would not view this play as an educational tool; it is a means of entertainment. The message, however, lingers because, as declared by Marchall McLuhan, "The medium is the message" (Littlejohn et al.,132). According to Green, "Stories that evoke strong emotions are more likely to affect behavior, and are also more likely to be passed on to others" (47). Narratives depicting grief and loss are well-suited to the behavior-changing aspect of NTT, particularly because they are so prevalent across media types from films to novels to stage plays, both modern and ancient. If done properly, grief narratives can shine a light on unrecognized or unrealized emotions by creating a link with the consumer.

Understanding the Cycle of Grief. First introduced in *On Death and Dying*, the five stages of Kübler-Ross's Cycle of Grief have become a permanent fixture in modern society. In addition to providing guidance and perspective within the psychological (Tavakoli) and medical fields (Baddeley and Singer; Lyckholm; Sisk and Baker; Sweeney). The Cycle of Grief consists of five distinct stages through which, according to Kübler-Ross, the terminally ill regularly pass as they struggle to come to terms with their impending death. Later, Kübler-Ross and Kessler

expanded the research laid down in On Death and Dying to apply the five stages to those suffering from grief as the result of a deceased – or dying – loved one.

While not the only theory on grief management, the Kübler-Ross Cycle of Grief is probably the best-known theory to help sufferers overcome personal trauma induced by loss (i.e. grief) (Byock; Shriver). One reason why some theorists and psychology professionals dislike this theory is that it appears to place grief into a neat package without empirical evidence to support Kübler-Ross's claims (Back; Corr; Strobe et al.); e.g., each person goes through each stage in order within a set amount of time and, upon reaching Acceptance, can move on with their life as if the loss never happened. Because everyone grieves differently, the stages may manifest out of order or, in some cases, not at all. This could lead some to believe they are grieving "incorrectly" (Avis et al. 8; see also Back) exacerbating an already stressful and emotional experience. According to Kübler-ross and Kessler ("On Grief"), however,

> [The stages] were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss…They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. (7)

Still, as illustrated by Back, the medical world Kübler-Ross inhabited when she wrote On Death and Dying is not the same medical world of the "metamodern" era (36), and the popularity of the Cycle of Grief model has largely fallen out of favor in the medical world as a result. Strobe, Schut, and Boerner caution healthcare professionals against emphasizing Kübler-Ross and Kessler's depictions of the Cycle of Grief. For too many, grief, loss, and Kübler-Ross have become synonymous, and her stages of grief are taken as gospel truths (Lyckholm). That said, appreciation for the revolutionary impact of Kübler-Ross's doctor-patient interactions remains (Back; Lyckholm; Sisk and Baker).

Anthony Back, in his article discussing the modern applications of On Death and Dying, said, "To me, what endures is the quality of attention that Kübler-Ross gave to the patients she interviewed…I wish she had written more about how she developed those capacities within herself" (36-37). Outside the medical field, however, the theoretical adaptation of the Cycle of Grief has expanded rather than diminished. Kübler-Ross's five stages have been used, both straight and satirically, to assist leaders with organizational transitions (Friedrich and Wüstenhagen), acceptance of new technologies (McAlearney et al.; Tarnoff et al.), the change in

required residency hours for aspiring surgeons (Barone and Ivy), and foster-child adoption (Jones). Outside the world of scholarship, Kübler-Ross's five stages have found a lasting home in modern culture. For this reason, a more meta-theoretical approach to the cycle of grief is utilized in this article when referencing grief narratives.

Prosocial Narratives. Grief narratives are not a new phenomenon. The active use of narrative as a grieving tool, however, is still being explored. Some, such as literary critic Andrew Riemer (Brennan), feel that literature – specifically memoir – is not an acceptable medium for exposing and working through one's grief while Bernadette Brennan takes the opposite view when discussing the cathartic effects of grief memoir writing on Virginia Lloyd and Maggie MacKellar. Susannah Sheffer details her experiences helping a teenage boy work through his grief by facilitating his efforts to write a fictional grief narrative about a teenaged boy named Andrew. According to Sheffer, "This was so moving…Jeremy was learning through writing Andrew's discovery of [grief management]" (20). Along the same lines of accidental catharsis, Rachel Robertson and Helena Kadmos discuss how their collaborative grief memoir "was not intended as therapeutic, but it did in fact help us understand and accept the mourning process" (224). Not everyone, however, is a writer, and for those who may not feel comfortable, or capable, of expressing their grief through either memoir or fiction, established grief narratives may make up the difference.

Following the massive prosocial success of Simplemente Maria (1969-1970), a Peruvian telenovela, Miguel Sabido developed a reusable strategy for creating popular television shows (telenovelas and soap operas, specifically) capable of disseminating prosocial information. This strategy was used by Sabido to create three popular telenovelas in Mexico before being taken worldwide. Countries that have made use of Sabido's strategy include India (Brown; Singhal and Rogers), Japan (Brown et al.), the United States (Singhal and Rogers), and Nepal (Strong and Brown), as well as various African nations (Brown; Singhal and Rogers), among many others (Brown). While the information presented in these radio and television soap operas dealt more with common societal issues, such as the dowry system in India or Aids in Tanzania (Singhal and Rogers), the strategy Sabido developed is just as applicable to grief narratives.

While there are several aspects to Sabido's entertainment education (EE) strategy, the one most relevant to this article is the creation of characters as prosocial behavioral models. The most successful EE projects – in addition to being

transporting entertainment – include three types of behavior models: positive role models, negative role models, and transitional role models (Singhal and Rogers). Positive role models have already adopted the prosocial behavior suggested through the narrative while negative role models resist or are unaware of the prosocial behavior and so behave, to their detriment, in an antisocial manner. Transitional role models are the linchpin for the adoption of prosocial behavior as they show the personal and societal benefits of rejecting antisocial behavior (such as unprotected sex) in favor of prosocial behavior (protecting oneself from aids).

Using these same tactics, positive, negative, and transitional grief models may allow those suffering from grief the opportunity to examine their own needs and feelings through the narrative lens. Because of the stigma surrounding grief and the societal need to have those in pain shut it out or set it aside once the "ritual" of mourning has been completed (Kübler-Ross and Kessler), many whose grieving process might be stretched out or seemingly endless may find solace or companionship in grief narratives, whether those narratives are fictional or biographical (Shriver). As stated by Shriver, "When you're grieving, sometimes your only constant companion is a book" (xii).

Method

A narrative rhetorical criticism approach was utilized in the analysis of five novels chosen from the required reading list for a doctoral-level literature seminar offered at a midwestern university as part of their Creative Writing Ph.D. program. The works were chosen due to the author's enrollment in the class, and the initial draft of this article was written to fulfill the final essay requirement. Of the eleven books required for the class, two were non-fiction treatises on the use of illness in fiction and two were books of autobiographical poems. As narratives, specifically, were required, these four books were automatically excluded. Quite Mad by Sara Fawn Montgomery and The Cancer Journals by Audre Lorde – two other required readings – were excluded from analysis due to a lack of one solid grief "thread" that could be followed throughout.

Additionally, the Kübler-Ross theory of grief was chosen as the lens through which the narrative criticism was focused due to public familiarity with the cycle, its five stages, and the general acceptance of it as a viable method for grief management amongst laypersons. Other grief approaches could be applied to

similar studies to further research in this area, but to keep this article streamlined, only the Kübler-Ross theory was actively applied.

Depictions of Grief in Narratives

The Illness Lesson: The Dangers of Inherited Denial. Discussing denial in her seminal work, On Death and Dying, Kübler-Ross states that denial is typically a short-lived stage due to the constant intersession of reality-affirming events. These events could range from hospital stays to medical necessities to the behavior of others (Kübler-Ross). According to Kübler-Ross, "Denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance" (39). The Illness Lesson (Beams) is an excellent illustration of the consequences of prolonged denial on both an individual and on those to whom they are connected.

A historical novel taking place in Massachusetts in the late 1800s, The Illness Lesson (Beams) is an unusual case of inherited grief due to Caroline Hood, the main character, being too young to fully understand the loss of her mother at the time of her death. In particular, Samuel Hood, Caroline's father, appears to suffer from denial to an almost debilitating degree; a denial he has long passed on to his daughter. However, unlike what is typically considered denial – the refusal to believe, or inability to grasp, the passing of a loved one (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief") – Samuel's denial centers very heavily around his inability to accept his wife's infidelity as that would solidify his own failings and their consequences. It is this denial of Samuel's fallibility that he passes on to his daughter Caroline almost from birth.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief") present denial as a means "to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief…It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle" (10). Samuel, however, and Caroline by extension, is unable to move on from denial because accepting his wife's infidelity and imperfections would unmake him. He needs to believe the delusion he is living in order to continue living (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), and because he needs to believe it, that denial is all Caroline has ever known. It is only when Caroline begins to question his story that the connection between father and daughter begins to crack.

Kübler-Ross touches on the relationship fracturing caused by denial when discussing the case of a twenty-eight-year-old mother of two – referred to only as "Mrs. K." According to Kübler-Ross, Mrs. K. was so deep in denial that she had

not only convinced herself that she was not, in fact, dying from cancer but also that she had been miraculously healed. Though Mrs. K. remained in the hospital and regularly followed her medical plan, her behavior was often erratic and seemed to border on lunatic. The harder Mrs. K. fought against the reality of her situation, the more "unhinged" she became, isolating her from both her family and the hospital staff. A similar descent into madness is experienced by Caroline.

As the novel progresses, Caroline receives more information about her parents and their marriage from reliable sources; information that shakes her foundational denial. Caroline becomes desperate to hold onto the lies her father lives by, and this desperate denial is accompanied by her descent into "hysteria," a key plot point in the novel. It is only after Caroline's denial is completely shattered that she can move on to a different stage – anger – which facilitates her confrontation with her father and her subsequent shattering of his own protective shell of denial.

With the trust between father and daughter broken, Caroline demands that her father face the truth: Miles Pearson's The Darkening Glass was not based on a lie. Anna Hood was not the dutiful, loving, idealized woman she was portrayed to be in both Samuel's memories and her Louisa counterpart. Unable to deter his daughter, Samuel's denial over his sainted wife is shattered, and he confesses to Caroline that he did know of the affair, having walked in on Miles and Anna mid-intercourse in the barn's hayloft. It is only then that Caroline understands the true purpose of her father's denial – his compulsive need to shield himself from his own flaws and fallibility. It was his way of having power over his own life and circumstances (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons"), however flawed that approach may be.

With the breaking of her inherited denial, Caroline has no need for subsequent stages because she has never truly been in mourning. Her grief was vicarious rather than personal. Because of this, Caroline can finally put her inherited grief to rest by taking ownership of her life and happiness in a place well outside the suffocating shadow of her father's continued denial and self-conceit.

Beloved: Justifiable Anger as a Roadblock to Emotional Recovery. Of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief, anger is one of the most common because it is a natural and immediate reaction to injustice (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). More than just natural, however, anger is necessary. Anger informs someone that they have been hurt in an unacceptable way; it is when that anger is not processed or expressed that it becomes a burden and, in many ways, dangerous. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, "Problems arise when we either express anger

inappropriately by blowing up or suppress it so that it accumulates. We end up either giving a situation more of our anger than it deserves, or none of it" ("On Grief" 126).

In Beloved, by Toni Morrison, anger plays a key role in both the plot and characters. Taking place eighteen years after the protagonist, Sethe, escaped from the slave plantation of Sweet Home, the book revolves around the life Sethe and her daughter Denver have made for themselves in a home haunted by the ghost of the daughter Sethe murdered. The baby ghost expresses violence and hatred toward the family, going so far as to drive Sethe's sons into running away. Despite the violent actions of the baby ghost, Sethe does not condemn or chastise the baby ghost and, in some ways, defends her actions after the arrival of Paul D, who ultimately drives away the baby ghost through a violent display of his own anger.

Later, the baby ghost returns in physical form as Beloved – Sethe's murdered daughter – and with her, she brings memories of Sethe's slave past. The more Sethe remembers of what happened to her at Sweet Home, the more anger she feels, and the more anger she feels, the more anger she diverts and suppresses. Her diverted anger, in many ways, appears to manifest in Beloved, who begins to devour Sethe emotionally, mentally, and physically through the outward expressions of that anger.

Read metaphorically, Beloved is the manifestation of the justified anger Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs have locked inside themselves for decades. Sethe's anger is two-fold: she is angry at Schoolteacher and his rapist nephews for ruining her beyond forgiveness, and she is angry at herself for murdering her own daughter – an action she believed necessary to save her from a fate worse than death. This can be seen in chapters Nineteen and Twenty, when Sethe justifies keeping her anger and bitterness inside because Beloved already knows what happened and why she did what she did: "Thank God I don't have to rememory or say a thing because you know it" (Morrison 226).

Paul D retains similar anger – anger at Schoolteacher for taking away his right to be a man, anger at the owner he was sold to, at the white men who imprisoned him and dehumanized him – but as the novel goes on, he discovers an anger he never knew. Mr. Garner treated his slaves as men, but as Paul D comes to realize "Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave…Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away. Would they have run then?" (Morrison 260). The more Paul D comes to understand the unacceptability of any type of slavery, even slavery under a

"good" master, the more anger he allows himself to feel. Tied in tightly with the anger of Sethe and Paul D is the anger of Baby Suggs – Sethe's mother-in-law who died eight years before the novel begins. Baby Suggs' memories are twined into the novel, and in none more prominently than chapters Fifteen – which features Baby Suggs' POV – and Nineteen, which show Baby Suggs after Beloved's murder from the point-of-view of Stamp Paid.

Having led a horrifying life, it would be wholly understandable for Baby Suggs to hold tightly to her anger and refuse to forgive, but after her son bought her freedom, she immediately went to work as an unordained minister to the black community in Cincinnati. She taught the freed men and women to laugh, dance, and cry and to love themselves "we flesh; flesh that weeps and laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard" (Morrison 103). This ability to let go of the past and love oneself is an important step in healing anger caused by grief. "Once we forgive others, or ourselves, we are restored to a place of grace…In forgiveness we take back our power to live and flourish beyond an offending incident" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 178-9).

Unfortunately, forgiveness is often mistaken as excusing or accepting bad behavior (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 178). This can be seen in Beloved when Baby Suggs withdraws after Sethe's murder of Beloved, locking herself into her room and waiting to die. Baby Suggs is unable to let go of the anger she feels against white people for always ruining anything good, against Sethe for murdering Beloved, and even against God – though she denies it – for seeming to lie about His grace. The anger Baby Suggs feels devolves into a depression (Kübler-Ross; Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons" "On Grief") from which she is unable to extract herself. In a very real way, Baby Suggs' unexpressed anger poisoned her to death (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons").

This same self-poisoning can be seen near the end of the novel when, driven off by Denver and the townsfolk, Beloved leaves 124, abandoning the anger she had been expelling back on Sethe, who still does not know how to work through it. Sethe takes to the same bed in which Baby Suggs died to wait for her anger to eat her up from the inside. In the end, it is Paul D, who worked through his own anger and came to a place of peace, who draws Sethe out of her anger and into a sense of understanding that she is worth forgiving. A self-forgiveness that finally brings peace to 124 and, ultimately, forgetting (Morrison 123-4).

The Kissing Bug: Grieving Through Obsessive Bargaining. In On Death and Dying, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross describes bargaining as "an attempt to postpone" the

inevitability of death. However, in 2005, Kübler-Ross revisited her definitions of grief and its stages in her joint venture with David Kessler, On Grief and Grieving. Unlike On Death and Dying, On Grief and Grieving looks at the processing and metabolizing of grief through the eyes of those left behind rather than from the perspective of the dying.

Daisy Hernandez, in her memoir The Kissing Bug, engages heavily with the bargaining stage of grieving as defined by Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief"). In their section on Bargaining, they state "The 'if onlys' cause us to find fault with ourselves and what we 'think' we could have done differently" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 17). This is seen in Hernandez when, after years of looking into kissing bugs and Chagas disease, she comes to an understanding of her own grief, of which she was previously in denial, as seen in her statement, "I convinced myself that my research into the kissing bug disease did not have much to do with Tía Dora" (Hernandez 70).

That sought-for understanding came through an exhaustive search and, ultimately, was inconclusive because, as Hernandez stated when asked about her hoped for resolution with her auntie by her students, "She died" (259). Because Tía Dora is already dead, Hernandez will never find full resolution and acceptance of the true reason for her grief: "When I cried, I was not grieving my auntie, but what I had hoped would happen between us one day" (258). With this realization, the intellectual journey Hernandez took part in takes on a different shade of understanding in the reader. Rather than a journey to better understand the disease that killed her aunt, Hernandez appears to have been on a journey to better understand her auntie. "It was work that felt necessary to me, work that connected me with Tía Dora and the immigrant community that had raised me…And it was work that kept my grief in its place" (Hernandez 250).

The idea of keeping grief in its place is a strong sign of bargaining; it is the idea that, as long as she continues working, Hernandez will not need to deal with or process her grief. This is especially appealing as it is a grief she does not understand. In her own words, Hernandez did not "know why I am grieving you. You were awful to me, and yet here I am crying in public" (70).

Grief is not an easy or predictable path. It is not even a "path" in that it is not linear with one stage leading to the next from Denial to Acceptance (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). Sometimes, as is the case with Hernandez in The Kissing Bug, some stages, such as anger and depression, do not factor much into the grieving process while others, like denial, are only touched on. Hernandez spends

the bulk of her grief in bargaining, wondering what she could have done differently to change her auntie from someone who "hated" her into someone who could love and accept her as she was (Hernandez 140). Something that Hernandez, at the very start of her book, had already described as "impossible" (4).

The Sound and the Fury: Suicidal Depression from Unresolved Grief. There is a common misconception that the five stages of loss established by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross are exclusive to grief over death, likely perpetuated from the title of her seminal work On Death and Dying. However, loss and grief are far broader concepts than death alone, something that is illustrated very well in Quinton's section in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury.

From the onset of Quinton's section, his depression is glaring. He is obsessed with the running of the clock, dragged down by the weight time has on him and his inability to control the time he's lost. Specifically, Quinton is worn down by his inability to save his sister Caddy from an unwanted marriage – a marriage that took place two months before. To Quinton, it would have been better had Caddy died, which is why he both offers and attempts to kill her, and he grieves her as if she did.

Quinton's intense grief focuses around depression caused by his inability to rescue Caddy from the men whom he feels have ruined her. Not only had they ruined her body and reputation, as in the case with Dalton Ames, but they also ruined her chance at happiness, which Quinton seems to regard as an even worse crime against his sister. He demands Caddy tell him whether she loves Dalton Ames, the man who got her pregnant, or Herbert Head – with whom she ran into marriage – or any of the other men he does not know by name, and his depression grows when he learns she does love Dalton Ames but not Herbert Head. It grows further when he tries to avenge Caddy but finds himself severely lacking. His inability to rescue Caddy from Herbert Head – or at least avenge her of Dalton Ames – leads him to obsession over his uselessness. As previously stated, Quinton offers to kill Caddy to save her but is unable to follow through (Faulkner 100-1), which opens the way for Caddy to marry Herbert Head, with whom he knows she can never be happy.

Depression is a natural and necessary part of grieving (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), but as with any of the stages, when taken to extremes, depression becomes dangerous and life-threatening for the bereaved. At the start of his section, Quinton is so deep into his depression that he is past the point of making plans to relieve himself of the pain; his decision is already made. Suicidal depression leaves

a mark on those around the person feeling depressed, and Quinton is no exception. The intensity of his feelings is palpable to those he meets throughout the day from his roommate Shreve to the watchmaker at the jewelry store to the little girl he nicknames Sister, who follows him around and keeps an intense eye on him at every presented opportunity. They see the signs, but Quinton appears so reasonable and detached that no one reaches out further than propriety would allow. This is also due to the culture of the period in which Quinton lives, where things such as depression were considered a mental illness, which was a highly taboo subject amongst polite society.

Quinton would have known this – especially considering the autistic presentation of his younger brother Benji and the strife it has long caused his family – which is why he kept his feelings so tightly enclosed. His one chance at working through his depression before it became dangerous was when he spoke about his feelings to his father. Feelings that were brushed aside with little to no consideration. With nowhere else to turn, Quinton allows his time to run down by forcing his time to speed up. A decision that echoes throughout time to resonate with the niece he never knew, the sister who needed him, and the brother who would resent him for the rest of his life.

Parable of the Sower: Acceptance as a Defense Mechanism. Of the five stages of grief, acceptance is always considered the last step to be taken (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), that makes finding books in which acceptance pays a key role extremely difficult. The one glaring exception is Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler. Lauren Olamina, the novel's viewpoint character, takes careful note of the dystopian world in which she lives and refuses to allow herself to see it for less. "I'm no good at denial and deception" (Butler 136) Lauren says upon the probable death of her father, and it shows in the pragmatic way she looks at death, life, and survival throughout the course of the novel.

Lauren's acceptance is founded primarily in the Earthseed religion she "discovers" through journaling, of which the primary tenet is that "God is Change" (Butler 116). By accepting this idea as fact, Lauren is able to use her acceptance of the inevitability of change to "Shape God" (Butler 125) and thereby shape her own destiny. The intensity of Lauren's acceptance of the world in which she lives, as well as her own belief that God is Change, grows through the course of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Lauren discovers the "truth" about God, and from that moment comes progressively larger moments of acceptance. Her beliefs allow her to kill a wild dog despite her hyper empathy – a neurological disorder that forces

her to share feelings and emotions with the living things around her; predominantly other human beings. The ability to kill that wild dog led her to the understanding that she can, and will, kill another human if necessary and does, in fact, lead her to do just that; a mercy killing of a wounded enemy later in the novel.

However, before Lauren can reach the point of acceptance where survival, at all cost, is equal to her belief in God as Change, she has to pass through several other relevant points of acceptance. She has to accept that her family can be broken, that her community can be destroyed, that her father can be – and is – killed. That last point of acceptance was particularly difficult for Lauren as, until the day her father disappeared, she believed, on some level, that her father cannot die.

In a very real way, by accepting the realities of her surroundings and worsening society, Lauren practices a sort of pre-grieving process. Throughout the novel – primarily before any great tragedy occurs in her life, beginning with the death of her half-brother Keith – Lauren experiences moments of anger, denial, bargaining, and depression, but they are all short-lived moments that, through her writing and discovering of Earthseed, she works through before the emotions can cripple her.

Unfortunately, Lauren's pragmatic ability to control and direct her emotional responses toward acceptance sets her apart from the community at large. Even her father, who sees many of the same things as Lauren, is unable to grasp the entirety of her reasons and ideologies and so forbids her from carrying her concerns to the rest of the neighborhood. Lauren does her best to tone down her need to preach Earthseed to those around her due to not wanting to upset or disappoint her father, but that need never disappears.

After the neighborhood is destroyed, Lauren carries Earthseed with her and passes it along to her companions during their travels. Her preaching gives even further strength to her convictions and allows her to actively change even in the span of just a few weeks as she shifts from being wary and suspicious of everyone to becoming more and more open and accepting of others joining their group as a means of forming a community. A community that is able to band together against seeming impossible odds in order to survive using the idea that God is Change.

While on the surface, Lauren's near instant acceptance of change – no matter how devastating – can be seen as a good thing, there is a level of apathy in her acceptance that presents a dangerous opening. By allowing herself to accept everything, Lauren could potentially maneuver her followers into accepting the unacceptable as inevitable, allowing them to survive to "shape God" enough to create their own great change. By learning to temper her acceptance with active

grief, something she seems to forget to engage in more and more as the novel goes on, Lauren can create a strong community that can share one another's pain while still being able to accept that God is Change.

Discussion

The different depictions of grief in these narratives offer an intense focus on only one aspect of Kübler-Ross's theory and should not be taken as prescriptive or used in place of clinical therapy. Additionally, studies on grief management vary far more widely than the Kübler-Ross theory alone, and additional research should be done to allow for a broader application and understanding of how grief theories and grief-centered narratives can provide assistance to those who either do not recognize or are struggling to manage their personal grief. Recognizing shared grief in others – be they fictional or otherwise – could allow narrative consumers to make connections between the feelings expressed by the characters on the page and their own feelings of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. They can also see the dangers that can appear when those emotions are left unmetabolized or are allowed to deepen. It is possible that by seeing Quinton's determination to end his personal suffering, a reader may recognize in themselves the same dangerous spiral and seek help or, perhaps, by connecting with Daisy Hernandez and her desperate need to understand Chagas and the kissing bugs, they might better understand the suddenly altered behavior of a friend or family member.

However, because this paper is based entirely on theory, a practical study utilizing measures for narrative transportation, identification, and parasocial interaction would be imperative in verifying the validity of this research. Having volunteers read all or part of the works – or similar works with a broader commercial appeal – before filling out a measures questionnaire is the first level of solid research required along with controlling questions for determining types and levels of grief suffered by the volunteers. Due to potential IRB conflicts, specifically selecting volunteers based on grief and loss trauma may not be feasible, but a mixed representative sample will include individuals who have experienced grief in one form or another.

Conclusion

The way individuals grieve is intensely personal. Just as no two people grieve the same way, no one should feel entitled or experienced enough to dictate to another the form their grieving should take. However, there are models of behavior expressed in cultural and societal settings that can help someone suffering a loss to find peace more quickly, models that go well beyond the culturally accepted works of Kübler-Ross. The connections readers make with the characters and settings of popular and literary fiction can facilitate self-reflection and stimulate lasting prosocial belief and behavioral change (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green) regarding grief and grieving. Additionally, experiencing the way parasocial others process grief in positive, negative, and transitory ways can help readers recognize in which category their personal grieving behavior falls. This recognition could then lead to the modeling of positive behavior (Singal and Rogers).

While NTT is still relatively new with much of the seminal literature written in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the relative novelty makes the exploration and even exploitation of the concept that much more intriguing. The immersive and identification factors of NTT are invaluable to any persuasive narrative due to their minimizing effect on counterarguments and ability to create an empathetic link between the consumer and characters (Green; Green and Jenkins; Igartua and Barrios). By reading about others' struggles with grief – whether biographical or fictional – sufferers of grief may come to better understand their own struggles (Shriver), even if the situation from which their grief originated is not in any way similar. NTT provides a gateway through which the reader can feel a sense of connection to grief models in narratives by way of situational empathy. By seeing themselves in a grief-affected character, the reader is also able to see similarities between that character and their own life and circumstances. If the empathetic connection is strong enough, significant behavioral changes – such as understanding what the five stages of grief look like and how they can manifest – can occur in the reader as a result.

Self-help books can provide a framework for understanding grief and the common stages through which the grieving pass, but they can also cause unintentional trauma when the expectations raised through reading these books are not met (Back; Corr; Stroebe et al.). Narratives, on the other hand, can create a space for exploring complex, complicated, and often dangerous emotions and the situations to which excessive indulgence of those emotions can lead (Singhal and Rogers). Additionally, when those narratives are deeply engaging, the information,

understanding, and ideas presented within the text can be transferred to the reader to affect positive behavioral changes toward not only how and why they grieve themselves but also how and why others' grief may not manifest in the ways society has come to expect (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Dahlstrom; Green et al.; Green and Jenkins; Iqartua and Barrios; Hoffner and Buchanan; Schreiner et al.).

Too often today, people are taught only how to mourn and not how to grieve (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). Mourning is done publicly, and it is expected for those close to the deceased to become upset physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, once the ritual is done and gone, outsiders expect grief to follow. As stated by Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief"), "We live in a new death-denying, grief-dismissing world…we don't die well and we don't grieve well anymore" (205). By connecting with grief narratives that depict both the positive and negative aspects of grief and grieving, consumers may be better prepared to face situations in their own lives that may evoke the same or similar emotions (Hoffner and Buchanan).

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