
Grieving to Heal: Analyzing Grief in Zauner's Memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021)

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Abstract

Grief is a universal human experience that has become a recurring theme in various literature genres, especially in memoirs. This study aims to discover how grief is portrayed in a contemporary memoir. Using Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014)'s five stages of grief, this qualitative study examines the embodiment of grief as expressed by the main character, Michelle, in the memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021). The method of this study is qualitative approach. This research results reveals Michelle to have undergone the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Certain stages, however, were found to be more prominently expressed by the main character. This study is expected to provide contribution on better awareness and understanding of grief and its impacts on individuals and our modern societies.

Keywords: *Crying in H Mart* (2021), five stages of grief, grief, memoir

1. INTRODUCTION

For as long as humanity exists, grief has been one of the universal emotions that any individual, at one point in life, has to endure. American Psychological Association (n.d.) explains that grief may occur following a major loss of someone or something that a person values deeply. It is often related to the death of a person; however, grief might accompany regret or remorse for something that had been lost or done. In many cases, grief can lead to further emotional distress along with guilt, anxiety, and confusion. In confronting grief, literature has been found to be instrumental in coping with and expressing emotions that come with enduring grief. For this reason, as with any human emotion, grief is a fragment of humanity that is often reflected in literary works.

Novels are among the literary works that often become the device to pour complex human emotions, including the emotional experience of grief. Alongside novels, poems and plays often feature the theme and plot that are frequently driven by the feelings of pain and trauma in accompaniment of

grief. A memoir is a literary work where its narrative relies on the author's personal memories or experiences. It consists of excerpts of one's life story based on the author's personal experiences (*Britannica*, n.d.). Though it is not a 'requirement' to include grief or any form of sadness in a memoir, the theme of trauma of loss seems to have become quite popular in memoirs. Schaeffer (2020), in her article titled *Grief as It Is: Genre and Narrative Withholding in the Miserable Memoir* names Helene Cooper's *The House at Sugar Beach* (2009) and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2007) as examples of popular "miserable memoirs." As grief is a universal emotional experience, the theme will undoubtedly persist in many literary works.

In regard to the recurring theme of attachment and loss in modern literature, this study aims to analyze the portrayal of the main character's grief in the memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021). The analysis draws on Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2014) five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Kübler-Ross and Kessler, (2014) believe that the stages of grief aid individuals to construct and to identify the feelings that might occur while experiencing loss. The stages are not, however, happening in any strict timeline nor specific chronological order. Every person that is experiencing grief has a different approach to acknowledge their emotions. The stages were formed to provide further knowledge for individuals in managing their feelings following loss.

Grief can be defined as a painful feeling which humans might encounter as a result of significant loss of a loved one (American Psychological Association, n.d.). In the medical field, grief is linked to poor psychological state, deterioration of health, and is evoking possible mortality, depression, and drug use; all often lead to necessary medical intervention (Archer, 1999). From a sociological perspective, Charmaz and Milligan (2006) state that grief is seen "... as a social emotion and interpersonal process because it emerges from relationships, attachments, expectations, and obligations" (p.525). As a universal experience to humans, grief is often perceived as a common response from an emotional separation of a significant other. It is a natural part of one's life experience and a paradigm of "normal sadness" (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007).

Despite its association to a mental or psychological condition, grief is different from a disease. Jakoby (2012) mentions that the notion of grief as a resemblance of illness in the medical perspective focuses on putting a person in a clinical framework and abandoning the connection of grief with the social, cultural, or historical setting. With this point of view, grief is seen as "health-related indicators", including stress and depression (Jakoby, 2012). It is also assumed that grief is a sign of an illness which an individual can be healed from. However, grief is not a disease. Grief can be generally categorised as an intensified sadness (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007). In the American Psychiatric Association's 3rd edition

of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-III), grief is not mentioned (Archer, 1999; Averill & Nunley, 2006). Additionally, Horwitz and Wakefield (2007) find that a grieving person, though they might show symptoms, is not perceived as someone with a physical or mental illness.

As a social emotion, grief is more complex than separation distress. Separation distress can be defined as an “affective program within the emotion ‘grief’, biologically rooted in adults, children, and social animals” (Jakoby, 2012, p.682). Meanwhile, grief needs to be taken care of with “higher-order cognitions of thinking, imagination, or integration of new information”. The experience of grieving emerges as a result of unintentional separation with someone or something. Other emotions are bound to be interconnected with grief, such as guilt, guilt, aggression, yearning, anxiety, or fear (Archer, 1999; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Anger and rage are also parts of the emotions which individuals have to endure in terms of coping with grief. Furthermore, Charmaz and Milligan (2006) describe grief as “the subjective emotional response to loss with mental, physical, and social manifestations” (p.518).

A theory on grief by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) explain that there are five stages which an individual would experience in grieving. The five stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The stages are meant to be used to identify and to understand what individuals feel when they experience grief. On the first stage, which is denial, a person is expected to feel numb. The numbness that a person may feel is the result of overwhelming emotions as they try to survive loss or separation. The second stage is anger, which gives strength in exchange for emptiness. Bargaining feels a lot like endless “what ifs” as a response to loss. A person might imagine things that they could do differently before a particular loss. Depression, the fourth stage, leans towards the present. A person might withdraw from life, and doubt or unwillingness to move forward could emerge on this stage. The last stage is acceptance, which is not the case of being finally all right about loss. On this stage, a person is acknowledging the loss and beginning to find new ways to navigate through a new life. Those five stages are not bound to occur in a particular timeline, since people would deal with grief in different ways and at their own pace.

As a reflection of the complex emotional experience of human beings, grief has been reflected in literature for a long time. Loss and separation are deemed to be universal and, inevitably, perpetual experience for all mankind. Grief as a larger theme can be found in many forms or genres in literary works, such as poetry, drama, and novel. Wilson (2013) in her article *Grief and the Poet* mentions that literary works “can be understood further as monuments to experience of loss that memorialize the highly pleasurable attachments associated with them.” Grief has been featured as a centre of many studies in literature and other humanities studies. Breen and O’Connor (2007) discuss grief theories, grief in medical fields, and the efficacy of grief interventions. Focusing on bereavement in literature, Day (2012)

examines the depiction of grief through the narrative in a young adult literature *A Monster Calls*. In relation to memoir, Schaeffer (2020) analyzes the genre and narrative withholding in miserable memoirs. Furthermore, Wilson (2013) reviews grief as an enduring theme in literature and how literature serves as an emotion machine.

Memoir is a sub-genre of nonfiction literature which focuses on the personal experience and memory of the author. The word memoir itself is derived from a French word *mémoire*, which translates to memory. In writing a memoir, the author further elaborates on their own memories and emotions of certain events in their life. By definition, memoir is oftentimes confused with autobiography, another branch of nonfiction literature which centres on one's life experiences. There have been a variety of statements made to separate memoirs from autobiography. In his book, *Memoir: A History*, Yagoda (2009) refers to a few versions of what differ the two kinds of literary works. Pascal (1960) believes that "In the autobiography proper, attention is focused on the self, in the memoir on reminiscent on others" (p. 5). Supporting this claim, Coe (1994) states that the writer's role in a memoir is a characteristically negative or natural individual; an autobiography makes the writer the centre of interest. Another distinction of memoir and autobiography are formed based on the perspective of truth and fiction. Yagoda (2009) also includes a classification from Vapereau which states that "autobiography leaves a lot of room to fantasy, and the one who is writing is not at all obliged to be exact about the facts, as in memoirs" (p. 2). Meanwhile, a statement by Vidal (1996) dissents the previous idea. Vidal (1996) defines memoir as "... how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts, double-checked" (p. 5). This study will specifically refer to memoir as a reminiscence of the author's life, and how the author observes others.

As a literary genre, memoir has been constantly favoured from time to time. In the last few decades, memoir seems to flourish in the market. Between 2004 and 2008, according to Nielsen BookScan, the sales of literary works under the category of Personal Memoirs, Childhood Memoirs, and Parental Memoirs have climbed up to more than 400 percent (Yagoda, 2009). Out of 16 books on the current New York Times Best Sellers nonfiction list, eight are categorised as memoirs. Those titles are: *Spare* by Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex; *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy; *Love, Pamela: A Memoir of Prose, Poetry, and Truth* by Pamela Anderson; *Straight Shooter: A Memoir of Second Chances and First Takes* by Stephen A. Smith; *Greenlights* by Matthew McConaughey; *Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing: A Memoir* by Matthew Perry; *Finding Me* by Viola Davis, and *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* by Trevor Noah. The list supports a point made by Couser (2012) who notes that a difference between memoir and fiction lies in the reputation of their

respective authors. Numerous works of memoir are often “... one-offs by people who made their reputations in other areas [...] rather than books by professional writers ...” (Couser, 2012, p. 4). However, life-writing narratives are not limited to those with a reputation; “ordinary people” are credited to many memoirs. The openness to the genre is believed to help its persistence in modern literature (Couser, 2012). Another factor which contributes to the popularity of memoirs is its cultural significance. Yagoda (2009) believes that “memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged” (p. 7).

Being a popular subgenre of nonfiction literature, there have been many studies that are conducted by utilizing memoir as the subject. As memoir is a tool that enables humans to reflect and reminisce about life, the psychological aspect of one can be explored through the writing of memoirs. Batcho (2023) discusses memoirs and literature in general as a supporting element in exploring nostalgia. It is found that literature oftentimes bears nostalgia as a way to cope with loss and struggle (Batcho, 2023). In relation to memoir and mental struggle, an article written by Gilmore and Marshall (2013) explore the representation of youth trauma in David Small’s *Stitches: A Memoir*. Another example of studies of memoir leans towards humanities, which is the analysis of modern slavery in a memoir by Syima Hall, *Hidden Girl* (Magdalena et al., 2019). Unlike the previous studies, the present study focuses on how grief is portrayed in a memoir using the five stages of grief by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014). *Crying in H Mart* (2021) is chosen as the data source due to it being an example of current popular memoirs with grief as the underlying theme, and its portrayal of grief can be seen as a reflection of how grief is perceived in the modern society.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study was done qualitatively, relying on textual analysis. As Bradbury (1999) points out, “cultural strategies, metaphors and taboos that characterize humanity’s responses to death can be best accessed through qualitative methodologies” (p.26). To understand how grief is portrayed in the memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021), Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s (2014) theory of the five stages of grief was adopted.

2.2 Data Source

The data in this study were taken from a memoir entitled *Crying in H Mart* (2021) by Michelle Zauner. “Crying in H Mart” was initially the name of an essay written by Zauner for *The New Yorker*

which was published on August 20, 2018. The elongation of the work as a memoir was then originally published on April 20, 2021. This text was chosen due to it being one of the current popular memoirs amongst adults and young adults which talks about the experience of grieving. The settings of the narrative are of the modern era, which build relevant circumstances to the present zeitgeist.

Additionally, *Crying in H Mart* (2021) can be perceived as a book that partakes in the “bereavement turn”, a shift in society in which the responses towards death and grief are being analyzed. Day (2012) believes that “the proliferation of books for young adults about death and grieving can be seen as part of a wider movement in which mortality is being explored” (p. 115). This memoir may project the alteration of the current society’s attitudes toward death and grief.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data used in this study revolved around the notion of grief depicted in the memoir. Specifically, they were excerpts in the form of the main character’s narratives. The excerpts were taken considering the context of grief in Zauner’s story, and they were identified by utilizing certain literary elements: dialogue, setting, and narrative devices.

The data of this study were analyzed using the theory of grief by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014). The theory includes the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The data, in form of excerpts from the memoir, were identified and interpreted by the implementation of those five stages to disclose the portrayal of grief in the memoir.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

To discover how the main character’s grief is portrayed in the memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021), this study classifies the data into the five stages of grief by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014). The five stages, which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, are found to support the construction of grief in the memoir. It needs to be reiterated that the five stages do not strictly occur in a specific chronological order. In *Crying in H Mart* (2021), certain stages of grief are more prominent than others. Depression, anger, and acceptance are found to be more present in the portrayal of the main character’s grief.

3.1.1 Depression

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) explain that the depression stage is when grief becomes more notable. Depression stage by itself is already self-explanatory; it is when someone begins to withdraw from their lives, and the heaviness of grief comes weighing in without a reasonable way out. Depression

after a loss might give a feeling of being stuck in grief forever. Someone who is grieving might feel like loneliness and any other feelings will follow them no matter what. In the memoir, Zauner describes:

“Sometimes my grief feels as though I’ve been left alone in a room with no doors. Every time I remember that my mother is dead, it feels like I’m colliding with a wall that won’t give. There’s no escape, just a hard surface that I keep ramming over and over, a reminder of the immutable reality that I will never see her again” (Zauner, 2021, p.6).

These lines express a negative thought which reveals that she feels suffocated, and she feels as though the heaviness of her mother’s passing will be perpetual and insurmountable.

In another event, in which her mother was in a critical condition and her passing is already diagnosed, Zauner confesses that she rejects to feel joy at the thought of her mother passed away:

“[...] I couldn’t fathom joy or pleasure or losing myself in a moment ever again. Maybe because it felt wrong, like a betrayal. If I had really loved her, I had no right to feel those things again.” (Zauner, 2021, p.153).

Zauner feels that it would be uncomfortable and pointless to feel happiness if her mother is not alive anymore. In the depression stage, it is expected that we see things as pointless.

In another excerpt, Zauner describes that after her mother died, the things in her life lose their meaning:

“All these objects seemed orphaned by her loss, or just devolved into objects, matter, impedimenta. What once had a purpose transformed into a blockade. The bowls once reserved for their own specific meals were now just dishes to be sorted, obstacles in my path to leave. The candleholder I used to pretend was a magical urn as a child, a key plot point in my imaginary narratives, now just another thing to throw away” (Zauner, 2021, p.187).

The depression stage could change our perspective on things that used to hold meaning for us. Following her mother’s passing, Zauner feels as if her mother brings those meanings with her, that when she lost her mother, she lost many other things as well.

3.1.2 Anger

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) explain that anger during grief does not have to be logical or valid. The anger that someone feels when grieving might be targeted at themselves, strangers, family members, etc., for different reasons. In the beginning of the book, Zauner explains the connections of the H Mart in her and her mother’s story. H Mart holds certain significance to Zauner and her mother, as it is a place which bears cultural relevance to their roots as Koreans. After her mother’s passing, Zauner finds herself getting emotional during her visits to H Mart because of her past memories with her mother, hence the title of the memoir. She would feel sadness, but also anger that comes with it. Zauner writes:

“If I’m being honest, there’s a lot of anger. I’m angry at this old Korean woman I don’t know, that she gets to live and my mother does not, like somehow this stranger’s survival is at all related to my loss. That someone my mother’s age could still have a mother. [...] Life is unfair, and sometimes it helps to irrationally blame someone for it” (Zauner, 2021, p.6).

In this part, Zauner expresses her frustration towards a stranger that she sees in the H Mart. She knows that logically the stranger has nothing to do with her mother's illness, but still, she gets upset. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) mentions that underneath anger is pain. It might seem irrational to be angry at a total stranger, but sometimes anger is inevitable in avoidance of the real pain of grief.

On the day of her mother's passing, Zauner recalls:

"I let out a wail so full of anguish, neither Peter nor my father dared to enter. [...] I was not prepared for this. No one had prepared me for this. Why must I feel it? Why must I have this memory? They were just going to put her in a bag, like trash to be removed. They were just going to burn her" (Zauner, 2021, p.155).

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) believe that following loss, someone might feel anger towards the "unexpected, undeserved, and unwanted situation". Anger during grief is also possible to be targeted to ourselves. It comes with the feeling of guilt; we might get the ideas to blame ourselves for things we did or did not do. Zauner experiences this guilt, she writes:

"Maybe I was punishing myself for my failures as a caretaker, or maybe I was just afraid of what would happen if I slowed down" (Zauner, 2021, p.193).

In this event, she is trying to distract herself from overwhelming feelings of grief by accepting a job that takes too much of her time. She then admits that maybe she was trying to "punish" herself for her "failures" in taking care of her mother, when in reality, her mother's passing is obviously not her fault at all and there is no need to punish anyone for it.

3.1.3 Acceptance

It is mentioned since the beginning of the memoir that food plays a big role in the main character's relationship with her mother. Her mother expresses love and care through food; and it is also a part that strengthens her acknowledgment of her cultural identity as a Korean living in the USA. To cook Korean dishes, Zauner and her mother often visit grocery stores that provide Korean products together. After her mother's passing, Zauner visits H Mart; from a perspective, it is obvious that she goes there to shop for ingredients. However, she is also trying to retain parts of her that are seemingly defined by her relationship with her mother. Zauner writes:

"[...] when I go to H Mart, I'm not just on the hunt for cuttlefish and three bunches of scallions for a buck; I'm searching for memories. I'm collecting the evidence that the Korean half of my identity didn't die when they did" (Zauner, 2021, p.11).

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) mentions that acceptance as a part of healing from grief looks like "remembering, recollecting, and reorganizing". Zauner's attempts to reconnect with her Korean roots in

honor of her mother seems to be the way to acceptance. After her mother's passing, Zauner and her husband, Peter, decide to visit Korea. Zauner recalls:

“These were the places my mother had wanted to visit before she died, [...] The last memories my mother had wanted to share with me, the source of the things she raised me to love. The tastes she wanted me to remember. The feelings she wanted me to never forget” (Zauner, 2021, p. 206).

Zauner honors her mother's wish by going to the places that her mother wanted to visit before her death. With this trip, she is surrounding herself with more memories of her late mother. Instead of avoiding the places and the people that would remind her of her mother, she chooses to embrace them. She visits Korea and she tries to have conversations with her mother's sister. This shows that she is preparing to live her new reality without ignoring the past.

Trying to get on with life after a loved one's death might feel excruciating and extremely uncomfortable at first. Not long after her mother died, Zauner was given her ring. When she puts it on her finger, she feels strange and somewhat heavy. She describes:

“With my mother's ring on my right hand I felt like a five-year-old in a full face of makeup. I twisted it back and forth, trying to get comfortable, its facets glistened in the light of the breaking dawn, oversized and out of place on my undiscerning finger. It felt heavy. A weight emblematic of loss, a tug I'd notice every time I went to lift my hand” (Zauner, 2021, p. 154).

Despite the heavy feeling, Zauner tries to be comfortable with its presence on her finger. This could resemble her attempt in trying to fit in with the loss of her mother. The other physical objects of her mother's life also construe Zauner's steps to acceptance. The first Christmas after her mother's passing, Zauner goes through her mother's closet and her other belongings in her parent's house. She is sorting out on which stuff to be kept and which to be given away. She tries on her mother's clothes and shoes; some she saves for herself and the rest she passes on. This shows the process of her starting to accept that her mother's belongings do not function as they used to. She is willing to acknowledge the new world where her mother does not need anything materialistic anymore; and she is starting to step forward with that knowledge.

Not only the physical belongings of her mother, Zauner also gets rid of her own things that remind her of the bad memories of her mother's illness. She deletes some photographs on her phone, and she rips apart the notebook where she had written down her mother's medications and some inventories regarding her mother's condition. She understands that she could never completely erase bad memories or the awful feeling of the past, but there is no use holding on to things that would remind her of the dreadfulness that comes with it.

While acceptance seems like the “final” of grief, it is actually a wrong idea to think that when we accept someone's death, we forget it. Acceptance is not the end of grief; rather, it is the way we live in a new reality following a loss. Grief will stay with us, and acceptance is simply aiding our journey forward. In the book, Zauner later tries seeking professional help by going to therapy. Even though she feels like she is doing well with her new surroundings (new city, new job), there are times when the grief will come more pronounced. “I tried my best not to dwell on what could not be changed and to throw myself into productivity, but every so often I was plagued by flashbacks.” (p. 211) However, she thinks that her sessions are not necessarily helping her. She describes her experience as “hardly therapeutic” and tires her out. “Nothing my therapist said was anything I hadn’t psychoanalyzed in myself a million times anyway” (p.212) Nevertheless, she finds her way to do something therapeutic on her own, which is cooking Korean dishes. “I cancelled the rest of my session and committed myself to exploring alternative forms of self-care” (p.212) “I started making kimchi once a month, my new therapy” (p. 216).

Seeking help in any form to deal with grief is naturally a good sign to move forward. Though in Zauner’s case it does not meet the expected result, it is still a well-intentioned step and a mark of progress. Booking a therapy session is a significant move for a person who is dealing with bereavement; it means that the person acknowledges the struggles and the desire to deal with them in a healthy manner. Even after therapy does not work, Zauner manages to find another way to act towards her emotions.

3.1.4 Denial

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) describes that denial might cultivate in shock or numbness. People grieving might question their reality after a loss. They acknowledge that their loved one has passed; however, denial enters their mind to ease the pain while trying to comprehend their situation. In the book, Zauner experience denial in the events leading up to her mother’s death. Before her mother’s passing, there were days where her mother just lay on the bed, breathing but not moving. Zauner writes: “We were waiting for her to die. The last days excruciatingly drawn out” (p. 150). On one of those days, while Zauner is aware that her mother is unconscious, she calls for her: “‘Umma, please wake up,’ I yelled, as if trying to wake her. ‘I’m not ready. Please, Umma. I’m not ready. Umma! Umma!’ (p. 152). Zauner mentions that she called for her mother in Korean, her first word, hoping that her mother would respond and would wake up to that word. Though Zauner understands that her mother is unlikely to survive, she keeps on calling for her.

On another day, when her husband arrives, Zauner finds herself talking to her unconscious mother again: “‘Mom, Peter is here,’ I said, for some reason. ‘I’m going to sleep upstairs. I love you.’” (p. 153).

The low probability of her mother's survival is acknowledged by Zauner, and she knows that it is unlikely for her mother to hear her, but she acts like she would anyway.

On the day of her mother's passing, Zauner feels like she wants to go to a farm where she and her dad used to spend time together as a kid. She writes:

“It was October 18th and that's where I wanted to go. I wonder in retrospect if I was drawn there because it was a place to which my mother was specifically not attached. [...] Maybe I wanted to go there because it was a place where I could pretend that my mother was still alive, waiting for me at home” (Zauner, 2021, p. 156).

In that excerpt, Zauner is denying that her mother is gone by visiting a place that holds no memories of her. This could be seen as a way to distract herself from the growing pain of grief, by spending some time away and pretending her mother is waiting at home.

Two weeks after the funeral, Zauner and her father plan a trip to go somewhere far. They decide to go somewhere completely new, hoping that it will distract them from the recent loss. Zauner recalls: “We figured that maybe if we were busy taking in a place neither of us had ever been, we could manage to forget, just for a moment, how much our lives had fallen apart” (p. 171). The excerpt shows that Zauner and her dad are trying to do something other than feeling the pain of losing her mother without completely ignoring the fact that their lives are changing drastically.

3.1.5 Bargaining

Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) explains that bargaining often comes with guilt. People grieving might find fault in themselves and might wish to do things differently. In the excerpt that is included in the “anger” section, the bargaining stage could fit into that part of grief.

“Maybe I was punishing myself for my failures as a caretaker, or maybe I was just afraid of what would happen if I slowed down.” (Zauner, 2021, p. 193).

Zauner expresses her feeling of guilt by saying that she fails as a caretaker. Evidently, there is no one to blame for her mother's death. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014) mention that people bargaining in grief are aware that their loss is not their fault, but bargaining becomes a distraction from the newfound pain.

In the memoir, Zauner also expresses her regret and guilt over the things that she did not do while her mother was still alive. When she visits her aunt in Korea, she wishes she could speak more Korean so that she could talk more with her mother's family. She writes:

“There was so much I wanted to say to Nami. I thought of all the years my mother had taken me to Korean school, how I begged her every week to let me skip it and enjoy my Friday night with my friends. All the money and time I wasted. All the times she told me I'd regret treating the lessons as a drag one day. She was right about everything. Sitting across from Nami, I felt so fucking stupid I

wanted to throw my head through the wall” (Zauner, 2021, p. 201).

Zauner feels as if she had taken things for granted while her mother was around. She feels guilty for skipping Korean classes and not wanting to go to lessons, and her mother is right: she regrets it all. Zauner acknowledges that there are things she could only wish for and never gets because of her mother’s passing, and as the bargaining stage proceeds, she could only use her wishes and thoughts to imagine the “what if” and “if only”.

3.1.6 Discussion

Close reading of the memoir, as indicated above, reveals that the main character underwent the five stages of grief, as delineated by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014). They maintain that individuals dealing with grief will experience denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, certain stages, namely depression, anger, and acceptance, were more prominently expressed by the main character.

A memoir that brings to the fore the notion of grief as its central theme is never a rarity within the nonfiction genre. The popularity of memoir as a subgenre has been proved to be constant and ineradicable. At least there are two prominent factors which support the welfare of memoir to this day. Albeit the fact that memoirs tend to be written by people who are renowned, memoirs can also be written products of ordinary people. Memoir as a subgenre is not necessarily exclusive for the elites. Along with that, memoir carries certain cultural significance within the society. The relevance of memoir to society is apparent due to the human complex being its core picture. Yagoda (2009) believes that memoir has become an essential part of culture with how the stories are told, and how they are marketed.

The findings of this study confirm not only the manifestations of the five stages of grief in literature, but they also relate to the issue of how grief is treated in today’s society. The reception of memoir can be perceived as a continuum of ‘bereavement turn’, a phrase which refers to the movement where issues relating to death and loss are being further discussed. The cultural movement provides a space for individuals’ attitudes toward bereavement to be examined (Day, 2012). The existence of ‘miserable memoirs’, and how readers welcome them continuously, show that the notions of grief and its portrayal in literature are not rejected. While, to a certain extent, grief might still not be fully embraced and properly treated, literature can provide a space to depict how grief should be dealt with. Memoir containing death and loss is not necessarily a self-help book; however, readers can get a picture of how others cope with grief.

The bereavement turn can shift the society’s perspective on grief; and the production of books which support the movement is necessary to its perseverance. Day (2012) mentions that “the proliferation of books for young adults about death and grieving can be seen as part of a wider movement in which

mortality is being explored” (p. 115). For this reason, the portrayal of grief in literature is requisite, and it should not be taken for granted as it impacts the way grief is treated in society. The topics relating to death and loss are delicate; therefore, the attitudes toward them should be addressed properly.

4. CONCLUSION

The portrayal of the main character’s grief in the memoir *Crying in H Mart* (2021) has indeed shown to correspond to the five stages of grief. These stages identify the experiences following loss into (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression, and (5) acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014). After her mother’s passing, Zauner faces inevitable grief and has to navigate her life within a drastic change. All of the mentioned stages can be found in how she deals with newfound circumstances; however, they do not occur in a specific timeline. Furthermore, there are certain stages that are more prominently expressed in the memoir than others, namely the experiences of depression, anger, and acceptance.

Memoir has been proven to be a recurring nonfiction subgenre, and it always has a secured position in terms of popularity in contemporary literature. The relevance of both grief and memoir can be seen as a reflection of the society's attitudes of bereavement. Future studies on this matter may explore how readers from different age groups react towards grief in literary works. Age could be seen as an aspect which influences how people approach and manage their grief. Comparing the attitudes of younger and older readers towards grief can lead to a better understanding of how grief is perceived in today’s modern societies.

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