

## THE PRESERVATIONS OF GRIEF IN KAREN JONES' *THE ANATOMY OF THE AFTERMATH*

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**Received:** 6 August 2024, **Revised:** 10 September 2024, **Accepted:** 5 October 2024

### Abstract

This paper is focusing on the representation of Grief in the short story of *Anatomy of the Aftermath* by Karen Jones. Grief is an emotional experience triggered by the loss of something or someone that a person loves, often involving the process of detachment. Then, grief also helps individuals feel closer to the object of love, honor their memories, or fill the void left behind. Karen Jones' flash fiction explores the story of a woman who feels sadness, regret, and longing for her husband's voice after his death. Through qualitative method, this article explores symbols and motifs of the woman's desire to hear her husband's voice and the love that still exists between them despite their separation. Through Kubler Ross' theory of grief, this paper suggests that if a person can navigate the process well, they can experience normal and healthy grief. In conclusion, it is noted that grief could have two faces of being constructive and destructive. Both aspects are thickly indicated in Jones' flash fiction.

**Keywords:** *Anatomy of the Aftermath*; Grief; Karen Jones; Kubler Ross

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini berfokus pada representasi kesedihan yang mendalam pada cerita pendek *Anatomy of the Aftermath* karya Karen Jones. Kesedihan yang mendalam adalah pengalaman emosional yang dipicu oleh kehilangan sesuatu atau seseorang yang dicintai, sering kali melibatkan proses pelepasan. Kemudian, emosi ini juga membantu individu merasa lebih dekat dengan objek cinta, menghormati kenangannya, atau mengisi kekosongan yang ditinggalkan. Fiksi karya Karen Jones mengeksplorasi kisah seorang wanita yang merasakan kesedihan, penyesalan, dan kerinduan akan suara suaminya setelah kematiannya. Melalui metode kualitatif, artikel ini mengeksplorasi simbol dan motif keinginan perempuan untuk mendengar suara suaminya serta rasa cinta yang masih terjalin di antara mereka meski berpisah. Melalui teori kesedihan yang mendalam Kubler Ross, makalah ini menunjukkan bahwa jika seseorang dapat menavigasi prosesnya dengan baik, maka mereka dapat mengalami kesedihan yang normal dan sehat. Kesimpulannya, kesedihan bisa mempunyai dua sisi, yaitu konstruktif dan destruktif. Kedua aspek tersebut banyak ditunjukkan dalam karya yang ditulis oleh Jones.

**Kata kunci:** *Anatomy of the Aftermath*; Kesedihan Mendalam; Karen Jones; Kubler Ross

## INTRODUCTION

Losing someone close to a person can be a challenging experience, leading to sadness, confusion, and depression. Grief is a personal journey, with each person experiencing different phases (Eisma, et al., 2023; Shear & Shair, 2005). Overcoming grief takes time, as memories from the past are present. Some people may recover due to support or the environment, while others struggle with the uncertainty of the end of these feelings (Oktavia, et al., 2023; Yuliasuti & Pasopati, 2021). On a hand, grief results to idea of being longingness and loneliness. If this one lingers, further sadness could come and may destroy any future of that person. On the other hand, grief could be healthy since it is considered a phase to gain better hope (Bolden, 2007; Listyaningsih et al., 2022). Indeed, there is a process of being sincere in reacting to such loss. Then, further hope to the one that is lost could be obtained furthermore.

Grieving after death or loss can bring hope, as the memory of that moment can make someone's hope appear and hope to return (Oktavia, et al., 2023; Yuliasuti & Pasopati, 2021). The arrival of this hope can also indicate emotions that can cause trauma, depression, and prolonged grief (also mental health). It is also possible to become more sensitive to situations. Reducing socializing or self-blame for loss or death may also appear at once (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011). Only by passing through such depression then hope could rise once again. The hope is not only for the one that is lost, but also for the one that misses the lost one. It is quite reciprocal between the one who feels and the event of loss.

It is not easy for someone to overcome the feeling of losing a loved one, because everyone has the memory of memories from

the past. Some people can recover from this feeling of loss, due to the influence of support from those closest to them or through mental therapy (Bolden, 2007; Listyaningsih et al., 2022). However, some people also have difficulty dealing with these feelings. No matter how strong it is, if it hurts the feeling of losing someone, it will hurt. The wounds are invisible, but those will last without knowing when it will end. Therefore, people need space or a place to deal with feelings of sadness and loss to pass the event of loss (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011).

Grief in a short story by Karen Jones entitled *Anatomy of The Aftermath* tells about the story of a woman whose husband left her because of an incident (Jones, 2021). With deep feelings of regret and sadness over the departure of her husband, she missed the warmth and affection of her deceased husband. This story explores the themes of sadness and regret through symbols, motifs, and language styles used by Karen Jones (Jones, 2021). Symbols on the ears and heart left by her husband's ghost on the kitchen table and sofa. The ears symbolize the wife's desire to hear her husband's voice. And for the heart, it symbolizes the love that still exists between them even though death is a wall between them.

While the motif in the short story is night and stars, which appear repeatedly in the story. The night symbolizes the loneliness and darkness felt by the woman. While the star symbolizes hopes and dreams that have not come true with her husband (Jones, 2021). The woman hoped that her husband could become a star who could shine and light up her lonely night sky. The language style in the story uses words such as "*chill of gray*" which means to show the contrast between life and death.

## METHOD

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlation about Grief in Kubler Ross's theory and *Anatomy of The Aftermath* short story by Karen Jones alongside literary concept and existential ideas. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matter. The data analysis includes obtaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with the other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references. The research data comes from both Karen Jones short and Kubler Ross's arguments. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. The plot and settings of the flash fiction are mainly involved to point to the significant condition of the woman who is experiencing grief over the departure of her husband. The premises and logics used in Kubler Ross's ideas are also drawn to underline matters of grief. The following analyses then include how the woman's feeling sadness, loneliness, and regret. Here, Karen Jones' short story is the object while Ross's ideas are tools to analyze.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Longingness and Loneliness in *Anatomy of the Aftermath*

Flash fiction of *Anatomy of The Aftermath* by Karen Jones tells the story of a wife who is dealing with grief and the aftermath of a traumatic event. The story is about how she copes with the situation and how she tries to move on (Jones, 2021). She feels guilty, angry, and depressed. She blames herself for the accident, and wishes she had died instead of her husband. She isolates herself from the

world, and refuses to talk to anyone. She has nightmares and flashbacks of the accident (Jones, 2021). The story then shows glimpses of hope for the husband from the wife. At last, she starts to heal, and slowly accepts the reality of that loss.

"He's left an ear on the kitchen table again – not funny the first time, not funny now." (Jones, 2021).

The sentence shows that this is not the first time he has done this, and that she does not find it amusing or endearing, but rather irritating and creepy. The sentence also implies that the husband is trying to get her attention or make her laugh, but she is not interested or amused (Jones, 2021). The sentence sets the tone for the rest of the story, which explores feelings of grief, anger, guilt, and longing for her dead husband.

The scene above shows how the wife longs for the husband. She knows that he has died but the voice of the husband keeps coming to the ear of the wife. This situation senses the idea of longingness of the wife to her husband (Jones, 2021). Meanwhile, the longingness is also a mere reflection of loneliness since all she could hear is just the voice of the dead man. At this time, she fights with his internal feelings whether the real and the unreal overlaps each other through the reality of her deceased husband.

"Eleanor tries to ignore it, clears plates, wishing this was a Greek restaurant, clenches her fists, imagining a muscled opponent, breathes deeply and exhales long, then drops her shoulders." (Jones, 2021).

She attempts to ignore the ear and distract herself by doing chores, fantasizing, and breathing exercises. However, her actions also reveal her frustration, anger, and stress. She wishes she was somewhere else, like a Greek restaurant where she could smash plates. She

clenches her fists, as if ready to fight (Jones, 2021). She breathes deeply and exhales long, as if trying to calm herself down. She drops her shoulders, as if giving up or surrendering. The sentence portrays Eleanor's struggle to deal with her grief and the haunting reminders of her husband's death.

It is interesting how the wife tries to transform her grief to any kind of violence she could do. She would like to do things to push out her anger and depression. She knows that she should not be in depression forever (Jones, 2021). She knows that the death is at the end and any wish will not return her husband alive. This situation then reflects her feelings to take out any bad feeling of hers and exchange them with better memories of his dearest husband.

"She reaches for the ear, knowing it will simply vanish at her touch." (Jones, 2021).

The sentence above shows Eleanor's curiosity and longing for her husband's ghost, who has left an ear on the kitchen table. She reaches for the ear, knowing that it is not real and that it will disappear as soon as she touches it. This suggests that she is aware of the failure and impossibility of her situation, but she still wants to feel some connection with her husband, even if it is only an illusion (Jones, 2021). The sentence also reveals the supernatural and surreal nature of the story, where the dead can manifest themselves in different forms and places, but only to the living who loved them.

Eleanor's grief is so deep that she sometimes thinks that the voice is real. However, she returns to reality when she instantly comes to her senses. The ear is a reflection of her longingness for her husband while the sense is her real condition right now (Jones, 2021). At once, she remembers

what is left of her husband. He may not leave anything, but memories of himself talking to her. This is what makes grief last longer, but as long as the memories pile up, that situation will soon come to an end (Jones, 2021). It is a phase where she will finally accept the loss and leave her husband as he really is in the afterlife.

"He's barefoot, his high-polished shoes dropped to the floor, his socks balled next to them. Neat. She should take the couch to the dump, but there's something about it that gives her comfort." (Jones, 2021).

He is barefoot, his shoes and socks dropped and balled next to the couch, implying that he is relaxed and comfortable in their home. He is also neat, as he always was in life, which contrasts with the messiness and chaos of his death (Jones, 2021). She thinks she should get rid of the couch, which is stained with his blood and reminds her of his suicide, but she also finds comfort in it, as it is the only place where he appears to her. The sentence reveals Eleanor's conflicted feelings of love and hate, guilt and resentment, and grief and acceptance.

She could not leave out any habit of her husband. She keeps reminding herself of any good memories of him. On one hand, it is good since remembering the deceased one will shape good memories intact. However, if it is not well managed, it will pile up into grief and anger (Jones, 2021). Someone should deal with the grief as best as possible so that further acceptance could be gained at last.

"He nods, gets up, puts on his socks and shoes, pushes his hair back from his face and blows her a kiss as he disappears." (Jones, 2021).

The sentence above shows the ghost of Eleanor's husband leaving her alone after she asks him for some peace. He nods, indicating that he understands and respects her request.

He gets up, puts on his socks and shoes, pushes his hair back from his face, and blows her a kiss as he disappears, implying that he still loves her and wants to look good for her, even though he is dead (Jones, 2021). These actions also contrast with the ear and the heart that he leaves behind on the table and the couch, which are terrifying and disturbing reminders of his death.

The sentence suggests that the narrator has mixed feelings about her husband's presence. She is annoyed and haunted by him, but she also misses him and wishes he was still alive. The mixed feelings are what transform her feelings from loneliness to longingness. The longingness is sweet for Eleanor rather than prolonging sadness (Jones, 2021). In addition, it is quite rare for grief to have that reversed situation. It is since people are used to longing more but later come to be lonely. Eleanor is having a reverse situation from what other people feel.

"He's smiling. Always smiling. His hair is so much longer, and it suits him. She hates that it suits him. But those clothes. Why did she choose that outfit? He only ever wore it once, to his father's wedding – a wedding he didn't want to attend,..." (Jones, 2021).

He is smiling, as if he is happy and carefree, which contrasts with her sadness and anger. His hair is longer, which means he has changed since his death, and it looks good on him, which makes her jealous and resentful (Jones, 2021). His clothes are the ones she picked for him to wear to his father's wedding, which he hated, which suggests that she regrets forcing him to do something he didn't want to do, and that she blames herself for his suicide. The sentence reveals Eleanor complex emotions of love and hate, guilt, grief and acceptance.

It is quite possible that the happy memories that Eleanor has with her husband later shapes her acceptance. She knows that her husband is always happy and she has to be happy for the sake of her husband (Jones, 2021). She knew that she could not have her husband again. However, she must not also be sad for her husband. The grief for her is not the end, but an ongoing process for her to gain more power to accept the reality of her deceased husband (Alvis, et al., 2023; Bolden, 2007). At last she must be happy again, for herself and her husband too.

"She seldom speaks to him, hates to give him the satisfaction, but sometimes she needs peace." (Jones, 2021).

She seldom speaks to him, indicating that she is angry and resentful of him, and that she does not want to encourage his behavior or acknowledge his existence. She hates to give him the satisfaction, implying that he enjoys annoying and haunting her, and that he wants her to react or communicate with him (Jones, 2021). But sometimes she needs peace, suggesting that she is tired and stressed by his constant interference, and that she wants him to leave her alone.

It is true that the memory haunts her, but it also reminds her about the best of him. In this sense, she knows that she is not a good wife for him (Jones, 2021). She is not so close to him while her husband is always there for her. This is what later makes her understand that the loss should be accepted as it is. The reality is always there, not to be compromised, but to be known, understood, and hoped.

"Could you not? Please? Not today. Just give me one day." (Jones, 2021).

The sentence shows that Eleanor asks him to stop bothering her and give her some peace, at least for one day. She implies that she is exhausted and overwhelmed by his

constant interference, and that she needs a break from his haunting (Jones, 2021). She hates that the memories keep coming and later she knows that she must do a final deed to end the haunting for herself.

The haunting is the ghost that keeps disturbing Eleanor. She knows that the ghost is always there, but she needs to ignore it. On the other hand, she misses her husband too. She wants him to exist, not to haunt her with constant ghosts (Jones, 2021). Nevertheless, it will not happen. Her grief is polluted with anger at this time, but still she needs to bargain with it. She could not sacrifice herself, but she could leave her bad feelings for her husband and keep the good ones intact.

“She lies down, craving warmth from where his body lay, but all he’s left behind is that chill of gray that more than matters. And a heart, balanced on the arm rest, still beating.” (Jones, 2021).

The scene above is the last sentence of the flash fiction by Karen Jones. It shows Eleanor’s despair and loneliness after her husband’s ghost leaves her (Jones, 2021). She lies down on the couch where he used to appear, hoping to feel some warmth or comfort from him, but all she feels is the cold and emptiness of his absence. The sentence reveals Eleanor’s tragic and hopeless situation, where she is haunted by the reminders of her husband’s death, but unable to feel his presence or love.

At last, she knows that she is alone again, but her longingness makes her relax. She is not disturbed with any ghost again. It is gone and she returns to her life. She has passed the bad phase of her life (Eisma, et al., 2023; Shear & Shair, 2005). It is unique how Jones shows the aftermath of a deceased person in a very short fiction. It also proves that flash fiction, in spite of its short words, will always contain deepful meanings of everyday life.

## Grief and Its Prolonging Conditions

There is no cure for grief. Grieving is a natural process or natural response in dealing with loss. Even though the wound of loss cannot be completely healed, at least over time it can be covered little by little (Araya, 2023; Jelita, et al., 2024). The main medication is by giving space to grieve. However, grieving can become dangerous if it is allowed to prolong. The consequences can be fatal if a grieving person experiences a prolonged emotional or mental health disorder.

Generally, grief has two processes. The first is the process of releasing emotional ties to feelings of loss. This process takes a long time, because someone faces a painful reality and can cause feelings of anger, regret, and despair (Araya, 2023; Jelita, et al., 2024). The second process takes over the emotional characteristics or nature of the feeling of loss. The process can help someone recover from a loss or honor its memory. Therefore, grief can also be said to be a normal feeling of loss and sadness in general. Someone can get through the most difficult phases if they go through the process well. However, if she/he could not pass that, the situation may result in severe stress, depression, psychological disorders or psychosis (Eisma, et al., 2023; Shear & Shair, 2005).

Kubler Ross indicates some stages of grief known as DABDA or Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). Not everyone goes through these stages of grief. Some people may not experience the stage of depression or anger, but there are also people who experience all stages of grief. However, in essence, everyone will experience a stage of self-acceptance (Elfers, et al., 2023; Yoshiike, et al., 2023). Everyone will come to the end of the grief as long as she/he knows how to handle it.

Denial is the first stage of grief in the Ross' model (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). At the denial stage, some people may tend to be in a long-term state of rejection and likely lose contact with the reality experienced at the time. Someone may also experience a stage of denial or rejection due to past problems. And the denial stage usually occurs after the shock stage (Elfers, et al., 2023; Yoshiike, et al., 2023). Denial is also a general defense mechanism used to protect oneself from the difficulty of considering the disappointing reality of what is experienced during a time of loss. Many times people will deny the facts they get. This stage is not very detrimental, but the existing emotions will make it increasingly difficult to reach reality.

Anger is the second stage of grief which describes the emotional reactions of people facing death or loss (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). After getting terrible news, it is common for people to solve things through anger. Anger is a normal or natural response to feelings of helplessness, injury, or betrayal by a situation. Moreover, various situations of anger can cause guilt, self-blame, limiting activity or limiting communication to the nearest person. However, anger is either a normal feeling or not a bad emotion, but is very dangerous if not properly controlled (Howarth, 2011; Nordal, 2011). It needs to be well handled, so that positive things that make anger a source of energy and a motivation to overcome the challenges of sadness could come to surface.

Bargaining is the third stage of grief. It is a way to overcome the pain and uncertainty caused by sadness (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). Bargaining is the emotional reaction of people facing the reality of death or loss. At this stage, people negotiate or try to make a deal with themselves to avoid the pain of loss. Someone who lost someone they loved may

still be remembered with their last interaction with the people they loved (Howarth, 2011; Nordal, 2011). Because of that memory, people tend to assume that if things were going differently, such as loss would never happen, or maybe they wonder if they could do something different to prevent death. That thing can cause tremendous pain. Bargaining could be praying, begging, or even making a negotiation. Bargaining is also a sign of the presence of a hope that indicates that the person is still looking for a way out of the pain of loss (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023).

Depression as the fourth stage tends to withdraw and goes into sadness. This phase indicates that the person is beginning to accept the situation and realize a reality that what is happening is real. At the stage of depression, people who face reality or loss will feel sad, desperate, and even lonely (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011). They may lose interest in activities, have trouble sleeping, eat irregularly, isolate themselves from the outside environment, and withdraw themselves from others. This stage really needs support from other people or people closest to them who can provide comfort, empathy, reduced emotional feelings, and calm (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). The only way to recover from this stage is by dealing with it and overcoming it. Positively, depression can also be a healing process, because it allows a person to express and release emotions and prepare for the final stage of grief.

Acceptance is the final stage which shows that individuals have accepted the reality and the impact of the loss or change experienced (Morrow, 2023; Tyrell, et al., 2023). This stage does not mean that individuals feel happy or relieved, but are more realistic, calm, and ready to face new challenges. Neither does it mean that people will not feel sadness or pain, but will be better able to manage emotions

and appreciate life (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011). Acceptance is more about making sense of life with existing changes.

### **The End of the Ghosts of Grief in *Anatomy of the Aftermath***

Grief is indeed characterized by feelings of confusion, despair, hopelessness, depression, and withdrawal from normal activities and social interactions. Depression in grief can make someone feel sad, hopeless, guilty, or worthless (Howarth, 2011; Nordal, 2011). However, if grief is handled properly, it could slowly come to accept the reality. Accepting the reality of loss or death may be quite difficult for people who are experiencing it. It does take time for them to accept the reality (Boelen, 2023; Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017).

In the first sentence of *Anatomy of the Aftermath*, it is said that “*He’s left an ear on the kitchen table again – not funny the first time, not funny now*” (Jones, 2021). That shows how Eleanor feels after what happened to her. It shows feelings of shock, numbness, and anger after loss or death. The grieving person may have difficulty accepting the reality of the loss, and may experience a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011). When the loss of a loved one has gone and never comes back again, it feels like the most important part has disappeared and will never be repaired again. Eleanor feels such denial in this part. Due to the feeling of loss, there is a wound that will never disappear and will always remain because there is no medication to heal it permanently (Boelen, 2023; Friedrich & Wüstenhagen, 2017).

In the next part of “*He nods, gets up, puts on his socks and shoes, pushes his hair back from his face and blows her a kiss as he disappears*” (Jones, 2021), it shows that Eleanor remembers memories with her

husband and still holds out hope. Though the days have passed, these wounds and these sorrows are always there and are always embedded in the memories left behind (Bolden, 2007; Listyaningsih et al., 2022). Life in this world is not the same. In the part above, it shows that Eleanor is not that easy to forget the memories left by her husband. Even the remaining memories with her husband always haunts her. There is a sense of bargaining in this sentence in which she has to deal with any bad and good memory of her husband (Wayland, et al., 2015; Ratcliff, 2022).

Next, in the part of “*Eleanor tries to ignore it, clears plates, wishing this was a Greek restaurant, clenches her fists, imagining a muscled opponent, breathes deeply and exhales long, then drops her shoulders*” (Jones, 2021), she feels disconnected since she loses someone she loves. Then, it raises pain in her heart as Eleanor experiences sadness over the loss of her husband. Eleanor is also very sorry for the incident that happened to her and her husband. She was very depressed about the time and memories left by her husband and her imagination was too. She starts to feel anger and depression at the same time (Jones, 2021). This is a time when she is actually confused about her condition.

The story also explores the complex and conflicting emotions of a woman who is haunted by the ghost of her husband. She experiences grief as a physical and mental pain, a cold and empty feeling, and a paradoxical longing and resentment for her husband (Jones, 2021). The story shows how grief can affect one’s perception of reality, memory, and identity, and how it can be hard to cope with and accept.

The story also uses metaphors, such as *the ear*, *the heart*, and *the chill of gray*, to convey the intensity and absurdity of grief. The ear and the heart are symbols of the



protagonist Eleanor's grief and guilt over the death of her husband. *The ear* represents his voice that haunts her, reminding her of their unhappy marriage and his violent end. *The heart* represents his life that she feels responsible for, as she chose the outfit he wore when he was killed (Jones, 2021). The ear and the heart also show how he continues to affect her, as they appear and disappear at his will, leaving her cold and empty.

Then, the phrase "*chill of gray*" in this flash fiction is a metaphor that conveys the sense of coldness, emptiness, and sadness that the protagonist Eleanor feels after the death of her husband (Jones, 2021). The word "chill" suggests that she is not only physically cold, but also emotionally numb and distant from others. The word "gray" implies that her life has lost its color and joy, and that everything is dull and bleak (Wayland, et al., 2015; Ratcliff, 2022). The phrase also contrasts with the "warmth" that she craves from where his body lay, and the "heart" that he leaves behind, which are symbols of life and love.

The "*chill of gray*" is more than a matter of temperature, it is a state of monochromatic mind and a way of living that Eleanor has to endure after the tragedy. However, the color is the sense of the morning as the acceptance finally rises (Levi-Belz & Blank, 2023; Pomeroy, 2011). She finally could sit comfortably, holding her breath regularly, while considering any goodness of her deceased and beloved husband.

## CONCLUSION

The flash fiction of *Anatomy of the Aftermath* is a powerful and pitiful image that shows how the protagonist Eleanor is haunted by the presence and absence of her husband. She feels cold and empty, as he takes away the warmth and color from her life. She

is trapped in a cycle of grief and guilt, unable to move on or find peace. Grief in this flash fiction is a vivid and emotional portrayal of how loss can affect a person's mind and body, and how difficult it can be to cope with the aftermath of a tragedy. Through DABDA or Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance, Eleanor passes her grief from depression to further better recognition of the death of her husband.

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