

Where grief lingers: Agnes's journey through loss in Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet*

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><i>Article History:</i> Received 27 June 2025 Approved 8 July 2025 Published 31 July 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Five stages of grief, grief, Hamnet, Kübler-Ross, loss</p>	<p>Death and loss, no matter how common at the time, are personal and emotionally tolling. Written as historical fiction, <i>Hamnet</i> tries to fill the gap in the history of the death of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, during the bubonic plague in late 16th-century England. Investigations into the novel <i>Hamnet</i>, particularly concerning Agnes and her grief journey as the protagonist, have not been previously conducted, so this study seeks to address this gap and examine grief with a focus on Agnes. This research intends to explore Agnes's journey through grief and how her feelings of loss influence her relationships with those around her. Faced with the death of her son, Hamnet's protagonist followed the Kübler-Ross trajectory of stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, though some emotions may emerge due to a trigger. The research indicated that the most significant stage of grief that Agnes went through was the depression phase, as it profoundly impacted her sense of identity and her relationships. Apart from acceptance, these grief stages, manifestations of emotional responses to grief, brought damage to Agnes's relationship with other people. Conversely, the acceptance stage brought conciliation to the relationship.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

This Grief is a response to loss in its whole and different kinds of loss (Guldin & Leget, 2023). The loss of a child is generally acknowledged as the most devastating experience for a parent (Chen and Tong, 2021). The emotional, physical, and social consequences of losing a child can deeply affect parents. Besides inflicting emotional pain, grief can disturb their self-perception and identity, changing their roles in the family and society (Vig et al., 2021). Grieving the loss of a child can impact the relationship between

the parents. Due to different reactions to grief and coping mechanisms, one partner may withdraw from the relationship and leave the other feeling isolated and unsupported (Albuquerque et al., 2017). Furthermore, grief can lead to a withdrawal from social connections, as individuals may feel isolated or believe others cannot understand their pain. This perception can heighten feelings of loneliness and anger, limiting opportunities for getting social support (Engler-Gross et al., 2019).

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The theme of loss and grief is chosen as losing someone and grieving is part of being human. As terrifying as it may be, one must experience death and grieving in one's life. Learning about a character's grief in literary works can help us understand more about the experience of grief and grieving, and how to manage the feelings of losing someone. As the research analyses a character whose story in this literary work is fiction, not someone real or someone we know, the research can provide a more objective lens toward grief; thus, it is easier for the reader to understand and learn about grief.

Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* reimagines something that may be happening in the family of Shakespeare, the famous poet. It also shows and highlights the family's point of view, particularly women figures, which has never been recorded in history before. Agnes, the mother of Hamnet, experienced profound grief after the loss of Hamnet. Her grieving experience, her journey on how to live with the memory of her son, and how grief affected her relationship with her husband are researched using Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—have become one of the most widely recognised frameworks for understanding the grieving process. It was originally used for understanding grief in dying patients, but later on, it was used to learn about grief in general. The theory is also easy to understand and applicable to the study's object. According to Corr (2018), this theory has highlighted the human aspect of dealing with death, and her theory found common patterns of familiar psychosocial reactions to difficult situations. However, this theory has faced some criticism due to its simplicity; it is often too simplistic and sometimes generalizes people's experiences. Responding to the criticism, Kübler-Ross

wrote that the theory did not mean the stages of grief limited the feelings and experiences of grieving, but rather that it aimed to help people understand what they feel and how to cope with it. Kübler-Ross also argued that grief is unique for every person; thus, not everyone goes through all five stages of grief, nor goes through them in a linear timeline or the prescribed order (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

Using Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief theory, studies found that grieving experiences are varied and diverse, including their portrayal in literary works. Salah et al. (2019) examined films and found that the characters universally navigated all these stages. Similarly, Kataoka (2021) highlighted grief's cultural commonality through Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, demonstrating a mother's full progression through the five stages. However, Kok Sin (2022) observed that Naomi in *The Book of Ruth* experienced grief non-linearly, skipping bargaining and denial, reflecting the individuality of mourning. In the meantime, Pambayun et al. (2022) examined *The Girl on the Train*, demonstrating how Rachel Watson's sorrow from her divorce aligned with the five-stage model, highlighting its applicability to various types of loss. Studies further emphasize the inconsistency of grief, demonstrating that people go through the stages in various sequences and intensities. Jayalaksana and Noorman (2019) found that in *The Thing About Jellyfish*, the child protagonist underwent all five stages but the stages are often intertwined with each other. In this study, the depression and acceptance stages are also found to be the most dominant, illustrating the diversity and personal experiences of grief.

Grief in literary works is also portrayed in various ways. It may be shown in the first-person narration, external observations, or creative expressions such as art. Ellis (2020) analyses *Untwine*, where the protagonist

Giselle processes grief by associating each stage with artworks, illustrating her mourning journey. Art serves as an interpretive medium for emotional progression. Maranda and Wahyuni (2019) examine *Did You Ever Have a Family*, where grief is primarily viewed through other characters' perspectives. Denial emerges as the most prominent stage, demonstrating how grief can be understood through the reflections of those surrounding the bereaved individual.

Research about the novel *Hamnet* has been done before by DePrado in 2020 and O'Neil in 2021. DePrado's (2020) study examines Shakespeare's portrayal of grief in *Hamnet* and contrasts it with other adaptations, such as Kenneth Branagh's *All Is True* and *Dead Centre's Hamnet*. This research focuses more on Shakespeare's survivor's guilt and the effect of *Hamnet's* passing on his connection with Agnes, mirroring the academic focus on grief in parents and how it affects their relationships with those nearby. Meanwhile, O'Neill's (2021) research explores Agnes's position as a mother, examining the novel through the perspectives of motherhood studies, memory studies, and adaptations of Shakespeare. Though research has been done on *Hamnet*, the study focusing on Agnes's grief journey, especially using Kübler-Ross theory, has not been done. Therefore, this research intends to fill the gap and find out the grief journey of the main character, Agnes.

The purpose of the research is to analyse *Hamnet's* main character's grief experience through the lens of the popular grief theory, the five stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Concerning the research purpose, this study's objectives are to identify the stages of grief the character went through as well as how these stages of grief influence her reaction and relationship with people around her. By looking into Agnes' journey

through loss, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of grief and how it impacts human connection.

METHODS

This research uses the descriptive-qualitative research method. The method is chosen for this research, as the results and discussion are explained by describing the character emotions associated with grief stages. Furthermore, the descriptive-qualitative method is used because the data from the object is not in numerical form, but in words, sentences, and paragraphs. According to Cresswell (2018), qualitative research is a method used to understand and explore the meaning people ascribe to social issues. Aspers (2019) defines qualitative research as an iterative process that improves the knowledge of a specific scientific community by making new findings and being closer to the studied subject. Qualitative research also deals with non-numerical data, or in other words, using words rather than numbers (Cresswell, 2019, p. 51). Using the qualitative method means the researcher aims to determine the meaning of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2018, p. 66).

A structured approach was implemented to collect and analyse data for this research. The analysis starts with carefully examining *Hamnet* to extract the key concepts, details, and themes related to grief. Then, analysing the textbook's portrayal of loss involves analysing its central issues. In addition, some relevant scholarly articles discussing the novel's themes were studied to form an enriched contextual framework for research. After this reading phase, specific points in the data were addressed within the text. This included defining some actions and feelings from Agnes, a mourning mother character, and her responses to loss align with the grieving experience. Once the relevant data were identified, they were classified

according to Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The researcher also analyses the data and finds the impact of grief on Agnes and her relationship with the people around her to answer the second research question. As part of the reporting phase, the researcher presented and explained the study's outcomes while incorporating relevant conversations, excerpts, and quotations from the novel that are linked with Kübler-Ross's grief theory to describe Agnes's loss journey. Finally, the researcher integrated and summarised the discussions by highlighting the main ideas regarding how the novel portrays grief and its importance in comprehending mourning as a concept in literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Judith, Hamnet's twin sister, caught the Bubonic Plague. Hamnet, Agnes's son, was healthy before he gave himself up to "fate" at the end of the first part of the book so that his twin sister could be healthy. Agnes, who had not foreseen losing her son, drowned in profound grief. Agnes's grief experience can be identified in the five stages of grief. Kübler-Ross argued that not everyone goes through all five stages of grief, nor go through them in a linear timeline or the prescribed order, as every grief is unique (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In Agnes's case, there is a time when a specific emotion appeared on a different stage due to a trigger. Though predominantly following the traditional framework, Agnes's emotional responses, ranging from denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventually acceptance, are unique to her and can be affected by her relationship and environment.

Denial/Isolation

Agnes's first reaction to the death of Hamnet was Denial. According to Kübler-Ross, denial and isolation are the first of the five stages of grief. In denial, someone's first

response can be shock, paralysis, and numbness. The denial stage is marked with the usual reaction, "No, it can't be true." (Kübler-Ross, 1969). In the case of losing loved ones, someone does not literally deny their beloved's death, but cannot understand that they will not meet or do things with them anymore (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

"She thinks, This cannot happen, it cannot, how will we live, what will we do, how can Judith bear it, what will I tell people, how can we continue, what should I have done, where is my husband, what will he say, how could I have saved him, why didn't I save him, why didn't I realise it was he who was in danger?" (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 195)

As the quote shows, when Hamnet died, Agnes's first thoughts were narrated as being in constant disbelief and questioning how to live without Hamnet. Her mind also kept looking for Hamnet while convincing herself that Hamnet had died. Her reaction showed signs of denial as she was "denying" the death of her son while fully knowing that her child had died. This response can be seen as processing the emotions of loss and slowly accepting the reality of losing her son.

"But nothing. She does not respond. She does not raise her head. She does not listen or even seem to hear suggestions to start the laying out." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 196)

Upon the death of her son, she was also described as being silent and not responding when people were talking to her or giving her words of comfort. These are Agnes's initial reactions that the surrounding people perceive, hinting that she was isolating herself, which is part of the denial stage. This isolation reaction was understood by her family and friends, as plenty of them had also lost their

loved ones, but still brought confusion on how to help Agnes.

“‘We will wait,’ she gets out. ‘Until tomorrow. You may tell the town that. And I will lay him out. No one else.’
‘Very well,’ he says, and stands up.”
(O’Farrell, 2020, p. 198)

In this particular quote, her brother, who had tried a few times to talk to Agnes, asks her again about Hamnet’s burial arrangement. This shows that people around Agnes were still trying to help her prepare for Hamnet’s burial while still respecting her space to deal with her grief emotions by not forcing her and letting her do what she wanted. In the quote, her brother did not cross her or question her decision at all; he respected all her decisions as he knew that she still needed more time to be with her son. In the social dynamic, the bereaved often isolate themselves from the people around them, and even refuse to be comforted, as people usually do not feel the pain the bereaved feel. Thus, words of comfort feel like lacking meaning.

Anger

After being in the denial stage, the realisation of her son’s death came to her. According to Kübler-Ross, the realisation that something that is not supposed to happen has happened brings people to be angry with the situation, which can present in many ways, including being angry with yourself for not seeing it coming. This anger is usually followed by feelings like sadness, panic, hurt, guilt, and loneliness, which appear stronger than ever. (Kübler-Ross, 1969, 2005). During the anger stage, Agnes also became more emotional and easily irritated, even by people who were not her immediate family. Her sorrow redirected into irritation and resentment.

“I should have known. I should have seen it. I should have understood that it was a terrible trick, making me fear for Judith, when all along—” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 208)

In this part, Agnes told her husband that she had been worrying for Judith all along and had failed to notice Hamnet’s condition when it was Hamnet who would die, not Judith. She told him it was her fault and she was guilty, though she knew that she had done everything. Here Agnes used the phrase “I should have...” indicating regret of the things she had not done to Hamnet. The regret then turned into anger. This shows that most of her anger was initially aimed toward herself as she felt the guilt of not knowing sooner that Hamnet also caught the plague and could not save him. This feeling led her to think that Hamnet’s death was her fault.

“‘You did everything you could. There is nothing anyone could have done to save him. You tried your best and—’
‘Of course I did,’ she hisses, suddenly furious, sitting up, wrenching herself from his touch. ‘I would have cut out my heart and given it to him, if it would have made any difference, I would have—’

‘I know.’

‘You don’t know,’ she says, thumping her fist into the mattress. ‘You weren’t here. Judith,..’ she whispers, and tears are slipping from her eyes,” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 208)

In response to Agnes’s anger toward herself, her husband was comforting her by saying that she had done everything she could, that it was not her fault but the sickness’s fault, which Agnes responded by saying that her husband was not there. Agnes’s response to her husband, saying “you weren’t here” indicates that she feels like her husband did

not see her effort and did not know if she really had done her best; thus, his reassuring and consoling words were just words to make her feel better. In this quote, she expresses her anger toward her husband as well. Because he was away when Judith was sick, and eventually when Hamnet died. She felt that she battled the sickness and was scared alone.

“Nothing can keep you from it. Not even the death of your own child. I see this,” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 213)

After the burial took place, Agnes’s husband decided that he could not stay at home and be dragged in the sadness, so he told Agnes that he wanted to go back to London. This decision left Agnes in disbelief because in her mind, she, her husband, and their two children would grieve Hamnet together. She accused him of prioritising his company in London, by saying “nothing can keep you from it”, insisted that his priority was his work not his family or even his dead son. Her husband’s decision was hurtful for Agnes as he was absent during Judith’s sickness and Hamnet’s death. This decision fueled her anger as she felt her husband had abandoned her and their family. This anger stage deeply strained her relationship with her husband and fostered resentment and emotional distance with her husband in his absence, as abandonment and loneliness in grieving consumed her.

Agnes’s anger stage sometimes emerged later on after she had entered other grief stages. In the storyline, right after she shortly entered the depression stage, when a priest comforted her by saying that God had needed Hamnet, so He called him, Agnes became furious.

“God had need of him, the priest says to her, taking her hand after the service one day.

She turns on him, almost snarling, filled with the urge to strike him. I had need of him, she wants to say, and your God should have bided His time.” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 216)

The priest saying “God had need of him” was suggesting that Hamnet’s death was God’s plan and thus Agnes had to let him go, but instead of finding solace in these words, Agnes reacted in fury. Agnes replied, telling him that “God should have bided His time” pointing she felt that what had happened was unfair for her. For her, saying that God need him more than her was dismissive of her pain. This moment emphasises how her grief, manifested in anger, can sometimes be triggered even after entering other grief stages and damages her relationship with the people around her.

Bargaining

After the anger stage, Agnes experienced the bargaining stage, which lasted briefly. As mentioned by Kübler-Ross, the bargaining stage lasts briefly, and people may experience remorse and try their hardest to alter who they are or compromise with others in an attempt to return to their previous lives (Kübler-Ross, 1969, 2005). Bereaved people are sometimes stuck in the if questions, questioning what would happen if they did things differently (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The portrayal of Agnes’s bargaining stage occurs when Agnes and her husband argue about her husband returning to London. At the time, her husband tried comforting and persuading Agnes to let him leave for London. When they were touching, Agnes’ mind started to bargain.

“There is a part of her that would like to wind up time, to gather it in, like yarn. She would like to spin the wheel backwards, unmake the skein of Hamnet’s death, his boyhood, his

infancy, his birth, right back until the moment she and her husband cleaved together in that bed to create the twins. She would like to unspool it all, render it all back down to raw fleece, to find her way back, to that moment, and she would stand up, she would turn up her face to the stars, to the heavens, to the moon, and appeal to them to change what lay in wait for him, to plead with them to devise a different outcome for him, please, please. She would do anything for this, give anything, yield up whatever the heavens wanted.” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 214)

Agnes’s thought, though brief, reflected the characteristics of the bargaining stage, in which people often attempt to regain control through hypothetical scenarios. Using the word “would” in all scenarios she thought of signaled that she imagined situations she wished had happened. Agnes’s willingness to sacrifice everything, even Hamnet’s existence, implies her anguish and pain. In Agnes’s journey, the bargaining stage helped her find momentary peace amid her immense feelings.

During the bargaining stage, Agnes’s thoughts drifted into a whirlwind of hypothetical scenarios. She became so absorbed in her “what-ifs” that they pulled her away from the present moment, making it hard for her to truly engage with what’s happening around her. This can make her seem distant and hinder any conversation.

“He breathes in and out, into the curved side of her coif, as if he might speak, but she doesn’t want the words, has no need of them.” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 214)

As written in the book’s narration, Agnes’s husband breathed and moved as if he wanted to talk, but he did not. As shown in the quotation, Agnes’s husband wanted to start a conversation to persuade Agnes to go to

London, but Agnes was all silent and distant, which made her husband hesitant to talk. The bargaining stage also helped her realise she cannot stop Hamnet’s death by moving through what-if schemes. After understanding all the schemes, she came to the same conclusion: that Hamnet would not return, and there is a life she must live and eventually let her husband go to London.

Depression

Depression was the most dominant stage for Agnes. Similar to what Kübler-Ross proposed, in the depression stage, people tend to lack motivation, withdraw from life, and wonder what the point of doing things is (Kübler-Ross, 1969, 2005), in the story, Agnes showed signs of the depression stage, which were a lack of motivation, persistent sadness, anxiety, withdrawal from life, and loss of interest in her hobby. Her depression stage started a few months after Hamnet’s burial and lasted for a year before eventually moving onto the healing stage. Unlike other stages, in this stage, she altered her sense of self and damaged her relationship with people around her, especially her first child, Susanna.

The first thing that marked the depression stage is constant sadness.

“It is hard to know what to do with his clothes.

For weeks, Agnes cannot move them from the chair where he left them before taking to bed.

A month or so after burial she lifts the breeches, then puts them down. She fingers the collar of his shirt. She nudges the toe of his boot so that the pair are lined up, side by side.” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 217)

Agnes still held onto Hamnet’s clothes for a month or so while reminiscing about Hamnet. The remnants often brought sadness as the clothes had his scent and reminded her

that he was gone. Also, when seasons passed and school started, Agnes was trying to divert her attention so as not to feel sad about the things Hamnet missed. Her constant sadness built a sad atmosphere in the household, thus affecting her children's feelings and their own grieving journey. This is why Susanna moved out of the apartment and lived in her aunt's bedroom, as she could not watch her mom's constant sadness (p. 222-223). In addition, due to her sadness, she became emotionally unavailable, creating a gap between her and her children.

"She and Judith and Susanna sleep together in the curtained bed, without discussing the matter: the girls' truckle is never pulled out but remains tucked away. She draws the curtains tight around the three of them. She tells herself that nothing can get them, nothing will come in through the windows or down the chimney. She stays awake most of the night, listening for the knock and keen of bad spirits trying to find a way in." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 216)

Agnes also depicted that she often felt anxious, for she was afraid that illness and death would happen and strike her children. This was implied by a constant reassurance she gave herself by telling herself nothing can get them and nothing will come from the windows or chimney. Despite persistent reassurance, she still stayed awake at night due to her anxiety. Furthermore, she was constantly on alert and checking her children's condition. She was so anxious that she obliquely made her two daughters sleep together with her in a curtained bed with curtains drawn tight around them. This anxiety, just like Agnes's constant sadness, was unbearable for Susanna that she gathered her belongings and decided to sleep in a different room.

"She can recall being someone who felt sure of life and what it would hold for her; she had her children, she had her husband, she had her home. She was able to peer into people and see what would befall them. She knew how to help them." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 223)

As described in this quote, Agnes was becoming someone she did not recognise. She had lost her sense of self. She described her past self as "someone who felt sure of life," which can be interpreted as having certainty of her life. She had been a strong, confident woman who adored and loved tending to her children and was talented enough to be able to diagnose someone at a glance. But during this depressed stage, she became uncertain and sensitive as she lost interest in doing anything, even the things she loved to do that made her herself, which were taking care of her children, tending to her herbs, and helping people by healing them. She loved doing healing work, but the last time she used her talent was for Hamnet; it is hard for her to do it now. Her love for healing work was damaged by the memory of her inability to save Hamnet when she was a healer.

"Agnes cannot see the point of sweeping the floor. It just gets dirty again. Cooking food seems similarly pointless. She cooks it, they eat it and then, later on, they eat more. The girls go next door for their meals; Agnes doesn't stop them." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 216)

According to this quotation, Agnes had lost her purpose and meaning of life. Even sweeping the floor and cooking, something she had done gladly for her children, seemed pointless. The change in her behavior was pointed out by how she did not cook for her children as narrated: the girls go next door for

their meals and Agnes doesn't stop them, Agnes, who loved being a mother, became neglectful as a result of her depression, which took a toll on her life purpose.

"The idea of harvesting them, bringing them home, stripping off their leaves and stems, then boiling them over a fire: she doesn't think she can do that at all. She would rather lie down in her bed and pull the blankets over her head." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 216)

Her depression stage made her lose her enjoyment of life. In this quotation, Agnes suddenly becomes unwilling to do the hobby and routine she always did every year with her children: harvesting rosehips. In this quote, she chose to stay in bed and pull up the blanket instead of doing what she loved; this behaviour shows a lack of motivation. Due to depression, every enjoyment and even a small task seems like a complex and painful ordeal, which is why she would rather do nothing instead of feeling the pain. This lack of motivation can impact the relationship between her and her daughter. When Agnes stopped being caring, it could bring her and her daughter further apart as she detached herself from doing the things that had been their quality time together; moreover, the daughter still needed their mother's support as they were also grieving.

"Agnes bolts her casement, closes her door. She doesn't answer the knocks that come in the evening or the early morning.

If people stop her in the street, with questions about sores, gum swellings, deafness, a rash on the legs, heartache, coughs, she shakes her head and walks on." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 223)

As the changes continued, she, who loved to help people, would not even answer a knock on the door or people asking about their

malady. Healing was her talent, and she had been confident in doing it, but after Hamnet died, healing people was still a painful thing for Agnes due to the association with Hamnet's death. Moreover, failing to save Hamnet made her less confident in her ability. All the behavioural changes impacted Susanna and burdened her the most as she was the oldest child. As the oldest daughter, she had to replace her mother role by doing the chores, looking after the medicinal plants, taking care of her little sister and even her mother, such as when it is rosehip harvest time, she, along with her sister Judith, had to drag her mother into simple tasks, like gathering rosehips which indicates that she had to "parent" her mom.

In times when numerous people had died of bubonic plague, the same illness that took Hamnet's life, Agnes's reaction and her depression stage might seem a little excessive for other people. Death was common in England in the 15th century, so people may think that Agnes is exaggerating; moreover, she was already perceived as peculiar.

"Mary, Susanna knows, is of the opinion that grief is all very well in moderation, but there comes a time when it is necessary to make an effort. She is of the opinion that some people make too much of things. That life goes on." (O'Farrell, 2020, p. 228)

For example, as shown in this quotation, even her mother-in-law and her daughter, Susanna, thought that Agnes' grief was too much and that she made too much of it. They felt that grief was acceptable if it was within reasonable limits, and Agnes should make an effort when necessary because life continued. This was undermining Agnes's grief experience and made her even more isolated and did not get the help and support she needed.

Acceptance

Agnes' acceptance stage does not happen as a sudden revelation but within a slow healing process. She went through the healing process by taking small actions step by step, from the start of the acceptance stage until she could completely accept her life condition, and the pain became more bearable. In her book, Kübler-Ross mentioned that the acceptance stage is more of an empty feeling and the realisation that the pain has gone and the struggle is over. Later, she also said this is the stage where healing and adjustment from the loss happen. The grieving person may still feel sad, but they begin to learn to live without their loved ones. They start to realise that their loved ones have died, but they live thus; they adjust their ways of life (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). After months of emotional numbness, Agnes finally made a small moment returning to her life.

“... and Agnes listens to her tales of aching joints, a phlegmy chest, a mind that skids and slips, forgetting names, days, tasks.

Agnes rises and goes to her worktable. She brings her pestle and mortar out of the cupboard. She does not allow herself to think that last time she used this it was for him.” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 224)

The earliest sign that she was reentering her life was when she finally helped an older woman at a dairy, whom she had refused several times, by working on her concoction to heal the woman. It was written that she was trying hard not to think about Hamnet. Her willingness to do her healing work, despite the hurt and pain, could be a sign that she has started to learn that she can continue her life even though Hamnet had died. With her beginning her healing works, she began to reclaim her identity, beyond grief, as a healer.

The acceptance journey climaxed when she went to London and saw the play, written by her husband, with her son’s name as the title.

“She stretches out a hand, as if to acknowledge them, as if to feel the air between the three of them, as if wishing to pierce the boundary between audience and players, between real life and play.

The ghost turns his head towards her, as he prepares to exit the scene. He is looking straight at her, meeting her gaze, as he speaks his final words:

‘Remember me.’” (O’Farrell, 2020, p. 272)

In the book's ending, Agnes saw that her son was remembered through the play. It was the moment when she comprehended that even though Hamnet had died, he still lived and would always live in their memory. She, as the novel described it, “acknowledge them”, became a gesture of recognition of the symbol behind the presence of Hamlet, who was alive, and Hamnet, who was dead. She acknowledged Hamnet as a memory and Hamnet in real life, Agnes's source of sorrow, thus acknowledging Hamnet’s death and her own pain. The Hamnet ghost said, “Remember me,” was an invocation for Agnes to move on with her life while carrying the memory of her son. With all the reasons being said, this moment was the moment she truly reached acceptance of Hamnet’s death and grief, and was able to continue her life despite the sorrow of losing Hamnet.

At this point, she also learned to understand that this play was the way her husband expressed his grief, which she had never understood before. She registered now that she was not grieving alone; this made her feel seen and no longer left alone in her grief. This moment bridges the emotional gap between them, dispelling the belief that he was

indifferent. In recognising his tribute to Hamnet, Agnes not only accepts her loss but also reclaims the emotional bond with her husband, marking a turning point in both her grief and their relationship.

CONCLUSION

Even when death is common, the loss of a child for parents is life-altering, as grief disrupts every aspect of their lives. The protagonist of the novel *Hamnet* had her life ransacked after the death of her son. This study established that Agnes, the novel's protagonist, went through all five stages of grief in sequence, denial-anger-bargaining-depression-acceptance, following the trajectory of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief, with the depression stage being the most profound and the bargaining stage being the briefest. However, at certain times, a different stage of grief may emerge due to a cause. Different stages of grief may have different emotional responses, thus having a different effect on the protagonist's relationship with her husband, children, mother-in-law, and even people in society. In the protagonist's circumstances, all the stages but acceptance negatively impacted the protagonist's relationship with others by bringing detachment, while the acceptance stage brought resolution to the relationships. Nonetheless, the anger and depression stage impacted Agnes relationship the most as in anger stage severe Agnes relationship and depression stage alter her relationship with her children. This study highlights the personal and unique grief experience of the protagonist. Further study of the novel should focus on how grief differs between Agnes and her husband, and how their dynamic changed before and after Hamnet died. Although this research has touched on the matter briefly, further investigation is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the protagonist and her husband.

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