

The Depiction of Grief and Its Articulation in *Train Dreams* by Denis Johnson

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Abstract

Grief is a common human experience that is frequently explored in literary texts through characters' responses to loss. This study examines the depiction of grief in *Train Dreams* by Denis Johnson through Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief model. Using a qualitative approach and a close reading technique, this study analyzes the passages that depict Grainier's emotional reactions after losing his wife and daughter. The findings indicate that Grainier's grief is mainly depicted through such stages of the process as denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. His grief is further intensified by his long-term isolation and previous experience of separation. The study also demonstrates that grief is initially articulated through self-directed speech, memories, and private reflection before developing into social articulation during Grainier's conversation with Claire. These findings demonstrate that *Train Dreams* depicts grief as a sequence of psychological stages and a gradual narrative process through private experiences of loss that becomes expressible over time. The study contributes to the literary academic of grief by extending the Kübler-Ross model application beyond identifying emotional stages to show how grief develops and is progressively articulated within literary work.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature depicts different human experiences, such as happiness, conflict, love, and loss, and portrays mortality as part of the human experience (Saha, 2026; Sekar, 2025). Among these experiences, death and loss still remain important for literary themes as they affect people psychologically and emotionally (Cumberland, 2017; Worden, 2018). Through literary narratives, authors explore how characters behave when losing their loved ones and what effect it has on their thinking, emotions, and behavior (Meekings, 2018; Nurjanah, 2023; Paputungan et al., 2025). Consequently, literary works serve as an interesting source for studying the experience of grief which is expressed through writing and reading (Collins, 2017; Małecka, 2023). As Luthfia

(2019) argues, death in literature becomes a complex theme that reveals additional meaning of mortality not just as an event but as the cultural and human experience. Accordingly, grief remains an important area of interest for psychological and literary research because it reflects the complex ways individuals experience, interpret, and respond to loss (Worden, 2018; Małecka, 2023).

One of the most well-known theories for understanding grief is Kübler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief Model (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Mahmood, 2016). This model was created to identify people's reactions to their losses and includes five stages, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Denial stands for the initial process of coping with a difficult situation because

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it is hard to accept the loss. Anger occurs in connection with emotions related to frustration. Bargaining is associated with people's attempts to negotiate with the reality of loss, and depression means deep sadness and emotional detachment. Acceptance does not imply that grief vanishes from people's lives, but it implies that one accepts loss and is ready to live with it (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; McCoyd, 2022). Although initially developed to explain when people had to experience bereavement in real-life situations, this theory has since become widely used in literary studies to interpret characters' reactions to loss and emotional changes in stories (Corr, 2019; Madden, 2023; Anish & Vishnu Priya, 2023; Luthra, 2025; Gamelia & Istiani, 2025).

In *Train Dreams* (2011), Denis Johnson follows the life of Robert Grainier as he experiences severe personal loss in the midst of social transformations of the American West at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story reaches a turning point when a huge wildfire takes away Grainier's house and is presumed to claim the lives of his wife and daughter. This disaster leaves Grainier dealing with the emotional weight of their absence and living in isolation for several decades. Rather than illustrating bereavement as a single moment of tragedy, Johnson depicts grief as an evolving experience that shapes Grainier's memories, daily life, and relationships over time. By depicting grief as a step-by-step process rather than an isolated reaction, *Train Dreams* provides a valuable literary text for examining the depiction of grief and the way it is articulated throughout the narrative.

Some scholars have analyzed *Train Dreams* from ecological, narrative, and cultural perspectives. In particular, Ngo (2015) explores the narrative technique and myths that exist in the novella, claiming that Johnson recreates the American West using a minimalist storytelling style. On the other hand, Chang (2019) analyses the novella ecologically and provides important information about *Train Dreams'* narrative structure, frontier culture, and environment. Similarly, Davies (2020) is interested in the issue of frontier masculinity and environmental memory and the connection between them. Although these

studies provide valuable insights into the novella's cultural, narrative, and environmental perspectives, the experience of Robert Grainier's grief has received little exploration. Therefore, it makes the novella underexplored as a literary work on how grief is depicted and gradually articulated after losing loved ones.

Grief has become an important theme of studies due to its influence on the development of characters and narrative meaning. For instance, Sigfrids (2018) notes that grief can be expressed in literature through changes in emotional reactions that result from coping with the loss, while Winardi and Subianto (2023) show that fictional characters may experience various stages of grief in one literary narrative. Grief can also be analyzed from a number of perspectives in recent research. The effect of loss on Agnes in *Hamnet* is studied by Harinda (2025), who discusses how grief influences Agnes' life even after her bereavement is finished. Applying Kübler-Ross's theory, Gamelia and Istiani (2025) find the stages of grief in the novel *Tuesdays with Morrie* and prove the significance of the psychological approach in literary studies. Likewise, Bastomi and Anam (2025) note that literature gives an understanding of complex reactions connected with death and separation. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the value of Kübler-Ross's framework for identifying grief stages in literary characters. However, they mainly stress the grief stages presented and the emotions transformed rather than giving attention to the development and gradual articulation of grief across the narrative through the character's interactions and reflections.

While previous studies offer important insight into grief depicted in literary works, there are some aspects that remain unexplored. Existing studies have successfully investigated that Kübler-Ross's model can identify the emotional responses of loss experienced by fictional characters in stories. But these studies only consider grief in terms of psychological phases without studying the process of grief development in a narrative and become articulated gradually through memory, reflection, and character dialogue. Similarly, although *Train Dreams* has been studied from

ecological, narrative, and cultural points of view, the depiction of Robert Grainier's grief and its articulation in Denis Johnson's *Train Dreams* have received little attention. In *Train Dreams*, Grainier's experience of loss extends across several decades and reveals grief through his emotions by the way he perceives, deals with, and finally articulates the permanence of loss. Accordingly, this study examines the depiction of grief and its articulation in *Train Dreams* by Denis Johnson and argues that the grief is depicted as a gradual process that builds from private experience into explicit social articulation of loss.

This study examines the depiction of grief and its articulation of grief in Denis Johnson's *Train Dreams* through the theory of Five Stages of Grief by Kübler-Ross. Particularly, this study is intended to reveal how Robert Grainier's grief is depicted throughout the narrative and how the articulation of that grief passes through when responding to his family's death. This study argues that Denis Johnson depicts grief as a process of going through certain emotional stages and as a process of developing from an experience of private loss into social articulation. By examining both the depiction and articulation of grief, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the enduring process of bereavement from literary narratives and demonstrates the ways grief gradually becomes articulated through language.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach because the data are analyzed in the form of words, phrases, and passages found in the literary text. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research involves an understanding of human phenomena through interpretation and meaning as opposed to quantitative measurements. In line with the approach, the study is geared towards the depiction of grief and its articulation in the character of Robert Grainier in *Train Dreams*, written by Denis Johnson.

The primary source of the data is *Train Dreams* (2011) by Denis Johnson. The data include narratives, dialogue, and text passages related to Grainier's experience of loss, emotions, memories, and relationships with other characters in the

novel. Relevant passages were identified through close reading and picked based on their connection to grief's depiction and its articulation. The picked passages were categorized in accordance with the stage of grief they were connected to and then interpreted through close reading to examine the grief depicted and articulated throughout the narrative.

Analysis of the selected data is conducted using Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Its focus is on examining how the stages of grief are depicted in the reactions of Grainier concerning the presumable death of his wife and daughter. Emphasis will be put on the passages in which Grainier articulates grief through memory, self-directed speech, and communication to other people in order to examine the development from private articulation towards social articulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors Contributing to Grainier's Grief

Grainier's grief emerges through several personal situations that determine how intense the loss of his loved ones becomes and how he reacts to it within the novella. While the death of Gladys and Kate is revealed as the main cause of his suffering, there are other events in Johnson's work that affect the emotions of Grainier in one way or another. His childhood estrangement from his parents, the unexpected destruction of his family in the fire, and his constant loneliness make up the framework through which Grainier's process of grieving is understood. These experiences give an explanation of why Grainier's grieving process develops gradually and why his grief is initially articulated in private before being articulated in social interaction afterward.

"When a child, Grainier had been sent by himself to Idaho... How had he lost his original parents? Nobody ever told him" (Johnson, 2011, p. 15).

The loss is introduced to Grainier at the onset of his life. At a young age, he loses his parents without getting any explanation of why this occurred. It turns out that the lack of information

about his background is further complicated by the fact that even his relatives have contradicting stories about his origin. Johnson creates this unresolved separation from the early part of the novella to provide an emotional background of Grainier's grief that would occur further on. Although it may not be explicitly shown in the novella that Grainier mourns his parents, but there is no closure in regard to the loss. The absence of closure of this early separation creates an atmosphere of uncertainty which further colors Grainier's reactions in subsequent losses. Therefore, Johnson suggests that grief can be created not as a result of one traumatic experience but formed because of previous unresolved separations that continue to influence future grief.

"So much ash, so much choking smoke..., but he went on anyway, weeping for his wife and daughter, calling, "Kate! Gladys!" over and over." (Johnson, 2011, p. 23).

This passage outlines the immediate response that Grainier takes after facing the devastation of the wildfire. From the constant calling of the names of Gladys and Kate, surrounded by the destruction, Grainier searches for their presence, while the destruction itself gives an indication of little chance to survive. Johnson frames this moment as more than the immediate recognition of tragedy. The forest fire becomes a pivotal moment that turns Grainier's experience of separation into deep sorrow and marks the beginning of Grainier's grieving process. Therefore, the loss of Gladys and Kate becomes the cause of the most important connections being taken away from Grainier and it makes the tragedy a central event of his grief that develops throughout the novella

"He rounded a bend to hear the roar of the conflagration and see the fire a half mile ahead like a black-and-red curtain dropped from a night sky. Even from this distance the heat of it stopped him. He collapsed to his knees, sat in the warm ashes through which he'd been wading, and wept" (Johnson, 2011, p. 23).

The passage highlights the powerful force of the fire before Grainier reaches the house which used to belong to his family. This fire is mentioned to be "black-and-red curtain," and the detail "the

heat of it stopped him" shows that the fire is an obstacle between Grainier and his family members. The fact that Grainier collapses to his knees and begins to cry indicates how strongly he feels due to the inability to protect or reach his family. In contrast to the slow separation from his parents when Grainier was a child, the wildfire is an event that happens suddenly and makes no possibility to say goodbye or do something in order to change the situation. Therefore, the author portrays the fire as the crucial event that transforms previous separations into deaths and allows the reader to understand why there is so much grief in the novella.

"Meanwhile Robert Grainier had passed his thirtyfifth birthday. He missed Gladys and Kate, but he'd lived thirty-two years a bachelor before finding a wife, and easily slipped back into a steadying loneliness..." (Johnson, 2011, p. 9).

Rather than depicting solitude as a result of the deaths of both Gladys and Kate, Johnson views solitude as a constant factor in Grainier's life since an early age. Before getting married, Grainier had been spending years in solitude and the period of his loneliness following the wildfire is a continuity of a certain way of life. It becomes clear that the narrator perceives loneliness as "steadying," meaning that the state of being alone does not cause Grainier to disorient and break down but is familiar to him. This means that Grainier's solitary way of life allows very little opportunity for expressing one's grief through interaction with other people, resulting in the emergence of many expressions of grief through memories, self-directed speech, and private reflection. Johnson therefore depicts solitude as the narrative condition through which Grainier experiences and gradually articulates his grief throughout the novella.

Following the analysis of the factors behind Grainier's grief, the discussion turns to explore the stages of grief as depicted in *Train Dreams*. While the model proposed by Kübler-Ross comprises five stages of grief, it becomes clear that all the stages are not equally represented in *Train Dreams*. The stages of denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance can be easily traced in the reactions of

Grainier to losses, while the stage of anger is depicted briefly.

Denial

Grainier initially copes with the assumed deaths of Gladys and Kate by denial, and this can be seen as the emotional refusal to accept the fact that his loss is permanent. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), denial is not denial of reality but rather a temporary incapacity to grasp the emotional impact of the loss. Instead of depicting denial as simple disbelief, Johnson shows how denial allows Grainier to face his tragedy gradually.

"He understood that he'd lost his wife and little girl, but sometimes the idea stormed over him, stronger than his natural grief, that Gladys and Kate had escaped the fire and that he should look for them everywhere in the world until he found them" (Johnson, 2011, p. 24).

The refusal on the part of Grainier is not due to his lack of knowledge of the tragedy but to his emotional unwillingness to accept its finality. Although Grainier is aware that there is very little chance that Gladys and Kate survived the fire, he continues to hope that they might still be alive somewhere out of the burned area. The statement of the narrator, "The idea stormed over him," shows that these thoughts come up spontaneously which overwhelm Grainier regardless of the fact that Grainier knows the reality. This depiction of Grainier by Johnson shows that denial is not a deliberate rejection of death but a temporary emotional state of mind that prevents Grainier from coming to terms with the fact of their death. This depiction supports the views of Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2005) that through denial, one comes to terms with the emotional effect of a shocking experience gradually.

"In September, thirty days after the fire, Grainier rented a pair of horses and a wagon and set out up the river road, intended to put up shelter on his acre and wait all winter for his family to return" (Johnson, 2011, p. 24).

The act by Grainier of rebuilding shelter while still waiting for his family members means that denial moves beyond just the emotional reaction of the moment. The activities of his day

continue to be focused on the chance of reuniting, even without proof that Gladys and Kate are alive. Instead of showing denial as disbelief, Johnson portrays denial as a habit of behavior that will defer the effects of his grief. Through this moment, denial becomes a tool for Grainier to preserve hope during the adjustment to irreversible loss.

"As soon as he entered the remains he felt his heart's sorrow blackened and purified, as if it were an actual lump of matter from which all the hopeful, crazy thinking was burning away." (Johnson, 2011, p. 24).

In this passage, there is a gradual change in Grainier's grief process. Earlier, hope enables Grainier to believe that his family members might still be alive. However, he realizes that these hopes have ended when Grainier faces the aftermath of the wildfire. The term "hopeful, crazy thinking" illustrates that Grainier has become aware that his emotions cannot stand what he sees around him physically. It means that Johnson has portrayed the end of the denial phase as a gradual process due to encountering reality several times.

Bargaining

As the denial phase wanes, Grainier's process of grieving develops into bargaining as he tries repeatedly to maintain a feeling of attachment to Gladys, despite knowing the fact of her death. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), bargaining often consists of a means of reducing the intensity of the sorrow by imagining some form of hope that would delay the ultimate acceptance of the loss. Instead of showing bargaining in the form of actual negotiations, Johnson presents it as a psychological phase of looking for signs allowing him to maintain his emotional connection to Gladys.

"Gladys, or her spirit, was near. A feeling overcame him that something belonging to her and the baby,... lay around here to be claimed." (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

Rather than taking the disappearance of Gladys as complete, Grainier perceives the landscape to bear the presence of her continued existence through the mention of her spirit. The reference to her spirit is not about Grainier actually believing that Gladys survived the wildfire. Rather,

the example shows how Grainier tries to maintain the emotional connection even when life interferes with it. For *Train Dreams*, bargaining is seen as an attempt to bridge the emotional gap arising out of death instead of denying the actuality of the death. This aligns with Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) idea about bargaining as a way of looking for hope when confronting an irreversible reality.

"He stayed on for weeks in this camp, waiting, wanting many more such visions as many as wanted to come to him" (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

Grainier's decision to stay at the campsite allows the bargaining to extend from a momentary idea to a behavior pattern. Rather than rejecting his visions, he waits for them deliberately to come again since through the campsite he gets an opportunity to feel temporarily close to Gladys. In doing so, Johnson illustrates that bargaining is not an attempt to alter the past but is a way of maintaining some kind of emotional connection after a loss. By seeking these encounters repeatedly, Grainier delays the process of total emotional detachment.

"A feeling overcame him that something belonging to her and the baby..., lay around here to be claimed. What thing? He believed it might be the chocolates Gladys had bought in a red box, ... A crazy thought, but he didn't bother to argue with it" (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

In above passage, it reveals that although Grainier acknowledges that his thoughts are unreasonable, he does not want to dismiss them. It is through acknowledging the fact that his thoughts are "a crazy thought" that Grainier demonstrates that he is aware of what is happening around him, but he still wants to keep on with his thought because of the emotional satisfaction that it provides. In this case, the depiction illustrates bargaining as a temporary emotional decision in order to adjust to bereavement for the individual.

Depression

With the imaginary possibilities of bargaining coming to an end, Grainier goes into a stage of depression where he feels the full impact of the loss of Gladys and Kate. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), the process of depression arises when people become aware of the

fact that they cannot change the loss and have to deal with its emotional consequences. Instead of depicting depression as an instant of extreme emotion, the novella presents it as a gradual process that slowly integrates into Grainier's daily routine.

"He wasn't good for much, sickened by his natural grief" (Johnson, 2011, p. 24).

This narrative immediately showing that grief is something that impacts Grainier's functioning. Unlike an expression of temporary emotion, "sickened by his natural grief" implies that the person is overwhelmed on both an emotional and physical level by his grief. For *Train Dreams*, depression is a state of mind that makes the individual incapable of living their everyday life as before, because Grainier cannot react to things around him as he used to before. This interpretation reflects the opinion of Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) that depression arises when individuals begin experiencing the full emotional weight of an irreversible loss.

"Often didn't sleep until dawn. He feared his dreams. At first he dreamed of Gladys and Kate. Then only of Gladys. And finally..., Grainier dreamed only of his campfire, of tending it just as he had before he slept—the silhouette of his hand... — and was surprised to find it gray ash and butt ends in the morning, because he'd watched it burn all night in his dreams." (Johnson, 2011, p. 40).

The above passage shows that grief remains an active element in Grainier's psychological life long after the fire incident. This is seen in his fear of going to bed since grief is experienced even in his subconscious mind through recurrent dreams. The fading away of Gladys's and Kate's dreams and their replacement with a dream about the campfire does not mean he has forgotten them. On the contrary, this shows that grief has become a permanent state in his heart that has transformed from direct memories into emotions that continues affecting his daily activity. This means that the novella depicts depression as a lasting mental condition and not just a brief emotion.

"Many times each day he found himself deflating on a gigantic sigh and saying, 'A pretty mean circumstance!'" (Johnson, 2011, p. 26).

Although mourning through a dramatic emotional response is common, Grainier constantly reacts through quiet exhaustion. The picture of "deflating on a gigantic sigh" symbolizes the draining of the person's emotional power, while the comment "A pretty mean circumstance!" reveals the person's acknowledgment of a bitter situation that cannot be changed. In describing depression, Johnson paints a picture in which mourning comes to people in the form of repetitive physical exhaustion and restrained speech rather than heightened emotions. This depiction illustrates how the permanence of loss is shown to become a part of people's normal routine in the wake of permanent loss and supports Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) understanding of depression as a sustained connection with the emotional reality of loss.

Acceptance

The final stage in the grieving process that Grainier does is acceptance and this is illustrated not by his coming out of his grief but by his growing capacity for living with his loss and accepting it in all its finality. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler explain (2005), acceptance is not about the end of one's grief but about beginning to adapt to a life in which loss is an inherent part. In Johnson's narrative of acceptance, the process does not depict the disappearance of one's grief and emotional attachment to what they have lost but depicts adapting to a life where loss has become a part of who one is as a person. This depiction develops through Grainier rebuilding his life, remembering Gladys, and expressing his grief more willingly. Together, these show that the acceptance stage in *Train Dreams* is not shown as the end of his grief but the stage at which he can gradually begin to articulate it through private reflections and later through social interaction.

"He and the red dog still bedded on a pallet on the floor, but for the most part he'd made as much a home here as he and Gladys and little Kate had ever enjoyed." (Johnson, 2011, p. 40).

Acceptance is first depicted by Grainier's slow return to his normal life after the deaths of Gladys and Kate. The depicted passage is not about trying to regain what has been lost but about

accepting the fact of their death and slowly returning to a normal life after the wildfire. Grainier's choice of rebuilding is not because of being emotionally disconnected from his loved ones and grief. In this regard, Johnson shows rebuilding as an adaptation to the new situation where life has to be continued even when suffering from permanent grief. This approach in the portrayal of Grainier's attitude to his family's death resembles Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) idea of acceptance as learning how to live in a different world and not to recover the life before the loss. By presenting rebuilding as adapting life instead of emotional recovery, Johnson establishes the foundation for the later development of Grainier's relationship with grief by allowing it to remain part of his everyday life rather than something that must be overcome.

"He'd felt able to tackle the responsibilities that came with a team and wagon because Gladys had stayed in his heart and in his thoughts" (Johnson, 2011, p. 43).

The process of acceptance is depicted further in Grainier's ability to retain the memory of Gladys and Kate while still living fully with the reality of her loss. Memory in this passage is illustrated as an ongoing emotion rather than something that is disconnected from Grainier's life even after the loss of his wife. In the passage, Johnson shows that the memory of his deceased wife affects Grainier's life much longer after her death. She "remains with him in his heart and in his thoughts" can be seen as a source of meaning that accompanies Grainier in his routine activities. This depiction reflects Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) acceptance stage which states that acceptance is connected not with detachment from the dead person but with enabling one to accept the fact that the deceased still has some place in one's life while continuing to live. By depicting memory as part of Grainier's identity, this passage implies that acceptance allows grief to go together with daily life that creates the conditions through which it can be articulated more openly afterward.

"He was glad he hadn't married another wife... That he'd taken on an acre and a home in the first place he owed to Gladys." (Johnson, 2011, p. 43).

In this passage, it becomes clear that the impact that Gladys has on Grainier extends outside memory into his perception of his current life. Grainier does not express any regrets about not having married as he realizes that most of his decisions that shaped his identity were made during his relationship with Gladys. Therefore, by presenting Grainier's acceptance as something other than detachment from the past, Johnson shows that acceptance means being able to realize that even though the person is dead, they still have some influence on someone's identity. In this way, Gladys remains an enduring part of Grainier's identity without preventing him from continuing his life which reinforces Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) view that acceptance involves adapting to loss while recognizing its lasting effect.

Private Articulations of Grief

Acceptance can be said to become ultimately visible through Grainier's increasing willingness to articulate his grief in private. As he rebuilds his life and comes to terms with living with the memory of Gladys, it is clear that the expression of his grief has moved from an act of silent suffering to an act of self-expression through self-directed speech and private reflection. While solitude has always been a characteristic of Grainier's life, it is clear that grief in these instances is not just something that is no longer experienced within but must now be expressed through language to oneself. Rather than depicting acceptance as the disappearance of grief, Johnson depicts it as the condition that enables grief to be acknowledged and articulated.

"He found the woodstove lying on its side... He righted it and pried at the handle. ... The door came off. Inside sat a chunk of birch, barely charred. "Gladys!" he said out loud. Everything he'd loved lying ashes around him, but here this thing she'd touched and held" (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

The process of grief in Grainier moves from an internal act of remembering to one of verbally expressing his grief because he instinctively utters the name of Gladys as he discovers the partially intact woodstove. Although this utterance does not

occur because of his seeing the presence of another person, it is done because Grainier is interacting with an object that is related to his deceased wife. Through this passage, it shows that Grainier is no longer restricting himself to just the act of remembering as he has now begun to articulate through self-directed speech. The utterance of his deceased wife's name signifies that he is beginning to accept the existence of her memory without denying the reality of her death. In this case, private speech functions as an early form of articulation that allows acceptance to express grief while remaining a deeply personal experience.

"Come June or July this clearing would be grassy and green. Already foot-tall jack pine sprouted from the ashes, ... He thought of poor little Kate and talked to himself again out loud: "She never even grew up to a sprout" (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

Unlike his spontaneous utterance of Gladys's name, Grainier's statement above regarding Kate reflects a more deliberate private articulation. It is stated in the narrator's words, "He talked to himself again out loud," implying that verbalization has turned into a repetitive process of communication when associated with his sorrow. With his statement "She never even grew up to a sprout," the character compares Kate's short existence to the growth of new pine trees from the ashes and contradicts the new growth of the scenery with Kate's death before she could be fully developed. In this case, the private articulation comes to expression aloud without anyone listening. This way, Johnson presents the concept of private articulation as the means by which Grainier understands the permanence of his loss and keeps the connection to Kate alive. This moment further suggests that acceptance does not silence grief but gradually enables it to be consciously expressed through language.

"and he figured as long as he saw impossible things in this place, and liked them, he might as well be in the habit of talking to himself, too" (Johnson, 2011, p. 25).

The passage further illustrates Grainier's awareness that talking to himself has transitioned into a regular part of his routine. Rather than believing his self-talk to be unusual and illogical,

Grainier sees it as a natural effect of being in a condition of prolonged mourning as the memories and imagined experiences become his everyday routine. The phrase states Grainier "might as well be in the habit of talking to himself" indicates that articulating grief has turned from an irregular emotional response into a usual way of coping with loss. Therefore, Johnson depicts private articulation as a thorough process when grief is constantly recognized without keeping it silent. This progression suggests that acceptance does not erase grief but enables it to remain expressible so that it can prepare Grainier for the later expression of loss during his conversation with Claire.

Social Articulation through the Claire Encounter

The progression of private articulation into social articulation represents the ultimate development in the grieving process by Grainier. While all previous forms of grieving remain limited to self-directed speech and private reflection, the conversation with Claire indicates that he is ready to express the importance of the loss to another person. Johnson depicts this as the point at which silent grieving becomes openly expressed towards people.

Claire: "... Are you going to marry again?"

"No," he said.

"No. You just don't want to work any harder than you do now. Do you?"

"No, I do not."

"Well then, you aren't going to marry again, not ever."

"I was married before," he said, feeling almost required to defend himself, "and I'm more than satisfied with all of everything's been left to me." (Johnson, 2011, p. 50)

Grainier's response provides the clearest example of how he explicitly acknowledges the importance of Gladys in his life. Contrary to his previous personal statements, Grainier is making the comment in the context of his interaction with someone else rather than speaking to himself. In response to Claire's suggestion of marrying again, Grainier is not evaluating the possibility of entering into a new relationship. Rather, he claims that the memories and experiences of his marriage still retain their value for him. In this way, Johnson depicts social articulation not as overcoming grief but as the ability to speak about one's grief towards

someone else. This moment suggests that acceptance has enabled Grainier to communicate a loss that had previously remained locked in private reflection for years.

"He did feel as if he was defending himself. But why should he have to? Why did this woman come at him waving her topic of marriage like a big stick? " (Johnson, 2011, p. 50).

Grainier's defensive stance is a sign that communicating his grief to someone else is still an emotionally difficult task despite the years that have passed since the fire. His reaction reflects the fact that openly stating the effect Gladys had on him for several decades still calls for justification of decisions made under the influence of grief. For Johnson, social articulation is a complex process that takes time and is sometimes not very comfortable rather than a demonstration of easy acceptance. Through Grainier's question about the need for defense, He is aware that his continued relationship with Gladys does not have to be validated by anyone else. This awareness advances the narrative progression from private acknowledgment of grief to its confident expression inside a social context.

Claire: "God needs the hermit in the woods as much as He needs the man in the pulpit. Did you ever think about that?" "I don't believe I am a hermit," Grainier replied, but when the day was over, he went off asking himself, Am I a hermit? Is this what a hermit is?" (Johnson, 2011, p. 50).

Claire's observation broadens the topic of the conversation beyond divorce and compels Grainier to reconsider the way he has lived in the wake of the death of Gladys and Kate. Despite his initial reluctance to be called a hermit, he goes on thinking about the matter even after the conversation ends, suggesting that the conversation makes him reassess himself in deeper ways. Johnson considers the process of social articulation not just in terms of expressing one's grief in conversation with someone else but in terms of integrating prolonged grief into Grainier's self-perception. By encouraging him to reflect on the solitude that has shaped his years since the wildfire, the conversation demonstrates that articulating grief can also reshape the way he

understands the identity that has emerged through loss.

Collectively, these interactions depict social articulation as the point at which Grainier completes his grieving process. Having expressed his loss in memory, solitude, and self-directed speech for many years, Grainier finally finds a way to express the importance of Gladys to him in his conversation with Claire and an opportunity to reflect upon the solitude he has been experiencing due to his prolonged grieving. Through this character, it ultimately depicts how acceptance is not the end of grief but a necessary condition that enables a person to express their grief in public and demonstrates that the articulation of loss deepens both interpersonal communication and personal self-understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on how the grief of Robert Grainier in the story *Train Dreams*, written by Denis Johnson, is depicted in relation to the Five Stages of Grief by Kübler-Ross. It is shown in the findings of the study that Grainier's grief is depicted in terms of denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance after losing his wife, Gladys, and daughter, Kate. The findings also identify certain factors that make the grief of Grainier stronger, including his separation from his parents since childhood, losing his entire family in the wildfire, and spending decades in isolation. Of all the mentioned stages of grief, denial and depression get more attention in the narration, while acceptance is shown through Grainier's rebuilding of his life, preserving the family in his memory, and continuing to live with his losses.

The study further demonstrates that the grief in the novel *Train Dreams* articulates itself progressively. Early forms of grief take place through memories, self-directed speech, and private reflections that help Grainier recognize his grief in isolation. As the story progresses, these forms of articulation of grief slowly transform into a more direct articulation of grief during Grainier's dialogue with Claire. This dialogue enables Grainier to express how important Gladys was in his life and recognize how decisions made by him were influenced by his grief, and also reconsider

the solitude that he attained after all the years of losing people close to him. The dialogue therefore offers the clearest example of grief articulated inside a social context.

By examining the depiction of grief and the way in which it is articulated, this study goes further than just identifying different emotional states in literary analysis. Through the findings, it becomes clear that *Train Dreams* presents grief as a sequence of psychological responses and as a gradual narrative process in which private experience of loss becomes articulated over time. The transition from private articulation to social articulation demonstrates the close connection between the elements of grief, memory, and communication in the novella, while also exemplifying the way loss continues to shape an individual's identity and relationship with others over time.

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