



OVERCOMING BEREAVEMENT IN SIGRID NUNEZ'S NOVEL

THE FRIEND (2018)

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue of overcoming bereavement in the novel *The Friend* (2018) by Sigrid Nunez. This analysis discusses the effects that occurs to the main character after losing someone she loves and the ways she does to overcome the bereavement. The conflict that occurs to the main character is losing someone she loves because of suicide and makes her feeling devastated and difficult for her to live, but she soon gets up from this loss thus, she can return to living her life as before. This analysis is related to the concept of defense mechanism which proposed by Sigmund Freud. The use of the concept is based on the interpretation of text and context of the novel. Also, uses a lot of fictional element such as theme, plot, and character to reveal the meaning. The result of the study shows that losing someone she loves affects her life but she also show her ways to overcome the bereavement she had and continue her life.

Key words: Bereavement, Defense Mechanism, Denial, Sublimation

A. INTRODUCTION

The feeling of bereavement over the loss of someone is complicated to go through, especially if that person means a lot to others. Some people who experience it can eventually forget the sadness and go through their days as usual, but some people. Some end up experiencing depression, so they have to see a professional to help them and find other activities to divert their minds to more positive things.

According to Pitman, King, Marston, and Osborn (2020), unexpected bereavement is associated with various mental disorders, which lead to or could lead to connections to loneliness. Not everyone is affected, and grief is a non-pathological process. However, bad results can be governed by factors such as

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personal vulnerability, quality of attachment to people who died, and the extent to which social support mitigates the adverse effects of traumatic life events.

This research focuses on the issue of the bereavement the main character experiences after the sudden death of her close friend in the novel. Also, this study exposes the affects of bereavement the main character to her life and the efforts to overcome the bereavement she meets. Also, this research aims to reveal how bereavement affects the main character's life after her friend's sudden death and the efforts that the main character makes to overcome the bereavement. This research uses the concept of defense mechanism by Sigrid Nunez.

Defense mechanisms are one of the techniques humans use to protect themselves from anything that threatens them. The use of defense mechanisms are one of the unconscious processes. These have different ways of working, but they all have the same goal—to prevent the person from worrying excessively and protect themselves and their self-esteem. The original definition of a defense mechanism, as Freud gave in 1894, was that it served as a counterforce to expressing desires and impulses. The theory was that defenses functioned to regulate or control impulse expression to prevent the person from being overcome by the distress that would come from becoming aware of unwanted urges. Later, this idea was broadened to include the use of defenses in response to internal and external stress sources (Cramer, 2006). Also, defenses can be considered unconscious mental mechanisms used to fight internal and external pressures, particularly those that undermine one's self-esteem or sense of identity, such as when friends or family fail to empathize with the person or otherwise become "lost" to them. The defense mechanism serves two purposes: to prevent the person from feeling excessive worry and to safeguard the integration of the self.

The topic of bereavement is also familiar in the world of literature, where many of them use this topic as the main topic of their literary works. Some examples of writers who use bereavement as the main topic of their literary works are *Mourning Diary* by Roland Barthes, *A Widow's Story: A Memoir* by Joyce Carol Oates, *Wave* by Sonali Deraniyagala, *Her: A Memoir* by Christa Parravani, *Death Be Not Proud (P.S.)* by John J Gunther, and many more.

The novel "*The Friend*" (2018) is about the main character who feels very lost when someone she loves dies. This protracted sadness makes her life empty, and she cannot do her usual activities, such as work. She had a job as a writer, but at the time, she could not think of how to finish it. Since the person's death, she has been crying so much that she feels that her eyes are going blind, and she begins to hallucinate when she sees the person outside her window. This grief made her tremendously depressed.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of method used for analyzing the novel entitled "*The Friend*" (2018) by Sigrid Nunez is the qualitative method. Qualitative method aims to comprehend the phenomenon of what research subjects experience, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action through the description in the form of words and language, in a specific, natural context, and by employing various natural methods.

The novel entitled “*The Friend*” (2018) by Sigrid Nunez is analyzed using literary elements such as theme, plot, and character. The elements of prose are interconnected to make clear the novel's purpose. In the novel entitled “*The Friend*” (2018), Character element shows the main character's problem through the feeling of grief. The problem that the character experiences is offered through the plot so that it creates conflict and allows researchers to observe and get the essence of the problem, then find out how the conflicts are resolved. The theme element can indicate the condition and situation faced by the main character in the novel “*The Friend*” (2018) where she experiences a bad event, namely, a friend she loves leaving her forever. Bereavement makes the main character's life more difficult to live.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of the main character facing enormous grief in her life and shows what she has done to overcome this bereavement, as shown in the novel “*The Friend*” (2018) by Sigrid Nunez. Researcher use two concepts of defense mechanisms; denial and sublimation. Also, this analysis uses fictional devices such as themes, characters, and plots to reveal the meaning.

4.1 Denial

First, the issue to discuss is what kind of grief the main character is going through. This novel “*The Friend*” (2018) clearly describes how the main character struggles to face problem and give a hardest time in her life, namely the loss of someone she loves. Never could she have imagined that such a person would choose such a fate of death like suicide. Of course, everyone who experiences the same thing will also find it difficult to accept reality, especially if that person is the closest. So that when other people try to talk about that person, the main character prefers not to talk about it or avoids it because she is still denying that fact, and according to her, this is best for her.

The first defense mechanism to discuss is denial. This type of defense mechanism is one type that is often used by someone when experiencing an incident or problem, and he/she refuses to accept that fact. The main character in this novel is described as a woman who has just experienced an event which, according to her, is very difficult, namely the loss of someone she loves.

I was not the only one who made the mistake of thinking that, because it was something you talked about a lot, it was something you wouldn't do. And after all, you were not the unhappiest person we knew. You were not the most depressed (think of G, of D, or T-R). You were not even—strange as it now sounds to say—the most suicidal. (p.11)

The quote explains how the main character reacts to this sad news. As previously explained by Freud (1984) that this type of denial is activated to

protect oneself when one does not want to experience bad experiences or the effects of the problems one is facing. The main character here shows that she cannot believe what happened that her loved one died by suicide because she feels that this person has a happy life and is unlikely to experience depression.

I don't want to talk about you, or to hear others talk about you.
It's a cliché, of course: we talk about the dead in order to remember them, in order to keep them, in the only way we can, alive. But I have found that the more people say about you, for example those who spoke at the memorial—people who loved you, people who knew you well, people who are very good with words—the further you seem to slip away, the more like a hologram you become.
(p.17)

The quote above shows how the main character refuses to accept that what she is going through is real. Usually, at the funeral, many people gather and start talking about the deceased to remember his life while he was still alive. However, here the main character prefers not to talk about that person because, according to her, it is useless and will hurt her, who is still in a position to reject this fact. "the further you seem to slip away, the more like a hologram you become." This quote clearly illustrates that the main character does not want to talk about this person because she feels that this person has left her forever. According to Cramer (2015, p.528), Denial interrupts the sense of reality but also protects the ego from being overwhelmed by the information it cannot process. This is why the main character refuses to continue talking about her friend. She cannot accept the reality she is facing because it will hurt her ego.

I tell the therapist about those uncanny moments, after I first heard the news, when I believed there'd been a mistake. You were gone but not dead. More like you were just missing. Like you'd decided to play some horrid juvenile trick on us. You were missing, not dead. Meaning you could come back. You could come back, and if you could come back, of course you would. Akin to that brief period years ago when I believed it was just stress or fatigue or some odd phase I was going through, and once whatever the trouble was had passed my looks would come back.(p. 119)

The quote above also shows the rejection of the main character. Even when she first heard the bad news, she denied it and said many times to herself that the incident was wrong and her friend just went away instead of leaving this world forever. She hopes her friend will only disappear for a while and return to his friends and family. She tries to believe this to make her suffer even more because she rejects the reality that is happening to protect herself so that she does not get hurt even more. However, grief lasts for quite a long time and continuously makes the main character suffer even more; she experiences depression; as Bowlby (1982: 108) said, "*unusually high levels of intensity and duration are often accompanied by self-reproach or anger, with sorrow noticeably missing. The mourner cannot replant his life, which frequently develops and is painfully*

chaotic, as long as these responses remain". This is what makes the main character go to a psychiatrist to ask for help to help her recover from this feeling of bereavement and be able to carry out her usual activities again.

4.2 Sublimation

When someone experiences a bad incident that can interfere with their daily activities, they cannot do anything because they are not focused, especially if a loved one leaves them forever. This feeling of bereavement, if continuously served, will cause depression. Some people aware of this will seek professional help to help themselves heal from these hurt feelings. At that time, defense mechanisms such as sublimation were active unconsciously to protect themselves from even worse events; for example, someone could do more positive activities than just being lulled by the depression they were experiencing. In this research, the main character do positive activities such as raising a dog, writing books, and going to psychiatric.

4.2.1 Raising a Dog

Dogs are one of the most common types of animals owned by people. There are various reasons why many choose dogs to keep because they are loyal animals. Dogs are social animals, so they will always need friends. Then also, they are intelligent animals where that can understand and empathize with humans. Therefore, many also adopt dogs as service dogs or emotional support animals. According to the American Kennel Club (AKC) website, the function of a service dog is to help people with special needs such as autism and disabilities. Later the dogs have tasks such as helping to walk helping to get medicine, and they can also find out earlier if their owner shows signs of illness.

Unlike service dogs, Emotional Support Animals (ESA) are animals that are there to help someone through emotional support. Mental health workers will determine which mental health patients need treatment like this to help their mental health. The novel "The Friend" (2018) explains that the main character has a dog named Apollo, Great Dane, who is five years old. The previous owner was a friend who passed away. The friend's family felt they could not keep the dog for various reasons. Therefore, the main character is willing to take care of him even though she has the consequence of being kicked out of the apartment he lives in.

These days I spend so much
time walking Apollo I can't imagine going out just to walk by
myself. What prevents me from falling into abstraction, though, or
doing much thinking at all, is the way he draws attention.
(p.67)

The quote above shows how the relationship between the main character and her new dog, Apollo develops. Previously they had an awkward relationship, and they did not even interact during the day, and the main character did not even intend to get closer to Apollo. However, as time passed, she realized how important the dog was in her life. She felt that she could not be far from the dog.

This activity is one of the positive activities in the main character's life after the bereavement that enveloped her some time ago. She subconsciously uses sublimation to protect herself, so she does not fall into deeper trouble.

After getting closer to her new dog, she also tries to be an excellent owner to build the dog's trust. Previously it was explained that the dog was depressed due to being abandoned by the previous owner, so he needed extra attention. The main characters suffer from the same grief, which is also one reason why they are closer than before.

Let's leave that as a last resort, he says. For now, don't ever leave him alone too long, and be sure you talk to him. Exercise him as much as possible. You might also try massage, if he'll let you. Just don't expect him to change into Mr. Happy Dog. He may never recover, no matter what you do. And you'll never know why. It's not just that you don't know his history. People think dogs are simple, and we like to believe we know what goes on in their heads. of course.
(p.69)

The quote above reveals that Apollo experienced a grieving phase. The main character's friend previously owned the dog, but because the friend died, she replaced that person with caring for the dog. As the friend's family said, the dog has a new habit, namely, always waiting at the door and barking at night, hoping that the owner will return to the house. This made them think that if the dog were left alone, it would die because of the grief.

The main character compares her former condition with his current state of caring for Apollo. She felt something different from the dog she used to care for before. This action can be seen in the quote below

But things are different now. The city has calmed down, the streets are safe, and I don't walk around late at night anymore anyway. At one or two in the morning I am asleep. I don't need protection. I don't need a badass dog to defend me. I don't want Apollo ever to feel that he has to bark or growl at anyone. I don't want him to worry. I don't want him to be anxious. I want him to feel that we are both perfectly safe, no matter where we go. I don't want him to be my bodyguard. I don't want him to be my gun. I want him to chill. I want him to be Mr. Happy Dog.
(p.71)

This quote shows the true feelings of the main character, who feels very close to her new dog. Even though it initially felt strange, she felt very close to the dog over time. It was previously explained that she used to have a dog but had different intentions from now because before, she had a dog to show it off to people, but for now, she feels that she does not need to do this because she just wants the dog to always feel comfortable and safe with her. She does not need a dog to watch over her all the time. Hence, the relationship is forming because

each other feels the same thing, namely grieving, so the relationship is formed quickly to look after each other.

The continuous activities with her new dog make the main character feel close to Apollo. With Apollo's attitude that kept her guarding her, she felt she could not stay away from Apollo because she thought she and Apollo were one unit. As stated in the quote below:

I've heard of therapy dogs, of course. Dogs trained to work in hospitals, nursing homes, disaster areas, and the like, their purpose to bring comfort and cheer in hopes of lightening whatever suffering humans might be going through. I know such dogs have been around a long time, also that they are now often used to help children with emotional or learning difficulties. (p. 106)

The quote above shows the benefits of raising a dog, such as being a therapy dog. The main character realizes that having a dog will help her get out of her bereavement, and then she can continue living life. She realized that a therapy dog is needed by someone when they experience difficulties because having one is like seeing a glimmer of hope from the problem being faced.

The continuous activities with her new dog make the main character feel close to Apollo. With Apollo's attitude that kept her guarding her, she felt she could not stay away from Apollo because she thought she and Apollo were one unit. As stated in the quote below:

As usual when he hunched in the street to do his business I guarded him from passing cars. And, in the park, when a texting jogger bore down on us, Apollo barked and blocked his path before he could run into me. I have played several rounds of tug-of-war with him today, I have talked to him, and sung to him, and read him some poetry. I have trimmed his nails and brushed every inch of his coat. Now, watching him sleep, I feel a surge of contentment. There follows another, deeper feeling, singular and mysterious, yet at the same time perfectly familiar. I don't know why it takes a full minute for me to name it. What are we, Apollo and I, if not two solitudes that protect and border and greet each other? It is good to have things settled. Miracle or no miracle, whatever happens, nothing is going to separate us. (p. 112)

The quote above shows that taking care of a dog makes the main character do many positive things compared to when she kept crying about her situation. She also feels here that she feels more closeness to the dog. She also thinks that no matter what happens that she will never separate from Apollo even though she experienced difficulties such as being kicked out of her apartment due to regulations that did not allow large dogs to live there and also the assignments of her students, which were sometimes torn apart by Apollo. However, she still chose to keep the dog.

This shows how sublimation works and positively impacts the main character so that he does not constantly think about the death of his friend.

4.2.2 Writing books

Many activities can be done to channel the stress that hits someone. Writing is one of the activities carried out by a person to vent frustration, stress, and anger so that when these feelings are channeled into writing, it will make the person's situation better. Many psychiatrists advise their patients to write in the hope that this activity can help patients.

As stated in the novel "*The Friend*" (2018), the main character is a writer whose work is being disrupted because she is still in a difficult position to accept that a friend she loves died tragically, namely suicide.

Lately I've done a lot of walking but no writing. I missed my deadline. Was given a compassionate extension. Missed that deadline, too. Now the editor thinks I'm malingering. (p. 11)

The quote above shows that the main character experiences bad events that affect her work life. She has a job as a writer where she should have finished her writing or book, but she cannot do it because of this incident. So she misses the deadline set by her boss and thinks she is just pretending to be sick as an excuse for not working on her project. However, her life did not stop there, and she started doing things she had missed while going through the mourning period. She began trying to work on her new book inspired by the incident.

Are you writing a book? Are you writing a book? Click here to learn how to get published.

Lately, since I started writing this, a new message has been popping up.

Alone? Scared? Depressed? Call 24 Hour Suicide Hotline. (p. 18)

The quote above shows that the main character is trying to return to work as a writer. Before this incident, when she was working on a project, a message would appear "Are you writing a book? Are you writing a book? Click here to learn how to get published." However, now when she tries to write about the things she went through during the bereavement after his friend's death, the message that appears is "Alone? Scared? Depressed? Call 24-Hour Suicide Hotline" this line shows that the computer detects how the state of the main character is searching, surfing, and writing about depression so that when a message appears there is a message trying to help people who are experiencing an unstable mental state.

Sure I worried that writing about it might be a mistake. You write a thing down because you're hoping to get a hold on it. You write about experiences partly to understand what they mean, partly not to lose them to time. To oblivion. But there's always the danger of the opposite happening. Losing the memory of the experience itself to the memory of writing about it. Like people whose memories of places they've traveled to are in fact only memories of the pictures they took there. In the end, writing and photography probably destroy more of the past than they ever preserve of it. So it could happen: by writing about someone lost—or even just talking too much about them—you might be burying them for good. (p. 158)

The quote above reveals that the main character is still determining whether her action is correct, namely writing about the events she is experiencing. However, she thought again that by writing, she would not forget what had happened to her because, in the end, only writing or photos would be the items she wanted in the future because they would not disappear. It would be different if the memory were only stored in the brain, which might later be forgotten.

4.2.3 Going to a Psychiatrist

A person's reaction to a problem will vary depending on how that person solves it. Existing problems can be solved quickly, but some are difficult to solve, affecting their lives. The previous life was bright, but after the problem came, everything looked complicated. So many choose to try to seek help from a psychiatrist in the hope that the problems they face will be solved and they can live as before. This shows in the novel "The Friend," where the main character struggles to face her friend's death, which affects her life. Her life became more complex, so she tried to get help from a psychiatrist.

I talk about how, no matter how much I sleep, I'm exhausted.

About the number of times I bump into something, or drop something, or trip over my own feet. Stepping off the curb into the path of a car that would have struck me if someone standing by hadn't jerked me back. The days when I don't eat, the days when I eat nothing but junk. Absurd fears: What if there's a gas leak and the building blows up? Losing or misplacing stuff. Forgetting to do my taxes.

These are all symptoms of bereavement, the therapist tells me unnecessarily. Doctor Obvious.(p. 118)

The quote above shows that the main character openly discusses her problems with the psychiatrist. He describes everything that happened to him during the mourning period as he says that he experienced symptoms of depression. According to Mazure (1998), who quoted from Brown & Harris's (1978) Life Events and Difficulties Schedule —noting that in depressed patients, stressors were 2.5 times more likely than in controls and that in community samples, 80% of depressed cases happen because of significant life events.

Moreover, the psychiatrist also said that it is true that the main character describes the symptoms of depression. The main character trusts the psychiatrist, so she does not hesitate to tell them everything that happened to her since the first time she heard about her friend's death. As stated in the quote below

All that anger, says the therapist. Yet none directed at you. No anger, no blame. Is this because I think suicide can be justifiable? Plato thought so. Seneca thought so. But what do I think? Why do I think you did it? Because you were trapped upside down in a tankful of water. Because you were weak and in pain. Because you were tired of fighting. (p. 122)

The following quote reveals that the main character initially believed that her friend committed this awful deed out of necessity. However, after consulting a psychiatrist, she realized that her friend made this decision because of his own choice. The main character realizes that her friend made a tragic decision because he cannot stand or is dissatisfied with his life, which makes him feel trapped or in prison.

Once, I spend most of the hour not saying anything. Each time I start to speak I break down. After a few tries, I give up and sit there sobbing until it's time to go. (p. 122)

The following quote describes the character's transformations. She had previously felt uncomfortable expressing her feelings or alerting her doctor, but with time, she started to open up and reveal her genuine self, including the fact that she was still grieving her friend's passing. This demonstrates that consulting a psychiatrist will help someone deal with their issues and discover answers more easily.

But you know, Apollo, I say after my fourth or fifth session, I think I really am beginning to feel a little better. (119)

The quote above shows that going to a psychiatrist to ask for a solution or help is not a wrong decision for the main character. After meeting the doctor several times, she felt a positive impact from it, so she began to feel calm after so long fighting the depression she was experiencing.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The novel "The Friend" (2018) by Sigrid Nunez is a novel that expresses the bereavement of a person who is left to die by a friend he loves. The analysis is done through text and context-based interpretation. The analysis is supported by the defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud (1917) Introduction to Psychoanalysis and Anna Freud in her book *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense* (1936). In this analysis, it is revealed how the main character tries to overcome the grief she is experiencing. The main character in this novel is a woman who feels her life has changed after the incident, and this happens because she tries to deny reality and aims to protect herself from anything that will hurt her; that is why she is depressed. Therefore, she could not carry out her usual activities, such as work and other. After all this time, the main character realizes that there is no point in continuing to be in that phase, so she tries to carry out positive activities such as going to a psychiatrist for help, raising a dog to be her friend, then also trying to write a book, this activity she did to help her to overcome this grief.

It can be concluded that the main character experiences a type of chronic bereavement. The same feeling of grief that lasted for quite a long time made her experience depression, and then she asked for help from a psychiatrist to help her overcome this feeling of bereavement. As Bowlby (1982) said, The other variation first seems to be the exact reverse: there is a more or less prolonged absence of conscious mourning, and the bereaved's life is still largely structured as it was before. He may, however, be suffering from various psychological or physical illnesses, and he may also suddenly and seems out of the blue become severely melancholy. The disturbances are discovered to be variants of normal mourning though strangely disconnected, both cognitively and emotionally, from the loss that causes them during psychotherapy with such people, which is sometimes undertaken for ill-defined symptoms, and interpersonal difficulties that have developed without any breakdown occurred, and sometimes after the breakdown.

At first, it might be difficult for the main character to tell the doctor everything she feels. However, sometime later, she began to try to open herself up little by little so that she felt more comfortable talking about her problems. Having a dog makes her much better emotionally. Initially, she took the dog intending to save it because the dog had no home and was depressed, and the previous owner

had died. At first, they have an awkward relationship, but after a while, they start a much deeper relationship, and even the main character feels that nothing can separate her from Apollo. After things got much better, she also started to write a book inspired by this incident that happened to her. She thought that by writing later, she would be able to read and remember it again one day. She can also do her job as a writer by writing the main character. Some positive ways that the main character does this help her overcome the grief she experiences because a friend she loves dies, which previously made her life awry.

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