

# Psychological Study of the Stages of Grief in Postmodern Poems

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**Abstract:** This paper sheds the light on the psychological study of the five stages of the grief (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance) in postmodern poems that are related to the theme of death and suicide. Ross model (1969) is adopted for the psychological analysis. Its analysis relies on the last three stages of grief (Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance) in postmodern poetry (poems). The paper analyzes the theme of death in the poems that are written by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Sexton, both of them have lost someone who is very close (father, friend) and they wish to be dead before their death, they also want to die in the same way (suicide).

**Key words:** grief, death, suicide, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance postmodern poems.

## 1- The Theme of Death

Most of the American post-modern poets are suffering from depression thus their death is intentional by committing a suicide which is an act of killing oneself. It is a crime of murdering (Webster, 1988:735). It is regarded as a major health problem and a personal tragedy. It is also considered by the World Health Organization as the thirteen the cause of death in the world especially in the age between 15-34 years. It is raised in the women specifically after giving birth and this is what happened with the confessional poet Anne Sexton (Joiner, 2005:29).

## 2- The Model of Psychological Analysis

This model is applied only on the poems that have the theme of the death and suicide because it has a connection with the experience of losing people by death.

### 2.1 Stages of Grief

**Elisabeth Kübler-Ross** was a psychiatrist with a particular interest in end-of-life care. Especially interested in the care of dying patients, she researched their attitudes to death. Her groundbreaking work, *On Death and Dying*, in (1969) identified the "five stages" that dying people go through as they approach death and people who experience the loss of the closest friends or parents. This model has been enormously influential over the past forty years (Ross, 1969:31-91).

#### 2.1.1 Denial

It is the first of the five stages of grief. It helps people to survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. It is the state of shock and denial. Everything will be difficult. It is hard to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial and shock help each one to cope and make survival possible. Also it helps to pace the feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is the nature's way of letting in only as much as it can be handled. As soon as people accept the reality of the loss, they are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as it proceeds, all the feelings which were denying begin to surface (ibid:31-39).

#### 2.1.2 Anger

It is a necessary stage of the healing process. There are many other emotions under the anger and they will come and appear in time, but anger is the emotion that it is most used to manage. The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to the friends, the doctors, the family, yourself and your loved one who died, but also to God. It may be asked, "Where is God in this? Underneath anger is pain that is natural to feel

deserted and abandoned, but living in a society that fears anger. Anger is strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss. At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything. Then you get angry at someone, maybe a person who did not attend the funeral, maybe a person who is not around. The anger becomes a bridge over the open sea, a connection from you to them. The anger is just another indication of the intensity of the love (ibid:40).

### 2.1.3 Bargaining

Before a loss, it seems like you will do anything if only your loved one would be spared as: 41-“Please God, ” you bargain as wanting life returned to what it was; wanting the loved one restored, going back in time to find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, and stop the accident from happening...if only, if only, if only. Guilt is often the bargaining’s companion. The “if only” causes finding faults and trying to do them differently. It may be even bargained with the pain in order not to feel the pain of this loss. Remaining in the past, and trying to negotiate the way out of the hurt. People often think of the stages as lasting weeks or months. They forget that the stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes or hours, each individual stage is left in a linear fashion but it is felt one, then another and back again to the first one (ibid:43-66)

### 2.1.4 Depression

After bargaining, the attention moves squarely into the present. Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters lives on a deeper level, deeper than it is ever imagined. This depressive stage feels as though it will last forever. It is important to understand that this depression is not a sign of mental illness. It is the appropriate response to a great loss. As if everything around is full of intensive sadness, wondering, perhaps, if there is any point in going on alone, why go on at all. Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural; a state to be fixed, something to snap out of. The loss of a loved one is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. To not experience depression after a loved one dies would be unusual. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way (ibid:69).

### 2.1.5 Acceptance

It is often confused with the notion of being “all right” with what has happened. This is not the case. Most people do not ever feel good about the loss of a loved one. This stage is about accepting the reality that the loved one is physically gone and recognize that this new reality is the permanent reality, this reality is not liked but eventually it is accepted. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live. By trying to live now in a world where the loved one is missing is so hard. In resisting this new norm, at first many people want to maintain life as it was before the loss. With time, through bits and pieces of acceptance, the past intact cannot be maintained.. Finding acceptance may be just having more good days than bad ones. It is time to live again and enjoy the life. It can never replace what has been lost, but new connections, new meaningful relationships, new inter-dependencies can be made. Instead of denying the feelings, people listen to the needs; by moving, by changing, by growing, or by evolving (ibid:91).

3- Postmodern poets

### 3.1 Allen Ginsberg

He is an American poet who was born in 1926, U.S and died in 1997 in New York. He was a practicing Buddhist and a self-professed communist. This poet was suffering because of his family, his father's death and his mother's mental illness, his brother and sister also were dead; he was alone, thus, the themes of death, loneliness, and sadness were heavily used in his poetry. He was suffering from mental disorder disease thus, he entered mental institution more than one time. (Ginsberg,1977:532).

### 3.2 Anne Sexton

*Anne Gray Harvey Sexton* was born in November 9<sup>th</sup> 1928 in Newton, Massachusetts and raised in middle- class family in Weston. (Middlebrook,1991:5). Sexton’s childhood was materially comfortable but not happy. Her relationship with her parents was difficult, perhaps even abusive. After her divorce, Sexton fell into depression and her health started to decline as her poetry enriched more filled with topics that are out of the familiar and mostly considered taboo (ibid:22).Sexton suffered from post-partum depression, and after the birth of her first daughter she suffered her first breakdown and was admitted to a neuropsychiatric hospital. Other institutionalizations followed. Anne Sexton started writing poetry at the age of twenty-nine to help her stay away from killing herself. She used her poetry and prose as a breather, somehow -regardless

of alcoholism and the mental illness that ultimately led her to suicide ,she committed suicide at age of 46 years (George,2001:37).

#### 4- Data Analysis

##### 4.1 Father's Death Blues (Allen Ginsberg)

The beatniks poet, *Allen Ginsberg*, wrote this poem during his flight home to attend his father's funeral. He describes his father's death and the death of his family like his brother , sister, mother, uncle , and aunt. All his family passed away. The poet gives a personality to **death (personification)** from the title of the poem because he is familiar with it and he also learns lessons from **death**. The poet was related to Beat movement which is stated soon after the second world war WWII. According to this school, the poets uses language and slang from jazz music and opens a door to self-expression and freedom of speech.

Psychologically, the poet uses the **bargaining** stage of grief by mentioning his wish to see his father again but this is something impossible when the poet finds it impossible; he tries to make something different which is going on and do his best by the **Birth** of the poet that is given by the father. The poet also accepts the death of all of his family members(**acceptance**). The poet goes through a process of grief after losing his family. **Acceptance** is the last stage of grief, it means that he is simply accepting it as a reality and something he cannot change. The poet is unable to forget the family he lost but he has learned to adjust, grow, and find a way to live without them. The poet also rhyming this line by repeating the consonant **l** as in

**Birth** you gave was **nothing ill**  
**My heart** is **still**, as time will **tell**.

The poet is able to challenge all the difficulties of the life and he will be a good man in his society. Even his heart is full of pain but it is still and one day everyone will talk about him.

##### 4.2 Sylvia's Death (Anne Sexton)

It is a confessional poem written by *Ann Sexton* in (1963) within six days after Sylvia's suicide. Ann describes the tragic life of her close friend Sylvia and the tragic death. This poem shows Ann's uninterrupted thoughts. Its structure is based on couplets that create a sense of a pattern and extended stanzas enclosed in parentheses. The use of alliteration and the accumulation of the lines refers to the poet's thoughts and breath. This poem lacks full-stops but it has many commas and question marks that indicate the life dilemmas of personas

Psychologically, *Anne Sexton* has a mental disease which begins after giving birth, her depression is because of her responsibility as a house wife. Ann is already depressed but her depression is rising by the death of her friend Sylvia . There are ten types of suicide, Anne's suicide is called as **copycat suicide** which is an act of imitation of another people who are committing of self-killing. **Anne Sexton's** suicide is an imitation of her friend **Sylvia Plath's** .Ann is suffering from the fourth stage of grief **depression** after losing her friend, therefore; Ann wishes to die by repeating **me** and **too**:

*And me,  
me too.*

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