

THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN AND NATURE DESCRIBING GRIEVING STAGES IN MAYA ANGELOU'S "WHEN GREAT TREES FALL"

Rr. Arielia Yustisiana
Program Studi Bahasa Inggris
Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi
Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya
arielia.yustisiana@ukwms.ac.id

Article History

Received
02-03-2022

Revised
29-04-2022

Accepted
26-05-2022

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas tema puisi berjudul "When Great Trees Fall" yang ditulis oleh penyair Afrika-Amerika, Maya Angelou. Tema yang tersirat dalam puisi tersebut adalah tahapan kesedihan. Oleh karena itu, tujuan penelitian ini membahas: 1) tahapan kesedihan dalam "When Great Trees Fall" karya Maya Angelou, dan 2) konsep manusia dan alam yang menggambarkan tahapan berduka dalam puisi tersebut. Tahapan kesedihan yang tersirat dalam puisi tersebut memenuhi teori tahapan kesedihan yang dijelaskan oleh Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. Selain itu, teori simbol juga digunakan untuk menganalisis beberapa gambaran yang menyajikan beberapa tahapan kesedihan yang dialami oleh penutur puisi. Berkaitan dengan konsep manusia dan alam, teori alam dan ekokritik memenuhi analisisnya. Metode deskriptif berguna dalam penelitian ini, dan tiga pendekatan yang digunakan untuk mendukung analisis adalah pendekatan psikologis, struktural dan formalis. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa ada empat tahap kesedihan yang tergambar dalam puisi secara implisit, yaitu isolasi, kemarahan, depresi dan penerimaan. Sedangkan konsep manusia dan alam dalam puisi tersebut menggambarkan pemanfaatan gejala alam dan salah satu unsur alam kehidupan yaitu udara. Meskipun pembicara merasakan kesedihan karena kehilangan orang yang dicintai, dia mampu bernafas untuk menjalani kehidupan.

Kata Kunci: *Tahapan Kesedihan, Konsep Manusia dan Alam, Ekokiritik*

Abstract. The research aimed to discuss the theme of the poem entitled "When Great Trees Fall" written by an African American poet, Maya Angelou. The theme stated implicitly in the poem was stages of grief. Therefore, the objectives of the research discussed: 1) stages of grief in Maya Angelou's "When Great Trees Fall", and 2) the concept of human and nature that describes grieving stages in the poem. The stages of grief that were implicitly stated in the poem meet the theory of stages of grief explained by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. Besides, the theory of symbol was also used to analyze some images that presented some stages of grief experienced by the speaker of the poem. Dealing with the concept of human and nature, the theory of nature and that of ecocriticism met the analysis. Descriptive method was useful in the research, and three approaches were used to support the analysis were psychological, structural and formalist approaches. The research found that there were four stages of grief portrayed in the poem implicitly, that is, isolation, anger, depression and acceptance. While the concept of human and nature in the poem was described the use of natural phenomena and one of natural elements of life, that is, air. Even though the speaker felt grief because of the loss of the loved one, she is able to breathe in order to live the life.

Keywords: *Stages of grief, concept of human and nature, ecocriticism*

INTRODUCTION

Grief is a natural response to loss. It is the emotional suffering someone feels when something or someone they love is taken away. Often, the pain of loss can feel overwhelming. Someone may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and profound sadness. The pain of grief can also disrupt their physical health, making it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to loss—and the more significant the loss, the more intense their grief will be. Kübler-Ross said that

Grief is a multifaceted response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, cultural, spiritual and philosophical dimensions. While the terms are often used interchangeably, *bereavement* refers to the state of loss, and *grief* is the reaction to that loss (2008: 23).

In regard with the previous explanation, it often becomes of the themes of literary works produced by some famous authors and poets. Some authors create their literary works based on their experiences which are very influential in their lives. It seems like they want to share to the readers what they have been through. One of the authors that often uses their life experiences in their literary works is an African-American poet, Maya Angelou. She is an African-American author, feminist and poet who has produced many remarkable literary works. Most of her literary works are poems. Poems are poet's pieces of work. According to Annas in *How the Poetry Works*, she says that

A poem is concerned with emotion, it is emotion shaped, controlled, and contained in form. A poem often says something significant; it attempts to achieve beauty. Of course, what is significant and beautiful is open to discussion and may change with time and place (1996: 181).

Reading a poem needs a particular emotion to understand its deep meaning because it is concerned with ideas and insights. Everyone has their own understanding in order to interpret the meaning of a poem. The readers may have found from their reading of poetry in their own language that they can often enjoy a poem without fully understanding its meaning. Before the readers can say why they like a poem, it is first necessary to understand its meaning well. Morris in his book entitled *The Language of Poetry* (2002: 3) states “three factors that should be taken into account in reading a poem: firstly, the readers must learn the person who wrote the poem; secondly, they must understand the thing that is written in the poem; the last but not least, it depends on the readers themselves who are the interpreters.”

“When Great Trees Fall” is a simple poem written by an African-American poet, Maya Angelou. The poem depicts how the speaker feels grief because of the loss of the loved one. How the loss really influences the speaker's and the surroundings' lives becomes the important image in the poem. Maya Angelou uses some symbols to show the speaker's grief implicitly. Therefore, the research focuses on the theme in the poem. It discusses the stages of grief in the poem. There are some words or phrases or lines that symbolize the stages of grief. The speaker experiences the grief through some stages, such as isolation, anger, bargaining, and depression. Even finally, the speaker accepts what she has been through. Those stages are discussed through the symbols. As a poet Maya Angelou often uses the elements of nature in the poems she writes. Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural world. It analyzes the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination in the minds of the writers of literary works. According to Glotfelty in Garrard (2004: 3), ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Therefore, the research also

elevates the concept of human and nature in the poem. Such concept focuses on the grieving stages experienced by the speaker.

Maya Angelou uses symbolism and strong imagery in this poem to show a person's response to loss. It does not matter how strong or tough someone is; when an influential person in their life passes away, they will feel the effects. Although this poem shows that people experience regrets with things left unsaid, their lives are made better by that influence. Therefore, the research discusses two specific topics deal with stages of grief. The first problem is stages of grief that are depicted through some symbols in the poem and the second one is how the concept of human and nature are used to describe stages of grief in Maya Angelou's "The Great Trees Fall". According to the topics, there are some theories that meet the topics. the first is the theory of symbol as the basic theory dealing with poetic devices. The second is the stages of grief, nature, and ecocriticism. Both terms are learned because they are related to the topic of the research, that is, the stages of grief in a poem entitled "When Great Trees Fall" written by Maya Angelou.

Symbol is something that refers to something else. Finding out a symbol deals with figurative meaning because it means beyond its real meaning or literal meaning. William Morris states that 'symbol is defined as something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or conversation especially a material object used to represent something invisible' (1969: 1302). It clarifies that a symbol is a way to represent another image or illustration.

A symbol is something that is literally itself (a shiny, patent leather shoe, for example) at the same time that it represents or suggests something else (childish innocence or purity). In other words, a symbol is a literal object or thing that suggests another level of meaning; a symbol may suggest a person, an abstraction, or an idea. A symbol is basically a kind of image, differing from other images in the use to which it is put (Kenney, 2005: 75). A symbol in a story may, in fact, harbor multiple levels of meaning. In addition, Kenney also claims 'it is this attempt that the symbol, while evoking a concrete, objective reality, also suggests an additional 'level of meaning' beyond that reality (1988: 75).

Moreover, Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* states that "Symbol is applied only to a word or set of words that signifies something else" (1993: 168). A symbol is something that means more than what it is fact. The other definition of symbol is stated by Kennedy in his book entitled *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*: "A symbol is a thing that suggests more than its literal meaning. Symbols generally do not "stand for" any one meaning, nor for anything absolutely definite" (2010: 113).

Nature, in the broadest sense, is the natural, physical, or material world or universe. "Nature" can refer to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. The study of nature is a large part of science. Although humans are part of nature, human activity is often understood as a separate category from other natural phenomena.

According to Rothenberg,

The word *nature* is derived from the Latin word *natura*, or "essential qualities, innate disposition", and in ancient times, literally meant "birth". *Natura* is a Latin translation of the Greek word *physis*, which originally related to the intrinsic characteristics that plants, animals, and other features of the world develop of their own accord (2011: 23).

The concept of nature as a whole, the physical universe, is one of several expansions of the original notion; it began with certain core applications of the word *physis* by pre-Socratic philosophers, and has steadily gained currency ever since. This usage continued during the advent of modern scientific method in the last several centuries.

Within the various uses of the word today, "nature" often refers to geology and wildlife. Nature can refer to the general realm of living plants and animals, and in some cases to the

processes associated with inanimate objects—the way that particular types of things exist and change of their own accord, such as the weather and geology of the Earth.

Grief is a multifaceted response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed. While the terms are often used interchangeably, *bereavement* refers to the state of loss, and *grief* is the reaction to that loss. Grief is a natural response to loss. It is the suffering one feels when something or someone the individual loves is taken away. The grief associated with death is familiar to most people, but individuals grieve in connection with a variety of losses throughout their lives. Archer states that

Loss can be categorized as either physical or abstract, the physical loss being related to something that the individual can touch or measure, such as losing a spouse through death, while other types of loss are abstract, and relate to aspects of a person's social interactions (2014: 23).

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has introduced five stages of grief in her book entitled *On Death and Dying*. The five stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages of grief are based on her studies of the feelings of patients facing terminal illness, but many people have generalized them to other types of negative life changes and losses, such as the death of a loved one or a break-up.

The five stages of grief:

Denial: "This can't be happening to me."

Anger: "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"

Bargaining: "Make this not happen, and in return I will ____."

Depression: "I'm too sad to do anything."

Acceptance: "I'm at peace with what happened." (Kübler-Ross, 2008: 67)

If someone experiences any of these emotions following a loss, it may help to know that their reaction is natural and that they will heal in time. However, not everyone who grieves goes through all of these stages—and that is okay. Contrary to popular belief, **someone does not have to go through each stage in order to heal**. In fact, some people resolve their grief without going through *any* of these stages. And if they go through these stages of grief, they probably will not experience them in a neat, sequential order, so don't worry about what they "should" be feeling or which stage they are supposed to be in.

In the poem written by Maya Angelou entitled "When Great Trees Fall", she also describes the stages of grief that are similar to the theory of Kübler-Ross. Moreover, she aligns the grief implicitly she mentions with the concept of human and nature. Maya Angelou portrays the environmental elements with the stages of grief that make the poem more beautiful.

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. It takes an interdisciplinary point of view by analysing the works of authors, researchers and poets in the context of environmental issues and nature. Cheryll Glotfelty's working definition in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996: 3).

Due to the development of Ecocriticism, there are two waves of ecocriticism. Several scholars have divided Ecocriticism into two waves (Glotfelty: 56), recognizing the first as taking place throughout the eighties and nineties. The first wave is characterized by its emphasis on

nature writing as an object of study and as a meaningful practice. Central to this wave and to the majority of ecocritics still today is the environmental crisis of our age, seeing it as the duty of both the humanities and the natural sciences to raise awareness and invent solutions for a problem that is both cultural and physical. As such, a primary concern in first-wave ecocriticism was to “speak for” nature (Buell, 2015: 11). This wave kept the cultural distinction between human and nature, promoting the value of nature.

The second wave is particularly modern in its breaking down of some of the long-standing distinctions between the human and the non-human, questioning these very concepts (Gerrard, 2010: 5). The boundaries between the human and the non-human, nature and non-nature are discussed as constructions, and ecocritics challenge these constructions, asking (among other things) how they frame the environmental crisis and its solution. This wave brought with it a redefinition of the term “environment,” expanding its meaning to include both “nature” and the urban and its concern on writing (Buell, 2015: 11). Out of this expansion has grown the ecojustice movement, one of the more political of ecocriticism branches that is “raising an awareness of class, race, and gender through ecocritical reading of text” (Bressler, 2010: 236), often examining the plight of the poorest of a population who are the victims of pollution are seen as having less access to “nature” in the traditional sense.

These waves are not exactly distinct, and there is debate over what exactly constitutes the two. For instance, some ecocritics will claim activism has been a defining feature of ecocriticism from the beginning, while others see activism as a defining feature of primarily the first wave. While the exact features attributed to each wave may be disputed, it is clear that Ecocriticism continues to evolve and has undergone several shifts in attitude and direction since its conception.

Moreover, the authors of literary works compose their works that have to do with environment and nature. They summon nature because they would like to remind the people to love the environment and nature. Human, nature and environment are connected to each other. In literature, the writers consciously use nature as imagery, metaphor or symbol to express something implicitly.

METHOD

The most suitable method of research used is descriptive method. Punch explains that descriptive method is setting out to collect, organize and summarize information about the matter being studied (2000: 38). Hence, this method is aimed to describe the topic of the research, that is, stages of grief shown in Maya Angelou’s “When Great Trees Fall”.

The data of the research are taken from words, phrases, lines and stanzas of the poem entitled “When Great Trees Fall” written by Maya Angelou. Maya Angelou is an African-American poet who mostly elevates her truly life experiences in her poems. Not only has she shown racism and segregation she has been through, but loss experience as well, such as, in her poem “When Great Trees Fall.” Moreover, she always uses sense devices, for example, she implicitly reveals the detailed meaning of her poems using symbols, metaphor and other poetic devices.

Additionally, in the poem the research focuses on, the poet also aligns the loss of the loved one with nature. She would like the readers to feel the speaker’s bereavement. The poem tells about the loss of the loved one suffered by the speaker. The poem is written beautifully by composing the concept of human and nature that also reveals the loss felt by the speaker.

The primary data that are used in the research are lines that describe the the stages of grief. Therefore, the most suitable method of collecting the data is the library research. George states that library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information

or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point (2008: 6). It means that some materials in the form of printed media are needed in order to support the analysis. Moreover, the data are also collected from some literary sites in the internet to support the analysis.

There are two problems discussed in the research, that is, the depiction of the stages of grief through some symbols in the poem "When Great Trees Fall" written by Maya Angelou and the concept of human and nature used to describe grieving stages in the poem.

Three approaches are used to support the analysis. The approaches intended include psychological approach, structural approach and formalist criticism.

The approach needed by the researcher is psychological approach.

"Psychological approach is an approach to art that can generate three kinds of illumination: First, provide a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process; second, go back to study of the life of an author as means of understanding his art, and third, able to explain fictitious character" (Scott, 1962: 71-72).

The researcher would like to learn the suffering of the speaker in the poem psychologically in which she feels grieved because of the loss of the loved one.

Structural approach is applied in this research because this kind of approach is very effective for analyzing a poem which has some poetic meaning of the words. Structural approach concentrates on each constituent of the construction. By understanding the meaning of the words, the truth can be discovered. D'haen states that structural approach is producing relevant results by looking in places where one would not look without being urged by sturdy model (2014: 143). In other words, the structural approach is used to get the mastery over the structures. It concentrates on each word to get the detailed meaning.

Formalist criticism regards literature as a unique form of human's knowledge that needs to be examined in its own terms. The natural, sensible starting point is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. To explore the intense relationship within a poem is done by close reading, a careful step-by-step analysis and explication of a text. The formalist criticism which is now called as the new criticism or formalistic approach is defined by Guerin as the assumption that a given literary experience takes a shape proper to itself, or at the least that the shape and the experience are functions of each other (2005: 83). It means that the formalist criticism is concerned primarily with the work itself. The form and content cannot be meaningfully separated since the various stylistic elements of literary work influence each other.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Loss is a tragic yet inevitable part of the human experience. When it strikes, it leaves despair and misery in its path. Loss can eat away at the very heart and soul of a human being. It leaves a gnawing pain that nothing can heal. It leaves an open wound that tries to heal and yet is re-opened again and again by memories and regret. In this poem, *When Great Trees Fall* by Maya Angelou, the speaker identifies with all who have felt the deep searing pain of losing someone close. The speaker is able to not only effectively identify with the feeling of deep loss and anguish, but is also able to offer hope for healing through her powerful words.

The research focuses on the stages of grief experienced by the speaker in the poem. The poem is simple but there are some symbols and images that are implicitly revealed. Those symbols and images deal with the stages of grief suffered by the speaker of the poem. Besides, the poet also uses some elements of nature which describe the stages of grief. The poem is the following:

When Great Trees Fall

When great trees fall,
 rocks on distant hills shudder,
 lions hunker down
 in tall grasses,
 and even elephants (5)
 lumber after safety.

When great trees fall
 in forests,
 small things recoil into silence,
 their senses (10)
 eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,
 the air around us becomes
 light, rare, sterile.
 We breathe, briefly. (15)
 Our eyes, briefly,
 see with
 a hurtful clarity.
 Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
 examines, (20)
 gnaws on kind words
 unsaid,
 promised walks
 never taken.

Great souls die and (25)
 our reality, bound to
 them, takes leave of us.
 Our souls,
 dependent upon their
 nurture, (30)
 now shrink, wizened.
 Our minds, formed
 and informed by their
 radiance,
 fall away. (35)
 We are not so much maddened
 as reduced to the unutterable ignorance
 of dark, cold
 caves.

And when great souls die, (40)
 after a period peace blooms,
 slowly and always
 irregularly. Spaces fill
 with a kind of
 soothing electric vibration. (45)
 Our senses, restored, never
 to be the same, whisper to us.
 They existed. They existed.
 We can be. Be and be
 better. For they existed. (50)

Stages of Grief in Maya Angelou's "When the Great Trees Fall"

According to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, there are five stages of grief that happens someone who just feel loss of the loved one, that is, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. From the five stages, there are four that match the speaker's stages of grief: isolation, anger, depression and acceptance. The speaker does not experience the stage of denial, but she feels isolated.

A. Isolation

Isolation is a state of being separated whether the one separates herself from others and vice versa. In the poem, the speaker feels isolated. It is not because she is isolated by the community but she isolates herself from others because she feels grieved. She has lost someone she loves so much, even other things that are far from her surrounding feel what she feels. "When a great tree falls" (line 1), it is felt for miles around. In the same way, when a great soul departs, the effects are felt deep and far. The image of the "rocks on distant hills shudder[ing]" (line 2) symbolizes the ways in which the death causes people, even distant people, to feel despair and shudder. The lions which "hunker down" (line 3) reflects the way some people will react to the loss. The loss causes a certain amount of fear and the pressing need to hide away and escape to safety. Only, there is no escape from the feeling of despair that comes from losing someone great.

The feeling of isolation felt by the speaker is clearly shown in the following stanza:

When great trees fall
in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses (10)
eroded beyond fear.

In the previous stanza, the speaker has already revealed the way in which great things are affected by the death of someone great, now turns her attention to the "small things". This suggests that the loss of someone great is felt among the great and among the small. Stage of isolation centers from the 9th to 11th lines of the poem. The left one only remains silence because of the eternal loss she has faced. She tends to recoil from the surrounding. She is hurt because her loss, even she does not realize that she enjoys her solitude. She does not care with the people who need her because she has deeply mourned.

B. Anger

Anger is a natural response to perceived threats. It causes the body to release adrenaline, the muscles to tighten, and the heart rate and blood pressure to increase. The senses might feel more acute and the face and hands flushed. However, anger becomes a problem only when we do not manage it in a healthy way. The anger that is felt by the speaker is different. Her anger appears because she has to control over her deepest grief. The anger is shown in the 3rd stanza of the poem:

When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly. (15)
Our eyes, briefly,
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines, (20)
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,

promised walks
never taken.

With the third stanza, the speaker speaks directly about death. Just as the great tree falling causes ripples for miles, so the great soul departed move affects the hundreds or thousands of hearts he has touched during the time he lived. The speaker describes the way in which the air, even, seems to become “light” and “sterile” (line 14). It is hard to breathe, when one has lost a great loved one. The speaker describes the way in which those affected by loss have a brief moment of “hurtful clarity” in which they are able to see and understand just what a valuable soul has been lost. When loss hits, often a person’s memory is “suddenly sharpened” (line 20) and they are able to remember the moments spent with the one who has been lost. These memories, though precious, also feel like a dagger to the soul. The speaker then explains the feelings of regret that can often plague a person who has lost someone. When one loses a loved one, he or she will sometimes regret “kind words unsaid” (lines 21-22). The speaker has clearly experienced the kind of loss which left her desperately longing for more time to express the love she felt in her heart for the person who was taken too soon. She thinks about the walks she promised to take with that loved one. Having never fulfilled those promises leaves her with a gnawing pain of despair and regret. The speaker’s regret emerges repressed anger that makes her feel languish. The death of the loved one has evoked a hurtful clarity (line 18).

The repressed anger that is suffered by the speaker makes her always think of the memories she has spent with the loved one who has passed away. Here is part of the third stanza:

...
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines, (20)
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks
never taken.

It echoes in the speaker’s mind and heart as a comfort when she has lost someone, and is still grieving. The third stanza speaks to us about what it feels like to lose someone suddenly, to gnaw at the unsaid conversations that still rattle on in the speaker’s mind years after the physical departure, or to wish her had said something different than what she’d last said to the loved one. The third stanza speaks to the intensity of a memory of loss, a sharpened cluster of images and sounds and smells.

Furthermore, the speaker may feel regretful that when the loved one departs suddenly, they actually have something to say to each other. Her regret of something unsaid causes her to get angry with herself. She recalls all the memories and promises that they have kept, but they are not able to make them come true.

C. Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Depression affects how someone feels, thinks and behaves. Moreover, it can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Someone who is depressed may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and sometimes they may feel as if life is not worth living. In the poem “When Great Trees Fall”, the speaker also feels depression because of her loss. The deepest loss she feels is stated in the fourth stanza. Here is the fourth stanza of the poem:

Great souls die and (25)
our reality, bound to
them, takes leave of us.
Our souls,
dependent upon their

nurture, (30)

now shrink, wizened.

Our minds, formed

and informed by their

radiance,

fall away. (35)

We are not so much maddened

as reduced to the unutterable ignorance

of dark, cold

caves.

In this stanza, the speaker gives insight into the mental and emotional effects of losing someone close. In this stanza, the loss of a “great soul” (line 25) means the loss of a soul that has had great impact on one’s everyday life. She expresses the way that loss can truly change a person’s reality. When one’s reality is bound up in the life of another, the loss of that person changes everything. She explains the way that “our souls” can depend on the nurture of another (line 30), and when that person dies, it leaves us feeling small, like our very souls have shrunk.

Furthermore, the speaker describes the way in which one’s mind can be “informed by their [Great One’s] radiance” (lines 32-34) and the way those suffering loss can feel as though their minds “fall away”. The speaker identifies with others who have felt this loss when she uses the second person point of view and claims, “We are not so much maddened as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of dark, cold caves” (lines 36-39). This reveals that the speaker, in the face of loss, is not necessarily angry, though anger can be a part of the feelings that come from this loss. She feels a sense of despair more than anger, however. This despair can only be described as a “cold dark cave”. The feelings are so strong that they are “unutterable”. The speaker identifies with all who have felt this deep despair as a result of losing someone great.

D. Acceptance

Acceptance is able to help depression. Acceptance is the first step towards getting better. Someone has, for whatever reasons, developed major depression. They have to accept it. No amount of denial is going to help. No amount of trying to figure out what has happened, how it has happened, what has precipitated it, etc., is going to help either. The stage of acceptance is depicted in the fifth stanza of the poem. The following is the last stanza:

And when great souls die, (40)

after a period peace blooms,

slowly and always

irregularly. Spaces fill

with a kind of

soothing electric vibration. (45)

Our senses, restored, never

to be the same, whisper to us.

They existed. They existed.

We can be. Be and be

better. For they existed. (50)

With the final stanza of this poem, the speaker offers hope to all who have suffered loss by revealing the healing that has occurred in the aftermath of the death. The speaker seems to imply that time has allowed for this healing to occur. She explains that “after a period” she was able to feel “peace bloom” (line 41). It happened “slowly and always irregularly” (lines 42-43). This reveals that she still had moments of despair and anguish even as she was slowly beginning

to heal and feel peace. She described the feelings in between the healing as something “with a kind of soothing electric vibration”.

Additionally, in a sense, the pain the speaker felt still buzzed in the background of her very being, and yet the memory of the lost one was soothing and comforting. She explains that eventually her senses were “restored” even if they were “never to be the same”. In the back of her mind and in the background of all that she does, she hears the presence of the one lost. She hears the whisper, “they existed. They existed” (line 48). This gives her a new meaning and purpose in her life. She claims that because this great one existed, she can “be better”.

The ending of this poem offers great hope to all who have experienced loss. The speaker continues to identify with others who have lost loved ones. This also creates the sense in the readers that they are not alone. Readers can know that others have felt such grievous pain, and yet have not only healed but been made better by the loss. Even if they will never be the same again, and even if there will always be pain and sadness, there is hope for healing and joy in the midst of great loss.

The Concept of Human and Nature Describing Stages of Grief in a Poem “When Great Trees Fall”

The poem entitled “When Great Trees Fall” depicts some concept of human and nature. The speaker of the poem often summons some characteristics of human and nature in the poem to reflect her grief. “Great Tree” in the poem refers to someone who is very valuable, loving and great. It may be the one who really influences the speaker’s life. When the great one passes away, everyone, especially the speaker, will feel lost and grieved. The great one has left us suddenly, it seems like every life cycle has also changed. In the first stanza, the speaker mentions “rocks on distant hills shudder” (line 2) and “lions hunker down” (line 3) that show close relationship of human and nature. The second line of the first stanza visualizes some great people who live far away also feel the condolence. The speaker prefers mentioning a king of the jungle, that is, “lions” to other animals. Lions are also animals who dominate other animals in nature. Remember as an example the expression “the lion, king of the jungle”. When a lion appears as the power animal, it could reflect the ability to lead others or tendency to dominate in relationships. Besides “lions”, another animal which is mentioned in the first stanza that depicts the relation of human and nature is “elephants”. In the most general, universal meaning, the elephant symbolizes strength and power. This meaning refers to both the body and the mind. The elephant is also seen as a sort of spirit guide to help us along a journey that requires patience.

The world is composed of 4 basic elements – Fire, Water, Air, and Earth. These were considered the critical energy forces that sustained life. All of these elements are integral parts of matter or the physical universe, and the human body is a physical creation existing in the material realm. Therefore, the human beings were seen to be made of and governed by the four elements. Maintaining a balance between these elements was advocated to ensure physical as well as psychological well-being. In the poem, the speaker uses one of the four elements, that is, air. It is light, mobile, and has the quality of dryness. Being that which we breathe, it is essential to life and can be thought of as the primary element. In the third stanza of the poem,

When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.

the air represents the breath of life. Air represents our mental activity such as intellect and the ability to reason, memory, thoughts, knowledge and comprehension. When the loved one passes away, the air still helps us breathe and think rationally so that it is felt so light, rare and sterile. It helps us to stay awake even though we feel deeply hurt by the grieving situation. Air is the primary nutrient. Survival without it is measured in minutes. It is so important that we do it

without thinking. Our breathing is the voice of our spirit. It is depth, smoothness, sound, and rate reflect our mood.

The element of air that is summoned in the third stanza is the key to continue the life when the loved one suddenly leaves. The air becomes “sterile” that may represent the speaker’s thought. She thinks the positive thing and accepts what has been through happening in her life. The air element symbol is the marker of intellectuals amongst us. People with a store of the air element are invariably clever thinkers who are able to handle abstract reasoning smartly. The lines of the last stanza of the poem are connected to the healing process and acceptance of the loss:

Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
better. For they existed.

The idea of energy, of soul, of something that transcends the physical world, always gets us. The final few lines gather us in, reassuring us: “They existed. They existed./We can be. Be and be/better. For they existed”. This is the core of it all, the exhalation of great pain and loss. The speaker feels blessed and is able to process her thoughts with a lightning quick speed. She finally accepts and changes her world into a better one.

CONCLUSION

The research aims to explain the stages of grief and the concept of human and nature in a poem entitled “When Great Trees Fall” written by Maya Angelou. Through the analysis, the messages that are voiced by the speaker of the poem can be achieved. In the research, it is found that there are four stages of grief in the poem. They are isolation, anger, depression and acceptance. The four stages are stated implicitly in the stanzas of the poem. The stage of grief, isolation, is stated in the first and second stanzas, anger in the third, depression in the third and fourth, and acceptance in the fifth stanza.

When Great Trees Fall by Maya Angelou is a five stanza poem that is separated into uneven sets of lines. The stanzas range in length from five lines up to fourteen. There is no specific rhyme scheme or metrical pattern but Angelou does make use of several poetic techniques that help to unify the text and create a feeling of rhythm and rhyme. *When Great Trees Fall* by Maya Angelou is a moving poem that discusses the impact lost loved ones have on the living.

In the first lines, the speaker begins by using an extended metaphor to describe a natural scene. She speaks about the reaction of animals when “great trees fall”. They hide, hunker down and “lumber after safety”. The metaphor compares the death of loved ones to the monumental shifts that occur when large and powerful trees fall in the forest. As the poem progresses, the speaker moves on to directly speak about “great souls” and how human beings react to loss. The third stanza discusses one’s inability to breathe and the sharpening one’s memory undergoes. The poem concludes with a message of hope and renewal, suggesting that after a loved one’s death that “We can be...better. For they existed”.

Additionally, the concept of human and nature is also clearly used in the poem. This concept is also shows the grief that is felt by the speaker of the poem. Natural phenomena and one life element become the precious implementation of the concept of human and nature. The speaker has summoned powerful and gigantic animals, solid natural substance, and a natural element of life that actually symbolize the feeling of condolence experienced by the speaker. It seems like how deep and miserable someone feels when the loved one passes away.

REFERENCES

Annas, P.J. 1996. *How the Poetry Works*. Cambridge: Cambridge Publisher Ltd.

- Archer, J. 2014. *The Nature of Grief: the Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss*. London: Routledge.
- Bressler, Charles. 2010. *Literary Criticism: an Introduction to Theory and Practice*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Buell, Lawrence. 2015. *The Environmental Imagination*. New York: Paperback.
- D'haen, T. 2014. *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Garrard, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- George, M.W. 2008. *The Element of Library Research: What Every Student Needs To Know*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm. 1996. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. New York: University of Georgia Press.
- Guerin, W.L. 2005. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (5th ed.)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, X.J and Dana Gioia. 2010. *Literature: an Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama and Writing*. New York: Longman Publishing Ltd.
- Morris, R. 2002. *The Language of Poetry*. London: Longman.
- Punch, K.F. 2000. *Developing Effective Research Proposals*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Ross Kübler, Elisabeth. 2008. *On Death and Dying*. London: Paperback.
- Rothenberg, David. 2011. *Survival of Beautiful: Art, Science and Evolution*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wilbur, F. Scott. 1962. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*. New York: A Division of MacMillan Publishing Co.Inc.