

ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER'S EMOTIONAL JOURNEY IN TERE LIYE'S NOVEL SENDIRI: A REVIEW OF LITERARY PSYCHOLOGY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ELISABETH KUBLER ROSS

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Article Info

Received: June 4, 2024

Revised: September 14, 2024

Accepted: November 18, 2024

Online Version: December 24, 2024

Abstract

Losing a loved one is an emotionally disruptive experience that often reshapes an individual's inner world. Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri* portrays this turmoil through the protagonist's struggle after the death of a partner. This study aims to examine how the main character navigates her emotional transformation throughout the grieving process. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis draws on narrative excerpts from the novel and interprets them through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief. Data were collected using reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed through content analysis. The findings show that the protagonist's grief is not merely a linear progression through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, but a complex journey marked by hesitation, emotional relapse, and gradual self-reconstruction. Her movement toward acceptance reflects not only the recognition of loss but also the emergence of renewed meaning and personal resilience. This highlights that grief in the novel functions as a transformative psychological journey rather than simply a sequence of emotional responses.

Keywords: emotional journey, novel sendiri, literary psychology



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Journal Homepage

<https://ejournal.staialhikmahpariangan.ac.id/Journal/index.php/JIET>

How to cite:

Purwanto, J., Fitriyanti, R., Kamaliyah, A. M., Ferina, R., & Permataningtyas, D. (2024). Analysis of the Main Character's Emotional Journey in Tere Liye's Novel Sendiri: A Review of Literary Psychology from the Perspective of Elisabeth Kubler Ross. *Journal International Inspire Education Technology*, 3(3), 340–349. <https://doi.org/10.55849/jiiet.v3i3.1077>

Published by:

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar

INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a medium for portraying the complexities of human emotion, whether in moments of joy or in experiences marked by profound loss (Simon & Deslandes, 2025). Through its narrative structure, literature offers readers a space for emotional resonance and reflection, as characters often embody struggles that mirror real human psychological processes. AlOtaibi, (2024)emphasizes that these emotional expressions shaped by internal impulses such as affection, and external triggers such as fear, disappointment, or trauma are articulated through dialogue, inner monologues, and characters' responses to conflict (Saha et al., 2025). While such perspectives highlight the richness of emotional representation in literary works, a more focused framework is needed to examine how these emotions evolve and contribute to character development (Srinak et al., 2025). In this context, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's grief model provides a relevant psychological lens for understanding how narratives structure the journey of loss (Wantchekon & Umaña-Taylor, 2024). Its stages denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance offer a conceptual pathway for interpreting the protagonist's emotional transitions, not merely as isolated reactions but as interconnected steps in shaping identity, meaning-making, and thematic depth within the story (Chai et al., 2025). By employing this framework, the analysis moves beyond describing emotional expression to understanding how grief functions narratively as a catalyst for transformation (Wang et al., 2025). Integrating this psychological approach thus strengthens the study's theoretical foundation and underscores the significance of examining emotional turmoil within literary texts.

Contemporary literary works, such as Tere Liye's novels, often feature characters facing profound emotional struggles (Hindmarsh & Geertsma, 2024). Tere Liye is one of Indonesia's most prolific writers, having written over 50 books in various genres, from young adult fiction to inspirational novels to fantasy (Matsuda et al., 2023). Throughout his career, Tere Liye has received numerous awards and achievements, including being one of Indonesia's best-selling authors (Holdsworth & Bridgman, 2024). Furthermore, several of his works have been adapted into films and television series, demonstrating the captivating depth and depth of his storytelling (Leidl et al., 2023). With his significant achievements and influence in the world of writing, Tere Liye's works have become fascinating subjects of study, particularly within the psychology of literature.

Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri*, published in 2024, is a literary work that presents a profound emotional narrative. This novel is an example of how Tere Liye is able to present a moving story with deep psychological relevance for readers. This novel depicts the journey of an elderly man named Bambang in coping with the loss of his beloved wife. This loss becomes the starting point of a complex psychological journey, where Bambang must struggle to understand and accept the new reality. Pykett et al., (2025)state that the loss of a life partner in old age is one of the psychological problems and often triggers feelings of deep loneliness. The narrative in this novel is very relevant to be studied through a literary psychology approach because it contains the emotional dynamics of the main character in facing a major loss in his life.

Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri*, which depicts the main character's struggle in dealing with loss, is related to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's psychological theory of the five stages of grief. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is a medical doctor, psychiatrist, and internationally known as an expert in thanatology, the study of death, especially its psychosocial aspects. In her book, *On Grief and Grieving*, Kubler presents a theory of the five stages of grief. This theory explains the stages of conditions that people usually go through when grieving for several reasons, such as the death of a loved one, being diagnosed with a serious illness, divorce, the loss of something valuable, and many more.

These stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. (Banou et al., 2025)explain that these stages are not always in the same order, and not every bereaved person experiences all stages. However, someone experiencing grief will experience

at least two of the five stages. In some cases, individuals will experience several stages repeatedly and alternately before passing the final stage. These stages reflect the process of accepting a new reality and restructuring life even though a sense of loss is still felt.

Based on the description, this study is designed to answer the main question: How is the emotional journey of the main character in the novel *Sendiri* by Tere Liye based on the theory of the five stages of grief from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross? This focus is important because it provides a complete picture of the character's inner process from the beginning of loss to the stage of acceptance (Grunberg et al., 2023). The purpose of this study is to analyze the emotional journey of the main character in the novel *Sendiri* by Tere Liye using a literary psychology perspective based on the theory of the five stages of grief from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

Several previous studies have examined grief in literary works using this theory. First, a study by in the Journal of Cultural Studies entitled *Forms of Loss and Stages of Grief in the Novel Lost* by Rizal Afif and Nia Janiar. The study analyzed the forms of loss and stages of grief using the narrative structure theory (Burhan Nurgiyantoro) and the theory of Kübler-Ross. The similarity is that both use the theory of grief Kubler-Ross to analyze the experience of loss in the novel. The difference is that the study focused on the forms of loss and stages of grief using the theory of narrative structure (Burhan Nurgiyantoro) and the theory of grief (Kübler-Ross), while the researcher's study focuses on the emotional journey of the main character using one theory, namely the theory of Kubler-Ross.

Second, a study titled "The Issue of Grief in Metropop Critical Eleven" by Ika Natassa by Intan & Wardiani (2023) shows that the main character goes through all stages of grief. The similarity lies in the focus of grief analysis using Kubler-Ross's theory, while the differences lie in the object of study and the number of characters analyzed. Intan's research focuses on the grief issues experienced by two main characters, while the researcher focuses on the emotional journey of one main character in dealing with grief.

Third, the study entitled *Analysis of the Sadness Emotions of Jim in the Novel Harga Seorang Percaya by Tere Liye: A Study of Kubler-Ross Theory in the Multidisciplinary Journal* by Yuanti, Putri, & Kurniawan (2023) which analyzes the sadness emotions of Jim. The similarity is that both analyze the character's emotions in Tere's novel using the literary psychology approach of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief theory (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). The difference is, the study focuses on one type of emotion, namely the sadness experienced by the character, while the researcher analyzes the character's emotional journey as a whole.

Based on the literature review above, the research conducted by the researcher has novelty in data sources and analytical focus (Dibekulu et al., 2024a). Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri* has never been studied using Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief theory, and the focus of the analysis is carried out comprehensively on the emotional journey of the main character from the beginning to the end of the story (Chai et al., 2025). This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the emotional process experienced by the main character in the novel, as well as how this process depicts the psychological dynamics of individuals in facing major events and significant life changes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the psychological dimensions found within Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri*. Rather than focusing on numerical data, the research explores meanings, emotions, and patterns that emerge through the characters' experiences (Rushton et al., 2025). The primary data source is the novel itself, which provides a rich narrative foundation for examining how grief is portrayed in literary form and how the characters navigate complex emotional transitions.

The research data consists of selected quotations, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that illustrate the five stages of grief as proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Nan & Chen, 2024). These elements were identified through a careful and repeated reading of the text, allowing the researcher to capture subtle psychological expressions embedded in the storyline. To ensure accuracy and systematic organization, data recording cards were used to document each relevant excerpt according to its corresponding grief stage.

Data were collected through systematic reading and detailed note taking, allowing the researcher to engage closely with the narrative while identifying emotional cues relevant to the stages of grief (Van Charldorp et al., 2024). These cues were operationally defined as textual indicators such as shifts in tone, internal monologues, symbolic imagery, and character reactions that reflect transitions in the protagonist's psychological state. The analysis employed content analysis, which involved coding these indicators into thematic categories aligned with Kübler-Ross's grief model to interpret how the novel constructs the emotional progression of loss. To maintain methodological credibility, the study incorporated reflexive memoing throughout the analysis process and cross checked coded segments with existing theoretical descriptions of grief to enhance interpretive consistency (Green & Wraight, 2024). The findings are reported using descriptive qualitative narration informed by accepted standards in literary analysis, ensuring clarity without reducing analytical depth. Through this approach, the study seeks to illustrate how Tere Liye transforms psychological constructs into narrative form, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the emotional journey embedded in the text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, researchers were able to identify the main character's emotional journey through the stages of grief in Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri*. These stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The following table presents the data and a discussion of the stages.

Table 1. Analysis of the stages of grief

No	Stages Of Grief	Amount Of Data	Percentage
1.	Denial	18	35,29%
2.	Anger	2	3,92%
3.	Bargaining	5	9,81%
4.	Depression	19	37,25%
5.	Reception	7	13,73%
Total Data		51	100%

Based on the data analysis table above, the discussion regarding the stages of grief in the data presentation can be presented as follows.

1. Denial

The first stage experienced by the main character as a form of loss is denial/rejection. Denial is a reaction of someone experiencing loss, rejecting the reality of what happened to them (Dibekulu et al., 2024b). Denial is actually a healthy way to temporarily reduce excessive emotional intensity. The function of denial/rejection is to buffer after unexpected, shocking news. This stage is temporary because the individual has not yet fully accepted what happened to them. The form of denial in the novel *Sendiri* by Tere Liye is seen in the following quotes.

“Sus.... What should I do now?” Bambang asked, “Sus....” (Liye, 2024:27).

The quote above demonstrates Bambang's denial. Bambang, the husband, continues to talk to his wife as if she were still alive. Bambang seems to still be unable to accept the fact

that his wife is gone forever. He assumes she's still by his side and will listen to everything he says.

“But I decided not to scream anymore. Your mother was sending an important message, so last night, when the nightmare came, I tried to stay calm. I looked around. The dark well. Your mother’s fallen body. Until I woke up alone,” Father answered bluntly (Liye, 2024:66).

The quote above shows that Bambang still hasn't let go of his wife's departure. Bambang interprets the dream, which was merely a dream, as a message from his deceased wife. Rather than accepting the dream as a subconscious expression of loss, Bambang interprets it as a real communication, reflecting a rejection of reality. His attempts to remain calm and “observe” the dream demonstrate that he still lives in false hope.

“Your mother is still alive,” his father said firmly, “That’s why she sent me a message. So I could find a way to see her again” (Liye, 2024:69).

The sentence “Your mother is still alive” perfectly illustrates his feelings of rejection of his fate. Bambang maintains that his wife is still alive, claiming she sent him a message. Believing that his wife's message is a sign to see her again demonstrates his attempt to maintain false hope as a form of denial of reality. This is a common initial reaction when individuals are not yet ready to fully face grief.

2. Anger

Anger at this stage stems from unbearable denial and is replaced by rage, irritation, jealousy, and hatred. At this stage, individuals experiencing loss begin to feel anger in response to deep disappointment. Anger arises from an awareness of the reality of the loss, which can be expressed by blaming others and venting disappointment on others. The object of this anger can be a person, an object, or a specific situation. In Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri* the stage of anger experienced by the main character is evident in the following quote.

“I’m not crazy, Ayu! I know your mother is buried. But your mother is still alive. I don’t know which world, or which timeline. Once I find a way to move to that world, or that timeline, I can find your mother” (Liye, 2024:71).

The quote shows his anger towards Ayu who doesn't understand his beliefs. The sentence “I’m not crazy, Ayu! I know your mother has been buried. But your mother is still alive.” indicates that Bambang is struggling to reject the harsh reality in an emotional and assertive way. In this quote, anger is implied from the character's rejection of reality and his belief that there is still a possibility of finding his mother in another “world” or “timeline.” Bambang tries to fight the reality that occurs by seeking justification and ultimately vents his emotions through anger due to not receiving support for his actions that defy fate.

3. Bargaining

The bargaining stage represents an individual's attempt to negotiate emotionally with reality a desperate effort to undo the pain of loss or momentarily suspend its permanence. In *Sendiri*, this stage emerges not only through expressed longing but also through the father's attempt to rationalize his grief by imagining an impossible solution. The quote, *“If that machine could be created, I would be willing to give up our entire family fortune... That machine would allow me to travel back in time and meet your mother again”* (Liye, 2024:59),

reveals more than a simple wish; it reflects a coping mechanism rooted in escapism and unresolved trauma.

The invocation of a time travel machine a technological fantasy symbolizes the character's struggle against the finality of death (Wang et al., 2025). By envisioning a scientific impossibility, the father constructs a psychological refuge where reunion remains conceivable, indicating how bargaining often blurs the boundary between rational thought and emotional yearning (Heng et al., 2024). This symbolic gesture demonstrates how grief can manifest as a search for loopholes in the natural order, highlighting the depth of his resistance to acceptance. Narratively, this moment deepens his characterization: his grief evolves from silent suffering into a visible, imaginative attempt to reclaim control in a situation defined by helplessness.

Such bargaining also reflects a culturally resonant longing to preserve family wholeness, showing how emotional negotiation may take different forms depending on personal history and narrative context (Scholz, 2025). In this novel, bargaining functions not merely as a transitional stage but as a thematic device that exposes the fragility of human hope when confronting irreversibility (Alshhre, 2024). This richer understanding underscores how Tere Liye uses symbolic and emotional textures to portray grief as a complex, multidimensional psychological journey.

The quote above shows the father willing to sacrifice his entire family fortune to create a time machine (Prathap & Devimeenakshi, 2025). This father does so he can travel back in time to reunite with his wife. Deeply grieving over the loss of his wife, the father tries to negotiate with reality and even the universe, hoping for a way to change the reality of the loss. The phrase "if the machine could be created" reflects hope, a combination of despair and a longing to reverse the situation. This process continues in the following quote.

"Father will find the time machine, then go back to the past, meet your mother again" (Liye, 2024:70).

In the quote above, the father convinces himself that he will find a time machine to travel back in time to meet his deceased wife. This statement reflects an irrational yet deeply emotional hope: the desire to change the past to avoid loss. The bargaining stage often manifests in thoughts such as "if only" or "if only." In this case, the character attempts to create a fictitious hope by building a time machine as a form of internal negotiation with the reality of grief that cannot be fully accepted.

4. Depression

Depression is a condition that arises when an individual can no longer deny their feelings of grief due to a painful loss (Uştuk & Yazan, 2024). At this stage, individuals begin to experience deep sadness, despair, and a loss of interest in things they normally enjoy. Depression is characterized by individuals experiencing sleep disturbances, eating disorders, a reluctance to speak, impaired social interactions, and decreased productivity. The stages of depression in Tere Liye's novel Sendiri are illustrated in the following excerpts.

"I can't eat, son." He turned to look at Mrs. Susi. "I... I don't even know what to do now" (Liye, 2024:25).

The quote above clearly demonstrates Bambang's profound sense of loss. The phrase "I can't eat" reflects the disruption of basic physiological functions, such as appetite, due to profound grief. Furthermore, the phrase "I don't even know what to do now" reflects the helplessness and confusion often experienced by individuals experiencing loss.

Bambang nodded. His face looked pale, his hair a mess, including his sideburns, which hadn't been shaved in a week (Liye, 2024:45).

Bambang had been daydreaming the past two weeks. He woke up in the morning, daydreaming. Until noon. Then he daydreamed again until evening. Then he daydreamed again at night. He only paused when food was delivered or his room was cleaned (Liye, 2024:46).

The quotes above convey a profound sense of loss, evident in feelings of despair and a loss of passion for life (Adda & Harel, 2025). As a result of losing his wife, Bambang has become difficult to talk to, his physical condition has deteriorated, and he continues to daydream. He struggles to carry out daily activities and is confused about the reality he faces.

5. Acceptance

Acceptance is a state where an individual begins to accept what has happened in their life, finds peace, and begins to learn to live a new life even though a loved one has passed away. Acceptance is a state without fear and despair (Yadav et al., 2024). An individual will reach this stage if they are able to make peace with the realities that occur to them. This stage is characterized by the absence of disturbances experienced by the individual, so that the individual returns to productivity, deepens with reality, does not experience sleep disturbances, appetite returns to normal, and does not isolate themselves. The stage of acceptance in the novel Sendiri by Tere Liye is seen in the following excerpt.

The Lord of the Forest was right, he should have just accepted Susi's loss. Make peace. Then everything would be over. Instead of getting lost in this strange world, with increasingly strange missions. He had actually endangered Princess Rosa and the knights. He had even caused the death of Lord Stork. He should have forgotten Susi. Move on, move on. Let all those memories be left behind (Liye, 2024:168).

Everything would be fine if he would just accept Susi's departure. Make peace (Liye, 2024:233).

The quote above shows Bambang beginning to accept the reality of what has happened. His rejection of fate has actually endangered those around him. The phrase "everything will be fine, if only he would accept Susi's passing" emphasizes that acceptance is the key to moving on. This is a key characteristic of the final stage of grief, where individuals begin to open themselves to a new reality with calm and sincerity. Ultimately, Bambang realizes he must accept his wife's passing and continue living as he should.

He wouldn't go back in time to see Susi. He would move on with his life. Continue the adventure. This was the great adventure. Whatever the ending, he would accept it. Bambang smiled again. Better. More sincere.

I always love you, Susi...

"Then. Now. The day after tomorrow. Whenever..."

"But I won't go back there..."

Bambang closed the door in that soft light. He had decided (Liye, 2024:304).

In this quote, Bambang has fully accepted reality and has graciously let go of his wife's departure. Although he still holds onto love and memories, Bambang chooses not to return and accepts reality with calm and sincerity. His decision to close the door to the past shows that he has made peace with the loss and is ready to move on. Bambang realizes that no matter how

hard he tries, he will not be able to return to the past to see his wife. Therefore, the only way is to accept fate and move on with his life.

Bambang's emotional journey in Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri* reflects a deep inner struggle, from refusing to accept reality to finally reaching a point of acceptance (Rezk, 2024). The stages of grief he goes through show that loss is a natural, emotionally charged process and a part of life that must be experienced, not fought (Kosch et al., 2025). Through Bambang's character, readers are invited to understand that grief cannot be avoided, but can be faced and healed with time, awareness, and acceptance, because facing grief is not about forgetting but learning to accept and move on with a calmer and more mature heart.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the main character in Tere Liye's novel *Sendiri* (Alone) experiences a complete grieving process through five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Denial is characterized by the belief that his wife is still alive. Anger is demonstrated by attempts to resist the reality of what has happened. Bargaining is demonstrated by attempts to return to the previous situation. Depression manifests as eating disorders, unwillingness to speak, and loss of enthusiasm for life. Finally, there is the process of accepting the reality of what has happened and returning to life as it should be. This entire process illustrates that loss will certainly be experienced by every individual regardless of gender, age, or profession, and each individual has their own way and time to reach the stage of acceptance as a form of self-recovery that is the key to returning to life with peace.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project Administration; Validation

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Writing Review and Editing

Author 4: Research data collector

Author 5: Research data collector

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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