

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general description of this research which are organized into eight subchapters. There are background of the research, research question, purpose of the research, scope of the research, significance of the research, research methodology, clarification of terms and organization of the paper.

1.1. Background of the Research

Notions about death and other related ideas, such as grieving, have been a part of human life for as long as humans have lived. There are many ways for humans to deal with death. Archaeologists have found archaeological records consisting of innumerable testimonies of how humans in various cultures at different times have dealt with death (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008). These records range from the prehistorical era to the historical era. Rituals, burials and mourning have the role of being a part of the process where an individual or a group of people deals with a loved one's death.

Religions and sacred religious texts have also contributed to the various perceptions on death and grieving. Religious figures such as priests "often advocate theological explanation of life and consequently death" (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, the notions about death and grieving can also be found in other forms that are more concrete. Davies (2005) argued that there are artistic, literary and musical compositions with the theme of death which are parts of human responses to mortality.

Nowadays, notions of death and grieving still can be found in the society. It can be found in literary forms which include traditional books and e-books which can be non-fictional or fictional. This phenomenon is especially true in developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. The proliferation of literary works about death and grieving may be caused by the changes in the contemporary society of the developed countries. A study conducted by Corless (2005) found that there are changes in the demography, relationship between individuals and communities,

social environment, and other changes which may resulted in the change of society's perception and behavior towards grieving and death socialization.

With that being said, the changes in the contemporary society do not only affect the adults, but also children because they are a part of the society. Therefore, literary works about death and grieving are not exclusive for adults. Day (2012) argued that literary works about death and grieving for young adults (which sometimes interchangeable with children's literature) have seen a rise in number. Day (2012) argued that it reveals the contemporary society's attempt to discuss the topics. Day (2012) further argued that the proliferation of children's literature on death and grieving is a part of a phenomenon called 'bereavement turn' which is a cultural movement where the society start to examine their attitudes towards death and grieving. The occurrence of this cultural movement is further strengthened by the notion which says humans have enter postmodern era. This progress does not only affect adults, but also children. Loo (2012) argued that children experiences childhood in which they have to deal with more adult issues which are reflected in contemporary literature.

The number of studies conducted by scholars strengthen the idea that the number children's literature on death and grieving has gradually increased every decade. Corr (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2007, 2009), Schroth (2017), and Malcom (2010) have studied issues related to the topics, more specifically on death. Meanwhile, Day (2012) have also studied a novel, *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness which was published in 2012, and argued that its success as a proof of the emergence of the 'bereavement turn.' Corr (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2007, 2009) hundreds of children's literature which are mostly published pre-2000s. Schroth (2017) analyzed three pre-1980s and three post-2000s children's literature. Meanwhile, Malcom (2010) analyzed 49 children's literatures ranging from book published in the 1970s to the 2000s with more than half of them were published in the year 2000 or after.

From the previous studies, it appears that most of the studies include older children's literature. Moreover, most of the children's literature analyzed depicted a child main character below the age of 12 as most of the previous studies, especially studies conducted by Corr (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2007, 2009)

and Malcom (2010) are picture books which are intended for younger children. Therefore, studies on newer novels that portray a main character that is in the transitional phase of being a child to become a teenager, such as *The Thing About Jellyfish* (2015) written by Ali Benjamin, may contribute to the studies of death and grieving in newer children's literature. *The Thing About Jellyfish* (2015) is also chosen because the novel appears to be quite popular. It has been translated into more than 20 languages in more than 30 countries ("The Thing About Jellyfish (a novel) | Ali Benjamin", n.d.). It has also won several awards such as New York Times Bestseller, National Book Award Finalist, and the Winner of E.B. White Readaloud Award ("The Thing About Jellyfish (a novel) | Ali Benjamin", n.d.).

By analyzing *The Thing About Jellyfish* (2015), the development of grieving portrayal in contemporary children's literature and the portrayal of a bereaved or grieving child who is in a transitional phase of childhood into teenagehood may be revealed. Consequently, this study may also reveal the changes of portrayal of grieving and death in the contemporary society, especially its portrayal in the contemporary society of developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K.

1.2. Research Question

This research attempts to answer the following question:

- How is grieving in *The Thing About Jellyfish* (2015) portrayed?

1.3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to discover how grieving is portrayed in a novel for children entitled *The Thing About Jellyfish* written by Ali Benjamin which was released in 2015.

1.4. Scope of the Research

This research focuses on the portrayal of grieving process experienced by the child main character, Suzy Swanson. The novel consists of 63 chapters; thus, they are analyzed to identify the excerpts that are assumed to portray or reveal the grieving process. These excerpts are called grieving contexts. The contexts may

contain formal elements, which can include plot, characterization, dialog, setting, and narrative devices.

1.5. Significance of the Research

This research is expected to expand the studies on grieving, death and other related topics in children's literature. This research may reveal the changes in portrayal of grieving and changes of perception and attitudes towards grieving and death in the contemporary society of developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. It is also expected that this research may help people, who are interested in the topic of grieving and death, in writing children's literature related to grieving and death, giving them ideas on how to introduce the concept of death to children or in caring grieving children.

1.6. Research Methodology

In order to discover how grieving is portrayed in *The Thing About Jellyfish* (2015), this research uses qualitative method, which is more focused on the process of describing and interpreting which may result in development of new concepts, theory, or an evaluation of an organizational process (Hancock, Ockleford, & Winridge, 2009). This method is more appropriate as "the cultural strategies, metaphors and taboos that characterize humanity's responses to death can best be accessed through qualitative methodologies" (Bradbury, 1999, p. 26).

The data of this research are in the form of grieving contexts. The contexts are in the form of excerpts obtained from the novel that assumed to portray or reveal the grieving process experienced by the child main character, Suzy Swanson. The data analysis employs Kübler-Ross and Kessler's theory of five stages of grief (2014). Meanwhile, Schroth's theoretical framework in analyzing portrayal of death, dying and grieving in children's literature (2017) is employed to support the discussions of the findings. The analysis attempt to describe the grieving instances, which may contain formal elements and narrative aspects, to reveal how grieving is portrayed.

1.7. Clarification of Terms

a. Grief

Grief is the subjective experience of the loss (Lindemann, 1944; Worden, 1982 as cited in Sabar, 2000). According to (Sabar, 2000), it may result in various experience, including, but not limited to, crying, sadness, anger, inability to assimilate the reality of the loss (disbelief), dissociation, isolation (despite the need for companionship and support), questioning the existence of God, and preoccupation with thoughts about the deceased.

b. Children's literature

Children's literature is defined as a collection of books written for children, read by children, an/or written about children (Schneider, 2016).

b. Bereavement

Bereavement means the loss of someone to whom one has been closely attached (Sabar, 2000).

1.8. Organization of the Paper

This research paper is organized into the following sections:

a. ABSTRACT

This section is a brief summary of this paper, scoping from the background of the research to the conclusion of the research.

b. CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the elaboration of the background of the research. It also presents possible significance and other general aspects of this research to give some background knowledge for the reader.

c. CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature and previous studies related to this research.

d. CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the technical aspects of this research, such as the research design, data source, and procedure used to conduct the research.

This chapter also presents the summary of the novel used as the data source.

e. CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings and analyses of this research. This chapter also discuss some highlighted issues found from the findings and analyses.

f. CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter concludes the whole research and presents suggestions for future studies which will explore related topics.