

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Grief is the emotional distress experienced after significant loss, often resulting from changes in relationships, health, or personal identity (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018). It may manifest in various forms, including physiological distress, separation anxiety, obsessive thoughts, withdrawal, and even suicidal ideation. While some individuals navigate grief through adaptive coping, others struggle with prolonged emotional disruption. When unresolved, grief can profoundly affect identity, mental health, and one's ability to maintain interpersonal relationships (HealthDirect, 2024). As such, grief is not only an emotional experience, but also a deeply psychological journey that can reshape the way individuals relate to themselves and to others. Bowlby (1980) highlights that grief is deeply rooted in the individual's relationship to the lost person or object, making it a highly individualized and personal experience. Understanding grief through a psychoanalytic lens can offer insight on the unconscious mechanisms that individuals use to deal with loss and the long-term effects of unresolved grief.

In the realm of psychoanalysis, grief is examined through the perspective of the unconscious mind and unresolved internal conflicts. Sigmund Freud, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), distinguishes between mourning, a normal emotional detachment from a lost object, and melancholia, where individuals

become stuck in grief and unable to move forward. This can lead to internal conflict that affects a person's psyche and behavior. Additionally, Freud's structural theory of the psyche (*id*, *ego*, *superego*), offers insight into how grief-related desires and moral pressures interact. In *The Hollow*, these psychic structures can be projected onto other characters, allowing us to interpret Abbey's internal grief through her relationships. For instance, impulsive actions may reflect the *id*, rational decisions the *ego*, and self-critical thoughts the *superego*. Through this lens, the novel offers a more in-depth psychoanalytic interpretation of how grief manifests both within and around the grieving subject.

In addition to Freud, Erikson's psychosocial theory of development (1950) provides another layer of understanding by examining grief through the lens of identity development. In adolescence and young adulthood, individuals face challenges of identity formation (Identity vs. Role Confusion) and intimacy (Intimacy vs. Isolation). Abbey's experience of loss disrupts her sense of self and creates emotional distance in her relationships, aligning with Erikson's stages. Abbey's grief in *The Hollow* can be examined using these stages. Her grief becomes more than just emotional pain, it becomes a challenge to her personal growth, identity formation, and ability to connect with others. Through Erikson's framework, Abbey's journey reveals how loss affects both psychological development and interpersonal bonds.

The relationship between grief through a psychoanalytic lens has been applied to various studies. For instance, in the journal article “A Correlational Study between Grief and Coping Mechanism among Adults” by Anchal Kaushik et al., investigates how grief influences coping strategies in adults and finds a significant positive correlation, such as as grief intensifies, so do the coping strategies utilize by individuals. This suggests that grief is a powerful emotional force that shapes how people respond to loss, highlighting the importance of addressing grief in therapeutic contexts to enhance mental well-being (Kaushik, 2024, Vol. 2). Jessica Verday’s *The Hollow* explores a similar issue, where Abbey, the main character, undergoes a deep emotional transformation following the death of her best friend, Kristen. Like the study by Kaushik et al., Abbey’s journey illustrates how grief, especially in adolescence, leads her to confront emotional vulnerability, identity struggles, and the need to cope with overwhelming loss.

Another relevant study, “A Time in the Ashes: How Grief Can Liberate Us from Our Life Script and Our Culture of Separation” by Carl R. Nassar, explores the cultural and psychological dimensions of grief. He introduces the concept of “life scripts”, culturally shaped expectations and personal histories that constrain genuine self-expression and suggests that integrative psychotherapy can help individuals break free from these limitations (Nassar, 2023, Vol. 14). Nassar emphasizes that grief has the potential to disrupt these life scripts, offering an opportunity for individuals to re-evaluate their identity and reclaim a deeper sense of connection. This aligns with Abbey’s experience

in *The Hollow*, where grief over Kristen's death leads her to question her identity and reality. The novel depicts grief as both a personal and existential struggle, reflecting Nassar's argument that grief can disrupt one's perceived role in life and force a re-evaluation of self-concept.

Both Kaushik et al. and Nassar's studies offer insightful perspectives on grief, using qualitative methods to explore how grief affects individuals emotionally, behaviorally, and culturally. While Kaushik et al. focus on the correlation between grief and coping mechanisms among adults, and Nassar highlights grief's potential to disrupt culturally constructed life scripts and enable reconnection, *The Hollow* presents grief as a deeply internal, psychoanalytic experience. Abbey's grief prompts more than just coping responses or cultural reflection, it becomes a psychological journey shaped by unconscious conflict, identity struggle, and emotional isolation. Unlike the two studies' linear or socially-oriented portrayals of grief, Abbey's experience aligns more closely with Freud's theory of Mourning and Melancholia and his structural theory of the psyche (*id*, *ego*, *superego*), in which grief operates beneath the surface of consciousness, shaping her emotional development and self-perception. Additionally, Erikson's psychosocial theory explains her grieving process to be viewed as part of the adolescence and young adulthood struggles for identity and intimacy. While both studies acknowledge grief's transformative power, this study delves deeper into how grief works internally to destabilize and reconstruct the self, making *The Hollow* a unique and relevant object of psychoanalytic literary analysis.

Jessica Verday, an American author, is best known for her young adult paranormal romance trilogy *The Hollow*, which was released in 2009. The trilogy, based on Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, follows the main character, Abbey, as she navigates love, loss, and the supernatural following the death of her best friend, Kristen. Verday's writing is known for its combination of romance, mystery, and supernatural aspects, as well as an emphasis on themes of grief, identity, and emotional healing. She is known for her ability to create emotionally complex individuals in creepy, atmospheric situations. She is earned significant recognition as a New York Times bestselling author with her "Hollow Trilogy", which includes *The Hollow*, *The Haunted*, and *The Hidden*, published by Simon & Schuster's Simon Pulse label. Her writing career began unexpectedly when she heard a character's voice while trying to fall asleep in 2006, leading her to write *The Hollow*, which is set in Sleepy Hollow, New York, and has elements of ghost stories and romance. In addition to the "Hollow Trilogy", she has written numerous additional books, including the *Of Monsters and Madness* series and *The Beautiful and the Damned*. While Verday's awards are not extensively documented, her works have earned positive acclaim, with the "Hollow Trilogy" contributing to her career as a successful novelist, her debut novel even received an Audie Award nomination.

Jessica Verday's *The Hollow* (2009) is a young adult novel that explores themes of love, grief, and self-discovery in a supernatural context in the town

of Sleepy Hollow, where Abbey's life is turned upside down following the mysterious death of her best friend, Kristen. The story follows Abbey as she deals with the emotional aftermath of Kristen's death, intermingled with mystery and supernatural elements from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. The novel focuses heavily on themes of loss, identity, and the quest for closure, making it an intriguing subject for psychoanalytic exploration. Abbey's psychological growth throughout the narrative is critical for understanding how unresolved grief impacts her sense of self and her interactions with others.

This study will examine Abbey's psychological journey through grief using Freud's and Erikson's theories. It explores how unresolved grief affects her identity formation, emotional regulation, and relationships, as well as how other characters affect aspects of her inner psyche. By combining psychoanalytic theory with literary analysis, the study sheds light to the intricate ways grief shapes the inner world of a young adult protagonist as well as how literature reflects this complexity.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are these two following questions:

1. How does grief contribute to Abbey's psychological journey?
2. How does the other characters affect aspects of Abbey's psychological journey through grief?

1.3 Objective of The Study

The study aims to examine the psychological impact of unresolved grief on Abbey, the main character in *The Hollow*, through the lens of psychoanalytic theories. It applies Freud's Mourning and Melancholia, Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stages, and Freud's structural theory of psyche. Based on these theories, the study concludes that Abbey's grief affects her identity formation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. Her identity is shaken after the loss of Kristen, causing confusion and self-doubt; her emotional regulation becomes unstable, driven by impulses, guilt, and internal conflict; and her interpersonal relationships are strained by emotional isolation and dependency on fantasy figures like Caspian, Nikolas, and Katy. Through this psychoanalytic approach, the study reveals that grief in *The Hollow* operates not as a singular emotional event, but as a transformative psychological journey.

1.4 Scope of The Study

The study focuses only on *The Hollow* (2009), the first novel in Jessica Verday's "Hollow Trilogy", excluding its sequels *The Haunted* (2010) and *The Hidden* (2011). While the trilogy follows Abbey's ongoing emotional and romantic development, *The Hollow* presents the most concentrated and unprocessed portrayal of grief following the death of her best friend, Kristen. In this novel, Abbey's psychological state is marked by denial, early signs of mourning, and obsessive melancholia, making it the richest phase for psychoanalytic analysis. In contrast, the sequels shift focusses away from grief

to Abbey's supernatural relationship with Caspian. In *The Haunted*, Abbey learns that Caspian is a shade (a bodiless spirit), and her emotional conflict shifts from loss to forbidden love. By *The Hidden*, Abbey has moved beyond grief, ultimately choosing death to join Caspian as a shade. As such, grief becomes secondary to romance and fate. As a result, *The Hollow* is selected as the primary text because it reflects the initial and most psychologically revealing stage of Abbey's internal conflict with loss, identity, and emotional fragmentation.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study is significant because it explores grief not merely as an emotional response, but as a deeply psychological process that disrupts identity, emotional stability, and personal relationships. By applying Freud's Mourning and Melancholia, the study highlights how unresolved grief may shift into melancholia, and Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stages—specifically stages five (Identity vs. Role Confusion) and six (Intimacy vs. Isolation)—to show how grief can hinder adolescents and young adulthood's task, particularly in forming a coherent identity and building emotional intimacy. Beyond this, the study analyses how other characters affect Abbey's inner psyche based on Freud's structural theory, offering insight into how grief fragments her internal world. Overall, the study contributes to both literary and psychological disciplines by demonstrating how grief, identity, and unconscious conflict are artistically expressed in *The Hollow*.