

Grief Of Louis Creed In Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*

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Abstract : This research explores the psychological transformation of Louis Creed, the protagonist in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, through the lens of the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999). The study aims to analyze how grief and loss shape Louis's character, behavior, and moral decisions throughout the novel. By examining his response to the death of his son and his subsequent descent into denial and irrationality, this research reveals a failure to oscillate between the two critical coping mechanisms proposed in the model: loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping. The analysis demonstrates that Louis becomes trapped in grief and unable to adapt to life after loss, ultimately leading to psychological collapse and catastrophic outcomes. Supporting evidence is drawn from key scenes and direct quotations from the novel. This study not only contributes to literary character analysis but also highlights the relevance of psychological frameworks in understanding human responses to trauma and bereavement.

Keywords: *Pet Sematary, Louis Creed, Dual Process Model, grief, bereavement, psychological analysis, Stephen King*

INTRODUCTION

The term literature seems best if limit it to the art of literature, that is, to imaginative literature. Literature is also produced by imagination of the author." (*Wellek and Warren, 1963*) Literature is not just a document of facts. It is not just the collection of real life. Literature can create its own world as a product of the unlimited imagination. Dealing with that, literature is the expression of life that is written to describe or share the thoughts, feelings, and emotions which aims to make the readers feels what the writer feels

Stephen King is an American author of horror, supernatural fiction, and fantasy novels. He was born in Portland in 1947 with the real name Stephen Edwin King. He starts the career by writing a short story titled *The GlassFloor* then sells for *Startling Mystery Stories* in 1967. He writes 61 novels until today. One of them is the phenomenal *IT* novel which has been adapted into a movie. Either his literary works or himself has been nominated and won plentiful awards. Stephen King manages to convey a fictional but realistic horror story. One piece of a quote from Stephen King, "It's probably wrong to believe there can be any limit to the horror which the human mind can experience" (*S. King 1983*) makes the writer want to explore more about the horror-theme literature that can bring the issue of human nature, *Pet Semetary* is a famous literary work by Stephen King in the form of horror novel

Pet Semetary tells the story of how a father, Louis Creed revives his son which brings disaster to his entire family and destroys himself. Starting with the killing of the Church, a family cat, by truck. Then, his second child, Gage was died from being hit by a truck front of the house. The father revives them by burying in the burial area that is controlled by the dark spirit called Pet Semetary. The corpse that has been revived is alive but it behaves strangely. However, the writer sees the irregularities in the character of Louis which become a major influence in the storyline of this novel.

The main discussion of this study is how the grief of the character Louis Creed is depicted in the novel, Louis is the main character of *Pet Semetary*, and the father of the Creed family. In the beginning of the novel he is presented as a loving father and husband, with very few flaws. He is not perfect though. However, since *Pet Semetary* is a horror novel, and Louis is the main character, it is not surprising for the reader when the novel delves into darker themes in which Louis can be seen as a victim, or at least experience negative emotions that help the reader to empathize with the character.

RESEARCH METHOD

The writer chooses this research to examine the novel by Stephen King entitled *Pet Semetary* by using qualitative approach. Berg and Howard (2012) characterize qualitative research as meanings, a concept, a definition, metaphors, symbols and a description of things. The writer chooses this research to examine the novel by Stephen King entitled *Pet Semetary* by using qualitative approach. Berg and Howard (2012) characterize qualitative

research as meanings, a concept, a definition, metaphors, symbols and a description of things.

The writer will use two sources of data collection: Primary source, the source of information from the novel itself, *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King. Secondary sources, the sources that help the writer to complete the research through articles, journal, dictionary and the internet related to this research and information to support the writer research study

The data will be analyzed by using descriptive method. Descriptive means the data elaborated through words, not in the form of numbers or pictures. The writer uses psychological approach to reveal the grief on the character Louis Creed in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*.

The data for this study were collected through a detailed reading of the text, the use of these two psychological models allows the study to uncover not only the emotional experiences of the character but also the deeper meaning behind his decisions and eventual downfall. In this way, the study provides both a psychological and literary interpretation of grief as a central theme in *Pet Sematary*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Analysis Based on the Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle

The Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle outlines five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In the case of Louis Creed, the cycle is incomplete—he becomes trapped in the early stages, particularly denial and bargaining, which progressively destabilize his emotional and moral functioning.

Louis Creed's psychological descent in *Pet Sematary* can be interpreted through the framework of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, rather than progressing toward emotional integration, Louis becomes trapped in a maladaptive cycle, where grief escalates into delusion, moral decay, and eventual self-destruction.

1.2 Denial

This stage serves as a psychological defense mechanism, "Denial is the initial reaction to loss, where a person struggles to accept the reality of what has happened. It acts as a defense mechanism that buffers the immediate shock." Denial is widely recognized as the initial stage in the grief process, particularly within the Kübler-Ross model of bereavement. According to Kübler-Ross (1969), denial is the mind's way of "letting in only as much as one can handle." During this phase, the bereaved may exhibit behaviors such as emotional numbness, shock, or the inability to speak about the loss in concrete terms.

Louis's denial begins subtly after the family cat, Church, dies. Although he intellectually understands death, he accepts Jud Crandall's offer to bury the cat in the Micmac burial ground—despite knowing something is off.

"Jud, what is this place? What are we doing here?" Louis asked. He felt a cold prickle on his skin. "This is the place where the dead speak," Jud said solemnly. "Where the ground is sour. But it can work... sometimes."

Even with misgivings, Louis buries Church, hoping to undo death while pretending it's just an experiment. His rational mind begins to fracture the moment he engages with the supernatural. His first denial isn't of death, but of finality. He begins to believe death might be negotiable.

1.3 Anger

Psycho dynamically, anger functions as a mechanism for reasserting control in the face of vulnerability (Bowlby, 1980). The grieving individual may feel abandoned, betrayed, or punished, and this emotional turmoil often externalizes as irritation, frustration, or rage. Though anger is frequently misunderstood or suppressed in contemporary grieving cultures, psychological literature emphasizes its importance in facilitating emotional honesty and mobilizing internal energy (Worden, 2009). Anger signals that the numbness of denial is lifting, and that the individual is beginning to engage more directly with the grief.

Louis's anger is less explosive and more corrosive. It festers in his silence—toward God, fate, and Jud. He doesn't lash out but rather channels his rage inward, resulting in reckless actions. His decision to resurrect Gage becomes an act of rebellion against mortality itself. His internal rage is masked by surgical calm—a trait typical of professionals disassociating from

trauma. His anger is quiet but evident. It festers in his internal monologue and refusal to confront others, *"He hated Jud for showing him the place. He hated God for letting Gage die. He hated fate, and he hated himself most of all."* (Pet Sematary, p. 108).

The anger doesn't lead to action—it becomes a slow-burning fuel for his later decisions. Following the initial denial of loss, individuals often enter a stage of grief marked by anger. In the Kübler-Ross model, anger represents the emotional response that arises when the psychological defenses provided by denial begin to weaken, and the individual is confronted with the reality of the loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969). This anger may be directed at a variety of targets, including oneself, other people, healthcare providers, God, or even the deceased. Importantly, the anger is rarely rational; rather, it is rooted in the profound sense of helplessness and injustice that often accompanies grief.

1.4 Bargaining

Bargaining, the third stage in the Kübler-Ross model, represents a transitional phase in which individuals attempt to regain a sense of control following a significant loss. It is characterized by cognitive and emotional efforts to "undo" or prevent the reality of the situation, often through internal negotiation or imploring a higher power (Kübler-Ross, 1969), bargaining tries to reframe the loss in hypothetical terms—*"If only I had..."* or *"What if they had..."*—in the hope of a different outcome, Bargaining typically reflects an individual's struggle with guilt, helplessness, or regret.

According to Worden (2009), it involves "a preoccupation with what might have been done to prevent the loss," and can be seen as a defense against the emotional weight of sadness and the irreversible nature of death.

The bargaining stage becomes increasingly visible as Louis plans and executes the resurrection of Gage. "If a cat can come back... then maybe a person can too. Maybe it's not the end. If I do it right—if I wait the right amount of time—Gage will come back... he will." He starts ritualizing his grief, treating death like a scientific variable he can control. His repeated statement, *"It will be different this time"* (Pet Sematary, p. 321), is both a justification and a plea to the universe. This stage becomes literal. Louis bargains with death through the supernatural. His actions are methodical—digging up Gage, re-performing the burial—but

emotionally, it's a desperate plea: "Let this work. Let him come back right." (*Pet Sematary*, p. 361), The Micmac burial ground becomes a stand-in for the divine, and Louis treats it like a magic loophole, if he performs the ritual correctly, he'll undo fate's cruelty.

By burying Gage in the cursed Micmac burial ground despite Jud's warnings, Louis attempts to make a trade with fate. This behavior reflects a desperate attempt to regain control over an uncontrollable situation. The repetition of the phrase indicates how entrenched Louis has become in his belief that he can manipulate death. His actions during this stage blur the boundary between hope and delusion

1.5 Depression

Depression, in the Kübler-Ross model, represents a critical stage in the grieving process where individuals begin to confront the full weight of their loss. Unlike earlier stages such as denial or bargaining—where emotional pain is either avoided or deferred—depression involves emotional immersion in the reality of the loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969), Depression, in the Kübler-Ross model, represents a critical stage in the grieving process where individuals begin to confront the full weight of their loss. Unlike earlier stages such as denial or bargaining—where emotional pain is either avoided or deferred—depression involves emotional immersion in the reality of the loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969), According to Parkes and Prigerson (2010), depression enables the grieving person to "restructure the internal emotional world in the absence of the deceased."

After Gage returns as something sinister and inhuman, Louis's emotional state begins to collapse. King describes, "*His heart abruptly filling with a love for the boy so strong that it seemed almost dangerous*" (*Pet Sematary*, p. 86). This overwhelming love, once a source of joy, now becomes a source of mental instability. Louis isolates himself from his family, engages in secretive behaviors, and gradually withdraws from reality. "*He barely slept. He saw Gage's face every time he closed his eyes—first laughing, then dead, then... something else. He was forgetting how Rachel and Ellie sounded. The world was shrinking.*" (*Pet Sematary*, p. 99).

Louis shows signs of breakdown and spiraling detachment: His fixation on his lost son leads him to neglect his wife and daughter, highlighting the depressive symptoms common

in prolonged and unresolved grief. Depression in Louis is present but suppressed. His isolation, lack of sleep, apathy toward Ellie and Rachel, and his single-minded obsession reflect deep internal collapse. He avoids emotional processing, redirecting all energy toward undoing loss. His dreams and hallucinations (Pascow's warnings) are projections of his deteriorating

1.6 Absence of Acceptance

Acceptance, as defined by Kübler-Ross (1969), is not about being "okay" with the loss, nor is it a state of happiness or closure. Rather, it is the stage where the bereaved individual begins to come to terms with the reality of the loss and starts adapting to life without the deceased, Parkes and Prigerson (2010) describe acceptance as the point at which "the bereaved are able to re-engage with life, form new relationships, and find purpose again." There is no longer an effort to change the outcome or dwell in the past. Instead, there's a turning toward the future, with the grief incorporated into the person's ongoing narrative.

Importantly, acceptance doesn't imply forgetting or detaching from the loved one. According to the continuing bonds theory (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), maintaining a psychological connection with the deceased can be healthy, as long as it doesn't impede emotional function. Acceptance involves adjustment and reorientation, not erasure. For some, acceptance is gradual and non-linear; for others, it may never be fully achieved. Cultural context, relationship to the deceased, and the circumstances of the loss all influence how acceptance manifests. When healthy, this stage fosters meaning-making, resilience, and emotional healing (Neimeyer, 2001).

Louis never reaches healthy acceptance. His version is twisted: he "accepts" death only by trying to conquer it. Even after Gage kills Rachel, Louis still attempts to resurrect her. His final act is delusional acceptance—embracing the lie that death can be reversed.

"It'll be better this time, Louis whispered. "She just died... it's still fresh. Gage was in the ground too long. But this time... it'll be better." There's no closure here. Only delusion disguised as hope, ending with the chilling silence that follows Rachel's return." his last words before Rachel's reanimation.

Throughout the novel, Louis never reaches the stage of acceptance. Even after seeing the horrifying consequences of Gage's resurrection, he fails to acknowledge the permanence of death. Instead, he repeats the same decision with his wife Rachel. King writes, "He carried her body to the Micmac Burying Ground, believing—hoping—that it would be different" (*Pet Semetary*, p. 374). This compulsive repetition of a mistake illustrates how Louis's grief has become pathological. His refusal to learn from previous trauma and his continued reliance on supernatural solutions show a complete breakdown in rational processing.

DISSCUSION

1.1 The Dual Process Model : Oscillation Gone Wrong

The Dual Process Model, proposed by Stroebe and Schut (1999), argues that effective grieving involves oscillation between two modes: loss-oriented coping and restoration-oriented coping. Louis's behavior is an example of how exclusive focus on the loss-oriented aspect can prevent healing. The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement, proposed by Stroebe and Schut (1999), emphasizes the dynamic and non-linear nature of grief. It identifies two primary stressors that the bereaved must navigate: loss-oriented coping, which involves confronting the emotional pain of the loss itself (e.g., yearning, sadness, crying), and restoration-oriented coping, which involves adapting to life changes and re-engaging with the world (e.g., new roles, responsibilities, routines).

Healthy grieving requires oscillation between these two modes, allowing the mourner to gradually process their emotions while also adjusting to the new reality, Louis Creed, however, becomes stuck in a pathological loop of loss-orientation, and even this is heavily distorted. Instead of facing the emotional pain of Gage's death, Louis externalizes his grief into desperate attempts to reverse the loss entirely

The Dual Process Model suggests that healthy grief involves oscillating between Loss-oriented coping (grief work, yearning) and Restoration-oriented coping (adjusting to life, distracting tasks)Louis becomes completely stuck in loss-oriented coping. He cannot detach from Gage or the idea of reversing his death. He doesn't oscillate; he descends. His avoidance of reality leads to obsession, culminating in dangerous magical thinking.

In Louis, we see a man consumed by pathological grief. Rather than oscillating, he becomes absorbed in the past. This psychological immobility is mirrored in his physical actions—digging up graves, revisiting sites of trauma, and circling back to the same fatal decision. His loss-oriented behavior is not about mourning, but re-enactment—he literally exhumes the body of his son in an attempt to correct his grief. This behavior shows that he does not oscillate between stressors but becomes psychologically fixated, arrested in a single dimension of coping. Stroebe, Schut, and Boerner (2017) warn that such fixations may lead to complicated grief, where emotional functioning becomes impaired and the bereaved fails to restore daily life. This failure to oscillate prevents any psychological integration.

1.2 Psychological Breakdown

The culmination of Louis's grief is a multifaceted collapse psychological, moral, and social. His inability to progress through the grieving process transforms him from a rational physician into a delusional individual who engages with dangerous forces beyond comprehension, King highlights this breakdown early on when Louis states, "I can do him a favor, I guess," before deciding to visit Jud (*Pet Sematary*, p. 81). Initially, this suggests a benign act.

Louis's behavior also reflects a broader social deterioration. He distances himself from his community, violates cultural taboos, and becomes a danger to others. His actions result in the deaths of Jud and Rachel and endanger Ellie, further emphasizing the destructive reach of unresolved grief.

King employs various literary devices to deepen the reader's understanding of Louis's grief. The Micmac burial ground is more than a supernatural element—it symbolizes the human desire to undo death. It serves as a metaphor for denial and bargaining, physicalizing the stages of grief. Louis's recurring dreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations represent intrusive thoughts and emotional fragmentation. These elements help readers visualize the mental toll of grief, as Louis becomes increasingly trapped in his memories and delusions. The contrast between the serene setting of Ludlow and the horror of Louis's actions underscores how grief can infiltrate even the most peaceful environments.

1.3 The Horror of Unresolved Grief

King intentionally uses horror to push grief into the grotesque. The burial ground is a metaphor for denial—an external manifestation of the wish that death is not final. Louis's journey shows what happens when mourning refuses to transition into meaning-making or healing. The horror genre allows King to literalize internal suffering.

Ultimately, *Pet Sematary* uses horror as a vehicle to explore the psychological terror of unresolved grief. The grotesque and supernatural aspects of the novel exaggerate the real consequences of mourning gone awry. Louis Creed is a tragic figure not only because he loses his family, but because he loses himself in the process.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, This study demonstrates that Louis Creed's experience in *Pet Sematary* is emblematic of maladaptive grieving. His journey through the Kubler-Ross stages is incomplete, stalling at denial, bargaining, and depression. The absence of acceptance, compounded by his failure to engage in restoration-oriented coping, leads to catastrophic outcomes. Using the Dual Process Model as a supporting framework reveals that Louis's coping is one-sided and ultimately destructive. His focus on reversing loss rather than rebuilding life isolates him emotionally, morally, and socially. The psychological consequences such as hallucinations, delusions, and irrational choices reflect a profound failure to grieve.\

In *Pet Sematary*, Stephen King offers more than a horror story—he constructs a tragic psychological portrait of a man consumed by unresolved grief. Through the lens of Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, Louis Creed's emotional trajectory reveals a catastrophic disruption of the mourning process: he moves erratically through denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, but never reaches acceptance. His inability to confront the finality of death leads him to pursue unnatural means of undoing loss, culminating in the complete unraveling of his moral, emotional, and psychological stability.

Simultaneously, the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement further illustrates Louis's downfall. His grief is defined not by oscillation, but by fixation. Rather than navigating between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping, Louis remains psychologically paralyzed—trapped in a loop of obsession, fantasy, and denial. The consequences are not

only deeply personal but also catastrophic for those around him, underscoring the destructive potential of grief when it is distorted by avoidance and emotional suppression.

Together, these models highlight that grief, when denied or mishandled, can mutate into something monstrous. Louis Creed does not simply grieve the dead—he resurrects them, violating natural and emotional boundaries in a futile attempt to escape loss. *Pet Semetary*, therefore, serves as a chilling literary case study of pathological grief, revealing how love, when entangled with denial and desperation, can lead not to healing but to irreversible devastation.

Stephen King's use of supernatural horror amplifies the emotional stakes of this failure. By positioning Louis as a rational figure undone by grief, the novel illustrates how unresolved emotions can drive individuals to the brink of madness. The Micmac burial ground serves as both a literal and metaphorical trap—a place where unresolved grief is fed and magnified.

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