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The Portrayal of Stages of Grief in *Evangelion:
3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021)

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Abstract: Grief is a common theme in literary works, including film. While ample studies have been done to analyze stages of grief in films, these studies did not consider the role of film techniques in the portrayal of this theme. Therefore, this paper will explore how stages of grief are portrayed through the *mise-en-scène* and cinematography in Hideaki Anno's *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of stages of grief consisting of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance is used. In this movie, there are two grieving characters, namely Shinji Ikari, the main character of the movie, and Gendo Ikari who is the main antagonist of the story and Shinji's father. Anger, depression, and acceptance are three of the five stages of grief that Shinji Ikari goes through. On the other hand, Gendo Ikari goes through the other two stages: bargaining and denial. The findings show how *mise-en-scène* and cinematography components, particularly shots and angles, help the filmmakers convey the emotional development of characters in coping with their grief. This study highlights that analyzing grief in films should go beyond narrative by examining how *mise-en-scène* and cinematography visually express characters' emotional journeys, demonstrating that film techniques are essential in conveying the stages of grief. It suggests that a holistic approach, integrating both literary and cinematic analysis, offers deeper insight into how grief is portrayed and experienced in film.

Key words: cinematography, grief, *mise-en-scène*, stages of grief

Abstrak: Duka adalah tema umum dalam karya sastra, termasuk film. Meskipun banyak penelitian telah dilakukan untuk menganalisis tahapan berduka dalam film, penelitian-penelitian tersebut belum mempertimbangkan peran teknik sinematografi dalam penggambaran tema ini. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini akan mengeksplorasi bagaimana tahapan berduka melalui *mise-en-scène* dan sinematografi dalam film Hideaki Anno, *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). Tahapan berduka menurut Kübler-Ross (1969) yang digunakan terdiri dari: penolakan, kemarahan, tawar-menawar, depresi, dan penerimaan. Dalam film ini, terdapat dua karakter yang mengalami duka, yaitu Shinji Ikari sebagai tokoh utama, dan Gendo Ikari yang merupakan antagonis utama sekaligus ayah dari Shinji. Kemarahan, depresi, dan penerimaan adalah tiga dari lima tahapan kesedihan yang dialami oleh Shinji Ikari, sedangkan Gendo Ikari menunjukkan dua tahapan lainnya: tawar-menawar dan penolakan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bagaimana komponen *mise-en-scène* dan sinematografi, khususnya pengambilan gambar dan sudut kamera, berperan dalam penggambaran tahapan kesedihan serta membantu sutradara menyampaikan perkembangan emosional karakter dalam menghadapi duka mereka melalui presentasi visual. Studi ini menyoroti bahwa analisis duka dalam film sebaiknya tidak hanya berfokus pada narasi, tetapi juga dengan menelaah bagaimana *mise-en-scène* dan sinematografi secara visual mengekspresikan perjalanan emosional karakter, sehingga membuktikan bahwa teknik film sangat penting dalam

menyampaikan tahapan berduka. Studi ini juga menyarankan pendekatan holistik yang mengintegrasikan analisis sastra dan sinematik untuk memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang bagaimana duka digambarkan dan dialami dalam film.

Kata kunci: duka, mise-en-scene, sinematografi, tahapan berduka

INTRODUCTION

People inevitably suffer a variety of losses during their lives. These could be losing significant possessions, status, or loved ones who passed away. The term *grief* is frequently applied to relate to the common experience that a person or group has after experiencing a loss (Clarke, 2021). The experience of grief is not a momentary or singular phenomenon. Instead, it is systematic and predictable. Additionally, it is a multifaceted process with biological, psychological, spiritual, and social components, like many phenomena within the range of human experience (Rodriguez, 2001).

The concept of progressive feelings towards death originated with Kübler-Ross in her book titled *On Death and Dying* (1969). She suggests the idea of stages that were initially built to identify patients' mental phases who experienced loss. Long after Kübler-Ross's passing, her co-author, David Kessler, added more to the topic which led him to write a book titled *On Grief and Grieving* (2005). This book holds the same topic and interpretation of the five stages of grief as Kübler-Ross's. However, Kessler reveals the answers to ambiguities and misconceptions toward the predecessor's book, such as how the denial stage is often misinterpreted, as it only focuses on the dying person.

Grief is also a recurring theme in literature. Literary works often delve into the human experience, including the emotional journey of characters as they navigate significant events such as loss and grief. Kennedy & Gioia (2009) state that literature is about anything written, a kind of art, which offers pleasure and illumination. With that being said, an animated movie is one of the literary works that involves visual and audio media that is recorded to tell a narrative story (Furniss, 2008). As a literary work, animated movies also contain intrinsic elements that present a narrative. It involves plot, character, setting, theme, and point of view that are put together to make coherent storytelling. Those elements have a crucial role in portraying the moods and nuances of a story as well as delivering values and meanings through the visual direction. *Mise-en-scene* and cinematography play a critical role in illustrating complicated emotions like reactions toward grief (Bordwell et al., 2024). The phases of grieving, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, are frequently portrayed in animated movies through distinctive visual styles and compositions.

Bordwell et al. (2024) suggest that a film is a text that should be analyzed both in its narrative and cinematography. Their approach to film analysis involves examining each of these components to understand how they work together to create the overall film experience. The breakdowns of their methods are narrative analysis, cinematography analysis, *mise-en-scene* analysis, editing analysis, and sound analysis. However, they emphasize that these elements should not be analyzed in isolation. Instead, a comprehensive analysis of a film text involves understanding how these components interact and complement each other.

The impact of postmodernism on media studies has been a major component in legitimizing the study of popular entertainment forms. People also realize how vital it is to analyze previously marginalized fields, such as animation or animated movies (Furniss, 2008). When compared to live-action movies, animated movies have several differences. The most recognizable one is the appearance of live items and continuous filming that suggests live action. In contrast, the usage of inanimate objects and specific frame-by-frame filming techniques suggest animation (Cooper, 2018). Aside from the distinction, animated movies also share similarities with live-action movies since both of them are packed with narrative structures, character developments, and genre varieties (Wells, 2002). Furthermore, both animated movies and live-action movies aim to evoke emotional responses from the audiences. This is due to the fact that both cinematography and *mise-en-scene* can intensify the viewer's emotional engagement (Bordwell et al., 2024), making the portrayal of grief appear more vivid. Such animated movies with the portrayal of grief is *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). By understanding its cinematography and *mise-en-scene* elements, insight into how the filmmaker manipulates visual elements to connect with the audience on an emotional level which revolves around the area of grief is gained. Hence, for the research, the writers utilize *mise-en-scene* and cinematography to indicate movie aspects that resemble the stages of grief of the characters in *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021).

Neon Genesis Evangelion originated as an anime (Japanese animated movies) series that aired from 1995 to 1996. Twenty-five years after the end of the first anime, the *Evangelion* saga is still hugely popular. Therefore, as his final entry in the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* franchise, Hideaki Anno and Khara studio agreed to make the rebuild movies of Anno's predecessor series which consist of four movies. Peters (2021) reported that *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time*, as the finale of the *Evangelion* rebuild movies, became Anno's highest-grossing film after earning 8.28 billion yen (75.7 million USD) from about 5.4 million admissions in the 59 days since its Japanese premiere. This movie is now listed as one of the highest-grossing movies at the Japanese box office in 2021 (Lacerna, 2021). This movie, however, is heavily influenced by the author's personal struggles in the past when he was diagnosed with depression. Moreover, Anno included his erratic personality to enrich the conflicts between characters (Stewart-Ahn, 2019). The complexity of the plot and characterization makes this movie appropriate for an analysis of grief.

The previous studies share similarities with this research since they all utilize Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of five stages of grief (i.e., the five stages of death and dying) to analyze literary works: novel, drama, movie. However, the previous studies did not include any film theory to concede stages of grief elements. Therefore, with the intention to find how these are used to represent grief, the researchers include *mise-en-scene* and cinematography theory. Furthermore, the gap of this research is also located in the object of research, an animated movie by Hideaki Anno entitled *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). Thus, the purpose of this research is to illustrate the portrayal of the stages of grief in *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021) by identifying the *mise-en-scene* and cinematography aspects which are applied in the movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Stages of Grief

Grief is the experience and natural feeling that comes with loss. Some deaths are traumatic when they are accompanied by exposure to the loved one's physical agony, medical procedures, suddenness- as in a death by suicide or homicide, motor vehicle accident, natural disaster, other catastrophic situations, and many other factors that shape our experience of loss (Kessler, 2019). Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist, developed a concept that indicates the mental state of grief into several stages. She formulated her theory in *On Death and Dying* (1969) based on her experience in handling and identifying the mental phases of her patients. Later, David Kessler co-authored with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross who passed away in 2004, and wrote a book entitled *On Grief and Grieving* (2005) which is the reaffirmed version of Kübler-Ross' initial framework of the five stages of grief.

The first stage is denial. This stage is the most common stage of all since it is the act of self-defense by a sense of disbelief. In this stage, people's initial reaction could be to feel completely numb or paralyzed by shock. The person who is experiencing the denial stage most likely would reject the nature of loss in every way. People tend to question how and why loss can occur in their lives. Furthermore, denial often comes in the form of people questioning reality (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

The second stage is anger. As soon as people start realizing everything that occurs is a fact and reality, they will shift to the anger phase. This phase can transform in several ways: anger at the loved ones who did not take care of themselves or anger that emerges from being incapable of saving the loved ones. Moreover, anger has no limits in that it can be pointed to family, surrounding people, friends, strangers, inanimate objects, or even to God. People may begin questioning God's decision and feel abandoned. Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process since it's a strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

The third stage is bargaining. Bargaining is often accompanied by guilt. People blame themselves and what they believe they could have done better when they dwell on the *if onlys*. They could even compromise the suffering to avoid feeling the agony of loss. Bargaining can also be useful when transitioning from one condition of loss to another. It may serve as a transitional point that allows people's mind the time they may require to acclimate. Bargaining could bridge the gaps left by powerful emotions, which keep pain hidden most of the time. In this stage, people may start to encourage themselves to search for probability to negotiate with others, such as with people around them, their environments, and their deceased loved ones to return to their normal lives and their previous lives (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

The fourth stage is depression. Depression is a common mental disorder that manifests in many forms of attitude: appetite loss, sleep deprivation, pleasure absence, low self-worth, and poor concentration (Bhowmik et al, 2012). In other words, depressed people would feel the pointlessness of taking care of their bodies. This mindset results in self-harming attitudes. Furthermore, people who experience depression have less intention to reach society (Kübler-ross & Kessler, 2005) while also producing fewer gestures than the stable person (Hinchliffe et al., 1975). In addition, this stage allows the dying patients to accept that death is real, and it is a fact

they cannot resist. Death is certain. Often, patients can disconnect themselves from their affections and loved ones (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

The fifth stage is acceptance. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Instead of denying loss, acceptance means to listen to self-fulfillment. People in the acceptance stage tend to become involved in other lives again while also investing their time to appreciate the loved one.

B. *Mise-En-Scene*

In film studies, *mise-en-scène* is used to discuss visual style. The term *mise-en-scene* which originally meant "putting into the scene" in original French, was originally used in reference to the act of directing plays (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 112). Film scholars use the phrase to refer to the director's control over what occurs in the frame of the film, extending its meaning to include film direction. As one might anticipate, *mise-en-scene* refers to the elements of film that share similarities with theatrical art, such as location, lighting, costumes, and figure behavior (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). In other words, *mise-en-scène* includes both what the audience is able to see and how we are asked to see it. It alludes to a number of the key components of cinematic communication and the ways in which they come together to work as a whole (Gibbs & Gibbs, 2001). *Mise-en-scene* in movies is a powerful tool for conveying characters' emotions and personalities. It encompasses everything visible and audible on screen—such as setting, lighting, costume, and character placement—which are all combined to create meaning that can enhance the plot of a movie. Settings and props can dynamically enter the narrative action, reflecting characters' attitudes and behaviors toward their surrounding environment. Meanwhile, lighting can highlight characters' emotions by emphasizing their facial expression. Through the plays between key light, fill light, and back light, a movie can treat characters based on what is necessary within plot-building (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Moreover, the overall sound of a movie, consisting of the characters' dialogue audio, is also considered as part of *mise-en-scene*.

C. Cinematography

Cinematography is the art and craft of capturing visual images for cinema. It involves the use of cameras, lenses, lighting, and other equipment to create the desired visual style and narrative of a film. Cinematographers, also known as directors of photography (DPs), work closely with directors to translate the script and vision into visual storytelling. They are responsible for the technical and artistic aspects of filming, including composition, framing, lighting, camera movement, and shot selection. However, in case of analysis, cinematography technically depends on what the directors intend to deliver in their movie. Therefore, the identification of visual portrayal is based on movies' contextual meaning (Bordwell et al., 2024). While *mise-en-scene* is everything that is visible on the screen, cinematography concerns how things are presented on the screen. Through camera plays, the director can influence how the audience perceives a character's emotions. Close-up shots focus on a character's facial expressions, capturing subtle emotional nuances. High-angle shots can make a character seem vulnerable, while low-angle shots might make them appear powerful or threatening (Bordwell et al., 2024). Apart from camera plays, a range of tonalities can also be considered as elements of cinematography. Close-ups focus on a character's facial expressions, allowing the audience to see subtle emotions, like the pain, sorrow, or despair associated with grief while the way a character

is framed within a shot can also symbolize their emotional state. For instance, a character framed alone in a vast, empty space can represent their feelings of loneliness or abandonment (Bordwell et al., 2024).

D. Previous Studies

Many studies concerning grief have been conducted in various literary works. As part of story development, narratives within novels, dramas, and movies introduce grief to their characters. The tragic losses that occur in characters in literary works have taken some scholars' interest in the field of literature study. Wang & Wang (2021) analyzed *Manchester by the Sea*, a film about grief. Their findings show that several characters within the movie suffer through different stages of grief: the main character experiences denial, the main character's wife experiences anger, and the main character's nephew shows the act of bargaining. Subsequently, due to varied reactions from the other characters, the main character demonstrates depression, which is concluded with acceptance from every character in the movie. Thus, the research claims that there could be more than one character who experiences the stages of grief in a story. Moreover, every character in a story can influence each other and emerge from any stage of grief.

Another study with the same framework by Kübler-Ross (1969) discusses how grief is addressed in the liminal space. Madden (2023) states that the main character in the novel *The Gathering* (2007) utilizes liminal space to reject the normal regularities of ordinary society. In this study, Madden also mentions that the author of *The Gathering* uses a non-linear story, which involves the depiction of a fictional flashback, to illustrate the five stages of mourning. Through her analysis, she found out that even though Kübler-Ross's stages of grief model raises a controversial discussion, it also launched a narrative that continues to be relevant today as part of literary works that present mourning in a more nuanced way. She also agrees that the subtle changes between the phases of mourning can broaden the story of grief after the loss of a loved one.

In another study, De Souza Paula et al. (2017) found that grief occurs in a drama named *My Life* (1993). They found out that grief is not only caused by death and loss but also by the announcement of a lethal illness diagnosis. In addition, De Souza Paula et al. (2017) claim that through the analysis of stages of grief within a movie, it is possible to identify the characteristics and discuss the importance of proper management of each stage.

Recent studies have further expanded the understanding of grief across media. Nurjanah (2021) examined *The Hunger Games* trilogy films through Boaz Hagin's philosophy of death, illustrating how death is portrayed as a multifaceted phenomenon—serving as a savior, a political tool, and a test for survival. The research demonstrates that death and grief in these films are not merely personal tragedies but are also embedded within broader social and political contexts, highlighting the communal impact and significance of loss. Nurjanah (2023) applied the Kübler-Ross model to analyze *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis, revealing how the protagonist navigates the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The study emphasizes the non-linear, subjective nature of grief and underscores literature's capacity to console and articulate the complexities of loss, as Lewis's autobiographical account ultimately leads him to find peace and meaning through acceptance.

As mentioned in the introduction, the studies of grief in films have not fully considered the role of cinematography and *mise-en-scène*, which is a gap that the current study attempts to fill. While most previous research has focused on narrative structure and dialogue, the present

study analyzes how filmic techniques—such as angle, framing, lighting, and props—visually articulate the stages of grief and the emotional development of characters, as exemplified in *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time*. This approach not only deepens our understanding of grief as a subjective and relational experience but also highlights the unique contributions of visual storytelling in portraying the complexities of mourning.

METHOD

A. Type of Research

This research is a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009) that explores the portrayal of the stages of grief in *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021) through the lens of Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) stages of grief theory. The investigation is grounded in a detailed analysis of both narrative structure and cinematographic elements, drawing on *mise-en-scène* and cinematography theory as outlined by Bordwell et al. (2024). The methodology employs textual analysis, which involves an in-depth examination of selected scenes to uncover their underlying meanings, intentions, and effects (Belsey, 2011). By situating these scenes within their broader narrative context and interpreting them through established theoretical frameworks, the study illuminates how filmic techniques and storytelling converge to convey complex emotional experiences.

B. Research Subject

The data comprise the English subtitled version of *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). There were 25 selected scenes that show how the two characters cope with grief. These scenes were analyzed further for their *mise-en-scène* and cinematography aspects.

C. Research Procedure

Data for this study were gathered through a three-step process: repeated viewing of the film, systematic note-taking, and detailed analysis. The researchers first watched the film multiple times, making careful notes of scenes—complete with timestamps—where characters exhibited signs of grief, guided by Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). This theoretical framework enabled the identification of key moments for further examination.

Subsequent analysis focused on both the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* of these scenes, using a textual approach that considered intrinsic elements such as visual composition, sound, and narrative structure (Bordwell et al., 2024). The scenes were segmented and broken down into individual shots, with attention paid to camera work, lighting, and dialogue. Finally, these observations were interpreted in light of the film's social and cultural context to provide a holistic understanding of how grief is represented (Stam, 2000).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part presents and discusses the portrayal of stages of grief by analyzing cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, and plot elements found in the movie *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice upon a Time*. Analyzing the stages of grief through cinematography and *mise-en-scène* elements is relatively subjective since the directors' motives for utilizing intrinsic aspects cannot be judged precisely. The interpretation of cinematography and *mise-en-scène* in a movie depends on what the

directors intend to deliver with their films (Bordwell et al., 2024). However, the researchers used the basic interpretation regarding the aspects of cinematography and *mise-en-scene* to narrow the analysis and correlate the director's film techniques with its portrayal of stages of grief.

This study discovered the five stages of grief within the movie. Through observation of 25 selected scenes in the film, it was found that there are two characters who experience stages of grief. The main character, Shinji Ikari, experiences three out of five stages of grief: anger, depression, and acceptance. The other two stages, denial and bargaining, are demonstrated by Gendo Ikari, the main antagonist of the movie. Throughout the film, the stages of grief do not resemble Kübler-Ross's (1969) initial order in her book. However, Kübler-Ross also explained that people's reactions towards grief are unique and individual. This means this study proves that people might respond in various ways according to their personalities. Regarding film aspects, this study found that the prominent *mise-en-scene* aspect revolves around the usage of lighting, dialogue, setting, characters' gestures (acting), and properties. In a similar vein, angle, framing, perspective, and off-screen space are the dominant cinematography aspects. The following elaborates on the findings of stages of grief in the movie.

A. Depression

The depression stage is portrayed through nine scenes in the movie. These nine scenes revolve around Shinji's attitude in reaction to the post-apocalyptic world resulted from his adventure in the previous movie. Shinji's depression is the result of the grief he endures after his friend, Kaworu, died in the previous movie. Additionally, his inability to rescue everyone else from the Near Third Impact tragedy in the last film causes Shinji to have a mental breakdown. This movie utilizes four categories of angles: extreme long shots, medium shots, close-ups, and extreme close-ups to portray Shinji's depression. However, it is worth noting that the scenes in the depression phase may contain more than an angle to deliver adequate context regarding grief. Therefore, in this section, a scene may be mentioned multiple times as well as its cinematography and *mise-en-scene* elements. This movie delves deeper into Shinji's grief by showcasing the diabolical destruction caused by Near Third Impact. Due to the limited space for this article, each category of angles is represented by one or two relevant shots.

Four scenes elaborate on the depression stage (minutes 14:24 – 16:07; 31:37 – 32:28; 32:29 – 32:56; 36:16 – 37:14) through the usage of extreme long shots which capture the world's carnage (Bordwell et al., 2024). As stated by Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2005), disaster causes deaths, injuries, and a wide path of destruction in the community. The outcome of these massive losses is Shinji's grief as he once failed to stop the Near Third Impact tragedy from happening, as can be seen in the Figure 1 below:



Figure 1.
Shinji on his liminal space (Maeda et.al., 2021. 32:29 - 32:56)

The use of an extreme long shot in this scene visually emphasizes Shinji's isolation and perceived insignificance, highlighting the profound impact his actions have on the world of *Evangelion*. Following a confrontation with Asuka (26:25–31:36), Shinji withdraws from others and is depicted walking alone to a location he once shared with Kaworu. This setting aligns with Madden's (2023) discussion of liminal space—a transitional zone where individuals separate themselves from daily routines, allowing for personal reflection and progression through grief. The absence of other characters in the expansive shot underscores Shinji's emotional seclusion. Further, three additional extreme long shots reinforce his detachment, as his lack of expression and subdued gestures suggest a state of depression (Hinchliffe et al., 1975). Consistent with Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) model, these scenes illustrate Shinji's withdrawal from social interaction, reflecting his belief that communication has become futile during his grieving process.

In addition to extreme long shots, the film employs medium shots to effectively portray Shinji's depressive state. During four key sequences (14:32–14:34; 16:18–21:24; 21:25–22:28; 26:25–31:36), Shinji remains unresponsive to those around him—including Asuka, Kensuke, Toji, and Toji's father-in-law—demonstrating his emotional withdrawal. This inability to communicate or express emotion is characteristic of the depression stage in the grieving process (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The use of off-screen space in these medium shots further accentuates Shinji's isolation, as the voices of other characters are heard without Shinji visually acknowledging them. For instance, in the scene from 21:25 to 22:28, Shinji's refusal to eat with Toji's family highlights his disregard for his own physical needs, underscoring his preoccupation with personal loss and emotional pain (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

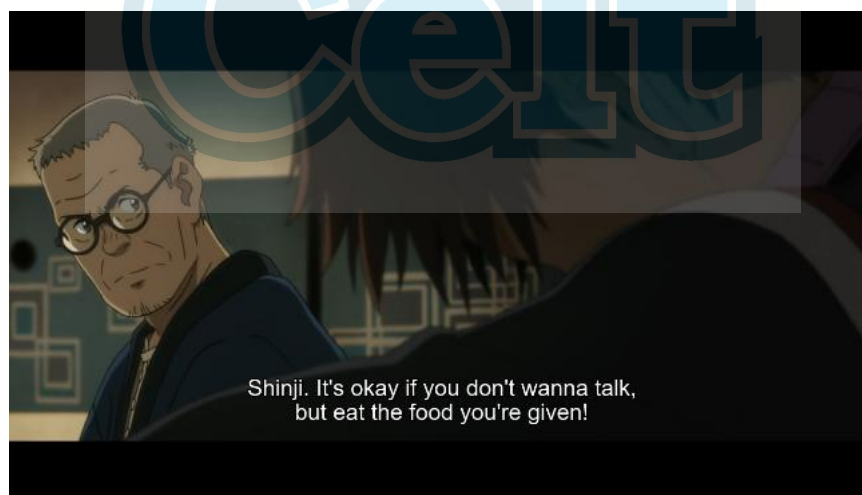


Figure 2:
A different mental state between Shinji and Toji's father in-law (21:25 - 22:28)

Figure 2 visually communicates Shinji's depression without revealing his face; instead, his slumped posture and falling hair subtly convey his emotional state. The scene's lighting further reinforces this mood, as Shinji is cast in low-key illumination while Toji's father-in-law, who invites him to dinner, is lit with high-key illumination. This contrast in lighting underscores the stark difference in their mental states, visually separating Shinji's despair from the relative normalcy of Toji's father-in-law. Additionally, the use of extreme long shots highlights Shinji's minimal gestures—he sits with his head down and arms crossed, reinforcing his withdrawal and emotional numbness (Hinchliffe et al., 1975). The film also employs medium shots and reverse

shots (back shots) to align the audience's perspective with Shinji's, as discussed by Gibbs & Gibbs (2001). This framing technique is evident in several scenes: when Shinji walks behind Asuka and Rei (14:24–16:07), stands behind Toji and Rei (16:18–21:24), is scolded by Toji's father-in-law for not eating, and when Asuka force-feeds him (26:25–31:36). To further immerse viewers in Shinji's experience, the film uses racking focus to blur Shinji in the foreground while keeping the interacting characters in sharp focus in the background. Figure 3 illustrates this technique, showing two shots where Shinji's refusal to eat prompts Asuka to force-feed him.

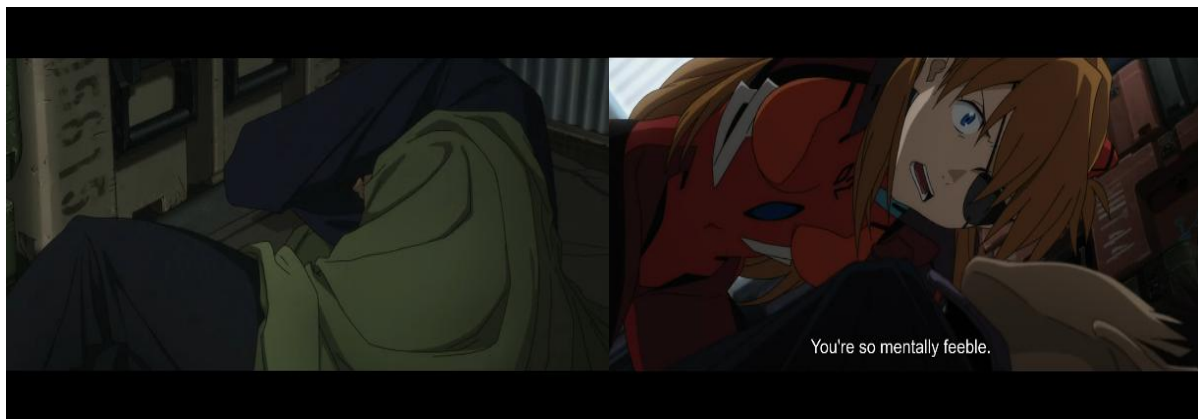


Figure 3:
Asuka force-feeds Shinji (26:25 - 31:36)

In the first medium shot (Figure 3), depressed Shinji is lying on the ground. Shinji has not touched his food prepared by his friends for two days. This implies he does not care of living anymore despite his hunger. This sense of depression is also highlighted by the low lighting. In the second medium shot, Asuka, who is portrayed as a determined friend, tries to pull Shinji out of his depression before he is ready (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Furthermore, to give Asuka a sense of superiority over depressed Shinji, this movie utilizes high and low-level cameras. The high angle in this scene gives the impression that the viewer looks down at Shinji (Edgar et al., 2015) as he keeps sleeping in the corner of a room and doesn't have the will to wake up.

Seven scenes of the movie portray Shinji's depression through a close-up angle. However, these scenes use three separate close-ups which are medium close-up, close-up, and extreme close-up. Three medium close-up scenes (14:28 – 14:31; 17:20 – 17:23; 22:52 – 22:55) portray depression by displaying Shinji's flat facial expression. Again, with a similar gesture, Shinji gazes at the ground as his face is completely backlit by the light sources from behind. The lighting plays within these three medium close-up scenes generate low-key illumination that creates a strong contrast between shadow and lighting (Bordwell et al., 2024). The combination of Shinji's flat expression and backlighting symbolizes Shinji's gloomy phase of grieving as well as his self-isolating manner. Meanwhile, the close-up angle portrays Shinji's depression phase in two scenes (23:32 – 25:57 and 26:25 – 31:36). Bordwell et al. (2024) explain that props can be tools that play causal narrative roles. In this case, the close-up shot of props can draw people's attention to what relation exists between props and the plot. The application of props as tools to portray depression can be seen in these scenes. For example, in the scene where Shinji sees naked Asuka, he completely ignores the sexual appeal of Asuka's body that indicates his ignorance towards sexual needs (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).



Figure 4:
A close-up of Asuka's necklace (DSS choker) (26:25 – 31:36)

The close-up shot of Asuka's necklace (DSS Choker) triggers Shinji to experience visual haunting. According to Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2005), visual haunting is the experience of seeing or sensing the presence of a deceased person or an object associated with them. In this case, Shinji is haunted by his helplessness for not being able to save Kaworu, his friend. When he sees Asuka's choker, which is very similar to Kaworu's, Shinji rewinds his experience where he saw Kaworu's head blew up into pieces. Naturally, his body reacts to the flashback by vomiting.

The depression demonstrated by Shinji is portrayed consecutively from the beginning to the middle part of the movie. This mental state is emphasized through extreme long shots, medium shots, medium close-ups, and close up angles. The extreme long shots send enigmatic nuance and idea that Shinji is staggered by his loss. Shinji's subtle and sloppy movements throughout the extreme long shots represent his depression. Whereas medium shots combined with off-screen spaces isolate Shinji from other people around him. Shinji's unresponsiveness towards people from off-screen space implies his ignorance of the society, indicating his depression. Subsequently, the close-up shots help in understanding Shinji's mental state more clearly.

B. Anger

There is only a scene portraying grief at this stage of anger. The scene draws Shinji's anger towards Rei (40:17 – 41:23). This specific stage is shown after Shinji's depression phase and prior to his acceptance phase.



Figure 5:
Shinji's anger expressed through dialogues and gesture (40:17 - 41:23)

Throughout the whole sequence (Figure 5), high-key lighting is used as there is no significant contrast between light and shadow. Along with high-key lighting, close-up shots are used to capture the emotions of two characters who are intimately in a deep conversation. Rei asks, “Why don’t you come back to the village?” After asking Shinji for his self-isolating behavior, she says, “You also aren’t doing anything, are you protecting the village too?” This line triggers a glimpse of the past in which Shinji couldn’t save anyone from the occurring The Near Third Impact tragedy. Shinji later replies, “I couldn’t protect anyone! Now, I don’t wanna do anything, no talking, don’t wanna see anybody, I want to be left alone.” Rei’s hospitality makes Shinji angry because he doesn’t think he deserves any affection from people around him. People’s kindness is an unexpected, unwanted, and undeserved thing for Shinji (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). As stated by Kübler-Ross (1969), the anger of grief could be pointed to any person around: friends, parents, or even God.

C. Acceptance

In the acceptance phase, four scenes depict grief. To provide insight into Shinji’s transition from depression to acceptance, the film employs medium and medium close-up shots. The first scene illustrating Shinji’s acceptance occurs when he returns to Kensuke’s lodge after a long period of isolation (41:24 – 41:44):

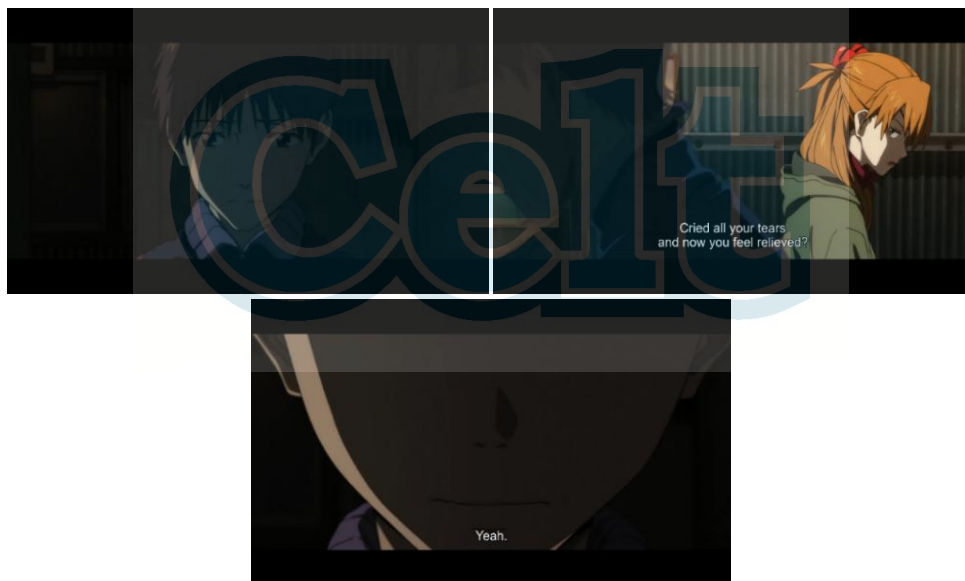


Figure 6:
Shinji’s beginning of acceptance (1:24 - 41:444)

Figure 6 shows reverse shots of Shinji’s beginning of acceptance phase. In this scene, the medium close-up of Shinji’s face emulates a more expressive emotion. The frontal side lighting makes Shinji’s face stand out from the bland background (Bordwell et al., 2024). This scene also shows Shinji’s and Asuka’s side profiles facing the opposite direction, generating distance and spatial images between the two characters. Asuka is delighted with the frontal light (key light) coming from the top. In this scene, Asuka asks Shinji “Cries all your tears and now you feel relieved?” Kübler-Ross (1969) mentions that tears are the primal release of emotions. Therefore, by releasing all of his emotional tension, Shinji regains his awareness of responding to people shown by an extreme close-up of Shinji’s face which emphasizes his mouth gesture answering Asuka’s question with affirmation “yes” to indicate that his depression stage is eventually over.

Another acceptance stage scene is portrayed afterward. The next morning after going back to Kensuke's lodge, Shinji and Kensuke go fishing by a lake.



Figure 7:
Shinji is communicating with Toji (442:57 - 442:59)

Figure 7 is taken in a medium shot that counterweights two characters in a single-dimensional display. By this angle placement, the audience is shown that Shinji eventually glances at Kensuke's eyes when they have conversations. The balance between characters in this scene is contrary to depression phase scenes (see Figures 2 and 3), where Shinji is completely overwhelmed by other characters in medium shots. Also, his gesture has completely been revived. By accepting Kensuke's suggestion to help him fish, Shinji realizes that there are more things to do rather than isolating himself from people and starts helping his friends to become involved in others' lives again (Kübler-ross & Kessler, 2005).

The third scene of acceptance follows after two events. The first event involves three characters (Asuka, Shinji, and Kensuke) as the shot focuses on a gravestone that is positioned slightly off centered with Kensuke intruding the right corner of the screen. The props give the audience the idea that Asuka, Shinji, and Kensuke go to mourn on Kensuke's father's grave. Kensuke says, "I never thought my father who survived from Near Third Impact would die just like that in an accident". After that, he follows with "I should have had talks with him. Had some drinks and listened to some of his gripes." He then reminds Shinji that his father Gendo is still alive. Kensuke connects his grieving with Shinji's circumstance by uttering "Even if you think it'd be useless, try talking to him. Or you'll regret it. Ties of father and son never die." The second event takes place in the hazardous containment setting. Here, Shinji realizes that a person they meet in the containment is also named Kaji (same as his old mentor). Kaji's name is also a possession that brings back Shinji's memories of his mentor who has passed away (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Subsequently, Kensuke tells the story of how Kaji died, and he explains further that everyone (including Misato and himself) experiences equal painful losses (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005). These two events trigger Shinji's awareness regarding life and how people around him experienced the same grieves and losses which at the same time embraces him, who brings knowledge from his deceased mentor Kaji, to replace Kaji's role by volunteering himself to help WILLE (a rebel frontier led by Misato) to fight his father Gendo Ikari (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005). Eventually, Shinji's acceptance is portrayed through his intrusion of Kensuke's camera recording (49:09 - 51:01):



Figure 8:
Frontal Shinji in Kensuke's recording (49:09 - 51:01)

In Figure 8, Shinji looks up at the people in front of him. He can hold his head up unlike in the depression stage. Shinji is displayed at a medium shot angle and centered on the screen. He is also beamed with frontal light which contradicts his appearance in the previous part of the movie. Kensuke's recording is a POV (point of view) shot (Bordwell et al., 2024), in which the viewers take Kensuke's view and by doing so, the viewers see and feel Kensuke's emotions.

D. Denial

In the denial phase, there are two scenes portraying grief involving Gendo, the main antagonist. The first scene involves Gendo's denial towards his wife's death, while the second scene shows his rejection towards humanity. Gendo's denial towards his wife's death (2:02:55 – 2:03:09) is portrayed through his imaginary flashback of his wife (Figure 9).



Figure 9:
Gendo is calling his deceased wife (2:02:55 - 2:03:09)

To portray the denial act, the movie displays a specified art style that simplifies the characters' looks by black and white color and rigid animation. In this scene, the black and white color signifies a part of Gendo's memories of his loved ones (Bordwell et al., 2024), in which Yui is colored black to appear prominent in the middle of the white background. Also, Yui's face is

barely visible throughout the scene, whereas Rei clones' faces are clearly visible. As explicitly uttered and displayed in the scene, Gendo knows that Yui has passed away during an experiment involving Evangelion Unit-01. However, Gendo reacts to Yui's death by asking where she is and keeps calling her as if she were still alive. This reactive behavior is an indication that Gendo experiences the denial stage of grief.

Subsequently, the other denial act takes place when Gendo refuses Shinji's music player that once belonged to him. In this scene, viewers are shown the back shot of Shinji who shares a similar perspective with the audience (Gibbs & Gibbs, 2001) and the medium shot of Gendo. This combination provides spatial distance between characters. Here Gendo speaks, "But I have get rid of my humanity!" In response, Shinji says, "This wasn't something to get rid of, this was something to be returned to you, Dad." Shinji's statement is valid according to Kessler's theory (2020) who argues that grief is not something to get rid of, but something to be acknowledged. The humanity rejected by Gendo involves death which is an inseparable part of human existence. In other words, the usage of property, an old music player, indicates that Gendo demands the world where he used to live in, where there is no pain and sorrow from experiencing grief.

E. Bargaining

Bargaining phases are portrayed in three separated scenes also involve Gendo. The bargaining act is demonstrated by Gendo as he tries to resurrect his deceased wife with a project called Human Instrumentality Project. The first scene associated with Gendo's attempt of resurrecting Yui is represented through combination of a reverse shot of Fuyutsuki and a long shot of Rei Ayanami clones which emphasizes characters perspective to the audience (Gibbs & Gibbs, 2001). The lighting radiating on Rei clones is frontal top lighting that brings out the detail of the human body (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2024). Furthermore, the close-up shot exposes stiff expressions coming out from Rei clones' faces signifying that they all are made artificially without human emotion. As elaborated in the movie, Rei clones are Gendo's attempt on bringing back his deceased wife Yui. However, throughout the scientific development, the production of Rei clones never reaches Gendo's expectation who yearns for Yui's warmth and softness. Therefore, this specific scene shows how Rei clones' abominable presentation causes Gendo to take a step further with a major plan which results in plenty of casualties.

The second bargaining scene shows Gendo's face in the close up shot centered on the screen. In this scene, we can see that Gendo's face is colored with unrealistic orange light to imply symbolic depiction of Gendo's grief (Bordwell et al., 2024). The act of bargaining can also be identified through Gendo's words as he says, "I want to make the world a restful place where I can be with Yui once more". This motive encourages Gendo to do anything to bring back his loved one who has passed away (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In this case, he conducts research in which he creates thousands of Rei clones (that resemble his deceased wife) to scaffold his project of bringing back his loved one, Yui.

The third scene of bargaining (2:06:44 - 2:07:18) displays Gendo's flashback when he initiated the attempt of resurrecting Yui.



Figure 10:
Rei clones' containments (2:06:44 - 2:07:18)

Figure 10 is a flashback scene that once again depicts Gendo's grief with the same specified art style as shown in the denial stage (see Figure 9). The scene involves an extreme long shot of Rei clones' containments. At the same time, the plays of lighting can be noticed through overexposure of Rei clones' containments. This scene directs the audience's attention towards the emphasized subjects, which are Rei clones' containments, since the background and other characters are completely darkened. (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2024) In this scene, Gendo says, "I just wanted to change myself by being at her side." The accumulation of Gendo's contradiction towards Yui's absence forms a harmful desire to bring his loved one back to life while ignoring his sense of humanity.

These three bargaining scenes conclude Gendo's form of bargaining which is associated with the mass production of Rei clones. The starting point of Gendo's bargaining journey is revealed through the third scene where he defines his motive behind the Human Instrumentality Project. The third scene also shows how precious Yui was for Gendo as she was the first person to ever accept him. Subsequently, the passing of Yui leads Gendo to create thousands of Rei clones as it is shown in the first and second scene. Similarities shared between these scenes are noticeable through the rapid appearances of Rei clones.

Since Shinji is the main character of the story, his emotional journey that corresponds to grief is dominant in the movie. Prior to this movie, Shinji loses a friend named Kaworu which results in his journey of grief. Therefore, in this specific movie, the most dominant stage demonstrated is the depression phase experienced by Shinji. From the beginning to the quarter part of the movie, Shinji's depressed state appears consecutively. It is indicated by the movie's narratives that are built through the plays of mise-en-scene and cinematography. The middle part of the movie shows Shinji's emotional transition from depression to acceptance. On the gap between his depression and acceptance stage, Shinji emerges in the anger stage. Later, the portrayal of the denial stage is noticeable in the resolution part of the story where Gendo, who is the main antagonist, revealing his motive behind the Human Instrumentality Project that revolves around his mental contradiction towards Yui's death. Gendo's retribution results in his attempt to bring back Yui (which embraces the act of bargaining) by mass-producing Rei clones exposed in the last part of the movie.

The core finding of this study is that *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* portrays the stages of grief in a manner that is visually and narratively complex, with Shinji and Gendo expressing grief through depression, anger, acceptance, denial, and bargaining, respectively. Crucially, these stages do not follow the linear sequence proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969), but instead unfold in a way that is shaped by each character's personality, experiences, and interactions with others. The film uses a range of cinematographic and mise-en-scène techniques—such as extreme long shots, medium and close-up angles, lighting contrasts, off-screen space, and symbolic props—to externalize the characters' internal emotional states and to visually construct their progression through grief.

The findings of this study contrast with those of Maranda & Wahyuni (2019), who analyzed the stages of grief in *Did You Ever Have a Family?* through a communal narrative structure in which multiple voices collectively reconstruct the protagonist's journey, thereby emphasizing the shared and multifaceted nature of grief. In contrast, the present study demonstrates how *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* distributes the stages of grief between two central characters—Shinji's individual struggle (depression, anger, and acceptance) and Gendo's antagonist perspective (denial and bargaining)—with the progression and expression of these stages shaped by filmic techniques such as extreme long shots, medium shots, close-ups, off-screen space, lighting, and props that visually externalize internal emotional states and construct liminal spaces for personal reflection.

When compared to the study by Ardyandika & Praptawati (2023) on *Swan Song*, both studies employ the Kübler-Ross model as a framework, but this study adds that grief in *Evangelion* is also depicted by distributing the stages across multiple characters and utilizing visual storytelling to communicate emotional nuance. While their study on *Swan Song* primarily relies on dialogue and behavioral cues to depict the protagonist's grief, this study goes further by revealing how grief is embedded in the very fabric of its cinematography and mise-en-scène. This approach not only underscores the subjectivity and non-linearity of grief but also highlights the influential role of individual and social factors in the grieving process. For instance, Shinji's prolonged depression is visually emphasized through his isolation in liminal spaces and the use of off-screen space to represent his detachment from others, while Gendo's denial and bargaining are depicted through stylized flashbacks and the mass production of Rei clones.

Avis et al.'s (2021) systematic analysis of the stages of grief portrayed online provides a broader context for these findings. They note that while the Kübler-Ross model is widely referenced, its uncritical application can obscure the diversity of grief experiences and the importance of social and contextual influences. This study supports this critique by demonstrating that grief is not only an individual phenomenon but also a relational one—Shinji's eventual acceptance is facilitated by his re-engagement with friends, while Gendo's inability to accept loss leads to his rejection of humanity and harmful actions. The use of visual storytelling in *Evangelion*—such as the contrast in lighting between Shinji and Toji's father-in-law, or the symbolic use of props like Asuka's necklace—deepens the audience's understanding of how grief is both shaped by and expressed through social interactions.

Corresponding to Wang & Wang (2021), this study also found that the occurrence of grief and the order of its stages are highly variable and subjective. This aligns with the broader literature, which increasingly recognizes that individuals may skip stages, revisit them, or experience them in unique sequences depending on their circumstances. Furthermore, this study is in line with Madden's research (2023) in identifying the phenomenon of liminal space as a key

element in the grieving process. In Madden's study, the main character in *The Gathering* creates a metaphorical hinterland to separate herself from the outside world, while in *Evangelion*, Shinji retreats to a nostalgic place associated with his deceased friend, explicitly stating his desire to disconnect from others. This liminal space serves as both a physical and psychological refuge, allowing for personal reflection and emotional processing.

However, again, this study advances previous research by analyzing how specific film techniques—such as angle, off-screen space, lighting, and props—are used to portray grief visually. Unlike studies that focus primarily on narrative and dialogue, the analysis demonstrates that the artistic choices of filmmakers can powerfully convey the emotional development of characters, making grief a tangible and immersive experience for the audience. The diverse application of these techniques in *Evangelion* not only distinguishes it from other works but also underscores the importance of visual language in depicting the complexities of grief.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has illuminated how *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* conveys the complexities of grief through a sophisticated interplay of narrative, cinematography, and mise-en-scène. By applying Kübler-Ross & Kessler's (2005) stages of grief, the analysis revealed that grief is experienced uniquely by each character, and that the film's visual language powerfully externalizes internal emotional states. The findings affirm that elements such as lighting, framing, and off-screen space are instrumental in depicting the characters' psychological journeys, particularly Shinji's progression through depression, anger, and acceptance, and Gendo's navigation of denial and bargaining.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and interpretative nature of textual analysis means that findings are inherently subjective and may be influenced by the researchers' perspectives and cultural context¹. The study focused exclusively on a single film and analyzed only 25 selected scenes, which may not capture the full spectrum of grief representations or the nuances present in other works or genres. Additionally, reliance on the Kübler-Ross model (2005), while widely recognized, has been criticized for its lack of empirical basis and for potentially oversimplifying the grieving process. The model's linearity does not always reflect the complex, non-linear, and individual nature of grief, and its use may inadvertently exclude alternative experiences and cultural expressions of mourning.

Future research should consider expanding the scope to include a broader range of films, genres, and cultural contexts to better understand how grief is depicted across different media and societies. Comparative studies involving various narratives or diverse animation styles could provide deeper insight into the universality and variability of grief portrayals. Researchers might also integrate alternative grief theories or phenomenological approaches to address the limitations of stage-based models and to capture the embodied, lived experience of grief more authentically.

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