

## Susie's Double Traumas: A Psychological Study of *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold

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### Abstract

This paper, “Susie’s double traumas: A psychological study of *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold,” focuses on recurrent universal issues, which are rape and rape trauma. American writer Alice Sebold, who suffered such trauma, wrote *The Lovely Bones* in 2002 to address this dilemma. Susie, the novel's fourteen-year-old protagonist, lived happily with her family before the tragic day when Mr. Harvey violated her and murdered her to escape legal consequences. The study concludes, through a qualitative deductive psychological approach, specifically Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief, that Susie suffered from two double traumas: rape trauma and murder trauma. Fortunately, she copes with both traumas separately and successfully, aided by the love of her family and the support of her companions in heaven. This highlights the importance of emotional support for rape victims during the healing journey.

**Keywords:** *The Lovely Bones*, Susie, Double Traumas, the Psychological Approach, Alice Sebold.

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## Introduction

Rape trauma syndrome (RTS) is a version of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that manifests post-rape experiences. It includes acute and long-term reorganization phases where victims deal with emotional, physical, and psychological aftermaths (Giannelli, 1997, p. 270-1). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the psychological consequences of the rape Susie experienced. This work will apply the five stages of the grief theory of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004) and David Kessler (1959) to explore Susie's psychological response to her rape trauma and the impact of her subsequent murder by her neighbour, Mr. Harvey.

Alice Sebold is an American writer born to a family who loves reading in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1963 (McShane, 2007, p. 1). She grew up with her elder sister, Mary, in the suburbs of Pennsylvania and graduated from Great Valley High School to join Syracuse University in 1980. She then earned a master's degree in poetry from the University of Houston, followed by another master's degree in creative writing from the University of California, Irvine, where she was introduced to her husband, Glen David Gold, whom she married in 2001 and divorced in 2012. She is famous for her writings *Lucky*, *The Lovely Bones* (2002), and *The Almost Moon* (2007).

The novel, *The Lovely Bones* was written in the 1990s and published in 2002, so it is a contemporary novel, even though it tracks the rape and murder events during the 1970s. *The Lovely Bones* is the story of the Salmon family, in which peace in their home ends abruptly when Susie Salmon, a teenage girl, is subjected to an unfortunate attack. She is raped, and then she loses her life at the hands of their very own neighbour, George Harvey. The novel is narrated by Susie, who tells her tale from the afterlife (Sebold, 2002, p. 5-6).

*The Lovely Bones* has gained the researchers' interest all over the world. Some writers, such as Sarah Whitney, attempt to analyse *The Lovely Bones* (2002) and *The Almost Moon* (2007) by Sebold from a postfeminist gothic perspective. In her work "Uneasy lie the bones: Alice Sebold's post-feminist gothic" (2010), Whitney argued that Sebold's narratives are presentations of misogyny and violence against women that are still recurrent. Her viewpoint is valuable; however, it does not reflect the emotional response to rape and murder trauma experienced by the female victim.

Others take a philosophical approach instead. Shahram Kiaei and Masoumeh Safdari, in their research on "Hyper-reality in Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*" (2014),

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focused on Jean Baudrillard's concepts of "hyper-reality" and "Simulacra and Simulation." They used these ideas to differentiate between the hyper-reality of Susie's heaven and that of a religious heaven. Ultimately concluding that Susie's heaven is limited and cannot fulfil all her desires. Yet, the current paper is slightly different, as in the end, Susie achieves the acceptance stage, and as a result, she fulfils all her wishes.

In 2018, Jane Kilby wrote "Saving the girl: A creative reading of Alice Sebold's *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones*." The work focuses on the intertextuality between Sebold's *Lucky* and *The Lovely Bones*, as well as the distinction between reality and fantasy in relation to the topic of rape. This research acknowledges that Kilby's research is interesting. However, it is more comparable than a deep analysis of the victim's response to the double traumas.

Nonetheless, some other researchers study *The Lovely Bones* by focusing on other characters than the main character, Susie. For example, in 2016, Lucia Opreanu's "Text and trauma in *Sophie's Choice*, *The Virgin Suicides* and *The Lovely Bones*: Remapping identity in a country of strangers" used intercultural communication from Ray Singh. Singh is a marginalised character who migrates from India to the suburbs of America, where Susie lives. Opreanu studied his traumatised experience because Susie is his beloved, and secondly, because he is accused of her disappearance (134-139). In 2019, the article "Mr. George Harvey's shadow archetype as seen in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*" by Rafida Arge Dianika offered a profound psychological interpretation of the criminal, Mr Harvey's personality. The article employed the shadow method to illustrate Mr Harvey's relationship with himself and his neighbours.

Similarly of equal importance are Candra Fransisca, M. Natsir, and Fatimah Muhajir, who focused their attention in 2021 on examining Jack's (Susie's father's) psychology in "Emotion and conflict in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* novel." They had applied the theories of emotion and conflict of Paul Ekman and Lewis Coser, respectively. The researchers analysed the five types of emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and surprise, as well as the two kinds of conflicts that Jack passes through after Susie's death.

One month later, in October 2021, Nabilah Nisrina and Hadiyanto Hadiyanto concentrated on Lindsey, Susie's sister, in "Lindsey Salmon's mourning process in facing her sister's death in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*." The authors examined her psychological healing process by using J. William Worden's theory, "The four tasks of mourning" (60). Nevertheless, P. Jenci Gladwin and M. John Suganya's paper "Psychological trauma and grievance in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely*

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*Bones*” (2022) referred to the idea of trauma and the post-traumatic experiences. The work is a psychological discussion of Susie’s family and friends without applying a specific theory to examine the psychological healing process. However, the authors concluded with a beneficial point: little girls should be taught to defend themselves physically.

This research supports the findings of the studies discussed above regarding the traumatic responses of the other characters to Susie’s murder, with one exception: Mr Harvey’s psychological disturbance is rooted in his traumatic childhood rather than in his crimes. Nevertheless, the paper primarily focuses on Susie’s psychology and her experience of double traumas.

In 2020, Shahid Ahmad and Shanthi Nadarajan adopted a stylistic approach in their study, “Thought presentation in Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*.” The researchers employed Leech and Short’s “model of thought presentation” (70). They demonstrated that stylistic techniques such as lexical choice, semantics, and linguistic patterns can reveal both explicit and implicit thought processes in the main characters. While their research focuses on the conscious and subconscious thoughts of Susie and Mr Harvey through a stylistic lens, conversely, this paper is rather a psychological one on Susie’s double traumas.

Hence, Shahid Ahmad worked on a further paper regarding the same novel under the title “A narrative structure analysis of Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*” (2023) to examine the horrors of rape narration. Ahmad applied William Labov’s model and Michael Halliday’s transitivity system. The paper agrees that studying the novel’s structure is important to represent the brutal rape context, but it is not the current study’s focus.

In 2021, Katrin Wehling-Giorgi wrote “Unclaimed stories: Narrating sexual violence and the traumatised self in Elena Ferrante and Alice Sebold’s writings” to connect sexual/domestic violence to the idea of trauma. The researcher used van der Kolk and van der Hart’s traumatic theories to analyse women’s crises, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Giorgi’s paper offers a comparative thematic analysis of sexual violence and trauma in Alice Sebold’s *Lucky* (1999) and *The Lovely Bones* (2002), as well as Elena Ferrante’s *L’amore molesto* (1992) and her *Neapolitan Novels series*—*My Brilliant Friend* (2011), *The Story of a New Name* (2012), *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (2013), and *The Story of the Lost Child* (2014). While the article effectively presents shared themes and narrative strategies across these works, its wide scope in tackling different novels means it does not provide an in-depth analysis of each novel individually.

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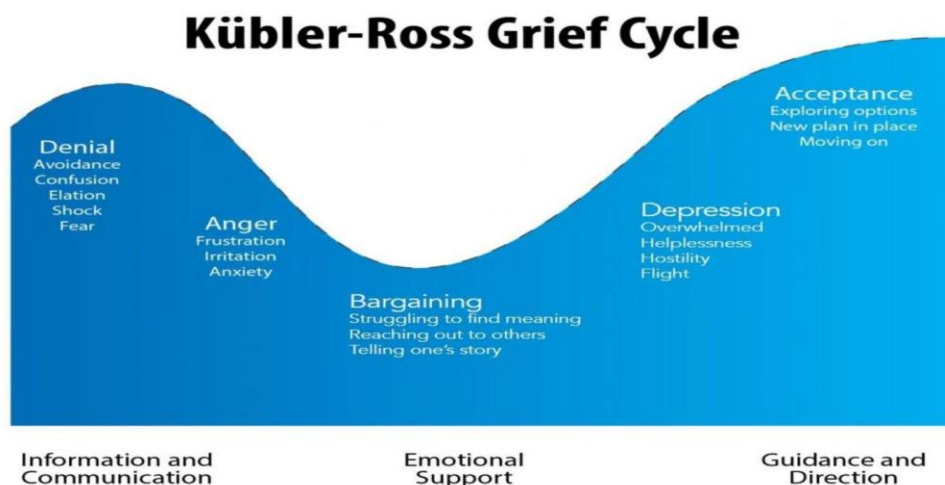
Last but not least, there is a thesis, “Death and dying in adolescent literature,” that was published in 2014 in which the author, Ashley Snoddy, used Kübler-Ross’s model of grief and selected *The Lovely Bones* as a novel among six other adolescent novels: *The Dogs of Babel* (2003), *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), *If I Stay* (2009), *When You Were Here* (2013), *Fall for Anything* (2010), and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012).

The researcher focused on how adolescent novels could help “teachers, counsellors, or parents” (Snobby, 2014, p. iii) cope more effectively with the topics of death in order to better assist the teenagers. The current paper agrees with Snobby’s general aims; yet, it argues that Snobby’s thesis lacks depth, especially in its discussion of *The Lovely Bones*, which is the primary focus of this paper. Snobby dedicates only three pages to this novel, while the present paper aims to provide more thorough thematic analysis of double traumas through a precise application of Kübler-Ross’s model of grief. Furthermore, the thesis claims that the bargain stage does not appear in *The Lovely Bones*; (none of the characters passes this stage) (Snobby, 2014, p. 52). In contrast, this research disputes the opposite, drawing on textual evidence and the defining features of the bargain stage (Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth & Kessler, 2014, p. 17-20). Ultimately, while the thesis seeks to demonstrate the importance of adolescent novels, this paper aims to show the possibility of healing from double traumas when the surrounding environment is supportive.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the gap by analysing *The Lovely Bones* through the lens of Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief, with a focus on the concept of “multiple losses” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 171). For example, when an individual loses both parents in quick succession, they experience double grief. Kübler-Ross’s model of grief suggests that a mourner should process the five stages separately for each loss, as losing a father differs from losing a mother; otherwise, the individual may remain overwhelmed by grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 172). This paper explores how Susie, the protagonist in the novel, passes each stage—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—demonstrating the importance of environmental support in her healing process.

Before proceeding to the next part of this research’s analysis of Susie’s double loss, it would be better to document the diagram created by the licensed counselling psychologist, Marisa M. Tomasic, Ph.D., from the University of Pittsburgh. She organises these five stages into three groups: information and communication, emotional support, and guidance and direction, each with its defence mechanisms

(such as avoidance, frustration, anxiety, irritation, etc.). This classification assists in understanding how the theory functions.



Tomasic, M. M. (2022). "The five stages of grief: An examination of the Kubler-Ross's model."

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## 2. "Drop of Pain": Susie's Five Stages of Grief

The story revolves around a teenage girl named Susie Salmon, who sits in her heaven to write down the story of her rape and murder. She narrates that on a pitch-dark day, while she was returning from school, her neighbour, Mr Harvey, was waiting for her in the cornfield. He had adequately prepared the tools for his crime. He constructs a hole underground to drive the fourteen-year-old Susie's inquisitiveness (Sebold, 2002, p. 9). Mr Harvey succeeds in his endeavour; Susie walks with him to the hole, where he brutally rapes her and eventually murders her mercilessly on December 6, 1973 (Sebold, 2002, p. 5, 12-15). The victim departs Earth (with a capital "E," as she writes it, to show her connection) for heaven.

In light of Susie's violent experience, it is important to recognise that the central character suffers from "multiple losses" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 171)—both rape trauma and murder trauma. According to Kübler-Ross's model, her grief journey unfolds incrementally over five stages, beginning with the final hour of her life and extending into her afterlife. However, Susie's story begins with

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part of her acceptance stage, as she narrates her rape and murder story to Franny, a heavenly counsellor.

Susie tells Franny all the details, starting with the hole. It is small in size, and it has a bench on one side with an odd lamp, shaving cream, and some other details, followed by a complete elaboration of their communication, even how he obliges her to drink the Coca-Cola (Sebold, 2002, pp. 10-11, 186). The shocked teenage girl further presents a nuanced description of the rape and murder scene, immersing the reader in moments, both breathless and brisk, while recounting her painful memories (Sebold, 2002, pp. 12-15). Thus, the paper studies first her response to the Kübler-Ross model of grief over her rape trauma and then her murder trauma.

### **2.1 “Please Don’t”: Susie’s Rape Trauma**

Susie’s confrontation with her rape trauma initiates the five stages of grief, as outlined by Kübler-Ross and Kessler. Susie’s denial works from the outer world through confusion, fear, avoidance, and silence to the inner world, where her unconscious is awakened to move on to another stage of the five stages of grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, pp. 8, 10; Tomasic, 2022). For example, first, Susie is confused, fears Mr Harvey’s strange behaviour, and denies his bad intentions, instead considering him a “loo-loo” (Sebold, 2002, p. 10). This early stage of denial reflects a common adolescent defence mechanism, where acknowledging danger feels too overwhelming, so reality is distorted as a means of psychological self-protection.

Subsequently, the denial takes another form, specifically avoidance. During moments of the rape, Susie mentally escapes to the memories of her family home, imagining her mother checking the clock above the oven and worrying about her lateness. These details serve as coping strategies, assisting her mind in separating from the immediate horror of the assault (Sebold, 2002, pp. 12-13). According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014, p. 10), such mental numbing is common when a victim’s reality becomes intolerable. This situation suggests how denial can serve as an essential—albeit temporary—buffer against trauma.

Grounded back in reality following her imaginative voyage into the past, the narrator viscerally describes her suffering while she begs Mr Harvey to stop. Susie, via a wounded voice, solicits for his mercy, saying, “Please don’t... don’t please.” Annoyed by her pleas, the merciless perpetrator grabs Susie’s hat, “smashing it into my mouth.” Under his grip, Susie’s voice vanishes gradually like a bell ringing weakly when its battery is low, turning eventually silent. Inflicted by the weight of

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the wound, the young girl hears her brisk palpitations, evoking the image of a prey escaping her predator (Sebold, 2002, pp. 13-14). Once more, the poor teenager uses avoidance to go on a journey to the family's dinner time (Sebold, 2002, p. 14).

Awakened by Mr Harvey's sweating drops that are drizzling upon her skin. They conquer her inner world; Susie's pain pushes its extremes. Plagued by the gripping pain, Susie further falls under the brunt of depression, a stage where she turns into a frozen entity—motionless and immovable—as a moment of stasis leaves her figuratively set in stone. She waits quietly for her murderer's knife. Susie lives a life of meaninglessness, reducing herself to that of worms that live in the dirt of the ground (Sebold, 2002, p. 14). She even responds positively to Mr Harvey's wishes to hear her telling him that she loves him (Sebold, 2002, p. 15).

During these moments, Susie realises that both her femininity and innocence are under attack, comparing herself to an "animal dying" (Sebold, 2002, p. 14). She submits to her unfortunate fate (Sebold, 2002, p. 15) and bypasses the anger stage, succumbing instead to depression—a common response when trauma overwhelms a teenage girl. To cope, Susie allows herself a kind of psychological relaxation, a defence mechanism described by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014, p. 21).

Rather than rejecting her pain, Susie seems to invite it to the dinner table to celebrate her ordeal in the depths of the earth, among the insects. This willingness to acknowledge suffering, though horrifying, is a necessary step in her healing journey, marking a profound moment of psychological growth (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, pp. 20–24).

However, once Mr Harvey is done with his crimes—rape and murder. The victim desires to escape that hole and fly to land in an angry stage. The rape and murder trauma left Susie indelibly frustrated (Tomasic, 2022). Deprived of peace even after death, hysterically, Susie cries and pulls her limbs closer to her body (Sebold, 2002, p. 8). Such a gesture suggests that the girl feels a deeper need for her mother's bosom to nestle inside as a token of motherly shield. Instead, she is alone in heaven, hugging herself while Franny, a heavenly counsellor, sits beside her.

Franny is calm and listens quietly to Susie's rage against Mr Harvey's audacity as he shows consolation to Abigail (Susie's mother). Additionally, he pretends that he does not even know Susie's name: "I heard about the horrible, horrible tragedy. What was your daughter's name again? . . . I hope they get the. . . . I am sorry for your loss" (Sebold, 2002, p. 8); such pretension increases Susie's anger. Aware of being raped and murdered, Susie could not have logical communication, and this is quite normal in this stage (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 11). Susie is just

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trying to structure her emotions, to frame them; such feelings provide the mourner with strength that she desperately needs (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 15).

In the case of her murder trauma, the anger stage of the victim indeed precedes her state of denial, as the depression phase prevents her from reacting to her imminent death, which she perpetually craves. Consequently, once the volcano of her rape trauma erupted, the depression stage blew out and inflicted itself on her immediately. Leading the victim to react angrily toward her experience of rape and murder. Continuing with her rape trauma, still, its effect is more substantial; she passes from the anger stage to the bargaining level.

After experiencing a wave of anger, Susie needs rest and a sense of calm. This time it will come not from surrendering to the nothingness of life but from the emotional support that only Franny can provide (Sebold, 2002, p. 18).

Susie, however, is caught in the maelstrom of loneliness and guilt, blaming herself for the rape ordeal that leads to her murder just hours later. As a teenager, she holds herself responsible because she lacked the insight to recognise Mr Harvey's criminal intentions, wondering, "Why didn't I?" (Sebold, 2002, p. 8). The famous "if . . . only" statement proves that Susie is on the right path in her healing journey (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 19). She believes that if she had only noticed his strangeness from the beginning and understood the significance of his weird small round glasses with gold frames—which often culturally signify innocence and intellect (Sebold, 2002, p. 8)—she could have acted differently. Thus, Susie is blaming herself for her inability to understand Mr Harvey's true nature.

Soon then, Susie begins to defend herself through retelling Franny how she resists Mr Harvey, reminding him that she must go home, and even employing manipulative strategies to convince him to let her leave by conforming to his wishes—such as drinking the coke and assuring him that it is a wonderful hole: "I swallowed the rest of my Coke, which was a lot, and said, "I got to go, Mr Harvey." This is a cool place, but I have to go home" (Sebold, 2002, p. 11). She further adds that she constantly pleads with him to stop.

Given her young age and weak body, Susie's sense of resistance gradually weakens. Her perpetrator, who exceeds her in height and weight, eventually overpowers her, making the resistance unequal (Sebold, 2002, p. 14). The act of resistance, in this case, is Susie's attempt to justify her powerlessness against a man, older and stronger. Susie oscillates between blaming and justifying herself, which is a common mechanism at this stage of recovery (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 17-20).

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However, Franny, as a counsellor, tries to assist her: “You did not and that is that. Don’t mull it over. It does no good. You are dead and you have to accept it” (Sebold, 2002, p. 8). Franny’s speech is as sharp as a warrior’s sword; it awakens Susie to her reality that she is not only raped but murdered as well. Thus, bargaining will end with the victim’s consciousness about her inevitable tragic reality (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 20) preparing her for the next stage of grieving, which is depression for the second time; yet this is natural because, according to Kübler-Ross’s model, grieving is not linear, and one may experience a stage several times before arriving at acceptance (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 18).

Sticking to her healing stages from rape trauma, she makes several trips to Earth and watches her family from the gazebo—a place in her afterlife where she can see the living world (Sebold, 2002, p. 34). On one such visit, she accompanies her sister Lindsey to a school camp and witnesses Lindsey’s intimate relationship with her boyfriend, Samuel. She ponders Samuel’s kindness and the way he shields Lindsey from the heavy summer rain, which brings back memories of the cruelty she endured the previous year.

The lonely adolescent is overwhelmed with depression, as she realises she may not have a chance to have a sincere relationship similar to her sister’s. She feels that her heart is filled with scars, while Lindsey’s heart is like a house with big windows where the sunbeams and breezes pour freely and widely: “At fourteen, my sister sailed away from me into a place I’d never been. In the walls of my sex there was horror and blood; in the walls of hers there were windows” (Sebold, 2002, p. 125).

This comparison highlights Susie’s emotional stagnation and her difficulty moving toward acceptance. Susie desperately wants to feel genuine love from a partner of her choice, a kind of love that she is willing to feel without lethal force or violence. Thus, when fate grants her an opportunity to be temporarily reincarnated in Ruth’s body (Sebold uses the liminal embodiment technique) (Sebold, 2002, p. 301), she does not choose to chase Mr Harvey (Sebold, 2002, p. 304) or to be with her family. Instead, she prefers to fulfil her sexual desire to heal her scars from a previous harmful sexual experience (Sebold, 2002, p. 304).

The opportunity to live love again allows Susie to come to terms with herself and almost reach the final stage of grief. Aiming to rewrite her fate and by large her narrative, through the sinew of hope rather than the grip of pain (Tomasic, 2022). She makes her plan to live her short life on Earth with her former school boyfriend, Ray Singh (Sebold, 2002, p. 13). Susie decides to live the real emotions of love, telling Ray that she wants to explore the Earth with him (Sebold, 2002, p. 305). she

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enjoys the sunshine as if this is the first time she notices, and she willingly responds to Ray's desires (Sebold, 2002, p. 304). She feels Ray's tenderness; moreover, she declares her feelings to him: "When you kiss me I see heaven" (Sebold, 2002, p. 304). Hence, throughout their communication, Ray figures out that she is not Ruth but Susie in Ruth's body, and he performs gently to Susie's wish to spend some private time together (Sebold, 2002, p. 306-8). She lies on his chest and sleeps beside him (Sebold, 2002, p. 309). That night, she deeply sleeps as she has a real man protecting her.

However, the time rings the end of her living experience again. Interestingly, this time, when she looks at the couple Ruth and Ray from the gazebo, she is content, not like the previous time when she felt jealous of their friendship (Sebold, 2002, p. 81) or when she sees Lindsey and Samuel. Susie finally achieves an acceptance level after living pleasant moments with Ray.

The teenage girl returns to her heaven easily (Sebold, 2002, p. 311) after experiencing real emotions with a man of her choice, as she refers to him as a gentleman who wants her to stay with him forever (Sebold, 2002, p. 308-9). She no longer considers herself an animal dying. Instead, she is Susie: "My name is Susie" (Sebold, 2002, p. 309)—the innocent girl whose boyfriend can recognise her spiritually even though she is in another body, Ruth's. Thus, Susie's rape trauma acceptance is her belief that she deserves to live real love and not to surrender to harrowing memories that she experienced with Mr. Harvey, providing her with a sense of stillness (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 25).

## **2.2 "Wide Wide Heaven": Susie's Murder Trauma**

Susie's rape trauma is parallel to her death trauma; while she is still alive, she understands that Mr Harvey is going to kill her, so yelling is useless. She knows that the end is coming; she can neither deny it nor resist it (Sebold, 2002, p. 14-15). This is attributed to the fact that during her rape, she lives two other stages of grief, notably denial and depression. Accordingly, Susie is constrained by time, feeling unable to fully react to her impending death.

Susie describes herself as "an animal dying" (Sebold, 2002, p. 14), a metaphor that underscores the extremity and dehumanising nature of her trauma. Notably, the miserable teenager reaches the apex of depression as a result of the violent event of rape, which is immediately compounded by her murder. This sequence of traumas positions Susie in a unique psychological state: she must grieve not only the loss of her future but also the loss of her life while she is still aware of it unfolding.

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As a result, her attempt to heal from her murder trauma is filled with profound sadness, since she cannot fully comprehend the reality of her death or the fact that she no longer exists as a girl, daughter, or sister. This situation illustrates the complexity and duration of her emotional response. Yet, such a reaction is considered normal according to Kübler-Ross and Kessler's analysis of the five stages of grief (2014, p. 18).

Consequently, Susie's reaction to her murder trauma begins once she inhabits heaven, starting with the denial stage. She refuses the outer world's reality physically and graphically, displaying mental avoidance and elation (Tomasic, 2022). For instance, she projects her longing for her family onto her dog, Holiday (Sebold, 2002, p. 26–27), rather than confronting her grief directly. This form of displacement is characteristic of psychological numbness, which Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014, p. 8) identify as a common immediate response among trauma victims.

Additionally, Susie attempts physical denial in two ways. First, she runs as fast as she can to escape the painful memories of her violent experience she went through, mainly clear in Mr Harvey's criminal personality. Second, she struggles to perceive the afterlife, demonstrated by her attempt to connect with Ruth's body through a liminal embodiment technique (Sebold, 2002, p. 37). It is as if she wants to remain connected to Earth in any possible way; Susie is trying to convince herself that she is still alive, though she knows this is not true, but she denies it (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 9).

This physical denial serves as a defence mechanism against her fear of Mr Harvey and his knife, as well as her trepidation about leaving the Earth, a place where she seeks endless connection. For instance, she celebrates with her heavenly roommate Holly when her father feels her presence: "I think Susie watches me" (Sebold, 2002, p. 59). To Susie, this statement seems to prove her physical existence, as if it confirms she is merely experiencing a nightmare and is not truly dead (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 9).

Beyond physical denial, Susie demonstrates graphical denial by writing "Earth" with a capital "E" and "heaven" with a lowercase "h" (Sebold, 2002, p. 16), signalling her rejection of her new reality. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014, p. 9), whenever the victim begins to accept her reality, she often adopts a new mechanism to sustain her numbness. Thus, Susie reverts to physical denial, albeit in a different form. This resistance underscores the importance of acknowledging and working through denial as a necessary step towards eventual healing.

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Ultimately, Susie cannot escape the truth; she attempts to numb herself by referring to herself as “a blue line” living “Inbetween,” between the sky and the ground (Sebold, 2002, p. 34). In these moments, she desperately wants Franny to assure her that she is right—that she is not dead. Such mechanisms are common in this stage of Kübler-Ross's grief model: the individual longs to hear from others that their suffering is unreal, that it is only a dream. She simply cannot accept the truth (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 8-9). As usual, Franny gently but firmly confirmed Susie's death. In response, Susie's pain seeps into her unconscious and manifests as waves of anger.

As a matter of fact, Susie's anger is directed not only at her killer but also at God, the police, her neighbours, her father, and even heaven itself. She rages against Mr Harvey as he puts an end to all her dreams to be a worldwide photographer (Sebold, 2002, p. 42), to experience love with a real man, and to earn an “Oscar for Best Actress” (Sebold, 2002, p. 6-7). Mr Harvey deprives her of all her wishes to grow up and live her life like any other girl.

Next, she is angry at God, though it is implicit in the novel; it is manifested in two ways. First, through her desire to see Mr Harvey dead and herself alive, which is only related to God's ability (Sebold, 2002, p. 20). Second, the *Are You There God? It is Me Margaret's* story (Sebold, 2002, p. 32) that she reads once on Earth as if questioning God's justice (as if she is trying to say, “Are you there, God?”). It is me, the innocent victim, Susie. By the way, such anger is normal, as it is evident in the five stages of grief theory (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, pp. 13-15).

After that, the teenage girl's anger reaches her old neighbours and police detectives on three levels. Initially, none of them noticed the blood leaking from Mr Harvey's sack (Sebold, 2002, p. 50). Second, they accuse her boyfriend, Ray Singh, of being involved in Susie's disappearance. However, two days after her death, the police find Susie's notebook containing a love note from Ray, written on the same day she was murdered (Sebold, 2002, pp. 25–26). She is angry at their aggression toward the innocent Ray, while the real criminal remains free, celebrating his success by eating apple pie and drinking coffee (Sebold, 2002, p. 51).

Last but not least, she is frustrated at the low security on both levels: legally and socially. The second piece of evidence the police found is *To Kill a Mockingbird* and then *Othello*, both feminist texts, to indicate that women are killed without any accurate provision by the legal system when she says, “In those days there was no security in the suburbs” (Sebold, 2002, p. 53). Additionally, the community's low awareness of recognising unusual personalities leads them to

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view Mr. Harvey merely as an “odd man” (Sebold, 2002, p. 55). In addition, she feels irritated when she sees her father helping Mr Harvey build the bridal tent for Christmas (Sebold, 2002, p. 55). Moreover, she is frustrated that Mr Harvey attends her memorial; she feels offensive in herself (Sebold, 2002, p. 112).

However, Susie's anger shifts from emotional rage against others to a practical and harmful reaction when she destroys the spider web using her heavenly power, which is motivated by her longing for her mother (Sebold, 2002, p. 41). In fact, Susie is frustrated at her physical situation in heaven because she feels that she does not fit there. She wants to be on Earth (Sebold, 2002, p. 119); she hates heaven, as she replies with a definite “No” to Holly's question, “Do you like it here?” (Sebold, 2002, p. 18).

Meanwhile, the coldness in Mr Harvey's waggon (where Susie's corpse is) freezes her, making her easily breakable into pieces (Sebold, 2002, p. 51). She feels extensive pain, which is quite normal in the angry stage (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 15). No more; she can structure her sadness and rage, particularly when she sees the reflection of herself in the smashed ships in bottles that Susie and her father used to build before her death (Sebold, 2002, p. 46). Such a view impels the emotions that she can feel, that she did love, and that she has lost (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 16).

Bombarded by a tsunami of anger, Susie feels exhausted and needs emotional support, which is available during the bargaining stage. The bargaining stage begins with Susie blaming herself for her naiveté in comprehending that she did not tell Mr Harvey her name, which leaves her wondering how he could call her by it? This contemplative moment exacerbates her sense of remorse, wishing she understood the lesson earlier (Sebold, 2002, p. 7). At the same time, she mentions telling Mr Harvey that her mother wants her to be home before dark (Sebold, 2002, p. 7), which suggests that she is both blaming and excusing herself. Such mechanisms are used by victims to relieve themselves from the guilt they sense (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 17).

Then, she moves on to negotiate with Franny to learn more about Earth (Sebold, 2002, p. 19). She wishes that if only she could go into Buckley's (her little brother) picture on the refrigerator and come back again to life, but it is impossible, or to live life through her sister Lindsey. Both scenarios are impossible, so she feels jealous of her sister, as she could live her whole life, whereas no one could even hear her (Sebold, 2002, pp. 32, 34).

Soon after, the bargain stage takes a different direction. It first manifests through Susie's decision to help her family as an attempt to change their lives for

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the better (Sebold, 2002, p. 19). For instance, she carefully watches her mother's steps for fear of slipping on the shore of the Pacific Ocean in California (Sebold, 2002, pp. 221-2), or when she scans the old Victorian house for Lindsey and Samuel, especially when they use it as a shield from the heavy rain on their way home after graduation from university (Sebold, 2002, p. 235). In another situation, the helpless victim tries to assist Lindsey in finding clues about Susie's murder at Mr Harvey's house (Sebold, 2002, p. 178). However, neither Abigail, Lindsey, nor Samuel is conscious of her presence, and she fails in all her ambitions to be an influential member on Earth.

However, Susie remains in the bargaining stage, feeling grateful that Lindsey is safe at Mr Harvey's house, since losing her on Earth would also mean losing Susie's chance to experience life (Sebold, 2002, p. 185). To elaborate, Susie perceives Lindsey's relationship with Samuel Heckler as a source of vitality: "I saw Lindsey move toward Samuel Heckler, she kissed him; it was glorious. I was almost alive again" (Sebold, 2002, p. 71).

Furthermore, she negotiates the power of memory she has from her childhood and those she creates over years of watching. Those memories no one can take from her, not even death itself (Sebold, 2002, p. 231). Sadly, however, Susie grows weary of watching and describes herself as "fruitless" (Sebold, 2002, p. 246). Consequently, she moves along the train of the five stages of grief to the next station: depression.

To sum up, Susie experiences the bargaining stage through employing various emotions and strategies to calm herself and reduce her feelings of guilt. She shifts from blaming herself to adopting a defensive stance, then attempts to live vicariously through her sister; afterwards, she plans to become a fruitful member on Earth. Eventually, she wakes up to the same sad truth: she is dead, and she is a "fruitless" character to her family (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 20).

Susie's efforts to achieve justice fail, and she loses hope. Whereas Mr Harvey, who knows how to manipulate police officers, successfully evades legal accountability (Sebold, 2002, p. 194). She observes her close friend Clarissa "spinning away from her" toward happiness with Brain (Sebold, 2002, p. 40), and she notices her peers growing up and enrolling in university while everyone works on fulfilling their dreams (Sebold, 2002, p. 225). She cannot even enjoy the snowfall moments with her family as she used to in the past (Sebold, 2002, p. 57). Susie eventually realizes that her memory is prone to forgetting, for fewer and fewer attend her memorial anniversary.

Ultimately, her story transforms into a haunting and poignant tale that lingers in the minds of young girls, warning them that wolves are often hidden in sheep's clothing (Sebold, 2002, p. 224). Her depression increases as she acknowledges that she cannot experience any real dreams; instead, she is always there with her depressed father:

*Years passed. The trees in our yard grew taller. I watched my family and my friends and neighbors, the teachers whom I'd had or imagined having, the high school I had dreamed about. As I sat in the gazebo I would pretend instead that I was sitting on the topmost branch of the maple under which my brother had swallowed a stick and still played hide-and-seek with Nate, or I would perch on the railing of a stairwell in New York and wait for Ruth to pass near. I would study with Ray. Drive the Pacific Coast Highway on a warm afternoon of salty air with my mother. But I would end each day with my father in his den. (Sebold, 2002, pp. 230)*

By means of comparison, Susie looks back at her sister, or “when they were sisters” (Sebold, 2002, p. 180). Lindsey is now twenty-one years old, while she is stuck at fourteen (Sebold, 2002, pp. 232-3). Lindsey adds “happy graduation” wishes from Samuel to her memory, whereas she has only childhood memories (Sebold, 2002, p. 234). Consequently, she is overwhelmed with depression as she finds herself doing nothing valuable on the Earth, where she once thought she belonged.

Therefore, caught in the vortex of void, Susie desperately bargains to keep her father by her side forever after he is transported to the hospital due to a severe heart attack. Susie's desire conflicts with her living sister's desire to have their father all to herself. As Susie says, “Die for me/don't die for me, die for me/don't die for me” (Sebold, 2002, p. 258). Then, she hears her brother's whisper pleading to her, “Please, Susie, don't let Daddy die . . . I need him” (Sebold, 2002, p. 260).

Susie feels anxious due to the emptiness (Tomasic, 2022) of her reality and the inner struggle between her desire to have her father and her siblings' need for him. She retreats to her heaven to find her grandfather with the same past smiling; they talk and dance together in the timelessness of heaven. Susie remembers his past advice that sometimes it is customary to cry for someone she misses (Sebold, 2002, p. 259). According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, tears are an influential

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mechanism in releasing sadness and depression that Susie needs in this stage (2014, p. 42). Eventually, he assures her that they will meet again. Susie's grandfather's presence encourages her to embrace her depression kindly.

In addition to her grandfather, Franny provides her with a heaven map and introduces her to Flora Hernandez, the youngest of Mr Harvey's victims. They share their stories, and as Susie begins to cry, all of Mr Harvey's victims soon gather around her. Susie feels comforted. Here, Mr Harvey's victims serve as a bereavement group in which Susie's tears and recalling her story to those who share the same agony (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 63). Susie becomes able to witness her pain as her "heart and mind rejoined in one state of pain" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, p. 63). Telling the story helps Susie rebuild and recreate the structure of her world, as each time she shares her story, she experiences a change, saying, "Each time I told my story, I lost a bit, the smallest drop of pain" (Sebold, 2002, p. 186). As a result, Susie makes significant progress in her healing journey.

However, Susie returns to the hospital and sees her family leaving together with daffodils (Sebold, 2002, p. 313). This moment leads her to the painful realization that she is dead and transforms into a daffodil—a symbol of purity that suggests rape does not diminish her reality as an innocent girl. As a result, she emerges from the stage of depression; she achieves a sense of selfhood, girlhood, and femininity, largely due to her relationship with Ray, which ultimately enables her to work through the trauma of her murder.

Finally, Susie accepts the challenge of solving the puzzle and putting each piece in its correct place. What was once impossible for her, now she plans to work on it. The puzzle is Franny's advice:

*If you stop asking why you were killed instead of someone else, stop investigating the vacuum left by your loss, stop wondering what everyone left on Earth is feeling," she said, "you can be free. Simply put, you have to give up on Earth. (Sebold, 2002, p. 120)*

Achieving a sense of guidance and orientation (Tomasic, 2022), Susie aims to understand the reality of her situation in five different ways. First, she is no longer obsessed with avenging Mr Harvey. Second, as her self-awareness grows, she becomes able to comprehend both her needs and those of her family, particularly regarding love. The family's unconditional compassion serves as a tribute to their unwavering devotion to her—a promise that her memory will remain

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permanently inscribed in their thoughts. This is evident in her mother's words, "I love you Susie" (Sebold, 2002, p. 317), which makes the teenage victim feel peace.

So, this time, she wants them to be there for themselves, not for her. She consents to be the daffodils in the vase (Sebold, 2002, p. 280). Susie eventually accepts her physical transition from a solid body into a spiritually beautiful flower—a daffodil—and into comfortable memories (Sebold, 2002, p. 327), leading to further acceptance. She acknowledges that her body on Earth has decayed so she may flourish in the afterworld as a lovely soul, free from worries (Sebold, 2002, pp. 320, 325).

Thus, she leaves her family "in one room" while the daffodils in the corner provide fresh oxygen to go where she belongs: to heaven (Sebold, 2002, p. 321). Thirdly, she accepts her need occasionally to visit Earth because living people also need the dead. Susie says, "If I'm to be honest with you, I still sneak away to watch my family sometimes. I can't help it, and sometimes they still think of me. They can't help it" (Sebold, 2002, p. 323). According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, acceptance does not necessarily mean that the victim is going to forget the loved ones; instead, it is about accepting the reality (2014, p. 25).

Fourthly, she begins to write Heaven with the capital letter "H," indicating that heaven will be her eternal home while emphasizing that her fourteen years on Earth cannot be rejected (Sebold, 2002, p. 325). Finally, Susie plans to explore Heaven with her new community members; she begins to call it "wide wide heaven" (Sebold, 2002, p. 325). So that Susie learns to keep her family in her heart and to make new friendships (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, pp. 25, 28).

Interestingly, she makes some tours to Earth, but not to watch others; instead, she uses her heavenly power to explore what living people cannot, to enjoy precious moments with her grandfather. During one of these visits, she comes close to Mr Harvey's new intention to rape and kill another teenage girl. Fortunately, he is hit by an icicle and loses his balance to fall dead (Sebold, 2002, pp. 326-7). When Susie stops thinking about revenge, God's justice manifests in a way that pleases her and fulfills Susie's wish to kill Mr Harvey with an icicle (Sebold, 2002, p. 125). One could imagine Susie returning to Heaven to celebrate Mr Harvey's demise with the other victims.

## Conclusion

The paper has come out that Susie, the female victim and protagonist in *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, successfully navigated her rape trauma over nearly nine years while also recovering from her murder trauma through the application of

Kübler-Ross's model of grief. As a teenage girl, it is difficult for her to depart from her family in that brutal way, so the denial stage is the longest as she denies her reality, physically and graphically.

However, her family's love and ambition to trace Mr Harvey, along with the genuine affection of her boyfriend, Ray, play a vital role in her healing progress. They symbolise the green spots in her double trauma recovery journey, helping her to accept her existence as daffodils on Earth and as a lovely soul inhabiting Heaven.

Finally, *The Lovely Bones* is a story of many girls all around the world who have been raped and murdered due to the failings of the security authorities and the inadequacy of the laws regarding such cases. In addition to the limitations of social organisations in increasing social awareness among people, if Susie's father had not dealt with Mr Harvey as "loo-loo," Susie would have had a different fate.

This analysis exemplifies how literature can illuminate the psychological dimensions of trauma, thereby offering insights into the therapeutic benefits derived from communal and emotional backing. These findings underscore the significance of integrating psychological perspectives within literary scholarship to facilitate a more profound comprehension of both the anguish and the fortitude exhibited by those who have endured trauma. Consequently, this investigation advocates for further research into specific support systems designed for survivors.

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## صدّات سوزي المزدوجة: دراسة نفسية في رواية العظام الجميلة لأليس سيبولد

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### المستخلص

تُرَكِّز هذه الورقة البحثية الموسومة "صدّات سوزي المزدوجة: دراسة نفسية في رواية العظام الجميلة لأليس سيبولد" على مشكلة عالمية متكررة، ألا وهي الاغتصاب وصدمة الاغتصاب، وقد كتبت الكاتبة الأمريكية أليس سيبولد - التي عانت نفسها من هذه الصدمة- رواية *العظام الجميلة* عام ٢٠٠٢ لمناقشة هذه المعضلة تحديداً، فقد عاشت سوزي، بطلة الرواية البالغة من العمر أربعة عشر عاماً بسعادة مع عائلتها قبل

ذلك اليوم العصيب الذي قام فيه السيد هارفي بغزو جسدها وقتلها هرباً من العواقب القانونية؛ لذلك ومن خلال تطبيق المنهج النفسي الاستنتاجي النوعي، وعلى وجه التحديد منهج كويلر-روس "مراحل الحزن الخمس"، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن سوزي عانت من صدمتين مزدوجتين: صدمة الاغتصاب وصدمة القتل، ولحسن الحظ، تجتازهما كليهما بنجاح، و بشكل منفصل بفضل حب عائلتها من الأرض ودعم رفاقها في السماء، مما يُبرز أهمية الدعم العاطفي لضحايا الاغتصاب خلال رحلة الشفاء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العظام الجميلة، سوزي، صدمات مزدوجة، المنهج النفسي، أليس سيبولد.