

Margaret's recovery way in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*: father death and writing opportunity

Cara pemulihan Margaret di "Last Summer with Maizon" karya Jacqueline Woodson: kematian ayah dan peluang menulis

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Abstract

The study represents Margaret's struggle to overcome the experience of grief in *Last Summer with Maizon* by Jacqueline Woodson. The study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to reveal the true meaning of the experience of grief, conveying a new interpretation of Margaret's life, which is a way of recovering herself from grief. This approach also conducted the process of subjectivity by developing the quality of themes regarding Margaret's grief struggle using the five phases of thematic analysis. The results of this study consist of discoveries and critical analysis regarding the issue of Margaret's grief experience, which develops a sure way to get through it. The research findings section describes the initial signs leading up to the experience of grief faced by Margaret. Meanwhile, the critical analysis section describes the struggle to continue living without Margaret's loved ones, the struggle to find a way to write creatively to express her grief, and unexpected happy experiences when Margaret uses writing as proof that she has overcome grief with all her might.

Abstrak

Studi ini merepresentasikan cara berjuang Margaret dalam mengatasi pengalaman duka di *Last Summer with Maizon* karya Jacqueline Woodson. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi kualitatif untuk mengungkapkan makna sebenarnya dari pengalaman duka dan menyampaikan interpretasi baru bagi kehidupan Margaret, yang mana sebagai cara penyembuhan diri dari duka. Pendekatan tersebut juga melakukan proses subjektivitas untuk mengembangkan kualitas tema perjuangan duka Margaret dengan lima fase analisis tematik. Hasil studi ini terdiri dari penemuan dan analisis kritis mengenai isu pengalaman duka Margaret yang membangun cara tertentu untuk melewati itu. Pada bagian temuan penelitian menggambarkan pertanda awal sampai terjadinya pengalaman duka dihadapi oleh Margaret. Sedangkan, bagian analisis kritis menggambarkan perjuangan melanjutkan hidup tanpa orang tercinta Margaret, perjuangan menemukan jalan menulis kreatif terhadap pengungkapan dukanya, dan juga pengalaman-pengalaman bahagia yang tak terduga ketika Margaret menjadikan menulis sebagai bukti dia telah melewati duka dengan sekuat tenaga.

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A. Introduction

Grief is an absolute experience that occurs in everyone's life. Characteristics of grief were quickly recognized by reacting to the signs of grief that a person would face, especially someone who takes care of monitors their loved ones, who have various severe illnesses (Fee et al., 2023; Najafi et al., 2022; Rini & Loriz, 2007). The reaction conveys the portrayal of grief, and its contents may appear before the actual death event. This allows someone to feel the difference between the hustle and bustle of two different meanings of life. A person and their loved ones who before passed away would share love, affection, smiles, and warmth; the reaction turned significantly when the news of the death of someone who loved was in front of the person and his surroundings. The changes in a person's reaction represent that grief cannot be controlled, when nature may have determined the exact fate of when someone would receive sorrow.

Physical changes can be called the actual change of part of life by a bereaved person, which various reactions occurring when facing grief. Someone might feel unwell or sick, have breathlessness, and have declining immunity (Lander, 2020; Pritchard, 2018). When someone faces grief, this sign of physical changes is more accessible to recognize by oneself and others. Grief might feel just after a profound loss; someone may feel empty, anxious, and numb as if they were in shock (ESYPR, 2023). Prolonged grief may occur through the intense stress of separation, constant preoccupation with the person who has died, and difficulty accepting the death (Cesur-Soysal & Durak-Batigün, 2022). Someone who faces the experience of grief does not avoid mental shock, and it can be mild or severe. So, someone may try to control their mental and physical state. Changes in behavior can include changes in a person's life in the grief experience. Whether the child or adult is still grieving, it might affect the decline in academic performance in the form of low assignment grades and low performance at school (Bistricean & Shea, 2021; Elsner et al., 2022). It means that the academic abilities of someone who faced grief become concerned with the experience, which is still in their minds. From several parts of life that change due to the experience of grief, a person must determine one or more ways to deal with grief- aiming to ensure that life changes do not worsen and are remedied.

Bereaved person would find ways around areas of life as alternative forms of dealing with grief. The family field was the primary way to find a warm embrace in sorrow. The closest people to a bereaved person were siblings, cousins, aunts, and others family members; surviving parents were the closest way to bereaved person, especially the children category (Apelian & Nesteruk, 2017). It means that by being with the closest family, a bereaved person would find peace and wise contact in accepting the reality of grief. The family field did not have come from one just one blood and one surname but also from friendships and relatives. The bereaved person shared emotions and memories with relatives and friends, like happiness or sadness, before someone they loved died. The attitude is deserved for a bereaved person who finds it challenging to express themselves directly in front of family members, while in a period of mourning. The friends and relatives would understand what they feel inside and give space to the bereaved person. In this way, the role of relatives can be a solution that helps the person survive their grief. The field of art was a possibly way for bereaved person to deal with grief. The field has many types that can be chosen, such as expressing grief through music using script writing, drumming, etc.; drawing, and painting (Art Creativity, 2020; Stephens, 2013). The field of art can relax the burden of bereaved people to express feelings of longing, unstable emotions, and so on to someone they love through the media provided by each field of art. Thus, the bereaved person might feel relieved to deal with it, like something makes new things in the bereaved person's life.

The importance of writing was new as small way that could overcome someone's experience of grief. Writing is an activity that allows someone to express and voice the content of their thought, and various feeling through writing about things they have experienced (Firdaus & Sukmawan, 2022; Himang et al., 2019, p. 96). This activity recreates a role in lightening and reducing the burden of thoughts and feelings that influence the person's emotions. Writing activities can also help bereaved people overcome their grief. This way can encourage grieving people to convey the ranges of their grief experience, resulting in writing as a form of therapy to reduce the pressure of grief. Writing can also help grieving people increase their emotional intelligence—the ability to understand feelings in oneself and others and control emotions as best as possible (Dilah & Zahro', 2021). Emotional intelligence can provide a good role for many people, especially when facing grief. Understanding one's feelings acquired from the experience of grief and the impact on the people around them, if gloomy emotions drown them, will make the grieving person learn to control these turbulent feelings and emotions.

In addition, a bereaved person who applies writing as a way of dealing with grief could express feelings and actions during the grief in expressive writing, as well as writing everything that the newest communication to someone who has left through writing letters or also writing new events that help the grief be resolved narrative writing (Mathew, 2023; Savitri et al., 2019). These various forms of writing can be constructed to reduce the feeling of pressure from the grief experience. Some inspiring experiences from a

bereaved person who uses writing become an alternate way to continue their lives by dealing with grief. Woodhouse, a Halifax musician, experienced grief when his father died of cancer, which is to continue the memories of his father and Woodhouse's daily life through the lyrics of his song entitled *Lost Soul Rodeo* (Woodhouse, 2023). An American writer in the latest memoir, *A Living Remedy*, Nicole Chung, faced the same experience by writing about her parents' deaths in the chapters of the book to deal with the experience (Al-Waheidi, 2023). Abigail Mack, the Harvard awardee from Cardinal Spellman High School in Brockton, experienced the life struggle of her mother's death as her essay inspiration and became the way to deal with the grief that acquired to Harvard Scholarship (Gavin, 2023). However, they convinced these people that conveying their grief by writing would open up new opportunities without their loved ones. In this way, the grief experiences expressed in these people's writings can be successfully overcome by opening new smiles to successful activities.

The most crucial previous study to obtain the gap in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon* is not being interested in time the last five years. Schafer (1998) critically analyses the educational expectations experienced by African-American Characters in selected literary works. It consists of Jacqueline Woodson's trilogy of novels entitled *Last Summer with Maizon*, *Maizon at the Blue Hill*, and *Between Madison and Palmetto*; Emily Moore's novels *Something to Count On* and *Whose Side are You On*; and other selected literary works in the study. The results of this study illustrate how specific characters from the selected literary works struggle to realize their family's expectations and hopes for a successful education, both as scholarship recipients and the best future student candidates at a higher level of education. However, the characters survive their self-concept and identity amidst the racism of the black race by white students, competition for intelligence abilities, and the accuracy of students' competence from teachers. Through the explanation of the critical analysis in this previous study, one of the trilogy novels, Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*, was taken through Maizon regarding the struggle for the quality of education in this analysis. Thus, Maizon experienced an identity struggle to show African-American intelligence and character amidst the quality of education, which could have been more idealistic for the characters with different skin colors.

This study found a similarity with Schafer's (1998) study, which presented a critical analysis of the research object in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. The previous study presented the main character, Maizon, as an African-American character who experienced issues regarding the quality of education that were not ideal in the novel. Therefore, this study found an analysis issue by emphasizing the main character Margaret, Maizon's best friend, facing the issue of experiencing grief from the death of her father due to a heart attack in the novel.

This study uses the Phenomenology theory to analyze Margaret's issue, which is a specific experience by Margaret that brought her profound sorrow and everything that slowly changed without the presence of her father. The experience of grief is one of the natural experiences that occur in human life, which requires each person to understand what happens when facing specific experiences without controlling or making assumptions. Phenomenology is defined by Husserl "For surely, I can get clear on the essence of knowledge when I see it for myself, and when it is itself given to me, just as it is, in "seeing". I must study knowledge inunantly, through a pure seeing, within the pure phenomenon, within "pure consciousness"" (Husserl, 1999, p. 36). This theory explains that phenomena and experiences that occur around humans are like science. With learning, natural understanding, and awareness, a person would know the essence of knowledge. Likewise, natural phenomena and experiences occur in the world, such as accidents, death, natural-social disasters, and so on, where someone who faces them sees what is obtained and what is received purely from that event. So that everyone will realize that an event cannot controlled when it should happen and make assumptions. Each person will also have the self-awareness to take a broad view of the experiences they have faced to continue other life activities.

This theory can convey the central issue in this study through Margaret's grief experience, a natural phenomenon depicted in realistic fiction work. This phenomenon represents how situations and conditions originate purely from minor to severe factors from the moment of grief and sadness itself. Thus, this study emphasizes how Margaret survived grief, both signs of grief from the development of a loved one's illness to the phase of accepting the loss, through the strategies she determined to reduce the pressure of grief and healing to let go of longing.

B. Method

This study uses Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). This approach is a systematic and methodologically controlled scientific analysis of text, pictures, films, and other communication contents (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). QCA intended to balance controlling the interpretation of research analysis in written and audio-visual texts. QCA approach could applied to literary research to complete objectives by

identifying, interpreting, and explaining the correlation between specific topics presented in the content of the text and intrinsic elements of literature, which may be related to phenomena occurring in the world, both in individuals, social community, and the natural environment. Through this study, the implementation of the QCA approach can be represented through certain characters from the numerous characters in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. Then, QCA can also use other intrinsic elements, such as describing the characteristics of characters when facing an event, which can influence their feelings, actions, and way of thinking, as well as elements of dialogue between characters.

This study contained how the data conveyed the main issue. Data collection could cover how to get through grief by Margaret in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. The frequent reading technique was a step in obtaining data collection, which would obtain an in-depth understanding of Margaret's specific experience, which was the primary analysis issue in this study. The taking-a-note technique was the most crucial in supporting data collection that presents how the part of grief would influence Margaret's actions, deeds, and feelings.

Meanwhile, this study analyzed the data from the thematic analysis. The method has one of the advantages of being easy to access and implement to obtain qualitative analysis data, especially for novice researchers. Thematic analysis is an activity on how a data set based on previous data collections would develop depth of the interpretation and analysis regarding subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The thematic analysis involves the researchers situated by feeling and experiencing the specific phenomenon. The researchers can apply the five thematic analyses from Braun and Clarke. The first stage is familiarization. The second stage is carrying out general and advanced coding. The third stage is to develop and review the themes that have been obtained from quality themes related to the research issue. The fourth stage is defining and naming the theme. The fifth stage is an analysis writing activity.

The applications of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2022) in this study could start with the first stage, in which the researcher observed Margaret's experience of grief in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon* as a pure phenomenon, which is presented of Husserl (1999) phenomenology. Either Margaret, a fictional novel character, or someone in real life could not control or avoid specific experiences of grief. Subjective in nature, the researchers could obtain how the depiction of grief, both general and specific criteria for the death of a loved one, can also be depicted in the depiction of Margaret's life in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. The second stage of the thematic analysis is a coding activity that may be close to semantics, in which the natural meaning of sadness from Margaret's grief experience can be through signs that the death of a loved one would appear in her life. The third phase of the thematic analysis could deliver Margaret's grief experience as having a different meaning, concentrating on a positive meaning for Margaret's self-development. The fourth stage, defining and naming the theme that presented the two meanings of Margaret's depiction of grief, might provide a view through which grief became a valuable purpose for people recovering from loss. The fifth stage is writing the analysis. This phase would analyze sequentially before and after Margaret's grief struggle, exploring specific skills and reaching a new life after mourning in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*.

C. Results and Discussion

This study will be broken down into two sections. The findings can start from the representation of small to prominent characteristics that purely occur from an experience of grief in Margaret's life in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. Characteristics are small and easy to spot through Margaret's patient and assertive behavior. Meanwhile, the characteristics are significant when Margaret's life becomes gloomy, and everything around her becomes sad.

1. Margaret's Witnessing of Father's Illness

Monitoring a patient's illness was an essential experience for the patient's family to discover the extent to which the patient's illness is embedded in the patient's body. Margaret consciously faced this situation through control activities repeatedly carried out by Margaret's father at the hospital. It is proven in the quote below.

Just some tests, he said softly, sitting down beside her on the window ledge (Woodson, 1991, p. 10).
They've gone to the hospital for tests (Woodson, 1991, p. 15).

The quote above tells that several tests at the hospital carried out by her father resulted from Margaret's supervision as the child or close family member of her father - the patient. It means that Margaret could observe the progress of her father's disease by characterizing it as a test visit, which means that the disease suffered by Margaret's father will continue to grow in his body. In addition, the experience of reviewing Margaret's father's illness can be described through physical changes as a result of the development of the illness. It is proven in the quote below.

She remembered her father's dark, handsome face looking shriveled and old beneath the hospital covers (Woodson, 1991, p. 11).

He looks skinnier too (Woodson, 1991, p. 15).

Daddy! He had another heart attack (Woodson, 1991, p. 27).

The quote above tells that the monitoring of his father's disease can be seen from how the decreased physical changes have occurred before and recurred, such as the skin appearing thin after his father underwent tests. It means that Margaret's experience dealing with the development of her father's disease was something she had never experienced before seeing her father struggle with it. However, Margaret faced the experience swiftly when other symptoms spread to her father's body from a heart attack. In this way, Margaret could try to survive when her father's illness declined.

2. Margaret's Experience of Grief

The request to accompany a loved one lying in the hospital is the most challenging experience for the patient's family. That is because each family member can feel the signs that grief for their loved one will appear in front of them. Margaret found the same thing when Margaret was able to convince herself that the signs of grief were getting more precise. It is proven in the quote below:

I wanted you to see him before he died, Margaret

Please, Mama, ... Margaret begged, holding on to her mother's sleeves. Tell me he didn't die, Mamam, please! (Woodson, 1991, p. 30).

The quote above describes her mother's request to Margaret to see her father, who was struggling with illness. This request can be said to be a challenging experience for Margaret. It can be caused that the experience of her father lying in bed could be said to be Margaret's last request to exchange greetings with her father, which might mean that Margaret's father would left in the world. Thus, Margaret's experience through the request to accompany her father emphasizes how the experience of grief appeared in Margaret's life suddenly so that it could be accepted with grace. Additionally, announcing the sad news of the death of a loved one is the most challenging experience for a bereaved person to face. This grief experience made Margaret sad, shocked, and full of tears. It is proven in the quote below.

She pressed her face against his crib. Daddy died today, she said again. He's not coming home (Woodson, 1991, p. 32).

The quote above describes that the news of her father's death changed Margaret's world with the most profound sadness and loss. It meant that this experience was part of the experience of grief for Margaret and her small family. Thus, the sad news Margaret faces influence how she might still have difficulty accepting her father's passing. On the other hand, the second section is about the analysis. the study found discussion analysis resulting from the experience of the father's illness to the sad news about Margaret in Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*. In this section, the study represents Margaret's recovery as a form of dealing with grief through her behavior.

3. Struggling to Continue Her Activities

The departure of a loved one is a situation that always affects someone left behind to feel lost and cry, just like what Margaret did when she tried to accept destiny for the death of her father, who suffered from a heart attack. Then, to continue new activities after the grieving experience, Margaret must have found it challenging to carry out different situations; and to be good at everything, including learning in class. It is proven in the following quote:

Ma'am? I was just...

I think I'm going to have to move you away from that window unless you can prove to me that you can sit there without being distanced.

I can, Ms. Peazle. It helped me write, she lied (Woodson, 1991, p. 53).

The above quote explains that Margaret sat in class by the window, which was why she was easily distracted outside the classroom. On the other hand, Ms. Peazle provides all students with a focus on learning in class by working on writing essays. However, that was not the case for Margaret because of her sad feelings. Margaret could have been more optimal in writing essays and reasoned that sitting by the window was her inspiration for writing. This portrayal emphasizes that Margaret's grieving experience is still felt when studying in class. The sense of neutralization would disappear as Margaret did by looking at the window, and the writing skill would drop instantly. That way, Margaret looked like she was trying to continue the activity to complete the writing task.

4. Creating-Reading Her Own Poetry About Grief

Writing skills could increase through poetry, a way for someone to express feelings, imagination, and life experiences behind it. Like what Margaret did to complete the task of one type of essay, she decided to create poetry. Margaret also decided to write a theme poem about missing her father. It is proven as follows:

I'm not sure where you are now

though I see you in my dreams

Ms. Dell says the things we see

are only sometimes as they seem (Woodson, 1991, p. 57).

The quote above delivers the content of Margaret's poem that her father's leaving the world made Margaret imagine her father's presence in a dream. It meant that Margaret's image of her longing for fatherhood was always before she looked. Thus, the content of Margaret's poetry refers to how the idea of writing is directed against the background of this grieving experience. Apart from that, the creation of the poem by Margaret was also an acknowledgment to the people around her, to be precise, in front of her classmates, that Margaret accepted life's destiny but gave up her father's departure.

5. Receiving the Contest's Benefits of Her Participation

Every experience cannot be separated from luck, like someone as a contest participant interested in the opportunity to benefit from the context itself. It could be through trophies, coaching money, souvenirs, etc. Through this attractive offer, someone tries to prepare themselves optimally to obtain benefits in the contest. Someone who goes through the experience of grief is to contribute their way about grief, which can be shown through participation in some contests. Margaret got the opportunity to contest herself to achieve new happiness after writing poetry became a way of expressing her sorrow. It is proven in the quote below.

Ms. Peazle entered my poem in a contest! If I win, I get scholarship money, and I get to read it in front of the major! (Woodson, 1991, p. 63).

The quote above presents Margaret's poetry work that has passed the selection as class representative by Ms. Peazle to enter the contest. In this way, there is a significant influence on Margaret's experience of grief as a flashback of meaning in Margaret's poetry. It emphasizes that accepting the reality of grief is an opportunity to participate in a contest that must be revealed to the audience and guests. Margaret felt that not only did the benefits of the pageant itself serve as a new source of happiness after the experience of grief, but she also presented her father with happiness in heaven.

6. Winning the Poetry Competition

The championship is the dream of all participants in the contest. The jury can crown someone as the winner, especially in poetry contests, based on how a poetry text and specific experiences in the life of the poetry writer are related. The grief experience of longing for Margaret's father was a work of poetry that deserves to be greeted with loud applause by the audience when she becomes the winner. It is proven in the quote below.

When she finished, Margaret expected the same silence that had followed when she read in class. But the auditorium rumbled with applause. Some people were even standing. A few whistled. In the back, Bo's long brown arm waved back and forth (Woodson, 1991, p. 71).

The quote above shows that the auditorium was packed with loud applause from the audience after Margaret read her poem. It means that audiences recognized Margaret and her poetry as worthy contest winners. Apart from that, through writing and reading poetry, Margaret positively influences the world; the death of someone we love cannot be blamed because God sided the people we love to heaven. However, grief taught Margaret, and the message to audiences about the experience of grief never fades for the families left behind. Longing for her father as the true meaning in Margaret's poetry was an important thing to rescue her from grief by writing, which is very meaningful for Margaret. That is to express feelings and actions to the audience regarding how the grief is still inside her.

D. Conclusion

In Jacqueline Woodson's *Last Summer with Maizon*, this study shows that grief does not always leave someone behind (children, parents, relatives, etc.) in a state of decline and lowest point. However, grief is the formation of self-awareness by the person that pure experience is an experience that exists in the world of life, where the person deals with grief to help continue daily activities. The recovery by a person is the way to overcome grief by writing because not everything related to grief is communicated verbally, considering that grief is still embedded in the person's mind. Writing was Margaret's way to revive herself; that grief made her hard work. The reason is that Margaret's poetry emphasizes the feeling of grief itself, such as the longing that still lingers in Margaret's mind even though her father has been dead for days. Her poetry also invites other people to understand that grief is about making people in heaven happy. It refers to how Margaret became the contest winner, where Margaret is sure that Margaret's father would be proud if he saw his daughter continuing her activities without her body. Therefore, this study would hope that future researchers analyze another aspect between outside and inside experiences in the main and also minor characters in the novel *Last Summer with Maizon* were the result of the characters' own experiences or a representation of the results of Jacqueline Woodson's life.

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