



The Analysis of Grief in Chukwu's *Till* and Braff's *A Good Person*: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract. This study aims to compare grief in Chinonye Chukwu's *Till* and Zach Braff's *A Good Person*. This study applies a comparative literary approach supported by psychological theory, specifically William Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning, to examine how grief is experienced, expressed, and resolved by the main characters. This study also uses a descriptive qualitative method. The analysis focuses on the similarities and differences in the cause of grief, tasks of grief, and the impact of grief. Mamie grieves the brutal murder of her son and transforms her sorrow into activism and justice, while Allison struggles with guilt after causing a tragic accident and begins a journey toward personal healing. The findings reveal that both characters experience the tasks of grief: accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain, adjusting to a new reality, and finding an enduring connection, though in different ways. Although both characters experience similar grief processes, the expression and impact of grief differ significantly. Physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, each character is affected in distinct ways depending on their background and the nature of their loss.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Grief, Task of grief, Impact of grief, *Till*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone must have experienced the loss of someone close to them. Coping with that loss is not easy. When it happens, the world seems to collapse instantly. Loss is a natural aspect of life, as every encounter is followed by a departure. According to Andriessen et al. (2020), grief is typically followed by a range of feelings like sadness, longing, guilt, and anger. However, each individual has their way of dealing with grief, so people can continue with their daily lives. Stroebe et al. (2017) suggest that the process of recovering from grief does not follow a straight line and does not have a clear endpoint where the pain of loss disappears. Instead, people learn to carry it with them, and grief becomes a part of them. In this sense, grief is a reflection of a deep emotional and loving bond with the ones they miss. Therefore, sadness due to loss is

natural, and grief takes a long time to recover. Everyone also has their way of recovering from grief.

Worden (2018) presents his Task-Based Model of Grief, which instead of using static grief stages, shows how people accomplish four targeted tasks during the grieving process. Acceptance of the person's death stands as the initial step during grieving. The next stage requires individuals to confront sadness alongside intense emotional pain. The grieving process includes a transition to surviving without the lost person by adapting to new duties. Once individuals learn to honor their departed loved ones, they can pursue their future path successfully. Every grieving process requires individualized effort from each person to heal.

The movie script *Till* (2022) tells the story of Mamie Till-Mobley, who suffers overwhelming grief after the brutal murder of her 14-year-old son Emmett Till in 1955 Mississippi. Instead of only mourning, Mamie transforms her pain into activism by holding an open-casket funeral to reveal the cruelty Emmett endures, which helps spark the civil rights movement and raise awareness of racial injustice. Similarly, *A Good Person* (2023) follows Allison Johnson as she copes with guilt and grief after a crash that kills her fiancé's sister and brother-in-law. The story shows Allison's difficult journey through addiction, shame, and loneliness, leading to self-forgiveness and recovery. After unexpectedly bonding with a man whose daughter died in the crash, both confront their pain and rebuild their lives. Allison's grief ultimately motivates her to stop harming herself and work toward healing and forgiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Comparative Analysis

According to Wellek and Warren (1956), comparing two or more literary works is a helpful way to study literature. This method can show patterns, themes, structures, and small details that may not be seen when only looking at one story. Comparative literature is a study that looks at different texts to understand their ideas, writing styles, and the time or culture they come from. It goes beyond one country or language and shows how stories are shared and understood in different cultures.

B. Grief

According to Worden (2008), grief can be defined as a broad range of feelings and behaviors that are common after a loss. That is why grief covers much more than just sadness and crying; instead, people can also experience anger, guilt, confusion, and sometimes even feel nothing. Troubles like avoiding people, insomnia, and not being able to concentrate may arise in situations of stress. All of these reactions are typical ways people go through grief. Everyone handles grief differently because it is a personal and unique experience, and it takes its time for people.

1. Tasks of Grief

According to Worden (2008), grief is the process of adaptation to losing someone or something. It is not only a quick depression but also a lot of time and effort. Instead of having a series of emotions, grieving focuses on completing various tasks that help people eventually accept the situation. Some of the tasks in the process of grieving are:

a. To Accept the Reality of Loss

A lot of people often feel surprised, despite their expectations that the person would pass away. Worden (2008) believes that to begin the grieving process, someone has to understand that the person is really gone from this life. Facing that reality is the main concern of this phase. A lot of people avoid anything or anywhere related to the departed, since it makes the loss seem more real to them. It is important to understand that this person has really passed on to start healing. After accepting that the person has passed, individuals are ready to start grieving more.

b. To Process the Pain of Grief

Grief hurts and facing that pain is a natural part of getting through it. According to Worden (2008), experiencing and coping with emotional pain after loss is necessary. Delaying it might result in physical health problems, emotional dissociation or bad ways to deal with stress. People may feel constant tiredness, anxiety or end up with physical health problems due to this pain. Crying, discussing feelings or being alone with sadness is not easy, but it does help.

c. To Adjust to a World Without the Deceased

Experiencing loss leads people to adjust their life, sometimes whether they want to or not. According to Worden (2008), people should start adjusting to living their everyday lives without their loved one. Part of this involves trying out new jobs and duties and getting used to a different social and emotional world. The one who has died could have been a partner, a parent or a best friend, meaning they were involved in much of our everyday experiences. It involves figuring out how to take care of activities a person previously handled and how relationships and daily tasks will change. It is not about replacing them, but making life different so we still remember the person who passed and keep on living.

d. To Find an Enduring Connection With the Deceased in the Midst of Embarking on a New Life

According to Worden (2008), keeping a bond with the person, even while seeking new meaning in life, is very important. Remembering does not stop us from going through grief. Sometimes, people feel better by remembering moments from the past or celebrating special rituals that remind them of their loved one. What is important is that this person keeps being part of your life as moving forward and changing.

2. Impact of Grief

Grief affects people in more than just emotional ways. According to Guldin and Lerget (2024), grief can affect people in some dimensions such as:

a. Physical Impact

Grief influences a person in both emotional and physical ways. It affects the body in major ways. Guldin and Leget (2024) state that physical reactions such as fatigue, difficulty sleeping, losing appetite and muscle tension, are common with acute grief. It can be so hard for somebody with insomnia that just basic daily routines may seem like a task. Someone going through significant grief may find their body responds

in ways similar to ongoing stress. It implies that grief exists outside of rational thought as well. The person feels it in their body and it wears them out physically.

b. Emotional Impact

Grief emotionally can be very strong, unpredictable and very individual. Stroebe et al. (2001) notes that those in mourning often experience different emotions such as sadness, despair, anger, guilt and longing. There's no order to these emotions as they come in waves which makes the grieving process very confusing and demanding. What makes grief so strong is that it can cause many different emotions to occur together. People may experience periods of deadening or sudden intense, upsetting emotions. Emotional changes are natural after grieving, displaying how meaningful the relationship used to be.

c. Social Impact

Grief usually affects the way someone interacts with the people close to them. Guldin and Leget (2024) explain that people often reduce contact with others, have difficulties communicating their feelings and see changes in their personal relations after loss. A number of people choose to be alone if they feel not understood, but some choose to take part in cultural customs or practices to help them feel a sense of belonging. Sometimes, grief makes people feel lonely, even when they are surrounded by others and it can also lead to communication problems with people close to them. Dealing with loss is personal as well as changes a person's place within the social network.

d. Spiritual Impact

Grief takes on a spiritual meaning. Guldin and Leget notes (2024) that for some people, the death of someone special can shake up their faith or encourage them to think through their ideas about life, love and what gives it meaning. A lot of people affected by loss expend great efforts to find comfort in the situation and figure out how to proceed. For someone, going through this can restore trust in the world, whereas for someone else, it could encourage reflection and bring an altered perspective. So, grief is about feeling the loss and also about building a new and significant life afterwards.

METHOD/METODE

This study employs a psychological approach as the basis to analyze the movie scripts, focusing on the main characters' inner emotions and behaviors. According to Freud (1975), psychology concerns the reasons behind people's behaviors, helping readers understand characters as individuals with complex desires and inner conflicts. A comparative approach is also used to examine the similarities and differences in how grief is portrayed in the main characters of Chinonye Chukwu's *Till* (2022) and Zach Braff's *A Good Person* (2023). Wellek and Warren (1956) states that comparative literary analysis is useful in identifying similarities and differences in characters, themes, structure, and culture. This study applies a descriptive qualitative method, which according to Lambert & Lambert (2012), focuses on identifying behavioral patterns and categories, making it appropriate for examining grief as both a psychological and social condition. The main characters in both scripts are the central focus of analysis, and the data consists of words, phrases, and sentences related to their

grief experiences. To analyze the data, the writer follows several steps: first, the writer classifies the marked data into categories based on the research problems; second, the writer examines the classified data using the relevant psychological and comparative theories; third, the writer evaluates how grief affects each character's behavior, relationships, and coping mechanisms; fourth, the writer interprets the findings by comparing and contrasting the grief journeys of the main characters in both movie scripts; and finally, the writer draws conclusions based on the overall data analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Similarities and Differences in Causes of Grief of the Main Characters in *Till* and *A Good Person*

In *Till*, Mamie's grief starts when she receives news that her child Emmett was found dead in the river in Mississippi. He was killed by two white people after someone falsely accused him of whistling at a white woman. When Ollie shares the news that her dad is dead, Mamie is totally surprised. The incident forever changes her life and makes her feel deep sorrow. The way Mamie continues to feel endless pain is due to the cause of Emmett's death. He is cruelly treated, murdered, and left in a river. After such severe injuries, it is the ring on his hand that allowed the police to identify him. The loss of him is strong, but the cruel manner it happens and made her life a nightmare.

In *A Good Person*, Allison feels her grief as soon as she learns that Molly and Jesse die in a car crash. First, she is confused about everything that is happening. At this moment, a policeman is there, and Nathan announces, "*They're gone.*" Both of them are no longer here. Allison wonders who has gone when she sees the door open.

It shows both Mamie in *Till* and Allison in *A Good Person* experience deep grief due to the sudden loss of loved ones. The similarity lies in the unexpected nature of the deaths. Both Mamie and Allison are overwhelmed by sudden loss. However, Mamie's grief stems from systemic racial violence, while Allison's is shaped by guilt over an accident. Mamie mourns as a mother and activist, while Allison mourns as a survivor. The emotional weight is equally heavy, but their grief is rooted in different causes and shaped by different responsibilities.

B. Similarities and Differences in Tasks of Grief in the Main Characters of *Till* and *A Good Person*

1. To Accept the Reality of Loss

In *Till*, It can be seen that Mamie says, "*I need Bo's body sent back here. I can't have him buried in Mississippi,*" she clearly acknowledges the reality of Emmett's death. By referring to him as a "body" and making burial arrangements, Mamie shows she has accepted the loss. Her refusal to let Emmett be buried in Mississippi also reflects her awareness of the racial injustice ties to his murder.

ALLISON

When I saw you the other day at the meeting, I instantly started worrying that you thought I may have been drinking or on drugs the day of the accident. I was sober. It wasn't my fault. (Braff, 2023: 53)

In *A Good Person*, Allison is trying to separate herself from the tragedy. She is still denying her connection to what happens. This is not only just about facts, but also about her inability to accept that she is part of something irreversible and tragic. She is protecting herself from the guilt and pain by shifting blame, which is a classic sign that she has not yet fully accepted her role.

Both Mamie in *Till* and Allison in *A Good Person* experience the first task of grief, which is accepting the reality of loss. They both go through moments where they start to acknowledge that their loved ones are truly gone. However, the difference lies in how they respond to this reality. Mamie faces the loss head-on by acknowledging her son's death, referring to his body, and taking steps to bring him home, showing a strong and immediate acceptance. On the other hand, Allison initially denies responsibility, shifts the blame, and avoids confronting the full truth of the accident. It takes her more time and emotional struggle before she finally admits her role and begins to accept what has happened.

2. To Process the Pain of Grief

In *Till*, when Mamie examines her son's damaged body and chooses to face the pain instead of avoiding it. By laying her head on his chest and sobbing, she processes her grief openly and fully.

INSERT PHOTO: Allison and Nathan making multiple silly faces in a black-and-white photo booth. She looks over to see a bottle of COLD MEDICINE under the sink. She grabs it and chugs half the bottle. She closes her eyes and waits for it to kick in. (Braff, 2023: 24)

In *A Good Person*, Processing the pain is not an easy task for Allison. When Allison finds an old photo, painful memories surface. Instead of expressing her emotions, she numbs them by drinking cold medicine, showing her struggle to face the pain.

Eventually, Allison begins to confront her feelings. She admits guilt and emotional pain, marking progress in her grieving process. Both Mamie and Allison experience the second task of grief, processing the pain. Mamie expresses her sorrow directly, while Allison suppresses hers and slowly learns to face it. Mamie's grief is external and immediate; Allison's is internal and delayed.

3. To Adjust to a World Without the Deceased

Mamie begins to adjust to a new role not just as a grieving mother, but as a truth-teller and activist. Her decision to show Emmett's body publicly becomes a form of political action.

The interview is played through a RADIO. CAMERA TRACKS a line of BLACK MEN getting their haircut. Some read a NEWSPAPER advertising the open casket viewing, all listen to Mamie on the radio.

Mamie's grief shifts from private mourning to public advocacy. Through media appearances and press conferences, she speaks out, seeking justice and challenging racial violence.

In *A Good Person*, Allison is no longer just avoiding the loss or sitting in the emotional pain but she is starting to make real, practical changes in how she lives. Joining a support group like AA is a new behavior, a new environment, and a new way of coping. Allie reaches out to Ryan and encourages her to rejoin the soccer team. This shows she is trying to reconnect and take on new roles in her changed world. Both characters show efforts to adjust, but in different ways. Mamie's adjustment is immediate and public. She transforms grief into activism, using her voice to demand justice. Allison's adjustment is slower and personal. She begins with small steps like joining AA and reconnecting with loved ones. While Mamie channels grief outward into social change, Allison's journey is more inward, focused on healing and self-acceptance.

4. To Find an enduring connection With the Deceased in the Midst of Embarking on a New Life

In *Till*, Mamie starts to realize that his death has a bigger meaning not only just for her, but also for many people. She starts embracing him as symbolic importance to the broader Black community. She is not just seeking justice for his son, but also civil right for Black community.

In *A Good Person* Daniel's letter, especially the message about *amor fati*, or "to love one's fate" becomes a turning point for Allison. Up to this point, she has been consumed by guilt, pain, and avoidance. But here, she has invited to see her suffering not as something to run from, but as part of her story. It is something she can accept, even embrace. Daniel's words offer her a new perspective.

Both Mamie and Allison complete the final task of grief by maintaining a lasting connection with the deceased. Mamie honors Emmett by turning grief into activism and embracing his symbolic legacy. Allison, on the other hand, finds quiet acceptance through Daniel's words, learning to carry her loss as part of who she is. Mamie's connection becomes public and purposeful, while Allison's is personal and reflective.

C. Impact of Grief in the Main Characters in *Till* and *A Good Person*

1. Physical Impact

In *Till*, when Mamie first hears the news of the death, she suddenly stumbles, losing her physical control. Her body weakens because she is shocked by grief. The fact that Gene and John have to catch her reinforces that this reaction is not voluntary but an involuntary psychological response to overwhelming sorrow.

In *A Good Person*, Allison is sweating, shaking, and insomnia shows how her body is overwhelmed by both withdrawal and the stress of loss. Grief takes a toll on the body, disrupting sleep, causing restlessness, and creating intense physical discomfort. Both Mamie and Allison suffer significant physical effects of grief, demonstrating that sorrow deeply impacts the body as well as emotions. Mamie's reaction is an immediate, short-term shock that incapacitates her momentarily. Allison's symptoms are prolonged and chronic, reflecting ongoing struggles including drug abuse as a harmful coping mechanism. Mamie's physical response is passive and involuntary, while Allison's reflects an active but damaging attempt to manage her pain.

2. Emotional Impact

In *Till*, the moment when Mamie cries on her son's body shows just how deeply Mamie is hurting. Resting her head on Emmett's chest and sobbing like that means she's finally letting out everything she's been holding in her pain, her anger, her heartbreak. In *A Good Person*, Allison feels guilty for the fact is the one driving when the accident happens.

Both Mamie and Allison experience intense emotional impacts as a result of their grief, which deeply disrupts their inner worlds and sense of self. Their emotional responses show how devastating loss can overwhelm a person's ability to think clearly, regulate emotions, and connect with their identity. Grief affects them at their core, altering how they interact with others and how they view themselves. The similarity in this task is that both are emotionally broken by losing someone deeply important and the difference lies in how they express their pain. Mamie's grief is external and expressive, shared publicly and intensely.

3. Social Impact

In *Till*, Mamie is clearly feeling the social pressure from the media and public. Instead of focusing only on her grief, she is now forced to worry about how people see her. How they are judging her personal life and digging into her past. She realizes that her reputation can affect the trial and justice for her son. This shows the social impact of grief as being in the public eye, feeling judged, and needing to manage how others perceive her even while she is mourning.

In *A Good Person*, Ryan's question about why Allison breaks up with Nathan shows how grief strains Allison's relationships. By ending things with Nathan, someone who is trying to stay by her side, Allison isolates herself further. Her decision to run away from the relationship shows how grief can push people to withdraw from their support network, even when they need it most. Both Mamie and Allison face social impacts of grief that transform their relationships and roles, but in different ways. Mamie faces public scrutiny and must defend her reputation amid personal loss. Allison's grief causes private withdrawal from loved ones. Mamie becomes socially active and public-facing, turning grief into political responsibility. Allison retreats, overwhelmed by grief's emotional burden.

4. Spiritual Impact

In *Till*, Mamie realizes her life will never go back to normal. Her grief urges her to leave her private life and experience facing the problems of racism and unfairness.

She does not remain silent. Instead, she starts to fight for justice and wants to see that her son is not forgotten. She realizes that her job as a mother is now tied to something. Doing what she can to let others know about important changes. What she has experienced drives her to accomplish something bigger than herself.

In *A Good Person*, Allie appears shell-shocked and afraid, showing the lingering weight of everything she has endured. But when the faint smile forms and the words “*Amor Fati*” Latin for “love of one’s fate” come, she is not resisting what has happened or wishing for a different past. Instead, she begins to spiritually embrace it.

Allison in *A Good Person* and Mamie in *Till* both experience spiritual growth through grief, but in different directions. Allison finds quiet acceptance through the idea of *Amor Fati*, learning to spiritually embrace her pain as part of her fate. Her transformation is marked by reflection and surrender. Meanwhile, Mamie’s grief leads her to a greater purpose beyond herself. She moves from a private life to one of public action, finding spiritual meaning by turning her loss into a mission for justice. While Allison finds peace within, Mamie finds purpose beyond.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the writer finds that both main characters has similarities and differences in their grieving process. Mamie from *Till* and Allison from *A Good Person*, experience grief because of the death of their loved ones. Mamie loses her son, Emmett, who is brutally murdered by two white men, while Allison loses her brother and sister-in-law in a car accident that was caused by her own mistake. The difference lies in how they go through each task. Mamie accepts the reality of her son's death bravely and turns her pain into strength by becoming an activist. She faces her grief head-on and tries to find meaning by fighting for justice. Allison, on the other hand, also accepts the death but struggles with guilt. At first, she denies her role in the accident and drowns herself in drug use and drinking. Later, she starts her healing process by going to rehabilitation and repairing broken relationships. In the final task, Mamie finds a spiritual purpose in her son's death. It becomes a symbol of justice for the Black community. Meanwhile, Allison accepts the tragedy as part of her life story and learns to live with the idea that fate is out of her control.

Grief also impacts them differently. Physically, Mamie is shocked and stumbles when she hears the news, while Allison suffers from insomnia. Emotionally, Mamie feels intense anger, but it motivates her to act, while Allison feels lost and guilty, becoming a different person. Socially, Mamie faces public pressure from the media, while Allison loses close relationships. Spiritually, Mamie’s belief grows stronger now she starts to care about issues beyond her own life. Allison learns that although she cannot change the past or her fate, she can take control of how she responds to it. Through these differences, it can be seen that grief is deeply personal, shaped by both the loss itself and how a person chooses to deal with it.

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