

Exploring the boss'
grief: an evaluation of
grief and the fly by
katherine mansfi...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Katherine Mansfield's story The Fly presents the reader with the emotive process of grieving. The loss of a man's son is the climax of the story and will be the main focus of this essay. This essay will set out to prove that in the human response of grieving, the man comes across a great truth of himself, and that his perspective is shown through the symbol of the fly. How the man copes with his grief and how he explores that emotion will be supported through in text citations .

The process of a losing a loved one is a difficult moment in life; that moment increases in intensity, especially when the person one is grieving over is their son. The grieving process for the boss in Mansfield's story is like an insatiable hunger: the boss journeys through the different emotions of grief such as denial, acknowledgement, and then moving past the grief. In the case of the boss however, he hides his grief and continues to wallow in the denial stage of parting with his son through death. While entranced in this stage the boss creates a distractions in from the death such as re-decorating his office, he bullies his staff and other people and he is not considerate of other's emotions but instead dwells in his egotistical fantasy.

The reason that the boss focuses on the mundane aspects of life and ventures into this fantasy driven perceptive is because he is blinded by the grief of losing his only son, the only person he had worked hard for in life. The beginning of the story suggests to the reader that the boss gains material wealth purely for his own ego. The end of the story however paints a different picture: the end of the story suggests that the boss endeavored his entire life, not because he was driven by avarice, but because he was devoted to his son, and giving his son a good life. With this new knowledge

<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-boss-grief-an-evaluation-of-grief-and-the-fly-by-katherine-mansfield-essay-sample/>

gained at the story's close, the grief, and harboring of denial are better understood since the boss's life becomes meaningless without a force of unconditional love to drive him to endeavor.

To a significant extent, Mansfield was able to show us how a powerful and successful man gripped by grief tried to cope with this alien emotion, albeit at times unsuccessfully, the story remains a story told in complete honesty of a human emotion. The boss's own struggles are so well defined throughout the story that the reader is enraptured with the character and struggles with him through his troubles. The story grips the reader into a glimpse of understanding about how grief does not only affect the person feeling it, but the people who surround that person in their everyday life, in their banal activities, just as the boss's grief affected his co-workers' lives. For the boss, the death of the fly was a triggering point for his coming back to reality- acknowledging his loss and mourning. Only then is he freed from his burden of grief.

Compared to Woodifield, the boss is stout and rosy- always in command of himself and any situation. His success in business and his pride in his office shows how he thinks of himself as superior to anybody else: This egoism is further explored in his denial of his son's death, as his world turns entirely inward. While Mansfield projects the image of the boss to be the picture of a soundly successful man, she also shifts to a tone of imposition in regards to the boss's power: the bright red carpet (which shows vulgarity), electric heating (with five transparent, pearly sausages) all symbolize the masking of the boss's true self. The loudness of his material wealth is, however, stunted and humbled by a picture of a grave looking young man in uniform.

<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-boss-grief-an-evaluation-of-grief-and-the-fly-by-katherine-mansfield-essay-sample/>

The picture shows great depth and insight in the eyes of the young man, and this stands in stark contrast to the showy decoration in the room. The photograph of his son shows a sore place in the heart of the boss which he wants to keep private in order to mask what he preserves as his weakness. Moreover, the photograph also represents the boss's inability to grasp the reality of his son's death and what it has done to him.

To a significant extent, the boss was not grieving publicly because that would have been an unbearable example of his 'weakness'. Beneath the façade of his machismo, however, his son is everywhere and is everything to him. This is shown in the story through the son being the main representation of everything the boss cherished. It was not power or material gain which the boss desired in his life but only the happiness of his son, the his son's life as making the boss happy. The boss's possessiveness and love of the son made him work hard to have the business offered to his son until he was ready to step into his father's shoes. In the process of doing so, the boss had patterned the behavior of his son to himself and he was proud of his son because of the father-son resemblance portrayed in the boy. The boss, however, had forgotten in the process of reflection, how controlled was his son's character. Through parallelisms and contrast, Mansfield shows the reader how Woodfield and Macey are alike in terms of how he treats them. His unawareness of his behavior and what it means to other people shows his vague sense of himself.

As the story unfolds, we see the boss acknowledging that he has never visited the grave of his son, which is an indication of how he does not want his world to be disturbed by his son's death. Yet, the reader sees the boss's

<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-boss-grief-an-evaluation-of-grief-and-the-fly-by-katherine-mansfield-essay-sample/>

life predominantly being ruled by this tragic event. While the first part of the book depicts how Mansfield has shown the arrogance, the vanity, and the manipulation of the boss to the people around him, the latter part of the book shows that the attitude of the boss reveals nothing about his true nature but only reveals how the boss is overcompensating in his life for the loss of his son.

The reader is exposed to how the boss dearly loves his son and how grief eventually makes him confront his fears and limitations. Similar to what he has done to the fly, the boss basks in the pain of his loss until he can no longer grieve. The reaction that the boss shows that's similar to other people who have lost their loved ones, is that he too is vulnerable to his emotions. He hides this behind the redecoration of his office within weeks after his son's death. This shows him diverting his attention to what he truly feels. The boss wants to be preoccupied, and for people to see that he is not lonely. The viciousness of this cycle goes on until he has to confront himself. The fly was a turning point in the story because it represents his emotions and his current situation.

The fly symbolizes the attitude and the emotions of the boss. Its significance is that it aids in the boss finding himself in an inkpot, similar to the tarnish in the fly; the boss is also tarnished by his son's death. Whether this event is seen as a tragedy of life, or a lesson that he was supposed to learn. The fly represents the tragedy of the boss: losing his son. The fly symbolizes freedom: this freedom is found in the fly's ability to roam around the room unfettered by human emotion, and yet, the fly somehow gets stuck in the inkpot. This is similar to the boss who views himself as powerful and

<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-boss-grief-an-evaluation-of-grief-and-the-fly-by-katherine-mansfield-essay-sample/>

successful; to be trapped in an emotion of grief is simply unbearable for him, however, instead of shaking off the ink from his body, the boss finds himself sulking in the emotion. Instead of avoiding the pain and the agony of losing his son he drinks the grief of his lost and tortures himself over and over. The process of torturing or the drenching of the fly, represents how the boss copes with his grief. He needed the time to mourn and somehow he got stuck in that emotion.

Drenched in this emotion, the reader can see the fly dying only for the boss to realize that while he may be the fly, he should not treat himself the way he had treated the fly. The boss wants the fly to live and fight, yet he experimented on the fly testing its strength and resistance just as he had tested his own reserve of strength and found that he must grieve in order to show fully how much he loves his son. This realization makes the boss reflect on the hollowness of his own existence but only to resume what he has always done; be the boss of his office and his life.

Another important symbolism of the fly is that the boss is willing the fly to fight, to challenge its resistance. In this, the reader sees the boss once again trying to impose his power and superiority on someone or something else, and is self-absorbed in his own emotions. The boss's disregard to the life of the fly is similar to how he considers his business and his son. These are however only means to mask his own fear of confrontation from his son and from himself. This is because he was not exactly the good father.

Thus, the fly does not only represent the boss's emotions, it is also an extrapolation and unmasking of the real attitude of the boss: when faced

with the dilemma of a life circumstance, the boss, while displaying emotions of affection, still chooses to be cold in the same manner he deals with business. However, now the reader sees the boss not as the cold-blooded person that he is in the earlier parts of the story but somebody who has an understanding of his own reality. A contrast to this point, however, is seen with the boss throwing the fly into the wastebasket which represents how he had willed himself to forget and reject his reality. Mansfield's ability to make an interesting character out of the boss is one of the best parts of the story. Even at the end, the reader is left wondering if or when will the boss change.

Grieving shows one of the most vulnerable times in a person's life. It demands reflection and contemplation of the loved one's value and how one has behaved to that person. Clearly, the realism projected by Mansfield shows how the boss was tormented by this reality and how he has responded to this only shows the defense mechanism that most people in grief employ. The Fly aptly shows a re-examination of what humans are and what humanity should be in order not to regret when something as tragic as losing a loved one occurs.

Reference

Mansfield, K. (1991) *Stories by Katherine Mansfield*. Vintage; Reissue edition (May 7, 1991). 328 pages.