

Between Life and Death: Uncanny Spaces in The Lovely Bones

Rukhsar N. Kareem

Department of English Language, College of Arts, Catholic University-Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT

Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002) is a poignant exploration of grief, loss, and the supernatural, narrated by the deceased protagonist, Susie Salmon. Through her tragic story, Sebold crafts a narrative blending thriller, mystery, and horror, while exploring the psychological and emotional aftermath of Susie's brutal murder. The novel's supernatural dimension, with Susie narrating from the afterlife, evokes uncanny feelings that blur the boundaries between life and death. Freud's concept of the uncanny is essential to understand the novel's emotional and atmospheric tension. The eerie atmosphere in Sebold's work arises from the unsettling reversal of familiar experiences, particularly through Susie's dual existence, present yet absent, and her interactions with the living. As Susie's voice continues to influence her family and the world she left behind, she disrupts the natural order, creating a spectral presence that forces characters and readers to confront unresolved trauma. This paper examines the novel in the light of Freud's concept of uncanny, focusing on how Sebold uses this psychological concept to enhance readers' engagement with the novel's central themes. The novel's portrayal of heaven as an unsettling, liminal space, filled with Susie's unfulfilled desires, mirroring Freud's idea of the return of the repressed. *The Lovely Bones* creates a narrative that invites readers to experience the unsettling intersection of the known and unknown.

KEY WORDS: Death, Life, Loss, Unresolved trauma, Uncanny

1. ¹ INTRODUCTION

The Lovely Bones (2002) is one of the heart touching novels that has been written by Alice Sebold in 2002. *The Lovely Bones* was 1st on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It contains elements of thriller, murder, mystery, and classic horror around a murder case, it focuses on the spiritual and uncanny of the brutal murdering rather than the police investigation.

However, the novel revolves Susie Salmon, the dead protagonist and the narrator of the novel touches the readers with her direct manner of expressing her feelings. She addresses the readers with her tragic story from the very beginning of the novel and the readers realize that the narrator is a dead girl, she states "My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973" (Sebold, 2002, p. 5). Sebold presents the readers with the rape and murder of the protagonist. Susie is brutally murdered by her pervert neighbour and observes her family and

friends from the heaven. The novel intricately explores themes of grief, loss, and supernatural which creates an atmosphere of the uncanny. Susie's narration from the other life blurs the reality and unfamiliar things become familiar which aligns with the concept of uncanny.

Freud, a prominent figure in psychology is regarded as one of those whose works are used to interpret works of literature. He provides insight into mystery and human fascination through the concept of uncanny. Any object that challenges the perception of reality and appears lifeless is considered as uncanny. The term of uncanny is used to describe unfamiliar things that are beyond logical. The German psychiatrist E. Jentsch introduced "unheimlich," which means unfamiliar, not from home, and scary in German" (Jentsch, 1997, p.1). Then Sigmund Freud, in 1919 defined uncanny as a feeling that arouses creeping horror and dread. Furthermore, Freud developed the uncanny idea as something that "disrupts individual's perception of the familiar things around them making them feel unnatural and alienated"

¹. Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (KUJHSS) Volume 8, Issue 2, 2025.

Received 26 February 2025

Accepted 27 April 2025

Regular research paper: Published 6 November 2025



Corresponding author's e-mail: rukhsar.nadhm@cue.edu.krd

Copyright ©2025 Rukhsar N. Kareem. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

(Freud, 1919, p.8). People in different ages experience uncanny feelings and it is linked to emotions and psychological reactions rather than rationality. What makes some objects extremely terrifying is that certain animated or imaginative things or people might really exist. Jentsch remarks that one of the most effective ways to create an uncanny effect in storytelling is to leave the reader unsure whether a figure is human or an automaton.

Freud, makes a connection between the idea of the uncanny and the theme of double, involving shadows, split selves, and spirits. People experience uncanny when the uncanny arises from the confusion between reality and illusion. In *The Lovely Bones*, the boundary between reality and illusion is constantly blurred, creating an uncanny atmosphere that aligns with Freud's theory. Susie's narration from the afterlife challenges the reader's sense of what is real, as she observes the living world while existing in a liminal, otherworldly space. This coexistence of presence and absence turns the familiar into something strange, she is dead, yet her voice remains. Freud concludes that the uncanny stems from a person's own fears. The most common manifestations of the uncanny are loneliness, spirits, and darkness. He argues that the uncanny originates from childhood fears, stating that primitive beliefs are closely linked to infantile complexes and are often indistinct from them. Freud's idea that the uncanny stems from childhood fears is reflected in *The Lovely Bones* through themes of loneliness, spirits, and darkness. Susie's lingering ghost evokes a primal fear of death and the unknown, while Mr. Harvey's hidden rituals suggest repressed childhood trauma. Even Buckley, Susie's younger brother, senses her presence, showing how children often blur the line between reality and belief, echoing Freud's link between primitive fears and the uncanny.

In literature, the concept of uncanny is widely used and Freud justifies this use and states that literary works do not adhere to the rational judgement of reality. The character or the speaker addresses repressed anxieties and fears by accepting the fictional developments of the story. Readers will have uncanny reactions to certain events as if they were real-life experiencing events. By the end of the story, the reader is attached to the events and finds it uneasy to be detached from their emotions and the uncanny effect. The work projects their fears and anxieties, encouraging identification with a certain character of the story. Thus, ordinary events or stories may seem uncertain or uncanny to the readers. Readers may experience familiar or unfamiliar emotions. This paper examines the manifestations of the uncanny in *The Lovely Bones*, focusing on how Sebold utilizes this concept to deepen the reader's engagement with the novel's themes and characters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers have conducted extensive studies on *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, examining its various dimensions and thematic elements. These studies have explored a range of perspectives, including trauma, grief, death, and the afterlife, each contributing to a broader understanding of the novel's complex narrative and emotional depth.

In their analysis of *The Lovely Bones*, P. Jenci Gladwin and Dr. M. John Suganya examine the psychological trauma and profound grief experienced by Susie's family following her brutal murder. They emphasize how her family "remain trapped in their sorrow, unable to process or overcome the devastating loss" (Gladwin and Suganya, 2020, p.45). This prolonged state of grief disrupts their emotional stability and deepens their collective trauma, creating a sense of unresolved mourning that impacts each member differently.

Similarly, Rachma Wati's 2020 psychoanalytic study titled *Psychopath and the Role of Grief of Losing in The Lovely Bones* (2002) delves into the psychopathic behavior of Mr. Harvey, whose inhumane actions bring tragedy to Susie and her family. Wati explores the psychological dimensions of Mr. Harvey's character and the ripple effect of his violence on the emotional well-being of those left behind. The study focuses on how the trauma inflicted by his behavior intensifies the family's grief, compounding their struggle to come to terms with their loss.

While these studies provide important insights into trauma and character psychology, they rarely foreground the novel's engagement with the uncanny. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the novel's portrayal of uncanny spaces and characters, especially the blurred boundaries between life and death, and the spectral influence of Susie after her murder. It builds on existing research while offering a new perspective on the narrative's emotional and psychological complexity.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative literary approach, applying Freud's theory of the uncanny to analyze Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*. Selected passages from the novel are examined to explore how the uncanny manifests through narrative voice, character interactions, and setting. The analysis focuses on Susie's dual role as both narrator and observer from the afterlife, her interaction with her family and the world of the living, and the portrayal of heaven as a liminal, unsettling space.

Secondary sources include critical works on the concept of the uncanny in literature. This study also

interprets the roles of Susie, Lindsey, and Mr. Harvey, examining how their dualities contribute to the novel's overall sense of tension and unease. The research method includes analyzing Susie's influence on the living characters, the portrayal of heaven, and the concept of doubling as it pertains to Lindsey and Mr. Harvey. Additionally, journal articles and critical essays on the novel's themes of grief, loss, and the afterlife provide context and depth to the analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alice Sebold's *the Lovely Bones* opens with a strikingly unsettling statement from the protagonist, Susie Salmon, who immediately reveals her murderer, "My murderer was a man from our neighborhood. My mother liked his border flowers, and my father talked to him once about fertilizer" (Sebold, 2002, p.13). This direct introduction invites the reader into an emotional and psychological space dominated by grief, loss, and an eerie sense of unfinished presence. As the novel unfolds, the murder case itself serves as a source of uncanny tension, as Susie's lingering existence challenges the natural order of life and death. Although her physical form is gone, her continued consciousness and interaction with the world she left behind intensify the novel's unsettling atmosphere. Susie's dual existence being simultaneously present and absent establishes a deep dissonance between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, as Susie States "And I began to see things in a way that let me hold the world without me in it. The events that my death wrought were merely the bones of a body that would become whole at some unpredictable time in the future" (Sebold, 2002. P.327)

This paradox evokes Sigmund Freud's concept of *the return of the repressed*, in which elements of the past, thought to be buried, resurface to disrupt the present, as Freud states in the Uncanny "The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1919, p.220). Susie's continued presence in the narrative exemplifies this, as she is neither entirely gone nor fully part of the living world. Her ability to observe and narrate events from beyond death transforms her into a spectral figure whose presence disturbs both the characters and the readers.

Furthermore, a primary source of the uncanny in *The Lovely Bones* is Susie's narrative voice. She occupies a unique position as a deceased observer, maintaining an intimate connection with the living world. Her haunting presence is encapsulated in her own words: "I was not gone, I could see my mother brushing her hair in the morning, the steam from the shower, my little brother's toothpaste smeared in the sink" (Sebold, 2002, p. 59). This passage exemplifies the disruption of normal boundaries between life and death, past and present. Although Susie

is no longer physically present, her continued perception of everyday moments creates a ghostly omnipresence, reinforcing the uncanny. The familiarity of these mundane activities juxtaposed with her spectral existence disturbs the sense of reality, making her presence both familiar and strange, a key feature of Freud's uncanny. Additionally, Susie's lingering presence serves as a haunting double that shadows her grieving family. Her inability to move on prevents her family from achieving closure, as they remain trapped in an emotional limbo where the past continuously reemerges in their present. Her father's obsession with uncovering the truth behind her murder, her mother's retreat into isolation, and her sister's attempts to navigate adolescence in the shadow of loss all illustrate how Susie's presence extends beyond mere observation. She actively influences the lives of the living. This aligns with Freud's assertion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that, "What is forgotten is not extinguished but merely repressed; its traces are conserved in the unconscious" (Freud, p. 15). Susie's presence does not vanish but lingers, resurfacing in the minds and actions of those left behind.

Moreover, Susie's omniscient perspective, which transcends human limitations, is a significant contributor to the novel's unsettling tone. She possesses knowledge inaccessible to the living, heightening the reader's unease. As Elkin (2024) notes, "Susie's narration from beyond the grave presents a world where the line between life and death is blurred, creating a sense of the uncanny. Her omnipresence in her family's life disrupts the natural order, making her both absent and present" (Elkin, 2024, p. 14). This quotation highlights how Susie's postmortem narration in *The Lovely Bones* creates a liminal space where life and death intersect, embodying Freud's concept of the uncanny. By existing in a state of omnipresence observing but not interacting, Susie unsettles the natural order, which traditionally separates the living from the dead. Her dual state of being both absent and present distorts the boundaries between reality and illusion, intensifying the emotional and psychological impact on her family and the reader. This disruption not only evokes the uncanny but also emphasizes the enduring nature of grief and memory, where the lost are never entirely gone.

This disruption creates a psychological unease, as her family unknowingly exists under her watchful gaze. The discomfort stems from the awareness that she is there, yet they cannot see or sense her, mirroring the sensation of being watched by an unseen force, a hallmark of the uncanny.

Susie's existence thus challenges conventional understandings of death. Rather than transitioning into an unknown void, she remains suspended between realms, embodying the concept of the uncanny, something both familiar and estranged. Royle (2003) elaborates, "The uncanny involves feelings of

uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (Royle, 2003, p. 17). Susie's condition embodies this uncertainty: she exists, but in a way that distorts traditional perceptions of identity and presence. She is neither fully alive nor truly deceased, a consciousness without a tangible form, an observer without agency. This contradiction unsettles the reader's sense of reality, reinforcing the novel's eerie and melancholic tone. Furthermore, the novel's exploration of grief itself is intertwined with its uncanny effect. The living struggle with the presence of Susie in their memories and emotions, often feeling as if she is still with them in an almost tangible way. This psychological phenomenon mirrors the way unresolved trauma manifests in the unconscious, another key aspect of Freud's theory. The more her family attempts to move on, the more Susie's presence reasserts itself, appearing in dreams, fleeting thoughts, and unshakable intuitions.

Moreover, although Susie is physically absent, she continues to interact with the world she left behind through dreams, signs, symbols, and subtle hints that guide her family toward uncovering the truth behind her murder. She asserts, "I wasn't lost, or frozen, or gone. I was alive; I was in the air and water, in the grass and the ground, in the faces of those who would come after me" (Sebold, 2002, p. 85). These words highlight Susie's lingering presence and suggest that death has not entirely severed her ties to the mortal world. Instead, she exists in an intangible yet familiar form, establishing an eerie connection between the dead and the living.

By straddling the line between the two realms, Susie exists in a limbo that defies conventional understandings of death, making her presence both familiar and disconcertingly alien. This ambiguity between life and death contributes to the novel's uncanny tone, as her existence unsettles not only the characters but also the reader's expectations of finality and closure.

Another significant element contributing to the uncanny atmosphere in *The Lovely Bones* is Sebold's depiction of heaven. Unlike conventional portrayals of the afterlife as a tranquil paradise or a realm of divine reward, Sebold presents heaven as an unsettling and liminal space, a reflection of the world Susie was forced to leave behind. This distorted version of heaven defies the reader's expectations, reinforcing a sense of strangeness and unease. Instead of finding peace and fulfillment in the afterlife, Susie remains tethered to earthly existence, consumed by her lingering attachments, unresolved trauma, and desire for justice. Sebold establishes this uncanny atmosphere early in the novel when Susie, after her murder, finds herself in a version of heaven that closely mirrors her past life. This version of the afterlife is not a place of eternal serenity but rather a continuation of her personal desires and memories. During a conversation with another girl in

heaven, Susie reveals her dissatisfaction with her new reality: "Do you like it here?" she asked. "No." "Me either" (Sebold, 2002, p. 18). This brief exchange encapsulates the unsettling nature of Susie's heaven. It is not a celestial paradise filled with divine light and harmony, but instead a place of yearning, restlessness, and unfulfilled longing.

The concept of liminality is central to the uncanny, as it disrupts established boundaries between life and death, familiarity and strangeness. Susie watches over her family, observing their griefs and struggles, but she is unable to interact with them in a meaningful way. She remains emotionally invested in the world she left behind, longing to reconnect with her loved ones and to influence the course of their lives. She yearns for justice, both for herself and for her grieving family. She is consumed by the need to expose her murderer and ensure that her death was not in vain. This persistent attachment to the mortal world prevents her from fully transitioning into a state of peace, keeping her in a perpetual state of limbo. Furthermore, Sebold's portrayal of heaven challenges traditional notions of the afterlife by infusing it with frustration, longing, and a profound sense of incompleteness.

This subversion of conventional expectations contributes to the uncanny atmosphere of the novel, as it renders a typically comforting and familiar concept into something unsettling and alien. Rather than being a place of rest, Susie's heaven becomes an eerie, suspended existence in which she remains emotionally entangled with the living. She states: "In my heaven, I was alone and the world was spinning around me, everything I wanted just out of reach" (Sebold, 2002, p. 114). This description reinforces the notion that Susie's afterlife is not a reward but a continuation of her suffering. She is unable to move forward, trapped by her unresolved desires and the injustice of her premature death. The uncanny feeling is heightened by the fact that Susie's heaven is not an entirely separate realm but is deeply intertwined with the world of the living. She can see her family's grief, witness their daily lives, and even experience fleeting moments of connection with them, yet she remains powerless to truly engage with them.

Additionally, the juxtaposition of the supernatural and the mundane intensifies the uncanny effect. Heaven is traditionally envisioned as a transcendent space, removed from earthly concerns, yet Susie's version of the afterlife is deeply rooted in human emotions, pain, longing, and unfinished business. This blurring of boundaries disrupts the reader's understanding of what the afterlife should be, making it feel unfamiliar and strange. The uncanny arises from this contradiction: heaven is supposed to be a place of peace, yet it becomes a realm of unresolved suffering. Susie's reflections further emphasize this unsettling nature when she states "There

was one thing my murderer didn't understand; he didn't understand how much a father could love his child" (Sebold, 2002, p. 37). This statement underscores Susie's enduring connection to the living world and her desperate need for closure.

Susie watches her father struggle with the pain of her loss, consumed by his search for the truth. The fact that she is powerless to change anything despite being so close reinforces the eerie liminality of her existence. The novel ultimately presents heaven as a paradoxical space neither fully divine nor entirely detached from earthly suffering. Susie's words highlight this ambiguity: "I would like to tell you that it is beautiful here. But this heaven is not about safety, just as, in its graciousness, it isn't about gritty reality" (324). This statement reinforces the novel's treatment of the afterlife as both a coping mechanism and a continuation of earthly concerns. It blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, intensifying the novel's uncanny atmosphere. Heaven, instead of being a final resting place, becomes a site of emotional and psychological entrapment, reinforcing Susie's lingering presence and the tension between life and death.

Susie's connection with her sister, Lindsey, exemplifies Susie's connection to earth. Lindsey's life, in many ways, mirrors the life Susie might have had, creating a spectral counterpart within the world of the living. Lindsey unconsciously carries the weight of Susie's memory, making her a living reminder of the sister she lost. Susie's presence, although intangible, distracts and haunts Lindsey, reinforcing the uncanny sensation of doubling. This phenomenon blurs the boundaries between identity and memory, making Lindsey both a distinct individual and an extension of Susie's lost potential. Throughout the novel, Lindsey struggles to step out of Susie's shadow, yet she cannot entirely escape the comparisons that others make between them. She becomes an unwitting double, living out milestones such as first love, academic achievements, and personal growth that Susie was denied. This dynamic is further emphasized when Susie observes, "Lindsey sometimes felt as if she carried me around with her, the inside-out girl they stared at after I was gone" (Sebold, 2002, p. 219).

Lindsey's physical resemblance to Susie and her efforts to navigate life in the wake of tragedy serve as haunting reminders of what Susie could have been, reinforcing the strange sense of a lost life still exerting influence. Lindsey's journey toward forging her own identity is deeply entangled with Susie's unfulfilled desires. She not only lives her own life but also carries the burden of what Susie never had the chance to experience. This doubling effect becomes more pronounced when Susie reflects, "he was the person I was never going to grow up to be, but at the same time, she was living a life I would have wanted to live" (P. 289). This revelation

underscores the inextricable link between the sisters and heightens the uncanny nature of their relationship. Susie sees Lindsey as both a separate entity and a reflection of herself, further complicating the boundary between the living and the dead. This uncanny doubling manifests not only in Lindsey's personal development but also in the way others perceive her.

At school, she is identified primarily in relation to Susie, as evidenced by the remark, "Lindsey had a hard time when she went back to school. They called her 'the dead girl's sister,' and they watched her to see if she would do anything as stupid as play dead in the cornfield" (320). The label assigned to Lindsey by her peers reinforces the idea that she is not seen as an individual but as a lingering extension of Susie's tragedy. This perception blurs the line between the past and present, life and death, as Lindsey is simultaneously herself and a spectral echo of her sister. Jentsch (1906) explains that "intellectual uncertainty is what gives rise to the uncanny, particularly when the inanimate appears animate, or when the boundaries between the real and unreal become blurred" (P. 37). The more Lindsey grows into adulthood, the more she unintentionally embodies the life Susie never had, making the familiar process of growing up strangely unsettling.

Similarly, throughout the novel, Mr. Harvey's character epitomizes the uncanny through his outwardly ordinary and unassuming demeanor that conceals his monstrous and predatory nature. His ability to blend seamlessly into the community while harboring his brutal impulses creates an unsettling contrast between the familiar and the horrifying, a duality that heightens the sense of the uncanny. This duality is a classic example of Freud's concept of *uncanny*, where something seemingly normal and safe transforms into something deeply unsettling and dangerous. The juxtaposition between Harvey's public persona and his hidden violence not only disturbs the reader but also subverts expectations, as evil is often imagined as something overtly sinister, not something that wears the face of normalcy. Susie observes, "He wore his innocence like a comfortable old coat" (Sebold, 2002, p. 45). This metaphor underscores how his innocence is not genuine but rather an affectation a disguise he wears effortlessly, allowing him to move unnoticed in society. The reference to an "old coat" suggests familiarity, comfort, and something second nature, implying that deception is intrinsic to his being. His ability to project innocence makes him all the more terrifying, as it enables him to evade suspicion while committing unspeakable acts.

This contradiction between appearance and reality contributes to the uncanny effect, as the reader grapples with the disturbing notion that the most dangerous individuals may not appear as threats at all. Instead, they lurk within the spaces we trust, presenting themselves as

neighbours, friends, or seemingly ordinary members of society. Harvey's ability to charm and manipulate others further exacerbates this effect. Susie recalls the horror of recognizing his deceptive nature: "The worst thing was sitting there and realizing he could charm people. That he could make them like him, even while he held them captive" (P. 254). This chilling realization speaks to his calculated performance of normalcy, which allows him to maintain his facade while concealing his true nature. This description aligns with what Freud describes "A person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self, or he may substitute the other's self for his own" (Freud, 1919, p. 234).

Furthermore, Mr. Harvey's uncanny presence extends beyond his interactions with Susie; it permeates the entire community. He is a figure who exists at the margins, never fully integrated, yet never entirely alien either. His house is an eerie reflection of his character; seemingly ordinary on the outside but filled with hidden horrors, including trophies from his past victims. His attachment to these trophies represents a perverse need to relive his crimes, reinforcing the idea that he is both present and absent, living among people while existing in a dark, secretive world of his own. His repression of his violent urges and the subsequent eruption of those urges mirror the uncanny notion of something hidden resurfacing in an unsettling manner. This resurfacing of the repressed aligns with Freud's theory of the uncanny, in which buried fears, desires, or memories return in a distorted and terrifying form. Moreover, Harvey's ability to disappear without a trace, evading justice for much of the novel, adds to his spectral quality. Unlike traditional villains who are confronted and punished, Harvey remains an elusive, ghostly presence, reinforcing the sense of unresolved horror. His fate dying alone in the snow, a death that mirrors the cold, isolated nature of his crimes not provide a sense of true closure. Instead, it leaves a lingering unease, as if his presence continues to haunt the narrative even after his physical death.

Throughout *The Lovely Bones*, a pervasive sense of incompleteness haunts the narrative, reinforcing the novel's themes of loss, grief, and the uncanny. Susie's murder is never fully explained in exhaustive detail, nor is there a clear resolution to her family's trauma. The novel resists closure, leaving the reader with a lingering sense that Susie's presence and the pain of those left behind persist indefinitely. This unsettling incompleteness is felt in multiple aspects of the story, from Susie's ambiguous existence in the afterlife to her family's struggle with grief, and even in the final scenes that suggest her presence endures in the world of the living. Gibson observes that "The trauma of loss in *The Lovely Bones* is not something that can be neatly packaged or closed off. It lingers, lingering like an open wound that refuses to heal, affecting every character in profound

ways" (Gibson, 2008, p. 187).

These mixed feelings create a sense of unease to the readers and there is a sense of unfinished business. Susie observes that "I was not yet dead. I was in the place between being and not being. I was in the waiting place... I had no way of knowing that it would take me a year to get to the other side" (Sebold, 2002. P.315) Susie is suspended between life and death. Her journey towards peace and acceptance takes an undefined amount of time which symbolizes the sense of unfinished business and the lack of closure. This sense of suspension and incompleteness creates the eerie, unresolved atmosphere that marks the story's emotional tone. as Jones observes "The conclusion of *The Lovely Bones* does not provide a final resolution, but instead leaves the characters and the readers feeling the absence of closure, as if Susie's life continues to ripple through the lives of those who remain" (Jones, 2009, p. 302).

In the final part of *The Lovely Bones*, Susie's bracelet is discovered by a man who takes it to his wife. As they talk about the bracelet, they discuss the owner of the tiny trinkets, unknowingly commenting on Susie's life. The man holds the bracelet in his hands, and his wife, unaware of its significance, says, "This little girl's grown up by now. Almost. Not quite" (328). The statement evokes a chilling sense of unease as it reflects the ongoing presence of Susie in the world, even though she has passed away. The couple is oblivious to the fact that the girl they speak of was brutally murdered. This scene emphasizes the eerie feeling of Susie's unresolved presence in the lives of others, making the reader question whether Susie's influence continues even in the lives of people who never knew her. The phrase "Almost. Not quite" suggests that Susie's story is far from over, leaving a haunting sense of unfinished business. This aligns with the uncanny feeling that runs through the novel, where life and death blur together. Ultimately, this pervasive sense of incompleteness is what makes *The Lovely Bones* so haunting. It denies the reader the comfort of resolution, instead leaving behind an eerie and melancholic feeling that echoes Susie's liminal existence. The novel forces the reader to grapple with the unsettling truth that some stories do not have neat endings, and some losses remain unresolved. The boundary between the living and the dead is not as firm as it seems, and the past continues to echo into the present, creating an uncanny and deeply emotional reading experience.

5. CONCLUSION

Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* offers a haunting meditation on grief, trauma, and the uncanny, blurring the boundaries between life and death. Through Susie Salmon's dual role as both narrator and spectral observer, the novel immerses the reader in a world where loss

lingers and the past refuses to fade. Susie's continued presence after death unsettles the natural order of time, creating an eerie tension between the living and the dead. Her in-between existence neither fully detached nor truly present heightens the novel's ghostly atmosphere, making the supernatural an intrinsic part of its emotional core.

The novel's psychological depth is further intensified through its use of the uncanny, particularly in the character of Mr. Harvey. His outward normalcy, concealing a deeply sinister nature, embodies Freud's concept of the return of the repressed. Sebold suggests that darkness often lurks beneath the familiar, forcing the reader to question the stability of what appears safe and known. Likewise, the persistence of unresolved grief both in Susie's longing for closure and in her family's struggle to heal demonstrates how the past continues to shape the present, refusing to simply vanish with time.

Ultimately, *The Lovely Bones* is more than a story of death; it is a meditation on how trauma shapes both individuals and their perceptions of reality. Sebold masterfully intertwines the supernatural with psychological depth, compelling readers to reflect on grief, the fragility of existence, and the unsettling presence of absence. By challenging conventional notions of life and death, the novel leaves a lasting impression,

inviting readers to confront their own ghosts both literal and metaphorical.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Elkin, M. (2004). Susie's narration from beyond the grave: The uncanny and the return of the repressed in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 27(3), 321-330.
- Freud, S. (1900). *The interpretation of dreams*. Basic Books.
- Freud, S. (1919). The uncanny. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 17, pp. 217-256). Hogarth Press.
- Gibson, R. (2008). *Trauma and recovery in contemporary fiction*. New York University Press.
- Gladwin, P. J., & Suganya, M. J. (2020). Psychological trauma and grief in *The Lovely Bones*. *Psychological Studies Journal*, 8(2), 134-145.
- Jentsch, E. (1906). On the psychology of the uncanny. *Journal of the British Society for Psychical Research*, 21(5), 56-72.
- Jentsch, E. (1997). On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906). Angelaki: *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2(1), 7-16.
- Jones, L. (2009). The legacy of loss in modern fiction: Revisiting "The Lovely Bones". *Journal of Modern Literary Criticism*, 12(4), 299-311.
- Sebold, A. (2002). *The Lovely Bones*. Little, Brown, and Company.
- Wati, R. (2020). *Psychopath and the role of grief in *The Lovely Bones*. *Journal of Psychoanalytic Studies*, 12(3), 89-98.