

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains the main idea of this thesis. It contains research background, statement of the problem, research objectives, research significant, and definition of key terms.

#### **1.1 Research Background**

Melancholia is a complex emotion that is commonly felt by humans in various phases of their lives. It is characterized by deep sadness, loss of zest for life, a feeling of emptiness, and emotional reflection that often has no clear or immediate cause. Sigmund Freud, in his seminal psychoanalytic essay “Mourning and Melancholia”, draws a fundamental distinction between mourning, a healthy and time-bound process of grief, and melancholia, which he describes as a pathological counterpart. Freud explains that in melancholia, “the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost” and that the loss is often “withdrawn from consciousness” (Freud, 1917). This suggests that melancholia may arise not only from tangible bereavements but also from more abstract or unconscious losses, such as the erosion of self-esteem, identity, or purpose. Therefore, Freud defines melancholia as a mental condition that arises from an individual's inability to let go of a lost object, so that the loss is internalized and leads to protracted suffering (Freud, 1917). In a nutshell, melancholia is not just ordinary sadness, but a form of sadness that is more deeply embedded and lasts for a relatively long time.

In human life, feelings of melancholia can arise in response to personal disappointment, social alienation, or even a deeper existential dissatisfaction that cannot be easily identified. Throughout history, melancholia has been portrayed in various artistic and literary forms as both a source of pain and an avenue for deep reflection. Writers, poets, and philosophers have explored melancholia not only as an emotional affliction but also as a state of mind that

allows for contemplation of life's deeper questions, such as the nature of existence, personal identity, and the boundaries of human emotion. As stated by Ross Chambers that melancholy is not simply a theme, but a mode of writing, a way of articulating opposition, of speaking from the margins, from the place of loss (Chambers, 1993). In this context, melancholia is not merely a psychological condition but a profound narrative trope in literary works that deal with themes of alienation, trauma, and the search for meaning. A similar view is expressed by Peter Toohey who sees melancholia as a form of withdrawal from a world perceived as disappointing and as a turning point towards self-contemplation. He writes, "melancholy may serve as a form of withdrawal from a world perceived as hostile or disappointing. In literature, it often marks a turn inward, a focusing on the self and personal identity" (Toohey, 2004). These two views confirm that melancholia is an important tool in literary narratives to articulate the complexity of human experience, especially in the face of unresolved wounds, alienation, and identity struggles.

In contemporary times, which are often described as digital, postmodern, or even as an era of existential crisis, melancholia has taken on new and more complex forms. The hyper-connectivity of the digital age paradoxically reinforces isolation and disconnection, while social pressures and the erosion of traditional values contribute to a sense of spiritual or psychological emptiness. Melancholia today can manifest in subtle and covert forms-through digital disillusionment, cultural fatigue, and identity fragmentation-making its exploration through psychoanalytic literature and theory all the more important. Therefore, this study situates melancholia not only as a psychological phenomenon, but also as a significant literary theme, especially in the context of modern cultural production.

Melancholia cannot only be understood from an individual or psychological perspective, but must also be seen as a complex social and cultural phenomenon. Within a psychoanalytic framework, the internal conflicts underlying melancholia are often rooted in the dynamics of the relationship

between the individual and their social environment, including cultural norms, identity pressures, and experiences of social marginalization or rejection. Therefore, melancholia can also be considered as a response to the misalignment between personal desires and disappointing or oppressive external realities. On the other hand, in literary and cultural studies, melancholia serves as a critical tool that allows writers and artists to explore complex inner realms, unearth hidden wounds, and present alternative narratives that challenge the dominance of official discourse or social norms. This reinforces the idea that melancholia is not just a pathological condition, but also a form of creative expression that provides space for reflection, resistance, and identity reconstruction. Thus, the interdisciplinary study of melancholia opens new insights in understanding how humans respond to and interpret loss, alienation, and the search for meaning in a changing and uncertain world.

Literature has long served as a profound medium for the exploration and representation of complex human psychological conditions, among which melancholia occupies a significant place. Melancholia, often characterized by deep, persistent sadness, loss, and introspection, is richly depicted in literary works through various symbolic devices, internal character conflicts, and introspective narrative techniques. These literary portrayals do not merely tell a story; they delve into the subconscious realms of human experience, rendering visible the often-invisible psychological struggles that shape human existence. In the psychoanalytic approach to literature, often referred to as psycho-literature, the concept of melancholia is analyzed through the lens of fundamental personality structures originally proposed by Sigmund Freud, namely the id, ego, and superego. The id represents primal drives and desires, the superego embodies moral standards and societal norms, while the ego mediates between these conflicting forces and reality. Literary characters experiencing melancholia often reveal a complex interplay among these psychic components, which may manifest in internal tensions, self-reproach, or a fragmented sense of self. Moreover, psycho-literature examines how characters employ various defense mechanisms, such as repression (the unconscious

blocking of painful memories or desires) or sublimation (redirecting unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable activities), to cope with their emotional turmoil. These psychological processes enrich the narrative by providing layers of meaning that illuminate the human psyche's intricacies.

Beyond the individual level, literature also reflects broader socio-cultural and historical contexts in which melancholia arises as a response to collective trauma, political upheaval, or existential crises. For instance, literary works emerging from times of war, colonization, or systemic oppression often embody a collective melancholic consciousness a shared sense of loss, disillusionment, and mourning that transcends individual experience. In this way, melancholia becomes not only a personal affliction but also a cultural phenomenon embedded in the fabric of societal memory and identity. This socio-cultural dimension is essential in understanding how literature functions as a space where personal and communal grief intersect and where readers can engage in emotional and ethical reflection. Significantly, the representation of melancholia in literary texts evokes empathy in readers, creating an intimate space for emotional resonance and self-reflection. By entering the melancholic worlds of characters, readers are invited to confront their own feelings of sadness, loss, or alienation, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human condition. This empathetic engagement transforms melancholia from a mere thematic element into a powerful catalyst for psychological insight and emotional catharsis.

In contemporary literary studies, the interdisciplinary approach has become increasingly vital for uncovering the multilayered meanings embedded in modern literary works. Among these methods, psycho-literature stands out as a particularly relevant and productive framework, especially when analyzing genres such as lyrical poetry, song lyrics, and other forms of expressive literature that intimately engage with emotional and unconscious dimensions. By combining literary theory with psychological inquiry, psycho-literature enables scholars to explore how literary texts serve as manifestations of deep

psychic conflicts within individuals or social groups. According to literary critic Kathleen Holland, the psychoanalytic approach allows readers to interpret texts as reflections of unconscious dynamics, revealing elements of trauma, repression, and symbolic expressions of the personality structure (Holland, 1990). From this perspective, literary works are re-conceptualized not merely as aesthetic artifacts but as psychological archives, repositories of human experience that encode and preserve the subtle workings of the mind. This shift in understanding broadens the scope of literary analysis, making it possible to address questions related to identity, memory, desire, and loss with greater nuance.

The foundation of psycho-literature is deeply rooted in the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud, whose theories on the human psyche, dreams, and melancholia have profoundly influenced both psychology and literary criticism. Freud's concept of melancholia, as distinguished from mourning, involves a pathological internalization of loss, where the ego identifies with the lost object, leading to self-reproach and diminished self-worth. This notion provides a crucial framework for analyzing how characters in literature internalize trauma and engage in complex psychological struggles that shape their narratives and identities. In sum, melancholia in literature is far more than a mere thematic device; it is a multifaceted phenomenon that bridges individual psychology and socio-cultural realities. Through the psycho-literary approach, scholars and readers alike gain access to a deeper understanding of the human psyche as it negotiates pain, loss, and the search for meaning. By exploring melancholia through the intertwined lenses of psychology and literature, the researcher uncovers the enduring power of literary works to illuminate the depths of human suffering and resilience, ultimately enriching our appreciation of both art and the complexities of the mind.

The selection of Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* (2021) album as an object of study in the literary psychoanalytic approach, especially in the context of melancholia, is a very relevant and strong choice theoretically and contextually.

This album explicitly and implicitly represents inner struggle, loss of meaning, psychological wounds, and emotional emptiness. In addition, the selection of this album has strength in terms of personal and social context. The album is reflected in the introspective and emotionally charged feel of the lyrics. This makes the album very rich to examine, not only as a musical work, but also as a contemporary literary narrative that gives voice to the alienated, depressed, and unheard voices of the younger generation. In this context, *Happier Than Ever* also provides ample room for interpretation through a psycho-literature approach, as musical works such as this contain text (lyrics), allowing for in-depth analysis as well as traditional literary works. Analyzing the album through a psycho-literature approach opens up a new understanding that melancholia is not just a pathological condition, but also a form of resistance to social norms that demand constant happiness. In Eilish's work, melancholia appears as a form of courage in acknowledging wounds, as an alternative narrative to the culture of false positivity that dominates social media. Therefore, the lyrics in this album deserve to be considered as literary texts that have high psychological depth and social relevance. Using Freud's theory, we can explore how the experiences of loss, guilt, and repressed desires materialize in the structure of language and musical rhythms.

In this research there are some previous studies as a reference for this research. For the first come from Muhammad Eksan Maulana entitled *Figurative Language Translation Strategies and Qualities of Billie Eilish's Song Lyrics in Happier Than Ever Album* (Maulana, 2024). This previous study had been chosen because has same object with that researcher analysis with this study. In the study from Muhammad Eksan Maulana examined, this previous study focused on examine figurative language, translation strategies, and translation quality contained in Billie Eilish's album entitled *Happier Than Ever*. The differences between this study and this previous study are have different topic and theory for analysis the object.



Second previous study is come from Nur Annisa Meutiasari & Setyobudi have thesis title *Loss, Grief and Depression Depicted in Alice Sebold's The Lovely Bones; a Psychological Study* (Setyobudi, 2024). This previous study had been chosen because has same theory with that researcher analysis with this study. Nur Annisa Meutiasari & Setyobudi focused analyzed on found loss and sadness experienced by the three characters in the novel *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. The differences between this study and this previous study are have different topic and object for analysis the object.

The third previous study is by Aulia Normalita, titled *Portrait of Id, Ego and Superego Listeners on Song Lyrics by Didi Kempot; Study Literary Psychology*. (Normalita, 2020). This study was chosen because it uses the same psychoanalytic theory as this research. Normalita's study focuses on the representation of the Id, Ego, and Superego in Didi Kempot's song lyrics, as well as the psychological responses of listeners. The difference between this study and the current research lies in the topic and the object of analysis.

Last previous study entitled *Bittersweet Symphony: Nostalgia and Melancholia in Music Reception* (Toth & Dienlin, 2023). This previous study had been chosen because has same topic with that researcher analysis with this study. Roland and Tobias focused on analysis the object identify the theoretical underpinnings and determine how they can be measured empirically. They analyze how listening to music causes nostalgia and melancholia, and whether both experiences are related to different behavioral intentions. The differences between this study and this previous study are have different object for analysis.

From various previous studies that have been presented, this research presents a different discussion, both in terms of topic selection and the approach to the theme raised. This research specifically combines a discussion of the theme of melancholia that refers to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory with an in-depth analysis of the writing of pop song lyrics written by Billie Eilish in her album entitled *Happier Than Ever*. Freud's original concept of melancholia as outlined in *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud, 1917) has been expanded in

recent scholarship, such as recent literary and cultural theorists, Tammy Clewell (2004) have argued that melancholia should be reconsidered not merely as pathological, but as a meaningful and productive mode of subjectivity that reflects unresolved grief and identity conflict. These modern reinterpretations open new pathways for applying psychoanalytic theory beyond traditional texts, specifically into the realm of contemporary pop music.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

In a contemporary world filled with emotional stress and social alienation, musical works often become a medium for expressing the deepest psychological conditions of humans. One such condition is melancholia, as described by Sigmund Freud as a form of pathological sadness due to loss that is not fully realized. Billie Eilish, through her album *Happier Than Ever*, voices form of inner suffering that seem to be in line with Freud's symptoms of melancholia. In reality (*das Sein*), the lyrics of the songs in this album contain expressions of loss, identity conflict, and aggression towards oneself. However, normatively (*das Sollen*), literary works including song lyrics should be a space for exploration of these psychological conditions and should be able to be analyzed literally through a psychoanalytic approach. Based on this reality, the problems raised in this study are:

1. How are the characteristics of melancholia in Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* album?
2. How do the lyrics in Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* album represent narrator inability to let go of her lost?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the statement of the problem that has been presented, the main objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the characteristics of melancholia in the lyrics of Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* album as defined by Sigmund Freud.



2. To examine the narrator inability of let go of her lost in the lyrics of the album *Happier Than Ever*.

#### **1.4 Research Significances**

##### **1. Theoretical Significance:**

Theoretically, this study contributes significantly to the field of literary criticism by demonstrating the relevance and applicability of psychoanalytic theory, particularly Sigmund Freud's concept of melancholia, in analyzing contemporary musical works as literary texts. By examining the intricate interplay between lyrical content and psychological expression, this research bridges the gap between literature and psychology, offering a nuanced understanding of how internal emotional states are externalized through artistic media. Specifically, it explores how melancholia, a complex psychological condition characterized by unresolved grief, loss, and self-reproach, can be effectively communicated through song lyrics, vocal performance, and aesthetic choices in musical composition. In doing so, this study not only affirms the enduring value of classic psychoanalytic frameworks such as Freud's theory of melancholia but also demonstrates their continued relevance in interpreting modern cultural and emotional narratives. Moreover, this interdisciplinary approach enriches contemporary literary discourse by expanding its analytical tools to include psycho-literary interpretations, thereby validating popular music as a legitimate and fertile ground for scholarly literary inquiry. Ultimately, this research underscores the evolving nature of literature in the digital age, where music and lyrics serve as powerful texts that reflect and shape the psychological realities of modern audiences.

##### **2. Practical Significance:**

Practically, this research serves as a valuable reference for students, scholars, and researchers across multiple disciplines such as English literature, cultural studies, media studies, and psychology, particularly those who are interested in exploring the representation of psychological states, especially melancholia, in popular culture. Furthermore, this study can inspire future

interdisciplinary projects that analyze popular music as a form of literary and cultural text, thereby broadening the scope of literary studies to include more diverse and accessible forms of artistic expression. For educators, this research may be utilized as an example to teach literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and contemporary cultural analysis in classrooms, helping students to engage more critically with popular media. On a broader level, this research also has practical implications for the general public, particularly for fans and listeners of Billie Eilish. It provides a deeper, more interpretative framework for understanding the emotional complexity embedded in the *Happier Than Ever* album, encouraging audiences to move beyond surface-level listening and engage in a more reflective and critical appreciation of music.

