

Psychoanalytic Criticism on Song Lyrics *Cancer* by My Chemical Romance

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the feelings experienced by the main character in the song "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance. This descriptive qualitative research aims to discover the anxiety and mental condition faced by a patient affected by cancer, as reflected in the song's lyrics, using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as an approach. Data were collected through the approach of repeatedly listening to the song, understanding, and interpreting the literary work. The song "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance, without an accompanying music video, is the focus of the analysis, relying solely on the lyrics as the source. This approach involves understanding the meaning of the words, examining the emotional context, and exploring potential symbolism within the lyrics. The main goal of this research is to uncover and analyze the anxiety and mental journey of a patient affected by cancer through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological dynamics faced by the main character in the song "Cancer" will be achieved, and how Freud's psychoanalytic theory can assist in analyzing subconscious layers and psychological conflicts that may arise in the context of the song's lyrics. In conclusion, through the psychoanalytic lens, "Cancer" becomes an emotional narrative illustrating the dynamics between personality components in facing feelings of loss and death, creating a profound experience that feels both personal and universal.

Introduction

The evolving function of music as a tool for mass communication is inseparable from its ability to convey emotions and entire lyrics, creating a profound emotional expression for its listeners. This capability allows listeners to feel the intensity of emotions embedded in each song, aligning with the definition of a song as described in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th edition (2010:1419), which defines a song as a short piece of music with sung lyrics. Lyrics, as an expressive medium, serve as a vessel for musicians to summarize and communicate the complexity of emotions, life experiences, and philosophical perspectives to their audience. Thus, through lyrics, songwriters possess the skill to express their personal identity, narrate their life journey, and contemplate the human condition with greater depth. Music and lyrics, as a unified entity, not only play a role in creating aesthetic works of art but also function as a crucial channel for sharing stories and building emotional connections between artists and listeners.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the power of music and lyrics goes beyond their ability to evoke beauty and artistic appreciation. They serve as profound means of communication, enabling the absorption of emotions and the creation of emotional bonds that enrich the listening experience for all involved in the world of music. Similarly, the renowned



alternative rock band My Chemical Romance (MCR), originating from the United States, gained acclaim with their album "The Black Parade" released in 2006. Among the tracks in this album, the song "Cancer" stands out for its profound emotional impact on fans. This poignant piece is inspired by the personal ordeal of Gerard Way, the band's lead vocalist, who revealed that "Cancer" was born from the heart-wrenching experience of losing a loved one to the ravages of the disease. The lyrics poignantly mirror sentiments of loss, pain, and the helpless acceptance of an unchangeable destiny. In the lyrics of "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance, the songwriter conveys profound meaning, depicting the experience of a man facing death due to cancer. The detailed lyrics portray the suffering and desperation experienced by the main character ("The Patient") in the midst of the struggle against this deadly disease. There is a theme of seeking truth in this song. The character in the song seems to desperately want to know the truth about his condition, creating an atmosphere of despair and a desire to reconcile with reality.

My Chemical Romance strongly conveys various emotions and sorrows through their song lyrics. In the song, they strive to provide a realistic depiction of the struggle against a devastating illness. The use of metaphors and analogies is a distinctive feature in delivering the message in this song. Although cancer is used as a metaphor, the lyrics still depict the real experiences and intense suffering of the character. Furthermore, the song should be understood as an integral part of the overall narrative found in "The Black Parade" album. Each song in the album contributes to the story of life, death, and the afterlife. "Cancer" itself reveals the most vulnerable and touching side of the character's journey. In the context of the album, this song serves as a crucial element that enriches and deepens the overall narrative. By delving into the emotional dimensions and the character's suffering, the song becomes a poignant climax that moves and resonates with the listener on a profound level.

This article aims to conduct a thorough analysis of the lyrics of "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance, presenting the psychological content within them and linking it to the psychoanalytic concept proposed by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud (1991), three crucial conceptual parts of human personality are the id, ego, and superego. Based on the pleasure principle, the id operates at the unconscious level and consists of two types of biological instincts: Eros and Thanatos. The life instinct, Eros, assists individuals in surviving in the world and directs life-sustaining activities such as respiration, eating, and sex. The ego develops from the id during infancy, with the purpose of satisfying the id's demands in a safe and socially acceptable manner. The ego operates at both conscious and unconscious levels, following the reality principle in contrast to the id.

During childhood, the superego develops, as every child follows the same-sex parent and attempts to identify with them. The superego is responsible for ensuring moral standards in individuals, operating on moral principles and motivating them to behave in socially acceptable ways. The fundamental dilemma for all human beings is that every part of the psychic apparatus makes demands that are incompatible with the other two. Therefore, every person is under inner conflict. Freud compares the relationship between the structure of personality and the levels of consciousness to an iceberg floating on water. The unconscious mind controls the conscious mind of the person.

In the melodious tune, the lyrics of this song become a field of complex play between the ID, Ego, and Superego. Seemingly permeating through every note, internal conflict brings forth ruthless instincts and basic desires from the ID, intersecting with the earnest efforts of the Ego to find a balance between desires and external reality. While the melody plays, the moral struggle and social values from the Superego involve themselves, embedding within the lyrics and creating an emotional narrative depicting an individual's journey in facing life's challenges. With a focus on



the internal conflict between the ID, Ego, and Superego, this article summarizes Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts by analyzing emotional and moral conflicts at the individual level or even in a collective context. The research has reviewed 3 studies related to the topic discussed.

The first research, titled "Portrait of Id, Ego, and Superego Listeners on Song Lyrics by Didi Kempot: A Literary Psychology Study (Aulia Normalita: 2020)," revolves around the exploration and description of the psychological elements of id, ego, and superego in listeners, as manifested through the lyrics of Didi Kempot's songs. Employing Sigmund Freud's literary psychology approach, this qualitative descriptive study utilizes content analysis and interview techniques to delve into the intricate layers of listeners' psyches. The data sources encompass a selection of Didi Kempot's song lyrics, including notable tracks such as "Pamer Bojo," "Cidro," and "Banyu Langit," complemented by insights gleaned from interview responses from the research participants. The analytical methodology applied involves an interactive model analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics at play. The outcomes of the research unveil the presence of distinct psychic structures, namely id, ego, and superego, both within the listeners themselves and within the lyrical compositions of Didi Kempot. Interestingly, the analysis reveals that the ego dominates the listeners' psychic landscape, signifying a conscious engagement with the emotional content conveyed by the songs. This observation is further corroborated by the examination of the lyrics, wherein the ego emerges as the predominant element. In essence, the study demonstrates the feasibility of utilizing literary psychology to portray and comprehend the intricate psychic structures inherent in both the listeners and the song lyrics. By examining the interplay of id, ego, and superego, the research provides a nuanced exploration of the psychological dimensions embedded in the musical experience, shedding light on the conscious and subconscious aspects of the listeners' engagement with Didi Kempot's poignant lyrics..

The second research, titled "Psychoanalytic and Interracial Perspectives in the Music Video 'My Humps' (Ayungnityas: 2017)," aims to delve into the analysis of poetic elements embedded in the lyrics and to present psychological content to readers as reflected in the music video. In conducting this analysis, the research employs textual and contextual theories as a framework to unravel the existing data. The research methodology includes close reading, attentive listening, and careful viewing as ways to compile the object of study from the "My Humps" music video. The focus of this study is the exploration of the existence of psychoanalysis through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory within the context of American hip-hop music. The analysis encompasses concepts such as id, ego, superego, defense mechanisms, psychosexual aspects, and interracial perspectives reflected in the lyrics and scenes presented in the "My Humps" music video. By delving into these elements, the research aims to unearth a deeper understanding of how psychological influences and dynamics of interracial relationships are manifested in this work of art. Thus, it is anticipated that this research will contribute to a broader understanding of the complexity of artistic expression, both in terms of the linguistic aspects of poetry and its implications on psychology and social dynamics as reflected in the medium of the "My Humps" music video.

The third research entitled The Psychological Concepts in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" (Putri Anindhita, Novia: 2015) This captivating study delves into the poetic elements of the lyrics, unraveling the psychological intricacies portrayed in the music video. By employing both intrinsic and extrinsic theories, the research not only analyzes the data but also embarks on a literary exploration through library research, delving into the profound psychological theories of none other than Sigmund Freud. The revelations of this study unfold a fascinating psychoanalytic



narrative within American pop music, unveiling the presence of id, ego, superego, defense mechanisms, and symbolization intricately woven into the lyrics and visuals of the song "Blank Space". As we dissect both the lyrics and the music video, a compelling conclusion emerges "Blank Space" serves as a poignant expression of a woman's insatiable longing for continual intimacy with her partner. The very term "Blank Space" poignantly symbolizes the woman's dormant desires, only to awaken during moments of passionate engagement. Further delving into the scenes, the narrative unveils the woman's cathartic acts a dance of displacement witnessed through actions like cutting a tree, assaulting a car, scissoring and discarding the man's clothes, setting fire to his suit, squeezing and biting an apple, stabbing a cake, and even adopting cats as pets. Each act, a symbolic release of pent-up emotions and love desires aimed at the man, cleverly employing displacement as a form of emotional liberation. Moreover, the study incorporates the enthralling theory of psychodynamic dreams, employing the symbolization process through the enigmatic brush, the symbolic tree, and the metaphorical knife, all subtly representing the male's genitalia. These symbols, strategically placed, add layers of intrigue, allowing the music video to convey profound messages while veiled in artistic symbolism. "Blank Space" becomes not just a song but a rich tapestry of psychological exploration and artistic expression, inviting the audience into a world where emotions and desires find a unique and captivating resonance.

In applying psychoanalysis to song lyrics, it is crucial to conduct a profound analysis of the song's text to unearth and comprehend the potential psychological elements it may contain. Several aspects of psychoanalysis can be applied to song lyrics, including the analysis of symbols and metaphors, which play a significant role in revealing hidden messages or profound meanings reflecting psychological concepts related to specific emotions or experiences. It is important to highlight that the expression of emotions, a key element in mental development and health, becomes the primary focus when song lyrics serve as an outlet for emotional expression for the songwriter. This process not only aids in identifying but also in understanding various types of emotions expressed, adding a rich psychological dimension to the artistic work.

Furthermore, an understanding of internal conflicts and efforts to achieve resolution is an integral part of the psychoanalytic approach to song lyrics. Lyrics may reflect internal conflicts, contradictions, or a search for meaning in life, all of which can be explained through in-depth psychological analysis. The influence of personal experiences, as proposed in psychoanalysis, is mirrored in song lyrics. The expression of personal experiences, including trauma or personal growth, becomes the focus of analysis, depicting a close relationship between artistic work and one's psychological reality. Lastly, the analysis of specific words and phrases provides additional depth to emotional conditions, self-perception, or subconscious conflicts that may be present in song lyrics. The application of psychoanalysis to song lyrics offers a profound perspective, allowing listeners to explore hidden meanings and gain deeper insights into the thoughts and feelings of the singer or songwriter. This creates a close connection between Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and creative interpretation in the realm of musical art.

The song "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance is a poignant and emotionally charged track from their concept album "The Black Parade," released in 2006. This particular song, written by the band's vocalist Gerard Way, delves into themes of loss, pain, and the profound impact of cancer. Gerard Way has openly shared that the inspiration behind "Cancer" stems from his personal experience of losing someone dear to him due to cancer. The lyrics reflect the deep emotions associated with such a devastating loss, expressing feelings of grief, suffering, and the sense of powerlessness in the face of an uncontrollable fate. The song's somber and melodic tone, coupled with the heartfelt lyrics, creates a powerful and moving musical experience. "Cancer" stands as a



testament to My Chemical Romance's ability to use their music not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a means to connect with listeners on a profound emotional level. The track resonates with many fans who can relate to the universal themes of love, loss, and the impact of illness explored within the song.

Discussion

"Cancer" by My Chemical Romance, penned by lead vocalist Gerard Way, explores profound themes of loss, grief, and the emotional toll of cancer. Inspired by Way's personal experience, the song delves into the struggle, pain, and powerlessness associated with the disease. It reflects a universal narrative of confronting mortality and the impact of illness on individuals and relationships. With a somber tone and raw emotion, "Cancer" provides listeners with a cathartic experience, resonating on both a personal and universal level.

"Turn away
If you could get me a drink
Of water 'cause my lips are chapped and faded"

The request for a drink of water paints a complex emotional picture associated with the experiences of loss and suffering. This request can be analyzed in the context of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, where the symbolism of water reflects a desire for freshness and healing, as well as a dependency on the ego to seek support in physical reality. When the lyrics mention dry and pale lips, it is not just a physical description but also a reflection of the emotional state connected to loss. This request also mirrors the feeling of an inability to directly cope with suffering, and through this expression, the singer conveys the need for support and recovery. Thus, these lyrics present a profound depiction of emotional struggles and efforts to find comfort in facing a challenging reality.

"Call my aunt Marie
Help her gather all my things"

The additional information that Aunt Marie in the song "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance represents Marie Curie, a cancer fighter and the founder of the cancer foundation "Marie Curie Cancer Foundation," who also succumbed to cancer, adds a layer of historical and symbolic significance to the lyrics. This detail expands the interpretation, suggesting that Aunt Marie becomes a poignant symbol not only of familial support but also of the broader struggle against cancer. In the context of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this revelation could be seen as a complex intertwining of personal and collective unconscious elements. Aunt Marie may embody not only the individual's personal connection to family but also a collective representation of societal struggles, fears, and losses related to cancer. This aligns with Freud's idea of universal symbols and archetypes that resonate across cultures and individuals. The act of gathering belongings, when associated with Marie Curie's representation, may take on additional significance, symbolizing the collective effort to gather and preserve the legacy of those who fought against cancer. The lyrics, therefore, become a poignant exploration of both personal and collective mourning, emphasizing the emotional impact of the disease on individuals and society as a whole.



"And bury me
In all my favorite colors"

This phrase can be interpreted as a desire to be buried in favorite colors, possibly reflecting personal identity and a wish to maintain authenticity even in the context of death. It may be related to Freud's concepts of ego and superego, which are involved in the preservation of identity and morality.

"My sisters and my brothers, still
I will not kiss you"

The lyrics reflect a resistance to close or intimate relationships, aligning with the concept of resistance in Freudian psychoanalysis. This phrase can also be seen as a rejection of the Eros drive, the force of love and life, which reflects the crucial role of the ego in self-control. Overall, these lyrics present a portrayal of an unwillingness to open up emotionally or engage in deeper bonds.

"Cause the hardest part of this
Is leaving you"

When applied to the context of psychoanalytic theory, these lyrics can be interpreted as an expression of the emotional conflict that arises when someone has to leave or face a separation from a beloved object. This process may involve a conflict between emotional needs (Id), the wisdom to accept reality (Ego), and internal norms or morals (Superego) that play a role in maintaining relationships and emotional bonds.

"Now turn away
Cause I'm awful just to see
Cause all my hair's abandoned all my body"

These lyrics reflect psychological aspects that can be associated with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The request to turn away may indicate an effort to protect oneself from anxiety or discomfort, aligning with the concept of the ego in psychoanalysis. Acknowledging that oneself is "awful" to see could indicate internal conflict and feelings of low self-worth, related to the superego concept that establishes moral and ethical standards. Additionally, physical changes, such as losing hair, can be interpreted as a symbol of losing control or personal appeal, connecting with the Id aspect in psychoanalysis that encompasses instinctual desires. Thus, these lyrics create a complex depiction of internal conflict, self-perception, and physical symbolism within the context of psychoanalytic theory.

"All my agony
Know that I will never marry"

In the lyrics there is an expression of suffering and a decision not to marry. From the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, this suffering can be associated with internal conflicts between various elements of the personality, such as id, ego, and superego. The decision not to marry may reflect the influence of past experiences, the use of defense mechanisms, and tension between instinctual drives (id) and societal norms (superego). Connection to Freud's psychosexual development stages, especially the genital stage, as well as associations with the



Freudian concept of symbolic death, can also be interpretations in the context of these lyrics. Thus, these lyrics can be understood as a complex emotional expression related to various psychological aspects and personality development within the framework of psychoanalytic theory.

"Baby I'm just soggy from the chemo
But counting down the days to go
It just ain't living"

The phrase "Baby I'm just soggy from the chemo" reflects the physical and emotional impact of treatment, which can be associated with the Freudian concept of the "Id," encompassing instincts and basic drives. The statement "But counting down the days to go" mirrors impatience and the desire to overcome a challenging period, possibly linked to psychological defense mechanisms. The expression "It just ain't living" signifies dissatisfaction with the current condition, and can be connected to the conflict between individual desires (Id) and moral norms (Superego). Thus, these lyrics depict a complex portrayal of an individual facing the physical and emotional challenges of cancer treatment, viewed through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic concepts.

And I just hope you know
That if you say (if you say)
Good-bye today (good-bye today)
I'd ask you to be true (I'd ask you to be true)

In those lyrics, a connection with the concepts of id, ego, and superego in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory can be identified. The statement "And I just hope you know" reflects the function of the ego, aiming to mediate between unconscious instinctual drives (id) and the moral demands or external reality (superego). The request or hope related to not saying goodbye, as expressed in the phrase "Good-bye today," may mirror spontaneous urges from the id to avoid separation or loss. Meanwhile, the expression "I'd ask you to be true" highlights the role of the superego, urging behavior in line with moral norms and ethics, inviting one to remain honest and faithful. Thus, these lyrics create a depiction of the complex dynamics between various aspects of the personality within Freud's psychoanalytic framework.

"Cause the hardest part of this is leaving you"

The lyrics reflect the emotional dynamics and conflicts that occur in the context of relationships and separation. In Freudian psychoanalytic analysis, the difficulty of leaving someone can be associated with the concepts of loss and separation, triggering a conflict between personal desires and societal demands explained through personality theories, particularly maturity and ego theory. The use of defense mechanisms, such as deviation and denial, may also emerge as responses to the anxiety of separation and parting, integral parts of psychosexual development according to Freud. Thus, these lyrics provide a window into the emotional complexities involving the process of separation, analyzed through the framework of psychoanalytic theory.

Conclusion

In the poignant song "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance, a profound exploration of psychoanalytic concepts such as id, ego, and superego provides rich insights into the intricate psychological struggles



that individuals face in the midst of loss and the inevitable reality of death. This analytical journey unveils the intricate layers of human consciousness as portrayed in the song's narrative. The psychoanalytic framework, as proposed by Sigmund Freud, sheds light on the dynamics of the human psyche presented in the lyrics. The id, characterized by instinctual drives, manifests in the profound desire to avoid the heart-wrenching experience of parting. This instinctual aspect of the self is a primal force that seeks to preserve emotional well-being and protect against the harsh reality of separation. Concurrently, the ego, functioning as a mediator in the psyche, emerges as a critical element in maintaining emotional equilibrium amid the tumultuous landscape of conflict and suffering. It serves as a rational force, negotiating the delicate balance between the instinctual desires of the id and the societal and moral considerations. The superego, akin to a moral overseer, assumes a prominent role in encouraging honesty and fidelity, especially in challenging circumstances. Within the lyrical narrative, statements like "And I just hope you know" reflect an innate instinct for self-defense when confronted with the harsh truth of mortality. Simultaneously, the longing for honesty within the context of impending loss represents a superego-driven urge to uphold moral values even in the face of adversity.

Delving into the emotional intricacies embedded in the song, "Cancer" becomes more than a musical composition; it transforms into an emotional narrative that encapsulates the profound and universal human experience of grappling with loss and mortality. The song offers a glimpse into the internal complexities of humanity when confronted with the harsh and inevitable realities of life, presenting a narrative that resonates on both personal and universal levels. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, the lyrics become a profound exploration of the intricate interplay between various components of personality when navigating the complex terrain of emotions associated with loss and death. In essence, "Cancer" serves as a poignant artistic expression that captures the multifaceted nature of the human psyche, creating an emotionally resonant experience that transcends individual boundaries.

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