

An Analysis of Billy Joel's Song Lyric *Vienna* using Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism Theory

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Abstract : Psychoanalytic criticism employs Freud's and following theorists' "reading" techniques to interpret texts. It is argued that literary texts, like dreams, reveal the author's unconscious desires and worries; a literary work is an expression of the author's neuroses. It is possible to psychoanalyze a specific literary character, however, it is generally accepted that all such characters are reflections of the author's personality. A remarkable characteristic of this method is that it affirms the significance of literature by utilizing a literary key for decoding. Freud himself penned, "The dream-thoughts that we first encounter in the course of our analysis often blow us by the unusual form in which they are expressed; they are not clothed in the prosaic language typically employed by our thoughts, but are instead represented symbolically through similes and metaphors, in images resembling poetic speech". This analytical attempt, like psychoanalysis itself, seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilts, ambivalences, etc. within a potentially disjointed literary work. The author's personal childhood traumas, family life, sexual difficulties, and fixations will be reflected in the conduct of the literary work's characters. Yet psychological material will be expressed indirectly, disguised, or encoded (as in dreams) via concepts such as "symbolism" (the repressed object represented in disguise), "condensation" (many thoughts or individuals depicted in a single image), and "displacement" (anxiety located onto another image by means of association). Many artists expressed their thoughts, anxiety, and buried dreams through song lyrics. One of which is Billy Joel with his song *Vienna*. The qualitative research method was used to analyze the data in this study. The lyrics of *Vienna's* song are analyzed utilizing psychoanalytic literary criticism theory as the guidelines. The findings show that this song contains many elements of psychoanalytic through the metaphors that Billy Joel used in the lyrics.

Keywords : *Psychoanalytic, metaphor, song lyrics, criticism*

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1. Introduction

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is a way of analyzing and interpreting literary works that rely on psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud to explain the workings of the human mind. In this field of literary criticism, the major concepts of psychoanalytic theory, such as the idea of an unconscious and conscious mind, the divisions of the id, ego, and superego, and the Oedipus complex, are applied to literature to gain a deeper understanding of that work. The idea of a conscious and an unconscious mind is one of the most important tools in psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Freud theorized that people have a conscious part of the mind, where thinking takes place and where they are aware of their thoughts. He also proposed the idea of an unconscious part of the mind, where desires and drives exist that people are not aware of, but that affect them and sometimes cause psychological problems. Freud would often analyze dreams, which he believed were windows into the working of the unconscious mind. He believed dreams had obvious, or manifest, content that masked the latent, or unconscious, desires and drives. He used symbolism and dream analysis to discover the latent content of the dream. One technique in psychoanalytic literary criticism is to treat a work of literature as though it is a dream. The goal of this technique is to understand the unconscious symbols and desires through the interpretation of the more obvious content. This type of literary criticism uses symbolism and other forms of analysis to get at the latent content of a work of literature. Childhood experiences are extremely influential and, to a large degree, shape a person's psyche, according to Freud. Freud believed the experiences of childhood lead to the development of three divisions in the mind: the ego, the id, and the superego.

The ego is the conscious part of the brain, the part a person is aware of. The id is the unconscious or repressed desires a person has, including the desires caused by the Oedipus complex. The superego is the conscience, the judge, and jury in a person's mind. Psychoanalytic literary criticism looks for the influences of all three parts of the mind in literature. This paper examines the psychoanalytic criticism in Billy Joel's song *Lyrics Vienna*. Vienna is a metaphor for old age, it is not something to dread, but something to embrace. You can still have a productive and peaceful old age. Billy said that the inspiration for the song came when he was visiting his estranged father, Helmut (Howard) Joel, in Vienna. He saw an elderly woman sweeping the streets and told his father that it was awful to see an old woman doing that, but his father pointed out that she was doing something useful and productive. In America, people tend to push aside the elderly, but in many other countries, the elderly were revered and respected, and contribute to society in many unrecognized ways.

Billy has also said that Vienna may subconsciously be about his father. Billy's father left the family when Billy was a child and returned to Europe. But in the end, Vienna is about enjoying the ride before the destination. Life moves on in the blink of an eye and you might be missing 'life' itself while chasing your dreams. God forbid, if you don't reach your dreams, you would have missed the journey, too. Billy Joel tried to share these morals and his point of view through the metaphor used in the song lyrics, with a psychoanalytic approach.

As references for this study, some relevant previous studies were reviewed. First is an article entitled *Self-reflection in Lana Del Rey's song 'Hope is a Dangerous Thing for Woman Like Me to Have'* by Nurcahyanti, Adelia, and Russilawatie, Novia in 2022. This paper aims to analyze the psychological self-reflection contained in Lana Del Rey's song

"Hope is a Dangerous Thing for a Woman Like Me to Have." In this paper, two problems are investigated. The lyrics of the song contain self-reflection, which is the first issue. The second element is the song's lyrical message. The author employs Freud's Psychoanalytic theory and Abrams' Objective theory as references to aid and supports this study. This study is a qualitative investigation supported by papers, books, journal articles, internet articles, and theses. Using reading and note-taking to acquire data is the method of data collection. This study demonstrates that Lana Del Rey's song "Hope is a Dangerous Thing for a Woman Like Me to Have" is a form of self-reflection about her struggle to attain the life she has always desired. The author also realizes the significance of self-reflection in life and demonstrates that hope poses no threat to anyone.

The second is an article entitled *Youth's Depression of an Artist Portrayed in "Lonely" Song by Justin Bieber* written by Mufida Julia Mursalim and Yunitari Mustikawati in 2022. This study seeks to examine the messages in the song "Lonely" and the factors that leave Justin Bieber depressed as defined in "Lonely" by Justin Bieber using a psychological approach with Edward Bibring's theory; Mechanisms of Depression (2018) and Aaron Beck's theory; Cognitive Theory of Depression (2009). Based on newspaper or magazine articles, Bieber's official Instagram, and Justin Bieber's YouTube documentaries, the historical context of Bieber's mental health has been investigated. This investigation was conducted using a qualitative descriptive methodology. According to data provided by Bieber, researchers discovered three messages in "Lonely." There are expressions of hopelessness and helplessness, as well as the struggle for existence, that are associated with fame. Based on the above data, researchers identified four factors that contribute to Bieber's depression. These include substance abuse (drugs), emotionally and physically abusive relationships, Lyme disease, and reckless behavior.

The last is an article entitled *Billie Eilish Select Songs: Psychological Study of the Depression of Youth Today* written by Makiling, Ilustrisimo, Bernaldez, and Diones in 2022. This paper examined the depression of today's youth as depicted in select Billie Eilish songs, focusing on the theme, lyrics, and symbols. The data for the study was gathered using Sigmund Freud's Psychodynamic Theory, which discusses human personality, and his Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, which aids in the interpretative analysis of texts and functions as a psychological mechanism to reveal the hidden meanings of literary works. In addition, this research employs a qualitative method based on discourse analysis. Unresolved grief, hopelessness caused by loved ones' abandonment, society's toxic standards, pressure from family, and isolation and insignificance are identified as aspects of depression in the themes of Billie Eilish's select songs, according to the findings of a study; lyrics reveal skepticism towards society's positive side, feeling unloved, frustration in terrible circumstances experienced, anxiety about being left apart, negative criticisms causing desperation, self-pity, misery. In conclusion, select compositions by Billie Eilish portray youth depression.

2. Methods

This study employed text analysis as its qualitative research methodology. This strategy takes into account analyzing the composition and conducting library research. Library research is a technique for accumulating data from books and other sources, a few additional references, or in this case, a song. This technique also collects all pertinent information and raw data from relevant sources. To write this thesis, the researcher obtains data using text analysis, which

involves reading the song. Next, the researcher would attempt to recount the song's backstory.

For the research to be done correctly, the researcher applied Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze the concerns (1989). In this study the researcher used the song by Billy Joel entitled Vienna, which was released on November 29, 1977. This research uses the documentation approach to gather data. To examine the data, the researcher employed the descriptive qualitative approach. The process of analyzing and criticizing song lyrics in terms of the theory to discover their meanings follows the data collection. A brief reference to the lyrics follows an explanation of the analysis in the data display.

It must be made clear to the reader that this study is a descriptive analysis. The source of the data is the published literature. The process of descriptive analysis involves describing a data fact and then analyzing it. According to Stephen (2000), the Hermeneutic method, which was utilized for this study, first appeared in Aristotle's Hermeneias Faerie. This methodology begins with a heuristic reading. A heuristic reading is an early reading that develops a literal understanding of meaning to discover explicit or actual intent. Before heading to the second stage, which analyses and interprets the song hermetically, this method entails completing a line of a song lyric in the form of who-sentences and polishing it into something bright. This interpretation of the text is highly dependent on the interpreter.

This research applied a qualitative methodology. This study contains no statistical information. According to Mickey & Gass (2005), qualitative research employs descriptive data without a statistical procedure. Thus, in this thesis, qualitative methodology is employed to comprehend the song's significance.

3. Result and Discussion

One of the greatest pop-rock musicians of the 20th century, Billy Joel, dropped his album *The Stranger* in 1977. Not only does this album hold up exceptionally well for his fans, but it also contains some of Joel's most iconic and fantastic tracks. The song entitled "Vienna" is one of the album's finest tracks. The song is about Billy personifying Vienna as a metaphor for life and taking things a little more slowly. The composition is written from the perspective of Joel's father, who lived in Vienna and discusses his perspective with Billy. Before the percussion enters, the song begins with a solo piano that features notably romantic trills. The melody exudes a strong sense of closeness as if it were composed specifically for the listener. Consequently, the listener is motivated to take special note of the song's lyrics. In the first two lines, Billy's father emphasizes the significance of living slowly and appreciating all that life has to offer.

Data 1

"Slow down, you crazy child

You're so ambitious for a juvenile"

Billy Joel's father said this to Billy Joel. His residence is in Vienna, Austria. Even though Vienna is a large city (1,8 million inhabitants), it lacks the activity of New York. His father is stating, "Why hurry through life when you can live comfortably and leisurely?" Teenagers, particularly nutty adolescents, are sometimes characterized as having a "fast" lifestyle and driving excessively fast. Their adolescent years of Joel suit this stereotype perfectly. Billy Joel (or rather his father) wants to know what's all the rush about.

At the time of this song, Billy Joel himself was a teenager in his prime and actively pursuing his lifelong dream of becoming a musician. When the majority of people are adolescents, they aspire to be something that will require many years of effort (astronaut, actor, singer). As they age, they recognize that they cannot do these things or that they are inappropriate for them. Billy Joel's father is correct in stating that being a singer-songwriter is an ambitious profession. Billy, eventually, did reach this goal, but he was burnt at one point in his life.

Sure, there is so much to do in life – achieve goals, maintain relationships, have fun with friends, study, travel, hobbies, cook, clean, and so much more. But there's also so much time on the clock for a day. You absolutely cannot do everything that you want to do in a lifetime. Does this mean giving up? Absolutely not! Prioritize. Do what you love the most. Pursue what makes you the happiest. Dream on, but be realistic.

Data 2

"Where's the fire, what's the hurry about?

You'd better cool it off before you burn it out"

The phrase "Where's the fire?" is commonly used to enquire why someone is in such a rush. Before advising you to calm down and mellow out before exhaustion, Joel poses this question. Many celebrities exhaust themselves by working too hard or taking on more than they can handle soon, putting out albums without enough inspiration. Billy's father reminds the youthful Billy that not only does he have time to wait, but it can be advantageous to do so.

Data 3

"You can't be everything you wanna be

Before your time

Although it's so romantic

On the borderline tonight, tonight"

If you haven't realized your full potential, it will always remain a fantasy. It's exciting and romantic to imagine how amazing it will be when you're finally accomplishing what you know you're capable of; you'll feel on top of the world. In contrast to the next phrase about how "it's the life you lead," this borderline romanticism emphasizes the ordinariness of the here and now over the fantastic possibilities of the future. The infinite possibilities of tomorrow can be paralyzing, but if you can keep your focus on the here and now, you'll be OK.

Data 4

"But you know that when the truth is told

That you can get what you want

Or you can just get old

You're gonna

Kick off before you even get halfway through, ooh

When will you realize

Vienna waits for you?"

Both "when all is said and done" and "when the truth is told" mean the same thing. This line alludes to the choice between living the life you've always dreamed of and settling for a routine existence until old age and death. All routes will eventually lead to old age, but one will grant your wishes.

Billy's dad worries that he won't be able to enjoy the second half of his life because he didn't enjoy the first half. He's telling you that at the rate you're going when you get to the middle of your life, you'll look back and realize you never stopped to enjoy anything, or you'll kill yourself by trying too hard. And, well, his dad was kind of right. Billy did burn out for a few years after his marriage broke up, but from what everyone says, he's back on his feet now.

Data 5

"When will you realize

Vienna waits for you?"

The capital of Austria, Vienna, and the largest city in the country houses approximately 2 million people. Life in Vienna is supposedly the exact opposite of the hustle and bustle of a city like New York City, USA. The people of Vienna are supposedly free from the engines that propel them towards a hundred goals in their lives. This was in 1977, at least. Vienna represents the remainder of your existence. Joel asks all the youthful and impatient overachievers, "When will you learn to be patient and realise that the rest of your life can wait while you pursue love and happiness?"

Billy stated that he was in Vienna when he began writing this composition. He observes an elderly woman sweeping the street in this municipality. He queries his father why she must perform the task and not someone younger. His father tells him that everyone in this town has a purpose and contributes to society; as a result, everyone is valued and cared for. Vienna will wait for you regardless of your actions or how long they take. Vienna is life and what happens in life when you are chasing your goals. Vienna is that scenic route you take to reach a destination. It stands for the beauty of life – something you are bound to miss if you only look at your goal in front of you. The beauty lies on either side of the road, not in front.

Data 6

"Slow down, you're doin' fine

You can't be everything you wanna be"

These two sentences are packed with emotion. The first line feels like you are dropped on a cloud. The second line feels like you are dropped on a rock. Unfortunately, in life, we need both these wake-up calls. We need people around us to say that we are doing fine. But we also need people to remind us to stay in our lanes. We cannot do it all. We can do a few things successfully. And we can hope to do one or two things masterfully. It is okay to fail at some things. You aren't supposed to fix everything and excel at everything.

The second verse ends with a very important message. Oftentimes, we do realize the times when we fail at something. Failures often tend to look obvious and we beat ourselves down for them. But wins in life are subtle. Because that is how life was supposed to go – winning at everything. If you completed school, that is not just another mundane routine – you actually accomplished something. Take time to label that as a ‘win’ and celebrate.

Data 7

“You’ve got your passion

You’ve got your pride

But don’t you know

That only fools are satisfied?”

The phrase goes that even though you have "passion" and "pride," which are typical traits, you should want and pursue more than that, like Vienna, which is a metaphor for the rest of your life. The problem with goals is that they never seem to be in your grasp. Even if you do reach a goal, another appears in front. And our pride does not let us stop at the last milestone. It feels as if human nature is to keep on chasing dreams, which is not a bad thing. Goals and dreams give us a sense of purpose in life. But when will you stop? Are you able to stop? When will you have enough money, enough fame, enough love, or your fill of happiness? Is this even possible in the modern world? It almost seems foolish to be satisfied with something in life because we are so used to seeing goalposts that move forever.

Data 8

“Dream on, but don’t imagine they’ll all come true, ooh”

As mentioned earlier, it is not a bad thing to dream. Hopes and dreams are two of the most potent drivers of human progress. But they are equally dangerous. So, keep your dreams grounded. Learn to be happy with small wins. These small wins surely will add up to be much more than what you can think of when your journey comes to an end.

Data 9

“Slow down, you crazy child

And take the phone off the hook

And disappear for a while”

When you take a landline phone off the hook, it means no incoming calls will be put through, the phone will not ring, and anyone who calls you will think you're busy with something else. Joel is telling you to take a break from the constant stress of ambition. You don't have to tell anyone where you're going or what you're doing. You can just disappear for a while, leave the phone off the hook, and anyone who calls will think you're busy.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Psychoanalytic critique follows Freud's lead in its methodology. It contends that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses and that literary works, like dreams, express the author's hidden unconscious wants and worries. The dream-thoughts that we first encounter as we move forwards with our analysis frequently surprise us by the unusual form

in which they are expressed; they are not dressed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts but rather are on the other hand represented symbolically through similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech. This is exactly what Freud wrote. The song Vienna is appropriate for analysis and criticism using psychoanalytic theory because the author's thoughts were inspired by it and then expressed through metaphor in the lyrics. A member of the audience questioned Joel, during one of the numerous Q&A sessions he held throughout the 1990s, why he chose Vienna as a metaphor for life and its occasional crossroads. He described the metropolis as a melting pot of people of all cultures and social standings. Also, as a personal connection, his father abandoned his family for the city, and later in life, Joel would meet up with him in Vienna, where they would discuss the societal differences among the city's inhabitants and their purpose. "Vienna," from Billy Joel's 1977 album *The Stranger*, is a monologue of a parent or mentor concerned for a naive teenager whose intense aspirations for renown or great accomplishment have endangered his own well-being. Joel employs "Vienna," a city that represents cultural or musical excellence (listen to him discuss this here), to represent the child's ultimate goal. The boy's overly ambitious disposition permeates every aspect of his existence. Thus, the boy labors ceaselessly to realize his dream: to ultimately reach Vienna. The adolescent, however, has become oblivious to the present and has neglected to take care of himself in his pursuit of securing his future. In addition, he develops dread and anxiety as he realizes that, despite his continuous efforts, his dreams remain just that: dreams.

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