

**Transformation of Mourning and Melancholia into Revenge in the Novel
Second Life Ranker: A Psychoanalytic Study Using Sigmund Freud's Theory**

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Abstract

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The study of trauma and loss in literary works is important to understand the psychological dynamics experienced by the characters. This study will analyse the transformation of Cha Yeon-Woo's loss in the novel *Second Life Ranker*, culminating in revenge. This study will use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework of Mourning and Melancholia because this theory can explain the relationship among melancholia, loss, and self-aggression. In the novel *Second Life Ranker*, there is a double loss: a mother and her twin sister. This causes grief that develops into a pathological melancholy condition. This is characterised by a libido originating from the outside world and aggression directed at oneself. Thus, causing a failure to complete the mourning process adaptively. The purpose of this study is to address two main focuses: the form of trauma experienced by Cha Yeon-woo according to Freud's Mourning and Melancholia theory, and how the trauma is transformed into revenge and reconstructs her identity through the internalisation of the lost object. Unlike conventional psychoanalytic studies that often focus on classical literature, this research fills a gap in the literature by applying Freud's theory to the popular web novel genre that has a distinctive narrative structure such as time regression. To examine this, research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis techniques through the following steps: narrative identification, data coding based on Freud's melancholia symptoms, and psychoanalytic interpretation of aggression transformation. Through reading and note taking, this study identifies narratives that contain symptoms of mourning and melancholia, as well as the shift from grief to revenge. Meanwhile, secondary data in the form of Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of mourning and melancholia will serve as an interpretative basis. The results of this research analysis show Cha Yeon-woo's failure to complete the work of mourning. As a result, he causes his brother's shadow to fall into the ego. So that

the loss is not only felt, but becomes the lost figure to take revenge. This transformation triggers aggression that was originally directed at himself, becoming revenge. This study confirms that the grief and melancholy he experienced functioned as a source of psychic energy to avenge his twin brother.

Kata Kunci:

Second Life Ranker,
Freud, Mourning,
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Abstrak

Studi tentang trauma dan kehilangan dalam karya sastra penting untuk memahami dinamika psikologis yang dialami oleh para tokoh. Studi ini akan menganalisis transformasi kehilangan Cha Yeon-Woo dalam novel *Second Life Ranker*, yang berpuncak pada balas dendam. Studi ini akan menggunakan kerangka psikoanalitik Sigmund Freud tentang Duka dan Melankolia karena teori ini dapat menjelaskan hubungan antara melankolia, kehilangan, dan agresi diri. Dalam novel *Second Life Ranker*, terdapat kehilangan ganda: seorang ibu dan saudara kembarnya. Hal ini menyebabkan kesedihan yang berkembang menjadi kondisi melankolia patologis. Kondisi ini ditandai dengan libido yang berasal dari dunia luar dan agresi yang diarahkan pada diri sendiri. Dengan demikian, menyebabkan kegagalan untuk menyelesaikan proses berduka secara adaptif. Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk membahas dua fokus utama: bentuk trauma yang dialami oleh Cha Yeon-woo menurut teori Duka dan Melankolia Freud, dan bagaimana trauma tersebut diubah menjadi balas dendam dan merekonstruksi identitasnya melalui internalisasi objek yang hilang. Berbeda dengan studi psikoanalitik konvensional yang sering berfokus pada sastra klasik, penelitian ini mengisi celah dalam literatur dengan menerapkan teori Freud pada genre novel web populer yang memiliki struktur naratif khas seperti regresi waktu. Untuk meneliti hal ini, penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik analisis isi melalui langkah-langkah berikut: identifikasi naratif, pengkodean data berdasarkan gejala melankolia Freud, dan interpretasi psikoanalitik transformasi agresi. Melalui pembacaan dan pencatatan, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi naratif yang mengandung gejala duka cita dan melankolia, serta pergeseran dari kesedihan ke balas dendam. Sementara itu, data sekunder berupa konsep psikoanalitik Freud tentang duka cita dan melankolia akan berfungsi sebagai dasar interpretasi. Hasil analisis penelitian ini menunjukkan kegagalan Cha

Yeon-woo dalam menyelesaikan proses berduka. Akibatnya, ia menyebabkan bayangan saudaranya jatuh ke dalam egonya. Sehingga kehilangan tersebut tidak hanya dirasakan, tetapi menjadi sosok yang hilang untuk membalas dendam. Transformasi ini memicu agresi yang awalnya ditujukan pada dirinya sendiri, menjadi balas dendam. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa kesedihan dan melankoli yang dialaminya berfungsi sebagai sumber energi psikis untuk membalas dendam atas kematian saudara kembarnya.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, literature can reflect human psychological complexity. Until right now, it has long been a subject of psychoanalysis. Most literature has a kind of psychological theme. Understanding how psychoanalytic concepts are incorporated into contemporary literature provides insight into the persistence of Freud's ideas within modern cultural narratives.

In the novel *Second Life Ranker* explores themes of loss, revenge, and identity change. This novel offers a rich space for exploring the psychological processes by which characters cope with trauma. This novel was written by Sadoyeon & Nongnong and published in 2017. The study will examine the main character's journey from his brother's death to his obsessive quest for revenge.

The Psychological Dynamics of the Protagonist's Response to Death and Loss will be analysed here, drawing on Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917). On the other hand, knowledge of Freud's theory can stimulate curiosity and intellectual interest by illuminating universal psychic processes at the deepest levels. The Theory from Sigmund Freud's Mourning and Melancholia, formulated in 1917, is over a century old. However, it remains highly relevant and widely used today, especially in the study of modern psychology and literature. A lot of previous studies have mainly focused on the depressive aspect of melancholia, not exploring the transformation into revenge. Freud's theory about mourning melancholia offers a deep understanding of universal inner dynamics and how humans respond to psychological loss, which is complex, ambivalent, and shaped by evolving ego conflicts. Freud's theory of Mourning and Melancholia remains highly relevant because modern literature and culture continue to address

loss, trauma, and psychological conditions that align with its rich mechanisms. This theory helps understand and interpret these dynamics in literary works, including *Second Life Ranker*. Therefore, modern fiction works like *Second Life Ranker* show that the main character, Cha Yeon-woo, still bears the impact, not much different from what Freud described. This impact stems from a complex identification process that produces an identification device incorporating the beloved object's negative aspects (Desmet, 2013). Thus, this process creates conditions in which individuals internalize the destructive elements of the lost object, leading to aggression that can be directed inward or outward.

To deeply understand, this study elaborates on two questions: what form of trauma did Cha Yeon-woo experience according to Freud's theory, and how did this trauma become revenge and reconstruct her identity? Previous studies by Freud on mourning and melancholia offer much. The relationship between trauma and revenge has been extensively explored in both clinical psychology and literary studies. Clinically, revenge is not viewed as a mere impulsive act, but rather as a complex psychological response to perceived injustice following a traumatic event. Research by Gäbler, (2011) suggests that the pursuit of revenge often serves as a maladaptive coping mechanism, whereby individuals attempt to restore a sense of agency and self-worth lost due to trauma. This view is supported by the empirical findings of Bayer et al (2007), who demonstrated that trauma victims such as former child soldiers often struggle with PTSD symptoms directly correlated with a desire for revenge as a means of coping with their emotional suffering.

In a literary context, this psychological mechanism is also reflected in classical narratives. Willis (2002) analyzed Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, using trauma theory to explain how the cycle of violence and revenge emerges as a manifestation of unprocessed grief. Willis points out that in literary works, trauma often "eats away" at characters from within, forcing them to internalize the loss and transform it into destructive energy directed at external objects as a form of revenge. Thus, in both psychological studies and literary analysis, there is a consensus that revenge is often a transformation of unresolved grief or trauma. While the literature has provided a solid foundation for the psychological dynamics of revenge, there is

a significant research gap regarding the application of these theories to contemporary media. Most existing studies, such as those by Bayer et al. (2007) and Gäbler & Maercker (2011), focus primarily on clinical contexts or real-world conflicts, while literary analyses such as those by Willis (2002) tend to focus on canonical or classical literature.

This study fills this gap by applying Freud's psychoanalytic framework of Mourning and Melancholia to a modern narrative form, namely the Korean web novel, *Second Life Ranker*. Unlike the classic work studied by Willis, *Second Life Ranker* offers a unique digital narrative structure, namely the use of game elements and time regression that interact with the character's melancholy state. This research will demonstrate that the mechanism of grief's transformation into revenge remains relevant in contemporary digital media, while also providing new insights into how modern narrative structures complicate the process of internalizing the lost object in Freud's psychoanalysis.

Examining how Cha Yeon-woo's experience of loss and Melancholia in the novel *Second Life Ranker* transforms into a drive for revenge using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Thus, the study aims to clarify the link between trauma and revenge on Cha Yeon-woo. Therefore, the focus of this study can hopefully help the audience understand the purpose behind the character's actions and the depth of his psychological struggles. Research will be highly relevant to psychoanalytic literary studies and psychosocial meanings in understanding trauma, aggression, and healing after loss.

Theoretical Frame Work

Mourning and Melancholia is a highly influential psychoanalytic work that has shaped literary theory discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in understanding responses to loss and the representation of grief in fiction. In Freud's theory, two distinct psychological states are distinguished in response to loss: mourning, a healthy and normal process, and melancholia, a pathological condition involving the destructive internalization of loss (Freud, 1917)

1. Mourning (Normal Grief)

Freud defined mourning as a normal reaction to the loss of a loved one or a substitute abstraction, such as land, water, freedom, or a particular ideal (Freud, 1917). This mourning process is painful, yet adaptive, enabling the individual to gradually withdraw libido investment from the lost object and reinvest in a new one. Freud also emphasized that in mourning, the subject consciously recognizes what has been lost. Thus, individuals experiencing mourning may experience a reality check that indicates that the beloved object is no longer present. Once the work of mourning is complete, the ego is free and uninhibited (Klein, 1940).

2. Melancholia (Pathological)

While mourning is a healthy and adaptive grief process, melancholia is a pathological condition similar to mourning. However, there is a crucial difference: the subject may not be fully aware that the object has been lost, even though they know who it is (Freud, 1917). Unlike mourning, the loss is more unconscious because the subject loses not only an external object but also certain aspects of it. A crucial concept here is narcissistic identification: the shadow of the object falls upon the ego (Freud, 2014). The shadow object is not only grieving, but is caught in an internal relationship and will have an impact on the separate self (Mock, 2019). Consequently, melancholia is characterized by strong ambivalence, a mix of love and hate stemming from the pre-existing object relationship (Freud, 1917). Interestingly, melancholia has one of its most prominent symptoms, namely a tendency to extreme self-reproach. Therefore, these reproaches, although not directed at oneself, are actually accusations directed at the lost object. However, they have been diverted by the ego to be identified in the psyche. Therefore, the shadow of the object falling into the ego is not only about loss but also a psychic event where the shadow of the object falls out of the shadow of the ego and reveals the deepest layers of the space of grief, identity, and human creativity that meet and bind each other (Bollas, 2017). According to Klein (1940), who discusses introjection and identification, the affective ambivalence between love and internal objects is stated. So that the experience of this ambivalence results in a universal

sense of guilt, which is caused by the subject who is aware of the destructive urge towards the object he loves simultaneously. So, from this point arises the reparative urge to repair and reorganize.

METHOD

In this study, qualitative research methods are used to produce descriptive data in written form to see phenomenologically and understand the meaning of events and their relationships (Bowker et al., 1978). This statement explains the basic concept of qualitative research, which focuses on descriptive data, such as written, spoken, and observable behavior. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to examine data on mourning and Melancholia in the novel *Second Life Ranker* (2017) by Sadoyeon & Nongnong. The qualitative descriptive method was used because it provides systematic, factual, and accurate descriptions and illustrations of data (Puji Santosa, 2015).

This study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data is the novel *Second Life Ranker*. This novel was chosen because it depicts the loss of a loved one, a topic that can be studied in greater depth through Freud's approach to mourning and melancholia. Meanwhile, the secondary data consists of prior research, namely Freud's 1917 book *Mourning and Melancholia*. The data collection technique employed observation and note-taking. According to Sudaryanto (Faruk, 2012), Observation and note-taking are methods for summarizing the facts of a research problem.

According to Sudaryanto (Faruk, 2012), the listening and note-taking technique is a method for summarizing the facts of a research problem. The listening technique in this study was implemented by reading Aan Mansyur's short stories about murder, processing the data, and using primary and secondary sources. The stages undertaken by the researcher in this study began with reading the entire novel, recording the reading results, and then entering the data into data cards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Transition to Melancholia

"His mother, who had been suffering from a chronic illness, had passed away. After searching for his brother for more than two years without success, Yeon-woo had given up on everything. He enlisted in the military as an officer without assignment, volunteered to be sent to Africa, and left Korea." (Sadoyeon & Nongnong, 2017:1)

The accumulation of these losses, the mother's death and the brother's disappearance force Yeon-woo's ego into an immediate state of melancholic crisis, effectively bypassing the adaptive phase of mourning. According to Freud, mourning requires a conscious reality check to enable the gradual withdrawal of libido from the lost object; however, Yeon-woo's inability to integrate these successive losses indicates that his psyche has been overwhelmed by an ambivalent cathexis that he cannot release. For this reason, the loss of his beloved mother and the inability to find his brother created a massive sense of hopelessness and loss. This is what caused the failure of Cha Yeon-woo's mourning and healing process. In the above narrative, Cha Yeon-woo seems to have given up on everything, and the consequence is that he voluntarily went to war in Africa and left Korea.

Therefore, Cha Yeon-woo's actions seem to be self-punishment for his inability to accept the reality he was facing. However, Cha Yeon-woo does not commit suicide or mention that he would die in the war. However, the reality is that he voluntarily puts himself in a dangerous place where death is right in front of him. It may be true that Cha Yeon-woo physically left Korea; however, he also carried wounds and painful emotions with him. Therefore, he had a sense of loss within himself.

This experience generated his aggressive behavior toward himself, driving him into a difficult situation that could be described as a place of escape. Therefore, Cha Yeon-woo's behavior indicates signs of withdrawing from the world and also from himself (ego). It could no longer be called a mourning situation but rather an act reflecting a total rejection of the world that had been the place for his trauma when the traumatic experience happened. Returning from three years in Africa, he

felt much warmer and more peaceful in Korea than in Africa. The word "Obituary" was written on the letter. His younger brother had disappeared.

Five years ago, this news of his brother's death informed him of his brother's death."(Sadoyeon & Nongnong, 2017, p. 1).

The narrative above emphasizes the false peace that Cha Yeon-woo experiences. This physical displacement functioned as a temporary repression of his melancholic symptoms. His escape to Africa as a fugitive and punishment, where there may have been many tragic events, led him to declare that Korea was warmer than Africa, which could reduce the internal aggression directed at him. This significantly reduced the effect of Melancholia on him, masking the underlying pathology of his unresolved trauma. However, Cha Yeon-woo received bad news when he received the Obituary, which came with the obituary, proclaiming his brother is dead. This confrontation serves as a violent rupture in his defensive structure. The absence of his brother makes them even more painful and pushes him deeper into melancholy. The loss of Cha Yeon-woo's brother for 5 years pushed his feelings of loss and hopelessness, whether his brother might be alive or dead. Thus, the news of his death removed Cha Yeon-woo's ambivalence or ambiguity about his brother's death. The confirmation of his sibling's death opened up Cha Yeon-woo's ego, which was already very vulnerable and fragile, filled with guilt that had not been resolved for five years. His ego could no longer process this grief in the usual way. Cha Yeon-woo, who was in the midst of a storm of trauma, now had a definite object to identify and internalize. This leaves his ego critically vulnerable, compelling a shift toward narcissistic identification. Which had been so cheerful and peaceful, and changed to a life full of pain and sorrow.

Transition to Revenge

He quietly looked at the photo in his room. In it, his brother was still smiling. They were twins. Born with identical faces and features, they were very different. (Sadoyeon & Nongnong, 2017:1)

The act of viewing this photograph functions as a ritualistic mechanism. This is the key to understanding Cha Yeon-woo's ego transition into Melancholia, according to Freud's theory. This is because "Yeon-woo's fixation on the image indicates an active, pathological resistance to the loss. Thus, Cha Yeon-woo has a personal ritual of secretly looking at photos of his brother, which shows that he has rituals to remember his brother and suppress the grief process. His ego effectively blocks the reality testing process, opting instead for narcissistic identification. This is a characteristic of Melancholia in Freud's theory. Yeon-woo's expression becomes gloomy. He finally knows everything his brother went through, even the identity of his brother's killer and the reason why his brother returned to the way he was after five years. The tower can turn a person into a god. However, for Yeon-woo, it is nothing more than a lawless area where people bite each other's necks. Moreover, his brother had been bitten by the starving demon there.

"If that's the case," he spoke aloud "I will repay the favor". He would follow their rules "I will return it to all of you." (Sadoyeon & Nongnong, 2017, p. 2)

The above narrative depicts the moment Cha Yeon-woo realizes that his brother has been murdered. This discovery provides a concrete focal point for the subject's previously diffuse self-directed hostility. This includes the identity of the perpetrator and the reason for the betrayal, thereby making Cha Yeon-woo, who is suffering from deep, heavy melancholy, the apparent target of his hatred. This facilitates a crucial psychic shift: the externalization of the melancholic ego's internal conflict. This would allow Cha Yeon-woo to vent out some of his internal pressure. So, Cha Yeon-woo's gloomy expression and his statement that he will retaliate and get even constitute a melancholic resolution achieved through obsessive identification and behavior. Therefore, he would soon continue his mission for revenge. The melancholic state, rather than resulting in paralysis, acts as a reservoir of psychic energy for active vengeance. So, Cha Yeon-woo would feel that perfect revenge would be completed for people who damaged his loved ones. "Alright. Now, let's just do it." Yeon-woo took a deep breath. It was clear to him that, compared to the other players, he had started with an advantage thanks to

his brother's help. Even so, he had a long road ahead of him. The people who had pushed his brother to His death were the strongest among all the high-ranking individuals. They had grown stronger over the years, some even existing for hundreds of years. The road ahead was long if he wanted to catch up with those people. The image of his brother in the photo came to mind.

“You just want me to find the cure and then live out the rest of my life in peace, but...” He clenched his fists, his veins bulging. “I don't think I can let it all go.”
(Sadoyeon &Nongnong, 2017, p. 2)

Yeon-woo's explicit rejection of a peaceful existence signals a conscious refusal to complete the work of mourning, opting instead to preserve the melancholic tie to the lost object. Cha Yeon-woo's psychological phase, showing his melancholia, which is pain and aggression towards oneself, into a desire for revenge. In the above passage, it is explicitly stated that he refuses to allow the grief he feels to become healthy mourning. For Cha Yeon-woo, this is an act of channeling bound libido. The negative energy that had been trapped in Melancholia for five years. With feelings of self-punishment in Africa and his depression, he has now been successfully released. However, this was not unhealthy, like mourning, and his action was programmed and triggered by his melancholic ego to seek revenge. This advantage serves as the psychic tether that legitimizes his narcissistic identification with the lost brother. On the other hand, His voluntary exposure to existential peril functions as a form of repetition compulsion and atonement. Cha Yeon-woo fully understands that his path of revenge is not easy, and that even a terrible death is not impossible for him. However, Cha Yeon-woo justified his actions as a melancholic need to suffer and continue fighting as atonement for his grief. Thus, at this point, Cha Yeon-woo had transformed melancholy into aggressive revenge. The externalization of his libido signifies the melancholic ego's successful, albeit destructive, reorganization in an act of revenge.

“From now on,” “I will make sure that the people outside these gates know whom they are messing with.” “I am Jeong-woo Cha.” Then, the gate was closed.
(Sadoyeon & Nongnong,
2017:2)

The appropriation of the brother's name signifies the culmination of narcissistic identification. This represents a radical psychic substitution and also the point at which his melancholic identification had peaked. Based on Freud's theory, Cha Yeon-woo's ego had been frozen by guilt and loss, which had become unbearable (Melancholia). In this narrative, Melancholia is not resolved by letting go of the lost object, but by becoming that lost object. Thus, Cha Yeon-woo declares himself to be Jeong-woo Cha, his brother. The dissolution of the original ego-structure serves to excise the 'guilt-ridden' self. He is full of guilt and regret, and replaces it with the lost and idealized identity (Jeong-woo) to carry out his revenge. Therefore, the new name is not just an ordinary name, but an ego built on the framework of a destroyed old ego, created for one purpose only: revenge.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Second Life Ranker*, especially character Cha Yeon-woo, from the tragedy that devastated his family to his obsessive declaration of revenge, exemplifies Melancholia according to Freud's theory. Cha Yeon-woo was unable to move past his sadness, thus plummeting into the pit of Melancholia. Thus, Cha Yeon-woo refused to. He made peace with himself and decided to use all his hatred and guilt as fuel for his burning desire for revenge. This transformation of his identity signaled that Cha Yeon-woo had changed from a victim to a ruthless instrument of vengeance. This was driven by his libido, which was closely tied to his murdered brother, and it was his brother that Cha Yeon-woo wished had not died. The failure triggered by the murder and the double loss he experienced were too heavy to bear in a healthy way (mourning). Thus, Cha Yeon-woo projected all his hatred and regret onto the outside world, namely, the cruel tower.

Moreover, this paper concludes that, in the absence of mourning, work will affect Cha Yeon-woo's ego, leading to radical reconstruction. Cha Yeon-woo cannot escape from the lost object and just does not remember, but becomes the lost object itself. Therefore, the self-aggression transforms into externalized aggression aimed at destroying his brother. It seems like precision and violence within the tower. This indicates in *Second Life Ranker* that melancholia is often just not as salient a trigger for the transformation into someone who wants revenge. Hopefully, this research will contribute to knowledge about psychoanalysis in modern and popular literature. Much literature has mourning and melancholia in modern storytelling.

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