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## DEPICTION OF ANXIETY THROUGH METAPHORICAL SYMBOLS IN BILLIE EILISH' SELECTED SONGS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Putri Ayienda Dinanti<sup>1</sup>, Indahjuli Arti<sup>2</sup>

English Literature Study Program, Universitas Dian Nusantara <sup>1,2</sup>

[putri.ayienda.dinanti@dosen.undira.ac.id](mailto:putri.ayienda.dinanti@dosen.undira.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [indahjuli.id@gmail.com](mailto:indahjuli.id@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

### Abstrak

Gangguan kecemasan adalah penyakit psikologis yang memengaruhi kemampuan seseorang untuk berfungsi secara normal. Jika tidak ditangani dengan baik, kecemasan dapat berkembang menjadi gangguan mental yang lebih serius seperti depresi. Fenomena psikologis ini sering dieksplorasi dalam bentuk seni kontemporer, seperti sastra dan musik. Salah satu musisi bernama Billie Eilish, yang dikenal dengan lagu-lagunya yang gelap dan penuh gairah, sering mengangkat tema kecemasan dalam karyanya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggambaran kecemasan dalam album *Hit Me Hard and Soft* karya Billie Eilish. Simbol metaforis yang terkandung dalam struktur lirik ditemukan dan dianalisis. Kemudian, Teori Psikoanalisis oleh Sigmund Freud digunakan untuk menunjukkan manifestasi kecemasan dalam lirik dan bagaimana hal tersebut berhubungan dengan tema kecemasan, ketidakpastian, dan konflik internal. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif, yang digunakan untuk menganalisis lirik lagu-lagu yang dipilih, yaitu: *Chihiro*, *Wildflower*, *Blue*, dan *Bittersuite*. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa memang terdapat penggambaran kecemasan terkait dengan kehilangan orang yang tercinta, pikiran yang tidak terkendali, dilema keinginan dan ketakutan akan hidup yang ditunjukkan dalam musik Billie Eilish. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana musik berfungsi sebagai media untuk mencerminkan dan mengatasi emosi yang sering dialami banyak orang.

**Kata Kunci:** kecemasan, Billie Eilish, lirik lagu, simbol, psikoanalisis

### Abstract

Anxiety disorders are psychological illnesses that affect a person's ability to function normally. If not treated properly, anxiety can develop into more serious mental illnesses such as depression. This psychological phenomenon is often explored in contemporary art forms, such as literature and music. One musician named Billie Eilish, who is known for her dark and passionate songs, often explores the theme of anxiety in her work. This research aims to examine the depiction of anxiety in Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* album. The metaphorical symbols contained in the lyrical structure are found and analysed. Then, Psychoanalysis Theory by Sigmund Freud is used to show the manifestations of anxiety in the lyrics and how they relate to the themes of anxiety, uncertainty, and internal conflict. The method used in this research is qualitative research. It is used to analyse the lyrics of the selected songs, namely: *Chihiro*, *Wildflower*, *Blue*, and *Bittersuite*. The result of this research shows that there are indeed depictions of anxieties related to loss of beloved, uncontrolled thoughts, dilemma of desire

and fear of living shown in Billie Eilish's music. This research highlights how music serves as a medium to reflect and address the emotions people often experience.

**Keywords:** *anxiety, Billie Eilish, song lyrics, symbols, psychoanalysis*

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety disorders are psychological conditions triggered by mental and emotional factors that can disrupt an individual's daily life. When experienced continuously and left untreated, anxiety may lead to more serious psychological consequences, including depression. As a psychiatric condition, anxiety can affect individuals from all social backgrounds, regardless of their social status (Gholipour, 2021). Even individuals living in stable social environments may experience anxiety disorders, indicating that anxiety is not limited to particular social groups.

In recent years, many artists have created works that explore the theme of anxiety. Literature, which offers space for emotional and psychological expression, is able to capture various human experiences, including anxiety. This theme is often characterized by elements that reflect emotional discomfort or psychological disturbance, which can be identified as manifestations of anxiety in literary works. Such representations are commonly associated with individual struggles, social problems, and cultural influences (Hinton, 2012). Human experiences in facing the complexities of life often give rise to feelings of unease and anxiety, which are then transformed into creative expressions. As a result, themes of anxiety frequently appear in various forms of artistic works, including novels, films, and song lyrics.

One artist who often incorporates themes of anxiety in her song lyrics is Billie Eilish. Known for her emotionally expressive and introspective style, Eilish frequently portrays characters who experience fear, loss, and inner conflict. From a psychoanalytic perspective, anxiety may serve as an indicator of internal struggle, particularly in relation to conflicts between desire and moral values (Freud, 2023). The theme of anxiety is strongly reflected in several songs from her album *Hit Me Hard and Soft*. For instance, *Chihiro* depicts anxiety related to the fear of losing someone, *Wildflower* presents anxiety experienced by a partner who remains attached to the past, *Blue* reflects anxiety associated with one's lived experiences, and *Bittersuite* describes the simultaneous emergence of desire and fear. Together, these songs illustrate how anxiety can envelop an individual and reveal complex emotional experiences.

This research contributes to the growing literary and cultural studies that examine song lyrics and psychological themes. Previous studies have explored similar topics, such as depression in Billie Eilish's earlier songs (Makiling et al., 2022) and figurative language in

her other albums (Queenta et al., 2022). In addition, Surbakti et al. (2024) applied Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze emotional conflict in the song *Cancer* by My Chemical Romance. Ardiantari et al. (2023) used a discourse analysis approach to examine metaphors and symbols representing emotional struggle in *Jiwa yang Bersedih*. However, research that combines semiotic analysis of metaphorical symbols with Freudian psychoanalysis to examine anxiety in Billie Eilish's recent album remains limited.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the representation of anxiety in selected songs from Billie Eilish's Hit Me Hard and Soft album. Specifically, this research aims to (1) identify metaphorical symbols and the deeper meanings of these symbols in relation to emotional experiences, and (2) examine how neurotic anxiety arising from conflicts between the id, ego, and superego through these lyrical expressions using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study contributes to literary and cultural studies by offering a focused analysis of how contemporary music articulates psychological anxiety through literary symbolic and psychology.

## **2. Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach to analyse Billie Eilish's song lyrics that depict anxiety. Semiotic studies were used to analyse the metaphorical symbols contained in the song lyrics. In addition, to find the depiction of the theme of anxiety, Sigmund Freud's theory of personality was used. This research aims to explore how the theme of anxiety is articulated in song lyrics and how this theme reflects wider social issues. The research process involved several systematic steps: (1) listen to the songs that are the objects of research several times, (2) determine a suitable approach or theory, (3) connect the theory and the object of research to be studied, (4) analyse the lyrics of the song with the chosen theory, (5) draw conclusions. This research method is expected to provide a deep understanding of anxiety depiction in Billie Eilish's work, as well as how anxiety reflects the complex human experience in facing life's challenges. In addition, the results of this research will make a significant contribution to the study of psychology and literature. It will encourage a better understanding of mental health issues in the context of contemporary culture.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the findings related to the metaphorical symbols identified in the four selected song lyrics. The analysis begins by examining the metaphorical symbols found in the lyrics and interpreting their meanings within the context of the songs. After the

symbols are identified and explained, they are then analyzed using Sigmund Freud’s structural model of personality, which consists of the id, ego, and superego. According to Freud, as explained by Feist et al. (2017), human behavior is shaped by the continuous interaction of these three components. The id represents unconscious instinctive desires, the ego functions as a mediator between these desires and reality, and the superego reflects moral values and social norms (Renninson, 2015). In this study, metaphorical symbols serve as expressive tools that help illustrate how these personality components interact. Through symbolic language, the song lyrics reveal internal psychological conflicts, allowing anxiety to appear as a result of unresolved tension between desire, reality, and moral control.

### **Metaphorical Symbols Found in Billie Eilish’s Songs**

Metaphor is a technique used to convey meaning by giving the same meaning and characteristics to words that are actually different without using the terms ‘like’ or ‘as’. According to Nurgiyantoro (2017), a metaphor is two compared objects, ideas, can be touched or not, or other things that show the comparison word explains the same meaning and is brief and clear. This research uses 4 song lyrics from Billie Eilish by analysing the metaphors contained in the song lyrics. Through these metaphors, the emotional expressions and psychological conditions of the speaker can be identified, as they reflects inner feelings, conflicts, and states of mind.

#### **a. *Chihiro***

*Chihiro* is the third track on Billie Eilish's album ‘Hit Me Hard and Soft’. The song tells the feeling of someone who is trapped in a space where they have to let go of things that they want. This song wants to convey how an individual feels facing various changes, such as loss in a relationship. The storytelling in the lyrics is very complex, using various symbols. In the lyrics of Chihiro's song, 6 types of metaphors were found as follows:

**Table 1. Meaning of metaphorical symbols in *Chihiro***

<b>Metaphorical Symbols</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
You told me it was war, said you'd show me what's in store ( <i>Chihiro</i> , chorus)	A pledge of certainty
Open up the door, can you open up the door? ( <i>Chihiro</i> , chorus)	Requesting an opportunity
Did you take my love away from me? ( <i>Chihiro</i> , refrain)	Love that is carried away

Saw your seat at the counter when I looked away Saw you turn around, but it wasn't your face ( <i>Chihiro</i> , verse 2)	Not what you expected
I was waiting in the garden, contemplating beg your pardon ( <i>Chihiro</i> , verse 3)	Waiting and expecting an apology
I know you said before you can't cope with any more ( <i>Chihiro</i> , chorus)	Realizing it's all over
Wringing my hands in my lap And they tell me it's all been a trap ( <i>Chihiro</i> , outro)	Consciousness trapped in hope and separation

In the chorus of *Chihiro*, the lyrics describe a person who is left with a lingering feeling of love after being abandoned. This creates a strong sense of loss, as if love were something that could be taken away. The word “*war*” is used to describe an argument between lovers, suggesting that the conflict is seen as only a quarrel. Meanwhile, “*store*” can be understood as a promise or something that is kept for later. In this context, these expressions show instability in the relationship, which continues while the speaker waits for an answer in the future. The chorus also expresses desperation, and the request to “*open the door*” represents a desire for another chance or an opportunity to be together. Verse two of *Chihiro* shows feelings of disappointment when expectations do not match reality. In verse three, the image of a “*garden*” is used to describe an emotional space where the speaker tries to understand her feelings, while still hoping that her partner will return and apologize for leaving. The word “*trap*” represents a feeling of being misled in the relationship, where the trust or hope that has been given is not used properly. Finally, in the outro, the phrase “*wringing my hands in my lap*” refers to a gesture that shows discomfort and anxiety. This gesture reflects the speaker’s uneasiness in facing a situation that she cannot control. Overall, these lyrics show how anxiety and emotional instability are experienced throughout the song *Chihiro*.

#### **b. Wildflower**

*Wildflower*, the fifth track on the album, describes a person who feels insecure within a romantic relationship. The title *Wildflower* can be interpreted as a symbol of an unsettled or restless mind, reflecting thoughts and worries that arise without clear reason. Through its soft and melodic arrangement, Billie Eilish conveys these feelings in a way that resonates emotionally with listeners. The song contains several metaphorical expressions that can be

examined more closely. In this study, eight symbolic elements are identified and analyzed to understand how metaphors are used in the lyrics to represent insecurity and emotional unease.

**Table 2. Meaning of metaphorical symbols in *Wildflower***

Metaphorical Symbols	Meaning
Things fall apart and time breaks your heart ( <i>Wildflower</i> , verse 1)	Destroyed by time
Now I know that you love me, you don't need to remind me, I should put it all behind me, shouldn't I? ( <i>Wildflower</i> , pre-chorus)	Should not be thought about
But I see her in the back of my mind, All the time ( <i>Wildflower</i> , chorus)	Haunted by the shadow of someone
Like a fever, like I'm burning alive Like a sign ( <i>Wildflower</i> , chorus)	A burning emotion
Did I cross the line? ( <i>Wildflower</i> , chorus)	Doubt in an action
More different from me (more different from me) Happy and free (happy and free) in leather ( <i>Wildflower</i> , verse 2)	Comparing self
You say no one knows you so well (oh) But every time you touch me, I just wonder how she felt ( <i>Wildflower</i> , bridge)	Extreme jealousy
Do you see her in the back of your mind? In my eyes? ( <i>Wildflower</i> , chorus)	Doubts and shadows of the past
I know you didn't mean to hurt me, so I kept it to myself ( <i>Wildflower</i> , outro)	Unexpressed feelings

In *Wildflower*, verse one describes a sense of heartache that develops and deepens over time. The pre-chorus then expresses the speaker's desire to forget the thoughts that continue to trouble her mind. In the chorus, the lyrics convey feelings of sadness and distress caused by the constant image of someone who remains in her thoughts, almost like a haunting presence in the subconscious that is difficult to ignore. The line "*like a fever, like I'm burning alive*" in the chorus represents an intense emotional state, suggesting overwhelming feelings

that are experienced as painful and uncontrollable. Verse two presents a form of comparison. The word “*leather*” is often linked to an edgy or unconventional image, while “*happy and free*” reflects an emotional state. In this context, the lyrics compare “*she*” with the speaker, highlighting emotional differences and feelings of insecurity. The metaphor in the bridge reflects jealousy or curiosity that arises during moments of physical closeness, suggesting lingering emotional ties to people from the partner’s past. The line “*do you see her in the back of your mind? in my eyes?*” from the chorus expresses uncertainty and jealousy, questioning whether someone from the partner’s past still occupies their thoughts and influences how they see the present relationship. This reflects feelings of comparison and emotional abandonment. Finally, the outro suggests that keeping these feelings to oneself may be the better choice, indicating emotional restraint and unresolved inner conflict.

**c. *Bittersuite***

The next song is the ninth track on Billie Eilish’s album. This song presents a complex theme that combines feelings of desire and emotional conflict. Through lyrics that blend emotions and use various symbolic expressions, the song conveys layered meanings. In this analysis, five lyrical expressions are identified as having deeper meanings that reflect the emotional tension presented in the song.

**Table 3. Meaning of metaphorical symbols in *Bittersuite***

<b>Metaphorical Symbols</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
You were in the foyer I was on my knees ( <i>Bittersuit</i> , intro)	Sacrifice for the uncertain
Gotta watch what I say God, I hope it all goes away ( <i>Bittersuit</i> , pre-chorus)	Realization and fear of regret
I don't need to breathe when you look at me, all I see is green ( <i>Bittersuit</i> , chorus)	The self that is neglected for the sake of love
I'll see you in the suite (in the suite) We can be discrete (ah) ( <i>Bittersuit</i> , chorus)	Deep feelings and expectations
It's something I don't know I've never paid this much attention to you, ever ( <i>Bittersuit</i> , outro)	Neglected recognition

In the intro of *Bittersuite*, the lyrics describe dreams of doing everything and feelings that have grown distant over time. The line “*you were in the foyer*” represents someone who is willing to move further into the relationship, while “*I was on my knees*” describes a person who has already surrendered or sacrificed their emotions. This contrast reflects an imbalance between hope and doubt within the relationship. In the chorus of *Bittersuite*, the speaker expresses emotions that are so intense they override basic human needs, symbolized by the inability to “*breathe.*” The color “*green*” is interpreted as a symbol of hope, which becomes a strong driving force that causes the speaker to ignore other aspects of life. In the pre-chorus, the lyrics reveal a boundary between desire and emotional awareness, marked by fear that the situation may end badly. The reference to “*God*” functions as a spiritual symbol, representing a plea for guidance and support in response to the actions that have been taken. The chorus further illustrates a condition in which the speaker has given everything to achieve what is desired and has placed significant hope in the person being pursued. Finally, the outro portrays someone who has expressed their feelings openly and made every effort to achieve their hopes, only to be ignored. This ending emphasizes emotional exhaustion and unresolved longing.

**d. Blue**

The last song on Billie Eilish’s album also received attention due to its unique melody, which combines two different musical compositions. Similar to her previous album, the final track serves as the closing song and brings together elements from earlier tracks, while still maintaining and conveying a different theme. Therefore, this study identifies six metaphors in the lyrics that represent several major themes expressed in the song.

**Table 4. Meaning of metaphorical symbols in *Blue***

Metaphorical Symbols	Meaning
I try to live in black and white, but I'm so blue ( <i>Blue</i> , chorus)	Struggling for certainty but getting sadness
A bird in a cage ( <i>Blue</i> , verse, line 7)	Entrapment
You were born bluer than a butterfly Beautiful and so deprived of oxygen ( <i>Blue</i> , verse 1)	Keeping the sorrow
You were born reaching for your mother's hands Victim of your father's plans to rule the world ( <i>Blue</i> ,	Carrying expectations

verse 2)	
Paranoid and petrified of what you've heard ( <i>Blue</i> , verse 2)	Fear that bad things will happen
Don't hate you But we can't save you (we can't save you) ( <i>Blue</i> , Chorus)	Fear and self-protection

In the chorus of *Blue*, the lyrics describe an attempt to live a normal life, where the words “*black and white*” represent seeing life clearly rather than in “*grey*,” which symbolizes obscurity. However, instead of clarity, the song presents a “*blue*” life that reflects sadness, gloom, and complex emotions. In *Blue*, verse 1, line 7 expresses a feeling of being trapped and not given the chance to experience freedom. Additionally, verse 1 describes a person who appears beautiful on the outside but carries deep sadness and pressure within, showing emotions that have been held for a long time. Expectations imposed by parents are also reflected in *Blue*, verse 2, creating anxiety that affects the speaker’s emotions. The word “*paranoid*,” which represents fear and pressure about future events, causes the speaker to remain alert and “*petrified*,” interpreted as being mentally or emotionally frozen, as shown in verse 2, line 4. Overall, the chorus bridges despair and concern about the future, revealing a balanced emotional struggle within the speaker.

### **Depiction of Anxiety as Seen from Personality Structure**

Anxiety is a response that appears in a person’s body, emotions, and thoughts when they face something they cannot fully reach or control. Unstable emotions can make individuals feel unable to handle a situation, which then creates insecurity. This condition is a sign that someone is experiencing anxiety (Yusuf, 2009). This section explains different forms of anxiety found in several song lyrics using metaphorical symbols discussed in the previous section. Four song lyrics are analyzed, showing anxiety caused by losing someone, uncontrolled thoughts, personal desires, and fear of living life. The discussion of anxiety is also examined through three personality aspects: id, ego, and superego. The id represents basic and instinctive desires that may go against social norms. The ego acts as self-control and helps manage these desires realistically. The superego reflects moral values and social rules that guide a person’s behavior.

### **a. Loss of Beloved in *Chihiro***

The lyrics of *Chihiro* describe the pain of losing someone important and the speaker's refusal to accept that loss. The speaker continues to hold on, hoping the relationship does not end. This feeling appears in several parts of the song. In the chorus of *Chihiro*, the lyrics show the id's strong desire to regain the loved one. The symbol of a "door" represents a request for another chance or an opportunity to reconnect. However, unmet expectations create a gap between desire and reality, which reflects the role of the ego. This is seen in *Chihiro*, verse 2, through the line "but it wasn't your face," which shows disappointment when hopes are not fulfilled. Furthermore, the line "I know you said before you can't cope with any more" in the chorus reflects the superego, where the speaker realizes that the relationship has reached its end and must be accepted.

Through the interaction of id, ego, and superego, the song portrays anxiety caused by loss. The lyrics describe a relationship that has ended, but the speaker has not moved on. The line "Open up the door" (*Chihiro*, chorus) symbolizes a strong hope to reunite, creating fear and anxiety about losing someone loved. According to Freud (2024), this fear of losing a loved person or emotional support is known as loss anxiety. This shows how anxiety creates strong emotional reactions that affect a person's mental state.

### **b. Uncontrolled Thoughts in *Wildflower***

A condition where a person continuously struggles with their thoughts to the point that it disrupts daily activities is known as overthinking. When expectations are not met, individuals may feel disappointment and blame themselves, leading to repeated negative thoughts (Kushharjanti, 2022). Overthinking can reduce focus, confidence, productivity, and disturb sleep, while also increasing emotional pressure. This condition is reflected in *Wildflower*. In verse 1 and the chorus, phrases such as "back of my mind" and "all the time" show constant mental pressure. These thoughts represent the id, which repeatedly pushes the speaker to focus on unnecessary worries, slowly causing loss of control over their own mind.

At the same time, *Wildflower* shows an inner conflict between desire, control, and understanding. In the pre-chorus and chorus, lines such as "I should put it all behind me, shouldn't I?" and "Did I cross the line?" reveal an attempt to control thoughts and reduce overthinking, reflecting the ego's role. Later, in the bridge and outro, the lyrics show empathy and moral awareness. The line "I just wonder how she felt" reflects understanding others' feelings, while "I know you didn't mean to hurt me, so I kept it to myself" shows emotional restraint. These moments reflect the superego, where moral values guide the speaker to protect others despite personal pain.

### **c. Dilemma of Desire in *Bittersuite***

The lyrics of *Bittersuite* describe strong desire that is restrained by doubt. In the chorus, the line “*I don’t need to breathe when you look at me*” shows deep obsession, where desire becomes more important than basic needs. This represents the id dominating the speaker’s emotions. However, the ego appears in the pre-chorus through the line “*But I gotta be careful, gotta watch what I say, God, I hope it all goes away,*” which shows awareness and self-control. The speaker begins to reflect and limit their actions. In the outro, the line “*I’ve never paid this much attention to you, ever*” represents the superego, showing realization and acknowledgment of emotional imbalance while trying to remain within moral and rational boundaries.

Desire and reality often create conflict. Fear can arise whether desire is fulfilled or not, leading to anxiety. Feelings of uncertainty and helplessness can trigger anxiety disorders (Stuart, 2006). When desire becomes overwhelming, it can disturb emotional stability and basic needs. Fear of failure and the consequences of unmet desires intensify inner conflict, resulting in anxiety.

### **d. Fear of Living in *Blue***

Life involves uncertainty, pressure, and constant challenges. These conditions often cause anxiety, especially in modern life. According to Rogers (1961), uncertainty encourages individuals to grow but also creates fear. Anxiety often develops from negative thoughts about the future and fear of failure, which can prevent decision-making.

This fear is reflected in *Blue*. The line “*You were born bluer than a butterfly, beautiful and so deprived of oxygen*” (verse 1) shows emotional pressure and unmet needs. The line “*Paranoid and petrified of what you’ve heard*” (verse 2) expresses fear and emotional distress. The chorus line “*I try to live in black and white, but I’m so blue*” reflects the ego’s attempt to live clearly and orderly but being overwhelmed by sadness. Meanwhile, “*I don’t blame you*” represents the superego, showing acceptance, morality, and emotional understanding. This acceptance helps prevent feelings of guilt and hatred.

## **4. Discussion of the Four Selected Songs**

Anxiety is not only discussed in psychology but also expressed through music. The songs *Chihiro*, *Wildflower*, *Bittersuite*, and *Blue* present different forms of anxiety using meaningful metaphors. These songs show how anxiety can interfere with emotional control, communication, and daily life. Although anxiety is often triggered by external situations, its

core lies in internal conflict between the id, ego, and superego. Difficulty in balancing desire and reality creates emotional tension that leads to anxiety.

## 5. Conclusion

This research explores how anxiety is expressed through song lyrics by analyzing Billie Eilish's works. The findings show that anxiety arises not only from external pressures but also from internal conflicts within human consciousness. The analysis of the four selected songs like *Chihiro*, *Wildflower*, *Bittersuite*, and *Blue* reveals how different types of anxiety, from fear of loss to inner conflict and overthinking, are symbolically represented through lyrical metaphors. These songs by Billie Eilish demonstrate that music can capture complex emotional experiences and make them relatable to listeners. Beyond this, the study highlights how music can be a powerful way to express and process emotions, allowing individuals to recognize their feelings and face life's challenges through shared experiences.

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