

Mapping Female Melancholy: A Study of Select Novels of

Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides

Thesis Submitted to the University of
Calicut for the Award of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English Language and Literature

by

Annliya Shaijan

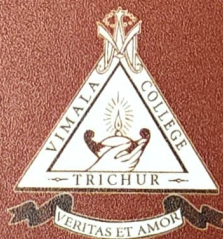
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Dated 21.05.2022

Supervisor

Dr. Bindu Ann Philip

Postgraduate Department of English and Research Centre

Vimala College (Autonomous), Thrissur- 680009



Affiliated to the University of Calicut



June 2026

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled “**Mapping Female Melancholy: A Study of Select Novels of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides**” is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Bindu Ann Philip, and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of this thesis have undergone a plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C. H. M. K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index was found to be 1%, which is within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI-generated content.

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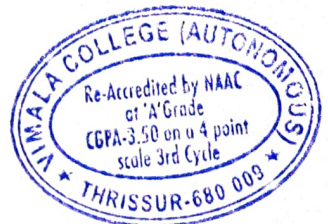


Name of the Research Supervisor: Dr. Bindu Ann Philip

DR. BINDU ANN PHILIP
Associate Professor & Research Guide
PG Department of English &
Research Centre
Vimala College (Autonomous)
Thrissur - 9

Place: THRISUR

Date: 10-06-2026



Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Mapping Female Melancholy: A Study of Select Novels of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides**” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a work of bona fide research carried out by **Ms. Anniya Shaijan** under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title or recognition. The suggestions given by the adjudicators of the thesis have been duly incorporated into the thesis. The contents of the hard copy and the soft copy submitted to the University of Calicut are one and the same.

DR. BINDU ANN PHILIP
Associate Professor & Research Guide
PG Department of English &
Research Centre
Vimala College (Autonomous)
Thrissur - 9

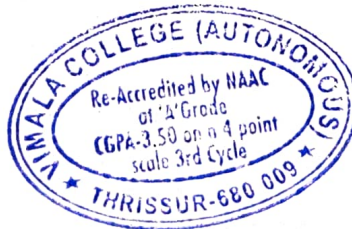


Dr. Bindu Ann Philip

Research Supervisor

Place: **THRISSUR**

Date: **10-06-2026**



Prof. (Dr.) Preethi Nair
Professor & Research Guide
Research and Postgraduate Department of English
Sree Sankara College, Kalady-683 574

Acknowledgement

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust; and I shall not be afraid"

- Psalm 56:3-4

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Epigraph

"Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart;

My silent heart, lie still and break:

Life, and the world, and mine own self, are changed

For a dream's sake."

— Christina Rossetti's "Mirage" (1862)

Abstract

Keywords: Melancholy, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Postmodernism, Hysterical Realism

The human mind is an intriguing phenomenon. The study on the functioning of the human mind is complex as it is individualised in each person. Human emotions are universal as people regardless of their age, gender, sex, class, religion, race and creed, experience similar feelings. The concept of melancholy, from its initial connotations, has evolved and altered over the centuries. Melancholy is a timeless emotion blending extreme sorrow, nostalgia and introspection. The focal point of the study is the postmodern interpretation of melancholy in women within the selected context. The thesis attempts to map the melancholic temperaments in women from a literary perspective and not from a medical outlook. The thesis attempts to study the psychoanalytic feminist analysis of postmodern melancholy in women within the selected works of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides delineating hysterical realism. The thesis also aims to distinguish melancholy from trauma and depression. Differentiating the postmodern interpretations of melancholy from the earlier notions of other theorists, an attempt will be made to mould the female mind within the selected context. The objective also aims to delve into the possible circumstances that construct the female mind to be melancholic. This thesis tries to fill the research gap created in the study of melancholy in women by tracing the expressions in contemporary American society through the chosen novels. The primary texts chosen to study the undertones of postmodern female melancholy are *The Corrections* (2001), *Freedom* (2010) and *Purity* (2015) by Jonathan Franzen and *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) and *The Marriage Plot* (2011) by Jeffrey Eugenides. Despite the criticism of conceptualising women through the male lens, the selected tales accidentally or deliberately expose the nuanced melancholic realms of women. The thesis is conceptualised in alignment with the notion that the author loses gender as these texts plunge into the depths of the female psyche. The thesis neglects the gender of the authors in the interpretations and analysis of the selected texts. This study intentionally emphasises on the privileged class of women such as the white, learned and financially stable American women. It is done in pursuit to delineate female melancholy as a multifaceted, inevitable and a subjective occurrence that eclipses the characteristic traits. The study will be based mainly on the theory of psychoanalytic feminism overlapping the important postulations in psychoanalysis subjected to the central aspects of the thesis. It also integrates the various aspects of postmodernism and hysterical realism. The thesis statement of the study is that the female melancholy is an inevitable, multifaceted and a subjective emotional state of the mind that functions as a refined contrast to the clinical mental disorders in the postmodern times. It proposes a nuanced comprehension of the affective terrains of women marked by unaddressed loss, disenchantment, fragmentation and upheavals. The postmodern melancholy in women is contextual; it presents a compulsive narration of desire and unresolved grief. The thesis eventually reconstructs the historical perspectives on female melancholy in the postmodern times. It analyses postmodern female melancholy as a central and coercive facet of the selected novels. The postmodern interpretation of melancholy unfolds as a powerful expression of identity, sorrow and defiance in women.

സംഗ്രഹം

കീവേഡുകൾ: വിഷാദം, മനോവിശ്ലേഷണ സ്ത്രീവാദം, ഉത്തരാധുനികത, ഹിസ്റ്റീരിയൽ റിയലിസം

മനുഷ്യ മനസ്സ് കൗതുകകരമായ ഒരു പ്രതിഭാസമാണ്. ഓരോരുത്തരിലും അത് വ്യക്തിഗതമായതിനാൽ മനുഷ്യ മനസ്സിന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനം സങ്കീർണ്ണമാണ്. പ്രായം, ലിംഗഭേദം, വർഗം, മതം, വംശം എന്നിവ പരിഗണിക്കാതെ ആളുകൾ സമാനമായ വികാരങ്ങൾ അനുഭവിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ മനുഷ്യ വികാരങ്ങൾ സാർവത്രികമാണ്. വിഷാദം എന്ന ആശയം, അതിന്റെ പ്രാരംഭ അർത്ഥങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന്, നൂറ്റാണ്ടുകളായി പരിണമിക്കുകയും മാറുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. തീവ്രമായ ദുഃഖം, ഗൃഹാതുരത്വം, ആത്മപരിശോധന എന്നിവ കലർത്തുന്ന ഒരു കാലാതീതമായ വികാരമാണ് വിഷാദം. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത സന്ദർഭത്തിൽ സ്ത്രീകളിലെ വിഷാദത്തിന്റെ ഉത്തരാധുനിക വ്യാഖ്യാനമാണ് പഠനത്തിന്റെ കേന്ദ്രബിന്ദു. സ്ത്രീകളിലെ വിഷാദ സ്വഭാവങ്ങളെ മെഡിക്കൽ വീക്ഷണകോണിൽ നിന്നല്ല, സാഹിത്യ വീക്ഷണകോണിൽ നിന്ന് മാപ്പ് ചെയ്യാൻ തീസിസ് ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. ജോനാഥൻ ഫ്രാൻസെൻ, ജെഫ്രി യൂജനിഡിസ് എന്നിവരുടെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത കൃതികളിലെ സ്ത്രീകളിലെ ഉത്തരാധുനിക വിഷാദത്തിന്റെ മനോവിശ്ലേഷണ ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് വിശകലനം പഠിക്കാൻ തീസിസ് ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. വിഷാദത്തെ ആഘാതത്തിൽ നിന്നും വേർതിരിച്ചറിയാനും തീസിസ് ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നു. വിഷാദത്തിന്റെ ഉത്തരാധുനിക വ്യാഖ്യാനങ്ങളെ മറ്റ് സൈദ്ധാന്തികരുടെ മുൻകാല ധാരണകളിൽ നിന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്തമാക്കി, തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത സന്ദർഭത്തിൽ സ്ത്രീ മനസ്സിനെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്താൻ ശ്രമിക്കും. സ്ത്രീ മനസ്സിനെ വിഷാദത്തിലേക്ക് നയിക്കുന്ന സാധ്യമായ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിലേക്ക് ആഴ്ന്നിറങ്ങുക എന്നതും ലക്ഷ്യം വയ്ക്കുന്നു. സമകാലിക അമേരിക്കൻ സമൂഹത്തിലെ ആവിഷ്കാരങ്ങളെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത നോവലുകളിലൂടെ കണ്ടെത്തുന്നതിലൂടെ സ്ത്രീകളിലെ വിഷാദത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനത്തിൽ സൃഷ്ടിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഗവേഷണ വിടവ് നികത്താൻ ഈ പ്രബന്ധം ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. ഉത്തരാധുനിക സ്ത്രീ വിഷാദത്തിന്റെ അടിവരകൾ പഠിക്കാൻ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത പ്രാഥമിക ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങൾ ജോനാഥൻ ഫ്രാൻസന്റെ ദി കറക്ഷൻസ് (2001), ഫ്രീഡം (2010), പ്യൂരിറ്റി (2015), ജെഫ്രി യൂജനിഡിസിന്റെ ദി വിർജിൻ സൂയിസൈഡ് (1993), ദി മാത്യേജ് പ്ലോട്ട് (2011) എന്നിവയാണ്. പുരുഷ ലെൻസിലൂടെ സ്ത്രീകളെ സങ്കൽപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനെ വിമർശിക്കുന്നുണ്ടെങ്കിലും, തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത കഥകൾ ആകസ്മികമായോ മനുഷ്യവുമോ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ സൂക്ഷ്മമായ വിഷാദ മേഖലകളെ തുറന്നുകാട്ടുന്നു. ഈ ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങൾ സ്ത്രീ മനസ്സിന്റെ ആഴങ്ങളിലേക്ക് വീഴ്ചവോൾ രചയിതാവിന് ലിംഗഭേദം നഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നു എന്ന ആശയവുമായി യോജിച്ചാണ് പ്രബന്ധം സങ്കൽപ്പിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങളുടെ വ്യാഖ്യാനങ്ങളിലും വിശകലനത്തിലും രചയിതാക്കളുടെ ലിംഗഭേദത്തെ തീസിസ് അവഗണിക്കുന്നു. വെളുത്ത വർഗക്കാരും, പണ്ഡിതരും, സാമ്പത്തിക സ്ഥിരതയുള്ളവരുമായ അമേരിക്കൻ സ്ത്രീകൾ പോലുള്ള, വിശേഷാധികാരമുള്ള സ്ത്രീ വിഭാഗത്തിൽപ്പെട്ടവരെയാണ് ഈ പഠനം പ്രധാനമായും ഊന്നിപ്പറയുന്നത്. സ്വഭാവ സവിശേഷതകളെ മറികടക്കുന്ന, ബഹുമുഖവും അനിവാര്യവും ആത്മനിഷ്ഠവുമായ ഒരു സംഭവമായി സ്ത്രീ വിഷാദത്തെ ചിത്രീകരിക്കുക എന്ന ലക്ഷ്യത്തോടെയാണ് ഇത് ചെയ്യുന്നത്. മനോവിശ്ലേഷണത്തിലെ പ്രധാന പോസ്റ്റുലേഷനുകളെ ഓവർലാപ്പ് ചെയ്യുന്ന മനോവിശ്ലേഷണ സ്ത്രീവാദത്തിന്റെ സിദ്ധാന്തത്തെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയിരിക്കും ഈ പഠനം പ്രധാനമായും പ്രവർത്തിക്കുക. ഉത്തരാധുനികതയുടെയും ഹിസ്റ്റീരിയൽ റിയലിസത്തിന്റെയും വിവിധ വശങ്ങളെയും ഇത് സമന്വയിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. സ്ത്രീ വിഷാദം മനസ്സിന്റെ അനിവാര്യവും ബഹുമുഖവും ആത്മനിഷ്ഠവുമായ വൈകാരികാവസ്ഥയാണെന്നും അത് ഉത്തരാധുനിക കാലഘട്ടത്തിലെ ക്ലിനിക്കൽ മാനസിക വൈകല്യങ്ങൾക്ക് ഒരു പരിഷ്കൃത വിപരീതമായി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നുവെന്നുമാണ് പഠനത്തിന്റെ തീസിസ് പ്രസ്താവന. പരിഹരിക്കപ്പെടാത്ത നഷ്ടം, നിരാശ, വിഘടനം, പ്രക്ഷോഭങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയാൽ അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തിയ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ വൈകാരിക മേഖലകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള സൂക്ഷ്മമായ ധാരണ ഇത് നിർദ്ദേശിക്കുന്നു. സ്ത്രീകളിലെ ഉത്തരാധുനിക വിഷാദം സന്ദർഭോചിതമാണ്; ആഗ്രഹത്തിന്റെയും പരിഹരിക്കപ്പെടാത്ത ദുഃഖത്തിന്റെയും നിർബന്ധിത വിവരണം ഇത് അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ഉത്തരാധുനിക കാലഘട്ടത്തിലെ സ്ത്രീ വിഷാദത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ചരിത്രപരമായ വീക്ഷണങ്ങളെ തീസിസ് ഒടുവിൽ പുനർനിർമ്മിക്കുന്നു. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത നോവലുകളുടെ കേന്ദ്രവും നിർബന്ധിതവുമായ ഒരു വശമായി ഇത് ഉത്തരാധുനിക സ്ത്രീ വിഷാദത്തെ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. സ്ത്രീകളിലെ സ്വത്വത്തിന്റെയും ദുഃഖത്തിന്റെയും ധിക്കാരത്തിന്റെയും ശക്തമായ പ്രകടനമായി വിഷാദത്തിന്റെ ഉത്തരാധുനിക വ്യാഖ്യാനം വികസിക്കുന്നു.

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1**Introduction**

The human mind is an intriguing phenomenon. The study of the functioning of the human mind is complex, as it is individualised for each person. Human evolution and various cultures have played a huge role in conceptualising and segmenting the present level of human thought. The basic capacity of human thinking lies within the realm of the location in which one is placed. The ability to imagine is another segment of the human mind that juxtaposes the senses and reality to create a fictional world in the mind. The imaginations improvise the reality in the mind for the better or the worse circumstances. When fully conscious, the human mind is within the bounds of how humans want it to be. But, the unconscious part of the mind wanders in ways corresponding to the experiences that the conscious part had. The ideas or perceptions that humans form mostly evolve from the sensations that the mind feels.

Emotional attributes are vital factors in the comprehension of the various dimensions of the mind, such as the capabilities to think, perceive, make decisions, and act accordingly. As Gislason notes in *The Human Brain: In Health and Disease*, “the term mind is the most inclusive word, embracing all human experience, thought, perceptions, knowledge, feelings and beliefs” (12). Human emotions are universal, and are subject to culture, as people regardless of their age, gender, sex, class, religion, race, and creed experience similar feelings. According to the classical view, these feelings are inbuilt in humans from birth and develop according to situational imperatives. They are indispensable for sustenance and are biological components. The hypothesis of constructed emotions proposes that emotions are also constructed as a response to the surroundings. This view has got a better scientific appeal compared to the former. The various states of human emotions are happiness, love,

anger, sadness, nostalgia, fear, surprise, anxiety, shame, envy and so on. A constant internal battle often happens between emotion and logic, leading to conflicts within the mind and thus forms a hindrance in making decisions. This thesis attempts to map melancholic temperaments in women from a literary perspective and not from a medical outlook.

Objectives of the Study

The concept of melancholy, from its initial connotations, has evolved and altered over the centuries. Melancholy is a timeless emotion that blends extreme sorrow, nostalgia, and introspection. It is an emotional expression stemming from the unconscious condition of the human mind. “Poised in between continuity and change, melancholia demands a historical perspective that takes recurring features into account but also the novelties that result from changing historical circumstances” (Middeke 173). The thesis attempts to study the psychoanalytic feminist analysis of melancholy in women within the framework of selected works of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides.

The thesis statement of the study is that female melancholy is an inevitable, multifaceted, and subjective emotional state of the mind that functions as a refined contrast to clinical mental disorders in postmodern times. It proposes a nuanced comprehension of the affective terrain of women marked by unaddressed loss, disenchantment, fragmentation and upheaval. The thesis also aims to study the literary significance of mental health in women afflicted by melancholy in contemporary society by attempting to distinguish melancholy from trauma and depression. Differentiating the postmodern interpretations of melancholy from the earlier notions of other theorists, an attempt will be made to mould the female mind within the selected context. The objective also aims to delve into the possible circumstances that

construct a female mind to be melancholic. This thesis tries to fill the research gap created in the study of melancholy in women by tracing the expressions in contemporary American society through the chosen novels.

The thesis hosts few research questions that would seek answers through the dissection and in-depth study of the selected framework in American Literature. The focal point of the study is the postmodern interpretation of melancholy in women within the context of the selected novels. Through the application of the theories of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism, the study forms novel perspectives on why women feel melancholic in general and specifically in certain situations. It identifies the analogies with the similar mental conditions of trauma and depression to scrutinise how melancholy differs from these varied explications of sadness. It attempts to critically observe how melancholy showcases a linkage with the female condition. Both of the selected authors, Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides, tend to incorporate female melancholy and hysterical realism into their fictional worlds. The thesis deals with the research question of whether this portrayal of the postmodern dimensions of realism and melancholy in women is a mere coincidence or a deliberate effort by the authors.

A critical examination of the texts entails inquiring whether an acknowledged melancholy is buried deep inside women in American society. The study will draw comprehensive inferences from the context of the chosen novels with regard to the postmodern dimensions of melancholy in women. The study will also facilitate an evaluative reflection on whether women are inherently melancholic. However, like any research, the study will have a few limitations in terms of the conception of melancholy in women. The research methodology of this study is based on qualitative methods and hence may not be statistically represented or verified factually. Since

melancholy is a broad subject, its interdisciplinary nature will set out limitations to theorise within the realms of literature. Also, the conclusions drawn from the study are strictly adherent to the primary texts chosen.

History of Melancholy

Melancholy, in the literary perspective, is a condition of the human mind when it feels utmost sorrow and despair or a reflective state in which it feels more than mere sadness. The feeling of melancholy is usually associated with affective fluctuations that are often depressing, hallucinations or delusions, and bodily complaints. Contrary to depression, melancholic persons are often capable of dealing with their daily affairs and managing their lives moderately well. “However, as Foldenyi¹ points out, it was not suffering and malaise that were first associated with melancholia, but rather excellence and extraordinariness” (Foldenyi XI).

The term *melancholia* has Greek origins as it came from the word *melaina chole*, which meant black bile (Toohey 27). The term *melancholy* originated from melancholia. It entered Latin in the fifth century with the same meaning. English derived the term from Old French in about 1180 after the Norman Conquest, retaining the earlier meaning. At times, melancholy is a fleeting state of mind and may turn out to be nostalgic; on the contrary, it can also be depressing and pensive. Ancient writers were in accord with the former view, as they recorded that great men were often melancholic and that their creativity bloomed from this subjective mood of mind. Feld notes in *Melancholy and the Otherness of God* that “sadness without torment, the feeling of being lost, longing without hope, living in a past without future all constitute the melancholic hypothesis of sadness” (44).

Plato explored the different dimensions of melancholy and posited it as a lighter version of craziness and a suffering of the soul, without actually naming it in

his *Timaeus*². Aristotle as well as Hippocrates argued that melancholy was knitted with manic characteristics. During the pre-Aristotelian era, melancholy was perceived as a severe illness, which Cicero named as *mentis ad omnia caecitas* in Latin. In contrast to other ancient writers, Cicero saw it as a threat to gifted people and a hindrance to their creativity. Dante Alighieri had characterised the concept of melancholy in his three-part universe of *Divine Comedy* (1320). “Dante set “the woeful people who have lost the good of the intellect” in “the city of grief” (Kristeva 6). In the treatise, the concept “appears in seven hypostases ranging from longing, sadness and anger, Medusian despair, suicide, indolence, sloth, to sublime contemplation” (Feld 47).

Hippocrates is a renowned ancient explorer of melancholy and known as the “Father of Western Medicine” (Ellis et al 26). In his book, *On the Nature of Man*, written around the fifth century BC, Hippocrates introduced the principle of the “four humours in the body, namely, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile” (Prioreshi 213) and opined that the state of melancholic temperament resulted from an imbalance in the production of black bile in the body. In the engraving, *Melencolia I* (1514), Albrecht Durer, a German artist, presented a melancholic winged woman striving for inspiration (Fig 1). Lucas Cranach, a German painter, had also drawn a deviation on melancholy of his times through his *Melancholia* (Fig 2), painted in 1532.



Figure 1: *Melencolia I* (1514) by Albrecht Durer

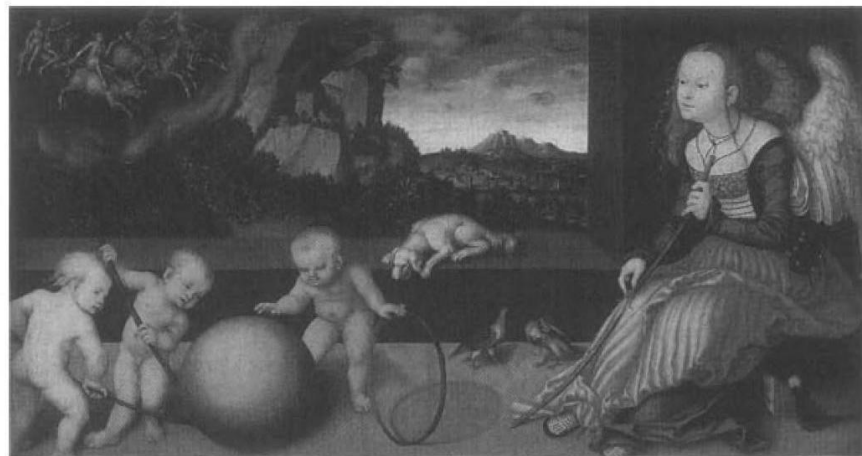


Figure 2: *Melancholy, An Allegory* (1532) by Lucas Cranach

In England, the English Reformation brought many religious ambiguities attached to the concepts of sin and after death in the seventeenth century that led to a cult of melancholy in culture and literature. A melancholic man was called a malcontent. *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586) by Timothie Bright is the first English book written exclusively on melancholy. In the book, Bright attempts to make studies on the attributes and intrinsic causes of melancholic temperaments in humans and seems to concur with Hippocrates' theory of four humours. William Shakespeare had reconceived the notion of melancholy through his plays. His extraordinary characterisation of layers of melancholy in his plays has left emotional imprints on the

readers. Robert Burton had famously explicated his views in his treatise, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). “Burtons choice of the term “anatomy” for his study of melancholy was hardly an accident. To anatomize is to work with a corpse, and with the corpse comes the assurance that the subject will not unexpectedly change positions” (Kitzes 15). Burton explored the causes, symptoms, cure and aftermath of melancholy, subjected to religious connotations as well. John Keats had also put forth his proposal on the theme of melancholy as a transient state like any other emotion in his poem, “Ode on Melancholy” (1820).

The meaning of melancholy remained unchanged until the mediaeval age but from the 15th century, it started to have alterations. Melancholy is often linked with feelings like sadness, gloominess, despair, dejection, pensiveness and moodiness or is regarded as a precursor to depression in literature. In the Oxford English Dictionary, an argument is made around the definition of melancholy as an emotion without causes which means that from the Elizabethan age until a few centuries, consistent introspections were made on melancholy as it was viewed as a symbol of intellectual and artistic refinement. The change in the meaning sprouted because people with more intellect and artistic talents are often believed to suffer the various dimensions of this state of sadness. “Medieval thought returned to the cosmologies of late antiquity and bound melancholia to Saturn, the planet of spirit and thought” (Kristeva 6).

Marsilio Ficino, an Italian philosopher and often called as the “child of Saturn” (Feld 47), was in agreement with this view of the condition of melancholy as he found connections between the planet Saturn and melancholic temperament in his *Libre de vita triplici*³. In the era of Middle ages and the Renaissance, this linkage of melancholy to the God Saturn was evolved. “The celestial cause of melancholy,

which is cold and dry according to physicians, is the patronage of those planets that are cold dry according to astrologers, that is, Mercury and Saturn” (Feld 49). Ficino tries to associate a connection between Saturn, as he considers it as a planet of exalted meditation, and the state of melancholy.

The history shows that the notion of melancholy existed throughout the ages and it has remained as a persistent state. The connotations remained intact in the age of Renaissance through the Romantic and Victorian periods, until the 20th century and were obvious through the works of the artists. Gradually, the advancements in psychology led to the scientific recognition of melancholy, in addition to its artistic influences, as a sense of mental instability and a subtype of depression.

Until the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the term *melancholy* appears to cover several quite different things- at the very least: fleeting moods, mental disorders ranging from severe to very mild, normal reactions, and long-term character traits. (Radden 4)

Jennifer Radden in her *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression* (2008) draws on different aspects to melancholy, especially in women. Certain sets of moods are attached with the feelings of grief and the consequent fears. The context of melancholy is framed and subjected to the different comprehensions of moods. The melancholy is usually gendered adherent to women as they are regarded to be more emotionally vulnerable than men.

Sigmund Freud saw the state of melancholy as a conscious distaste in extremity in his essay, “Mourning and Melancholia”⁴ (1917). He is one of the early theorists of psychoanalysis who examined how the mind affected the body. He provided scientific explanations of melancholia and delineated its role in modern psychoanalysis. In the essay, Freud drew a comparison between the two states of

mourning and melancholia and opined that both these emotional conditions are reactions to the feeling of loss. He saw the latter as a pathological condition, due to the prolonged existence of something repressed in the unconscious mind, characterised by the lack of interest in worldly activities, requiring medical treatment. He attempted to distance the doctrine of melancholia from the school of humors and opined that the complexities of melancholia in man works like an open wound. He argued that the state of melancholia evolved from a conflict between the Ego and Superego of the unconscious mind. However, Tammy Clewell criticised Freud's views as subjective interpretations, in her article, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss" (2004).

Myths and religion also had their own versions of conceptualising melancholy. In the Christian views, people experiencing melancholy were perceived as truly sick and they were in agreement with the notion of associating black bile to melancholy. The Christian doctrine "considered sadness a sin" (Kristeva 6). They believed that the bile was painted black by the devil and the devil hid within the black bile as it was viewed as the devil's bath. According to Greek Mythology, melancholy, characterised by poor spirits, was infused by Gods, specifically Zeus, the king of the Gods and Dionysus, the God of wine. Oizys, the daughter of Nyx and Erebus, the Gods of night and darkness respectively, was regarded as the goddess of misery, suffering, grief and depression in Greek mythology. Sculptures were also erected as a tribute to the condition of melancholy.

Albert Gyorgy, a Romanian artist, created a sculpture on melancholy (Fig 3) of a human figure with a large hole in the chest, depicting the emptiness created by the extreme emotion of loss. The sculpture is erected at Lake Geneva, Switzerland. From ancient times, throughout history, words associated with melancholy always had

negative connotations such as grief, loss, despair, suffering, sadness, elegiac or devil in the religious context and also a colour symbolism in black attached to black bile. History, no doubt, puts forth a negative perception on the condition of melancholy as a state that people wished to avoid.



Figure 3: *Melancholy* (2013-2014), a sculpture by Albert Gyorgy

Melancholy in Women

Melancholy in women, throughout human history, points toward unhappy and often unproductive women who are plunged into the confines of grief in a society that is mostly patriarchal. “There have, of course, been many women at different historical moments who have lamented, complained, spoken ironically, sorrowed and despaired about losses suffered or grievances felt under oppressive and exclusionary conditions” (Schiesari 4). John Weyer, a sixteenth century physician, opined that the masculinity attached with the sense of melancholy makes it even more severe in women. In his *De praestigiis daemonum*⁵ (1561), melancholy was linked to women and witchcraft and the demonic possession in women. This condition in women may propel them into sheer inarticulateness. Mostly, women find themselves to be alienated in such a state and may long for the company of a man.

History shows a partial negligence on the depiction of melancholy in women, delineating oppression to women's sense of grief. The major course of the state of extreme sadness in women is their barred identity enforced on them, often making them refigure their existence in the society. According to Hildegard of Bingen, a critic of the misogynist representation of melancholy, there is a general tendency to devalue the melancholy in women as their personal failure in handling the situations, which is not the case with men as it is seen as a misery brought by women on them. This is an outcome of existence in a patriarchal society that attempts to relate the grief or melancholy as a boost to the creative genius in men while the same as a state of loss in women. Society, in addition, sees this melancholy inflicted in men or women owing to the doings of women in general.

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), a seminal work, did not explain the actual cause of the condition of melancholy in women. "Burton's *Anatomy* explained little about women's actual experience of depression, however, relying instead on ancient ideas that tied women's pain to medical misunderstandings about their menstruation cycles" (Alexander 2). His views were influenced by the two legitimate works on melancholy; Galen's *On the Affected Parts* (165 BC) and Aristotle's *On the Soul* (350 BC). He attributed melancholy with artistic genius in men, while it was associated with the state of madness in women. Aristotle gave prominence to soul over body and mind and hence the theories then existed proved useless in treating the illnesses of the body and mind, particularly in women. This view, derived from the ancient humoral theory, outlined that the imbalance of the humors in the body, specifically the black bile, led to the overtaking of the mind by the vapours generating melancholy. Rene Descartes, in his *Les Passions de L'Ame*⁶ (1649), opined that all the emotions including melancholy passed through the nerves

in the body and the excess of these emotions led to the vibrations in the nerves especially with women. Alterations, on the conception of melancholy, constantly bloomed with further discoveries, for instance, the circulatory system by William Harvey and the hypothesis of nerves by Thomas Willis, proved beneficial for women in the seventeenth century.

In the field of mental health studies in women, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830- 1980* (1985), is a pertinent book. She emphasised on the significance of the extensive medical and social dimensions of mental realms of women. She delineated the depiction of mental illnesses in women since the Victorian age as a reflection of patriarchal oppression in the society. She associated all kinds of women's mental illnesses, including melancholy, with their gender responsibilities that they were assigned to perform in the society. Her gendered depictions of women's mental health impacted the literary as well as the medical perspectives. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar presents the subdued fury and exasperation of women, indicating their melancholic temperaments, in the nineteenth century. The persistent male dominance during those times led to the women's sense of captivity, inadequacy and melancholy. The restricted patriarchal perspectives of women made them madwomen resulting in a vent of emotions.

Julia Kristeva, a French feminist demarcated a theoretical framework for melancholy in women in her book, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). She encapsulated the feeling of grief over lost objects as a vital perspective of life which is best expressed through art and literature. She tried to intersect melancholy with the failure of religion and its ambiguities. She was in accord with ancient writers who saw the melancholic mind as a creator of artistic genius. This state of mind

steered women towards the generation of their own oeuvre in new languages. They survived a decaying world from the sense of loss, as they were often silenced, marginalised and abused. They conceived a new rhetoric of melancholy confined by the aesthetics of pain. Kristeva saw melancholy as a recovery from the state of absurdity.

Juliana Schiesari's *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (1992) drew a psychoanalytic and feministic approach to re-evaluate the conceptualisation of melancholy, specifically in women. The author showed the disparity in the celebration of melancholy in men as a sign of creative inspiration and the suppression of female melancholy as an utter failure. Schiesari also encapsulated a feminist critique of Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholy" in the book. She saw the melancholy in women as an affliction on them by men.

Many theorists and critics commented on the possibility of female melancholy in women who were mostly heterosexual. Amidst such thundering prospects, Judith Butler, an American theorist, came up with her views on lesbian melancholy⁷ or homosexual melancholy, majorly in women, in works like *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1996). According to her, the pure or the true form of homosexual aspects of melancholy turns out to be the straight man or woman, as she calls the exaggerated straight figure in the society as a hyperbolic identification. The reasons for such melancholy vary from the usual psychic facets and they accounted for the real unmourned losses in the society that marginalised the gay culture. Butler opined that,

gender and sexuality are melancholic effects. Insofar as gender is produced through identification, Butler argues, "masculinity" and "femininity" are the

result of prohibitions that demand the loss of certain attachments while concurrently demanding that they not be avowed or grieved. (Traub 351)

The lesbians in turn experienced their own kind of melancholy compared to that suffered by other women. Apart from their personal grievances, the historical negation that they encountered obstructing their future hopes of sexual diversity added fuel to the existing flames.

Luce Irigaray, a French philosopher, in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), conceptualises the notion of melancholy in women differently from that of Freud's ideas. In contrast to Freud, Irigaray rejected a highly functional superego in women parallel to narcissistic instincts, which is required to feel the condition of melancholy, because she regarded it as masculine. She sees a woman's sense of loss as a state of beyond expression, which makes her unable to represent her feelings through symbols, as she is marginalised in the society. She finds hysteria or madness, not melancholy, as the only means of expression of loss in women. She refuses to see melancholy in women as a psychological syndrome, but rather regards it as a gendered practice.

Irigaray, Silverman and Kristeva made women centric interpretations of psychoanalytical readings on melancholy. Kaja Silverman, an American academician, in her *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988), put forward her ideas on female melancholy. She saw the Oedipus complex as the stage of development of female melancholy, following the theories of Freud. The connection with oneself and with the mother is lost at this development in a girl and gets attracted towards the father as the physical differences are recognised, which gradually leads back to identifying herself with the mother. In the process, she

develops narcissistic instincts, but when she re-identifies herself with the mother, it leads to a potential for melancholy.

Melancholy in American Literature

American Literature simply refers to the literature of the United States of America (USA) or United States (US) or America, a country comprising fifty states and a federal district. The country is sandwiched with the Pacific Ocean on its West, Atlantic Ocean on its East, Canada on its North and Mexico on its Southern borders. The citizens of thirteen English colonies who crossed the Atlantic coast during the American Revolution in the mid-1700s (1765-1791) and the later immigrants who joined them identified themselves as a new collective group called Americans. In the beginning, their writings endured the styles of the English people. Gradually, they emerged as less English than their forefathers. As per the historians such as Charles Richardson⁸ and Barrett Wendell⁹, the actual beginnings of American literature could not be traced until the nineteenth century, though the Puritans had scribbled their ideas and creativity for the canon in the seventeenth century. The early literature of the natives included creation tales, letters, speeches of the natives and trickster stories. The initial phase of the canon also comprised travel voyages, including the letters of the Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus.

During the colonial period (1607-1775), marked by the founding of Jamestown, American literature mainly consisted of literature of religious and nature themes. The notable writers of the period were Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, Edward Taylor, Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley. The colonial period comprised mainly oral literature of tales and chants by the Native Americans and seldom had written manuscripts. It was followed by the Revolutionary age (1765-1790) which showed resistance to the political upheavals, mainly in the works of Thomas Jefferson

and Thomas Paine. In the Early National period (1775-1828), the major writers who contributed to the tradition of imaginations were Edgar Allan Poe, Royall Tyler, William Cullen Bryant, William Hill Brown and James Fenimore Cooper.

One of the most noteworthy periods of American literature called the Romantic age or Transcendentalism (1830-1870), focused on the themes of nature. Ralf Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were the two stalwarts of the era. Some of the other significant writers of the period were Herman Melville, H.W. Longfellow, Frederick Douglass, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe. Then followed the Realistic era (1865-1900) characterised by the realistic aspects of then America which incorporated the ideas of individualism, urbanisation and industrialism. The major writers were Mary Wilkins Freeman, Henry James, Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickenson, Harold Frederic and William Dean Howells. The naturalists in literature of the Naturalistic age (1900-1914) are Jack London, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser.

Between the two world wars, America saw the rise of the Modernist era (1914-1939) in its literature. The writings of the period were so intact that it attracted international attention. Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner (Nobel Laureate), Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Cummings, Sinclair Lewis, Thomas Wolfe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill and Langston Hughes were some of the astonishing writers of the period. Literary movements like imagism, symbolism, naturalism and Harlem renaissance found space in this era. The period between 1939-1970 is called the Postwar age in American literature. The political happenings of the time influenced and shaped the then literary works. New criticism emerged during the period. Vigorous literary movements were Beat movement, Black mountain poetry,

Hippie movement, New York poetry, Black Arts Movement and confessional writings. The Native American Renaissance also flourished during the time. Notable authors of the Postwar era were Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Miller, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Edward Albee, Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs, Tennessee Williams, Amiri Baraka, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and M. Scott Momaday.

The period from the 1970s of the American literary canon is called the Postmodern period. The era is characterised majorly by the experimentation of the writers, marking a multitude of dimensions in parallel to contemporary literature. The canon is vastly expanding with writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, John Barth, Jeffrey Eugenides, Jonathan Franzen, Toni Morrison, William Corbett, Wendy Wasserstein, Sam Shepard, Jayne Cortez and so on.

The feeling of extremities of sadness is a commonality in any part of the world. America too, is no different. Melancholy, in its present characteristics, is so inbuilt in people that it barely calls for additional attention necessitating medication. Anne Anlin Cheng, an American cultural theorist, makes the following observations on melancholy in America in her book, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2000):

The history of American national idealism has always been caught in this melancholic bind between incorporation and rejection. If one of the ideals that sustained the American nation since its beginning has been its unique proposition that "all men are created equal," then one of America's ongoing national mortifications must be its history of acting otherwise. While all nations have their repressed histories and traumatic atrocities, American melancholia is particularly acute because America is *founded* on the very

ideals of freedom and liberty whose betrayals have been repeatedly covered over. Even as the economic, material, and philosophical advances of the nation are built on a series of legalized exclusions (of African Americans, Jewish Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and so on) and the labor provided by those excluded, it is also a history busily disavowing those repudiations. (10)

Few of the forefront reasons for melancholy in America are the racial discriminations and labour struggles. The dominating white community is a driving force that catalyses melancholy in America by bringing a racial dimension to the mental state. Melancholy tends to theoretically combine guilt and shame attached with the seldom rejection of the other within the framework of racism. More than a reality, the melancholy associated with racism often finds space in American literature. The dominating Whites cause racial internal battles of conflicts in the suppressed community that the latter are frequently barred into melancholic notions. The visible and the underpinned discrimination experienced in the labour sector is yet another facet that contributes to the societal melancholy in America, along with the isolations encountered in the domestic realms. The fast pace of life, attacks of explosions causing devastation in people, lack of personal inclinations and economic, social, political pressures and so on amount to the existing causes of melancholy in general in America. Besides, the natural disasters and man-made havoc apparently creates widespread trauma as an after effect of the events which may lead to a cultural melancholy among people in any country. Hurricanes, heat waves, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, cyclones, shipwrecks, etc., contribute to the existing subjective reasons of melancholy. This melancholy is often evoked by the irreversible losses felt of the past.

Grief and mourning attached to loss is a frequent topic of choice by writers in American literature, as it is a basic human emotion attached to the essential segment of identity formation. Pamela A. Boker¹⁰ argues that a constant renewal of the self and the obscurity of the past often hinder such expressions of melancholy in the American canon, leading to repressions of grief. The American critics tend to bestow heroic crowns over characters that show the capacities to surpass the expressions of sorrow over loss, as the patriarchal structures of the society equate them with femininity.

The American writers also have a tendency to revolt against the maternal dependency of men and thus deny the portrayal of the vulnerability of emotions as they are generally seen as feminine characteristics. This leads to repressions of the grief in the unconscious and thus the unmourned suffering gets piled up deep in the psyche that gradually it reverberates thunderously in the form of inevitable melancholy. Mark Twain, Herman Melville and Ernest Hemingway are few of the American authors who dealt with the different dimensions of emotional vulnerabilities and deprivations in their works. The psychoanalytic feminist approach to American fiction attempts to unravel the gender roles of their patriarchal fantasies.

The American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson also explicated his views on grief and sorrow. He was one among those who was saddened because of his inability to express sadness. He categorised people into two in his essay, "The Tragic" (1844); people above grief and those below grief, and he saw himself in the first category as creative people who expressed the repressed emotions through art and literature. A similar American writer on the line with emotional deprivations was Henry David Thoreau. "The grief and sorrow that Thoreau undoubtedly felt from being so removed from his fellow human beings are denied overt expression, but they are clearly recognizable in his compulsive denial of loss, his avoidance of emotional pain, and

his tendency to universalize or generalize about his sorrow” (Boker 15). Through his writings, Thoreau channeled his own sorrow and found solace in them. Walt Whitman, an American poet, continued and culminated the ideas put forth by the earlier writers on the dismissal of the past, the centering of self, the supremacy of the unconscious and America's idealism in his poetry. His works reflected a longing for the suppressed feminine identification which is seen as homoerotic by the patriarchal society in America.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, another American writer, also dealt with emotions in his novels and expressed the menace attached with the repressed sorrow in the psyche. He saw that melancholy happens in people when they repress the grief attached with the separation of desires in their mind. The women writers also expressed grief and loss in their works as an immediate reaction to the suffering caused in contrast to the repressed emotions by male writers. Few of the American women writers who delineated the manifestations over the themes of grief, dejection, unresolved conflicts and feminine identity in their works were Emily Dickenson, Anne Bradstreet, Susan Glaspell, Carson McCullers and Mary Rowlandson.

Jonathan Flatley, an American writer and Associate Professor of English, expressed a link between modernity and melancholy in his book, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (2008). He says the term modernity itself means now, referring to the lost past, which runs parallel to loss attached with melancholy. It also denotes that the very present is transient and the world is an eternal collection of losses. He brings in a Christian view, as Christianity is the dominant religion in America, to the topic and argues that melancholy is regarded as a sin as it is associated with dejection and lack of interests, specifically in the presence of God. Flatley also finds a multitude of melancholy, apart from the universal

melancholy, characterised by the misery. He also juxtaposes the utopian world with melancholy as the former provides an imaginary escape from all human suffering. Flatley pondered upon the medical dimensions of melancholy and observed that there is a gradual substitution by clinical depression to the state of melancholy, even though they are distinct mental states, with the former being less severe. He aims to reflect on the practical aspects of melancholy rather than the theoretical one.

Michael Ann Holly, an American art historian, explicated her ideas on melancholy in her book, *The Melancholy Art* (2013). She seems to be in agreement with the earlier writers who accounted for the creative motivation in people experiencing melancholy. She argues that the art which is created is often a record of the past protruded from the melancholy one feels and hence this preservation of past events denotes a disciplinary melancholy. She opines that it is significant to view the unconscious state of art history through the lens of melancholy. Richard Stamelman, a critic, draws a parallel between literature and loss. He opines that the art of writing itself is lost as it is a different kind of existence from the reality and the language used signifies the absence of the lost aspect in reality. She calls melancholy a noonday demon. She links melancholy with mourning and death and finds that these interlinked themes recur throughout art history.

Eric G. Wilson, the author of *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* (2008), calls melancholy, in the context of America, a sweet sorrow and a serious threat at the same time. In contemporary times, the positive psychology¹¹ finds different means to elevate happiness in people. He draws attention to a survey done by Pew Research Center which claims that eighty-five percent of Americans are happy. On the contrary, he seldom tends to believe the results of this survey as the statistics seem impossible to be true. People undergo different agonies of existence

such as domestic violence, relationship spats, work pressures, financial crisis, loneliness, physical and mental woes, etc. He argues that the emphasis that the Americans give to joy at the cost of sorrow is a dangerous act and the seeking of only happiness and measures to eradicate melancholy in the world make one inauthentic to oneself. This America's haunt for feeling happiness alone in life is a frailty and pure ignorance to accept the polarity between joy and sorrow. His thoughts are not at the expense of glorifying the medication attached with the unbearable extremities of despair. He makes a clear cut division between melancholy and depression. Both are chronic forms of sadness but the former being less chronic compared to the latter. The majority of people aims for only happiness in their life and see it as their greatest dream. They aspire for joy but, for Wilson, that is blind reality where there is no day without night. He sees the American dream to pursue only happiness in life as a dystopian idea.

In the fictional realms of American literature, writers often portray women characters who outwardly seem to be happy and comfortable due to the economic class to which they belong but inwardly suffer from many battles of mental conflicts due to the roles they are compelled to perform in the society. Melancholy in women can be misinterpreted in terms of the idea that it is a necessity to hold an outward reason for them to feel grief. But the American canon puts forth women who happen to relish everything in their capacities but yet suffer internally on unknown territories. Grief and loneliness, especially in women, can often be cited at the crux of American literature. Such melancholic female figures appear in the literary works of many American writers like Kate Chopin, Jonathan Franzen, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jeffrey Eugenides, Henry James, William Faulkner, Mina Loy, Zora Neale Hurston, Djuna Barnes, and so on. Through their characters, these authors attempted to express their

frustrations or grief or the feelings they experienced in people around them as in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), etc.

The image of a 'poor little rich girl' appears throughout the canon over the centuries, which indicates the commonality of such women in the society who are plunged into gloom. There is a tendency to archetype these sad women as failed women. Their sorrow is seen as an outcome of the sacrifices they are naturally expected to make in line with their responsibilities, with the intentions to bring stability to the society. The American literature frequently depict saddened women, who on the run to advocate societal commitments, often neglect their own personal aspirations that finally lead them to develop different versions of melancholy.

Primary Texts

The primary texts chosen to study the undertones of female melancholy are *The Corrections* (2001), *Freedom* (2010) and *Purity* (2015) by Jonathan Franzen and *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) and *The Marriage Plot* (2011) by Jeffrey Eugenides. These novels combine eloquence and emotional complexity, especially of women. They also arduously reverberate with postmodern characteristics such as psychological deterioration, purposelessness, repudiation and gender identity. The framework of the study is purposefully chosen as American Literature due to the significance it occupies in the progression of globalisation, capitalism and individualism. These novels rightly incorporate the psychic conflicts and fallouts of these paradigm transformations in America. They resonate with the contemporary society in which the conventional systems deteriorate. They showcase a society that

deserts individuals, especially women, to experience ubiquitous impressions of isolation, overwrought feelings and unvoiced anguish.

Franzen and Eugenides excel among the contemporary American authors for their keen representation of female dynamics, entangling their individual and collective distress in the novels. Despite the criticism of conceptualising women through the male lens, the selected tales accidentally or deliberately expose the nuanced melancholic realms of women. The thesis is conceptualised in alignment with the notion that the author loses gender as these texts plunge into the depths of the female psyche. The thesis neglects the gender of the authors in the interpretations and analysis of the selected texts.

The selected novels portray unique yet intersecting non-clinical and pragmatic melancholic female characters. Franzen and Eugenides integrate the portrayal of melancholy through their female characters in the postmodern context of America. These novels explore the psychic sphere of women and their discords between their inner aspirations and their realities. They facilitate the literary analysis of the functioning of female melancholy as a sign of catharsis and social commentary. Besides, sadness is often associated with individuals who are discriminated against on the grounds of class, caste, gender, creed, disabilities, race, color and religion. Even though these facets stay significant in the comprehension of personal experiences of misery, this study intentionally emphasises on the privileged class of women such as the white, learned and financially stable American women in the selected novels of Franzen and Eugenides. It is done in pursuit to delineate female melancholy as a multifaceted, inevitable and a subjective occurrence that eclipses the characteristic traits.

The selected female characters, from teenagers to students, housewives, romantics and professionals, showcase profound emotional disintegration, inner turmoil and estrangement. It implies that the status of deep-seated sadness is structured, multifaceted and inevitable in women. They experience intrinsic emotional disintegration, inner strife and fragmentation in the postmodern world. The study indicates that melancholy does not stem only from discrimination. It facilitates an examination of the cognitive realms of women and proposes a detached and insightful depiction of female melancholy.

Theoretical Framework

The study on melancholy in women within the framework of the selected texts will be based mainly on the theory of psychoanalytic feminism overlapping the important postulations in psychoanalysis subjected to the central aspects of the thesis. It also integrates the various aspects of postmodernism and hysterical realism. Psychoanalysis is a theory that pertains to the processes of the mind, specifically the unconscious part, to delve deeper into the internal aspects. Moreover, psychoanalysis is applied for the medical treatment of mental or nervous disorders. In the 1890's the theory started achieving attention.

Indeed, the birth of psychoanalysis is marked by the introduction of the concept of “defense hysteria” and the “cornerstone” concept of repression, which can be understood as an inhibitory ego process that prevents the emergence of unacceptable mental contents in conscious awareness. (Eagle 4)

Psychoanalytic criticism is a version of psychoanalysis that studies how the mind functions by the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious segments. It uses the psychoanalytic concepts in literature and culture to understand the happenings of the world. Major proponents of the theory are Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Norman

Holland, Slavoj Zizek, Frederick Hoffman, Jane Gallop, Simon Lesser, George Klein, Shoshana Felman and Elizabeth Wright.

Central to the theory of psychoanalysis are the important studies made by Freud as a psychologist and philosopher, on how the mind affected the body. He devised the concepts of pleasure and reality principles in his book, *Civilization and Its Discontents*¹² (1930). Under the pleasure principle, people tend to enjoy life as one pleases without any regrets, whereas the reality principle prevents one from the former and urges to subordinate it for the important aspects in life, through sublimation. Under such a suppressed state, the desire for the former gets buried in the psyche and it often shudders the inner core of the mind. The unconsciousness is the central aspect of the Freudian theory, which acts a mystery and an inaccessible segment to people. Freud referred to the term repression for the unresolved trauma, desires and conflicts in the unconscious mind.

Freud also introduced the concepts of id, ego and superego in his model of the psyche. He referred to the completely unconscious part of the human mind as the id, the partially conscious part as the ego and the conscience as the superego. He also elaborated on the concept of the dream mechanism in *The Interpretation of Dreams*¹³ (1899) and argued that dreams are repressed desires that attain symbolic fulfillment in the unconscious. He viewed the two elements of the dream mechanism as the latent and manifest contents. The former referred to the repressed aspects while the latter to the distorted versions of the dreams. He sees the literary works as parallel to dreams, forming an ideal world of repressed aspects. Oedipus complex, referring to the sexual attraction of the child towards the parent of opposite gender, and sexuality serves as the linchpins in Freudian psychoanalysis as he sees the sexual desires as a major repressed desire.

Lacan had a different approach towards psychoanalysis. In the Lacanian model, there are three stages in the formation of self; the Imaginary stage wherein a child below eighteen months gradually identifies the bodily differences from that of the mother and others; the Symbolic stage where the child begins to acquire language and develops regard for the father; and the Real stage wherein the child starts to realise the things to be possessed and not to be possessed. He proposed that “the real ‘I’ is impossible and the ‘self’ one possesses is just an image created by a misperception of the relation between body and self” (Xavier 77). The focal point of his theory is the mirror stage, which shows the transition from the real to the imaginary stage. In this stage, the child recognizes the bodily difference of the self from others, especially from the mother. However, the recognition of the self is often narcissistic, which is bloomed in fantasy. At this Imaginary stage, the first self-perception is a false image and it initiates the ego process in people. He argued that language forms a channel to convey feelings of absence, loss and lack. Lacan uses the term *desire* for the futile yearning to be someone else.

Slavoj Zizek is yet another proponent of psychoanalysis who is known for his exploration of fantasy. He explicated his theories in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) wherein he proposes that the idea of the real is a mental construct of the fantasy that masks the real of the desires. Fantasy enables people to learn how to desire. Desires are infinitely created in the fantasies of the people and the absence of it creates anxiety in people, taking away the *lack* and finally the *desire*. Zizek gives an inclusive outline on melancholy and opines that:

Against Freud, one should assert the conceptual and ethical primacy of melancholy. In the process of the loss, there is always a remainder that cannot be integrated through the work of mourning, and the ultimate fidelity is the

fidelity to this remainder. Mourning is a kind of betrayal, the second killing of the (lost) object, while the melancholic subject remains faithful to the lost object, refusing to renounce his or her attachment to it. (Frosh 58)

Zizek perceives the fantasy that one forms in mind as a freeing experience from the feelings of sadness. However, the fantasy of the existence of a lost object may have negative effects at times. Side by side, with the creation of fantasy, we also tend to look back in time, which may possess unfavourable impacts. The past of the lost in the fantasy may hinder the pleasure of the present, forming tension along with the freeing aspect.

Christopher Bollas, a British psychoanalyst, in his *Meaning and Melancholia* (2018), explicated his understanding of melancholy through the application of psychoanalysis. According to Bollas, the mental distress in people can happen without their knowledge, as it gets concealed in them. He prefers healthy lifestyle, fitness, pop psychology¹⁴ over means of self-medication such as alcohol and painkillers which may take a destructive turn in the long run. He regarded any state of mind as a structured phenomenon in the mind more than a mood when it is prolonged from unchanging situations. It gets engraved into the society as a collective process over the years that it may affect the frame of mind within the population, causing transitions. In the study of melancholy, attention is also drawn to 'projective identification,' which is the mental action of ascribing one's mental state to the other person; in other words, it is an unconscious fantasy, a contribution made by Klein. He argued that the havoc of losses such as world wars and nuclear explosions caused a deformed kind of mourning that led to a disoriented and unknown melancholy. And the responses to these mental distresses may vary. He states that the extremities of pain can afflict in people the possibility to abandon the quest to find the meaning of

life and he sees it as a catastrophe to be not able to deal with the mental crisis. He tries to overlap the aspects of psychology with states of mind to form his idea on melancholy.

Over the years, more psychoanalytic approaches emerged to encapsulate the feelings of loss, grief and melancholy. There is a sense of grief and melancholy brooding over the loss of someone. Timothy Keogh, a psychoanalyst, views the unmourned grief to loss as a dangerous accumulation in people. Constant grief over time may cause adverse effects but the necessity of it in random amounts is also vital. The unremitted grief over loss, as one feels it, for a long period, may lead to destructive acts in life, to the self and also to others. It often directs toward a preoccupation with the loss. Insecure attachment to the deceased may lead to melancholic reactions in people. This might be an outcome of several factors such as the proximity of closeness, past events, anxiety, neglect, abuse and so on. Fantasy and dreams may bring relief to the grief to an extent.

Freud had given similar perceptions on unmourned grief and the negative impacts it can create in people through the framework of psychoanalysis. In his paper, "On Transience" (1916), he argued that the inability to face the pain of loss and the prolonged attachment to the lost, result in the incomplete relishing of the beauty of things around. The psychoanalysts also do their studies on melancholy with the view on the fluctuating differences of the responses to loss, the level of psychological adjusting in individuals. Such understandings pave ways to the psychoanalytic treatments of the mental distresses.

Within the framework of psychoanalysis, a narcissist or central image is bestowed on the melancholic. Usually, melancholy turns out to be an outcome of an internal reaction to something lost and there may be an identification of the self-

attached with the loss, such as death, relationships, past events, objects or places, etc. This narcissistic image of the self, paves way to the state of insecurity and vulnerability that it leads to the state of melancholy in people. Along with the significance attached with the loss, someone who is in a state of melancholy may also be centred to feel the state of extremity of sadness over the loss.

Besides, some interesting concepts regarding the psychoanalytic understandings of the mind and its functioning were formulated by psychoanalysts such as Wilfred Bion who connected the human psyche with the digestion process as he viewed that the emotion of loss is something to be digested and metabolised likewise the food. Psychoanalysis holds very structured perceptions and theories regarding the internal world and aspects related to the complexities of loss, with an interference of the outside world. It attempts to present explications on the workings of the human mind through the lens of various exponents.

Feminist studies and criticism have protruded new dimensions to the theory of psychoanalysis. Renewed studies and perception on women brought a new lens into the branch of psychoanalytic criticism in literature. Feminism arose in around the mid-1800s as a response to the relegation of women to the peripheries of the society, denying equality on various fronts. It focused on the marginalisation that women had to encounter on external factors like domestic affairs, employment sectors, political, social, economic, religious and financial affairs, as they are regarded as the inferior gender in the society. How these aspects of unjust social exclusion affected the functionalities and the proceedings of their mind or their internal world is a very significant question that seeks different layers of answers. The long term suppression and discrimination that they face may adversely affect their mental well-being and consequently interfere with their daily living. Men are often biased on their physical

capabilities and there is always a psychological desire to dominate women.

Psychoanalytic feminism emerged as a theory to deal with and study about the complexities of the mental life in women as a result of the oppression they experience from men. It views gender from the psycho-sexual dimensions rather than from the biological developments. The theories of feminism and psychoanalysis juxtaposed to study gender through a new outlook of psychoanalytic feminism since the late twentieth century.

Psychoanalytic feminism argues that the psyche of people holds a vital role in the way of living and the perspectives that one forms in life. The theory evolved in the 1970s and its major exponents are Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jessica Benjamin and Nancy Chodorow. They critiqued Freud's psychoanalytic treatment of femininity and brought new distinct norms, emphasising on the emotional implications on women. The theorists decentered the theory of psychoanalysis to form their own perceptions from the prospects of women and how it affected their social self. "The psychoanalytic feminists have unfailingly produced figurations that women should embrace to see the value of psychoanalysis to feminist theory" (Meyers 12). Julia Kristeva and Martha Nussbaum pinpoint towards the vitality of love in life that often caters to the figurations of emancipation in life. This state of liberation may aid women, specifically the socially marginalised groups, to expand trust aspects and collaborations with others and thus reduce anxieties and the complexities of suppression in them. However, the theory in turn is often criticised on various facets such as the incapability in providing complete answers to why men have an inherent need to dominate women and for the neglect of the sexual differences in women.

Juliet Mitchell, a British psychoanalyst, intertwined socialism, feminism and psychoanalysis on her theorising of perceptions on women and thus brought out interdisciplinary aspects to feminism. In her *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), she developed her own theory on Freud's psychoanalysis through the lens of women. She argued that the theories of Freud on the human psyche are mostly applicable within the patriarchal society. She viewed the ancient practice of oppressing women as a normal phenomenon buried deep in the human psyche and argued that more than the social reforms of giving equality in various realms of social structure, priority should be given to the rectification of the prejudices and beliefs in the human psyche of both men and women. She noted that the alternatives and scientific inventions brought out to aid the reproductive procedures in women as a biological liberation do not serve as a solution to the psychological complications. None of the external liberating claims including the financial independence of women may actually draw parallel to the internal battles and perceptions on women. She rejected patriarchy and capitalism and saw them as the two dominating forces encapsulating the true self of women, constituted in the unconscious of the human mind.

Jessica Benjamin observed a gradual structure drawn in the human psyche with the association of male as subject and female as object in the Freudian model of psychoanalysis. This parallel identification in the unconscious, formed from the very infant state, influences the future of the girl or boy and how they perceive things and surroundings around them. The structure formed in the psyche is rooted so deep that it determines the feeling to dominate the female object as a natural happening. She pinpointed the existence of this structure in the mind in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988) as the reason for the difficulty in viewing a relationship in which both the sexes are subjects. She sees

the biases attached to gender as more than merely a social construction. At the infant stage, a formation of self is done with respect to the relationship with others, according to the pre-oedipal stage. She saw the domination tendency as the result of this relationship of the earlier identification of the self with the others, leading to differentiation.

Jessica demarcates a child as the most important stage in life in the formation and recognition of the differences between the self and the opposite sex. Both the inside (the unconscious) and outside realities play a vital role in this formation. The mother-child relationship is significant in the perceptions of others in the child. A depressed mother due to the suppressions she has to endure as a woman may develop such instincts in the child, influencing the future of the child in the assertion of the self and the recognition of others. Feminism as a theory generally tends to view the domination of women as the result of their vulnerability overshadowed by the male aggression. But under psychoanalytic feminism, it focuses on the unlearning of the different layers attached to the female suppression, centering her and her psyche in the structure of study.

The arguments put forth by Jessica seem to be in alignment with the theories of the American sociologist and psychoanalytic feminist, Nancy Chodorow. She also views the formation of self in the psyche of an infant as the earlier notion formed in the process of differentiating oneself from the others which continues throughout one's life in accord with the opposite sex, influenced by societal and cultural factors. She prioritised the diversity in women instead of drawing attention to the singular representations of women by the earlier psychoanalytic writings. The use of the word maternal, suggesting women as the subject, is often absent in reality and the comprehension of female sexuality and desire is often made through the male eyes.

She sought to place women as subjects, accentuating the selfhood and treated woman as the “Freud’s theoretical feminine subject, or theoretical subject of theoretical femininity” (Chodorow 6). Freud delineates women as subjects in terms of sexuality. Chodorow makes a comparison and argues that the Oedipus and Castration complexes are simpler in girls than the boys and thus the girls develop less complex superego in them. Freud’s treatment of homosexuality in women is also questioned by Chodorow as he views lesbians as inferior and bad women rather than confused women. Chodorow perceives it as something to be regarded as a normal happening.

Julia Kristeva was continuously engaged with the issues and conflicts pertaining to women. She attempted to explore the intricacies in women and suggested that a true definition can never be attributed to a woman. The Austrian-British writer, Melanie Klein brought in a new dimension through her mother-centred approach to psychoanalysis. The emphasis is rooted in the bond between the infant and the mother and different aspects of the psychic terrain is brought into her theorization. Klein saw the emergence of the internal battles of aggression and anxieties from the death drive. According to Klein, the sadism created in the infant tries to draw all the contents from the mother and gradually destroy her, the primary source of everything for the infant. So the layers of different negative feelings such as sadness and aggression in any person evolve in the unconscious from the stage of an infant. She names it the ‘depressive position’ in the infant in which it eventually realises the existence of only one mother.

The psychoanalytic feminists introduced terms such as *plenitude* and *lack*. Plenitude refers to a maternal instinct formed by the union of the mother and the child and the father gradually enters and breaks this union with lack. For Klein, this plenitude only creates anxiety in the infant. She points towards the depressive anxiety

in the infant in contrast to the castration complex made by other male psychoanalysts. She opines that the unconscious identification of the sexual organs and the gradual recognition of sexuality happen in the infant naturally. Klein elucidates the realisation of femininity and masculinity in the human psyche from the stage of infancy.

Methodology

The study on postmodern female melancholy is operated under the paradigm of interpretivism. Interpretivism is a qualitative research approach that focuses on interpreting the cultural and social dynamics through the analysis of individual perspectives and subjective experiences within the specific circumstances. This research integrates the qualitative methodology of discourse-aligned textual analysis through the application of the method of close reading. The core aspect of the study revolves around the plot, concepts and symbols included in the texts to understand the subjective emotional terrains of the selected female characters, framing these individuals within the comprehensive contexts. The methodology adopted aids to analyze the functioning of storyline, language and imagery to ascribe significance. The method of close reading discerns the underlying patterns, symbolic motifs and the perspectives of void, fragmentation and isolation in women.

The primary synthesis of psychoanalytic feminist criticism into the study deciphers the internal terrains of women characters. The comparative analysis of the selected texts underscores the overlaps and discrepancies of female melancholy in the fictional worlds of both Franzen and Eugenides. This methodological layout is selected to encapsulate the individual cognitive and the societal roots to engage with the structured yet multifaceted essence. It also aims to provide an analysis of male perspectives on female melancholy through a conceptual framework that is theoretically robust and empirically supported.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, dispensing specific yet incremental advancement to conceptualise the female melancholy in the selected novels. The opening chapter provides an extensive introduction to the thesis embedding the objectives of the study, thesis statement, research questions, background of the study, theoretical framework, methodology and review of literature, constructing the conceptual foundation. Chapters two and three follow a similar pattern as it includes the grouped data collected for the study, with each chapter focusing on individual exploration of the selected works. Chapter two probes into the melancholic representations by Franzen in his works; grouping the data from the selected novels, analysing and investigating the major themes and concepts, scrutinising the women characters and identifying the differences of the conception of female melancholy from depression and trauma. Chapter three also follows a parallel study on Eugenides as an exponent of female melancholy through a similar analysis of his selected texts.

Chapter four extensively applies the theories of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism into the texts to interrogate the female melancholic sensibilities of the female characters grounded in the theoretical background. Chapter five consolidates the postmodern dimensions of melancholy in women. This chapter incorporates the key findings, postmodern aspects and hysterical realism in the novels. Chapter six concludes the thesis summarizing the analysis of the study, reiterating the major arguments and including the relevance, limitations and scope of the study. Chapter seven or the final chapter proposes the future prospects or recommends potential directions for further studies on the area. In essence, the structure of the thesis is carefully and deliberately designed to ensure a logical and consistent advancement. It deals with textual analysis integrating a theoretical

approach, subjective perspectives, conceptual synthesis and comprehensive academic implications. It facilitates the scope and range to revise the interpretations of the female melancholy through the postmodern perspective. It ensures that the objectives of the study are achieved meticulously and logically.

Review of Literature

Mental health is an utmost relevant aspect of life. Often people, specifically women are plunged into the confines of internal battles of agony for existence that an escape is rather difficult. In recent years, rigorous studies have been happening on mental health in women within the realms of literature. They are also subjected to the areas of melancholy, overlapping the research on depression and trauma. They explore studies on the possible dimensions and the solutions to rectify or better the circumstances. Depression and trauma often operate out of the control of the conscious mind shutting down the mental activity, which makes them different from melancholy as it is a conscious and thoughtful feeling of sorrow. In the thesis, titled as, “Saturnine Constellations: Melancholy in Literary History and in the Works of Baudelaire and Benjamin¹⁵” (2016), by Kevin Godbout, the author drew his ideas on melancholy around the theory of black bile and he saw it as the cause of artistic genius in people, especially in writers like Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire. He introduced two counterparts of melancholy; sublime and splenetic. He conceptualised a positive realm of melancholy that bloomed the intellectual power in people. The thesis argues that though melancholy in itself is antithetical from its destructive literary connotation of extremities of sadness to the constructive function it performs in bringing out the aesthetic genius, it is an unavoidable mechanism for the survival of art and literature. It states that the melancholy stored up in an inspired artist is a necessitating factor for its release of new perceptions.

Similar studies and research on melancholy are also made by many scholars around the world. Molly Bridges made her arguments around the topic in her thesis, titled as “Womanhood, Melancholy and the Problem of Genius in the Work of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle–Upon–Tyne (1623–73)¹⁶” (2019). She compared melancholy with aspects of madness and the mental trouble that it caused in Cavendish reflecting in her literary works, conceptualising a new dimension for womanhood. She links a connection between the intellect and the nexus of mental troubles. A person who suffers has a stronger capacity for imagination, driven by a longing to escape the situation in which they are confined. The thesis explored the efficacy of a melancholic female through Cavendish as an archetype of female mad genius. Molly Bridges delved into the possibilities of connecting melancholy with womanhood and geniuses who are both intellectual and artistic. Moreover, the study focused on the life and the literary works of Cavendish to unleash the theme of melancholy in women writers, specifically. She brought a new encapsulation of womanhood which reclaims the female body as a powerful aspect, delineating the female melancholy. In the context, a woman prioritises herself and her body over other aspects and the mental troubles empower her imaginations, which turn out to be rather noble, creative and productive.

Major research on female melancholy is done so far within the age of Renaissance, as it was enriched with melancholy due to varied reasons. Emma Rayner also undertook a similar study on melancholy in her thesis titled as, “The Matter of Early Modern Female Melancholy¹⁷” (2018). Emma argues that a negative shade broods over melancholy in women in contrast to that in the male counterparts and states her perceptions on melancholy that is female-voiced, through the selected works of William Shakespeare, John Webster, John Milton, Hester Pulter and Lucy

Hutchinson. The thesis reflects on the significance of expressing the melancholy in women which is often underrated to male melancholy that leads to artistic representations in the Renaissance age. Emma pinpointed that melancholy of the period is elevated as a masculine facet and all the glory one experiences is a result of the suffering they underwent, excluding women from the male discourse, and even pointed out the fact that the female melancholy was often male authored. She brings in the religious dimensions to the study and introduces the Postlapsarian Melancholy, stating that the thought of the Fall of man influences the understanding of the subsequent perceptions on life. In a melancholic woman, there is always an obsession with the past and a fear of belonging to a doomed universe. The female melancholy is majorly associated with a disorientation of the self, involving the body, thus presenting a monist view of melancholy.

The melancholy in women is a broad subject that requires consistent studies, subjected to the changing times. Incorporating the perceptions of Burton's, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Henriette Marie Kolle attempted to conceptualise the subjectivities of melancholy in women that pave way to identification and finding of the self through the autobiographies of Jean Rhys and Margaret Cavendish, in her thesis titled as, "The Melancholic Woman Writer: Claims to a Melancholic Subjectivity in Margaret Cavendish and Jean Rhys¹⁸" (2017). She chose the female writers to seek new insights on the topic through their lens by decentering the male melancholy and by integrating women into the sphere of melancholic tradition. The thesis reflects upon the existence of a gendered melancholy that subjugates women and posits it as an elite illness. Melancholy is put forth as a major creative force that boosts the understanding of the authorial self. A multidimensional aspect is attached in the portrayal of female melancholy in the

autobiographies, subjected to the loss of the objects in life, the gaze of others, the contrast in the viewing of productivity associated with male and female mourning, feeling of deathlike existence and various self-proclamations. The author draws attention towards the importance of expressing the grief of loss in women, which are feminine in nature to get the true essence of female melancholy.

Emily Brady and Arto Haapala co-authored a research paper titled “Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion” (2003) which argued that the melancholy is an aesthetic emotion influenced from the daily encounters with the surroundings. The paper also attempted to bring a distinction of melancholy from the emotion of sadness and depression and opines that the intertwining of these states of mind actually causes the misunderstanding of their individualities with qualities of their own. It states that depression is a debilitated state of resignation involving pain, and the feelings of disinterest and discouragement, whereas melancholy, though a complex emotion compared to sadness, is a state of contemplation and reflection, often providing pleasure amidst the grief that it motivates for productivity in life. Madison Rosa Schaefer Ms. presents similar conclusions in her paper titled as, “The Joy of Melancholy” (2015). She argues that the negative emotions lead to greater artistic creativity and attempts a distinction between melancholy and depression. Melancholy must not be regarded as a disease and its moods, unfortunately, seldom have a cure. The paper also delved into the association of melancholy with stars and the darkness of the night. The arguments, in pursuit of the need to find happiness and creative inspiration, are made in accord with the postulations made by various theorists such as Wilson, Whitman, Anton Chekov, Ficino, Flatley, Pieper, Kaufmann and Bell. It argues that the advent of melancholy in people makes them embrace the pain awakened by morality, experience more of the world and thus create aesthetics.

Ideal dimensions of melancholy are explored by Julia Patricia Wallace Cooper in her thesis titled as, “Melancholy Utopia: Loss and Fantasy in Contemporary American Literature and Film¹⁹”(2016). A multifaceted dimension, altogether, is brought in the thesis, juxtaposing loss with fantasy, and presenting utopia as the core of modern grief. It states that the melancholy holds a potential in reshaping the way people respond or perceive the feeling of loss. The concept of death and fidelity is brought into discussion and the grief attached to it. It sees melancholy as a narcissistic aspect that prioritises the self. It attempts to bridge the gap between melancholy and the feeling of enjoyment. This state of mind plunges one into the world of utopia, and both the feeling and the imaginary ideal world tend to be temporary, which refuses to be static though there is a longing to be. Derrida’s theories of detachment and anticipated grief from the beginning, not merely at the end of loss, are applied to the study.

In a research paper, titled “Tales of Beauty: Aestheticizing Female Melancholia,” the author, Frances Restuccia makes attempts to comment around the arguments put forth by Julia Kristeva on female melancholy. For Restuccia, women writers like Anita Brookner, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Drabble hold Kristeva’s perceptions of melancholic writing. These authors have dealt with female melancholy in their novels adherent to both form and content, and have rightly portrayed women’s grief. Mostly, women’s suffering is seen as a consequence of men’s dominance in the patriarchal society; however, it is structured in the psyche of human beings. She brings in an economic background to the area by pointing out that usually melancholy is regarded as an illness of the elite class as women in privilege have the leisure to romanticise their grief over loss of someone or past occurrences. Moreover, she also opines that the psychic pain in any, irrespective of class is a painful state to be in.

Some of the novels by Anita Brookner that focused on melancholy in women are *Look at Me* (1983), *Hotel du Lac* (1984), *The Misalliance* (1986) and *A Closed Eye* (1992). She represents the melancholic women in her novels as losers without elegance, dependent on male counterparts and immersed in despair. Similar representations of self-destructive melancholic women can be drawn from the fictional worlds of Atwood and Drabble, such as *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967), respectively. Restuccia argues that the female melancholy is aestheticized in the works of these women writers as they find a symbolic relief to their grief while expressing them through their literary art.

Studies have been conducted on the literary works of the American novelists, Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Kent Eugenides, but it is sparse. Zuzanna Gorenstein wrote a thesis, detailing studies on Jonathan Franzen, titled as, “New Sincerity and the Contemporary American Family Novel: Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* and Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*²⁰” (2014). It talks about the family tradition in fiction exploring the employment of literary realism in the selected works of study. The study elevates the literary sincerity of the realistic portrayal of the novels of Jonathan Franzen. It analyses Franzen as a prolific essayist dealing with different themes related to cohesion, art and morality.

Megumi Grace Chou makes a study on the ambivalent imagery of America devastated by the trauma created by 9/11, as delineated in the novels of Franzen, in her thesis titled as, “The View from Somewhere: Ambivalence in The Fiction of Jonathan Franzen and Amitav Ghosh” (2019). Franzen is looked upon as a writer influenced by middle class ideals and he seeks to disavow technology in his novels. In a research paper titled “Corrections: Contemporary American Melancholy” (2003) written by Catherine Toal, published in *Journal of European Studies*, the author

examines American literature of a popular discourse on depression in Franzen's *The Corrections*, along with other works. It argues that the texts gesture towards a shared set of preoccupations regarding the culture of depression, associating it with the absence of coherent forms of cultural authority and processes of formation.

Similarly, there is scarce research on Jeffrey Eugenides. In a thesis, written by Lene Renneflott, titled as "Power and Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*"²¹ (2011), the author reflects upon the identity crisis caused in a person who fears the society to disclose the true gender different from the one at the time of birth. The study focuses on the deconstruction of power that separates the different classes in the select novel of Eugenides. It conceptualises the structures of sexual categorization and self-identification presented by Eugenides through his subjective perceptions in the novel. In a research paper titled as, "Theory and Text: Frames of narrative techniques employed in Jeffrey Eugenides *Middlesex*" (2018), the author, Arathy K. P., reflects upon the battles of internal struggles faced by the protagonist of the selected novel by analysing the structure of the primary text and the style of writing of Eugenides. It argues that Eugenides is a prolific writer who gives attention to the nuances of expressions through his works.

Conclusion

Existing studies pinpoint towards the melancholy that inspires the creative genius in people, supported by ancient theories of black bile and spleen, the melancholy that is gendered, which marginalises women over the centuries and gives an upper hand to men, specifically regarding the productivity of ideas, intellect and artistic aspects, the melancholy as an aesthetic emotion and the religious connotations and utopian fantasies attached to the concept. My thesis attempts to conceptualise the female melancholy in the selected postmodern scenario, filling the research gap

created in the process and thereby presenting new insights on the topic, laying groundwork for further studies on the area. The study will be limited within the selected framework of the American authors, Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides and would delineate on how the texts have presented the female melancholy, through the exploration of hysterical realism. The chosen novels depict different stories of female melancholy buried in American society, which seldom draw attention for medication and are often inbuilt in women as a normal happening of emotion. They present postmodern facets to the female melancholy in the novels, which are distinct from the earlier studies made around the area. The postmodern interpretations of female melancholy perceive an invisible outline that is individualised, differentiating the feeling in each person as it refuses to universalize the cause for the feeling of grief over loss. As postmodernism suggests, it is never a single truth, but it is always truths, subjective to circumstances and so is melancholy in women, despite the commonality of the feeling of sorrow. There is a strange resemblance of the melancholic shadow brooding over the selected female characters of the two different contemporary American authors, Franzen and Eugenides, which will be dealt deeply in this thesis, incorporating the postulations of psychoanalytic feminism and psychoanalysis.

2

Franzen's Chronicles of Female Melancholy

“The generation of American writers who came to be associated with the rise of postmodernism in the 1960s were unusual not just in their self-conscious efforts to classify their relationship to literary history, but also in their tendency to dramatise that self-consciousness within their fiction” (Burn 2); Jonathan Earl Franzen was one among these writers. Franzen, an influential voice of the twenty-first century, is an established figure of the contemporary American literary canon. He has penned several literary pieces of short, long and non-fiction. He is also a recipient of numerous honours, recognitions and prestigious awards like National Book Award (2001), James Tait Black Memorial prize (2002) and Thomas Mann Prize (2022) and a finalist of Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (2002), PEN/Faulkner Award (2002) and International Dublin Literary Award (2003). He appeared on the cover of August 23, 2010 issue of *Time* magazine with the headline, “Great American Novelist²².”

Franzen was born on 17th August 1959 in a village called Western Springs in Illinois, United States. He was born as the third child, after Bob Franzen and Tom Franzen, to Earl Theodore Franzen, a civil engineer and Irene Super, a homemaker. His paternal ancestry can be traced in the United States and his maternal lineage is in Europe. Franzen's background is Midwestern as he grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri, US. He did his schooling at Webster Groves High School, St. Louis, from where he graduated in 1977. He completed his studies from Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania in 1981 with a Bachelor of Arts in German and a minor in English with High Honors. At Swarthmore, his writing skills flourished. He continued his education at Freie Universität, Berlin as a fellow of Fulbright scholarship. Later, he pursued the job of a research assistant in 1983 at a seismology lab in the Harvard

University, where he remained until 1987. On 2nd October, 1982, he married a writer, Valerie Cornell but later they got separated in 1990. Presently, he lives with Kathy Chetkovich, a writer in Santa Cruz, California.

Franzen's works were published from the late 1980's and majority of his works are published in the twenty-first century. He has written six novels; *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), *Strong Motion* (1992), *The Corrections* (2001), *Freedom* (2010), *Purity* (2015) and *Crossroads: A Novel* (2021), and all are published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux at New York. Franzen fused the opposites in his novels as they amalgamated the conflicting forces, resulting in different interpretations. He has written around sixteen short fictional works and about ten non-fictional works. He has also made two translations of German works into English. There are several layers of postmodernism entangled in his works, especially because his fiction bloomed towards the end period of the literary movement.

As much as any writer of his generation, Jonathan Franzen has been preoccupied by the question of how a writer who grew up in the heyday of postmodernism might relate to a movement that so forcibly established and policed its own borderlands. In 2001, Franzen told Donald Antrim that he had begun writing novels as a way of creating a "conversation with the ... great sixties and seventies Postmoderns" (73), and his reviews of other novels, as well as the essays where he meditates on the state of fiction, indicate how deeply he is concerned with the place of his fiction within a larger literary ecology that has been predominantly shaped by the energies of American postmodernism. (Burn 4)

In the 1990s, Franzen associated his fictional world with the works of David Foster Wallace and Richard Powers while he was developing his latest techniques of

writing. These writers identified themselves conceptualising similar frameworks for the future of fiction. Their works emphasised on the correlation between form and content. He belonged to a set of writers who longed to explore beyond the elements of postmodernism in their works. In the works of Franzen, form is given less importance than the plot of the story. He draws various layers to the personal history of the characters of his fictional world. Melvin Jules Bukiet, an American author and literary critic, categorised Franzen under the group of authors who experimented crackpot realism²³. He internalised, knowingly or unknowingly, a dispute between the postmodern techniques and the traditional narratives, stressing on the story-based aspects, in his novels, which never seems to achieve a resolution.

Franzen views books as part of a larger network rather than something to be conceived as single entities. There are evident influences of ancestral authors in his works, indicating Northrop Frye's concept in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that fiction can be made out of other fiction. He seems to express an association between earlier works and his own fiction. "Franzen's early novels frequently identify analogues between the self and more visible structures and this bleeds into a larger American obsession with the relationship between architectural structures and the mind" (Burn 118). This strange linking of mind and buildings parallels MacLean's theory of the evolution of the brain that heaped new components over the prior ones in the inner structures of the brain, resulting in conflicts in humanity. He attempts to theorise the operation of the human mind by framing varied descriptions of selfhood in his literary space. There is an underpinned prominence given to the society compared to the alienated characters that live in it in his works. Often, the deprivation of descriptive languages in his works incapacitates the interrogations on identity. Franzen's works insinuate at stipulating action in his readers. His writings render a sense of uncertainty

of the world, delineating ambivalence attached to human existence in the present times.

However, Franzen's writing is often criticised for his various adoptions of discourses in his literary world. His novels represent his literary state in a quandary, where he discovers that the strings of separation of class have been amplified to be blurred. "Franzen is caught between nostalgia for a system that would value his work without reference to its social context, and an anxious recognition of a new, emergent cultural field that leaves him in a position of marginality- insignificant and anachronistic beside the unrelenting machinery of mass culture, and marginal too in relation to the rise of multiculturalism" (Green 103). His works constitute triumphant propositions of the origination of a stance between class recognition and cultural paragon.

Franzen seems to astonish his readers with incisive flips on the present day existence in America. His novels facilitate an amalgamation of the intellectual heaves and the emotional contentment. He deserts the social novel and embraces the psychological realism, as the former no longer succeeds to convince its assertion to cultural authority. He is often criticised for his abstain from the depiction of social progress and change. Despite this claim, the characters of his novels take the path of self-enhancement. He merged the micro and macro lenses in his works through the expedition of the convergence of the household and the societal apprehensions.

Indeed, Franzen conceptualised a framework of womanhood in his novels. An equal representation of male and female characters can be discerned in his fictional world. He attempts to chronicle the realistic experiences of the serenity and tumult in women in his novels. However, Franzen has also attracted feminist criticism with regard to his representation of female characters. "He has drawn the ire of female

authors and feminists for his privileged position in what many have described as an insular male literary culture, his fictional treatments of female characters, and comments about women” (Gallow 2). Despite such criticisms, Franzen facilitates an association between his female characters and contemporary society in his novels. His women characters are studded with further remarkable stereotypes compared to male characters. His literary world constitutes females who grapple in a male dominant society that prioritise men’s tales. They, rather, seem seeking answers to intricate motives in life. The cessation of arguments in his novels can be traced through personal relationships that he creates among his characters, instead of direct address of social concerns. The convoluted depictions of present times in his novels draw on the nature of Franzen as an advocate of social reformation. His novels rather seem to bring up the fundamental tale of America itself.

Franzen conceived emotions such as grief, sense of loss, melancholy, depression, trauma and sorrow in his novels. His works delineate that the feeling of worthlessness obstructs the accomplishment of joy and the formation of human relationships. This feeling becomes the gateway to melancholy in human beings. “From another point of view, he interestingly relates realism with anger and depression: Depression presents itself as a realism regarding the rottenness of the world in general and the rottenness of your life in particular. But realism is merely a mask from depression’s actual essence, which is an overwhelming estrangement from humanity” (Blanco 204). Franzen extracts an appropriate similitude between melancholy and realism in his works. Franzen portrays a fictional world where the female characters find it difficult to escape from the emotional layers of melancholy. He excavates a cryptic psychic vista in his novels where his female characters tussle with misery and disenchantment. He showcases how the female minds sail through

the outer struggles and impediments in life. He associates the disintegration of the human psyche with the varying degrees of sadness in his novels.

Melancholy, depression and trauma constitute three definite, unique and yet inter-related affective conditions of the human mind. These emotional states characterise the conscious and the unconscious terrains of human distress and agony. They are intermittently used interchangeably in the everyday discourses and literary frameworks. However, each symbolises a distinct emotional endurance with its own etymological roots, history, indications and consequences. “The more archaic condition of melancholia, from which the psychic disorder of depression conceptually originates, has a longer, richer, and ultimately more positive history” (Miller 11).

Melancholy is conventionally anchored in the theoretical, aesthetic and clinical dialogue. It harks back to venerabilities where it was conceived as body humor. It is habitually linked to deliberations, yearnings and stylized renditions of profound sorrow. It often represents a reflective attachment with loss and nostalgia that is usually intangible and metaphysical in essence. In the literary realm of art and letters, it is often enshrined and glamorized to intensify introspections and innovations and not regarded as morbid and compulsive.

Depression is often conceptualised through a diagnostic and cognitive analysis. It is associated with symptoms such as despair, weariness, alienations, apathy and lack of enthusiasm. It is often incapacitating and symbolizes a despondency and loss of purpose in life. It disrupts the routine performances. In the literary realm, it is represented with psychic authenticity. It unfolds the inner dislocations and numbness of the self. “Kristeva refers to melancholia as an ever-widening “abyss of sorrow” that, often on a long-term basis, makes us “lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself” (Miller 21), which leads to the more

severe state of depression. The abyss mentioned by Kristeva is an abiding and deep-seated sadness. It denudes the purpose of life and undermines the association of the subject with discourse, vigor and engagement. At times, a person with a melancholic frame of mind collapses with the symbolic articulation of verbal meaning. Such a person recedes into a vacuum of ineffable torment. It resembles the therapeutic symptoms of depression, specifically in the gradual attrition of intrigue in existence and dialogue.

“It is that an ancient melancholy is passing into a truly new depression, a depression wholly beyond all possible individual enactment, and hence beyond all individual responsibility, but precisely thereby it is all comprehensive as melancholy cannot possibly be” (Feld 170). A transition happens from the serene state of melancholy to the stringent condition of depression in the individuals. It indicates a dynamic change from a meditative and thoughtful sadness to a pervasive, diagnostic, impersonal and therapeutic condition. It often delineates the lack of figurative resonance and thematic richness in depression that characterises melancholy.

Trauma is typified by volatile and disruptive experiences. It arises from an event or a sequence of events. It submerges the potential of the conscious part of the human mind to assimilate or comprehend them as they happen. Trauma is often seen as an intractable impasse of the unconscious. It unveils the integral paradoxes of experiences and discourses. Lacan posits trauma as a habitual impression of neglect that severs knowledge of the unbridled experience. People with trauma over the loss of someone often “experience post-traumatic phenomena, such as recurrent nightmares, not as symptoms to be worked through but as bonds or memorial practices linking them to the haunting presence of dead intimates” (LaCapra XV). Melancholy is unhurried, introspective and enduring. Trauma, on the other hand, is

fierce, instant and characterized by segregation and disintegration. Trauma wholly derails timeliness. It fragments the chronology of time. It prompts the victim to revive the distressing experience through unintentional and invasive recurrences. People, in general, articulate melancholy.

However, trauma is often inexpressible because it is never completely realized; but rather, disengaged or suppressed. “Moreover, in victims themselves, trauma, instead of calling for processes of working-over and working-through, may be valorized as a limit experience or as stigmata demanding endless melancholy or grieving, whose mitigation or rendering in narrative is perceived as objectionably consoling or even as sacrilegious” (LaCapra XIV). Historically, melancholy accommodates figurative illustrations and reflective recountings. Trauma frequently thwarts such conclusions. People often undergo static, unprocessed and unresolved traumatic experiences. Such experiences portray trauma as an absolute and constraint exposure. The bereavements persist as timeless and inviolable emotions in such circumstances. Trauma necessitates boundless stillness and repudiates the solace of storytelling and recuperation.

The Corrections: Melancholic Family Dynamics

The Corrections (2001), a bestselling novel by Jonathan Franzen, is a straggling and a sarcastic examination of a dysfunctional family in America. It won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2001. The novel, written in the third person omniscient point of view, documents the vicissitudes of the Lambert family. It narrates the tales of Alfred and Enid in St. Jude, Missouri, a fictional location in America, and their children; Gary, Chip and Denise. It begins through the angles of Alfred Lambert, a dictatorial patriarch, and his wife, Enid Lambert, a homemaker. Alfred is a retired railroad engineer with fifty years of experience and suffers from

Parkinson's disease. Enid pivots on her husband and wails over the life decisions of their children who deserted their Midwestern principles. The adult children left their parents' place in search of a life on the East Coast during the 1990s. The recurring motif at the crux of the novel is Enid's longing to bring her children back for Christmas at Missouri for one last time. Even the aged Alfred is only left with the desire of a family reunion. The lurking atmosphere of the extremities of sadness of the novel is hinted at the very beginning when the author alarms, "you could feel it: something terrible was going to happen" (Franzen 3). In contrast to the usual categorization of novels into various chapters, *The Corrections* includes a succession of named parts.

In the very first part, entitled, "St. Jude", Franzen introduces the tensions and the collapsing relationships between the aging couple, Alfred and Enid. He sets forth the apprehensions in their house as he states that "ringing throughout the house was an alarm bell that no one but Alfred and Enid could hear directly. It was the alarm bell of anxiety" (3) and "the alarm bell had been ringing for years" (4). The couple lives in an orderly house in St. Jude²⁴ which symbolises Franzen's hometown, the suburban St. Louis in Missouri. This part introduces the deterioration of Alfred's mental and physical capabilities and Enid's confrontation with her existing circumstances in life. Alfred "who can walk, and write, and dress himself, does nothing all day but sit in his chair" (75).

Alfred and Enid pay a visit to their middle son, Chip's place in New York. Chip is in defiance with their conventional values. He is an aspiring writer but a ne'er do well. Enid is hoodwinked into believing that Chip pens down for *Wall Street Journal*. However, he is insolvent and financially dependent on Denise. Earlier, he was a proficient student while at school and was employed as a college teacher in

Connecticut. But he got terminated on account of a scandalous affair with one of his students, Melissa Paquette. Alfred and Enid meet Chip's girlfriend Julia Vrais at his apartment. She is married to Gitanas Misevicius, the deputy prime minister of Lithuania, who is affronted by the derogatory sexual remarks in Chip's script.

Later, Alfred and Enid also meet Denise, the youngest child, at Chips's apartment. She lives in Philadelphia and is an accomplished chef. She had a repressing childhood that made her a rebellious child. During that time, she had a furtive affair with a married subordinate of Alfred. "Enid had looked forward, some day when Denise was older and had finished college, to hosting a really elegant wedding and reception... for Denise and a tall, broad-shouldered, possibly Scandinavian young man whose flaxen hair would offset the defect of the too-dark and too-curly hair Denise had inherited from Enid but who would otherwise be her match" (137). However, to Enid's shock, Denise just announced that she got married to her boss, Emile Borger, "a short, unsmiling, middle-aged Jew from Montreal" (138) in a courthouse in Atlantic City.

Alfred is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease around this time, which Enid connects with Denise's marriage announcement and blames her for Alfred's illness. Adding to Enid's chagrin, Denise gets divorced after five years. Years after, Denise aids to open a new restaurant in Philadelphia and attains advancing triumph in her culinary vocation. She is seen struggling with her sexual identity as she develops affairs with both her boss and his wife, while working in the esteemed restaurant. Later she gets expelled from the restaurant. Enid discusses her financial concerns and about Alfred's health insurance with Denise at Chip's apartment. She also expresses her desire to arrange a Christmas party and asks her children to visit them at their home.

Franzen introduces Gary Lambert, the eldest son in the part titled as, “The More He Thought About It, the Angrier He Got.” Gary, a successful investment banker, lives with his wife Caroline and three sons, Caleb, Aaron and Jonah. Earlier, Caroline worked as a full-time lawyer, but at present, she works in part-time mode, due to her prioritisation of the upbringing of her sons. Gary’s marriage with Caroline is strained and he fosters the fear of being declared as depressed. When Enid coerces Gary to visit St. Jude for Christmas with family, Caroline is disinclined and beguiles her sons against Gary and Enid. She asserts that she doesn’t wish to go, “we agreed that five people with busy lives should not have to fly at the peak holiday season so that two people *with nothing in their lives* wouldn’t have to come here” (209).

Amidst the chaos, Gary learns about the prospects of Alfred’s treatment and urges his parents to migrate to Philadelphia. However, Enid is reluctant about the proposal and the underlying tensions in the family become rather apparent. Besides, “the more Gary thought about his sister’s involvement with married men, the angrier he got” (252). Gary also urges his parents to appeal for more funds over the patent that Alfred owns from a biotech company. It results in heated arguments between him and Alfred. Gary fails to take control of his own life and it amplifies his powerlessness, isolation and vulnerabilities. During his previous visit to his ancestral home, he was dismayed by the existing circumstances. He gradually realised that he detests St. Jude and the Midwestern values. However, he decides to visit his parents’ home for Christmas without his wife and children, despite the perplexities in his marital life.

Meanwhile, Alfred and Enid embark on a cruise, *Gunnar Myrdal*²⁵ to Canada. During this trip, the novel draws flashbacks of the Lambert family when Alfred was an authoritarian and conservative parent. In that period, Alfred worked as an assistant

chief engineer of Midland Pacific for track and structures. He was “sent east to inspect every mile of the Erie Belt Railroad” (280). Alfred felt discomfort with his sexuality and often exerted his dominance over Gary and Chip in barbarous ways. Before marriage, Enid dreamt of being a perfect wife and mother. But she was overlooked by her husband after marriage. She found her solace in taking care of her children in the initial decades of her marital life. In the cruise ship, Alfred’s health worsens and Enid is prescribed sedatives for her overtly anxiousness. While Enid takes part in a presentation, “Surviving the Corrections”, Alfred falls off on the sides of the cruise. He is rescued by the helicopter.

For Christmas celebrations, Gary and Denise arrive at St. Jude to fulfill Enid’s dream. Chip reaches late for the family reunion. Enid realises “that the family she’d tried to bring together was no longer the family she remembered---that this Christmas would be nothing at all like the Christmases of old. But she was doing her best to adjust to the new reality” (549). Denise is appalled by Alfred’s knowledge about her past affair with one of his colleagues. After Christmas, Alfred’s health deteriorates and he is moved to the Deepmire Home, a care facility. Enid visits “him every day, to keep him well dressed, and to bring him homemade treats” (651). Gary returns to Philadelphia, Denise moves to New York to open a new restaurant and Chip stays back with Enid to take care of Alfred. Later, Alfred dies at the care home. Enid eventually feels liberated from the shackles of her life. She relishes being an open minded person after his death.

The Corrections is profusely a family drama at its core. Franzen delineates an engrossing grip of the family dynamics through the lives of the Lamberts. They typically represent a quintessential upper middle class American family. Franzen draws a close scrutiny of Alfred’s disintegrations and the subsequent consequences on

the lives of Enid and the children. “Seeing their children was the only thing he seemed to care about anymore” (12) in his old age. When Alfred ultimately departs, Franzen has nothing much to convey to prolong the story. The house at St. Jude represents the abode that connects all the family members together, like any ancestral family house. The reference to the house recurs throughout the novel. Enid persuades her children, “if you’d especially like to have one last Christmas in the house you grew up in” (86).

The dysfunctional aspects in the family comprise the individual dismays, psychological tussles and estrangement from each other. These elements amplified in proportion with Enid’s attempts to control and impose her opinions on the lives of her children. “Enid was skilled at playing her children off against each other” (60). However, she also made sure that the family knew about the happenings in each other’s lives although they had drifted apart. “In the mail Chip found an envelope containing a short note from Enid lamenting Alfred’s moral failures (“he sits in that chair *all day, every day*”) and a lengthy profile of Denise, clipped from *Philadelphia* magazine, with a slaving review of her restaurant, Mare Scuro, and a full-page glamour photo of the young chef” (60).

The novel also highlights the generational conflicts in the Lamberts' family. The novel symbolises the extensive cultural changes that are happening in the contemporary scenario in America. Alfred’s disengagement with the family and his inflexible, conventional principles made the children feel a sense of meagre in their childhood. Enid rightly occupies the position of a homemaker and maternal figure in the family. The only motif in her life seems to be nursing her husband and looking after the children. Gary strives to attain the societal definitions of success but he is bound to make compromises in his marital life. “At first his intention was simply to

avoid his father's mistakes---to give himself time to enjoy life, cherish his wife, play with his kids" (223) but nothing turned out as he longed, like in any family.

Denise is successful at her professional front, but has to battle her struggles in her personal relationships and with her sexuality. Chip, nevertheless, becomes a failure in his career. "To Chip, unfortunately, it seemed that Alfred cared about his children only to the degree that they succeeded" (605). Alfred and Enid had deep rooted disputes, but Denise "was struck by how seldom in her childhood her parents, that other married couple in her life, that other incompatible pair, had shouted at each other. They'd held their peace and let the proxy war unfold inside their daughter's head" (496).

Despite the individual dilemmas and familial compulsions, the parents and the children attempt to reconnect. Denise, once unsettled at Chip, called him and said, "I'm upset because it's Dad's seventy-fifth birthday and you haven't called him and you didn't send him a card. I'm upset because I've been working for twelve hours and I just called Dad and he's worried about you" (89). This exchange is an instance of the familial bond that they share among themselves. There is this sense of "we all need to get along" (151) that runs in the family. Gary had "imagined that his whole family, even Chip, would eventually settle in Philadelphia. He'd imagined nieces and nephews, house parties and parlor games, long snowy Christmases on Seminole Street" (250). However, the novel also discerns the eventual destiny of the old aged people, when Gary utters to Denise that, "I want them in a retirement community out here, and I'm not afraid to say it" (246). The novel rightly encapsulates the empathetic nuances, sarcastic elements and the close scrutiny of the familial bond among the Lamberts. Franzen incorporates the individual and the bureaucratic concerns within the structure of the novel.

The novel's women characters traverse through the emotional and the psychological underpinnings. Enid Lambert is a Midwestern old lady of sixty-five years old when the novel begins. She is married to Alfred for at least fifty years and is "perfectly submissive, infinitely forgiving, and so respectable" (324). She symbolises the maternal figure of resilience. Her life twirls around the authoritarian Alfred and overtly pondering upon her children. Gradually, she realises "that her own head would clear if only she didn't have to wonder, every five minutes, what Alfred was up to" (5). She is also frustrated with her own house. "Although Enid's ostensible foe was Alfred, what made her a guerrilla was the house that occupied them both" (7). Even though she constantly coerces her children to visit them at their place for Christmas, it is only because of her "obsession with Christmas" (169).

Enid is profoundly immersed with the societal notions of success and standards. She is disheartened when she finds out that Denise marries a middle aged man before seeking her parents' approval. She finally finds credence that "she and Alfred had taken a wrong turn somewhere in Denise's upbringing" (85). Enid accepts the void vows of the postwar America that associate the worldly accomplishments and adhering to the old values with bliss. She constantly grapples to project a perfect family in the society. However, the familial dysfunctions tamper her idealised vision.

Enid occupies herself in the position of the caregiver in the family as Alfred's health worsens. Gary firmly voices his opinion against this submissive nature of Enid. He urges her to redefine her life when he says, "and if you want to dedicate your life to being his servant, that's your choice. If you want to live in an old house with a lot of problems, and try to keep everything just the way you like it, that's fine, too" (206). Enid is a representation of the class of women who devote their lives for their beloved ones and forget to prioritise themselves and their needs in the process. As a child, she

was hardworking, focused and talented. “Enid had a gift for math, and so she not only washed sheets and cleaned toilets and served meals but also handled numbers for her mother” (307). However, she lost that determined child in her after marriage and made herself submissive to her husband. “She demanded nothing and in return for nothing gave him everything he needed to do a long day’s work” (324). The constant reward she achieves is utter disappointment, throughout her life. “It was an ancient disappointment with the refusal of the world in general and her children in particular to participate in her preferred enchantments” (592). The novel ends with Alfred’s death and indicating Enid’s spirits, stating that, “she was seventy-five and she was going to make some changes in her life” (653). Enid’s flaws and impulses are poignant to the inner framework of the novel. Through Enid, Franzen demarcates the split between the idealised American aspirations and the grim reality under the pretenses of the world.

Contrastingly, Denise Lambert is an independent and strong-willed young lady. Denise, who is thirty-two years old, works as an executive chef in Philadelphia. “Denise had her mother’s dark hair and pale complexion and her father’s intimidating air of moral authority” (34). She is highly ambitious on her professional front. She has built an accomplishing career in the culinary field, away from home. However, she is emotionally entangled with the complexities of her sexual dilemmas and romantic relationships. This emotional perplexity interferes with her career prospects and results in professional drawbacks. Her simultaneous affairs with both Brian and his wife, Robin, led to her expulsion from the restaurant. She regards people as individuals and believes in respecting that individuality. Once she asserts to Enid that, “Mother, those patents are Dad’s. You have to let him handle it however he wants” (82).

Denise's different kinds of experiences at various stages of her life contributed to her stronger emotional maturity in handling adverse conditions in life. These experiences included her drop out from college, her early marriage to her middle aged boss, the subsequent divorce and setting a career on her own terms. As the narrator delineates, "she wanted above all to be a private person, an independent individual" (441). However, her bond with her family members remains intact amidst frequent quarrels and personal conflicts. She is a breakthrough from the conventional American notion of the feminine ideals in accord with her professional accomplishments and sexuality. Her characterisation in the novel echoes with Franzen's inspection of the convolutions of contemporary life in the novel.

In *The Corrections*, Franzen investigates the role of female melancholy in moulding the life experiences of women. Enid's existing frustrations in life only increased by living with an ailing husband. Enid's melancholic temperaments also protruded from the desire to be involved with the life decisions in her children's lives. According to Gary, "it was a burden to have a mother need you so extremely, to be responsible for her bliss" (191). The melancholy in Enid is multifaceted as it stems from various reasons. She is tied down to her hollow aspirations, failing relationships and the load of expectations. She constantly fantasised about marriage that became entirely dissimilar from her reality. "This was a *bad* husband she had landed, a bad, bad, bad husband who would never give her what she needed. Anything that might have satisfied her he found a reason to withhold" (320).

Like the other typical wives, Enid too chose the wee hours to weep and produced "mewling noises of a wife trying to cry herself to sleep at two in the goddamned morning" (324). Enid is emotionally isolated. Her children live away from her. Her husband, who is her only companion, is sick. It caters to her increasing

potential disposition of melancholy. She also seems to be reluctant to acknowledge her ageing. Enid's melancholy is not explicitly made visible in the novel.

Nevertheless, her sense of discontent and dejection with life is mildly entwined into her gestures and conversations with the other characters. Her desperate longing for nearness to her children becomes futile and results in further indifferences and distances. Her endeavours to thrust her idealised fancies of normalcy on her children generate tensions. It simply emulates her own discontents with reality. Her melancholy also stems from her hesitation to accept the underpinned dysfunction in the family. Moreover, her grasping of her own past causes the experience of further layers of sadness. Franzen represents Enid Lambert as a poignant symbol of melancholic elderly woman in the novel.

Franzen also unearths female melancholy through Denise Lambert. She herself declares, "my divorce is the great unhappiness of my life" (450). Denise grapples with her sexual identity, familial aspirations, numerous failed relationships and career ambitions. "Having dropped out of college and having married badly, Denise at least had some acquaintance with darkness and disappointment" (91). She had a suppressed childhood and was heeded to the restrictions of her parents. "Denise when her time came, asked to follow in Gary's footsteps, but Enid didn't think that little girls and trumpets matched" (409). Her success in her career, however, failed to bring happiness on her emotional front. Her relentless devotion to her work can be perceived as a temporary escape from her harsh realities.

Life, in her experience, had a kind of velvet luster. You looked at yourself from one perspective and all you saw was weirdness. Move your head a little bit, though, and everything looked reasonably normal. She believed she couldn't hurt anybody as long as she was only working. (442)

The underlying tensions in the relationship between the mother and daughter are yet another source of melancholy in both Enid and Denise. Enid is disinclined to accept Denise's independent nature and capabilities of making her own decisions. It creates internal disputes in both Enid and Denise. Denise also carries a sense of guilt with regard to the medical condition of Alfred within herself. The melancholy in both Denise and Enid arose from their internal struggles as a reaction to their external circumstances. Their melancholic journey intertwines with the other extensive themes in the novel such as the search for true happiness in the intricate contemporary world.

The Corrections integrates the postmodern psychic indifferences. It entangles the emotional experiences of melancholy, depression and trauma into the narrative structure of the novel. Franzen probes into the embodiment of psychic distress in his characters. The Lamberts seem to exemplify the various aspects of mental anguish. Enid represents a wistful facet of female melancholy. Melancholy is primarily embedded in her because of her fixation for a fantasised marital life. Her melancholy unfolds as a frivolous inhibition and conceals the profound and neglected losses.

Denise's melancholy is rather internal as she grapples with suppressed identity, remorse and aloofness. Her meticulousness and collapsed bisexual romances indicate an unprocessed grief. It propels her forward but depletes her emotional reserves. Franzen explores depression through Chip Lambert. His life is characterised by disenchantment, repentance and uncertainty. His termination as a teacher has impacted his mental health in profound ways. It causes depressive temperaments in him. His state of unemployment deteriorates him into self-contempt, financial fragility and mental gridlock. His actions, compulsive behavior and feelings of humiliation are symptomatic of clinical depression. His withdrawal from Lithuania exacerbates his

despair. It symbolises his disconnection from the world. His depression echoes the sense of meaninglessness, cultural isolation and emotional void in human beings.

The novel explores trauma through the characters of Gary and Alfred. Trauma is significant in moulding the character and behaviour of an individual. Gary's childhood is dominated by memories of forbidden days. He lived under a tyrannical father and a coercive mother. It resulted in wariness, mental suppression and domestic strife in him. Caroline pinpoints to him that, "you don't sleep well. You don't seem to get pleasure out of anything" (209). The frequent emotional collapses in his marital life are a consequence of this unresolved trauma in his childhood. Alfred also encountered trauma in varying degrees. The detachments with the world and the sense of apathy and resilience often masked his trauma from the world. He experienced hallucinations because of his condition of dementia. They revealed his regrets and disintegrations that he endured secretly in life. Trauma is presented as a shared psychological wound inherited in the family. Trauma creates an emotional scar that is often left unhealed and made invisible under the societal deceptions. The lives of the Lamberts are highly impacted by the expressive interplay of melancholy, depression and trauma.

Freedom: Dissociation and Psychic Exile

Freedom (2010) is a daunting and searing novel by Jonathan Franzen. It captures the narrative drive similar to his other successful novels. The critics regard the novel as the Great American Novel²⁶. It presents yet another dysfunctional family in his literary universe in realistic parameters. It integrates characters who are often compared to those of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*²⁷. The novel is written from an omniscient point of view. It delves into the lives of the members of the Berglund family. "The Berglunds were the super-guilty sort of liberals who needed to forgive

everybody so their own good fortune could be forgiven; who lacked the courage of their privilege” (Franzen 7). According to their neighbours, “the Berglunds weren’t all that privileged; their only asset was their house, which they’d rebuilt with their own hands” (7).

The Berglund family consists of Walter Berglund, an environmental lawyer; his wife, Patty Berglund, a homemaker; and their children, Jessica Berglund, the elder child and Joey Berglund, their younger son. The Berglunds are one of the first families to settle in St. Paul following the white fight²⁸. Moreover, the novel also showcases the glimpses of life in the suburban areas. It begins with the description of the lives of the Berglunds in the suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota. They represent a typical middle class family in America. They lived with their intrusive neighbours who gossip and judge about people in their community. However, “the other neighbors were avoiding conversation with Patty, as they never had before” (20). Concurrently, it seemed they shared a good sense of camaraderie too. “Patty had been implacably generous in offering to look after Connie while Carol²⁹ was out working or shopping or doing her Thursday-night business, and Carol had become dependent on her for a ton of free babysitting” (7). Patty stayed on good terms with her neighbours.

The parents tried to inculcate the values of an ideal middle class family in their children. “According to Patty, the lesson that Joey had learned from his incessant arguments with Walter was that children were compelled to obey parents because parents had the money” (12). Walter, a moral idealist, is a very hardworking, well-mannered gentleman who took the responsibility to take care of his family. “Walter’s most salient quality, besides his love of Patty, was his niceness. He was the sort of good listener who seemed to find everybody else more interesting and impressive than

himself” (22). Patty, though a homemaker at present, was a basketball athlete in her childhood. As a homemaker, “Patty was no great progressive and certainly no feminist (staying home with her birthday calendar, baking those goddamned birthday cookies) and seemed altogether allergic to politics” (7). She devoted her life to her husband, house and the children, especially Joey, after marriage. Jessica is portrayed as an academically accomplished daughter in the novel. She is “smitten with books, devoted to wildlife, talented at flute, stalwart on the soccer field, coveted as a babysitter, not so pretty as to be morally deformed by it” (8). Patty is undeniably passionate about Joey, the rebellious child. “He was golden-haired and pretty and seemed innately to possess the answers to every test a school could give him” (10). After spending many years in Minnesota with their nosy neighbours, the family slowly starts to deteriorate. When the children grow up and join college, the couple moves to Washington as Walter commutes to a new job.

The novel shifts to the autobiography, “Mistakes were Made,” of Patty that was written at her therapist’s suggestion. It includes the details of her childhood and college days. This session is an embedded narrative³⁰. Patty reflects on her alienated days of her childhood, her life as a basketball player at college and the incident of rape at school. She was “raped at a party when she was seventeen by a boarding-school senior named Ethan Post” (38). She was devastated by her parents’ reaction to the incident. It affected her more intensely than the rape. She was shocked when her mother, Joyce, asked, “Do you think it might be enough if Ethan formally apologized to you?” (44) Later, she joins the University of Minnesota with a scholarship. She forms friendship with Eliza, a disturbed girl at the University. Through Eliza, she develops friendship with Richard Ritz and Walter Berglund. Richard and Walter are roommates and best friends at college.

Patty feels physical attraction towards Richard who is also a musician. But develops love towards Walter. During her days at college as a skilled basketball player, she endures an injury that almost ends her career. “Walter Berglund had learned from his own mother how to be attentive to women with ailments, and he took advantage of Patty’s extended incapacitation to reinsert himself into her life” (98). Despite Patty’s consistent efforts, she fails to woo Richard. She finally decides to marry Walter as she regards him as an honest man. Walter comes to know about Patty’s feelings towards Richard and distances himself from Richard. “He took possession of the girl he wanted, the girl who could have gone with Richard but had chosen him instead” (137). Patty is afflicted by the swing of emotions towards both Richard and Walter throughout her life.

The novel then navigates to the 2000s when Joey reaches adulthood. He migrates to Washington for his studies. He is plunged into a state of dilemma and conflict as he develops attraction towards Jenna. She is the sister of Jonathan, his affluent friend in the university. Later, he learns of his impotence. However, his childhood romance with Connie blossoms to marriage. Meanwhile, Richard becomes an accomplished musician during his middle age. His musical composition, *Nameless Lake* becomes a tremendous success. Walter reconnects with Richard at Patty’s suggestion that “he’s your best male friend, and you should look him up” (139).

Walter joins the Cerulean Mountain Trust, a coal-trade endorsing environmental organisation in Washington. He also joins the new campaign, *Free Space*, against overpopulation and invites Richard to join them. In the meantime, Richard and Patty engage in a physical relationship at the Nameless Lake; and, Walter and Lalitha, his Indian Bengali assistant, develop mutual attraction towards each other. Richard speculates about Walter's feelings through his admiration for Lalitha.

He also “suspected that Walter was calculatedly dangling this Lalitha as a bait” (220). However, he urges Patty to leave Walter. But, she asserts that she is in love with her husband and gives him her autobiography to prove her love. Richard, purposefully, leaves the manuscript on Walter’s table for him to see. Walter finds out about the extramarital affair of Patty from the diary and chucks her out from his house, “after twenty-four years of marriage” (497).

After Patty leaves, Walter starts a life with Lalitha. “She was just a high-spirited young woman---just, actually, the brightest ray of light in his entire life these days” (309). However, he was also envious of her---“envy of her youth; envy of her innocent idealism; envy of the simplicity of her situation, as compared to the impossibility of his” (322). Jessica and Joey are informed about their parents’ separation. They decide not to interfere in their relationship even though they wish to see them together. Meanwhile, Patty embraces a new life with Richard. Unfortunately, it lasts only for a year. She realises that she is still in love with Walter. Walter and Lalitha continue their life and work together with the campaign without aid from any external organisations. But, their professional journey deteriorates.

On their personal front, “his happiness was reminiscent of his early years with Patty, their days of teamwork in child-raising and house renovation, but he was much more present to himself now, more vividly and granularly appreciative of his happiness, and Lalitha was not the worry and enigma and headstrong stranger that Patty, at some level, had always remained to him” (520). Later, Lalitha dies in a road accident that drags Walter into a state of low spirits. Patty learns about Lalitha’s death and is saddened by the news, despite her earlier longings for their doom. “Having hated the girl and made no secret of it, she had no right to console Walter now, and

she knew it could only seem monstrous of her to use such a sad occasion to try to worm her way back into his life” (541).

Patty shares a room with her college friends after her life with Richard. “To absent herself and earn money, she worked evenings as a barista, making exactly those coffee drinks she’d once ridiculed the idea of making” (542). Later, she tries to strengthen the bond with her family members. However, she relocates to Brooklyn after her father’s death due to cancer. Meanwhile, both Joe and Jessica attain success in their respective careers. Patty once meets Richard, who urges her to reunite with Walter and pen down a concluding chapter to her autobiography. Patty and Walter’s separation lasts for years. Walter has retreated to the Canterbridge Estates after Lalitha’s death. “Canterbridge Estates was a new development, consisting of twelve spacious homes in the modern many-bathroomed style, on the southwest side of a minor water now officially called Canterbridge Estates Lake” (575). He survived on his own for around six years. “There had been a time, after the car accident that had effectively ended his life, when Jessica had descended on him and nursed him in his grief” (585). Jessica urges her parents to either reunite or to get divorced. Patty sends Walter the manuscript of her concluding autobiography but he doesn’t read it. Patty reaches his Estates home to meet Walter. Walter, on seeing her after a long time, instantly accepts her into his life. They live in the Estates for a year and then they move to New York. The novel ends with the description of how the Estates home gets converted to a bird sanctuary in memory of Lalitha.

Freedom can be analysed as a domestic as well as an urban fiction. Franzen looks into the inner lives of the Berglunds. He also highlights the interference of the inquisitive neighbours into their lives in the beginning of the novel. The descriptions of the intimate relationships and the conversations among the characters echo the

domestic dimensions of the novel. The novel sheds light on the significance of commitment and children in marriage. Walter says, “Kids have always been the meaning of life. You fall in love, you reproduce, and then your kids grow up and fall in love and reproduce. That’s what life was always *for*. For pregnancy. For more life” (236). However, the extramarital affairs mentioned in the novel are a testament to the contemporary scenario of marital life.

The novel also puts forth the internal battles and the kinship in the family over the decades. For instance, whenever Miss Bianca, Walter’s mother, visited them for Christmas or for their birthdays, “Patty always took her to a local masseuse and plied her with licorice and macadamia nuts and white chocolate, her favorite treats” (15). But, disagreements arise between Walter and Patty with regard to the management of the small house that Walter inherits from his mother. Walter wishes to sell the house, while Patty wishes to keep it as a vacation home. In the end, Walter agrees to Patty and keeps the house. The novel also reflects on the generational gap between the parents and the children. It becomes more visible through the unruly Joey and Patty. For instance, Joey shows his defiance against the values that the family uphold over the years. The novel underlines the association of the individual desires with the psychic dues of domestic suppositions.

The novel also facilitates the socio-political and environmental dimensions of urban life. Walter comments about the then scenario in Washington, “Washington’s all abstraction. It’s about access to power and nothing else.” (238) Walter asks Richard to reflect about the overpopulation, when he says, “think about how crowded the exurbs are already, think about the traffic and the sprawl and the environmental degradation and the dependence on foreign oil...” (233). In the start of the novel, the Berglunds are shown as socially responsible people who are in pursuit to refine their

surroundings. Gradually, the novel raises concerns over the existence of urban life amidst the inner struggles of the individuals. The novel rightly blends the domestic and urban dimensions of American life. It highlights the comprehensive social aspects through the personal lives of the characters. Franzen emphasises on the value of liberation at both the individual and societal realms. He makes a compelling observation on both domestic and urban verisimilitudes through his fictional world.

Franzen characterises his women, especially Patty, through a refined approach in the novel. Though Patty Berglund, the central character, was restricted by the invisible chains, she symbolises female autonomy and empowerment. “For all queries, Patty Berglund was a resource, a sunny carrier of sociocultural pollen, an affable bee” (5). Her character represents an arc that stems from her pursuit for self-identity. Her father, Ray Emerson was a lawyer and her mother, Joyce Emerson was a professional Democrat. In her childhood, she felt overlooked by her parents. “She’d been a standout athlete in high school and college and possessed a jock sort of fearlessness” (4). She was grateful “for school athletic programs, because they basically saved her life and gave her a chance to realize herself as a person” (31). However, when she got raped in her teenage days, she urged her parents to register a complaint, but was suppressed by them. It created a deep psychic wound inside her.

While at college, “Patty was inclined to want to be a homemaker and an outstanding mother” (101). Her life as a wife was rather more passive in St. Paul. It became a contradiction to the spirits she exhibited as a student with regard to her earlier ambition of having a career. As a wife, she is a representation of the classic upper-class women in America. She gossips and dawdles around her neighbours about her own life and of others. “In Patty’s stories, the discipline always came from Walter, as if Patty were just some feckless bystander whose job was to be cute” (9).

Her words and behaviour are filled with gestures that display her discontent with life as a wife. It reflects on the wider reality about the deprivation of the female identity that women encounter once they adopt the traditional marital roles. Patty herself says, “I loved living here, even at the beginning. And now suddenly everything looks so dirty and ugly to me” (19). Patty as a wife is a representation of the eradication of individual desires at the cost of societal expectations.

Patty’s is arduously associated with the role of a mother. As a mother, she has always been partial to Joey. “She loved Jessica an appropriate amount, but Joey she loved way too much” (156). She has been definitely nurturing as a mother and she did try to arm Jessica for a life better than the one that she had. But “although she’d tried, for nineteen years, to do everything for Jessica that her own mother hadn’t done for her... there was, as noted, an absence of true closeness. This was due partly to Jessica’s self-sufficient nature and partly to Patty’s overdoing things with Joey” (193). She is reluctant to approve of Joey's marriage. It reveals her over-possessive nature towards him. “She persisted in inflicting the norms of her own life on Joey. She probably thought she was trying to protect him, but all he heard was the drumbeat of negativity” (416).

On the other hand, her extra-marital affair with Richard is a reflection of the modern times and a representation of the modern women. It protrudes due to her instant pursuit for liberation. But it only shoves her into the realms of uncertainty and dejection. The separations from both Walter and Richard empowers her to realise her self-worth and to build a financially independent life. Her perspectives on life changes and she comes to terms with the idea of “what’s wrong with working?... It’s good for the self-esteem to work” (560). She acknowledges in her autobiography that she had committed a few mistakes in life in pursuit of short-lived pleasures. Also, she realises

how these experiences moulded her to find her self-esteem. They aid her to elevate her emotional capabilities.

Patty fails to recognise her love for Walter. It becomes the source of the catastrophe in her life after the separation from Walter. Their reconciliation in the end blooms from the maturity that both Walter and Patty have attained. Patty decides to be more of a grounded person in her marital life and “she wants to become a better person in every way” (568). Her character is refined in the course of time. She conceals her internal upheavals with her outward pretenses in life. Franzen represents her character as intensely flawed and her inner tussles posit the crux of the novel. She soars from a state of emotional uncertainty to that of greater understanding of life.

Franzen conceptualises instances of female melancholy in the novel. Franzen depicts Patty, the very central female character of the novel, as melancholic. The novel excavates the various ways in which Patty encounters emotional conflicts, inner discontents and societal constraints. These feelings aided Patty to confer to her expectations at the expense of unattained desires and tussles of self-esteem. The first episode of melancholic temperament strikes her at her teenage days, when the incident of rape happened, “she went and cried in the shower. This was, without exaggeration, the most wretched hour of her life. Even today, when she thinks of people who are oppressed around the world and victims of injustice, and how they must feel, her mind goes back to that hour” (39).

As mentioned before, Patty’s parents’ careless reaction to the incident pained her more than the rape. She was shaken by the fact that they urged her to suppress the incident and asked her not to take legal actions. She was devastated at her mother’s advice that, “sometimes the best thing is just to learn your lesson and make sure you never get in the same position again... Let it drop” (50). The news of her best friend,

Eliza's diagnosis of leukemia added to her sorrows at college. "Patty's cloud of guilt and worry now condensed into a storm of sentiment. She wept and wept and asked Eliza if she was *sure*, if the doctors were *sure*" (85). Also, Richard's refusal to reciprocate Patty's love at college shoved her further into the realms of melancholy. "Her body so wanted Richard, but the rest of her could see that she'd made a Mistake in coming along with him: that everything she'd hoped for from him and Chicago had been a big fat fantasy in her head" (121). She started to lose her identity as an athlete after marriage. It pained her further.

Besides, the demise of Dorothy, Walter's mother, saddened Patty beyond her expectations. "Patty was surprised by the intensity of her own grief... That Dorothy in her eternally trusting niceness had had to pass through death's bitter door unaccompanied: it just pierced Patty's heart" (155). Her extra-marital affair with Richard plunges her into instances of melancholic temperaments and associated dilemmas. "She began to cry for Walter... This was the beginning of a terrible confusion of the heart" (183). At her later age, she even regrets and pities herself about her friendship with Eliza in the college. Furthermore, she failed to become the cool mother to Jessica that the latter longed for. "While the other mothers and daughters walked shoulder to shoulder on the paved pathways, laughing or comparing cell phones, Jessica walked on the grass one or two steps ahead of Patty" (195). This emotional distance tormented her. "She was feeling so bad about herself, indeed, that almost any punishment would have seemed appropriate to her" (196).

As a husband, Walter fails to recognize the causes of unhappiness in his wife. But he seems to agree that she is melancholic. He confesses to Richard that, "I don't know why she's so unhappy. I don't know why she can't seem to get out of it" (242). Franzen presents Patty in such a way that he asserts that her weeping over various

concerns of her life intensifies her beauty. “Her tears had softened her eyes and reddened her lips and made her very pretty, if you cared about her prettiness, which Walter no longer did” (491). In the end of the novel, Patty’s character identifies her self-worth. But, her dependence and tendency to cling onto Walter for a sense of fulfillment in life is an indication of the upcoming melancholic temperaments. “Although she believes herself to be genuinely changed, and doing infinitely better than in the old days, and therefore worthy of a fresh hearing, she still can’t bring herself to let go of a voice she found when she had nothing else to hold on to” (539). Patty’s inner conflicts between the attainment of female autonomy and the societal expectations form the crux of melancholy in the novel. The novel navigates through the emotional arc of Patty. It integrates melancholy in her as part of her understanding and acceptance of the self.

The mood disorders of melancholy, depression and trauma are unleashed through the psychological landscapes of the characters in the novel. The manifestations of these distinct psychic afflictions direct towards the societal and cultural unrest. The Berglunds undergo mental and emotional distress because of the conflicts between their inner desires for liberations and the outer pressures to conform to the norms of the society. Patty struggles in accord with the societal expectations of a married woman to comply with the traditional duties at home. She persistently feels incomplete and unsatisfied in life due to her unattained desires, which is revealed in the section, “Mistakes were Made.” She suffered from the lingering episodes of unprocessed sorrow that made her mind stagnant and preoccupied due to the lost opportunities in life. She often internalised and endured her sorrows. Franzen cites depression in Joey’s girlfriend, as “she gets confused, she never smiles. She may be getting high at work” (256). Also, Walter’s state of mind is depressive. The

depression in Walter stems from the disconnection between his true self and career. It led to the loss of his control over his family matters and his career. He is propelled into a state of mental burnout, isolation and moral dilemmas. The persisting despairs, fixations and emotional exhaustions mark his depressive symptoms. It represents his existential anguish and the absence of purpose in life. Through Walter, Franzen attempts to portray the emotional toll attached to the progressivism that transits to the desolate circumstances in the society.

Patty also suffers from trauma. She fails to flee herself and find solace from the traumatic experience of the childhood rape. Her trauma is reflected in her psychic disregard for things around. The psychic wound moulds her character and outlooks on life from the very childhood. Her trauma remains unresolved throughout her life that makes her mind stagnant. The formation of her identity is conflicted and left incomplete. The desire for validation persists in all her relationships with others throughout her life. Her parents forced her to mask and transcend her trauma in her younger days. In a way, Patty's recurring episodes of melancholy emerged from this unprocessed trauma. She is deserted into a tailspin of guilt, emotional flatness and the quest for wholeness. The seamless fusion of melancholy, depression and trauma in the characters impacts their psychic journey in life. The individual sorrows contribute to the extensive degrees of disintegrations in the society.

Purity: A Quest for Selfhood

Purity (2015) is the fifth novel by Jonathan Franzen. The novel, with the third-person omniscient narration, blatantly signals toward the chronicles of the past. The novel appraises the intersecting tales of various characters such as Purity, Andreas Wolf, Tom Aberant, Leila Helou and Anabel. The tale of Pip Tyler's search for her father and her past is the crux of the novel. She is in pursuit of her real identity and

the story of her parents' past. Anabel, her mother, conceals the truth from her throughout her life; "she won't tell me who my father is, she won't tell me where I was born, she won't even tell me what her real name is. She says she's doing it for my protection, but I think the danger is only in her head" (Franzen 23). Pip, aged twenty-three years, lives in Oakland, California. She holds a student-loan debt of \$ 130,000. She was raised in the Santa Cruz mountains, California by Penelope, her mother. She had always been keen to know the real name of her mother, her age, the past of her parents and who her father was, right from her childhood. "When Pip was very young, vague stories had satisfied her, but by the time she was eleven her questions had grown so insistent" (33). But Penelope always slipped away from revealing the truth.

Pip works as a telemarketing representative at a firm for a living. She lives in a rent-free house owned by Dreyfuss, who is a schizophrenic. "She was a mess of debts and duties" (11). She develops a crush on her roommate, Stephen, a married activist. Simultaneously, she also develops infatuation towards Ivan, her boss as well as on Jason, a young man she encountered at a café. Her advancement towards Jason progresses. Whereas, Stephen rejects her by conveying that he always saw her as a daughter figure. Amidst all the chaos in her life, she is determined to find her father. She has always imagined of "him as a basically decent person in whom her mother had brought out the worst, and who was now peacefully married to someone else, and who might feel relieved and grateful to know that his long-lost daughter was alive; grateful enough to take out his checkbook" (35). Meanwhile, Annagret, a German activist, offers placement to Pip at The Sunshine Project³¹ in Bolivia, South America. Pip initially rejects the offer despite the numerous mails of persuasion she received from Annagret and Andreas Wolf, the head of The Sunshine Project. She finally accepts it on the prospects of finding her father. When Pip informs her mother about

her decision, her mother discourages her and calls it “the illegal leak thing” (71).

However, Pip defies her and relocates to join the firm.

The novel then navigates to the flashbacks of the life of Andreas Wolf. He was a loner and had an emotionally disturbed childhood. He had to endure the internal conflicts between his parents that impacted his upbringing. He was referred to medical experts for his unusual behaviour. “Nevertheless, there were psychologists, a few of them, and when Andreas was fifteen his father arranged for him to see one of them. He stood accused of having tried to kill himself, but his presenting symptom was excessive masturbation” (108). He took up the job of a counsellor for young girls when he turned twenty-seven years of age. But he got involved in physical relationships with them in the church. Once the police caught him, when one of the girls refused him and was brought to his parents’ dacha.

Later, Annagret, a fifteen-year old troubled girl, reaches out to him for counselling. She has been abused by Horst, her stepfather. He took advantage of the fact that her mother, a nurse, was stealing drugs from her workplace. Andreas and Annagret fosters mutual admiration towards each other. Andreas urges Annagret to murder her stepfather and offers help for the deed. They successfully commit the crime at Andreas’ parents’ dacha and hide it from the police investigations. However, it haunts their lives forever. Andreas seeks the support of his parents to sweep it under the rug. Accidently, he gets interviewed by the media while stepping out from the Stasi headquarters. He made the visit to examine the documents of the crime. The interview makes him an instant star. He lies to the media that he heads a crusade against the Stasi’s coverts.

Years later, Andreas bumps into Tom Aberant, an American TV reporter in a pub. He is desolated by the demise of his mother. They build an instant kinship

between them. They start to meet often and share their life struggles with each other in the bar. Tom spoke about his past experiences with Andreas. He had developed feelings for Anabel Laird, an art student at college. She had an affluent background. But she was reluctant to accept the wealth of her father. Tom brought his mother to meet Anabel at college thinking she would accept her. He expected that his mother would be happy as he was dating the heir of McCaskill. But, she disapproved of his relationship with Anabel. However, they got married on Valentine's day. As days passed by, Tom felt entrapped in the marriage. Anabel enrolled herself on a film project about the human body that needed the devotion of ten years. Tom had to "bore the brunt of this" (402). Their marriage gradually started to deteriorate because of the growing distance between them. He "told Andreas how I'd ignored my own instinctual liking for him, and pledged my allegiance to a nutty woman. I was betraying Anabel with every word I said, and the terrible thing was how good betrayal felt" (421).

Finally, Tom decided to end their marital life of twelve years after his mother's death. Anabel disappeared from his life after the divorce. She shunned even her father's wealth and left a note for him, "*To David Laird: I'm not your daughter. You won't hear from me again. I'm dead to you. Don't look for me. I won't be found. Anabel*" (439). Tom inherited David's wealth after his death. The whereabouts of Anabel remained hidden. Tom was also concealed from the news of her pregnancy and about Pip. Meanwhile, Anabel changes her name to Penelope and begins a new life. Tom shares his feelings with Andreas about how his past relationship with Anabel had impacted him in numerous ways. Andreas also reveals about the murder he had committed for Annagret to Tom. Tom advises him to rebury the body to destroy the evidence and helps him with the same. However, Tom feels repulsed on

seeing Andreas masturbating over the grave. The incident makes him break his bond with Andreas. Years later, Tom meets Leila Helou, a *Denver Independent* journalist and falls in love with her. They decide to live their life together.

Nevertheless, the novel shifts back to the present. Andreas asks Annagret to hire Pip to his firm in Bolivia because he recognizes that she is the daughter of Tom. He uses her as a bait against Tom so that Tom may never dig out the details of the murder. Pip finds it hard to acclimate at Andreas' firm. Andreas tries to develop friendship with Pip. He even discloses his secret of the murder he had committed for Annagret. He tells her, "when I was twenty-seven. I killed a man with a shovel. I planned it carefully and did it in cold blood" (270). Gradually, Andreas advances physical intimacy towards her. But, she refuses him. He offers backing her to nail down a job at the *Denver Independent*³². He asks her to repay by planting spyware on Tom's computers. She agrees with the condition. Pip meets Leila Helou and helps her to get some hacked information for her journalistic work and wins her over.

Pip succeeds to be on good terms with Leila and Tom. They welcome her to their house and decide to share a roof together. She successfully installs the spyware on Tom's computer. Over time, Leila grows envious over the closeness between Tom and Pip. She even confronts Tom. But, to her shock, he reveals that Pip is his daughter. He finds out about her identity from Anabel's photo on Pip's phone. As days pass by, Pip starts to feel guilty. Andreas speculates about Pip's changing behaviour and communicates to her through a handwritten note; "*Be happy: your spying days may be over. No plausible story is available*" (283). Pip's regret turns out stronger when Andreas fails to reciprocate her love. She confesses about the installation of the spyware to Tom. Tom directs her to take an immediate departure from his place.

Andreas informs Tom about his knowledge of the identity of Pip. He asks Tom to make a visit to his place. Tom requests Andreas to not get involved in Pip's life. He also begs him to destroy the documents that Andreas has obtained from hacking his computers. However, Andreas gets hold of the memoir about Pip's past and mails it to Pip. Tom and Andreas climb up a mountain where the latter implores the former to push him off. When he sees Tom is reluctant to do so, he pens about Horst's murder on his arm "on sweat-dampened skin, and with hairs interfering," (512). He commits suicide by jumping off the mountain. Tom gets scared and returns to his place. He asks Pip to dump any documents that Andreas would have sent her as he was insane. But, Pip chooses to read it. "The document was like a box she couldn't put the lid back on; like the secret of nuclear fission, the so-called Pandora's box" (523).

Pip finds out about her past, her mother's real name, and the story of her parents from Andreas' mail. "But now that she had it, she didn't want it. She saw that she'd done a very bad thing to both her mother and Tom by getting it. Both of them had known, and neither of them had wanted her to know" (523). She discloses her identity to Anabel's manager to acquire her inheritance. Pip reaches out to Anabel and confronts her about her past. Pip consoles her and stands by her. Pip's reaction surprises Anabel. Later, she persuades Anabel for a meet-up with Tom after twenty-five years of their separation. However, to Pip's dismay, the reunion goes awry. As the novel ends, Pip and her boyfriend, Jason, sadly listen to the brawl between her parents. "The people who'd bequeathed a broken world to her were shouting at each other viciously" (563). Pip hopes to do better in her love relationship than her parents.

Purity stands out as a psychological fiction. The novel probes into the mental spaces, motivations and the intricate psychological catalysts of the characters. It

reflects on how the characters have integrated themes such as power, self-esteem, guilt and secrets in their lives. “Pip nodded, but she was thinking about how terrible the world was, what an eternal struggle for power. Secrets were power. Money was power. Being needed was power” (539). The novel also explores the moral and emotional dimensions of the characters. Pip’s sense of uncertainty, worthlessness and dilemma recur through-out the novel. For instance, “it brought her some relief from the feeling that she wasn’t suited for her job, that she had a job that nobody could be suited for, or that she was a person unsuited for any kind of job; and then, after twenty minutes, she could honestly say that she needed to get back to work” (3). Her inner tumults over the various concerns of her life protrude from her mother’s reluctance to disclose the past. She constantly feels attraction towards elderly men throughout her life. It simply indicates her longing to have a paternal figure in her life.

The novel puts forth Andreas as a grey-shaded character. For example, there is an episode of Andreas’ appointment with Dr. Gnel, a psychologist. Dr. Gnel makes deeply intriguing comments to Andreas during that meet-up that “what we choose to joke about can be revealing” (118) and “when you tell me you draw figments of your imagination, things that only exist inside your head, doesn’t that sound a bit like a self-portrait?” (119) The bond between Andreas and his mother, Katya hints at the Freudian Oedipal theory. Their bond is devoid of any kind of sexual dimension. His inner scars come from this bond with his mother. It paves way to the formation of his complicated relationships with women in his later life. His moral declination emerges from this oedipal undercurrent. Andreas once talks about the psychological interpretation of secrets in life to Pip:

There’s the imperative to keep secrets, and the imperative to have them

known. How do you know that you’re a person, distinct from other people? By

keeping certain things to yourself. You guard them inside you, because, if you don't, there's no distinction between inside and outside. Secrets are the way you know you even have an inside. A radical exhibitionist is a person who has forfeited his identity. But identity in a vacuum is also meaningless. Sooner or later, the inside of you needs a witness. Otherwise you're just a cow, a cat, a stone, a thing in the world, trapped in your thingness. To have an identity, you have to believe that other identities equally exist. You need closeness with other people. And how is closeness built? By sharing secrets. (275)

Andreas' perception of the self is fractured. It moulds his inner turmoil. His disturbed childhood and experience of loneliness shapes his psyche. He conceals his enduring psychological struggles through his propulsion to hack the secrets of others. The novel also showcases a brief psychological journey of Tom. Tom is devastated with Anabel's departure from his life. It indicates how a loved one's exit can affect others; "Her act of disappearance and negation becomes more significant and wounding, not less, with every year that passes without a sign of her existence. She may have been weaker than me, but she managed to outplay me...I have to hand it to her: I feel checkmated" (443). The novel excavates through the emotional and moral complexities of its characters. It analyses how the past actions of individuals can alter their present. Their psyche forms the zone of unsettled struggles, guilt and secrets. They are confined to societal expectations and power relations.

Franzen scrutinises the psychological power dynamics through the characterization of Pip Tyler. She is represented as a complicated and multifaceted character. The name, Pip is an allusion to Dickens' character, *Pip*³³. She is an orphan who is also in pursuit to find her identity and purpose of life. Her characterisation emphasises on themes like parentage, inheritance and progression. The name Purity is

again a biblical allusion to the ideal state of being pure. This biblical interpretation contradicts the circumstances in the novel. It delineates the unattainable ideals in the chaotic modern world. Pip is raised by a reclusive, single mother. She is portrayed as an independent young lady. But, the undercurrents of her dependency are rooted towards her mother. "The problem, as Pip saw it---the essence of the handicap she lived with; the presumable cause of her inability to be effective at anything---was that she loved her mother" (5).

Anabel's overprotectiveness made her inept. It was Stephen who made her learn about the worldly affairs; "he'd shown her how to spackle, how to caulk, how to operate a power saw, how to glaze a window, how to rewire a scavenged lamp, how to take apart her bicycle, and he'd been so patient with her, so generous" (45). She persistently longed to meet her father. Her attraction towards elderly men stemmed from this desire as Stephen pointed out to her; "*It seemed like a father was exactly what you needed*" (55). Her financial instability in her adulthood also motivated her to find her father. It worsened her sensitivity to existential angst.

Pip is presented as a very hardworking and determined girl. Her psychic terrain is profused with contradictions. She is fiercely independent. Yet, she is enormously vulnerable and emotionally dependent on her mother. She often longed to break off from this emotional shackle. "Pitied her: suffered with her; warmed to the sound of her voice; felt an unsettling kind of nonsexual attraction to her body; was solicitous even of her mouth chemistry; wished her greater happiness; hated upsetting her; found her dear" (5). It is Pip's determination and independent nature that resulted in achieving what she has always been searching for throughout her life; her true identity and the information about her past. "Pip's actual birthday was February 24, not July 11. She'd been delivered naturally, by a midwife, in a safe house in

Riverside, California. Until she was two, she and her mother had lived in Bakersfield, where her mother cleaned hotel rooms for a living” (552).

Pip’s character is structured as a strong willed girl. She is capable of negotiating with the ethical ambiguities. It unveils through her ethical choices of her association with The Sunlight Project and the multiple affairs with elderly men who are married. She experiences a psychic growth over the course of time. She is completely responsible for herself and holds the power over her life. She also finds solace in the bond with her roommate, Colleen. “Pip, for her part, felt she was finally finding a friend who could understand her own strange childhood” (250). Pip represents women who lead an authentic life amidst a chaotic and distorted world. She matures as a person and becomes capable of reconciling with peace and uncertainties in life. She builds a life for herself which is devoid of societal expectations and pressures.

In line with his earlier novels, Franzen attempts to trace female melancholy in *Purity*. He explores melancholy in the psyche of his women characters, especially in Pip. Pip’s melancholy is visible from the very beginning of the novel. She grapples with her unsettling quest for her true identity from the very start. She feels isolated and realises that her lived life is a deceitful reality. She is saddened by the mystery of her mother’s past and feels suffocated and restricted in her dependence on her mother.. “Pip lay awake in bed and worried that her mother might die soon” (6). She feels dejected when Stephen rejects her love. “She was able to sob at her loss of Stephen, off and on, for many hours” (54). Sadness hits her when she comes to know about the news of Andreas’ suicide. She is further saddened with the revelation of her father’s identity as she “sobbed until upwelling anxiety overwhelmed her grief” (523).

Franzen traces melancholy in his minor women characters too. Andreas once kicks his mother, Katya's chin. It drowns her in tears, underpinning the oppression she has to bear in her life; "But now she was weeping---real tears, not make-believe" (106). She even confesses to him that her "family has a history of emotional distress...Not a mental illness. But extreme emotional distress" (132). Annagret also sinks with melancholic temperaments when Horst assaults her. Andreas finds difficulty in pacifying her; "Her expression became desolate. The natural thing would have been to put his arms around her and console her, but nothing about their situation was natural" (98).

Franzen underpins emotional turmoil in the characterization of Leila Helou. She thrusts into extremities of sorrow when she learns about Tom's past life with Anabel and Pity's identity. "She was remembering the old desolation and feeling it again now, the conviction that love was impossible, that however deeply they buried their conflict it would never go away" (238). Clelia, a teenager, laments over her relationship with Andreas before she is found dead under mysterious circumstances. "Tears in her eyes gave trembling, diaphanous wings to the bars of sunlight leaking in around the heavy curtains that the stomach insisted be kept closed" (332).

Even Anabel suffered in her marriage with Tom. When Tom revealed about his creative writing that he hid from her, he heard "the sharp gasps of her unsuccessfully resisting tears" (399) as she couldn't believe that he kept secrets from her. Yet, even the very thought of them getting separated plunged her into the confines of sadness. It is evident in her words, "that I'm going to work better without you, and you're going to be happier without me. And that'll be the end of us" (410). The sorrow of the women characters in the novel reveals about their navigation through the complicated associations in the disintegrated world. The novel showcases

female melancholy as a state beyond the individual distress. It mirrors the comprehensive apprehensions and societal discontents that impact women's realities.

Franzen integrates the various dimensions of the emotion of sorrow to explore the moral uncertainties of the fragmented minds in the novel. The relationships, deceptions and the burden of credibility and caution led to these emotional inclinations in the novel. The women's relationships and their interactions with others often get disrupted because of the deep seated emotional pain in them. In the process, he reveals their psychic subtleties of survival. Melancholy in Pip becomes a driving force of motivation and inner strength in her. She navigates through the implicit pain attached to her hidden past. She longs for emotional resilience. Anabel's sorrow is dominated by her fanaticism and rejection of traditional customs. She masks her melancholy for affinity and validation. She observes, "I'm getting used to being alone. I'd forgotten how hard it is. It's very hard, even harder this time, much harder" (550). The lingering emotion of melancholy manifests as mental inertia and the feeling of discontent with life in both Pip and Anabel.

Andreas Wolf's emotional distress can be delineated as depression. He attempts to hide his emotional vulnerabilities, emptiness and detachments from the world. The childhood exploitations and sacrifices led to a persistent feeling of guilt, numbness and meaninglessness in his life. He experienced depressive symptoms such as apathy, disconnection and occasional episodes of self-destructive ideation. His depression made him often feel mental flatness and numbness. It caused moral decay in him unlike the melancholic temperaments. His depression emerged primarily from the psychic distress and the collapse of ethical principles. Andreas and Pip also suffer from trauma in minor magnitudes. Andreas is emotionally devastated and morally directionless. It protrudes from the childhood trauma of exploitation, abandonment

and excessive intrusion. The unresolved trauma in him makes him deceitful, aloof and cold.

The overt control of Anabel over Pip's childhood has created a traumatic experience for Pip. Trauma is internalized and often passed down across generations. Pip's trauma is subtle and inherited from Anabel. She is emotionally entrapped due to the suppression of her true identity. The trauma causes recurring incidents of melancholic temperaments that make her suffer in life. Trauma occupies a significant position in her life that moulds her character, behaviour and psychological and ethical dilemmas. The characters in the novel suffer from inner conflicts because of the inevitable confrontations with melancholy, depression and trauma in their lives. Their psychic pain is often unsettled that influence their quest for wholeness in the postmodern world.

Conclusion

Jonathan Franzen unveils the temperaments of female melancholy in his novels, *The Corrections*, *Freedom* and *Purity*. His female characters often confront feelings of dismay and despair in his novels. These melancholic emotions are elevated by the progressive landscape in these novels. The novels portray women characters who have lost their identities in the fragmented conventional settings that earlier ensured stability. Their existence is associated with the harsh realities of the modern world. Franzen probes into the notions of isolation, individual predicaments and inner upheavals in them. They confront uncertainties at various stages in their life. They exemplify distinctive forms and multifaceted causes of melancholy. They are moulded by the individual conflicts as well as societal pressures. Franzen chronicles the poignant intricacies of contemporary women in America. They are entrapped between tradition and liberty and inculcate the very essence of female melancholy.

3

The Feminine Interiorities in Eugenides' Novels

Jeffrey Kent Eugenides is a towering figure of contemporary American Literature. He is an eminent writer of profound psychological insights. He has authored several essays, short stories and novels. He occupies a noteworthy position in the American literary canon. As a writer he attempted to fill the void of the postmodern era. He tries to confront the perpetual human experiences with authenticity and emotional resonance through his fictional world. He is acclaimed for his nuanced and resonating storytelling style of his works. He is the recipient of several awards such as Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (2003), Salon Book Award (2011), Whiting Award (1993), Fitzgerald Prize (2013), Guggenheim Fellowship (1994) and the finalist of National Book Critics Circle Award (2002), International Dublin Literary Award (2013), etc. He has also won the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Nicholl Fellowship in 1986 for his story, "Here Comes Winston, Full of Holy Spirit."

Jeffrey Eugenides was born on 8th March, 1960, as the youngest of the three sons, in the opulent residential area of Detroit, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. The area features profoundly in his works. His father, Constantine Eugenides, is of Greek descent and his mother, Wanda Eugenides is of Irish and English descent, owing him a multicultural heritage. However, his family strived to embody the conventional American culture. He did his schooling in University Liggett School in Grosse Pointe and later graduated from Brown University in 1982, earning a Bachelor of Arts in English. He, then, travelled to India and turned out to be a volunteer with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity and Service in Calcutta for a year. Later, he acquired his Master of Arts in English and Creative Writing from Stanford University in 1986.

After graduation, he lived a few years in San Francisco, California, which he refers to as his “lost years” (Volle), as he was unproductive in his literary career during that time. Later, he relocated to Brooklyn, New York, where he was employed as the executive secretary of the Academy of American Poets³⁴. He fostered kinship with his fellow writer Jonathan Franzen while in New York. He got married to Karen Yamauchi, a photographer and sculptor whom he divorced later. They had a daughter by the name Georgia Eugenides. Subsequently, he got married again to Marlene Morgan and together they had a daughter, Helen. He moved to Berlin, between 1999 and 2004, as he was bestowed with a literary grant for twelve months in Berlin. In 2007, he became an academic of the course in Creative Writing in Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey. His career in education propelled as he acquired the position of a tenured professor in American Letters of Lewis L. Glucksman and at New York University in 2018. In 2022, he converted from Greek Orthodox to Catholic Church.

At the age of 15 years, he happened to read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*³⁵, which influenced him to choose the path of a writer. In the 1990s, he emerged as a prominent literary figure with his three highly acclaimed novels. His first novel, *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) has been translated into 34 different languages. His second novel, *Middlesex* (2002), which integrated the genre of coming-of-age and themes such as self-discovery, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2003 and the third novel, *The Marriage Plot* (2011) became a finalist of numerous awards. He has authored multiple short stories such as “Baster” (1996), “Air Mail” (1996), “Early Music” (2005), “Find the Bad Guy” (2013), “The Oracular Vulva” (1999), “Capricious Garden” (1988), a collection of short stories, *Fresh Complaint*³⁶ (2017), etc. He experiments with the postmodernist facets in his storytelling approaches. He skillfully

amalgamates the intellect and the emotion in his works. His tales are made merry for their opulent narrative stratification, evocative writing and existential resonance with universal themes.

Around the late 1980s, he met and made friends with several aspiring writers such as Franzen and David Foster Wallace.

Eugenides had a breakthrough in 1990 when *The Paris Review* published his short story “The Virgin Suicides,” which won the literary journal’s Aga Khan Prize the following year. Inspired, Eugenides began expanding the story into a novel. He maintained a disciplined schedule and allegedly began writing surreptitiously during his work hours at the academy, which resulted in his being fired. Eugenides used the unemployment checks to focus on completing the book. (Volle)

The publication of his first novel *The Virgin Suicides* in 1993 won him much acclaim and attention as a promising writer of the contemporary American Literature. The novel was critically lauded for its keen insights on the loss of innocence among the adolescents and the waning prosperity of Detroit. The novel was later developed into a feature cinema in 1999. He accrued widespread approbation with the publication of his second novel, *Middlesex*. It integrates themes such as identity, migration narratives and gender;

Spanning some eight decades, the ambitious book chronicles the coming of age of Calliope Stephanides, an intersex Greek American. It traces his struggles with gender confusion while growing up as a girl named Callie before eventually becoming a man and adopting the name Cal. His story is juxtaposed with that of his paternal grandparents, a brother and sister who

eventually marry after being forced to flee the Greco-Turkish War of 1921–22.

(Volle)

In 2007, Oprah Winfrey selected *Middlesex* for her book club, thus increasing Eugenides' visibility to a wider public. His third novel, *The Marriage Plot*, is influenced by his trip as a volunteer for service to Calcutta and his exposure at Brown University. Like his other novels, *The Marriage Plot* is also critically acclaimed. It includes an empathetic, introspective and pragmatic depiction of love. His novels reflect his artistic vision. The nuances of their narrative delve into the human experiences.

Eugenides' works exemplify features of postmodernism. He experiments with various narrative styles, the intricacy of the themes, intertextuality, literary allusions and identity formation. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the narrative voice is a fragmented plural first-person. The narration is made through an anonymous group of boys. The style of narration is called an observer-hero narrative, as put forth by Lawrence Buell³⁷;

In this genre, a dramatized first-person narrator retrospectively tells the story of an important figure in his or her life who has died....the deceased figure seems to embody a certain kind of heroism, in that his or her life seems to offer a model of decision and temporal agency set against a postmodern backdrop that has placed these qualities out of bounds. (Kelly 10)

Similarly, the narration in *Middlesex* is also unique. It is done by a first-person narrator with a third-person omniscient point of view, who is identified as a hermaphrodite. *The Marriage Plot* includes references to Roland Barthes, the Victorian novelists and their concepts. The literary allusions from the book *A Lovers' Discourse* find space in the novel. *The Virgin Suicides* is ambiguous and open-ended.

It leaves the readers to ponder upon the sources and causality of the happenings.

Eugenides' works integrate the plurality of truth and the fallibility of memory. They mirror the fragmented and uncertain facets of postmodernism. They often experiment with human emotions that transcend the peripheries of the genre.

Eugenides attempts to explore a bond between womanhood and sorrow in his novels. His novels investigate the impact of social responsibilities and obstacles on the psychic realm in women. Women find a core place in the plot of his novels. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the protagonists are the five daughters of the Lisbon family. Their life is narrated through the male perspective by a group of boys. They are portrayed as archetypes of typical female adolescents without hyperbolic descriptions. They assert their individuality through the circumstances that confine them.

Eugenides depicts the mental space of a female body who longs to get converted to a male body in *Middlesex*. In *The Marriage Plot*, the narration revolves majorly on the life of the female protagonist, Madeleine. "For the most part, *The Marriage Plot* follows in the footsteps of its predecessors as an authentic portrait of what it is to be female" (Barkhorn). The critics claim that Madeleine cannot be viewed as a true female catalyst as she seldom had female friends and conversations; "There are countless other Madeleines in modern-day literature and film: smart, self-assured women who have all the trappings of contemporary womanhood except a group of friends to confide in" (Barkhorn).

Eugenides' novels, nevertheless, offer a nuanced representation of women. His novels inculcate the supremacy of female characterization. He posits the various expressions of female sorrow as a poignant element in all his novels. The articulation and experience of sadness of his female characters resonate universally. His female characters encounter different extremities of sorrow at various junctures of their lives.

He attributes female melancholy to crises with their identities, human bonds, cultural obligations, societal interventions and privacy.

The Virgin Suicides: The Quiet Despair

Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*³⁸ (1993) is a gruesome coming-of-age³⁹ novel. The novel is set in the groovy 1970s suburbs of the Michigan town. It centers around the lives of a quintet of sisters in the Lisbon family in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. It is emotionally resonant to the inner conflicts of the adolescent females. It scrutinizes their despair and the enigma of their quiet suburban life. Eugenides entwines a poignant mosaic of reminiscence, preoccupation and pragmatic ambiguity through the tale of the Lisbon sisters. The novel is narrated in the first-person plural point of view through an anonymous group of boys.

The novel commences with the narration of the suicide committed by Mary, the final sister in the family. It indicates the impending chronic atmosphere of melancholic temperament at the very outset of the novel- "it was Mary this time, and sleeping pills, like Therese" (Eugenides 1). The Lisbon Catholic family consists of the father, Ronald Lisbon, who "taught high-school math" (6), the mother, Mrs. Lisbon, a strict homemaker and their five daughters. "The Lisbon girls were thirteen (Cecilia), and fourteen (Lux), and fifteen (Bonnie), and sixteen (Mary), and seventeen (Therese)" (5). The strange happenings in the Lisbon family fascinate the neighborhood boys to pry into their lives. They find the sisters mysterious and enigmatic.

The boys go back to the old days when the Lisbons first sparked interest with the first suicide attempt in the family. In a June, "Cecilia, the youngest, only thirteen, had gone first, slitting her wrists like a Stoic while taking a bath, and when they found her, afloat in her pink pool, with the yellow eyes of someone possessed and her small

body giving off the odor of a mature woman” (1). However, she is timely saved out of danger from her maiden attempt. The motive behind her action is still under the wraps. Mrs. Scheer, who dwells nearby, informs the boys that she saw Cecilia wearing the antique wedding dress the day before she attempted the suicide. Cecilia’s doctor warns Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon that all the girls require special attention and more social interactions. However, “after they returned home, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon shut themselves and the girls in the house, and didn’t say a word about what had happened” (12). They are even reluctant to talk about the suicidal attempt and its reasons. They refer to it as “Cecilia’s accident” (12) to Mrs. Scheer.

Gradually, the parents allow their girls to engage socially with their peers and the neighbors. They even organize a party so that the girls can socially interact with others. The neighborhood boys are also invited. Cecilia wears the wedding dress with the shorn hem as usual. During the party, she goes upstairs alone and shortly after, what they hear is “the wet sound of her body falling onto the fence that ran alongside the house” (27). She throws herself from the window of her bedroom onto the fence and succeeds “on the second try, in hurling herself out of the world” (28). Cecilia receives the final Catholic rites at a public non-denominational cemetery. Her death is officially recorded as an accident in the Church register.

After Cecilia’s death, the parents begin to closely watch the girls. “Little is known of Cecilia’s state of mind on the last day of her life. According to Mr. Lisbon, she seemed pleased about her party” (41). The mystery behind her suicide is still in the shadows. So is the case with the other girls. Gradually, the Lisbons start to get back to their normal life. The girls resume attending their school. “Mrs. Lisbon hadn’t taken the girls to buy new clothes, so they wore last year’s” (60) and it looked uncomfortable on them as they were grown up. Lux turns out to be the most rebellious

among the girls. The parents become more restrictive about their daughters. “It was well known that Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon didn’t allow their daughters to date, and that Mrs. Lisbon in particular disapproved of dances, proms, and the general expectation that teenagers should be allowed to paw one another in backseats” (64).

Lux begins to romance Trip Fontaine, a popular boy in school, in secret. In class, the girls ostracized themselves from others at first. Eventually, they started to get themselves engaged in various activities. “Day by day, the girls appeared to be getting over their loss” (108). Trip succeeds in convincing Mr. Lisbon to take the girls for the homecoming. But they are asked to return home by eleven. Kevin Head and Therese, Joe Hill Conley and Bonnie, Parkie Denton and Mary and Trip and Lux go as pairs for the homecoming dance. After the dance, Trip ushers Lux to walk towards the soggy football field, into the end zone. He gets physical with her and later abandons her in the field. Lux ceases to talk with Trip again. The girls except Lux return home. Lux later returns in a cab and the parents turn furious upon knowing the reason. Mrs. Lisbon, then after, shuts “the house in maximum-security isolation” (136). The girls are even taken out of the school.

As the days elapse, the boys often spot Lux smoking a cigarette on the roof of her house through their binoculars. Lux exhibits surged sexual permissiveness. She even secretly let men inside her house. She gets into physical relations with them on the roof. The boys could hear “the unavoidable prior noise of sneaking down to let the boys and men in, of leading them up creaking stairs in a darkness charged with anxious vibrations, night noises humming in their ears, the men sweating, risking statutory rape charges, the loss of their careers, divorce, just to be led up the stairway, through a window, to the roof” (141). The boys peep into these secret doings of Lux from afar. One day, the boys see the arrival of the EMS⁴⁰ truck at Lisbon's house to

carry Lux. She appears to be in pain but she is very much alive. Dr. Finch examines her and does a pregnancy test. The results come out as negative. However, she is diagnosed with HPV⁴¹ and he concludes that she has been sexually active. The parents make stern rules and isolate the girls further. The boys remain oblivious to the girls' suffering in the house.

As the days pass by, the boys slowly tend to forget about the girls. They “would have lost them completely if the girls hadn’t contacted” (182) them. The sisters reach out to them over several phone calls. The boys speculate that the girls are in love with them. According to the boys, “inside their house they were prisoners; outside lepers. And so they hid from the world, waiting for someone-for us-to save them” (193). They plan a night rescue from the house. The boys manage to get into the basement of Lisbon's house. They meet Lux there. She apprises them that the girls have been waiting for them. Tom Faheem, one of the boys, informs Lux that they have brought a car for the mission. They have planned to flee them to Florida. But Lux suggests taking her mom’s car instead. Lux, then, asks the boys to wait for her sisters in the basement while she would wait in the car. The boys wait for the girls but they don’t turn up.

To the boys’ horror, they find that all the girls have individually committed suicide in their house. “Mary put her head in the oven shortly thereafter, on hearing Bonnie kick the trunk out from under herself. They were ready to assist one another, if need be” (210). “Therese, stuffed with sleeping pills washed down with gin” (210) while Lux is found “in the front seat, gray-faced and serene, holding a cigarette lighter that had burned its coils into her palm” (211). Shocked to the core, the boys flee. Mary manages to survive while others die. Neighbors raise different theories about the cause of the collective suicides of the Lisbons. They suspect a foul play from Mr.

and Mrs. Lisbon. Deliberately or not, “the girls, it turned out, had killed themselves on June 16, the anniversary of Cecilia’s wrist-slitting” (217). The newspapers report their own stories about the mysterious suicides. Dr. Hornicker examines Mary and finds “no evidence of a psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or manic depression” (227). Mary takes an overdose of sleeping pills after a month and succeeds with the attempt. Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon leaves their house and a new couple takes possession of it. No one finds the actual reason behind the suicides. The boys assume that “the essence of the suicides consisted not of sadness or mystery but simple selfishness” (242). The novel concludes with the hypothesis that the girls got immersed in their own craziness. The boys realise that it is not easy to flee themselves away from the mysterious loop of the Lisbon sisters.

The Virgin Suicides can be analysed as a psychological fiction. The novel attempts to dissect into the intricacies of the inner terrain of the adolescents. It tries to portray the reactions of the repressed teenagers against the psychic and societal pressures and distresses. “Psychologists agree that adolescence is much more fraught with pressures and complexities than in years past” (92). However, the novel fails to directly expose the mental landscape of the Lisbon sisters. It can be attributed to the choice of narration through a male perspective. For instance, the exact cause of the collective suicides in the family is still in the shadows. The reasons put forth by the boys are mere assumptions in the novel. They speculate that the suicides are a collective response to the distress and trauma owing to their isolation in the house..

The novel explores the mysterious lives of the Lisbons in the context of their mental upheaval. It examines the concepts of suppression, compulsion, obsession, despair and the systemic collapse to understand the functioning of the human mind. The characterisation of Lisbon girls is layered. Their inner turmoil is described to be

aggravated by their upbringing and surroundings. The plural tone of the narration reflects the fragmented comprehension of the events. It fails to provide accurate interventions. It might be a purposeful effort from the author for multiple interpretations.

Eugenides also delineates how the lives of these sisters affect that of the neighborhood boys. It also impacts their inner landscape due to their collective obsession with the sisters. The death of Cecilia creates the first penetrating stun on their minds;

Poor Cecilia appeared in our consciousness at odd moments, most often as we just waking up, or staring out a car-pool window streaked with rain-she rose up in her wedding dress, muddy with the afterlife, but then a horn would honk, or our radio alarms would unleash a popular song, and we snapped back to reality. (107)

Their shared fixation with the girls is an indication of the persisting remorse over their inaction to provide help to them. “Discussing it later, many of us felt we suffered a mental dislocation at that moment, which only grew worse through the course of the remaining deaths” (147). It also suggests their psychological tendency to peek into others’ lives and to form judgments. Gradually, the boys realise that they are retracing a path that led nowhere. Their obsession only makes them more sullen and frustrated. Eugenides also draws attention to certain symbols in the novel that reflect on the psychological decay of their mind. It includes the decaying home, the wedding dress, fishflies, etc. The characters view them as signs of ill omen. For instance, the Lisbon porch, where the boys first stood to see Cecilia on the fence, “had become like a sidewalk crack: stepping on it was bad luck” (91). These physical symbols serve as metaphors of the psychological state of their minds. The novel confronts the readers

with the ambiguity and uncertainty attached with the storyline. It puts forth an aesthetically layered rendering of the emotional and psychological states of mind. It entwines the themes of adolescence, grief and societal pressures that leave imprints on the readers' mind.

Eugenides' characterisation of women is layered and complex in the novel. He entangles the mystique of femininity through the Lisbon sisters, the protagonists. He draws them as ethereal, elusive and enigmatic. Cecilia, the youngest sister, sets the tone of the novel with the first suicide attempt. Her death serves as a catalyst for the following sequences of tragic events that engulfs the family. After the first suicide attempt, when the doctor enquires about the reason for her attempt, she replies, "you've never been a thirteen-year-old girl" (5). Her mind tends to exist on the outer reaches of anyone who attempts to comprehend her issues. The psychiatrist makes the diagnosis that "her suicide was an act of aggression inspired by the repression of adolescent libidinal urges" (19). However, there is no evidence to substantiate this argument in the novel, except for her uncanny obsession with the wedding dress.

Cecilia is portrayed as a quiet and introverted character who relishes spending time in loneliness. "She would sit on her front steps, picking red berries off the bushes and eating them, or staining her palms with the juice. She always wore the wedding dress and her bare feet were dirty" (14). She displays signs of detachment from others and the surroundings. Her room and her diary, a crucial artifact, reveal a bit about her personality and the extremity of despair she had to endure. The boys find cryptic writings and drawings in her diary. It reveals that she was emotionally unstable. They perceive her as a dreamer from the contents of her diary. "Somebody out of touch with reality. When she jumped, she probably thought she'd fly" (38). Cecilia's presence is very brief in the novel. However, her character is significant as she

represents the vulnerability of the female adolescents. Her life symbolises the hidden menace of ignorance and the unwavering enigma of human misery.

Lux Lisbon, a pivotal character, is a standout among the sisters. She is rebellious, bold and daring. She grapples for autonomy within the restrictive regimes of her family. Like the other sisters, she is stunning and attractive. She “radiated health and mischief” (24). Her basic nature is going against the grain. She often breaks the rules of her house, smokes cigarettes and keeps clandestine amours. It simply elucidates her yearning for liberation. “In Dr. Hornicker’s opinion, Lux’s promiscuity was a commonplace reaction to emotional need.... Lux confused the sexual act with love. For her, sex became a substitute for the comfort she needed as a result of her sister’s suicide” (84).

Lux outwardly puts upon a confident demeanor. But, she is deeply vulnerable and increasingly reckless inside. “Her thrashing, cries, scowls of agony only emphasized the inertness of Cecilia” (146). Trip’s enticement of Lux and the following desertion only reflects her fragility. She longs to be loved by someone. Few boys saw “Lux as a force of nature, impervious to chill, an ice goddess generated by the season itself, the majority knew she was only a girl in danger, or in pursuit, of catching her death or cold” (144). She is an exception to the monolithic existence of the rest of the sisters. She acts as a stimulus to the plot. Her tragedy is an unnerving reminder of the precarious stability between restriction and liberation.

Eugenides presents a subtle characterisation of Bonnie, Mary and Therese compared to Lux. They also undergo mental strain because of repression. Their actions depict multilayered dimensions of the dysfunctional family. Bonnie is religious and “had the sallow complexion and sharp nose of a nun. Her eyes watered and she was a foot taller than any of her sisters, mostly because of the length of her

neck which would one day hang from the end of a rope” (23). She adheres to her parents’ opinions and she is the most obedient daughter in the house. She finds herself incapable to liberate from familial repression. It elevates her silent suffering leading to the tragic end. The character of Mary also finds a subdued presence in the novel. “Mary Lisbon’s hair was darker; she had a widow’s peak and fuzz above her upper lip that suggested her mother had found her depilatory wax” (23). She is majorly occupied with her physical looks and the conventional norms of the society. “Mary spent hours looking into her portable mirror” (171). She behaves rather normally amidst the family’s atrophy. She survives her first suicidal attempt. It indicates her resilience to live. But she succumbs to the unavoidable fate of death in her next attempt.

Therese Lisbon, with “a heavier face, the cheeks and eyes of a cow” (23), is the most intellectual, logical and the pragmatic minded daughter. “Therese brought science books onto the front steps, studying photographs of deep space” (14) and “spoke in a credible Castilian accent and had a great capacity for memorizing vocabulary” (98). Her interest in Science reflects her endeavor to understand the reality of the world through knowledge and order. “Therese was reaching out toward a freer world” (163). She is an ambitious child and longs to build a career. She is anxious “over getting into an Ivy League College” (43). She also maintains unusual hobbies such as growing “sea horses in a drinking glass” (171). Her logical pursuits set her apart from the emotional turmoil of the family. However, even her sense of logic fails to protect her from the psychological confinement of the repressive atmosphere around her. The individual cases of the Lisbon sisters constitute the essential segment of their collective haunting legacy. Eugenides emphasises on the devastating outcomes of restrictions and objectifications through the misunderstood

sisters. He reflects on the fundamental necessity of keeping interpersonal relationships with others.

The novel integrates female melancholy into the plot of *The Virgin Suicides*. The extremity of sadness in the sisters stems from the individual and collective levels. They are expected to endure the domestic repressions and to conform to the societal pressures. The authoritative and rigid nature of the parents fuelled the melancholic temperaments in the girls. Dr. Hornincker gives consultation to Cecilia after her initial self-destructive attempt. He informs Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon that he does not think “the patient truly meant to end her life. Her act was a cry for help” (19). However, she proves him wrong. Her mental state gets worse by the increasing physical isolation and the emotional suppression. The girls ostracized themselves from their peers;

Added to their loveliness was a new mysterious suffering, perfectly silent, visible in the blue puffiness beneath their eyes or the way they would sometimes stop in midstride, look down, and shake their heads as though disagreeing with life. Grief made them wander. (49)

It is evident that the sisters traversed through a melancholic journey in their minds. Joe Hill Conley, a neighborhood boy, observes that the girls inherited melancholy from their mother. He opines that an ancient pain arose from Mrs. Lisbon. Her pain is the sum of all the grief of her people; “She came from a sad race” (116) and “the sadness had started long before. Before America. The girls had it, too” (116). The neighbours also attribute the apex of sadness in the daughters to Mrs. Lisbon’s legacy. However, “the Lisbons’ sadness was beyond comprehension” (228).

Various characters put forth several assumptions regarding the reason for melancholy in the Lisbon sisters. Dr. Hornicker ascribes the cause to Cecilia’s death in the family. As per Hornicker, the remaining sisters experience the chronic emotion

of melancholy as it is “the bereavement process of adolescents who have lost a sibling by suicide.... To act out suicidal behavior in an attempt to come to grips with their grief” (152). The mass suicide is deplorable. It suggests the consequences of neglecting female melancholy. The narrators seem incapable to comprehend the inner turmoil of the sisters. It reflects the systemic failure to validate female agony and despair. The narration through the male gaze associates mystery and obscurity with the psychological realm of the sisters.

Often, in today’s world, the extended childhood American life has bestowed on its young turns out to be a wasteland, where the adolescent feels cut off from both childhood and adulthood. Self-expression can often be frustrated. More and more, doctors say, this frustration can lead to acts of violence whose reality the adolescent cannot separate from the intended drama. (92)

The integration of female melancholy acts as the stimulus of the story. Eugenides projects a scathing critique of the misinterpretation of female melancholy. He emphasises on the significance of acknowledging female melancholy for the emotional and psychological wellness in women.

Eugenides also assimilates the differences between depression and trauma in the novel. He delineates these emotions through the individual cases of distress in the sisters. The nuanced deliberation of the emotional realm is done to make social commentaries. Melancholy is conceived as a pervasive emotion that recurs throughout the lives of the Lisbon girls. The extremities of their sadness are serene and enigmatic. The external world may fail to explicate the causes and genesis of their melancholy. The ineffable deprivations and estrangements make them still, disconnected and emblematic that plays a vital role in moulding their psychic realm. The narrators’ reminiscent and preoccupied perspectives on the sisters augment this melancholic

temperament. They present the sisters as fictitious symbols of allure and distress. Eugenides perceives melancholy as an undesirable emotional state filled with perplexity which unsettles the characters and the serene society in which they are placed.

Cecilia's suicide signals a deep psychic predicament. Her actions symbolise symptoms of depression such as her loss of interest in her surroundings. She seems to live in a world of fantasy. "Basically, what we have here is a dreamer. Somebody out of touch with reality. When she jumped, she probably thought she'd fly" (38). Her depressive disposition surfaces to be diagnostic and lethal. It is bereft of intense portrayal yet catastrophic in effect. Her silence and sense of uncertainty emphasise the postmodern collapse of confronting the cognitive aspects of life with compassion and transparency. The rest of the sisters also start to exhibit subtle signs of depression as the restrictions amplify in the Lisbons' house. The symptoms include hushed acquiescence, lassitude, detachment and self-destructive acts. However, they are not clinically diagnosed as depressed individuals. The subtle depressive characteristics impact their psychic intricacy at both individual and systemic levels.

Moreover, the novel also facilitates subtle representation of trauma in the novel. The first suicide of Cecilia in the family creates an unspoken and unprocessed trauma in the remaining sisters. It indicates the commencement of their psychic retrieval and degradation augmented by their confinement. The society's inadequacy to arbitrate and the narrators' male gaze denude the sisters of their selfhood and gradually lead to an unacknowledged collective trauma. Their unresolved trauma operates concurrently with Caruth's notion of trauma. Caruth asserts that a single incident or a series of incidents lead to traumatic experiences in the individuals. The collective suicides demarcate a reaction against a kind of a psychic panorama in the

family. It is characterized by entrenched disregard, suppressive impressions and social dynamics that intensify the traumatic disruption at the core of the plot. Eugenides entangled the emotional states of melancholy, depression and trauma into the psychic realm of the narrative to disclose the quiet torment concealed under their inscrutable existence. He attempts to convey through the fatal end of the sisters that the unarticulated melancholy may give rise to irreversible harm to the individuals as well as to the society.

The Marriage Plot: The Melancholic Undercurrents

*The Marriage Plot*⁴² (2011) is the third novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. It integrates a postmodern refined approach to comment on the traditional notions of marriage. It explores the intricacies of romance and the transformation of the cultural terrains of the late twentieth-century. It is set in America in the 1980s and includes an all-knowing narration. It presents the tales of three different characters who are in the pursuit of meaning in the chaotic world. The protagonists are the three mates of Brown University, Leonard Bankhead, Madeleine Hanna and Mitchell Grammaticus.

The novel commences in “early June, Providence, Rhode Island” (Eugenides 4), with the graduation of the ingenious scholar, Madeleine. She is an English Literature student from an opulent family. Her parents, “Alton and Phyllida had driven up from New Jersey to see her graduate” (5). She is often enthralled by the amorous encounters and the civic obligations in Victorian fiction. It has inspired her to do research on the marriage plots in the novels of Jane Austen, George Eliot and Henry James. She is caught between her scholarly pursuit of the classical notions of love and the actualities of contemporary relationships.

The novel navigates through the romantic entanglements among the three characters. The love triangle turns out to be the driving force of the plot. Madeleine is

at an impasse at her graduation day. She is saddened by the deterioration of her courtship with Leonard, a Biology student. “Madeleine and Leonard weren’t planning on living together, because they’d broken up three weeks ago; despite this fact, however, Madeleine hadn’t given up hope of a reconciliation” (12). The interim friction between Madeleine and Leonard plunges her into a state of dilemma. Her attention draws towards the advances from Mitchell, a scholar of Religious studies at the University.

“Mitchell’s relationship with Madeleine Hanna-his long, aspirational, sporadically promising yet frustrating relationship-had begun at a toga party during freshman orientation” (69). Mitchell starts showing up in the days that followed. It becomes evident that he had feelings for her. On the graduation day, he meets her parents to impress them. “Later on, after their relationship became the intimate, unsatisfying thing it became” (71). However, Mitchell fails to impress her. He is disheartened and feels numb. The feelings of diminishment and hopelessness swamp across his mind. He plans to fly to India with his roommate, Larry Pleshette, for a year as research assistants. “Mitchell and Larry began to be seen as enviable, brave, free-thinking individuals. And so finally they decided that they had better go” (100). They leave the country. Meanwhile, Madeleine decides to get reacquainted with Leonard.

The bond between Madeleine and Leonard starts to bloom. The medical condition of Leonard is kept under the wraps from her. Later, she comes to know that “Leonard had been officially diagnosed with manic depression in the spring semester of his freshman year” (231). She tries to empathize with him, “Leonard! If I knew you were depressed, that wouldn’t have mattered” (125). However, his mental condition becomes a hindrance in their relationship. After the graduation ceremony, they move

to Cape Cod. She is influenced by the Victorian ideology of love. She tends to believe that love can cure any disease. “For the last four months, instead of focusing on her “career,” she’d been nursing Leonard back to health, cooking his meals and cleaning his clothes, calming his anxieties and cheering him out of his frequent low moods” (166).

Mitchell continues his spiritual and literal expedition in India. Mitchell still feels love towards Madeleine amidst his journey. He questions himself about the purpose of his life. Once he encounters a woman named Janice P. while travelling in the American Express. The meet up influences him and draws him towards the religious realms of Christianity. He chooses to serve as a volunteer at one of the institutions of Mother Theresa. There he gets exposed to the unpalatable realities of the destitute and the underprivileged;

Mitchell had been volunteering at the Home for Dying Destitutes. He’d been going five days a week, from nine in the morning until a little after one, and doing whatever needed doing. This included giving the men medicine, feeding them, administering head massages, sitting on their beds and providing company, looking into their faces and holding their hands. (297)

His life in India makes him ponder upon the motivations of faith to live in there.

“Mitchell had found India to be the perfect place to disappear” (298). He has always looked upon India as a pilgrimage for spirituality. He seeks to find solace in India to escape from his inner turmoil. His journey turns into a reflection of personal fragility. He desires to submerge himself in a broader perspective of life and to juxtapose the missing pieces of his life. His repatriation to America makes him a better person. He comes to terms with the harsh realities in life. He composes an aerogram to Madeleine in which he asserts her not to marry Leonard.

Leonard and Madeleine are married. They have been living with Madeleine's parents. "Madeleine had married Leonard in the grip of a force much like mania" (339). Leonard's condition remains the same, while Madeleine hunts for a house for them. Living with Leonard only made her gloomier in life. Their marriage gradually deteriorates. Madeleine realises that love is not a solution to the problems in life. Leonard's depression turns out as that gnawing pain at her heart. Leonard conveys to her that, "I don't want to ruin your life" (382). They begin to interrogate the plausibility of their marriage.

Leonard recognises the intensity of the emotional burden he is causing on Madeleine. Finally, he decides to leave her against her wish. He believes that she deserves a better life without him. "In a soft voice edged with pity, with sadness, Leonard said, "I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee"" (383). Madeleine is devastated with this unexpected declaration of his desire to divorce her. After they get separated, Mitchell tries to reconnect with Madeleine. To his dismay, he finds that she does not reciprocate his love. She decides to take an independent path devoid of any love relationships. Mitchell communicates about the diminishing idealized version of his love to her. He even lives with her parents to impress her. But it turns out to be a futile attempt as "she gave no clear sign that her feelings about him had altered in any significant way" (403).

Madeleine tries to cope up with the reality of the intricacies of relationships. She awakens to the broadening horizons of love's rugged nuances. The reality is far removed from what she had read in the romanticized versions of Victorian novelists. In the submission of the final paper of her studies, "she used a line from Trollope's *Barchester Towers* as an epigraph: "There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel"" (22). It is a reflection of her experience of her love life. Her father,

Alton, suggests annulment instead of divorce. Alton proposes that an annulment “represents a voiding of the marriage. It’s as though the marriage never was. With an annulment, you’re not a divorcee. It’s as though you never were married” (398). Madeleine is infuriated at this suggestion and forbids making any kind of further communication with her parents. “She seldom came downstairs. This put Mitchell, who is living at her place, in an awkward position. As the only impartial person in the house, it was up to him to maintain communication among others” (399). She is aware that her parents never liked Leonard and they were unhappy with her decision of marrying him. They had never mistreated him though. She knows that they were secretly happy about her divorce and “for this she wanted to punish them” (399). As the days passed, her parents put forth efforts to motivate her to move forward in life. She draws out that love cannot amend all the hurdles in life. She relocates to Columbia with Mitchell. She moves forward with her studies and career.

The novel concludes with the uncertainty linked with Leonard’s mental space and his future after the separation from Madeleine. It ends ambiguous regarding the union of Madeleine and Mitchell. Mitchell asks a literary question to Madeleine that whether there is a book in her reading list “where the heroine gets married to the wrong guy and then realizes it, and then the other suitor shows up, some guy who’s always been in love with her, and then *they* get together” (406), but upon realizing that she doesn’t wish to get married, he chooses to not propose her. Madeleine answers him that she hasn’t come across any such ending to a book. Mitchell inquires if that would be a good ending to a book. The novel ends with her reply, “Yes” (406), which simply delineates that their union and the culmination of their relationship in a wedding is dubious.

The Marriage Plot is a campus novel. The plot development and the character progression are intrinsically grounded at Brown University. The University becomes a vital backdrop of the plot. Libraries, seminars, classes, dorm rooms, etc. create an explicit campus ambiance in the novel. In the literary realm of Eugenides, “college wasn’t like the real world. In the real world people dropped names based on their renown. In college, people dropped names based on their obscurity” (23). Eugenides portrays the campus life and the reality outside it in the novel. He delineates that the college embraces intellectual rigor and academic exclusivity while the actual world revolves around power, wealth and success.

A substantial fraction of the campus experience and the academic rigor is depicted through Madeleine Hanna, an English major. “She’d become an English major for the purest and dullest of reasons: because she loved to read” (20). Eugenides presents Madeleine as a studious student of English Literature, “she could scan book spines for as long as an hour” (21). Madeleine’s studies revolved around the topic of *The Marriage Plot*, specifically in Victorian literature. Her professor, K. McCall Saunders, “a seventy-year-old New Englander,” (21) was impressed by her final paper titled, “The Interrogative Mood: Marriage Proposals and the (Strictly Limited) Sphere of the Feminine” (22). He suggested she could develop it into a comprehensive senior honors thesis and offered to be her advisor. As the work progressed, he shuffled the submitted papers. It demotivated Madeleine to proceed with her research.

Besides, Semiotics 211, an upper-level seminar, emerged as a hub where literary theoretical framework and human experiences intersected in the Brown University. There are episodes of interesting exchanges of academic conversations in the campus. Madeleine once converses with Thurston Meems, a fellow student,

regarding the topic of her paper on Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*⁴³; "I deconstructed Barthes' deconstruction of love" (87). Also, as part of her academics, she participated in a conference at Boston College on the topic, Victorian literature. "What Madeleine sensed at the conference was the emergence of a new class of academics. They were talking about all the old books she loved, but in new ways" (177). The books that she read on campus highly influenced her character formation. Her life decision of marrying Leonard is rooted in the relationships that she made on the campus.

The novel also delves into the dynamics of romance in the campus. The love triangle bloomed at Brown University. Madeleine's readings, especially during her college days, influenced her concepts of love. "Madeleine's love troubles had begun at a time when the French theory she was reading deconstructed the very notion of love" (19). The romance between Leonard and Madeleine started in the electric environment of the semiotics seminar. "On weeknights, after Madeleine finished studying, she headed over to the biology lab, where she'd find Leonard staring in slides with two Chinese grad students" (63). Madeleine felt attracted to the wit displayed by Leonard in the initial days and their love progressed thereafter.

The physical beauty and the intellectual charm of Madeleine drew Mitchell's attention. His attraction towards her began in the college days. Initially, "Madeleine had run into Mitchell on campus and brought him back to her apartment" (14). They engaged themselves in intellectual divergences in the campus. Gradually they got entangled in the intricacies of youthful love. *The Marriage Plot* integrates the setting of campus life in the narrative framework. It aids to scrutinise the themes of love, identity and English Literature through the emotional progression of the protagonists.

Eugenides crafts a nuanced characterization of Madeleine Hanna in the novel.

Madeleine is portrayed as a relatable girl whose character progression acquires a central spot in the plot. She hails from an upper-class family in New Jersey. She is born to Alton Hanna, a businessman and Phyllida, a homemaker. She relishes the privileges of being born to an upper-class family and pursues higher education. Her behaviour is influenced by Phyllida. Phyllida has always prioritised family over her personal freedom. Her incompetency to actualize her aspirations has moulded Madeleine's perspectives in life. "Her mother's life was the great counterexample. It represented the injustice Madeleine's life would rectify" (32).

Madeleine's life evolves into a figurative endeavor to resolve the sacrifices and injustices of Phyllida. She is determined and devoted to forge her own identity and path. Raised in affluence, she is exposed to creative art, literary studies and cultural analyses. She is introduced in the beginning as a character who is in the relentless pursuit for knowledge and dogmas of love. As the novel progresses, she is caught up with the entanglements of love that plunge her into emotional anguish and apprehensions. However, she evolves into a mature, introspective and self-sufficient individual in the end.

Madeleine is an intelligent, passionate and ambitious student of English Literature in the academic frontier. Despite her intellectual perspicacity, she is emotionally vulnerable to the happenings in her life. She is easily affected by the relationships she forms in life. She fails to find happiness at her own graduation as she is hooked up with the intricacies of her love life. "She wasn't proud of herself. She was in no mood to celebrate" (5). She sanctifies love and marriage in life. Her choice of the topic on the marriage plot for her final dissertation reflects her aesthetic appeal

and intellectual curiosity towards the theme of love. She attempts to juxtapose her personal philosophy with the thematic framework of her research.

Madeleine encounters challenges to reconcile her traditional conception of love with the postmodern views of Barthes⁴⁴. She faces impediments to define the legitimacy of love in the epochs of satire and deconstruction. As a lover, “she got jealous when Leonard talked to other girls at parties. She flashed warnings of insecurity” (249). Leonard finds everything in Madeleine that he wanted in his partner; her beauty and intellect. He finds her loyal and compassionate. He finds her to take efforts to bring him back to his normal life. When Mitchell realises that she loves Leonard, he spots a kind of stupidity on her face; “It was the stupidity of the fortunate and beautiful, of everybody who got what they wanted in life and so remained unremarkable” (77). Madeleine fails in the endeavor to reverse the health condition of Leonard. She realises that she longs to carve out her own path and wishes to be independent.

Eugenides elucidates the underpinned theme of female melancholy through the experiences of Madeleine. Her identity is disrupted in the course of the progression of the story. Her melancholy derives from the sociocultural expectations, romantic disenchantments and intellectual impasse. She suffers from multifaceted dimensions of inner turmoil and outer pressures. Her affinity towards the clinically depressed Leonard turns out to be the major reason for her melancholy. “Madeleine had fallen in love with Leonard the first moment she’d seen him. She hadn’t even known him then” (59). Their first breakup pushes her into the abyss of melancholy;

In the weeks after breaking up with Leonard, Madeleine spent most of her time at the Narragansett, lying on her bed. She dragged herself to her final classes. She lost much of her appetite. At night, an invisible hand kept shaking

her awake every few hours. Grief was physiological, a disturbance in the blood. Sometimes a whole minute would pass in nameless dread---the bedside clock ticking, the blue moonlight coating the window like glue---before she'd remember the brutal fact that had caused it. (78)

Madeleine's melancholy is intricately linked with her romantic entanglements throughout the novel. "Love had made her intolerable. It had made her heavy... She'd lost track of her own priorities and had become a drag" (78). Her ideal fantasies of love are rooted in her Victorian literary readings. The incongruity between her expectations and the reality turns out to be a causality of her extremities of sorrow.

Madeleine's melancholy has existential dimensions. The loneliness added to her sorrowful temperaments. She longed for things that her mother couldn't materialise in her life. Her mother even failed to voice out her emotions. "Everything Madeleine hated about her mother--- her imperturbable rectitude, her lack of visible emotion---was exactly what Madeleine needed at the moment. She broke down, sobbing in her mother's lap" (365). She isolated herself from the world and lacked a social life while she stayed with the depressed Leonard; "sometimes, the emptiness of the apartment made Madeleine want to cry for it all suggested about Leonard's aloneness in the world" (167). This melancholy is entangled with the romantic enmeshments and the lack of social interactions. It results in the existential crisis and the disintegration of the identity.

Madeleine represents a modern woman who grapples because of the inclination towards the traditional notions in the contemporary world. She suffers to uncover the purpose of her life. The melancholy becomes an impetus in the evolution of her character. She gradually learns to steer through the intricacies of life. She forms a refined perception of love and existence. Eugenides conceptualises melancholy as

not merely a state of sadness. He presents it as an intense emotional experience in women that paves new paradigms to selfhood.

The psychic realm and the emotional intensity of the characters unleash in the novel. The narrator delineates the fundamental causes such as unresolved grief, mental health disorders and the ideal conceptions of love. The human interactions in the novel become intricate and their cognitive pursuits often get subdued due to emotional perplexities. The characters encounter the expressions of melancholy, trauma and depression at various stages in their lives. Melancholy in Madeleine is caused by the tension between her utopian ideals of romance and her reality. The clinical diagnosis of Leonard forms the root cause of the postmodern experience of sorrow in her.

Madeleine suffers from an intangible and disrupting sense of loss throughout her life with Leonard. It unveils as an obstacle to her insights and convictions on life. The manifestation of her melancholy corrodes the two different worlds of fiction and reality. The melancholic temperaments fail her to align her intellect with her emotional terrain. Her melancholy lingers throughout her life due to these predicaments and inner struggles. She expresses an existential longing for the unfulfilled desires. She gradually experiences an implicit discontent with herself and the world. Here, the novelist highlights the discrepancy between the individual's anticipations and experiences of life.

Leonard's case is different from that of Madeleine. He is clinically diagnosed as depressed. His battle with mental state is profoundly represented in the novel. "At first his dark moods were closer to melancholy than to despair" (236). He showed symptoms such as fatigue, self-contempt, hallucinations and alienated behaviour. His internal monologues embody the disruption of his emotions, apprehensions, passion

and social dynamics. He often condemns the idealisation of the intellect and insanity. It discloses the latent existence of his depression underneath the cognitive prowess. His state of depression is disabling and requires medication. “When the pills didn’t work the doctor prescribed a mild tranquilizer, and then a stronger one, but even this brought Leonard no more than two or three hours of shallow, dreamless, nonreplenishing sleep per night” (106). Eugenides delineates depression as a chaotic coercion that recapitulates selfhood. It ruptures the bond of the diseased with others. “Depression be like a bruise that never goes away. A bruise in your mind. You must got to be careful not to touch where it hurts. It always be there, though” (260).

Leonard’s mental condition is also caused because of his childhood trauma. He grew up with a sick mother in a chaotic family environment. He was fragile as a child and it forged lasting psychic wounds in him. It surfaces in his skeptic behaviour, sense of insecurity and conflicts in his relationships. His trauma is severe and aggregate that amalgamates with his recurring mental distress. It stands forth as a hindrance to his selfhood and psychic balance and impedes his progress and relationships. The trauma influences his perspectives in life. Eugenides implicitly assimilates trauma in the novel as a quiet latent force. It is concealed under the apparent hurdles of mental disorder and romantic disputes. He integrates the emotional intricacies through the affective states of melancholy, depression and trauma. The novel reflects on the hurdles of facilitating a sense of belonging in the fractured world.

Conclusion

The chapter promulgates Jeffrey Eugenides as a custodian of female melancholy. It includes a critical analysis of his novels, *The Virgin Suicides* and *The Marriage Plot*. The novels integrate the intricate experiences of women battling with

existential distress. They raise profound awareness about the mental realms of women. Eugenides articulates how the women's identity is impacted by the personal, familial and societal norms and pressures. He highlights the case of collective female melancholy in *The Virgin Suicides*. He cites negation and repression as the root causes in the novel. On the other hand, he showcases the individual case of female melancholic temperament in *The Marriage Plot*. He points out the romantic entanglements and the futile attempts to reconcile one's desires as the reasons for female melancholy in the novel. Eugenides masterfully elucidates the deep dynamics of sorrow and desire in women in these selected novels. He beckons his readers to encounter the intricacy of female melancholy and its unwavering relevance in life.

A Psychoanalytic Feminist Reading of Female Melancholy

The lineage of literary theories has its genesis in the ancient era of Athens with the philosophies of Plato⁴⁵ and Aristotle⁴⁶. “Arguably, the lines of thought these two thinkers inaugurated comprising almost all of Western philosophy according to some modern commentators, have been engraved so deeply upon Western consciousness that they have become truly unconscious, structuring the ways we perceive and process our world as if they were “natural” or biologically “hardwired”” (Martin 1).

From the critical perspective, literary theories are a set of tools used to comprehend and interpret literature by seeking answers to the questions raised with regard to its form, content and scope. Over the years, specifically in the modern period, various distinct theories, such as formalism, structuralism, postcolonial theory, feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc., were introduced. Theories like psychoanalysis, which is woven through literature, implemented ideas into literary works rather than uncovering the discourse of literary analysis within the theory.

Mathew R. Martin attempts to conceptualise psychoanalysis as a literary theory:

Like literary theory, psychoanalysis is a mode of textual analysis, starting from texts—the texts produced by free association, jokes, slips of the tongue and, of course, dreams—and moving to interpretations that go beyond the conscious hermeneutics of the *cogito* of classical and Enlightenment philosophy. Arguably, psychoanalysis is literary theory at its most radical, and to study literary theory through psychoanalysis is to study literary theory in its most intellectually engaging, interrogative and open-ended forms. (2)

The earliest postulations of Freud targeted the author and the text with the analysis protruding with regard to the author’s symptoms and the association of the literary

text as a dream-text. It led to the dismissal of the conventional analyses of the textuality of the texts and to the approval of Freud's motifs apparently concealed in the abyss of the texts. "Lionel Trilling argued in 1947 that 'the Freudian psychology makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind'" (Ellmann 5).

The gradual integration of psychoanalysis in literature shifted the emphasis onto the reader and their subjective interpretations of the literary texts rather than the author's perspectives in the twentieth century with the inception of reader-response criticism⁴⁷. Besides, critics like Peter Brooks, a Professor of Comparative Literature, notes that the traditional psychoanalytic theory redirects the focus from the textual aspects to people, for example the characters in the text. Psychoanalytic criticism becomes obvious as a person-centered criticism that parallels the ego-psychology⁴⁸ of America. Nevertheless, this criticism is confined to the raw materials provided in the texts in accord with the psychic upheavals of the characters and fails to elucidate the metamorphosis behind the process.

In the late 1900s, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a Viennese doctor, came up with the theory of psychoanalysis as "*the science of the unconscious*" (Barratt 4) and the advantages of its practicality as an approach to medicate nervous patients in Vienna, Austria. He collaborated with Josef Breuer to study hysteria in people, constituting a trailblazing feature of the psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis, an elaborate interdisciplinary doctrine, regarding the functional and structural aspects of the human mind, revised the notions that people formed about themselves. The theory evolved from the notions exclusively around the mental facets of life. However, the concept of the unconscious existed before Freud. His theory evolved from the conceptualisation of the unconscious as the basis of the conscious facet of the human mind from the postulations of earlier philosophers such as Plato's *Timaeus*.

Subsequently, before Freud, writings on the unconscious appeared in the works of writers such as Paracelsus, Gottfried Leibniz, Jakob Bohme, Baruch de Spinoza, Franz von Baader, Friedrich Jacobi, etc., in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

In 1807, George Hegel enhanced the concept of the unconscious in his critique of the notion of *I* or the *self* of Johann Fichte. The various concerns with regard to the unconscious appeared in *Philosophy of Will and Representation* (1844) of Arthur Schopenhauer. Since the late eighteenth century, the concept of “the stranger within thee” (Barratt 12) emerged in the fictional works that laid the base for Freud’s cognitive thought process. Freud makes indirect references to Eduard von Hartmann’s *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) in his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). With the establishment of The International Psychoanalytical Association in 1911, the discipline expanded rapidly.

Psychoanalysis is an emotive topic and “to many, psychoanalysis is more than a theory of mind and an associated set of methods: it is a way of life and a road to deliverance” (Livingstone 5). Freud’s psychology of repression is a crucial segment of psychoanalysis. It simply meant repressing the contents of the consciousness. Repression refers to a method of concealing the emotions from the realm of the consciousness with its potential for introspection. For Freud, the notion of repression of the unconscious is the fundamental premise for the entire discipline. “Freud referred to the repressed as “for us” the *Vorbild* of the unconscious, which can indeed be translated as the “prototype,” but also as the “standard” or “exemplification”” (Barratt 15).

Freud knew that his focus on the functioning of the nuances of the unconscious and his inception of the psychology of repressed unconscious would foment a paradigm change in the field. He also formulated the idea of ‘preconscious’

which meant the thoughts that are not readily retrievable but can be with the aid of indications. They are not repressed but suppressed from the promptness of the conscious. Like the conscious and the unconscious, the preconscious is also equally significant for the seamless functioning of the human mind. A boundary acts between these domains and when a repressed concept is introduced into the conscious part of the mind, also, through the preconscious at times, this barrier is often annulled.

Freud attempts to interrogate the various aspects of consciousness and “discovers an “unconscious” that is repressed from the knowable domain of the “I” of consciousness” (24). Freud came up with a topographic model of the human mind of positioning the human feelings between these domains, which according to him lacked any kind of association with the anatomy of the brain. Since the 1970s, researchers like Zajonc, with empirical research, demonstrated the working of the mind outside the domains of the conscious and the preconscious, but through the unconscious.

Freud expressed his concepts that the unimpeded access of psychic force in the vicinity for tension-discharge is the attribute of methods with regard to the unconscious system. He suggested that ‘cathexis⁴⁹’ is the psychologically fixated attachment of an idea or memory formed in the mind. A thought is formed in the mind by the flux of this cathexis from an idea to another as the psychic energy is devoted in the mental constructs of objects. Freud associates his concepts of dream manifest and slips of tongue with these theories. According to Freud, an underpinning hindrance concerning psychoanalysis is the lack of visual evidence to infer outcomes as it is realised through the verbal interpretations of the mental functioning of the past experiences, the present circumstances and the state of emotional stability. Also, pursuant to him, sexuality and sexual differences such as penis-envy remained the

base of the psychoanalytic theory resulting in the subsequent denial of femininity and the quest for masculinity. In essence, Freud's postulations and analyses suggested that the theory of psychoanalysis links together the entities of the unconscious, the social contexts and the subject.

Besides, a significant custom of the theory of psychoanalysis emerged from the works of Freud in the 1930s which is known as the Object-Relations theory. The theory was developed by psychoanalysts such as D. W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein and Ronald Fairbairn. It puts forth the hypotheses on the development of humans' relationships with each other and how they internalised these concepts and objects into the psyche that influenced their thought processes. Freudian theory differs from the latter in the sense that how the unconscious is constructed and the extent to which its role is emphasized. Both procedures focus on the concept that a repressed experience is either split off or dissociated from the consciousness.

Freud's work highlights the father while the Object-Relations theory lays emphasis on the mother. Freud's postulations view identity as fragmented, precarious and erratic by the defiant unconscious and emphasises on the unconscious conception of gendered subjectivity. Meanwhile, the Object-Relations theory perceives identity as something capable of being centralized, secure and valid and views gender as a biological construction at birth through the reinforcement in the early stages of childhood. Winnicott's Object-Relations theory paves a significant path in the realm of psychoanalysis.

Philosophers that came later, such as George Klein, Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas critiqued the postulations of Freud. Habermas and Ricoeur devised the theoretical frameworks and conceived the hermeneutic form of the psychoanalytic theory. Habermas indicated that Freud theorised the different correlations between his

clinical ideas and the metapsychological concepts such as, for instance, in the linkage of the metapsychological notion of pleasure-unpleasure principle with the clinical effects like pain and pressure. Similarly, Freud also connected the clinical recollection of a repressed memory with Breuer's metapsychological concepts of reliving and releasing the repressed emotions.

Influenced by the Hegelian jargon of *self-reflection*, “Habermas coins the term “movement of self-reflection” to designate the kind of psychoanalytic process that is traditionally described by speaking of the patient’s “working through his(her) resistances, defenses and transference-repetitions, lifting his(her) repressions,” and achieving “the return of the repressed”” (Grunbaun 7). He views the autonomy of the process of the self-emancipation of this movement as essentially unfamiliar with the methodological and ontological systems characterized by the natural sciences.

Ricoeur and Klein backed Habermas’ allegations of Freud’s denial of natural science.

Jacques Lacan is another major proponent of the theory of psychoanalysis. Lacanian psychoanalysis, which began around the 1950s, expanded the theory rooted in Freud's dynamics of the analysis. His psychoanalytic approaches associated the formations of the linguistic aspects with the unconscious. He propounded the saying “the unconscious is structured like a language” (Nasio 2) by which he meant that the unconscious, which surfaces in unanticipated acts, is an integrated framework of signifiers linked to each other. He further claims that what he actually meant with the statement was that like the language, the unconscious is also structured and not that both shared a common structure. Lacan’s other theoretical construct with regard to the unconscious revolves around the term, *jouissance*, which meant the “energy of the unconscious” (4). According to Lacan, *jouissance* refers to the apparently incongruous experience of pleasure through torment or contentment through pain. It is a kind of

satisfaction that surpasses the pleasure principle and can be called a surplus of life. In simple terms, *jouissance* refers to the energy released in the unconscious when it is activated, for instance, by a blunder fumbled by someone.

Lacan proposed the three fates of the energy of the psychic which are the complete release, the fragmented release and the total restraint from the release, due to the repression, of this psychic energy. He also delineated the three Orders that categorized the mental processes; the Orders of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary in parallel to the different stages of the development of a child as it learns to demarcate an identity of its own distinct from the outside world. He formulated the *Mirror Stage* of the Imaginary order as the key principle of his theory. He employed the Borromean knot to intertwine the three orders together portraying their interdependence. His psychoanalytic inferences indicate that the various ways in which the systemic approaches reinforcing the social norms are engraved into the subjective domains of the unconscious.

Juan-David Nasio, an Argentinian psychoanalyst, puts forth that the structural aspects of the unconscious is not an individual or a collective entity but lies somewhere between them. For him, the logical dimension of the unconscious cannot be an individual existence as the beginning and the ending cannot occur within a single subject or segment. Nasio reformulates the Lacan's three fates of psychic energy with the states of *jouissance* such as the surplus-of-*jouissance* with the total release, the phallic *jouissance* with the partial release and the *jouissance* of the other with the non-release of psychic energy. He associates the human body with the *jouissance*. "As Nasio explains, psychoanalysis does not ask, "What is the body?" but rather, "How does one experience *jouissance*?" or more directly, "Where is *jouissance*?" (7) He proposes that when the human body encounters *jouissance*, it

simply means that the body is losing. For Lacan, the human body is the site of jouissance. Nasio conceptualises the body in psychoanalysis from a different angle as he states that the body must react to the two different elements of the theory, i.e., the speech and the sex. Thus the unconscious, jouissance and the body transpires to be the fundamental concepts of Nasio's theory of psychoanalysis.

Slavoj Zizek, a Slovenian Marxist philosopher also made major contributions to the theory of psychoanalysis in the 1980s. As Terry Eagleton⁵⁰ notes, Zizek is "the most formidably brilliant exponent of psychoanalysis, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged in Europe for some decades" (Myers 1). Zizek scrutinised the functioning of the collective identities, culture and mundane experiences to form his psychoanalytic hypotheses. An essential perspective is his notion of the subject, which he describes as the state of the consciousness contrary to its individual and specific substances. For him, the subject is a segment of the world from which it is distanced to make observations. He integrates the Lacanian notions of the little Other and the big Other in his works to refer to the former with the Imaginary Order and the latter with the Symbolic Order.

Lacan's *Otherness* advances from the radical aspects as it cannot be integrated by the identification methods. A key aspect of his psychoanalytic theory is the notion of fantasy and the feeling of desire that follows with it which substantiates this state of mind. Fantasy is an indispensable construct of the mind that masks the inherent desires of the unconscious. He outlined the proposition of the need to traverse the fantasy of the mental construct and not to disintegrate fantasy in order to unfold the hidden anxieties and contradictions. For Zizek, the core focus of the theory is to repudiate the fervent distortion of the fantasy rather than to probe into its innate

vagueness. Zizek attempted to render interpretations that are accurate within the boundaries that they impact revitalization in the field of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is one of the formidable influences on twentieth-century ruminations. However, psychoanalysis is often criticized on various fronts. Critics like Hans Eysenck argued that the theory is unscientific as it is based on speculations and not verified or proved through observations and experiments. Eysenck puts forth his opinion that psychoanalysis is a failure as he says about the theory that:

We are left with nothing but imaginary interpretation of pseudo-events, therapeutic failures, illogical and inconsistent theories, unacknowledged borrowings from predecessors, enormous ‘insights’ of no proven value, and a dictatorial and intolerant group of followers insistent not on truth but on propaganda. (Frosh 6)

This critique of the theory of psychoanalysis for its ignorance of scientific principles is rather a significant irony in accord with its broader frameworks and moral integrity. “Freud’s aim certainly was to construct a new ‘science’, fusing biology and psychology, the body and the word; in terms of the unpublished 1895 manuscript which influenced all his later psychoanalytic work, it was to develop a ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’” (Frosh 7). Besides, Freud’s idea of Science was the demarcation between the perceptions of the philosophers and the mystics and the objective and the unbiased endeavor to unlearn the regulatory principles of the human mind that formed his concept of the theory of psychoanalysis. He has clearly indicated the significance of the speculations to form the theoretical boundaries of psychoanalysis as he notes in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that:

What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further

an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead. (Freud 295)

Nevertheless, critics, like Brian Anthony Farrell, have brought various critical aspects of psychoanalysis, reflecting on it as a premature theory, rather than completely abandoning it. Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher, argued that the psychoanalysis is based on speculations which are formed prior to the conceptualisation of the hypothesis despite Freud's claims of the theory to be scientific. He highlights that the major flaw in Freud's theory is his intention to draw laws of thought and behavior as there can be none. Sebastian Timpanaro, another critic, notes that the Freudian approach to psychoanalysis is resistant to verifications and is quick to form inferences with pre-ordained validations.

Despite the various criticisms, psychoanalysis is significant as it charts a new perspective for research and execution. The hermeneutic approaches of the theory put forth it as a practical illustration of Science that integrates methodological introspections. It is a kind of an interpretative exercise and a form of literary criticism of the daily hustles. The core aspect of the theory is the subjectivity of the seamless, dynamic, efficient and fragmented experiences of oneself and that with the world, and the network structure that the subjectivity holds with the unconscious and the external forces. Psychoanalysis reflects on the means of comprehending the working of the world from the inner experiences of the individuals.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalytic feminism emerged as a critical theory of the concept of gendered subject in the 1970s with the works of writers such as Juliet Mitchell in England and Luce Irigaray in France. Mitchell posited that women are distinctive in comparison, who are often relegated as they constitute about half of the entire human

species. She added, “women are essential and irreplaceable; they cannot therefore be exploited in the same way as other social groups can” (Mitchell 11). Evelyn Fox Keller, an American feminist, indicated that Science has evolved to become a masculine sector that omits women. Psychoanalytic feminism, a branch of feminism, evolved to analyse women’s oppression through their mental terrains. The theory focused on the necessity to comprehend the psyche of humans from individual, social, political, economic and other perspectives that impacted their mind’s functioning through a feminine lens.

“Psychoanalytic feminism is distinguished from other feminisms by its particular method of theorizing gender as the object of transformation” (Elliot 3). The core aspect of psychoanalytic feminism is the inquiry into the concepts of subjectivity and sexuality. It embodies a distinctive perspective with regard to gendered subjectivity. It solicits into the mechanism of engendering the individuals. Besides, Thelma Rowell, a British primatologist, proposed that it would be simpler “for females to emphasize with females” (Gowaty 31). The psychoanalytic feminists postulate that the existing mechanisms can be revamped if its circumstances and the factors of production are comprehended instead of conceptualising the process in a narrow sense as organic, indelible and solely psychological.

The term gender is a core aspect of psychoanalytic feminism and it unfolds as the process of analysis and transformation;

‘Gender’ usually signifies a fixed position of identity based on a concept of a unified subject and on a firm relation to anatomical sex. This definition rests on a questionable, pre-Freudian view of subjectivity and it obscures the processes through which gender is actually achieved. (4)

The theorists of psychoanalytic feminism revisit the former formulations of gender and sexual differences and unfold new perspectives. They assert that gendered subjectivity is a socially constructed reality and sexual differences introduce the paradigm of logic and the arbitrary formation of gender. For instance, feminists like Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein applied the Object-Relations theory to evaluate the structuring of gender identity and sexual difference by analysing the Oedipal stage to discern the reasons for male dominance in the society. They postulated that the supremacy of the men resulted from the psychic conceptualisation of women as the caretakers in the early developmental stages of the psyche. Moreover, the psychoanalytic feminists critiqued the postulations of psychoanalysis owing to the misogynistic dimensions in the execution of this school of criticism. The disgruntled feminists questioned the anacritic bonds that a branch of feminism formed with the psychoanalysis in contrast to others who embraced it.

Many psychoanalytic feminists re-consider Freud's notions on gender as a figurative representation of cultural gender conventions that conveys the affective influence that people have with gender of being masculine or feminine. According to Freud, masculinity is a framework which hosts the only libido and the psychic evolution of the women is a replication of the men at the initial stages and only deviates at a later stage. Freud regarded femininity as a cryptic, uncharted region and pondered upon what women wanted in reality. He posited in his discourse on "Femininity" that "psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is—that would be a task it could scarcely perform—but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition" (Moran 27).

Psychoanalytic feminism is viewed as inverse analogues of gender by reinterpreting the established traditional norms of gender. They view gender through at least three different aspects; first it as an independent and liberal social association, molded by other bonds like economic status and race, in a kind of a form impacting the existing theories and practice. Second, gender is seen as a subset of thought such that thinking about it is perceived as subtle and explicitly gender-biased. Third, gender is discerned as a core component in an individual's self-perception and the cultural apprehension of the human experience. However, even the psychoanalytic feminists find it difficult to resolve the enigma of femininity.

Psychoanalytic feminism postulated that the unconscious formations have to be attended to interpret the subjugation of women. British psychoanalyst John Bowlby emphasized on the impact of the amalgamation of feminism and psychoanalysis. The French feminists embraced the investigation of patriarchal culture and the significance of the unconsciousness and gender differences of Lacan and Freud. Nonetheless, since the 1980s, the British feminists ratified the postulations of Lacan as a non-essentialist framework on account of the non-biological construction of the feminist theory. "Lacan argues that it is precisely the fact that woman is pushed into the position of an exchange object that constitutes the difficulty of the feminine position" (Evans 221). Lacan's psychoanalysis asserted that femininity was devoid of any substance and it formed the feminine position accessible for both the sexes. Lacan's notions hypothesized femininity that was neither biological nor historical. For the psychoanalytic feminists, psychoanalysis expounds on the negation of femininity.

However, feminists like Elizabeth Wright argued that psychoanalytic feminism prospered within the framework of literary criticism, disengaging itself from psychoanalysis and deliberated on the integration of the theories of

psychoanalysis, feminism and postmodernism, grounded in the repudiation of the binaries of masculinity and femininity as metaphysical. Freud's notions faced criticism on account of being phallogentric and father-centered.

Nevertheless, feminists like Juliet Mitchell introduced the Freudian theoretical framework of how man is culturally constructed and conditioned to the feminist network. She championed the unknown sides of Freud to the American feminists by integrating psychoanalysis in order to strengthen the notions of feminism. Assimilating Freud's theories, the feminists hit a crossroad that women's aggressiveness is socially subjugated that culminates in masochistic impulses. Despite the assertion to suppress feministic aspects and reinforce misogynist claims of psychoanalysis, the theory stood as the stimulation for the feminist reconstruction of gender dynamics.

The paradigm of psychoanalytic feminism emerged due to diverse historic and cross-cultural reasons. The British feminists, such as Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, viewed the Freudian Psychoanalysis as a vital attachment to the insufficient formulated notions of subjectivity of the Marxist philosophers. They approved psychoanalysis as an effective strategy and framework to discern the inner workings of the mind. Many feminists recognized the discovery that the theory of psychoanalysis offered of how the notions of masculinity and femininity are unconsciously ingrained as identities by both men and women broaden the range of scrutinising the realms of women's oppressions.

Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, the American feminists, observed the convergence of psychoanalysis and social theory as an approach to revisit the notion of mothering. They implemented psychoanalysis as a strategy to interpret reproduction of the prevailing state and to elucidate the ways of social change.

Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin scrutinised the method of assimilating the emotionally invested relationships and the social identity which it led to. Their notions focused on the status of empathy in sustenance and the significance of reciprocity in nurturing bonds. Whereas, the French feminists like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray unfurled a crucial space for new dimensions of sexual difference by the intersection of Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud and Derrida's deconstruction.

Joan Chrisler and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, American psychoanalytic feminists, postulated their notions about "how the female, and particularly the feminine, body influences a woman's sense of self, especially her image and identity" (Chrisler 3). A woman's association with her body is rather problematic as they determine the individual norms for their bodies. According to these psychologists, the human body is a familiar aspect but is nuanced as it mandates intricate cognitive perspectives "to produce a sense of the embodied self" (4). From this frame of reference, the feminists seem to be in alliance with Freud's notion of *anatomy is destiny*⁵¹, by which he meant that the differences in the physicality of human beings determined the psychic realm of men and women. These cross-cultural feminists adopted the psychoanalytic paradigms to re-evaluate the mental landscapes to unlearn how power is embedded in the unconscious and perpetuated leading to gendered oppressions.

For the psychoanalytic feminists, the core argument of their approach is theorizing sexual differences as a terrain of power, intersecting the theory of Michael Foucault⁵². Foucault postulated that the existence of humans and their activities are structured and replicated by various sets of power relations. He defined power as "a set of actions which acts upon other actions" (5). He proposes that any individual is either a subject of or a subject to different rhetoric and practices that involve

fluctuating levels of empowerment. He infers that even though the individuals choose to focus on any one of the governing factors of power such as gender, class or race, however, the complexity of a person's life cannot be lowered into any one of the categories. Besides, Foucault argues that power functions in analogous ways such as "by seduction and incitement and not simply by force and restraint, to make us accomplices in our own subjection" (6). The balance of gender and sex implies the mending of subjects in two different confined positions such as the masculine subject and the feminine subject, as the process of positioning the subject offers separate powers. "What are 'subject-positions'? To be a subject, one must tacitly identify oneself as a subject and do so, implicitly, under a certain description-for instance, in the chief modern form, as a unitary, autonomous, thinking agent" (Stone 9).

When gender identity is linked to the subject, it emerges as a feminine or masculine subject with various approaches and intentions for defying its identity. According to Julia Kristeva, the undertaking of current tussles is to refuse our identities rather than to discover our individuality. She hypothesizes the struggles of women in a way that offers the gender-specific aspects of power in her essay, "Women's Time"⁵³. She argued that essentially the women's claim for equality with men conceals or disputes the individuality as stipulated by the position placed in the procreation and the socio-symbolic order. While the essence of subjectification as masculine or feminine may function on men and women equally, however, the identities and positions conferred upon them are different.

Nancy Julia Chodorow writes in her essay "Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective" that;

In the development of gender identification for girls it is not the existence of core gender identity, the unquestionable knowledge that one is female, that is

problematic. Rather, it is the later-developed conflicts concerning this identity, and the identifications, learning, and cognitive choices that it implies. The difficulties that girls have in establishing a “feminine” identity do not stem from the inaccessibility and negative definition of this identity, or its assumption by denial (as in the case of boys). They arise from identification with a negatively valued gender category, and an ambivalently experienced maternal figure, whose mothering and femininity, often conflictual for the mother herself, are accessible, but devalued. Conflicts here arise from questions of relative power, and social and cultural value, even as female identification and the assumption of core gender identity are straightforward. I would argue that these conflicts come later in development, and are less pervasively determining of psychological life for women than are masculine conflicts around core gender identity and gender difference. (16)

The psychoanalytic feminists offer very distinct discourses of gender that embody the essence of the theory. A core idea of the theory is the maternal body. Over and over, it has been elucidated as the context, condition, the initial home and vessel which everyone departs from to metamorphose to their true self. In the modern age, the ideas of female selfhood and female subjectivity have been complicated. In the twentieth century, psychoanalysis has pioneered the acknowledgement that the individuals’ initial bond with their mothers is crucial in the shaping of their selfhood. The mothers set the base for the development of the selfhood and the potential for subjectivity, which, nevertheless, demand for withdrawal from the maternal body to actualize its completion.

Luce Irigaray posits that the individual gradually detaches from the mother to exist as a female self and this view asserts subjectivity upon a repudiation of the

female incorporation. She argues that women, while subjecting herself to any theory, unknowingly abandons the specificity of her association with her imaginary link to her own bodily form. Alternatively, women can suppose subjectivity by emulating men and inhabit their female body by being reduced to mere objects. “Thus, Irigaray concludes, woman ‘submits to being objectified by discourse-insofar as she is “female”. Re-objectifying her own self whenever she claims to identify herself as a masculine subject” (Stone 7).

Irigaray’s views and similar criticisms paved the way to the expedition of the prospects of female subjectivity. Feminists strived to liberate women from being objectified by re-conceptualising the notions of subjectivity to include women. Female subjectivity and maternal subjectivity, two distinct forms, are variations of each other. Irigaray stated that women were never considered as subjects as they were associated as females with the maternal body. She said female subjectivity can be actualized only when a daughter distinct herself from her mother and maternal body, in agreement with psychoanalysts such as Freud and Lacan.

Julia Kristeva argued that the various ways of positioning oneself within different bonds will lead to different types of subject positions, i.e., re-positioning within the mother’s body will result in a new form of subjectivity. “Thus mothers have increasingly been recognized to mediate children’s transitions from nature to culture, body to mind” (14). According to Kristeva, the individual is displaced from the center as the unconscious impels and the repressed contents rattle the thoughts and actions. Psychoanalytic feminism focuses on the bond between the mother and the child and on the essential aspect of the mother’s body in these associations.

Karen Horney, a German-American psychoanalyst and one of the pioneers of feminist psychology, asserted for an embedded female temperament and not for a

secondary stature grounded on castration. Horney addressed the apparent consequences of penis envy and anticipated emotions of inferiority in women. She tried to recollect the sexuality of women and a legitimate structure of womanhood by aligning with autonomy and condemning cultural norms for women's inferior rank. She posits the theory of psychoanalysis as an exclusive domain of interrogation of the psychic depiction of the unconscious.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist, explored these paradigms in her book *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir disapproves Freud's notion about the existence of masculine libido and the negation of a feminine libido and the social construct of masculinity and male dominance. She regards Freudian psychoanalysis as insufficient to validate women's otherness and elucidates that the penis envy is a misconception as the only factors that women are envious about are societal sovereignty and privileged status that men relish and not due to any anatomical differences. Beauvoir typified psychoanalysis as *sexual monism*⁵⁴ and elucidates that;

Psychoanalysis allots to women the same destiny of self-division and conflict between subjectivity and femininity that follows from social dictates and biological norms. Psychoanalysis presents the characteristics of femininity and subjectivity as divergent paths, incompatible with one another. Women might be able to be full persons, subjects with agency, but only at the expense of their femininity; or they can embark on the course of femininity, but only by sacrificing their independence and agency. This either/or between the masculinization of subjectivity and the submission to femininity retains the moral, political, and metaphysical opposition between free self-creation and corporeal incarceration that precludes the possibility of being both a woman and a subject. (Zakin)

Beauvoir claims that psychoanalysis retains the female to a predestined fate, an oriented and formative life process. Psychoanalysis delegates women with a definite and intrinsic identity which results in the rendering of them as the *other* instead of the *subject*, renouncing their autonomy. Her apprehensions about Freud's concept of femininity emanate from two roots; the feminist uncertainty that the female is interpreted from a masculine lens and the theoretical principle that humans are self-regulating as they determine themselves through self-initiated actions. She asserts that her comprehension and postulations with regard to femininity can unveil autonomy in women by the paradoxical interplay of subjectivity and femininity. Her notions reflect the casting of the female as the other within the male-dominated domain of subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic feminism fails to provide an extensive explication of the hurdle of male supremacy. This school of criticism was often denounced regarding its condition of insensitivity towards divergences among women in addition to the negation of the economic structures that maintain the power dynamics between men and women. These disagreements are overwhelming if the theory is perceived as a unified empirical framework of childhood development or as an absolute feminist theory transcending different forms of social evaluations and criticism. However, psychoanalytic feminist chronicles can be interpreted as theories about the essence of subjectivity and the implication of gender. If these accounts are deciphered as heretic counterparts of gender and construed as compelling vigilance on moral faculties that philosophers have relegated, it is reasonable that feminists adhere to psychoanalytic feminism. This school displays emotional resonance of gender and illuminates relational abilities that are allied with maternal caregiving. At times, sex and gender are elucidated with respect to the distinction between nature versus nurture or biology

versus culture, which Freud obstructs these dualisms. Psychoanalytic feminism intervenes in the various speculations on women within the realm of feminism.

In essence, the school of psychoanalysis and feminism are often in a tenuous coalition. The psychoanalytic notions offer resources about the functioning of the unconscious for varying inquiries in feminism. Psychoanalytic theory provides the foundation for the field of feminism about the diverse psychic perception of gender and sexual differences to understand the various dimensions of female oppression and their societal misrepresentations. The doctrine of differences that distinguishes the males and the females are generated by people thriving in and forming their social, cultural and psychic realms.

Psychoanalysis proposes a display of the forces that urges to arrange, derange and rearrange the associations that sustain them. It enables feminist scrutiny of the inflexible fragments of the patriarchal system encompassing the symbolic links and the inner energies that fortify identity and affix gendered subjects to alliances of hegemony and submission by providing insights into the configuration of subjectivity and the invigorating imagery of social life. To reflect on the concept of differences as absolute, impervious notions and to emphasize on gender differences as the focal point is to embody them and to renounce the factors that forge the definition and parameters of gender. Psychoanalytic feminism offers close inspection of the essential components of civilization, the core aspects of gender and sexual difference. It aids to elucidate the persistence of masculinity and facilitates the feminists to enunciate reformations.

Female Melancholy: An Analysis

The novels chronicled the various dimensions of human suffering, especially about women's inner battles, from the very commencement of their evolution as a

literary form. “Women’s melancholy language shaped literature and made it new” (Alexander 9). The analysis of female melancholy in literature explores the different tales of women and the urge to reformulate the essence and enunciations of women’s language. The writers express their utterly discrete, deep-seated emotions and thoughts of torment through literature. Melancholy in women is moulded by familial, social, cultural, economic, political and most significantly psychological aspects. The selected novels of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides incorporate melancholic feminine figures that represent artistic apprehensions. Franzen and Eugenides employ novel approaches to articulate the extremities of sadness in women. They outline the inner feelings of women at life's injustice by reflecting on melancholy as an emotional expression that leaves an aesthetic legacy. They attempt to unfurl an unsettling perception of the world dynamics and the status of women in it.

The authors’ comprehension of female melancholy is analysed from the theoretical lens of psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek, Christopher Bollas, Timothy Keogh to the psychoanalytic feminist conceptions of Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Jessica Benjamin, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Lauren Berlant, Juliana Schiesari, Luce Irigaray, Kaja Silverman, Melanie Klein and others. The selected novels portray the significance of melancholic temperaments in women as an individual anguish as well as a structural state.

Pathological Reasons

For Sigmund Freud, melancholy is a pathological state in human beings. He used the term *melancholia*, due to its medical value, instead of melancholy. He asserted that melancholic emotion occurred owing to the unmet desire for the repressed contents in the mind. He referred to melancholy as “a process whereby an

individual refuses to let go of a lost object” (Miller 10). He viewed *melancholia* in the capacity of a self-destructive agent of the unconscious. He perceived it as a sort of an attack or a reaction against a cherished possession that was lost.

The radical argument of Freud’s later work is that a melancholic response to loss should not be seen as the pathological exception to the healthier, more common response of mourning but that melancholic responses to loss are so widespread that the ego itself must be understood as the result of early process of melancholic identification. (Middeke 7)

Rather, he conceptualised *melancholia* as a condition of inability in people to surrender their emotions. The perpetuation of this emotion can be over an object, an idea, a person or a lingering desire in the unconscious. For Freud, “the distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (Freud 244). Freud posits that the temporary state of in-depth mourning is a similar reaction to that of melancholy, but is distinct in the sense that it is not a pathological dysfunction. He argues that a melancholic person is so fervent to relinquish the gone object that it is unified with the ego of the psyche. It becomes a prompt of unmourned bereavement.

In the novel, *The Corrections*, Enid Lambert is situated in a circumstance that makes it difficult to unleash her idealized past. She becomes reluctant to accept the deterioration of Alfred’s health and is unlikely romanticised with the obsession of a family reunion for Christmas. As Freud notes, “a good, capable, conscientious woman will speak no better of herself after she develops melancholia than one who is in fact

worthless” (247) which can be drawn in Enid. She saw herself as an unaccomplished woman which is reflected in her words, “I don’t know where my children got their talents, But not from me. I’m a nothing as a cook. A big nothing” (114). Similarly, in *Purity*, the identity of Pip Tyler’s father is hidden from her and her father becomes the lost-object in the story. It creates a void in her mental realms and his absence in her life makes her melancholic. Her inner voice reciprocated; “*It seemed like a father was exactly what you needed*” (55). Her relentless pursuit of her father delineates Freud’s notion of a melancholic individual’s inability to detach from the lost-object in life.

Freud’s notion of repression of the desires in the unconscious can be delineated in the selected novels. In *The Corrections*, one of the basic reasons of Enid’s melancholy is due to the desires she had to repress because of her discontented marital life, a dominating husband and self-directed children who drifted apart from her in search of their fortunes in life. “Enid had a gift for math, and so she not only washed sheets and cleaned toilets and served meals but also handled numbers for her mother. By the time she’d finished high school and the war had ended, she was keeping all the house’s books, billing the boarders, and figuring the taxes” (307). However, her desires were suppressed and she was forced to become a homemaker. She was deprived to build a career that gradually evolved as a reason for her melancholic temperaments.

In the novel, *Freedom*, melancholy in Patty Berglund protrudes majorly from her traumatic childhood experience of rape. In the subsequent three years after the incident, she was so melancholic that “she simply didn’t have a state of consciousness” (52). These memories get repressed in her unconscious and recur throughout her life. In *Purity*, Anabel is smothering and deceptive in revealing Pip’s past, which forms one of the causes of her melancholy. However, Pip’s sorrow is

amplified as she is unable to dislike her mother. Despite her mother's reluctance to reveal her true identity, which forms the repressed desire in her unconscious mind, she finds it difficult to desert her mother and vice versa. It is evident in the conversations between them;

“Well, so then leave me alone. You don't have any rights with me.”

“I have the right to love you more than anything in this world.”

“No you don't!” Pip cried. “No you don't! No you don't! No you don't!” (73)

The Lisbons, in *The Virgin Suicides*, exert debilitating constraints on their daughters. “The Lisbons' sadness was beyond comprehension” (228). They repress the daughters' sexual desires and other passions, driving them to self-annihilation. In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine is enthralled by the idealized romantic fantasies in the Victorian novels. The unattained desire for an ideal love life gets repressed in her unconscious mind. Such unaccomplished entrancements make her melancholic.

Freud also augmented his concepts of eros and thanatos in psychoanalysis. For Freud, the two forces that drove people were the life instincts (eros) and the death instincts (thanatos). The former incorporated sexual reflexes and reproduction while the latter integrated revulsion and destruction. In *Purity*, Pip's attraction towards several men delineates Freud's eros. It drove her life forward amidst her struggles. Their refusal of her romantic encounters direct towards thanatos. She encountered temporary death instincts in life because of her inability to cope up with such situations. “The only thing that changed was that she was able to sob at her loss of Stephen, off and on, for many hours” (54). Freud's famous theory of the Oedipus complex can also be drawn in Pip. Her attraction towards elderly men stems from this Oedipus complex of a child's sexual attraction towards the parent of the opposite gender. The absence of her father may have driven her attraction towards elderly men

to compensate for the lost love from a father. In Pip, this desire or attraction in the early stages of her development is repressed that it surfaces in the later years of her life, fueling her melancholic state of mind.

Enid also undergoes eros and thanatos in *The Corrections*. Enid adheres to the eros of her fantasized outlook of a family reunion. The repudiation of her reality and the possibility of the family reunion concurrently stimulate the thanatos in her life. The children saw the mother's interference in their lives as an obligation; "It was a burden to have a mother need you so extremely, to be responsible for her bliss, Gary knew this" (191). Her melancholy is simply a consequence of her relentless yearning for the past and her reluctance to succumb to her disintegrating present. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the Lisbon daughters clung onto the thanatos that paves their melancholy to a self-destruction end to their lives. From the Freudian perspective, the cause of melancholy in the selected characters is because of their repressed desires, the Oedipal Complex and inner wounds.

Symbolic Causes

Lacan's notion of melancholy is rooted in Freud's theories. Lacan moulded subjectivity of the individuals in accord with his three orders of imaginary, real and symbolic stages. He argued that the melancholic subject is "in two places at once, split between the 'unreal' world of social being and their 'real' existence of absolute solitude" (Hook 11). He posits that melancholy stemmed from the unprocessed synthesis of bereavement into the symbolic order that comprises social norms, language and meaning. He did not view melancholy as an internalised loss in people. Anabel's refusal of her family inheritance in *Purity* symbolizes the repudiation of the symbolic order of Lacan. It led to melancholic temperaments in Anabel and in turn affected Pip as she became financially unstable while growing up.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the Lisbon daughters feel melancholic because of their limited access to the Symbolic order of language and social agency. “Inside their house they were prisoners; outside, lepers. And so they hid from the world, waiting for someone-for us-to save them” (193). Their suicides are a collision with the Real order as they finally select utter rejection of the world. Melancholy in Madeleine in *The Marriage Plot* results from the breakdown of her imaginary order. The ideal concept of romance as depicted in the Victorian novels fails to meet her expectations in reality. She felt melancholic when she came to know about Leonard’s disease that shattered all her concepts of romance and life in general;

Given more time, Madeleine could have separated and identified the welter of emotions that were now surging through her. There was a foreground of panic. Behind this were embarrassment and anger for being the last to know. But underneath everything, bubbling up, was a strange buoyancy. (110)

Lacan’s mirror stage introduces the conflict between the unified sense of the self and the disintegrated reality. In *Freedom*, Patty’s identity is profoundly ruptured as she regards herself a failure as a mother and a wife. It creates a bridge between her ideal self and her real self which leads her to be melancholic. Initially, “Patty was inclined to want to be homemaker and an outstanding mother. “I want to live in a beautiful old house and have two children,” she told Walter” (101). However, she encountered a recurring sense of melancholy as her fantasy of a joyful marital life failed to be a reality.

Lacan also seems to be in alliance with Freud in his conception that melancholy can occur due to unfulfilled desires for the lost object. For instance, in *Freedom*, Richard Kitz becomes the lost object which Patty longs for. Her unfulfilled

desire to reconcile with him is a reason for her melancholy in the initial years of her marriage.

Patty was in a very low place that night, the lowest ever, and had to keep forcing herself to think of her children. Her pain levels, though perhaps no greater than Walter's, were great indeed. And Richard was the person who'd put her in this situation. Richard was the only person who could understand it, the only person she didn't think she'd die of shame to see, the only person she was sure still wanted her. There was nothing she could do now about having wrecked Walter's life, and so, she thought, she might as well try to save her own. (540)

Lacan, in general, posited melancholy as a consequence of the bridge between the Symbolic and Real stages. He pointed out that melancholy is an intrinsic and systemic impasse of incorporating identity into language and society.

Factors of Fantasy

Slavoj Žižek conceptualised melancholy as an outcome of the unfortunate longing of something lost that never existed in reality. He calls it a *fantasy*. For Žižek, the society enforces fantasies upon the individuals that they pursue only to deem them lacking. In *The Corrections*, Enid's melancholy stems from her futile longing for a family reunion. Her desire emerges from her fantasy of a happy family thereafter. In alignment with Lacan's notions, the Midwestern norms that Enid integrates into her life constitute the empty signifiers that plunge her psyche into sorrow. Her failure to realise the reality of the family reunion and the mental space of her children caused melancholy in her. After Alfred's death, "she felt that nothing could kill her hope now, nothing" (653).

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine's concepts of an idealized romance turn out to be an unachievable fantasy that leads her to be melancholic. "Looking back, Madeleine realized that her college love life had fallen short of expectations" (29). The failure to actualize the ideal construction of the fantasised version of love disintegrates her. "Sometimes, the emptiness of the apartment made Madeleine want to cry for all it suggested about Leonard's aloneness in the world" (167). However, unlike the other melancholic female characters, she chooses to abscond this fantasy by leaving Leonard. In Žižek's lens of melancholy, the female characters weep over the fantasies and the deceptive assurances of their life. Their melancholy protrudes from their investment in unrealized ideological fantasies.

Elusive Elements

Christopher Bollas postulated that melancholy arose from an elusive and implicit thought or idea in the unconscious. For Bollas, these thoughts and ideas mould the psyche of the humans but they are left unexplored. In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine is unconsciously fixated with torment as an indispensable aspect of love. "She was petrified of becoming the half-alive person she'd been before" (200). The characterisation of Madeleine is in sync with Bollas' concept of projective identification. The narrator ascribes Leonard's mental state of depression in a lighter version compared to her psyche and her melancholic mood swings. Like the suppositions of the earlier psychoanalysts, Bollas suggested that the melancholic individuals experience an unrealistic sense of loss that is often internalised.

In *The Corrections*, Enid's melancholy is due to the internalised bereavement over the unachievable life she longed to experience. "She intended to be comfortable in life as well as happy," (308) but unfortunately she couldn't achieve it. The unfulfilled life that she desired forms the implicit idea in her life. Her sense of loss

over the implicit notion of a happy marital life makes her melancholic. Bollas refers to the unarticulated and idealized object of desire in the unconscious as a transformational catalyst. It becomes the source of melancholy that echoes the inner angst of the individual. Enid's existence centers on Alfred and she finds solace in taking care of him. "Her life would have been easier if she hadn't loved him so much, but she couldn't help loving him. Just to look at him was to love him" (309). Here, Alfred becomes the transformational catalyst for Enid's melancholy. Her reluctance to accept his deteriorating health is also an indication of her fear of losing her own identity.

In *Freedom*, Richard Kitz emerges as a temporary transformational catalyst in Patty's life. Richard emerges as the source of disillusionment rather than the pleasant respite that she envisioned. It ultimately exacerbates her melancholy. However, she is in love with Walter throughout her life. She says to Walter that;

"You can believe me or not, but it's the truth. It was just a thing I had to write for myself, to try to get better. It was a therapy project, Walter. I gave it to Richard last night to try to explain why I stayed with you. Always stayed with you. Still want to stay with you." (491)

Bollas outlines that melancholy is an internalised phenomenon formed by the sense of loss of something. It occurs due to the futile presence of a transformational catalyst and elusive objects in life. He refers to melancholy as a cognitive paradigm through which the world is perceived. It forms the aftermath of the individual's reluctance to disengage from the internalised desires of the unconscious.

Unmourned Origins

Timothy Keogh's notion of melancholy is rooted in the theories of Freud and Melanie Klein. Keogh stated that melancholy emanates from the sense of

disintegration of the self, unprocessed bereavement and persistent yearning of something lost. In *Freedom*, Patty's melancholy is embedded in her sense of disintegrated identity. Her melancholy is a marker of her dissociated self as she adheres to a futile, ideal sense of being a perfect wife and mother. Also her mourning over the childhood rape is rather incomplete that causes recurring episodes of melancholy in her life. "Patty couldn't remember why she hadn't screamed" (49). In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine views herself as the heroine of a romantic chronicle. The melancholic temperaments unfold in her while she fails to dispel her illusions. It fosters her to seek an outward locus of approval of her identity as "she couldn't be herself" (340) from then.

Through Keogh's perspectives, Enid's melancholy in *The Corrections* is caused due to her fixation on the unlikely desires and her powerlessness to tackle emotional vulnerabilities. Alfred "could cheat on Enid in Enid's own bed without giving her a shred of legally admissible proof, and as long as he kept the affair private to the extent of not dozing at dinner parties Enid tolerated it, as sensible wives had always done, and so it was an infidelity for which as the decades passed there never seemed to come a reckoning" (324). However, it had definitely caused irreversible pain to Enid. The accumulation of this unmourned grief would have plunged her into a state of melancholy. Her life progresses in the hope that her prospects would ameliorate but life only augments her melancholic dynamics of her mental terrain.

In *Purity*, Pip's sorrow over the concealed identity of her father is rather unmourned. It is the major course of melancholy in her life. In *The Virgin Suicides*, Keogh's theory of melancholy can be drawn in the Lisbon sisters. Their suicides pinpoint towards the unmourned grief over the restrictions in the family as well as over the loss of Cecilia. Ever "since Cecilia's suicide the Lisbons could hardly wait for

night to forget themselves in sleep” (55). Their silences and internalised sorrow implied volumes rather than the outwardly restrictions. Their sorrow is left unmourned that it leads to self-destructive actions such as the collective suicides. It was difficult to “understand how the Lisbons kept so quiet, why they didn’t wail to heaven or go mad” (169). They lacked the capabilities to process and release their emotions. The negation of their autonomy, romantic entanglements and the very elegiac ambiance of their house catered to their melancholic moods. These unmourned grieves got accumulated in their psyche that lead to the series of suicides in the family. The neighbours find the remaining sisters as quite normal and unaffected after the youngest sister’s suicide. However, they could have mourned over the loss for the solace of their mind. From Keogh’s lens, these unmourned grieves could have hoarded leading to the subsequent suicides. Keogh viewed melancholy as a psychic progression of the unprocessed emotional vulnerability of sorrow that gets accumulated in varying degrees.

Maternal Sources

The psychoanalytic theories are often criticised for being posited from a male-oriented approach. The psychoanalytic feminists revamped the psychoanalysts’ notions on melancholy through feminist revisions. They provided deeper nuances about the female melancholy that is entangled in the turmoil between internal and external pressures. One of the pioneers in this direction was Julia Kristeva. She argued that “melancholia is a malady that affects individuals in modernity to a greater extent” (Miller 21). The selected novels explicate Kristeva’s notions of melancholy as a substantial and a continuing perspective on life occurrences that seeks meaning through art and literature. “Kristeva explains that the melancholy cast of mind can generate its own art” (Alexander 5). The select novels put forth the shattering world

of the melancholic women that create a psychic void in them. Kristeva's comprehension of the female melancholy integrates the semiotic connection from the maternal perspective. She posits that melancholy in women differs from that in men in accord with the differences that they hold in the relationship with their mothers. She views melancholy in women as the result of the process of repressing the semiotic at the pre-Oedipal stage of the formation of emotions.

Kristeva defines melancholia as 'an abyss of sorrow, a non-communicable grief that at times [...] lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself'. In melancholia loss is not accepted, and language is therefore unable to draw the subject out of the state of mourning. (DeGasperin)

For Kristeva, melancholy in a woman stems from her disconnection of the bond with her mother as she enters into the realm of the Symbolic order of societal exposure to language and worldly pursuits.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the Lisbon daughters reside in isolation. They are confined to a silenced world created by their parents, especially their dominating mother. They are incapable of unleashing their feelings of grief and are distanced from the outside world of language. It results in the formation of an unarticulated psychic wound that forbids them to get embedded into the world of language structures or the Symbolic order. The daughters feel a sense of disconnection from their own authoritative mother. The resulting isolation makes the Lisbon girls seek an "exile in a state of sadness that is divorced from the play of the signifier. In this context, however, language loses its ability to represent the drives and affects of the repressed" (Kritzman 146). From Kristeva's lens, the Lisbon girls are silenced and

their identity is disregarded. The silence and the obscurity enforced upon them, especially by their mother, lead to melancholy in them.

In *The Corrections*, the depreciation of motherhood in Enid caters to her melancholic temperaments. “She would sooner have died than admit that her own children disappointed her” (345). Throughout her life, she has always attempted to prioritise her duties as a mother and a wife over her personal aspirations; however, she is the least valued person in the lives of her children and husband.

And yet, on that October night, as she knelt on the bathroom floor, Enid had the heretical thought that it might after all have been wiser, in her maternal homilies, to have laid less stress on marriage. It occurred to her that Denise’s rash act might have been prompted, in some tiny part, by her wish to do the moral thing and please her mother.... This sickening conundrum confronted Enid: that it might actually have been preferable for Denise to go ahead and commit adultery.... Except that Denise should never have been attracted to Emile in the first place! It was the same problem Enid had with Chip and even Gary: formatch. They didn’t want the things that she and her friends and all her friends’ children wanted. Her children wanted radically, shamefully other things. (139)

From Kristeva’s perspectives, Enid’s maternal figure is gradually expunged in the Symbolic order that makes her melancholic.

In *Freedom*, Patty is disengaged from her emotional self that triggers her to indulge in undermining behaviors and infidelity. As Kristeva notes, the root cause of melancholy in Patty emerges from her unprocessed pain of the trauma of her childhood rape. Her extramarital affair with Richard reflects Kristeva’s concept of the incomplete reconciliation with the semiotic order. Her bond with her mother Joyce is

eroded that this disengagement with the maternal figure protrudes melancholy in her from a young age. “She’d tried, for nineteen years, to do everything for Jessica that her own mother hadn’t done for her...It was Joey, not Jessica, that she’d gone with her overflowing heart. But the road to Joey was closed and locked now, due to her mistakes” (193). These futile attempts to become an approachable mother to her children intensified her melancholy. “It was clear from the other families’ very body language that she hadn’t been a great mom in the ways that counted most” (194).

In *Purity*, Pip’s bond with her mother Anabel is palpably strained as Anabel is reluctant to reveal the identity of her father. Her resentment in the direction of her mother forms the crux of Pip’s melancholy. “Pip felt a distinct urge to slap her in the face, and then to inflict pain in cunning, invisible ways. “Well, it’s not working,” she said. “I’m not safe. You have failed to keep me safe” (35). Pip develops a disconnect with her mother that aligns with Kristeva’s concept about how the maternal bond becomes a key aspect in the formation of melancholic dispositions in women.

Kristeva “sees a certain form of metaphoric activity as melancholy’s ultimate prevention and cure” (Smith 46). In *The Marriage Plot*, there is a window for this metaphoric endeavor in Madeleine’s love life. Her bond with Mitchel abates her melancholic essences. However, Kristeva also posits that melancholy “transcends the individual and must be understood as a relation between self and world that cannot be “cured” simply by altering the constitution of the melancholic’s psyche through medication” (Miller 11).

The Marriage Plot is open-ended with regard to the possibility of a marriage between Madeleine and Mitchell and the recurring occurrence of melancholic temperaments in Madeleine. Similarly, the rebelliousness in Lux and her secretive acts to escape from her mental frustrations in *The Virgin Suicides* are indications

towards this metaphoric activity. But as the novel ends, the metaphoric activity in the case of Lux becomes futile as she commits suicide like the rest of the sisters. Kristeva is one of the first psychoanalytic feminists to revise the psychoanalytics' framework of melancholy in women from a feminine perspective. Her postulations of female melancholy provide an in-depth analysis of how women endured and defied sorrow in the selected novels.

Structural Concerns

Luce Irigaray, one of the pioneers of psychoanalytic feminism, posits that the patriarchal structures and the systemic suppression of an individual's desires create melancholic dispositions in women. She opposed the earlier theories of psychoanalysis which framed femininity as a negation or lack and woman as the *other*, moulded by the patriarchal discourse. She conceptualised melancholy in women as a systemic effacement of female agency.

Luce Irigaray refers to such female melancholy as a state of 'dereliction' and argues that the masculinist bias of Western metaphysics traps femininity in an unrepresentable, melancholic position and women as objects of exchange in the male imaginary. According to Irigaray, women remain trapped in this position because there does not exist a language which adequately represents and mediates the mother-daughter relationship. (Smith 48)

Irigaray asserts that women are deprived of their own linguistic expression. The existence of the phallogentric structures makes it rooted in patriarchal obliteration, self-effacement and muted desires due to phallogentric structures.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, The Lisbon sisters' catastrophic end indicates Irigaray's argument of viewing women as 'the other'. Their existence is visible and

yearned but often negated and silenced. It is mediated through the male gaze in the novel.

Cecilia had released an airborne virus which the other girls, even in coming to save her, had contracted. No one cared how Cecilia had caught the virus in the first place. Transmission became explanation. The other girls, safe in their own rooms, had smelled something strange, sniffed the air, but ignored it...Contagious suicide made it palpable. (153)

The actual cause of their collective suicides is hindered in the novel. It simply suggests the confinement and silencing of their inner happenings. Cecilia's suicide is the indication of Irigaray's silencing of the inner realms and the suppression of the desires in women.

Amy Schraff, who knew Cecilia in school, said that Dominic had been all she could talk about for the final week before commencement. Instead of studying for exams, she spent study halls looking up ITALY in the encyclopedia. She started saying "Ciao," and began slipping into St. Paul's Catholic Church on the Lake to sprinkle her forehead with holy water. In the cafeteria, even on hot days when the place was thick with the fumes of institutional food, Cecilia always chose the spaghetti and meatballs, as though by eating the same food as Dominic Palazzolo she could be closer to him. At the height of her crush she purchased the crucifix Peter Sissen had seen decorated with the brassiere. (18)

Her diary remains the solitary record that provides a partial exposure to her life.

However, "most of the diary told us more about how the girls came to be than why they killed themselves" (39). Therese, the most intelligent daughter in the family, also suffers from the marginalization of female epistemology and agency. The suppression

of her intellectual realms leads to profound melancholic temperaments. Similar denial of one's emotional expressions is apparent in Enid in *The Corrections*. The patriarchal power structure of the family denies her the freedom to acquire the sense of unified whole that plunges her into the state of melancholy. In *Freedom*, Patty's tendencies towards alcohol consumption, as she "had alcoholic proclivities" (310), and resentment reveal how the societal constraints result in distorted behaviors to deal with melancholy;

A week before the date, she repaired to the lake in solitude and gave herself entirely to her derangement. It consisted of getting stumbling drunk every evening, awakening later in panic and remorse and indecision, then sleeping through the morning, then reading novels in a suspended state of false calm, then jumping up and pacing for an hour or more in the vicinity of the telephone, trying to decide whether to call Richard and tell him not to come, and finally opening a bottle to make the whole thing go away for a few hours. (188)

In the case of Pip in *Purity*, her melancholy protrudes from the implicit bereavement over the concealment of her father's identity. "When Pip was very young, vague stories had satisfied her, but by the time she was eleven her questions had grown so insistent" (33). The secrecy of her identity and the subsequent melancholy indicate her confinement within a male-dominated society that negates her agency and her own true identity.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine is melancholic as she compromises her own identity by sacrificing herself for Leonard's care which mirrors Irigaray's notion that melancholy stems from the formation of female identity through male desires. Madeleine seems to be fully immersed in Leonard that she finds no joy in her own

achievements such as her graduation. “The problem was that Madeleine, for the first time in her life, wanted no part of it. She wasn’t proud of herself. She was in no mood to celebrate. She’d lost faith in the significance of the day and what the day represented” (5). Irigaray’s framework on female melancholy represents the structural subjugation in women. She posits that melancholy in women emerges as a result of the denigration of their identities, subjectivity, desires and agencies.

Social Motives

Juliet Mitchell juxtaposes the theories of Freud and Lacan into feminism to scrutinise the social construction of melancholy in women in the male-dominated society. Mitchell critiques Freud’s theory on melancholy and mourning as she argues that his notions fail to provide a nuanced interpretation of female melancholy in accord with the repression of the desires and internalised loss. She posits that women encounter dual repression; first through their relegation from the masculine-centered structures and second through the internalised association with the denigrated maternal figure. It culminates in female melancholy profoundly entwined with the surrender of selfhood, agency and autonomy. In *The Corrections*, Denise experiences melancholy mainly due to her conflict with her sexual identity. She develops affairs with both men and women which is usually unacceptable in the society. “She had a thing for a straight woman who was married to a man whom she herself might have liked to marry. It was a reasonably hopeless case. And St. Jude gave and St. Jude took away” (471). Her profession as a chef defies Lambert's Midwestern values and this radical step is an underlying cause of her melancholy.

In *Purity*, Pip's sense of incompleteness due to the concealment of her true identity is the source of melancholy in her. She wondered “why did people keep asking her about her father?” (305) The societal ideology imposes upon individuals

the necessity to know about their origins and familial heritage in an effort to feel the impression of completion. Pip's state of sorrow embodies this void of female agency in the patriarchal society. Her erratic actions reflect Mitchell's notion that female melancholy often protrudes from the society's negation of their ability to define their unified identity.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine sacrifices her own ambitions as she gets intensely enmeshed in taking care of Leonard "of worrying about Leonard, of constantly keeping tabs on him, of wondering what had happened if he was a half hour late coming home" (363). It reflects Mitchell's suggestion that female melancholy is a response to the societal gender roles that expect them to relinquish their needs and aspirations in relationships. Her ultimate parting from Leonard can be comprehended as the feminist repudiation of melancholy that aligns Mitchell's concept that women must forge the autonomy of their lives beyond the confines of societal pressures. Mitchell's notion on female melancholy facilitates the social aspects of this state of mind rather than perceiving it as an isolated individual pathology.

Rooted in Subjectivity

Nancy Chodorow theorises the interplay of gender identity, maternity and socialization in moulding female melancholy and subjectivity. Chodorow argues that "the basic feminine self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (Wilson 93). She posited that women tend to conflate loss as a diminishment of the self that transforms melancholy into a persistent and debilitating state. For Chodorow, the maternal bond lays the foundation for the melancholic experiences in women leading to gender-specific articulations. The fluidity in the bond between the mother and the individual plays a pivotal role in the establishment

of the identity in women. It often acts as an impediment to the establishment of a sense of liberation in women. The misogynistic society reinforces melancholy in women by disparaging the maternal bonds and demanding gender specific roles from women.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine is inextricably associated with Leonard's mental turmoil that she finds herself depleting her sense of self. She realised that "when you stood between somebody you loved and death, it was hard to be awake and it was hard to sleep" (372). Chodorow's notion that women's relational tendency to nurture and heal others often culminates in melancholy. When women fall in love, they often end up sacrificing and relinquishing their own identity. So is the case with Madeleine. "His suffering was sharpened by the knowledge that he was inflicting it on her. But he was unable to stop it" (375). In *The Corrections*, similar depletion of the sense of self can be surmised in Enid as she revolves her life around taking care of others. "She'd felt Wrong all her life" (652). Enid symbolizes Chodorow's concept of maternal abnegation. Chodorow suggests that the lack of recognition of the emotional labor in women leads to a lasting sense of sorrow. Enid finds it difficult to define her identity that is independent of others but her sacrifices are often taken for granted. A similar identity crisis can be drawn in Patty as she is entrapped in the role of the caregiver in the family in *Freedom*. She struggles to find the balance between the role as a giver of the family and her individual desires. Walter even helps her to occupy in things outside of the role of a homemaker;

Becoming a front-desk greeter at Republic of Health did for Patty's spirits everything Walter had hoped a job would do. Everything and, alas, more. Her depression immediately seemed to lift, but this only showed how misleading the word "depression" was, because Walter was certain that her old

unhappiness and anger and despair were all still present beneath her bright and brittle new way of being. (352)

Patty's infidelity with Richard is a means of her temporary escape from her sorrows in life. In the process, she fails to disengage herself from the maternal figure and the role of a caregiver in the family. This incapability to disconnect herself from others makes her melancholy linger throughout her life. Like Enid, Patty internalises her agonies, mirroring Chodorow's argument that melancholy often takes the form of a silent and insidious emotional ache. In *Purity*, Anabel also suffers from melancholic encounters as she hides her true identity. Her life revolves around Pip, but this connection only plunges her into emotional austerity as she relinquishes to reveal their true selves. She detaches herself from the happenings of the world and it leads to unresolved sorrows of varying degrees in both Anabel and Pip.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the mother strips of the subjectivity in the Lisbon daughters due to the stifling ambiance of suppressed emotions within the family as "the girls felt being imprisoned in it" (164). In the perspective of Chodorow, this sense of detachment from their mother led to melancholy in them. They experienced restriction in their formative years when they needed nurturing and care from their mother that hindered the development of their selfhood. Chodorow posits that melancholy in women is a broader systemic phenomenon that is often linked to their identity crisis and struggles to seek autonomy and agency.

Political Aspects

Judith Butler delineates that gender itself is inherently melancholic as it is forged through the negation of the desires of the same gender. Butler posits that the state of melancholy "results in the failure to displace into words" (Butler 93) and is the "result of the internalization of a lost object of love" (83). Melancholic state acts

as a key aspect in the fragmented formation of gender identity in women as they are conditioned to oblige the societal norms.

Yet, Butler in a next argumentative step conceptualizes not only the gendered psyche but also the sexed body as a product of melancholic incorporation.

Thereby, Butler pleads for a radically new interpretation of ‘melancholic anatomy’ approximately four centuries later Robert Burton’s epoch-making

The Anatomy of Melancholy. (Middeke 8)

Butler argued that melancholy is a political phenomenon that governed the human experiences of grief, identity and desire through societal principles and power dynamics of gender discrimination. She proposed that “what ensues is a culture of gender melancholy in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love” (Moglen 183).

In *The Virgin Suicides*, melancholy in the Lisbon daughters proceeds from the stifling of their freedom of expression. The parents’ strict rules and their interference into the daughters’ privacy show the male oriented policing of women’s agency. Bonnie’s adherence to her mother’s austere rules in the house implies a kind of conformity to the melancholic state of mind as she subdues her inner self. Butler’s notion of the loss without grief generates melancholic subjects which is the case with the subsequent suicides of the Lisbons. In *The Corrections*, Enid’s desires are compromised to sustain obsolete family ideals.

There were a thousand things she *wanted* from life, and since few were available at home with Alfred in St. Jude, she had forcibly channeled all her wanting into the numbered days, the mayfly lifetime, that the luxury cruise would last. For months the cruise had been her mind’s safe parking space, the future that made her present bearable. (335)

Enid's fixation with the ideal vision of the future and her unrequited desires reflects the confinement to the social conventions imposed upon women. Further, Denise experiences melancholic sequences due to Enid's disapproval of her homosexual flings that reflects Butler's argument that "the ways in the ritualized prohibition of homosexual love—and, indeed, all rigid forms of gender and sexual identification—creates personal and cultural melancholia" (Moglen 183).

In *Purity*, Pip's melancholy is rooted in her inadequacy to interpret herself outside the realms of roles assigned to her by the society. As Butler argues, the inherent self is formed by the political norms of the society. Pip feels sorrowful as the society demands her to synchronise with the politicised version of the self which she fails to possess in reality. In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine idolizes the romantic heroines of the Victorian literature which generates episodes of melancholy in her. "Madeleine's love troubles had begun at a time when the French theory she was reading deconstructed the very notion of love" (19). The cause of her melancholy is more than her inability to make a turnaround for Leonard. But it comes from a profound despair over her adherence to the established gender norms. Butler asserts that melancholy is a political occurrence of gender regulation that is moulded by social standards.

Relational Variables

Jessica Benjamin accentuated on the relational dimensions of melancholy in women. Benjamin postulates that melancholy in women is the "result of the imposed denial of cross-gender identifications" (Moglen 183). She argues that the obliviousness between selfhood and otherness spawned female melancholy. Melancholy is caused by the suppression of women, negating their autonomy in the

society. Women internalise their selfless actions and they adhere to the societal expectation of them to subjugate their individual ambitions.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, Cecilia's suicide in the Lisbon household is an indication of the repudiation of the imposed feminine identity. "When they spoke of her, it was to say that they has always expected Cecilia to meet a bad end, and that far from viewing the Lisbon girls as a dingle species, they had always seen Cecilia as apart, a freak of nature" (107). Correspondingly, Lux's amorous encounters are a revelation of her subdued sorrows that springs from the futility to find her independent self. "Her thrashing, cries, scowls of agony only emphasized the inertness of Cecilia" (146). In the case of Mary, she takes efforts to embrace the societal norms of femininity following her initial abortive suicidal act. It simply intensified her feeling of sorrow. She seems to be obsessed with herself;

Mary spent hours looking into her portable mirror. Set in an oval of pink plastic, the mirror was surrounded by exposed bulbs like a mirror in an actress's dressing room. A switch allowed Mary to simulate various times and weathers. There were settings for "morning," "afternoon," and "evening," as well as one for "brite sun" and "overcast." For hours Mary would sit before the mirror, watching her face swim through the alterations of counterfeit worlds.

She wore dark glasses in sunshine, and bundled up under clouds. (171)

Her death implies that reverting to the hollow societal constructs of femininity cannot adjudicate melancholy. In *The Corrections*, Denise's endeavor to reconcile with her cross-gender identification through her career as a chef as well as her erotic relationships with both men and women delineate the root cause of episodes of melancholy in her. Much later, Denise understood "that she wasn't a lesbian at all" (441). Denise's melancholy echoes Benjamin's postulation regarding the discrepancy

of cross-gender identification. In *Freedom*, Patty's marriage imposes upon her the roles of a wife and a mother at the cost of the loss of her identity as an athlete. In this context, her extramarital affair with Richard is a figurative endeavor to reclaim her fragmented self.

In *Purity*, Anabel refuses her family inheritance, opulence and sensual desires in life. She holds a concealed love for Tom Aberant and an altruistic maternal devotion for Pip. These circumstances lead to an internalisation of her sorrows. Benjamin's theory of relational construction of melancholy renounces women's confinement into the stereotypical feminine roles. She posits that female melancholy is a reaction against the rigidity of the society that erodes the relational aspects of female identity.

Formative Dimensions

Dorothy Dinnerstein associated melancholy with the influence of early psychological formation during childhood. "Dinnerstein and Chodorow examine the conditioning society gives to women, who can also replicate oppressive systems" (Alexander 2). Since women are assigned the duty of caregivers, children are often attached to their mothers in the early childhood stage. Detachment from the mothers in the later stages of life results in implicit indignation and melancholy. Dinnerstein argues that women are conditioned from birth to be unconsciously confined to selfless endeavors. They experience melancholy because of the implicit bereavement over their limited agency. In *The Corrections*, Enid is caged in her house to perform her duties as a wife and a mother. She conforms to the Midwestern traditional values that expects women to do socially constructed roles from childhood. "It frightened and shamed Enid, the loving-kindness of other couples. She was a bright girl with good business skills who had gone directly from ironing sheets and tablecloths at her

mother's boardinghouse to ironing sheets and shirts chez Lambert" (279). In alliance with Dinnerstein's notion, her inability to disengage herself from these conventional responsibilities infused deep rooted melancholy into her psyche.

Congruent causes of melancholy can be drawn in Patty in *Freedom*. Her discordant bond with her mother moulded her emotional paradigm in childhood. In her younger days, Patty repudiated the conventional notions of femininity by becoming an athlete in college. The confrontation with the rape changed her perspectives in life. She questioned her repudiation of the traditional gendered values and roles. Her adoption of the feminine domestic roles after marriage only intensified her melancholy. Dinnerstein's theory of the influence of the formative years can be discerned in *The Virgin Suicides*, with the imprisonment of the Lisbon daughters resulting in melancholic temperaments in them. They are emotionally shackled in the house in pursuance of their socially constructed roles. Mr. Lisbon believed that "children were only strangers you agreed to live with" (56). Dinnerstein's theory infers melancholy as a structural concern.

Facets of Deception

Lauren Berlant's lens of interpreting melancholy in women demarcates how women are affixed with fake promises and societal illusions. She argues that the non-fulfillment of these fantasies leads to disappointments, emotional depletion and episodes of melancholy in them. She refers to the deceptive promises of the society as cruel optimism and opines that women's attachment to them inflicts intense mental suffering that hinders their joy and progress. Melancholy in this case appears as chronic emotional distress, insidious despair and silent sorrows. Women are often overwhelmed with the patriarchal mandates of unrealistic demands of gender-based obligations. Women's melancholy is moulded by the disconnect between these

deceptive promises and their disillusionment. In *The Corrections*, Enid's melancholy is rooted in her deceptive longing for reconciliation of her family with a Christmas reunion.

It wasn't a wonderful life, but a woman could subsist on self-deceptions like these and on her memories (which also now curiously seemed like self-deceptions) of the early years when he'd been mad for her and had looked into her eyes. (279)

The false hopes in Enid echo Berlant's notion that cruel optimism perpetuates unrealistic expectations in women that consistently falls short. Berlant states that the illusion of happiness can itself be a barrier in the fulfillment of one's desires that leads to melancholy.

In *Freedom*, Patty's enduring passion for Richard is a pattern of cruel optimism as she supposes that love will bring her to bloom. She invests herself into an illusion of the existential redemption of passion that never actualizes in her life. However, her unrealized ideal concepts of love hurl her into the voids of sorrow. In *Purity*, Pip's journey to the discovery of her identity only plunges her into disillusionment in the process. Her pursuit for her father reveals itself as an odyssey for self-discovery. The enlightenment of her past shatters her romanticised notions of life. In Berlant's concept, Pip feels melancholic throughout her life due to these false hopes and disillusionments. She becomes vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine's melancholy is born out of the realisation that her love life lay in tatters. She is left with the feeling of bereft and sadness;

Since breaking up with Leonard, Madeleine had been crying more or less all the time. She cried herself to sleep at night. She cried in the morning, brushing

her teeth. She tried very hard not to cry in front of her roommates and for the most part succeeded. (79)

Her sorrow exacerbates as she understands that the love adventure she imagined is incongruent with reality. Berlant elucidates that melancholy in women is a systemic outcome of the longing to realise the unfeasible things in life. The female melancholy becomes the lingering aftermath of the deceptive promises in the society that perpetually dissolves in the psyche of women.

Gendered Angles

According to Juliana Schiesari, melancholy had been linked with men's states of mind while women's sorrow was often negated as a mental disease. "Schiesari argues that literary texts show virtually no examples of women's melancholia" (Tambling 157). The nuances of the female melancholy were erased from the public acknowledgement that consigned them to navigate an unprocessed and solitary melancholy. She further posited that melancholy is gendered as the inherent coldness in women "seems to limit them to the "cold" version of melancholia, to the symptoms of "torpor, despondency and fear" (Schiesari 108). The society expected women to relinquish their ambitions to prioritize selfless devotion for the family. The society silenced their sufferings and eclipsed to prioritize the male melancholy. In Schiesari's opinion, "woman is... more easily moved to tears,... more prone to despondency and less hopeful than the man" (108). She asserts that female melancholy was invisible, historically neglected and marginalised.

In *The Corrections*, Enid's sufferings and sorrows are seen as fleeting annoyance rather than profound bereavement. The family prioritises Alfred's Parkinson's disease and his mental health while Enid's state of mind is often negated and made invisible. Similarly, Denise's sorrows are also neglected as her independent

character is viewed as a rebellious nature against the Midwestern values. In *Freedom*, Patty's emotional desolation and inner turmoil are dismissed in the family. Her traumatic experience of rape is ignored that sinks her into a chasm of unprocessed sorrow. At several instances, she withholds her tears in the public delineating the gendered dimensions of melancholy;

She was feeling so bad about herself, indeed, that almost any punishment would have seemed appropriate to her. Saving her tears for later—feeling as if she didn't *deserve* whatever emotional advantage she might have gained by crying. (196)

It is clearly evident that though Patty withheld her tears in public, she would have wept at some-time later. She would have preferably chosen night to cry which is analogous to the question raised in *The Corrections* that "Why did wives choose night to cry in?" (323) Her family emphasised on her responsibilities in a marital life and ignored her emotional well-being. In *Purity*, the sorrows of Pip and Anabel are often ignored and not emphasised by the people around them compared to the attention given to Andreas' self-destructive sorrows. This ignorance implies Schiesari's notion of how the society isolates women's sorrows and expects them to conform to societal norms.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the collective suicides stemmed from the absolute ignorance of their nuanced expressions of melancholy. The parents as well as the society failed to acknowledge their sorrows. The circumstances of their deaths are shrouded in mystery that erases the painful reality of the systemic negation of oppression of autonomy. Like Enid, Madeleine's melancholy in *The Marriage Plot* is also ignored and narrowed down to romantic entanglements. The society gave significance to the clinically depressed Leonard and negated Madeleine's state of

mind about “how much she was suffering” (90), who relinquished her aspirations for his well-being. Schiesari asserts that melancholy is gendered and is often inferred as a dismissed condition. She argues that female melancholy is not acknowledged in legitimate and intellectual dimensions as compared to men’s sorrows.

Signs of Denial

Kaja Silverman postulated that the society denies women’s agency and autonomy that leads to melancholy. Silverman attempts to “retain the concept of melancholy as a psychoanalytic concept, related to the subjugation of women: women’s melancholy is a result of the devalued Ego, through the ambiguous identification with the mother” (Chowaniec 57). She conceptualises how female melancholy is constructed through the social norms that expunge women’s voices. Women are objectified and suppressed for the male gaze that they gradually internalise this objectification. For instance, in *The Virgin Suicides*, the Lisbon sisters are silenced in the family and are objectified through the male gaze of the anonymous group of boys. Their melancholy becomes obscure and concealed that their identity is revealed only through the narrators’ perspectives. In *Purity*, Pip’s identity is unveiled through men whom she encounters at different stages of her life. She internalises her sense of selfhood and believes that it will be established only through the discovery of her father.

Pip had arrived on Thirty-Third Street with a hunger to learn practical skills.

And Stephen had taught her these skills. He’d shown her how to spackle, how to caulk, how to operate a power saw, how to glaze a window, how to rewire a scavenged lamp, how to take apart her bicycle, and he’d been so patient with her, so generous, that she (or at least her body) had had a feeling of being

groomed to be a worthier mate for him than Marie, whose domestic skills were strictly of the kitchen. (45)

Pip's existential questions regarding her identity resonate with Silverman's notion that women are hemmed in by stereotypical norms. It suppresses their ability of self-expression that links female melancholy to the unrealistic paradigms.

In *The Corrections*, Denise grapples with familial pressures and romantic entanglements, despite being successful in her career. Her speculation regarding her bisexuality intensifies her melancholy as she struggles to articulate her expressions and establish her true identity in the society. In the case of Enid, her identity and agency is denied by the male-centered familial structures and her sorrows are often ignored by her husband and her children. "Years ago, when they were first married, she'd sometimes cried in the wee hours... that he never failed to ask why she was crying" (323). However, her melancholic state was ignored by both Alfred and her children. In *Freedom*, Patty's autobiography seems to be the only medium for expressing her emotions. She is already in melancholy from the trauma of her childhood rape and it is worsened by the neglect of her opinions and desires in the family since childhood. Her behaviour of disruption and hostility toward Walter pinpoints the impact of melancholic temperaments in her. It aligns with Silverman's concept that the collapse of women's internalisation of their emotions leads to a state of profound melancholy.

In *The Marriage Plot*, the societal construction of ideal femininity denies the agency and the articulation of Madeleine's inner emotions plunging her into melancholy. Madeleine's separation from Leonard indicates her disengagement from the deceptive illusions of the society. Silverman posited that melancholy in women

emanated from the denial of expressing their agency as their identity is often peripheral in the male-dominated discourses.

Sense of Guilt

Melanie Klein views melancholy in women as the consequence of enduring pain at the infantile stage and of the unsettled guilt attached to the loss of something. She puts forth the concept of paranoid-schizoid position, where the individual divides the objects into two categories as good and bad at the very infantile stage. Melancholy makes women incapable of reconciling these two categories in life. It results in a disjointed version of the self in women. She argues that melancholy sometimes creates a death drive in the unconscious that creates the desire for self-annihilation. The melancholy amplifies the unresolved guilt attached with the lost object that leads to self-destructive thoughts. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the Lisbon sisters' melancholy is the outcome of their inadequacy to synthesize their desires with the suppressions they had to bear. The girls are engulfed by the psychic chasm because of their sense of loss over a potential future. It leads to the creation of the death drive in their unconscious mind protruding from the melancholic temperaments. Klein suggests that melancholic women are often haunted by the feeling of guilt in their unconscious that fuels a fervent urge for atonement. They feel obligated to bear the responsibilities of others' well-being amidst their own sorrows.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine is very much aware of the fact that the relationship with Leonard will only drain her and hinder her growth. But she decides to take care of Leonard which is analogous to Klein's concept of a melancholic individual who struggles to revitalise the fractured relationships with their loved ones. The unconscious guilt attached with the very thought of leaving Leonard intensifies

her melancholy. Also, her casual encounter with Thurston plunges her into melancholy because of the guilt attached to it;

In its horror her hangover was seamless with the horror of the night before.

Here, emotional turbulence achieved physiological expression: the sick vodka-soaked taste in her mouth the very flavor of regret; her nausea self-reflexive, as if she didn't want to expel the contents of her stomach but her own personhood. Madeleine's only comfort came from knowing that she'd remained—technically—inviolate. (91)

In *Freedom*, there are instances when Patty's guilt paved way to melancholy over her relationship with Richard. "Patty's cloud of guilt and worry now condensed into a storm of sentiment. She wept and wept" (85).

In *Purity*, Anabel isolates herself from the world which echoes Klein's notion of death drive. Pip has "grown up with a mother so unworldly" (45). Here her escape or self-erasure from the world represents the death drive that plunges her into the abyss of sorrows. It is simply a reflection of Klein's concept that melancholy results in an illusion of disappearance instead of endurance. Pip often feels melancholy attached to the guilt of romanticizing several men including the married ones. For instance, when her advances towards Stephen are denied, she feels utmost sadness. "Pip kept her eyes shut and said nothing, and the words that Marie then poured down on her were devoid of any sense, were just blow after blow on her brain, a torment to be endured until it stopped" (53). The guilt attached with her secret feelings for Stephen and his denial intensified her melancholic temperaments. Also, she gets saddened by the news of the death of Andreas. "More than shock, or dread, or pain, what punched her in the stomach and sickened her was *guilt*. And this was strange: why guilt? But she knew what she knew. The sick feeling was definitely guilt" (522)

and this guilt led to melancholy. Klein postulates that the melancholy gets intensified with the psychic guilt attached to the adversities in life. Women internalise their sorrows often resulting in sequences of self-destructive impulses and temporary moments of emotional numbness.

Other Factors

Andre Green proposed the notion of *dead mother* by which he inferred that melancholy proceeds from the emotional absence of mother in the developmental stages of a child. This concept resonates with Pip, Patty and the Lisbon daughters as their respective mothers are emotionally unavailable or emotionally dead to them. This initiates melancholic quirks in their behaviours and in their emotional realm. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's idea of cryptic melancholic, referring to unexpressed and repressed emotion that torments the psyche, can be detected in Enid and the Lisbon sisters as they deny the presence of the lingering sorrows in their lives. Bracha Ettinger's notion of the matrixial borderspace, a terrain of feminine psyche where the identity is moulded, can be drawn in the Lisbon sisters. Their melancholy protrudes as the pain over the loss of their desires. In the case of the Lisbon sisters, their suicides are a part of collective feminine experience of melancholy instead of their existence in individual psyches. Teresa Brennan refers to the cause of melancholy as the *energetic depletion* which is subsequent of the emotional toll they have to exert. Through Brennan's lens, Patty, Enid and Madeleine can be sighted as melancholic due to this energetic depletion. Their energies are depleted by taking care of their loved ones and by prioritising others. The different theoretical interpretations of melancholy offer varied dimensions to the causes of melancholy in the selected female characters.

Conclusion

The broader realms of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism delineate that melancholy in women is not derived from a single specific cause. The emotion of melancholy is accumulated in the mind because of the dynamic convergence of several factors. Whether Patty, Enid, Denise, Pip, Anabel, Madeleine or the Lisbon daughters, the melancholic struggle in women is an everyday affair, as “the melancholic lives its pain in the same way that the revolutionary lives their revolt, daily, interfusing it with every aspect of everyday existence” (Watkin 87). The female melancholy is not unidirectional but rather a complex, recurring vicious cycle as it leads to the intrusion of the past into the present. The agony in the selected characters cannot be interpreted at the individual level alone but at various conditioned progressions. It is moulded by the dynamic interplay of individual, cultural and psychic elements. Melancholy causes a mosaic of pain in the psyche over the losses of the abstract and the real. The selected chronicles of female melancholy are that of resurgence, disintegration and emotional resilience in women. The women’s sorrow is constantly reconfigured, reinterpreted and relived in the intricate fabric of their tales.

The Postmodern Interpretations of Female Melancholy

The multifaceted causes of female melancholy direct towards the postmodern dimensions of melancholy in the selected female characters of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides. This study is not primarily based on the theory of postmodernism; however, it attempts to conceptualize the postmodern interpretations of melancholy in women.

Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. (Eagleton 1)

Postmodernism is often viewed as a paradigm rupture from modernism.

Postmodernism abstains from the concept of a cohesive, integrated subject and accentuates on fragmentations, divergences, multitudes and deconstructed subjects. It interrogates on the fixed and stable aspects of truth and fosters on the uncertainties and absurdities of life.

Postmodernism speculates the terrains, characteristics and the capacities of reason and truth and incorporates the “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). Critics like Terry Eagleton notes in his *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) that literary postmodernism is such a synergistic phenomenon that when any aspect is attached to an object, it likely turns out to be incongruent with another.

Postmodernism scrutinises the uncertainty and obscurity of reality which characterises a distinct structure of the consciousness. As Matthias Stephen notes, postmodernism adheres to an alternative structure of consciousness that aids to analyse literature;

Postmodernism represents a different 'structure of consciousness' (to use William Spanos' term), the structure of which can be defined as a structureless structure and is best epitomized by the metaphor of the rhizome. I call this *the* postmodern metaphor... A rhizome is a plant system which expands horizontally, laying down new roots (and is thus able to expand vertically), the structure of which doesn't require (or allow to be identified) a centralized part of the plant. (6)

The postmodern structure of consciousness, that discerns the world, subverts the Enlightenment concepts of reason and universal truth. Jean-Francois Lyotard⁵⁵ portrays that this structure is outlined by cynicism of meta-narratives and an inclination for confined, seamless happenings of reality. Lyotard posits that the postmodern consciousness discards the extensive grand narratives and universal truths that mould the modern world. It acknowledges that meaning is subjective, conditional and temperamental. The occurrences of reality are facilitated by signs and symbols, forging hyperreal experiences where the demarcations between the real and simulation disintegrates. The postmodern consciousness speculates even the facts and logic and views Science and philosophy as jostling and confined narratives.

Roger T. Ames⁵⁶ analyses postmodernism through non-Western lens. Roger elucidates how postmodernism enfolds flexibility, reciprocity and dissolution of the self. The postmodern consciousness perceives the self as a correlational and a dynamic entity. It concedes diversity over uniformity and embraces discordant and multiple selves. It also views time and space as fragmented and erratic entities. Roger proposes postmodernism as molded by conditional and circumstantial values where morality is dynamic and mutable. Postmodernist paradigm accentuates on the disintegration of knowledge and the deterioration of grand narratives emphasising

how postmodern consciousness functions through confined and diverse language exercises. At the core of postmodernism lie the dislocated, contextual, sequential and the protean self. The postmodern consciousness turns out to be fragmented, pliable and subjective, moulded by discordant perspectives, media bombardment and the repudiation of single universal truths.

The literary theory of postmodernism often incorporates characteristics such as reflections on their own fictional works. The postmodern narrators of fiction make commentary on their own styles of thought process in the works. “Postmodern American fiction expands human possibilities and creates new languages and new ways of thinking about these human dimensions, outside Freud, the patriarchy, and the ego-centered subject” (Hogue X). Postmodern fiction integrates pastiche⁵⁷ and intertextuality⁵⁸ and blends paranoia, conspiracy theories, uncertainties and unreliable narrators in the construction of their works. It mocks serious subjects with the aid of literary devices such as irony and satire often incorporating black humor to confront existential apprehensions. The representations of symbols and media substitute and obscure the borders of reality. In fact, postmodernism prefers a multitude of subjective and personal micro-tales.

The postmodern writers conceptualise their fictional works without any closures for the readers to interpret and reinterpret the endings of their tales. Postmodern works emerged in defiance to the preceding concepts of modernism. In such works, timelines are distorted; narrative style and language are deconstructed; and the dialogues hold multitudes of unconventional meanings. The uncertainties and the multiplicity attached with the interpretations of life are better represented through the postmodern works. The discrepant impressions on worldly affairs are juxtaposed with the miscellaneous fragmentation of the individuals’ psyche through the

integration of allusions, references and cultural relics. The simulacra of events often influence the attitudes and outlooks in people and obscure the real happenings of the contemporary world. The illusions of the world unfold through the theoretical framework of postmodernism. The theory destabilises the traditional paradigm of literature and celebrates the multiplicity of things. The fragmented realities of the worldly affairs and the deafening complexities of the individuals are unveiled. However, postmodernism as a refined period in literature often gets exhausted. Regardless of the criticisms, the postmodern explorations of the literary realms persist in the pursuits of experimental narratives and ambiguities attached with truths.

The Postmodern Facets

The selected novels of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides typify the characteristics of postmodern literature such as non-linear narration, experimentation of techniques and diversity in interpretations. They outlined the plurality and disintegration of contemporary perspectives on life through a mixture of narrative voices. The plots and the storylines conflated the boundaries between reality and fiction. Franzen's novels, in particular, "indicate how deeply he is concerned with the place of his fiction within a larger literary ecology that has been predominantly shaped by the energies of American postmodernism" (Burn 2). He intricately crafted social vignettes in his novels that imbued postmodern irony and metafiction⁵⁹.

The dissociated facts of contemporary life are unleashed through his fragmented narratives, variance of perspectives and disrupted timelines. Eugenides also interplays with postmodern experimentation, intertextual references, dissembling narrators and metafiction in his novels. His disjointed narratives recurrently waver through the multiplicity of truths and the postmodern plurality of occurrences. Both Franzen and Eugenides embody the congruent styles of postmodernism in their

novels. There is a sense of refinement in their narrative approaches compared to the conventional styles. They infused authenticity with their themes that emotionally resonate with the readers. They involve a gradual divergence from the audacious exploration of the preceding postmodernists. Their amalgamation of postmodern cynicism with humanistic sensitivity forges a link between the trends of late postmodernism and post-postmodernism. Their fictional world corroborates the inner battles of the individuals to probe the various dimensions of reality in the disjointed world.

The Corrections incorporated the postmodern treatment of non-linear and fragmented narrative styles. The novel itself is divided into distinct sessions of altering viewpoints. For instance, in the section, “Failures,” the narrator draws the readers’ focus towards Chip Lambert. Chip’s disjointed sense of self and emotional instability is a reflection of the postmodern fragmentation of reality. He is often isolated in life that creates an inner void and the dismantlement of his identity. His ideology is revealed in his words, “yet, without a woman in his life, a man lost the sense of agency and difference that, for better or worse, was the foundation of his manhood” (52). Franzen portrayed his characters as introspective individuals. Chip seems to lose his inner strength with the passage of time. “He now had almost nothing to persuade himself that he was a functioning male adult, no accomplishments to compare with those of his brother... or of his sister” (22). His lack of purpose in life directed towards the fragmentation of his character.

Franzen implements postmodern dark humor, satire and absurdity to delineate the struggles of the Lamberts. Denise is discordant in terms of the relationship with both her boss and his wife. The author uses dark humor to represent the abhorrence in her. The rise of capitalism subdued the despair in her mental realm. The author uses

satire and consumerist metaphors to mock the societal principles that coerce the individuals to compromise their identities.

Enid Lambert also grapples with the postmodern sense of disjointed identity as she feels disengaged from the circumstances in her life. Her attempt to infuse obsolete morals into her children turns futile and impacts her mental well-being. She becomes incapable to accept the reality as she often fantasises a domestic repose. Her desired self is entirely distinct from her disrupted reality. The scepticism towards her motherhood aggravates the fragmentation of her identity. Franzen crumbles from the broad canvas of the American dream through the discontent in the middle-class uniformity of the Lamberts. It signifies Lyotard's denial of the grand narratives and universal truths. Gary is preoccupied with the prosperities in his life that disguises his inner turmoil. His relentless pursuit for stability and his decaying marital life pinpoint the collapse of the American dream.

The novel also draws attention to the pastiche of contemporary American life through Chip's failed career. His academic endeavor with post-structuralism is a meta-analysis on postmodern life. "Chip was now learning... that the more patiently satirical the promises, the lustier the influx of American capital" (505). His unsuccessful screenplay is packed with postmodern absurdities reflecting the collapse of his substantial perspectives. The incongruity of his script demonstrates that he is internally ruptured to interpret the events of the world that delineate the disjointed pastiche. The novel also navigates through different perspectives of various characters integrating temporal dislocations and non-linear progressions. Alfred's cognitive decline is also an indication of the vulnerabilities of the postmodern non-linear narration. *The Corrections* is undisputedly postmodern as Franzen explores the multitudes of fragmented identity, uncertainty and isolation of the mental realms of

the characters. The novel's employment of metafictional elements, pastiche and temporal distortion stabilises its position in the postmodern American canon.

In *Freedom*, Franzen uses the postmodern multiplicity of narrative voices through an altering third-person perspective and also in the autobiographical sessions by Patty in a non-linear fashion. The third person narration in the novel constructs an unsettling effect as the voice of the story is that of a detached spectator, especially with the case of Patty's autobiographical chapter "Mistakes Were Made." It indicates postmodern self-reflexivity as Patty's identity formation occurs through the narration. The autobiography also functions as an example of metafiction. Her unpretentious insights indicate the awareness and realisation in Patty with regard to the fact that her autobiography is written for an audience. Her realisations, dreams and aspirations find space in her autobiography like, "imagining herself never going back to Minnesota, trying to picture the apartment they might find to live in" (117).

Franzen amalgamates the postmodern satire and absurdity into his novel through the character of Walter. Walter's environmental activism showcases the hypocrisy underpinned in his futile attempts to protect the endangered songbirds enmeshed in corporate corruption. The novel also dismantles the grand narratives through the disclosure of hedonistic commercialism, strained alliances and existential ambiguity of the Berglunds. The serene suburban life of the Berglunds is demonstrated with nonchalant sarcasm highlighting the frivolity of the American dream. The final deterioration of the family is an example of this postmodern disintegration of the grand narratives.

The characters internally battle with their disjointed identities, moral ambiguities and self-reflexivity. Joey Berglund incarnates this identity crisis through his inherently rebellious nature. Joey's constant quest for financial stability is often

framed as a rebellious rejection of family traditions. His emotional detachment from the family resonates with the postmodern fragmentation from reality. The integration of non-linear narrative and flashbacks in the novel is yet another embodiment of postmodern experimentation. The novel's seamless blend of inter-textual references, pop culture and media reflects the essence of modern America. His entry into the corporate world is punctuated by references that reflect on his prioritisation of moral values. Franzen explores the pervasive impact of commodification of the individual lives by embodying postmodernist concerns. Walter's eco-activism represents the postmodern sensibility with regard to the fallibility of human efforts to govern nature. Franzen's use of the devastated landscape in the novel becomes a postmodern metaphor for despondency. It simply symbolises the author's nihilistic attitude towards life. *Freedom* fosters a compelling investigation of life from a postmodern framework.

The postmodern devices of non-linear narration and fragmented identities can be drawn in *Purity* too. The incongruous narration of the section "Too Much Information" highlights a nuanced portrayal of Tom Aberant's past life through his ruminations and musings. The disjointed introspections of Tom unveil through the postmodern non-linear narration. The deceit of the narration is revealed through the postmodern metafiction in Tom's memoir. Franzen uses caustic humor in the narration about Andreas to ridicule the discrepancies of the digital era, surveillance anxieties and the commercialisation of identity. Andreas is pestered by moral deception and introspective bleakness. Franzen dismantles the existing ideologies such as the futurism of the digital era and progressive media. Andrea's The Sunlight Project, emulated after WikiLeaks, appears as a subversive entity for truth and the disillusionment attached to it indicates the futility of the grand narratives. The

characters grapple from literal and existential identity crises and ambiguities. Pip's identity crisis and incomplete sense of self, due to the hidden knowledge of her father, symbolises the postmodern theme of fractured formation of identity. Whereas, the concealment of Andrea's criminal identity from the society reflects the postmodern performativity as identity transpires to be an orchestrated display.

The novel's fragmented timeline and disrupted chronology create a mosaic pattern that reveals the fractured perceptions of the characters. It is peppered with references to the real-world experiences, social media and internet. Franzen's use of media highlights the postmodern tensions regarding scrutiny, awareness and the dislocation of individuality. The Sunlight Project in the novel devolves into a digital dystopia of decay of truth and privacy invasion. Pip's association with the Project reflects the postmodern dread of erasure of the self in the digital era as the self is viewed as a tradable resource. *Purity* is noticeably a postmodern novel typified by the perplexing impacts of contemporary reality through the scrutiny of inner turmoil, digital apocalypse and strategic sincerity.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Eugenides unflinchingly condemns the conventional marital structure of the nineteenth century Victorian literature. For instance, Madeleine's romantic life repudiates to adhere to the narrative arc of fiction that she idealises. Eugenides makes a metafictional commentary over the discrepancy between traditional literary marriage concepts and contemporary reality. The novel is infused with intertextual and metafictional references to Roland Barthes, Derrida and poststructuralist concepts. Specifically, references exist in the novel such as "she used a line from Trollope's *Barchester Towers* as an epigraph: "There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel"" (22). Also, the mention of Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* in the novel adheres to the self-validation of postmodern

superficiality and recurring integration of postmodern inter-textuality in the novel. The novel also mocks academia, its pomposity and emotional detachment. Leonard emulates the dismay with intellectualism. His mental collapse is merged with the trivial academic affectation of his associates. The novel explores the grand narrative of the marriage plot of Victorian literature unveiling it as an obsolete tool and explores the variability and uncertainty of love. Leonard's mental disease disassembles Madeleine's romantic idealism of conventional marriage plot. The deflation with the concept of love as a means of salvation in Madeleine and her choice to escape the traditional confines of marriage indicates the postmodern deconstruction of grand narratives.

The novel integrates existential ambiguity and incongruity between cognitive notions and reality. Leonard's clinical depression reflects his disjointed sense of self. The intermittent occurrences of mania in Leonard mirrors the uncertainty attached with his identity formation. His disoriented mental realm reflects the disjointed subjectivity of postmodern characters whose sense of self is often inconsistent and conditional. Mitchell's spiritual journey to India symbolises the postmodern existential pursuit for purpose in the fractured world. His vain attempts at religious veneration mirror the postmodern cynicism towards transcendental narratives.

The novel also incorporates non-linear narration and dislocated timelines. As the novel begins, the readers are introduced to the college years of the characters, but later, the narration seamlessly traverses through multiple timelines. The ending of the novel is open-ended as it associates uncertainty with the future lives of the characters leaving the readers to ponder upon the union of Madeleine and Mitchell. Intentionally or not, Eugenides undermines the expectations of the readers to enfold postmodern

vagueness and inconclusiveness. The novel offers postmodern self-reflexive inquiry of contemporary cynicism and emotional ambivalence.

The Virgin Suicides also elucidates postmodernist techniques. The novel's narration is unusual as it is done by a collective 'we', an anonymous group of boys in the neighbourhood. The plural narrative style indicates the fragmented nature of the interpretations of the happenings. The narration seems unreliable and disjointed as it integrates the postmodern repudiation of an authoritative narration. The novel shifts back and forth between present and past to recollect on the lives of the Lisbon sisters. This non-linear narrative structure leads to a postmodern transient sense of stability that emphasises on the unreliable constructs of the memory. The boys' fixation with chronicling the lives of the Lisbon sisters through their collection of the relics such as medical reports, diary entries, etc., symbolises the synthesis of their narrative. "Most of the diary told us more about how the girls came to be than why they killed themselves" (39). However, their futile attempts to find the causes of the collective suicides in the Lisbon family reflect the postmodern skepticism of objectivity. It simply denotes the significance attached with subjective realities.

The novel ridicules the social constraints and frivolity of American suburban life. Franzen embeds dark humor to illuminate on the absurdity of the Lisbons' detached life. The novel's denial to expose the reasons behind the suicides indicates the postmodern repudiation of narrative closure. Franzen leaves the readers to formulate their own interpretations and theories on the happenings of the novel. The novel integrates postmodernism in its narrative construction to acknowledge uncertainty, obscurity and fragmented identities. The selected novels of both Franzen and Eugenides embody the quintessential characteristics of postmodernism reflecting on the significance of subjective perspectives.

Postmodern Female Melancholy

Since the late twentieth century, the concept of melancholy has been occupying a significant position in postmodernist gender theory. The association of postmodernism with melancholy interrogates whether this linkage is an indication towards the end of melancholic temperaments or an emotional resurgence. Gilroy asks whether the postmodern present is represented by the melancholic reaction to the bygone era and not liberated itself from the past. Apparently, the unfathomable postmodern leisure with differences and the disruption of meta-narratives indicate that the emotional state of melancholy is perpetual till the present day. Jean Baudrillard argues that;

individuality and subjectivity of the human being fall victim to the new melancholia of simulation, which resolves not only the ideals of man's self-determination – as they arose from Enlightenment – but also literally every reality itself into the mere surface of the non-authentic and hyperreal.

(Middeke 15)

Baudrillard posits that the human perception of a sense of the self is lost in a world dictated by simulation and media images. He states that a new form of melancholy emerges in the postmodern world in which hyperreality surfaces without intrinsic ideals and truth displaces reality. Moreover, critics have attempted to find a linkage between psychoanalysis, postmodernism and feminism to unlearn the various dimensions of gender:

Both psychoanalysis and postmodernism have much to contribute to feminist discourses. Psychoanalytic theories of the constitution of femininity can increase our awareness of gender-based distortions and repressions within feminist theories. Postmodernist philosophies can make us more critical of our

epistemological presuppositions. Feminist theories cannot be exempt from the implicit or explicit critiques of universalizing claims to knowledge made by psychoanalytic and postmodernist theorists. There cannot be, nor should we expect there to be, a feminist equivalent to a falsely universalizing Marxist or empiricist “science.” Any feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial and will to some extent merely reflect out embeddedness in preexisting gender relations.... Each person who tries to think from the standpoint of women may illuminate some aspects of society that have been suppressed within the dominant view. But none of us can speak for “woman” because no such person exists except within a specific set of already gendered relations—to “man” and to many concrete and different women. (Flax 27)

The three branches of literary critical school amalgamate to conclude that gender is a constructed identity beyond the biological traits. It leads to a pensive and melancholic nature on account of the repressed desires. The theories critique the disembodiment of gender from concrete experiences by focusing on volatility, fragility and embodiment of gender.

Postmodernism enfolds difference and abyss at the core of language and essence and repudiates singular identities and absolute truths. However, this perception cannot ablate the sensation of melancholy which persists to afflict the disjointed self. “The apotheosis of difference, the acceptance of the void in any process of linguistic or symbolic signification accentuated by postmodernism, could not fully do away with melancholia” (Middeke 17). According to Baudrillard, the postmodern consciousness is devoid of fragmented self and inner discord as it is characterized by transparency and vacuous naivety. The reversal of postmodern experiences unfold through the manifestation of the emotional state of melancholy.

The postmodern melancholic condition takes a stance as an ominous indication and augury of profound theological interpretations. It is more than a consequence of existential disarray, moral lapse and dysfunctional biology. “What may appear to be a postmodern embracing of loss may turn out to be patriarchal melancholy’s appropriation of femininity for its own purpose” (Radstone 179).

The female gender deteriorates because of this melancholic position, where the renounced urges and the interdicted desires are internalised. The undeviating adherence of gender stereotypes synchronises with the scrutiny of static identity and with the feministic emphasis on the mental strain of gender normativity. In postmodernity, the conflicted identity forms the base of inner discord and remorse in individuals. The augmentations of the absence and presence of these conflicts in the consciousness facilitates melancholy and joy respectively. The postmodern version of female melancholy is moulded by the fragmentation of the multitude of personal and social facets.

Franzen and Eugenides have intricately woven female melancholy in their novels reflecting the postmodern aesthetics and literary expressions. Franzen explores the intricacies of gender stereotypes and subverts the frictions between social norms and personal identities. Eugenides analyses gender as a dynamic and socially constructed concept resonating with Butler’s postmodernist approach to gender. His portrayal of women characters reflects the postmodern skepticism towards fixed subjectivities. Both Franzen and Eugenides represent disconnected and perplexed fictional landscapes. Their understanding of female melancholy is articulated through their novels, embodying the convergences of postmodern and psychological uncertainties. The postmodern narrative of the novels challenges the conception of an adaptive, unified self.

In the novels, the melancholy unfolds through a dispersed sense of self, where the female characters undergo a deterioration of their inner spirit and strife with dynamic and protean identities. The postmodern melancholy is essentially characterised by the vagueness of fiction and reality. The submersion in the constructed and simulated experiences subverts the female sorrow resulting in emotional dissociation. The cultural collapse of the overriding metanarratives unfolds through the melancholic temperaments in women. It plunges the individuals into the void of existential ambiguity. Female melancholy is embedded into the very narrative arch of the novels to scrutinise the postmodern dimensions of gender. The profundity of sadness in the female characters resonates with Butler's impression of gender melancholy, where the psychic agony surfaces from the constraint of the non-normative aspirations in women. Postmodern female melancholy is often imbued with fond recollections of faux and emotional shallowness. Melancholic women long for emotional stability in their lives. Franzen and Eugenides delineate the emotional realm associated with melancholy in women. Their conception eclipses the personal sadness and transfigures it into an existential angst of the postmodern epoch.

In *The Corrections*, Franzen uncovers female melancholy in Enid and Denise that mirrors the broader dimensions of postmodern isolation, distortion and emotional disengagement. "Denise's voice and Enid's voice in the kitchen were like a larger bee and a smaller bee trapped behind a window screen" (78). Enid represents the attributes of postmodern melancholy such as unvoiced anguish and mental dissociation. She conceals her sorrows through the daily chores and by upholding the moral principles of the family. The suppression of these sorrows symbolises the discrepancy of womanhood in the postmodern era. "Enid felt morally obliged to offer to care for him at home" (651). She is noticeably not weeping in the novel, however,

she carries a perpetual sadness embedded in her unquenched aspirations, unused time and emotional neglect. Her identity is fragmented as she embraces the ideals of a conservative family, but gradually, the reality around alters. She fails to meaningfully resonate with her disoriented children in the postmodern world. “Enid’s letters had reliably contained a paragraph of despair about Denise and Denise’s failing marriage” (60) and “Enid was pretty well convinced that Denise and Emile had ruined her life” (141). Her gendered sense of self is not merely an articulation of her identity but rather a sad acquiescence to the anachronistic social norms. Her attempts to keep composure and to uphold the contrived joviality amidst her fixation with a family reunion for Christmas echoes the postmodern irony. Her melancholy is moulded by a suppressive environment at home and also due to her overtly motherly affection towards her children. Her melancholy is not positioned in mental implosions but in tedious despair.

Disparate from Enid, melancholy in Denise protrudes from the dislocation of her mind, identity crisis and the estranging effects of career advancement and sexual curiosity. Her sadness is subdued, introspective and restrained in expression. The distant closeness with her children and the excessively inhibited discipline of her character pinpoint towards postmodern dimensions of female melancholy. The conflicts with her sexual orientation unleash through the subversion of non-binary approaches towards both men and women. Her sexual collisions are often internally shallow and propelled by impulse and intrigue rather for fulfillment. Her relationships are taut and transient and even her genuine engagements withdraw quietly. “She suffered for her reluctance” (432).

Denise’s career as a chef turns out to be a kind of a refuge and an emotional outlet in her life. Her artistic talent is steered into a culinary craft where her emotions

align with relationships and labor. She is detached from her parents, especially from Alfred, as she is torn between remorse and ambivalence. Her recurrent ingress into morally complicated and irredeemable relationships becomes a melancholic refrain of destructive patterns. Her affair with her boss's wife is more than an emancipating act of sexual defiance. Her suppressed pain is unraveled in her words, "I hate my life here. I hate family. I hate home. I'm ready to leave" (585). In Denise, Franzen conceptualises a free woman whose freedom itself becomes her obligation. Her reluctance to conform to societal norms leads to subtle desperation rather than to liberation. The melancholy in her is invisible that reflects the postmodern incompetence to resonate with the experiences that rejuvenates women. In *The Corrections*, Franzen explores the normalisation of female melancholy and how female melancholy is integrated into women's everyday existence in the postmodern world.

In *Freedom*, Franzen illuminates postmodern melancholy in Patty. Her profound sadness emerges not from an apparent loss but from an enduring sense of emptiness, drift, disintegration and loss of purpose in a world overwhelmed with possibilities, satire and ethical ambiguity. Melancholy in Patty is not characterized by a single traumatic cause. It is a result of the amalgamation of the postmodern ubiquitous sense of various discontents in life. The third person narration in Patty's autobiography suggests a deep-seated detachment from her own sense of self. The choice of the narration indicates the reduction of her status as an object rather than the subject in her own story. It symbolises the decentralisation of the self as her identity is constructed and not owned. Her melancholy is integrated in this estrangement that results in a vicarious living. The autobiography is her attempt at healing, but it fails to culminate in freeing herself. It rather plunges her deeper into the abyss of melancholy.

Patty finds discontentment in her conformity to the suburban lifestyle. “Patty’s own depressions were apparently autumn hayrides in an apple orchard” (558). Her sorrow is delicate but persistent, characterised by the silent deterioration of her identity as time passes. Like the other melancholic characters, Patty’s melancholy is also entwined into the daily routines. Patty’s sense of autonomy becomes a form of stagnation, as it leads to psychic isolation and uncertainty. Her sadness is rooted in the void of liberation without direction. Her extramarital relationship with Richard perpetuates her destructive dynamics instead of sparking a change in her life. Franzen highlights how her sadness is rooted in the society where sincerity is often conflated with cynicism. He captures the subtle and muffled melancholy in women in the postmodern world.

Franzen explores the intersection of the blurred lines between the digital and real existence in *Purity*. Pip is a quintessential example of a woman who experiences postmodern female melancholy and is haunted by an obscure sense of desolation and absurdity. She represents melancholic women who reside in a society where purpose, equilibrium and autonomy are indefinitely delayed.

It brought her some relief from the feeling that she wasn’t suited for her job, that she had a job that nobody could be suited for, or that she was a person unsuited for any kind of job; and then, after twenty minutes, she could honestly say that she needed to get back to work. (3)

Her mental instability is primarily knotted to her ambiguous provenance. Her desperate endeavors to find the identity of her father symbolises the melancholic yearning for an object which is unlikely to be found. Even if the object is found, it fails to provide resolutions to her melancholic state of mind. She is both capable and

vulnerable at the same time, an oxymoron representing postmodern melancholy in women. The assurances of liberation fail to guarantee the emotional stability in her.

Pip's bond with her mother is strained by underlying resentment. She inherits the legacy of apathy and radical feminism from Anabel, which somehow created an emotional void in her. She finds herself dissociated from her mother and her surroundings that leads to recurring interludes of melancholy in her. She is in constant pursuit of soulful relationships with others in the midst of the chaotic happenings in her life. The unbending ideologies and the sense of withdrawal creates a postmodern facet of melancholy in Anabel. She fiercely repudiates all her fortunes and privileges in life, which makes her relinquished. She seems to be fixated with the moral fundamentals in life and her affinity towards Pip is seemingly subdued. She upholds an unflappable nature filled with integrity that pinpoints the subtlety of the postmodern resistance against sorrow. Both Pip and Anabel embody a nuanced characterisation of postmodern melancholic temperaments. The nature of frailty in their relationship is the key cause of their melancholy. They felt isolated in their psyche and grappled with cognitive dissonance in pursuit of their identity.

In *The Marriage Plot*, Madeleine endures the postmodern dimension of melancholy and represents the female sense of subjectivity. The novel subverts the traditional literary narratives of the nineteenth century by revealing the psychic complexities of women in the postmodern era. Melancholy in Madeleine is torn between her sense of idealism and reality about love. The gradual progression of her character over the course of the story reveals the intricate nuances of the journey of a melancholic woman in the postmodern world. Her desire for a traditional setup in marriage is only a reflection of her longing for emotional stability. However, her life contradicts her romantic ideas of marriage.

The disconnection between her reason and emotion only fuels her melancholy. Her relationship with Leonard is characterised by interdependence, cynicism and mental exhaustion. The vulnerability of her emotions overthrow her capabilities and intellect.

She knew “she was the thing that stood between Leonard and death. That was how it felt to her. Because Madeleine now knew the warning signs, she was constantly alert to their appearance... She was alert to *warnings* of the warning signs.” (371)

This contradiction between her emotion and reason symbolises the postmodern version of melancholy. Like the other melancholic women, she internalises her sadness. Her identity gets deteriorated because of her unrealistic expectations and the lack of stable narrative resolutions. Her dilemma to choose between Leonard and Mitchell represents the two facets of her identity, which is moulded by romantic ideology and intellectual inquiry.

Madeleine’s melancholy is derived primarily from an epistemic ambiguity as awareness breeds anxiety in the pursuit to secure a place in the world. Women are traditionally expected to take the role of caregivers and her role towards Leonard aggravates her melancholy in the postmodern reality. She is torn up in the iterative cycle of fulfillment of the obsolete principles. Her experiences of melancholic episodes represent a kind of survival in the postmodern world. The repudiation of closures to a matrix of absences, discrepancies and incoherence in life indicates the postmodern variance of melancholy in women. Her melancholy is subtle and silent that results from the disintegration of the traditional narratives. The persisting fears and dilemmas also elevate her melancholic state of mind. Madeleine’s fragmented identity and her yearning for rationality culminates in postmodern female melancholy.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, Eugenides render postmodern melancholy in women through the unsettling tale of the Lisbon girls. Their unspoken anguish echoes the inner void and alienation of suburban living. The novel dissects the conventional chronicles of formative years and sadness by highlighting the disjointed aspects moulded by nostalgia, uncertainty and loss. The elusive nature of their melancholic temperaments reflects the postmodern absence and an unfathomable sorrow, which is characterised by suppression, and senselessness in a façade-driven culture. The collective suicides of the sisters are more of unsolved enigma rather than a chain of events. Their melancholy represents the cultural void over an individual crisis, where female subjectivity is repressed, misinterpreted and mythologised. The plural tone of the narrative voice reflects the postmodern dimensions as the sense of self is discerned as evasive, inscrutable and impenetrable.

The Lisbon sisters are objectified, silenced and suppressed by the intrusive gaze of others.

The Lisbon girls, stranded in separate homerooms, declined to play, or kept asking to be excused to go to the bathroom. None of the teachers insisted on their participating, with the result that all the healing was done by those of us without wounds. (101)

Postmodern nature of melancholy indicates the Lisbons' mental disconnection from the world. Their sorrow fails to find closures as the object of loss is obscured.

Cecilia's suicide, the first disruption in the family, represents the ineffability of female agony. She represents a form of sadness which is inexpressible into reasonable exchange and an intricate inwardness that defies elucidation.

Like Cecilia's sorrows, the sufferings of all the other sisters are mystified, romanticised and sanitised. Their sadness is observed, not felt and their agony is

dislodged into an enigmatic narrative. The very suburban existence creates a kind of a psychic void in the Lisbon sisters because of their trade-off with the societal standards. The Lisbon girls are forced to be barred in their house that reflects the postmodern manifestation of inner desolation. They are silenced in their own house, which indicates the postmodern dismissal of the articulation of female voice and emotions. The anonymous group of boys seems to objectify their melancholic emotions that elevate their mental instability. They are the extrinsic forces of postmodern female melancholy who are paralysed in the mental tranquility of a world that failed to understand them. The Lisbon sisters incarnate a postmodern version of melancholy through their alienation and pervasive emptiness that they desert. Eugenides portray melancholy in women as an enduring absence, which is unsettled, inscrutable and intrinsically linked to the inner and outer desolations of postmodern reality.

The Hysterical Realism in the novels

Realism as a literary genre or movement, though is in the crosshairs, emerged to represent life in literature in realistic parameters in the nineteenth century. It still continues as a narrative structure governed by preference, accentuation and interpretation, that consequently obscures the demarcation between reality and fiction.

Vermeulen suggests that a particular form of the realist novel might be the appropriate genre to make it 'a vehicle for a productive and resolutely post-melancholic stance, Vermeulen argues, the novel can enhance its social realism, it can insist on the materiality of the world, rather than focus in a psychically realist manner on the traumatization of its protagonist, whose kernel is slowly unraveled. Alternately, Vermeulen concludes, the utopian dimension inherent in the social realist novel can sustain its psychological

realism and emphasize the connectedness of the individual, also across cultures, and thus undermine any melancholic sense of isolation, while at the same time replacing the linear narrative that traces the traumatic source by a proliferating network of stories without a discernible core. (Middeke 16)

Like any literary movement, realism too underwent amendments and modifications in literature. The postmodern version of realism is “the genre James Wood calls “hysterical realism”: the busy, rowdy, and wordy books typical of contemporary fiction” (Matz 36). James Wood, a British literary essayist and critic, coined the term *hysterical realism* or *recherche postmodernism* in an essay titled as “Human, All Too Human” published on 24 July 2000 on Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*. The genre is marked by the difference between surreal prose, absurd plot and character depictions and also by the meticulous and exhaustive examinations of real and precise cultural moments on the other. It strives to transform literature into a sociological framework, to apprise the audience about the functioning of the world rather than the individual perceptions.

The traditional norms of realism are not nullified under hysterical realism but rather depleted and overloaded. They incorporate intricately compact sentences, frantic vitality, intellectual digressions, satirical exaggerations and intuitive prose interposing the real life with convoluted narratives and an improbable liability of scattered characters. The genre may seem to evade realism, however, in turn, it avails from realism itself. It attained momentum by means to capture the unrest and perfusions in the society. The characteristic features of hysterical realism in postmodern fiction symbolises the intricate, ambivalent and structured existence of life.

In *The Corrections*, Franzen blends hysterical realism with the narrative structure to construct a bizarre depiction of a disordered household of America. The author integrates the exhaustive realistic characteristics with absurd hyperbole, morbid humor and extensive subplots. The synthesis of hysterical realism in the novel manifests through Franzen's augmentation of ludicrousness of the postmodern society. For instance, the academic controversies, materialistic temptations, corporate avarice and cognitive generative disorders are embedded into the realistic portrayal of the human psyche. The novel includes descriptions such as "since Alfred had once mildly but unforgettably remarked that he didn't see the point of literary theory, and since Enid, in the florid biweekly letters by means of which she saved many dollars on long-distance dialing..." (37).

Franzen also incorporates the frenetic and impulsive subplots such as Chip's academic implosion and loss of credibility due to his scandal, Gary's escalating mental disarray and Denise's professional conundrums and sexual complexities. The resonant subplots of the novel embody the collective fragmentations in the society that surpasses the individual levels. Franzen frequently deviates from the plot progression to incorporate tangents of hysterical realism. The richness of the novel's compendious language, sarcastic tone and plot digressions direct towards the incorporation of hysterical realism. This literary approach demonstrates the postmodern intricacies and paradoxes of the world. The flaws with regard to the amplification of female melancholy in American society are emphasised and critiqued in the novel. The narrative structure is exaggerated and introspective that aids to explore the impulsiveness and psychic void in Denise. She fails to feel contentment even with her professional success because of her sense of disconnection from the world.

The emotional perplexities of Enid and Denise are unravelled through the non-linear narration and the jarring shifts in the storyline. Their residual sorrows in their minds remain as a hindrance to their unfulfilled desires and aspirations in life.

Franzen consolidates sarcasm and irony in the novel that echoes the way women's distress is habitually concealed, misinterpreted and stigmatised. The novel artfully employs hysterical realism as a conduit to disclose the quiet and assimilated female melancholy in the disjointed postmodern society, where selfhood is uncertain, affinity is fragmented and inner realness is adrift under the strata of cultural expressions.

Franzen persists in using hysterical realism in his subsequent novels too. The sprawling episodes, nuanced character developments and subtle criticisms in *Freedom* exemplify the profound focus on the authenticity of the mind. Patty's melancholy, discontent and loss of selfhood eventually unfurls beneath the surface of the impeccable pretension of an ideal homemaker. Instances of dense and exaggerated narration can be spotted in the novel, such as; "the autobiographer suspects she simply didn't have a state of consciousness. She had the sensation of being awake but in fact she must have been sleepwalking" (52). Franzen also uses satirical amplifications with the subplots of Walter's compulsive environmental activism and Joey's odd entanglement in an arms trade controversy to scrutinise the American progressivism, deceit and materialistic affluence.

These hyperbolic and hysterically real circumstances vary from Patty's inner battles. They are imbued with sarcasm, irony, desire and restraint that discloses the postmodern version of female melancholy, characterised by gender stereotypes, unrequited romance and unmet identity formation. *Freedom* is more tranquil in the integration of hysterical realism compared to *The Corrections*. However, it features keen senses, cognitive excursions and episodes of irrationality entangled into the

narrative that analyses the psychic realms in the postmodern world. The individual and collective terrains intersect and women are overwhelmed by emotions and the inconsistencies with liberty, solicitude and adherence in the process. *Freedom* symbolises a refined version of hysterical realism where satire and irony encounters postmodern melancholy, furnished with intricacy and benevolence.

In *Purity*, Franzen merges the psychic profundity with hysterical realism to dissect into the concepts of selfhood, obscurity and isolation, especially through Pip. The hysterical realism forges a detailed and extensive narrative that encompasses cyber-activism, anonymous origins and doctrinal disputes, by situating Pip in the realm of overblown circumstances and gray individuals. Andreas's subplot belongs to a comprehensive, bizarre narrative that critiques the modern preoccupations with reality, disclosures and integrity. Franzen employs irrational narrative turns and societal reflections, for instance, Pip's recruitment to the firm displays the functioning of hysterical realism as a review and deliberation of the world exhausted with news, facts and moral conducts. Pip's melancholy is quiet and ambivalent of seeking autonomy and sense of belonging simultaneously. Franzen's application of hysterical realism as a plot mechanism in the novel showcases Pip's life as both absurd and deeply morose. She occupies an affectively uncertain status characterized by oversight culture, hidden truths and social paradoxes. Maximalist and overblown narration can be seen in the novel, such as;

he remembered remembering, when he saw her pussy in the rose garden, that this wasn't the first time he'd seen it—that something he'd thought was a disturbing dream from his early childhood hadn't actually been a dream; that she'd shown it to him once before, to answer some precocious question of his.

(117)

The novel incorporates convoluted storylines, meandering passages and overblown characters that represent the postmodern melancholic dispositions in women. These features of hysterical realism put forth the ambiguity, inner stability and self-assurance in a world permeated with illusions and fractured bonds.

Eugenides also leverages hysterical realism in his fictional world in a more nuanced and centered approach. His novels merge the profuse emotional substances with instants of satire, absurdity and cognitive asides. In *The Marriage Plot*, the incorporation of the approach of hysterical realism aids to analyse the affective states of adolescents who are struggling with romance, selfhood and mental disorders in the postmodern chaotic world. He moderates the stylistic elements of hysterical realism with a reflective and character-centric method and sustains the core characteristics of the genre such as satire, social commentary and exaggerated plotlines. Maximalist cataloguing can be spotted in the novel, namely, the narration observes, “her meetings with the old professor were dispiriting, consisting of Saunders shuffling the pages she’d given him, pointing out various red marks he’d made in the margins” (23). Eugenides imbues thematic richness and intellectual profundity into the novel. He explores Derrida, Barthes and other semiotics within the realm of romantic entanglements by obscuring distinctions between fictional narrative and rational exploration.

The satirical digressions in the novel generate a diverse setting in which the individual associations are interwoven into the societal norms. Madeleine’s contradictory fixation with the paradigmatic concept of ‘marriage plot’ differs starkly with the cluttered and unconventional reality of romance dynamics that leaves a reflective analysis on the classic plotlines and prospects. The novel inculcates a realistic and tragic absurd treatment of the subplot of Leonard’s bipolar disease. His

diagnosed mental disorder is caused by the individual afflictions, psychic separations and the semantic breakdowns. These symptoms characterise the chronic dimensions of sorrow and effectively articulate his emotional conflicts. Both the genius and the deterioration of his character are inflated within the terrain of hysterical realism through detached and stimulating circumstances.

Correspondingly, Mitchell's spiritual path is an absurd yet ambitious pursuit for purpose and fulfillment in a chaotic world. Eugenides seems to inculcate a milder and layered version of hysterical realism in the novel to illustrate sorrow and uncertainty of the postmodern world. Through the narrative constructs and subplots, the novel scrutinises the literary heritage, social and cultural norms as well as the silent anguish and melancholy of individuals pursuing legitimacy in a hyper-analysed society.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, Eugenides applies a subdued and lyrical version of hysterical realism. This employment of hysterical realism depicts the psychic terrain of the exurban teenagers and their postmodern version of melancholy under restraint, suppression and societal norms. Compared to the novels of Franzen, this novel is devoid of a sprawling narrative and chaotic subplots that characterise hysterical realism. However, it mirrors the quintessence of the genre through the evocative merge of surrealism and overblown social cognition in the way the Lisbon sisters are perceived, romanticised and misinterpreted by the neighborhood boys. Dense narration can be illustrated in the novel, such as, "many people felt the illuminated pages constituted a hieroglyphics of unreadable despair, though the pictures looked cheerful for the most part" (38). The plurality in the narrative voice of the neighborhood boys acts in an ironic and somber expression that repeatedly indexes the tedious particulars, domestic turmoil and unsuccessful endeavors to save the girls.

Their fixation with dissecting the consciousness of the girls and in assembling the evidence such as photographs, diary entries and firsthand accounts, evokes their cognitive surplus that characterises hysterical realism, as it attempts to enforce purpose on the discernible beings.

The deaths of the sisters unfurl the emotional strain of femininity. The overblown delineation of the quietness, ambivalence and symbolic resonance in the novel fosters melancholy as an individual as well as an emblematic affair. Eugenides inspects the psychic restraint, commodification and powerlessness that often characterise the lives of women through the disjointed plots and the satirical disconnections of the narrative structure. The suicides are a reaction against the smothering and the barren circumstances of the world and they represent an instance of hysterical realism. The negation of the postmodern sense of melancholy resulted in these exaggerated consequences of suicides. The hyperbolic and overblown elements of hysterical realism evoke the postmodern intricacies of melancholy in women.

Key Findings

1. The Postmodern Reading

The existential uncertainties in women gradually cause melancholic temperaments in the chaotic postmodern world. The female subjectivity is fragmented and women constantly desires for the return of their past lives. These elements amplify their melancholic dispositions in accord with Baudrillard's notion of the hyper-real society. Enid's melancholy, for instance, reflects Berlant's concept of attachment with the unattained desires. She constantly longs for an ideal family life that results in melancholy. The women are emotionally worn out at various stages of their lives, which is a characterising feature of melancholy. The sense of void in the unconscious

plunges Denise into melancholy and her lechery turns out to be a postmodern defense strategy that conceals her melancholic despair.

Similarly, Patty slides into postmodern melancholic disconnection and her sadness is thus sublimated. She is delved into an emotional shallowness essentially due to her detachment from Walter. Her marital life creates a void and her vacant persona as a wife symbolises her existence in Baudrillard's hyperreal society. Her idyllic conception of joy turns out to be a postmodern melancholic appearance. In Pip, melancholy occurs due to her encounter with the emotional isolation that reflects the disillusionment attached to the postmodern essence of life. Anabel experiences melancholy mainly due to her denial of the association with consumer culture. Melancholy becomes a postmodern configuration of disavowal of reality that reflects the deflation with selfhood in women. Madeleine's melancholy symbolises the postmodern identity crisis as she is suspended between the fantasy of literature and the postmodern disenchantment of the reality regarding love.

The Lisbon sisters encounter melancholic temperaments which mirrors the postmodern disorientation of female identity. The collective suicides depict the tragic articulation of gendered isolation that delineates the adverse consequences of postmodern melancholy in women. The infeasibility attached with the identity formation in a disjointed world causes sadness. Their intangible presence portrays their disengagement with their own bodies as they survive as ethereal beings of melancholy. The selected female characters undergo melancholy at different points of their life because of the postmodern dissociation with their emotional realm. Their sadness transpires to be vague and enigmatic and gets embedded into the unconscious. The novels integrate melancholy in women as a metaphor for postmodern fragmentation and disengagements.

2. The Causes in Common

As Freud posits, melancholy protrudes from the unconscious state of incomplete mourning over the lost object. The lost object remains integrated into the ego of the unconscious. However, melancholy in women emerges from diverse premises and the internalisation of the male-dominated norms that signifies the postmodern and the psychoanalytic feminist interpretations. In the context of the selected novels, women undergo melancholic dispositions through the subjugation of the self and a sense of disintegration linked to the latent impulses and to the suppression of subjective experiences. These melancholic women embed self-destructive urges that become palpable as an accusation and a deliberate distress in a society that normalises the sacrifices and the sufferings of women. Women are assimilated to integrate emotions that forge melancholy as a prevalent and prolonged condition. Women's sadness is quashed by cultural norms of resilience and selfless fortitude by impeding therapeutic bereavement. They weep over the internalised restriction of liberty and the unrealistic expectations of femininity as melancholy is often normalised as an existential segment in women.

Elisabeth Bronfen, a Swiss-German feminist and theorist, posits that women experience melancholic temperaments essentially due to the postmodern disillusionments. Women encounter the collapse of idealised love that leads to the mental dissonance between reality and the mythical fantasies. For instance, Madeleine experiences a recurring emotion of melancholy due to this female surrender to romantic myths moulded by the patriarchal society. Similar association of melancholy to romantic disenchantments can be drawn in Enid, Denise, Anabel, Pip, Patty, and Lux. These women characters experience the extremities of sorrow due to their entanglements in love at some points of their lives. Enid, Anabel and Patty unfurl the

maternal isolation and the suppression of female melancholy attached to the denial of the love they fantasised from their husbands and their children. They experience emotional restraints and unrequited yearning for love. Their resistance and nonconformity augment their emotional isolation and drive them to repudiate the worldly desires. Their sadness and self-imposed suffering mirrors female oppression because of societal pressures. The experience of melancholic temperaments in Pip and the Lisbon girls arises from the vain efforts to establish their identity and to find life companions. Women's emotional distress and melancholy are pertaining to the restraints in society. As Sylvia Plath notes in *The Bell Jar*, the female melancholy is a counter reaction to the women's suppressions in the patriarchal society. Women's sorrow acts as a desperate defiance against the systemic norms and as a postmodern catalyst for existential inquiry of purpose in life.

3. The Differences between Melancholy, Depression and Trauma

The emotions of melancholy, depression and trauma are often intermingled, but they are unique and discernible with respect to their origins, realisations and the conceptual framework. In the context of the novels, melancholy surfaces as an enduring, existential and socially constructed psychic experience in women. Depression is more of a medical and therapeutic condition and trauma is a prompt reaction against the coercive harm and unsettling occurrences of the past. Melancholy is perceived as a recurring occurrence of unsettled lamentation over a loss that forms a part of women's identity. Women, in general, continuously feel sorrow at different stages of their lives due to the existential and incurable internalisation of the gender roles dictated by the patriarchal society, the suppression of their impulses and the erosion of their identity, as is the case with Enid, Denise, Madeleine, the Virgin sisters, Pip, Anabel and Patty.

Depression, a clinical illness, is characterized by despair, exhaustion and detachments. In women, depression is tied to mental alienation, domestic responsibilities and societal norms. The depressed individuals feel disconnected from a particular loss that is realised as a psychic numbness. For instance, Alfred, Chip, Leonard and Lux, experience the depressive moods to an extent. Alfred's suffering from Parkinson's disease propels him into depression. Leonard is clinically depressed as stated in the novel. Chip undergoes encounters with existential depression due to the financial instabilities in his life. Lux's depressive moods result in her reckless attitudes as a cathartic outlet.

Trauma in people causes emotional withdrawals from the various happenings of their lives. Trauma occurs as a recurring reaction against a distressing event or a sequence of events in life. The systemic violence, oppression and abuse leads to traumatic reflexes such as self-annihilation in women. The childhood rape, for example, delineates the gendered dimension of trauma in Patty. It gets embedded into her psyche as she frequently grapples with the traumatic consequences of this event that happened in her younger days. The invasive scrutiny of Lux's desires results in a shattering experience and her impulsive behaviour is an outcome of this trauma. Pip develops a fragmented impression of her identity because of the uncanny ordeal of the emotional abuse from Anabel which makes her suffer from trauma in life. Melancholy is perpetuated through unresolved grief; depression causes apathy and impairment; and trauma shatters the mental stability of the individuals. The female sorrow upholds the chaotic and cyclical dynamics of the societal expectations that sustains agony in women.

4. The Association of Melancholy to the Female Condition

Melancholy is often considered as a gendered experience as it renounces liberation and sustenance in the society. Women's desires remain unfulfilled and their perspectives of an ideal life often get deteriorated. In such circumstances, they undergo melancholic episodes. The psychoanalytic feminists claim that female melancholy plays a vital role in moulding the subjectivity in women. Society has a tendency to normalise melancholy in women as it seldom draws attention from others. Women constantly feel sorrow over their subjugation and lost liberty. Melancholy can be viewed as a response to the oppressions that women encounter in society.

The insinuated defiance against societal marginalisation creates an emotional numbness in Enid and Patty. The gender dimensions of melancholy situate it as a transient misery in women while it is viewed as an intellectual and artistic struggle in men. The selected characters delineate that melancholy is often represented as a characteristic trait of the women. Melancholy in Enid symbolises women's disempowerment in the roles she performs, as women grieve over the loss of their idealised desires in life. For Patty, melancholy emerges from the gendered silencing of her inner feelings. They outwardly showcase contentment while inwardly feel sorrow and loss, as her emotional requisites are subjugated.

Anabel imposed sufferings upon herself, which became a deliberate act to plunge herself into melancholy. She symbolises the feminine martyrdom or a woman's choice to sacrifice her joy in the quest for dogmatic purity. Madeleine's melancholy simply represents the futility of fantasising love while Pip's melancholy showcases the significance of identity formation in women. The Lisbon sisters' melancholy echoes women's torment under the emotionally suffocating authoritarian restraints. Their yearning to flee their suppressing circumstances is impeded by

concealment that creates recurring episodes of melancholy in their lives. The selected female characters posit that melancholy is inherently a female condition, reflecting their sadness as a fortress for defiance, effacement and a lingering reminder.

Melancholy is intrinsic into how women are habituated to traverse loss, identity, relationships, ambitions and love in the postmodern world.

5. Integration of Hysterical Realism

The authors, Franzen and Eugenides, both integrate James Wood's hysterical realism in their novels to delineate the disjointed, hyperreal postmodern existence of women. They employ rambling, interconnected narratives, wistful nihilism and satirical disengagement in their novels that contradict melancholic implications. The amalgamation of hysterical realism and melancholy in the select female characters is a reflective and deliberate artistic decision from the writers and not a mere coincidence. The integration of hysterical realism into the narratives echoes the frantic and perplexing postmodern world while symbolising female melancholy as an emotional deflation underneath the chaos. With the synthesis of hysterical realism, these authors augment melancholy in women to forge their psychic void. They form a nuanced and eloquent understanding of melancholy contradictory to the dizzying storytelling styles of others. Hysterical realism accentuates the gendered dimension of emotional suppression creating an ethereal melancholic feeling in women.

Women are envisaged to repress their sorrows and conceal their bereavements from society. The selected novels often rendered melancholy in women in the parameters of postmodern realism. Hysterical realism emulates this surplus by amplifying women's torment in parallel to the societal illustration of normalising their emotions. It inundates the readers with excessive details, insights, occurrences and emotions concurrent to the mental exhaustion that melancholy afflicts in women. The

real agony is transpired into a display similar to the mythical representation of women as symbols of sorrows. It mimics the lassitude and the disintegration of female melancholic temperaments. The authors deliberately employed hysterical realism as a narrative tool to augment female melancholy as an inexorable and a disquietingly magnified emotional state of mind.

6. Unacknowledged Melancholy in Women

The selected female characters serve as a representation of the ubiquitous and fervently embedded melancholics in America. The female melancholy is characterised by muteness and suppression and concealed by societal norms. Melancholy in women is often misinterpreted or disordered as depression, angst or neurosis. It is often aestheticised and belittled as an androcentric tale. In the novels, hysterical realism culturally overlooks female melancholy as an individual impairment instead of a communal bereavement. Women's sorrow is hidden inside them and is thus left unaddressed in the society. Their sadness is often framed at the individual levels and neglected as a deep-seated issue. In the case of Madeleine, her melancholy is trivialised and seldom attracted attention while Leonard's clinical depression garnered considerable empathy. She represents how women's sorrow attached over romantic entanglements is disparaged as a fleeting emotion. Instead, it has to be viewed as a significant psychological condition that necessitates understanding. Her quest for romantic fulfillment echoes the role of female melancholy as an endeavor to find meaning in the postmodern world.

Correspondingly, melancholy in Enid, Patty, Denise, Pip and the Lisbon sisters is misconstrued and dismissed. Their melancholic state of mind is unacknowledged as a profound crisis that requires significant attention. The melancholy in the Lisbon daughters is idealised as a doomed destiny. The disregard

and the negation to acknowledge their collective melancholy is the root cause of their collective doomed destiny. Their sorrow is deified as an ethereal allure and not recognised as an alarming sign of suppression. Enid masked her melancholy under the façade of the imposed role of a caring homemaker. She adheres to the reminiscences of an idealised family portrait. She is forced to veil her prolonged sorrow as the other members of her family associate it with resentment of ageing. They fail to regard her melancholy as a legitimate emotional concern. Anabel's abstinence only symbolises the isolation that women endure in the materialistic world. Like the other melancholic characters, her sorrow is also perceived as a mere fancy.

Patty's melancholy emerges through emotional detachments and self-destructive actions. Her sorrow is majorly due to maternal discontent. She represents the marginalised American women, whose sadness is often concealed with submission to societal expectations. Her psychic emptiness is perceived as a character flaw and the profound societal dislocation attached to it is often neglected. Franzen and Eugenides posit that female melancholy is a profoundly ingrained and often unacknowledged state of mind as women internalise their sorrows, their suppressed sense of self and the burden of cultural expectations resulting in unresolved bereavements. The selected novels delineate the necessity of female melancholy to acknowledge the concealed strains of womanhood in American society by forging their visibility and cultural significance.

7. Inferences

The selected novels elucidate the discrete contemporary attributes of melancholy in women. They symbolize the intricate and adaptive expressions in the postmodern American community. Franzen and Eugenides emphasise that female melancholy, which acts as a retort to gendered suppression, is emotionally and

culturally imperceptible in the society. The novels highlight the trivialisation and anesthetized depictions of women's sorrow through the selected characters.

Melancholy in women renders a form of resistance against the postmodern isolation that women had to endure. Their sorrows are seldom culturally validated and understood. Lacan's notion of the *Real* that evades symbolisation is a correspondence to female melancholy in the novels. The subjectivity in women or the subjects of the Symbolic Order, are often repudiated, as they yearn for dreams that are mostly regarded as elusive. As Butler notes, gender is a habitual behaviour and the melancholic state of mind surfaces in women when this display fails to establish identity integration.

In late capitalism, the quest for pleasure transpires to be an elegance of female melancholy. Women undertake to assuage their melancholic temperaments with erosion, retrospection, reminiscence and cursory associations, yet they feel emotionally drained and void. Melancholy in women is aligned with an aspiration for emotional reciprocity that is systematically barred in the patriarchal society. The suicides of the Lisbon sisters reflect the manifestations of their inner sorrow that is inaccessible for the societal interpretation. Pip's sadness situates in the ineptness to absolutely assimilate her within the symbolic configuration. Patty's melancholy surfaces from the abrasion of her identity beneath the conventional gender roles. Enid's torment materialises as an outcome of her immersion in a culture that replaces emotions with distractions. Madeleine's sadness echoes an existential plight, where love metamorphoses into a zone of despair parallel to affirmation.

Melancholy protrudes in women when loss is not deliberately perceived or articulated, abiding internally as remorse or self-condemnation. The female melancholy symbolises a relational distress where emotions become a terrain of loss

instead of ratification. The authors exemplify the postmodern existence of disjointed identity and the inexorable sorrow attached to it. Female melancholy transpires to be a postmodern condition of emotional rationality of gendered subjectivity in the society, forging the selected novels to be an amalgamation of fictional and psychological archives.

8. Inherent Melancholy in Women

Melancholy appears to be a stipulation moulded by gender norms and cultural expectations integrated in women. Though there is no scientific evidence substantiating that women are inherently melancholic, the frequency of melancholic temperaments in women caters to the commodification of suppressed animosity. However,

Freud imagined the conditions of mourning as inimical to men but part and parcel of the female repertoire, the foundation of woman's inherent melancholy. (Stein, 82)

Melancholy in women protrudes from a loss that cannot be exemplified. Women endure melancholy as an outcome of the disregard for reciprocal perception, conceptualised in association with others. Their melancholic identifications itself form a part of the formation of the sense of the self.

The female melancholy surfaces from an unresolved distress, as with the case of Enid, due to the thwarted and unrealized emotional articulations of life. Women in the society experience melancholy due to the internalisation of trauma and ignorance, as is the case with Patty. The metaphorical void of subjectivity in Pip reflects the inherent melancholy in women who lacks a true sense of their identity. Madeleine's sorrow delineates that women also encounter melancholy from the dashed illusions of femininity and love. The societal confinement and repression formed the causes of

collective suicides emerging from the severe melancholic conditions in the Lisbon sisters, highlighting the existential dilemma attached to the mental realm of women. There is no substantial evidence to show that the selected female characters are inherently melancholic. The inherent existence of melancholy in women is a subjective interpretation in the postmodern world but the selected novels explore a fictional and psychological illustration of grapples of women for identity, subjectivity and meaning in the chaotic world that repudiates their voice. Women are not predisposed to the melancholic state of mind compared to men, however, the circumstances that they inhabit as well as the relational dynamics that they form plunge them into this emotional condition, more often and persistently than men.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the postmodern sensibilities that mould melancholy in women as a multifaceted state of mind. The female melancholy encapsulates the fragmented and disjointed subjectivity in the postmodern terrain. The selected novels showcase the postmodern characteristics such as disjointed and non-linear narration, self-reflexivity, denial of universal truths, cynicism towards metanarratives, metafiction, intertextuality, etc. The selected novels integrate the dual expression of hysterical real and hysterical realism, which are absolutely distinct entities. The female melancholy realises to be hysterical in the context that it materialises through the bodily reactions and the novels' extensive and redundant narrative structures. The obscured borders between melancholy, trauma and depression symbolise the mental realms of postmodernism, where grieving becomes interminable and women remain a vortex of disintegration and defiance. The postmodern female melancholy delineates how this emotional condition transpires to be a metaphor for personal bereavement and societal discontent.

6

Conclusion

Melancholy in women surfaces as an intricate psychological-behavioural state, characterised by history, tradition, and social constructs. “At once a form of madness, a sign of genius, a symptom of sickness, and a fleeting mood of sadness,” (Daniel 5) melancholy unfolded in women “in a promiscuously variable cluster of modes, some overlapping with one another, some contradicting one another” (5).

The selected novels of Franzen and Eugenides unveil the postmodern interpretations of female melancholy entwined in the relational collapses, family obligations, repression of the desires and social norms. The selected female characters, encompassing discontented housewives, cerebral romantics, demotivated professionals and stifled youth, are represented as emotionally torn and internally ambivalent individuals. They are often stuck between the postmodern aspirations for liberation and the actualities of estrangement. The close reading of the narratives reveal that their melancholy is often born out of unprocessed grief, unrealistic expectations and the cultural assimilation. The theoretical analysis of the texts discloses that melancholy is more than a mere inactive state of emotional reaction in women; it is a kind of defiance and an indication towards profound psychic dissonance with the postmodern notions. The articulation of female melancholy symbolises the authenticity of her emotions and unveils the latent expenses of compliance and repressed sense of self in the society.

This study attempted to achieve the objectives delineated in detail through the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism. The study conceptualised female melancholy in the selected postmodern context and endeavoured to recognise the psychic intricacies of the female characters of

Eugenides and Franzen. It also highlighted the personal afflictions, the social constructions and the consequences of melancholy on the mental health in women. In the postmodern age, melancholy impacts the functioning of women's psyche and the internalisation of emotions leads to discords, unfulfilled desires and unsettled wounds. The melancholic temperaments in women are integrated into the very narrative structure of the texts. They represent the postmodern angst, absurdity, fragmented psyche and sense of disillusionment in women.

The tensions and frictions, however, between the desire for liberation from all melancholic dejection in the face of the abyss of epistemological nothingness and death and sublime insight gained from the very melancholic grieving have not lost any of their cultural efficacy; indeed, the very tensions and frictions have been more interesting to the artistic mind than more-or-less easy solutions to the problem of loss. (Middeke 17)

Women strive for liberation from all kinds of melancholic and mental distresses. Melancholy urges women to brawl internally with their lost objects and frailty. They overlap with the cognitive realignment of the epistemic void created in the psyche by the dissociated sense of self and precarious purposes in life. Given such a framework, the female melancholy emerges as a terrain of disinterred and deep fundamental reality. Women also confront the limitations of reason and language to articulate their sorrows. They experience a constant disagreement between the urge to get liberated from their sorrows and the insights that those sorrows would procure to mould their characters. This tension often forms the very essence of the artistic expression of the writers and the cultural significance attached to it. The female melancholy is conferred with aesthetic values that showcase the uncertainties attached to the

persisting conflicts in women's lives and their quick fixes. This study emphasises on the intricate emotional nuances and the ambiguities of sorrow in women.

Franzen and Eugenides have taken deliberate efforts to consolidate hysterical realism into their texts to depict female melancholy. The selected novels integrate the aesthetics of postmodernism to blur the lines between absurdity and emotional profundity. They represent contemporary anxieties with a hyperbolic chronicling of women's sorrows, which is characteristic of hysterical realism. The postmodern version of realism unveils the frictions in the paradoxes of expressing melancholy in the female characters. The authors succeed in capturing the legitimate mental suffering of the individuals amidst the societal expectations for conformity. Women's expressions of melancholy are a kind of a resistance against various dimensions of mental confinement in the postmodern world. Female melancholy acts as an innovative and compelling stimulus in life that explores the borders of the women's mind.

Melancholia stems from a sense of loss, and at the same time – and if only because of grief of pain – such pain confirms our very existence; all knowledge gained in theorizing melancholia may thus point to the nature of or show a way out of dejection, yet its enigmatic ways hold us captive in aporia, which itself provokes new interpretation and, hence, change. (Middeke 17)

Female melancholy revives the memories of nostalgic sensations and discernment in women. The sense of loss is uncertain, overlooked and ostracised in the selected female characters, thus creating a deficiency in the process of grieving. In a way, the melancholic expressions are a validation of their very existence over causing harm to them. The deprivation of the emotions forges a psychic lesion that transpires to be a

zone of contemplation in women. It raises awareness about the profundity and delicacy of the consciousness in women. The inferences on female melancholy, through the analytical perspectives of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism, re-construct the psychic experiences of people for the better comprehension of the causes and consequences.

Summary of the Analysis

This study comprehensively analysed the doctrine of postmodern dimensions of melancholy in women through the selected novels of Jonathan Franzen and Jeffrey Eugenides. The various disciplines of philosophy, psychology, theology and literature have depicted and theorised the concept of melancholy over the years. The thesis implodes the historical models of melancholy to represent the novel approaches to female endurance of existential fragmentation in the postmodern context. It finds nuanced and intricate interpretations of melancholy in the selected female characters through the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism. These theories aided to surpass the individual afflictions attached to the female sorrow and loss of their subjectivity to reflect on the extensive social discontent and cultural malaise.

The thesis is segmented into seven chapters that are systematically conceptualised to gradually develop the argument of the research. It incorporates the historical background, in-depth analyses and comparative investigations grounded in theory to comprehend the findings on the postmodern interpretations of melancholy in women. The thesis probes into the overlap of gender, cultural norms and individual trauma to address the research questions raised in the study. Women quietly exhibit their defiance against the divisive factors of dislocation and privatisation through the expressions of melancholy. The authors' choice of the non-linear narratives,

polyphonic narrators, intertextuality and postmodern reality represent the inner terrains of the melancholic women and their significance in the development of the plot. The postmodern interpretations put forth melancholy as a psychoanalytic feminist construct within the realms of literature. The causes arise from individual isolation, societal restrictions and postmodern cynicism.

Chapter 1, the introduction chapter, outlines the core argument of the thesis which is to conceptualise the postmodern dimensions of melancholy in women in the selected novels of Franzen and Eugenides. It initiates the functioning of female melancholy as a cognitive condition of mind and a cultural context in the society. It provides the existing definitions, historical interpretations and understandings of melancholy while stating the objectives of the thesis. It specifies the purpose of the study in conjunction with identifying the research questions of the thesis. The chapter also describes the methodology, the methods of study and the theories that will be applied to seek the findings of the study, which includes the discourse and textual analysis through close reading of the selected texts with the application of the theories of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism. It also traces the history of melancholy in general and melancholy in women in literature and in American Literature in specific. An introduction to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism with the postulations of the major proponents of the theories is included in the chapter. It also reviews the existing literature and scholarly works on the topic such as melancholy, melancholy in women and on the works of Franzen and Eugenides and so on, delineating the research gap, formulated in literature. It thus establishes the thematic concerns, motifs and the theoretical foundation of the thesis and positions the research within the extensive discourse on female melancholy in American literature.

Chapter 2, titled as, “Franzen’s Chronicles of Female Melancholy,” includes the analysis of the grouped data on the novels of Jonathan Franzen. It incorporates an individual investigation of the depiction of female melancholy by Franzen while also tracing the brief biography of the author. The chapter situates Franzen as a chronicler of melancholy in women delineating the integration of distraught and emotionally shattered female characters in his novels. It entails the detailed analysis of the plots, characterisation of the selected female characters, thematic exploration and the identification of differences among the emotional states of melancholy, depression and trauma in *The Corrections*, *Freedom* and *Purity*. His fictional women such as Enid Lambert, Patty Berglund, Denise Lambert, Pip Tyler and Anabel endured internalized conflicts, unaddressed grief and emotional stagnation. They experience disconnections from their family members, chaos in romantic relationships and cultural malaise that lead to a postmodern form of melancholy in them.

Franzen employed a non-linear narrative approach to depict the postmodern disruptions in their tales. The rigorous depictions of psychic analysis and honest dialogues among the characters in the narration reflect on the undertones of female melancholy. Franzen succeeds in exposing the complex inner realms and emotional vulnerabilities of his characters. Franzen portrays female melancholy with compassion and critiques the gender stereotypes such as the normalisation of sadness in women. The emotional burden and the consequences of internalising and suppressing melancholy can be apparently drawn in the female characters. Chapter 2 closely reads and dissects the selected novels of Franzen to analyse how his female characters grapple with their lingering sorrows to seek autonomy in a society of altering perspectives.

Chapter 3, titled as “The Feminine Interiorities in Eugenides’ Novels” puts forth a similar analysis of the grouped data from the selected texts of Eugenides. His novels *The Virgin Suicides* and *The Marriage Plot*, depict him as a champion of female melancholy like Franzen. The chapter includes an in-depth study on Eugenides’ depiction of female melancholy, a short biography of the author, a critical perspective of his writing style, the narrative resonances and the dominant motifs in his works. Similar to the preceding chapter, it closely reads and investigates the plots and the themes of the novels. It also traces the character sketches of the selected female characters and their melancholic temperaments by demarcating it from depression and trauma. The women in these novels encounter whimsical idealism, inner void, absence of purpose and the pressure to conform to the cultural norms.

Eugenides’ writing style is sensitive and introspective and he blends literary finesse and layered storytelling techniques into the plot of these novels. The women in his fictional world like Lux, Mary, Therese, Bonnie, Cecilia and Madeleine often confront internal conflicts, ambiguity and isolation. It leads to recurring episodes of melancholy that disrupts their psychic terrains. They evoke empathetic resonance with the readers. Their fragile minds suffer from existential angst and inner turmoil. The internal sorrows and the external norms of the society play a pivotal role in the character formation of these women. Their melancholy is quiet, misunderstood and embedded in the social and cultural contexts of the postmodern age. He abstains from the representation of melancholic women as stereotypical victims; but rather, he portrays female melancholy as a normalised facet in women’s life. They often grapple internally with the social conformities and exclusions at various stages of their lives. Eugenides attempts to represent female melancholy as an entrenched reality of

women. It acts as an influential stimulus in the plot development of his narrative structures to voice out his perspectives against the paradoxes of the postmodern times.

Chapter 4, titled “A Psychoanalytic Feminist Reading of Female Melancholy,” incorporates a comparative analysis of the novels to discuss the intersecting motifs, divergent narrative approaches and pluralistic comprehension of female melancholy through a theoretical interpretation. It extensively applies the concepts of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism to explore the materialisation of melancholy in women. Women’s emotional disorientation and psychic numbness due to melancholy is dissected through the theoretical constructs of psychoanalysts such as Freud, Lacan, Zizek, Bollas and Keogh and of psychoanalytic feminists such as Mitchell, Irigaray, Kristeva, Chodorow, Butler, Benjamin, Dinnerstein, Berlant, Schiesari, Silverman, Klein and others. The gendered dimensions of societal repressions and psychic marginalisation impact the melancholic experiences in women.

Women assimilate their sadness and become incapable to process the grief attached with the lost objects resulting in self-inflicted behaviours and melancholic stagnation. The nuanced and pragmatic representation of melancholy in Enid, Denise, Patty, Anabel and Pip showcases their impasse, dissociation and self-revulsion in reaction to the domestic distress, collapse of relationships and social discontent. The romanticisation of women’s struggles and the adverse consequences of neglecting melancholy can be drawn in Madeleine and the Lisbon daughters in a poignant, reflective and wistful tone. The chapter juxtaposes the key insights of the preceding chapters to examine the similarities and differences in the depiction of melancholy in the chosen characters from the theoretical lens. It reinforces the argument of the research that the intense cultural and analytical involvement in women’s affairs makes

them indicative and dissident individuals. They are profoundly impacted by the melancholic articulations from purposeful reticence to cognitive inertia.

Chapter 5, entitled “Female Melancholy: The Postmodern Interpretations,” synthesises the postmodern understandings of melancholy and the findings of the study to vividly present the contours of melancholy in the selected female characters. The chapter delineates that the multifaceted causes of female melancholic temperaments point towards the postmodern interpretations. The selected novels portray postmodern characteristics such as non-linear narrative techniques, dislocated timelines, multiple narrative voices, ambiguities and metafiction to portray the shattered female minds. The social conditioning and the disordered hyperreality eventually creates internal conflicts and melancholy in the female characters defying any form of settlements and solutions.

The integration of hysterical realism forms another channel through which female melancholy in the novels becomes rather apparent. Through hysterical realism, melancholy is tied to the affective and symbolic surplus-emphasis in the female characters. They become incapable of processing their sorrows and their identities remain fragmented. They undergo the consequences of melancholic anguish and postmodern marginalisation. The psychic disengagement of women with the external world and the gendered forms of confinement typifies the postmodern dimensions of female melancholy. The chapter mentions the key findings of the thesis such as the association of melancholy to the very female condition, consolidation of unacknowledged female melancholy into the society and other inferences.

The postmodern interpretations of melancholy surpass the individual causes and conflate as an unwavering, reflective and substantial mode of cultural commentary in women. The chapter unveils the setbacks of postmodern frameworks

to sufficiently regulate the mental complexity of women. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis revisiting the core objectives of the study rooted in conceptualising the postmodern explications of melancholy in selected female characters and summarising the analysis of the investigation. It also incorporates the relevance, scope and the limitations of the study, recapitulating the arguments of the research. The thesis culminates with Chapter 7 that recommends potential frontiers for further studies. It argues that expanding and augmenting the study at relevant intervals would contribute to the existing stock of knowledge on female melancholy.

Relevance of the Study

Mental health is an area that requires ongoing research at appropriate intervals. Human emotions are dynamic and in a constant flux and so does the topic of melancholy. The ever evolving Literature serves as a pivotal medium through which life is represented and analysed. It also explores the emotional upheavals, disruption of identities and sense of dislocation in the psychological landscapes of people. This thesis on female melancholy in the postmodern times stays relevant within academia on the inclusive and comprehensive deliberations on mental health. The gendered perspectives on melancholy facilitate a nuanced and intricate research on the subjective and existential reality of women. The study addressed and filled the research gap created in the study of melancholy in literature through the analysis within the selected context.

The study is made around the underlying structures of the female mind in the postmodern times from a literary perspective, which is distinct from the medical and diagnostic realms. In a way, it signifies the relevance of the fictional approaches on female sorrow to draw comparisons in real life. Judith Butler suggested that,

the renewed interest in melancholia today is part of the ethical turn which does not emphasize the playful postmodern position of 'anything goes' but the commitment to political and ethical questions. It is such a politicization of melancholia that is at stake in postcolonial, gender and queer studies which have perceived 'melancholia at the turn of this century... [as] a crucial touchstone for social and subjective formations.' (Middeke 8)

The constant revival of interest around human emotions and on melancholy, in particular, is an indication towards purposeful investigations of universal concerns regarding the complex inner psychic realms. This study on female melancholy provides a platform for women to re-construct meaning and purpose in the uncertain world through introspection and resilience. It does not offer fixes to melancholic temperaments in women but rather posits it as a stimulus for change and awareness. This research indelibly proffers perpetual ruminations on female melancholy that would synchronise with the nuances of mental health.

The significance of human emotions and its impact on the mental health in women, in particular, is universal that transcend beyond the boundaries. Women occupy a crucial position in society and thus their mental realm, sorrows and the causes merit continuous research. The societal influences on the mental landscapes of women offer nuanced reflections on the need to investigate and validate their melancholic episodes.

Melancholics might be spotted by their outward behaviour: their tendency to seek out solitude and to sit lost in their own thoughts and fantasies, or to act in bizzare ways.... Then again, they may appear entirely normal but, like Hamlet, have 'that within which passeth show.' (Lund 2)

The catharsis of melancholy is dual in nature as women thrive with their mental anguish in solitude under the guise of joyful appearances in everyday life. Authors had integrated the concept of melancholy in the various literary genres since its beginning. The fact that it continues to find space in contemporary literature owes to its universal implications, exceeding the territories of class, caste, creed, race and ethnicity. Franzen and Eugenides' conceptualisation of the timeless emotion of melancholy as a state beyond the individual psychic level is through a postmodern lens. They associated identity crisis and societal conformity with female sorrow in the pursuit of broader significance in the postmodern context.

Literature serves as a pivotal domain that investigates and represents the different dimensions of people's mental realm. The literary depiction of melancholy in women is not bound to any particular frame work or society but rather it evolves and lingers over generations. The emotional profundity in women pinpoints towards their confrontation with the convoluted inquiries in life. The study lays the foundational background for the awakening of the introspections in women's psyche. The inner realities and the sorrowful tales of women ought to be articulated. This study draws global attention towards the mental realms and the unaddressed struggles of women. The significance of comprehending mental health manifests through the incorporation of thorough psychoanalytic investigation in the thesis. The postmodern findings on female melancholy reveal the emotional truth of women through the impressions of literary analysis.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is beyond the interpretations of melancholy as an emotional state of mind that demands pressing attention. Melancholy often serves as a dynamic catalyst to stipulate the intellectual, instinctive and moral realms in human

beings. Literature unfolds as a powerful force in the midst of the perplexities of life. It formulates mysterious thoughts on melancholy, specifically in women, as a source of progress, insight and change. The persistent inquiries on female melancholy embody a sustained reflection to understand the human predicaments. Hence, “studying, reflecting on and representing melancholia thus means both a diagnosis of crisis and an avenue to new shores” (Middeke 17). The scope of the study is extensive, introspective and multidisciplinary. It integrates the literary, medical, theoretical and socio-political perceptions on female melancholy representing it as a habitual process. The study is rooted in the interplay of cultural and moral issues with the historical and contemporary roots. The research on female melancholy facilitates binary functions as it highlights the postmodern female melancholy as an individual crisis and a collective nexus for noncompliance and resurgence.

The thesis offers a critical perspective to reflect on the broader realm of women’s challenges and hurdles in the postmodern world. Women often suppress their emotions because of their confrontation with feelings of alienation, disappointments and societal pressures. The mental anguish in the selected characters does not symbolise isolated scenarios, but rather, they form a part of the wider system of moral and societal disruptions. The gradual disintegration of systemic communication protrudes from this melancholic emotion in the individuals.

The study stimulates the curiosity to understand the causes of sorrow and psychic inertia in women that results in the creation of discernments and emotional clarity in the readers. Literature leaves imprints to provide realistic and fictional representations of moral decisions, vulnerabilities and interpretations on melancholy. Melancholic expressions are introspective reactions against the varied forms of suppressions to prompt inquiries on identity, sense of liberation and emotional

dynamics. The representation of female melancholy in the selected novels is a kind of a universal navigation through the emotional voyages in women. The study also aids to elevate awareness on the intricacies of interdisciplinary facets on women's selfhood, tranquility and postmodern figures.

Besides, "every study of melancholia... is, in some sense, a reflection on the intellectual act itself" (Foldenyi ix). Studying melancholy simply refines the reasoning abilities, purpose and expertise of the researchers. In the process, their skills to introspect and analyse on the psychic realms enhance. The scope is interdisciplinary as it also reflects on the epistemological propositions. The emotion of melancholy coincides with inner and external realities and discourses. The theorisation of female sorrows, the expression of the agonies of women and the negotiation between reason and emotion offer deliberations on the very pursuit of knowledge. The integration of the theoretical context in the study offers epistemic concoction of liaising with female melancholy to provide analytical conclusions rather than closures to the issue.

The research scholars improve their interpretive and analytical skills upon investigating the nuances of the female psyche. They resonate with their emotions in the process to comprehend the gendered facets of the psyche. Female melancholy is re-interpreted in the study as a psychic emotion that fosters the interplay of gender, literature and psychology. Female melancholy as a concept is intricate and dynamic and the study on it facilitates persistent explorations. The scope of this study is directed towards the investigations on trauma psychology, inscrutable perspectives on female subjectivity, imperial melancholia, queer affect theory and postcolonial melancholia.

The study on melancholy itself is interdisciplinary in nature and its scope can branch over to cross-disciplines such as psychology, humanities, literature, gender studies and mental health. It can draw significant findings on the consequences of unacknowledged melancholy of societal and medical values in contemporary society. It validates the scope and relevance of melancholy in the overall well-being of human beings while boosting literacy on mental health. The quiet endurance of women's despairs needs to be addressed and studied at regular intervals. The study is a pivotal junction in the persistent literary analysis and representations of female melancholy.

Limitations

The thesis is carefully organised with meticulous calculations to conceptualise the postmodern facets of female melancholy through the literary lens. However, it unavoidably encounters certain shortcomings that impact the scope and findings of the study. The conceptual framework is fixed and though the selected texts foster prolific ground for the scrutiny of female melancholy, they delineate a limited archive. The specific selection to investigate female melancholy through the male gaze of Franzen and Eugenides limits the study to conceptualise it through the lens of women writers. Thus, it may not completely portray the subtleties and cohesive expressions of the functioning of women's frame of mind.

Anchored in American literature, the study is principally explored through the cultural perspective of the West. Even though the postmodern construct of female melancholy embodies collective and universal appeal, the social influences and cultural determinants formulating the psychic and affective experiences in women vary in accord with the territories, social strata and backgrounds. The findings of the study are limited as they do not encompass the experiences and articulations of the non-Western contexts.

Further, the study is grounded within postmodern perspectives. It does not incorporate extensive investigations and research on the prior literary epochs even though it outlines a very brief historical background of melancholy. Nor does it include analysis of the contemporary literary paradigms of the present decade, especially after the mental repercussions of planetary catastrophes such as the outbreak of pandemics. Despite the integration of the multifaceted theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism into the study, it remains confined due to the analytic and expository theoretical applications. The enormity of the theoretical integrations indicates that certain approaches, deliberations and narratives may remain uncharted.

Besides, the employment of the psychological realms may seem to disregard the other efficient conceptual methods such as trauma mediated approaches, ethical criticism, intersectional analysis or disability research. The methodology and method of study chosen within the paradigm of quantitative approaches such as discourse and textual analysis through close reading of the selected texts does not integrate data-driven investigations such as surveys, case studies or interviews that are grounded in the real-world context.

The thesis strives to resonate with the mental and emotional well-being of women and their psychic truths. The study primarily conceptualises women as fictional and analytic subjects and highlights the feminine endurance of melancholy in the postmodern world. But, it fails to assert the diagnostic judgments and therapeutic guidelines on the mental concerns such as melancholy, trauma and depression. It neglects to acknowledge the specific intersection of feminine sorrow with oppressing factors such as class, creed, race and sexuality. However, the thesis serves as the groundwork for further research on the various realms of mental health in women. It

asserts the necessity to diversify the human perspectives and reconfigure and redefine the concept of female melancholy at regular time intervals. Despite the limitations, the study offers novel discussions and holistic findings and heralds interdisciplinary research on postmodern female melancholy.

Conclusion

The thesis forged a structured and comprehensive analysis of postmodern dimensions of melancholic state of mind through the selected female characters. It investigated the association of female melancholy with the intellectual and social dynamics. The theoretical framework of the study asserted that female melancholy is a multifaceted and profound mental state of sorrow. The use of the methodology of discourse-aligned textual analysis through the close reading of the texts revealed that melancholy is an inevitable, structured and subjective phenomenon in women. The feeling of melancholy recurs throughout their lives in accord with societal expectations and postmodern disconnections. Though the root causes may vary, the selected female characters experience intense sorrow at various stages in their lives, irrespective of their triumphs. They neither can be discerned as passive victims of sorrow nor can be misunderstood as individuals suffering from a transient mental disorder. Melancholic women quietly endure the feelings of disengagements, isolation, suppression and postmodern angst. They navigate through these feelings that impact their sense of identity and overall well-being. The postmodern melancholy indeed serves as a contemplation of the societal dissonance and apprehensions in women.

The study unveils that the underlying dynamics and complexities of postmodern female melancholy can be better comprehended through the lens of psychoanalytic feminists. Theorists such as Freud, Kristeva, Chodorow, Irigaray,

Schiesari, Butler, Benjamin and many more, posited that female melancholy is a gendered, symbolic and semantic concept moulded by social assimilation, disintegrated identity and shattered illusions. Intrinsically, Freud argued that melancholy emerged due to the linkage of the ego with the lost object leading to unprocessed grief. He regarded melancholy as a psychic wound that habituated loss that re-directed sadness to remorse and impasse.

Lacan refined Freud's ideas by proposing the concept of the symbolic order. He argued that the sense of lack within the language system prompted melancholy in individuals as the *real* became unattainable and the self-turned splintered. His mirror stage moulded the way the female identity got integrated into the unconscious. Zizek saw melancholy as the fantasy of the inaccessible desires where individuals are confined in systems of deceptive promises. Bollas emphasised on the impact of the implicit sentiments on the identity formation in individuals and analysed how their subjectivity is moulded by the suppressed bereavements and internalized sorrows. Keogh conceptualised melancholy through psychodynamic approaches within the cultural realms of gender and differentiated melancholy from depression as a psychic construct.

Psychoanalytic feminists such as Mitchell amalgamated the theories of Freud and other psychoanalysts with feminism showcasing how the oedipal notions suppressed the desires and agonies in women. She opined that melancholy in women is a cultural and social construct of gendered bereavement. Irigaray analysed the patriarchal discourse and the omission of the feminine ideals in Western philosophy. She urged attention on the significance of melancholy in women embedded in the lack of semiotics and the symbolisation for feminine agency and identity. Kristeva conceptualised melancholy as a non-verbal lamentation of motherhood, integrating

the norms of semiotic analysis and repulsion. She also highlighted that female melancholy is an emotional reaction against both individual and cultural detachment from maternal lineage.

Chodorow proposed a theoretical framework of the self, positing that the female identity is developed through consistent bond with the maternal body, She forged liability to melancholic temperaments in relationships and backed the women characters who assimilated sadness through caregiving responsibilities. Butler revised the concept of female melancholy and opined that melancholy itself is gendered around the dashed desires highlighting how women internalised sorrow that the society interdicts to display. Benjamin developed the notion of intersubjectivity that suggested the significance of recognition in moulding psychic conception and examined how melancholy in women is born out of disproportionate relationships.

Dinnerstein investigated the significance of mother in the early stages of development of a girl and stated that female melancholy protruded from maternal dependency. Berlant opined that the level of contentment in relationships and identity formations is in direct proportion with the levels of female melancholy. Schiesari critiqued the erasure of female melancholy in history and emphasized on the necessity to redefine and reimagine the inner realms of women. Silverman explored the role of narration in the creation of gendered identities and stated that melancholy is a subsidiary product of identity in women. Klein argued that the early disputes in the psyche and the co-existence of love and hate become a part of melancholy in women. It led to the feelings of attachment and hostility simultaneously. These theorists established a robust and comprehensive framework to scrutinise the internal and external factors linked to female melancholy. The multifaceted approach adopted in

the study acts as a symbolic register to unveil the lingering fears, restrictions and inconsistencies of the feminine stereotypes.

Franzen and Eugenides do not represent melancholy in women as a matter of concern that requires solutions. But rather, they signify it as a domain of apprehension and convulsion. They view it as a space where the purpose of life is displaced and re-conceptualized. The selected novels investigate the paradoxes of love, grief, memory and selfhood. The integration of hysterical realism and fragmented artistic approach to the non-linear narration augment the implicit postmodern dimensions of female melancholy. The authors purposefully displaced the traditional tales of resurgence with the oscillating and unsettled chronicles of women's psyche.

This study also identified the distinguishing boundaries among the emotional states of melancholy, depression and trauma in the selected novels. It implies that the female melancholy impedes inflexible therapeutic and authoritarian understanding of feminine instincts. The study highlights the literary, social and psychic consequences of female melancholy and contributes to the extensive dialogues on gender, mental health, psychoanalysis and postmodernism. It encourages further research on the role of different literary genres to mould and understand the female psyche. The selected texts analyse the depth, resilience and determination of female melancholy to validate its significance. They offer deep insights into the articulation of women's sorrow, identity and autonomy in the postmodern world.

Postmodern melancholy will stand forth as a disturbing sign or portent of full theological significance, rather than merely a symptom of existential failure, moral fault, or defective biology. (Feld 169)

In the postmodern context, the universal implication of female melancholy is viewed as a symbolic, structured, multifaceted and a subjective emotional state of mind and

not merely as a pathological condition. Women express their inner apprehensions, disquiet, intellectual uncertainties and indifferences of contemporary life through the experience of melancholic state of mind. The close reading of the selected texts asserts that the female melancholy is a state where though women are profoundly sad, they still endure nostalgia, introspection and longing for unfulfilled desires. It is a recurring emotion in women without closures and persistently encounters mental frictions in the postmodern context. The characteristic features of melancholy can be discerned simultaneously at the intersection of selfhood, gender and literature. The discussion on female melancholy indicates that it is an individual crisis and also holds a broader societal significance.

The transcendent level of societal uneasiness is unleashed through the expression of melancholy in women. The postmodern dimensions of melancholic temperaments raise questions in women on the meaning of life, marginalisation and the absurdities in the chaotic world. It is not merely an individual tale of passive suffering in women. Melancholic women often introspect on the core aspects that impact the society at large. The feeling of melancholy acts as a portent that women may be plunged into self-destructing deeds. It also forms a channel through which women connect with the postmodern sense of anonymity as well as identity formation. The postmodern melancholy in women is contextual; it presents a compulsive narration of desire and unresolved grief. The thesis eventually reconstructs the historical perspectives on female melancholy in the postmodern times. It analyses postmodern female melancholy as a central and coercive facet of the selected novels. The postmodern interpretation of melancholy unfolds as a powerful expression of identity, sorrow and defiance in women.

Recommendations

This chapter recommends further explorations on female melancholy. The present study investigates the postmodern interpretations of female melancholy in the selected texts of Franzen and Eugenides. The study integrates the theoretical constructs of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism to formulate the findings of the study. It has attempted to conceptualise the multifaceted causes of melancholy in women in the postmodern context. Women undergo recurring episodes of melancholic experience throughout their life. Caste, class, race, colour or creed are beside the point of discussion in the case of female melancholics. From this lens, melancholy in women is inevitable, multifaceted and a subjective emotion. This thesis does not offer any practical solutions to rectify the condition of melancholic state of mind. Humans' tendency to seek solutions to surpass this condition demands continuous research on the topic. Future studies on melancholy and mental health can focus on areas beyond the literary realm. Interdisciplinary and solution-oriented research can be conducted on medical disorders like *melancholic depression*. It is a serious issue that juxtaposes the two related emotions of melancholy and depression.

Persistent and comparative studies can be done in various literatures apart from the American literature. It would aid to analyse the female melancholy in the fictional world of recent writers to remain updated on the topic. Studies can be made on the first-person narrative of female authors to understand the nuanced representation of female melancholy in their voice. Research can be done on the works of Sheila Heti, Mary Gaitskill, Lorrie Moore, etc., and comparisons can be drawn between women's portrayal and men's perspectives. The expression of

melancholy differs in poetry compared to that in drama which calls for a cross-genre investigation across genres such as poetry, drama, memoir, etc.,

Further studies can be based in the opulent and varied socio-political and cultural landscapes of Indian Literature. Research can be made on women's melancholy, isolation, resistance and emotional disintegration in the works of women writers of India such as Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, K. R. Meera, Lalithambika Antharjanam Anita Desai, and Sara Joseph. The male perspectives on the topic can also be analysed through the works of Salman Rushdie, O. V. Vijayan, Amitav Ghosh, Vasudevan Nair, R. K. Narayan, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer and Vikram Seth. The inclusion of research on both male and female writers would draw parallels with the storyline structures to identify the biases, differences, gendered voices and conceptual intersections.

In the future, research can be done to analyse the convergence of female melancholy with race and ethnicity in literature to explore how the melancholic chronicles of people of color unfolds the profound sense of loss embedded in cultural dislocation, imperialism and diaspora. For instance, “studies like Paul Gilroy’s *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) and Anne Anlin Cheng’s *The Melancholy of Race* (2000) have led to an extended awareness of melancholia, which not only shapes European cultural history but also plays a role in intercultural, global, colonial and postcolonial processes of dominance and exchange” (Middeke 9).

Concepts such as *national melancholia*, postcolonial melancholia, *postimperial melancholia*, etc., can be explored to get broader dimensions of melancholy. “According to Gilroy, Great Britain suffers from a ‘postimperial melancholia’, because the ‘[r]epressed and buried knowledge of the cruelty and injustice that recur in diverse accounts of imperial administration can only be denied

at a considerable moral and psychological cost''' (9) and future research can be made to understand how this postimperial melancholia affects women in specific. New theoretical dimensions of psychoanalysis, such as Sara Ahmed's concept of sticky affects and Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism can be applied in the literary works to acquire innovative insights on female melancholy.

Further, scientific inquiries can be forged regarding the melancholic manifestations in queer women and queer persons in general, that would broaden the scope of the research. It would incorporate the experiences of sadness and the feeling of disconnection attached to their psyche amidst the unconventional progressions in the society. Case studies, surveys and interview-based research can be conducted to examine the melancholic dynamics in women. Interview-based research would delineate the socio-cultural aspects that impact the melancholic state of mind in people in the real world scenario. In-depth case studies would present the nature of melancholy ingrained in the individual testimonies highlighting the bond between the realms of emotional miseries and societal landscapes. Unrelenting focus towards collaborations with mental health specialists can be laid in research projects that would unveil the intersections and discrepancies between literature and medical health sectors. Also, studies can be done on the researchers own experiences of melancholy through the integration of contemplative and auto-ethnographic methods to provide evocative and nuanced insights.

Future research can also be made on the commercialised and glamorised representation of female melancholy in the digital platforms. It can include studies on how women communicate, mask and represent their feelings of sorrow virtually. Inquiries can be pursued on the interventions of artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems into the emotional realms in women. Research on films can be done to study

on how the narrative techniques are integrated to represent female melancholy. Future studies may adopt both interdisciplinary and empirical methods. They may merge the literary theories with evidence based analysis to address the research gap in this thesis. The scope of the study can be augmented beyond the literary frameworks to incorporate the experiences of people in reality that may forge viable solutions.

Notes

¹ F. Laszlo Foldenyi is a Hungarian critic, essayist, philologist, and a specialist in aesthetics and artistic theories.

² *Timaeus* is a work on the different aspects of the universe by Plato, written around 360 BC. It includes dialogues, majorly monologues, by famous figures like Critias, Socrates, Hermocrates and Timaeus.

³ The English translation, *Three Books on Life* (1489) is a Renaissance text by Ficino in which he draws his conceptualization of the linkage between Melancholy and the planet, Saturn.

⁴ Originally written in German, titled as “Trauer und Melancholie”, published in *International Journal for Medical Psychoanalysis*, translated into English by James Strachey. The term *melancholia* has a medical tone while *melancholy* has a literary tone.

⁵ Translated into English as *On the Tricks of Demons*, the book argued for the proper treatment of the mental diseases and strongly criticised the witchcraft trials as treatments for human delusions.

⁶ Originally written in French (English translation: *The Passions of the Soul*), the treatise dealt with the concepts of human emotions and was dedicated to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.

⁷ According to Butler, lesbian melancholy in women may also account for real losses of people in addition to being a psychic state. It emerges majorly from the refusal of heterosexuality.

⁸ Author of *American Literature (1607-1885)* published around 1886-88.

⁹ Author of *Literary History of America* (1900).

¹⁰ Boker, an American writer, makes the observations in her book, *Grief Taboo in American Literature: Loss and Prolonged Adolescence in Twain, Melville, and Hemingway* (1996).

¹¹ Positive psychology is a branch of Psychology that studies the different aspects of enhancing the well-being and happiness of people. It aims to understand the individual and subjective experiences and aids in facilitating the positive traits.

¹² First published in German titled as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*.

¹³ First published in German, titled as *Die Traumdeutung*.

¹⁴ Also known as popular psychology, pop psychology deals with the theories on human mental life based on psychology, refers to people who are regarded as psychologists but without academic credentials and are often disapproved as unproven, but are perceived by experts as valid and effective.

¹⁵ A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree

in Comparative Literature under the supervision of Călin Mihăilescu to the University of Western Ontario

¹⁶ A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature to the University of Birmingham.

¹⁷ A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature.

¹⁸ A Thesis Presented to The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of OSLO in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the M.A. Degree.

¹⁹ A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy to the University of Toronto.

²⁰ A doctoral thesis submitted to the University, Freie Universität Berlin.

²¹ A Thesis Presented to The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages in partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree to the University of OSLO.

²² Reference to John William De Forest's coinage of the term, "Great American Novel" in 1868.

²³ Coined by C. Wright Mills, a Texan sociologist, in 1958. It is a type of fiction that juxtaposes the latest technological changes of the present times and the conventional methods.

²⁴ According to Christianity, St. Jude is an Apostle of Jesus Christ and is known as the Patron Saint of impossible or lost causes. In the novel, this allusion may represent Enid's refusal of acknowledgement of the underpinned disputes in the family.

²⁵ The cruise ship is an allusion to Karl Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish sociologist and the recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1974.

²⁶ Refers to a canonical novel that incorporates and evaluates the various themes associated with the ethos, temperament and the soul of America.

²⁷ *War and Peace* (1869) is a novel by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Contradicting, Tolstoy's characters seem to be divinely zealous, while Franzen's characters are preoccupied and incapable.

²⁸ The sudden relocation of white people from ethno-culturally diverse areas.

²⁹ Carol Monaghan is a neighbor of the Berglunds

³⁰ A literary device, also called as story-within-a-story, in which a character turns out to be the narrator of the story.

³¹ The Sunshine Project is a media organisation that leaks documents. It is a fictional firm in the novel that is an allusion to WikiLeaks, a non-profit media agency that does the same.

³² *Denver Independent* is an online news service owned by Tom Aberant in the novel.

³³ Pip is a character in Charles Dickens' novel, *The Great Expectations*.

³⁴ A non-profit organization, constituted in New York in 1934, which aimed to promote and encourage the poets and the art of poetry in America.

³⁵ A novel by the Irish writer, James Joyce, published in 1916.

³⁶ *Fresh Complaint* is a prominent publication, which is a collection of short stories penned over decades.

³⁷ A pioneer of ecocriticism, Lawrence Ingalls Buell is a professor, specialist on antebellum (1812-1861) and a recipient of the Jay Hubbell Medal for Lifetime Achievement in American Literary Studies.

³⁸ The first chapter of the novel was published in *The Paris Review* in 1900 and it earned the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction in 1991.

³⁹ Coming-of-age fiction is a genre of literature that showcases the protagonist's evolution from childhood to adulthood. When the story focuses on the moral as well as the psychological development of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, it is called a bildungsroman.

⁴⁰ EMS truck or Emergency Medical Services vehicle serves as a vehicle for immediate medical care and transport to patients.

⁴¹ Human Papilloma Virus is an infection that acts as a precursor to genital warts and it increases in proportion with the number of partners one has.

⁴² The novel won the Salon Book Award for Fiction in 2011.

⁴³ *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977) is a seminal book by Roland Barthes, a French critic, which deconstructs the lovers' use of language and speech patterns.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes (1915-1980) is a French literary critic and philosopher. He puts forth his views on love in his *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977), stating that love is not merely a feeling but a language and a channel to enunciate ourselves.

⁴⁵ Plato is a Greek philosopher, renowned for Western philosophy who lived during 428-348 BC.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, student of Plato, is a Greek philosopher who contributed to philosophy, science and politics and lived during 384-322 BC.

⁴⁷ Reader-response criticism is a literary theory that scrutinises a literary work through the lens of the readers with their interpretations and the experiences of the texts.

⁴⁸ Ego-psychology, a psychological approach rooted in Freud's model of mind, was pioneered by Heinz Hartmann and David Rapaport in the United States in the 1940s which placed ego as the most vital aspect of the human mind.

⁴⁹ Cathexis is the process of devoting energy into something. When this investment is in an external object, it is called object cathexis, in ego or self is called ego cathexis and when in certain goals or instincts, is called id cathexis.

⁵⁰ Terry Eagleton is an English philosopher and literary critic who belongs to the literary school of Marxism and is renowned for his book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983).

⁵¹ The quote was originally written by Freud in German which first appeared in "The Dissociation of the Oedipus Complex" (1924) and later in "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes".

⁵² Michael Foucault is a 20th century French historian and philosopher, who is an advocate of theories such as Nietzscheanism, Post-structuralism and the connections between power and knowledge.

⁵³ "Women's Time" is an essay by Julia Kristeva, published in *Signs* in 1981, in which she talks about her notions of feminism, femininity and symbolic order.

⁵⁴ Sexual monism is the notion that a single human sexuality exists which is masculine. In her *The Second Sex*, she notes that this is a kind of oppression, rooted in the patriarchal society that limits women and the diversified dimensions of sexuality.

⁵⁵ Lyotard is a French literary critic and philosopher who scrutinized postmodernism and its effects on the existence of humans since the late 1970s.

⁵⁶ Roger is a Canadian author and philosopher who delineated the importance of analyzing Chinese philosophy not through Western lens but through its own philosophy.

⁵⁷ Pastiche is an artistic or literary work that imitates the styles of other works or periods.

⁵⁸ Intertextuality refers to a text's inclusion of references or allusions of other texts.

⁵⁹ Metafiction is a literary device that knowingly reflects and draws attention on its own fiction and obscures the gap between the reality and fiction

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