

# MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA IN JULIE BUXBAUM'S *WHAT TO SAY NEXT* NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to describe the depiction of mourning and melancholia in the novel *What to Say Next* and to find out the causes of melancholia on character in *What to Say Next* novel. This study is entitled "Mourning and Melancholia in Julie Buxbaum's *What to Say Next* Novel". The object of the study is novel by Julie Buxbaum. It described how someone developed mourning and melancholia after the loss of someone loved. This study is sought with qualitative methods in order to reveal the issue of the novel. This study applied the theory of mourning and melancholia by Sigmund Freud (1971). The result of the study should that the main character developed melancholia as portrayed by changed her behavior, aligned herself, blaming herself, having death wishes, and paralysis. It also found that the cause was that she developed melancholia because of the sudden death of her father and loss the family in which her parents were in the middle of divorce before the accident.

Keyword: *depression, melancholia, mourning, loss*

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penggambaran dukacita dan melankolis dalam novel *What to Say Next* dan untuk mengetahui penyebab melankolis pada tokoh dalam novel *What to Say Next*. Penelitian ini berjudul "Mourning and Melancholia in Julie Buxbaum's *What to Say Next* Novel". Objek kajiannya adalah novel karya Julie Buxbaum. Ini menggambarkan bagaimana seseorang mengembangkan duka dan melankolis setelah kehilangan seseorang yang dicintai. Kajian ini diupayakan dengan metode kualitatif untuk mengungkap persoalan novel tersebut. Penelitian ini menerapkan teori berkabung dan melankolis dari Sigmund Freud (1971). Hasil penelitian adalah bahwa tokoh utama mengembangkan melankolia yang digambarkan dengan mengubah perilakunya, menyalahkan diri sendiri, memiliki keinginan mati, dan kelumpuhan. Ditemukan juga bahwa penyebabnya adalah dia menderita melankolis karena kematian mendadak ayahnya dan kehilangan keluarga di mana orang tuanya berada di tengah perceraian sebelum kecelakaan.

Kata Kunci: *depresi, duka, kehilangan, melankolis*

## INTRODUCTION

Sadness is a part of human experience. In its simple term sadness is often thought of as the natural reaction to a difficult situation. People feel sad when a friend, a family, parents or lover moves away, or even dead. Yet, there is a study about sadness or depression because of loss. According to Beck (2009) the grief from loss is called mourning and melancholia but most people call it depression. It is focused on the link between melancholia, madness, and emotion. Mourning and this depression share

some characteristics and they are both triggered by some sort of a loss but the mourning is triggered by only death of a loved one or maybe even loss of a cherished object like someone's liberty or some preconceived notion.

The fact, everyone will lose their lover, like a father dead, mother, lover or best friends dead and then by reality lets someone know that they are gone and he did not perish and then he recovers and then the mourning process is over. The process of losing someone

also can lead people developed traumatic grief. People who have a traumatic event especially losing someone loved such as parents and then they are stuck in the trauma so they cannot transition to that natural grieving process. When somebody is grieving when they experienced a loss, it is a complicated grief or simple grief it is or can be traumatic and if they are experiencing traumatic grief they are going to have shock, denial, disbelief about what is going on in their life. This process restores someone in the previous state mostly and onward and upward right but melancholia is different, the thing that is lost is harder. It is harder to figure out what that thing that is lost.

From those concerns, mourning is a feeling of intense sorrow especially when somebody is dead. Then, they begin to feel sad and the feeling that they have uncomplicated bereavement. It is just intense sadness but melancholia is different. It becomes more complicated because the sadness is deeper and leads to depression. It is not a straight route after losing somebody but rather a valley. The deviant behavior occurs due to loss of somebody that causes personality change in someone. According to Freud (1971), mourning and melancholia, both of their responses look similar as far as mood or expression, because they deal with grief. In mourning, it is a finite and transforming process, but melancholia is a persistent state and takes root just outside of a person's conscious understanding. Meanwhile, losing someone can also lead someone to develop traumatic grief.

In fact, identification of the phenomenon of mourning and melancholia in real life can be seen from losing someone loved. For instance, as cited from Margiana (2020) in the case of Virginia Woolf, she developed melancholia after losing her mother. At age thirteen her mother died, from that moment a series major of mourning become more complicated which she has become changed her behavior, paralysis of will, and suicidal wished. Then, it worsened with the death of her father in 1904 and the death of her brother in 1906. Woolf also had experienced sexual abuse by her half-brother George and

Gerlad that was caused of traumatic and depression. Woolf had ever tried to commit suicide for times. As depicted in her works, she puts her experience into the novels such as *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *a Room of One's Own*. Then, with a long time she suffered from melancholia, she committed suicide by drowning herself into river Ouse on March 28th, 1941.

From the case of Virginia Woolf, it is seen that she developed mourning and melancholia. After losing someone loved and a traumatic event, people can suffer from melancholic depression. They will have a feeling of intense sorrow after the death of the loved one. This grief will pass after some time. Yet, it is a different case in melancholia or depression after losing someone loved. In this response of loss, they feel the pain in an internal way, the pain of melancholia is felt within the unconscious, meaning that the significance of loss is not apparent to the griever, even though the pain of it might still be deep. It means that the grief exists but cannot get processed by conscious mind. This unconsciousness is a part of the mind that generalizes thought and feeling which are difficult, aggressive, or traumatic. The traumatic grief influences their psyche which is inflicted by the pain of sadness. Similarly, the psychic shock and regretless incurred by the memory of the loss, recurring the nightmare, and compulsive repetitive behavior inflicted by the loss.

In this study, the writer is interested in analyzing *What to Say Next* novel by Julie Buxbaum. The novel was published in 2017. From the novel, the author won New York bestselling and a Best Young Adult Novel of the Year by POPSUGAR. The novel is the winner of the Westchester Fiction Award 2018. After reading the novel comprehensively, the writer found the issue was Mourning and Melancholia experienced by the character in the novel namely Kit.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The writer used a qualitative approach in analyzing the data. The qualitative method deals with interpretation by which qualitative method is used to dive deeper in analyzing the

problem of the study. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative method is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individual or group lay to a social or the problem of humans. Additionally, qualitative is fundamentally interpretive which means that the researcher makes an interpretation of data. It does not use number or calculating analysis. This method is used to complete understanding of social phenomenon and social behavior. Thus, this approach helps this study to solve the problem.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### The Cause of Melancholia on Character Kit in *What to Say Next*

In melancholia, the pain of grieving is internalized to the point that the person experiencing it might be unconsciously avoiding things that are related to the loss. The main cause of melancholia on Kit is because of the sudden death of her father and loss of her family in which her mother was cheated with uncle Jack.

#### 4.2.1 Sudden Death

After the sudden death of her father, it obviously makes Kit develop melancholia. the internal pain of her loss becomes more sorrow and unbearable as seen as in the quotation below.

I'm tired of the constant hole in my stomach, that slow burn of loss. I will never see my father again. Nothing I will ever do can change that. I wonder if one day soon I will forget the sound of his voice. I can't imagine a world where I can't conjure up its deep bass. Where I can't conjure up the planes of his face or the feeling of his hand on my forehead. That's not a world I want to live in.

(Buxbaum, 2017, p. 122).

The quotation above reveals that sorrow and grieving are more complicated. She doesn't even know how to feel. After her dad died, she

changed her behavior from avoiding her friends, isolated herself, and even blaming herself. These are indicated that she developed melancholia and the quotation above shows that she is afraid of forgetting her dad's voice and his face. Though it may be normal to feel that something is missing when losing someone over death, it may be harder for those who have internalized the pain as Kit mourns is more complicated and it turns into melancholy. Kit tries to explain her feeling in words, "slow burn of loss," which means that her feeling is constant, does not go away, and get more severe through times. However, at this point, Kit can still think logically by saying, "Nothing I will ever do can change that," because she knows that nothing that she can do will bring her father's back from death.

The idea of forgetting that particular person she had lost is more terrifying than having to remember her father constantly. She likes it that she still has photographs to remember her father, but cannot see the future in which she might forget her father. The use of the word "conjures" written two times in the line above means that Kit takes memory as something that needs to be invoked or called up because it lies deep in her thought. In the final line, Kit said, "that is not a world I want to live in," which may imply that she does not want to be alive, especially because her father is not around anymore. It can also mean that she wants to go from her current life, finding new places and friends.

Then, the feeling of melancholy becomes more sorrow as she has avoided many words that have reminded her of her father that indicates her developing trauma as seen in the quotation below.

So many available words:  
Expired. Killed. Departed.  
Liquidated. Gone. All have  
been banned from my house.  
"Sort of," I say. "That was a car  
accident, though. A bunch of

things added up, but there were two drivers. Human mistakes were made. That's different from an atmospheric disturbance, right?" "Maybe. But take each one of those human mistakes in isolation and you'd have a totally different outcome. Your dad could have walked away without a scratch."

(Buxbaum, 2017, p. 76)

Internalizing pain means that the pain of losing someone or something cannot be expressed with words. Kit avoids words that are related to death such as, "... expired. Killed. Liquidated. Gone. All have been banned from my house." It expresses that everything reminds her of the moment she lost her father. Words like "expired" are not normally used for a person's death, but for Kit, it still reminds her of the loss of her father. In the next dialogue, Kit still tries to find a logical reason about why her father was killed in the car accident. Another denial is expressed through the words, "... but there were two drivers. Human mistakes were made," assuming that Kit thinks that her father should not be the one who died because there is also a chance of another driver who could have been dead. This also implies that the accident happened because of someone, besides the fact that it is Kit's father's fate.

Every person who has experienced grief, most likely to go through seven clinical stages of grief. For those who experience melancholia, the stage of grief stops and develops at depression, never reaching the acceptance step. In the dialogue below, Kit seems to explain the difference between her and other people's grief towards her father's death.

My mother, who has clearly reverted back to stage one, denial, or maybe pre-stage one, bacon, has taken to her bed, stuffed with an array of pig products. She's left us alone to

this masochists' exercise. Too many memories in here [...] One of my dad and me all dressed up at my elementary school's father-daughter dance, which I turned around as soon as we walked in so I didn't have to look at it. And last, my favorite picture of my family taken at my mother's fortieth-birthday party, which is now face down: My dad is holding me on his hip, even though I'm ten and way too big to be carried, and we're all laughing at a joke he just cracked about my mom getting too old for him.

(Buxbaum, 2017, p. 85 - 86)

Stage one of grief is denial, where one usually cannot accept the fact of someone's death. "Reverted back to stage one," probably means that Kit's mother goes back to the condition right after the death of Kit's mother, before she starts to go into the denial phase. With this condition, Kit feels that her mother left her by saying, "left us alone to this masochists' exercise," which means that she knows that remembering her dad will only cause harm or pain to her, but she does in any way. Masochism is a behavior where one feels satisfaction when being hurt, emotionally or physically. This is what Kit feels by going through her photographs with her father. It can be seen further from the line, "I turned around as soon as we walked in so I didn't have to look at it," which emphasizes that it still hurts for Kit to see her father looking all happy in the photographs, where the fact shows the opposite.

Through the line, "my favorite picture of my family taken at my mother's fortieth-birthday party, which is now face down," it can also be seen that Kit tries to forget the memories because one of the photographs is not "face down". It is clear that Kit does not want to see the memories anymore. However, the fact that the photographs are still in her house shows that it is inevitable for her to

remember her father. Furthermore, it implies that now Kit does not feel the happiness she used to feel when her father is still around. It can be seen from the last line on the paragraph, “We look happier than anyone deserves to be,” which can be understood that the photographs remind her of the happy times she had with her father and feels that it is how things were supposed to be.

In addition, the way Kit internalizes the pain takes her further to investigate the death of her father. It is obviously emphasized that the sudden death of her father is the main cause she experiences melancholia. Thus, she is trying to find the reason, while in fact the accident had already happened. This is shown in the paragraph below.

I want to know the exact last second my dad’s accident could have been avoided. When the brakes needed to have been pressed. If the whole thing could have been stopped in the first place. I want to make mathematical sense out of the inexplicable. Now it just sounds insane.

(Buxbaum, 2017, p. 134)

Death is inevitable and most people will eventually accept the condition of losing someone. Kit starts to show her obsession towards the tragedy that took her father’s life. It is implied in the sentence, “I want to know the exact last second my dad’s accident could have been avoided,” which sounds ineffective because the accident had already happened. Through the questions of “when the brakes needed to have been pressed,” and “if the whole thing could have been stopped,” Kit is making illogical reasoning for her father’s accident. This means, even if she finds the calculation, her father would still not be alive. However, her desire to “make mathematical sense out of the inexplicable,” sounds impossible because it would take too much effort. Yet, Kit realizes this but cannot stop herself from doing it by saying, “it just sounds insane,” which means that a rational person would not even think about that.

#### 4.2.2 Loss Family

After the sudden death of her father, it really indicates that Kit develops melancholia. The fact that her father was dead hardly hit her. she feels the pain more than she ever imagined. Then, she knows that her mother was cheated on with Jack and before her father died, both of them are still in the middle of divorce. The fact that her parents will divorce makes her sink in terrible sadness. losing someone indeed is painful, but at times there are other implications after that particular person passed away. This makes Kit fall deeper by knowing that she has lost her father and now she has lost her family as depicted in the quotation below.

Marriages fall apart all the time, but I never thought it would happen to my parents. They seemed above that somehow. And then it hits me that ironically there are no real consequences. My dad is dead. I don’t have to deal with two homes and complicated weekend arrangements and awkward. Thanksgiving negotiations. This changes nothing about my future.

(Buxbaum, 2017, p. 87)

From the dialogue above, it can be denoted that Kit’s parents were at the edge of a separation or divorce before the accident happened. Kit tries to understand this from the point of view of a daughter by saying, “marriages fall apart all the time.” However, though the fact of her parents’ divorce might be true and would be a bad thing for Kit, it is shown in the dialogue that Kit is somehow grateful that her father is dead because it means there is no divorce between her parents. It can be seen from the line, “it hits me that ironically there are no real consequences.” What Kit means by “consequences” is the things that might happen if her parents go through the divorce. There may be implications such as child custody, visitation arrangement, and

scheduling especially when there are celebrations or holidays. Yet, her father's death seems to be equal with her parents' divorce, only without those implications. For Kit, there might not be a better choice between the possibility of divorce or her father's death, because in her words, "this changes nothing about my future," implies that she would still be in a melancholia whether any of those conditions happen.

When someone is in grief, usually they are drowned in their feelings and do not have the time to try to have the burden of questioning other people's grief. This happens to Kit, while imagining a scene in her head, shown in the lines "I'm imagining my dad finding out about my mom and Jack. How had that terrible scene played out? And were their tears at the funeral real? Was it grief or guilt?" (Buxbaum, 2017, p. 100). The first line, "I'm imagining my dad finding out about my mom and Jack," implies that Kit imagines things that did not happen. Kit also ignores the fact that her father might know about her mother's affair even before his death. At this point of mourning, what hurt her father now hurt Kit, too. It can be seen from how she explains the affair as a "terrible scene". The way Kit questions, "and were their tears at the funeral real? Was it grief or guilt?" is not relevant because she cannot demand to know other people's feelings when her father died. The questions rise because Kit takes every detail of her father's death internally, unconsciously being tense about every problem that happens from before her father's death.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### 5.1 Conclusion

From the data analysis, there are several points that can be concluded. Regarding the novel, which discusses the depiction of mourning and melancholia after the protagonist lost her father. The representation of mourning and melancholia is reflected on the character in the novel *What to Say Next* by Julie Buxbaum. It also represents the cause and the impacts of melancholia. In the analysis, it is found that the protagonist Kit develops mourning after losing her father but the mourn becomes more complicated and

unbearable for her, then she ends up with melancholia. The portrayal of melancholia on the main character is seen from her acts as she avoided or escaped from people, changed her behavior, aligned herself, blaming herself, and having death wishes.

Then, from the analysis is also found the cause and the impacts of melancholia. The main cause the protagonist develops melancholia is because of the sudden death of her father. After losing her father, she started to feel grief stages as she mourns in the absence of her father and then the grief becomes more sorrowful and complicated which she has feeling terrible that refers to a very confusing condition and slowly drowns into an endless pit and she cannot find a way out. Melancholia also impacted her which she experienced trauma, having a nightmare, having negative expectations, drowning into her feelings, and paralysis of will.

### 5.2 Suggestion

This study analyzed the depiction of mourning and melancholia in *What to Say Next* novel by Julie Buxbaum. The first suggestion goes to the students who want to analyze melancholia and the cause and its impacts. Then, the writer also suggests that future researchers in the same subject can use different theories and different objects in order to reveal more about melancholia. Furthermore, in order to make the analysis easier to do, please read the novel carefully to find the character's behavior easily. To the readers, *What to Say Next* novel is a good novel that gives a deep understanding about mourning and melancholia and how someone can develop melancholia.

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