

# Ego vs The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Unsolved Trauma in Joji's Past Won't Leave My Bed

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of the conflict between the ego and the unconscious, as well as the dynamics of unresolved trauma, in the lyrics of Joji's song "Past Won't Leave My Bed." Additionally, this study aims to identify how these psychological patterns consistently emerge through their connection to other songs, such as "Glimpse of Us," "Will He," and "Slow Dancing in the Dark." This study employs a qualitative approach using text analysis grounded in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The primary data, consisting of song lyrics, were analyzed through documentation and literature review techniques, then processed using data analysis steps according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, as well as Creswell. The analysis was conducted thematically to identify patterns of trauma representation, including the persistence of the unconscious, intrapsychic conflict, the emergence of intrusive thoughts, superego pressure, and conditions of psychological helplessness. The results of the study indicate that trauma in song lyrics is not only represented as an emotional experience but also as a complex and recurring psychological process. The conflict between the ego and the unconscious is evident through the individual's inability to let go of the past, which continues to intrude into consciousness. These findings confirm that unresolved traumatic experiences can lead to anxiety, emotional dependency, and psychological imbalance. Thus, this study reinforces the relevance of the psychoanalytic approach in the study of modern music while demonstrating that song lyrics can reflect real and profound psychological states.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, trauma, unconscious, song lyrics, intrapsychic conflict

## INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics are a form of human emotional expression conveyed through imaginative and poetic language. Through the use of symbolic language, lyrics can convey meanings that are not always literal but also contain a deep emotional dimension. As a form of expression, lyrics often represent human inner experiences, such as emotions, psychological conflicts, and reflections on life. The use of indirect language allows the writer to convey complex feelings in a more subtle and aesthetically pleasing manner.

This demonstrates that language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for expressing deeper, more subjective meanings. In this context, language serves as a vital means of representing human emotional experiences. In the field of music psychology, emotions conveyed through lyrics and music can influence and reflect an individual's inner experiences ( Juslin & Västfjäll, n.d.) Therefore, song lyrics can be understood not only as entertainment but also as a representation of complex emotional experiences.

In a broader context, this form of expression falls within the realm of literature. Literature plays a vital role as a medium for expressing inner experiences and serving as a social reflection, as it represents not only external reality but also internal realities such as inner struggles, anxiety, loss, and hope.

(Wellek and Warren 1949) state that literature reflects the psychological and social aspects of human life. Meanwhile, (Eagleton Theory, n.d.) asserts that literary works can be used to understand the structure of emotions and ideologies within society. (Abrams 1999, n.d.) also emphasizes that literature is a form of interpreting human experience through imaginative language. Thus, song lyrics, as a part of literature, hold great potential for deeper analysis, particularly in uncovering the psychological meanings they contain.

The urgency of research on song lyrics lies in their ability to reveal emotional and psychological structures that are not always explicitly apparent. Lyrics are not merely artistic expressions but can also reflect inner conflicts, emotional repression, and an individual's subconscious experiences.

One song worth examining in this context is "Past Won't Leave My Bed" by Joji. This song conveys a strong melancholic atmosphere through its minimalist musical arrangement and reflective lyrics.

Sad-sounding music is often associated with the process of self-reflection and the adaptive processing of negative emotions. (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014) explain that melancholic music can help individuals understand complex emotional experiences, including sadness and loss.

In this song, the simplicity of the word choices reinforces a personal and intimate feel, allowing listeners to feel an emotional connection to the experiences depicted.

Additionally, the use of minimalist elements in popular music is often employed to emphasize a reflective and contemplative atmosphere (Taruffi & Koelsch, 2014).

This song is also characterized by the use of repetitive lyrics. The repetition of certain phrases creates the impression that the lyrical protagonist is experiencing a cycle of thoughts that keeps repeating. This repetition can be linked to the concept of rumination, which is the tendency for individuals to repeatedly dwell on painful emotional experiences (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000)

Research on the psychological functions of music indicates that repetition in songs can intensify emotional experiences and enhance listeners' affective engagement (Schäfer et al., 2013). Thus, the repetition of lyrics in this song can be understood as a representation of unresolved inner conflict.

The title "Past Won't Leave My Bed" offers a powerful metaphor for the past that is constantly present in an individual's personal space. The bed, which is typically a symbol of comfort, is instead filled with shadows of the past. This situation reflects the psychological experience of someone who struggles to come to terms with trauma.

(2024 van der Kolk (2014) explains that traumatic experiences often resurface in the form of intrusive memories that disrupt an individual's daily life. Additionally, (Cathy Caruth 1996) on his *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) states that trauma is an experience that repeatedly resurfaces in consciousness because it has not been emotionally resolved.

To analyze these psychological dynamics, this study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. (Freud,1923)

divides the personality structure into three main components; the Id, Ego, and Superego which interact to shape an individual's behavior. Furthermore, (Freud, 1920) introduced the concept of repetition compulsion, which refers to an individual's tendency to unconsciously reenact traumatic experiences. This concept relates to the ideas in Mourning and Melancholia, which explain that unresolved grief can develop into prolonged melancholia (Freud, 1917).

Previous studies on Joji's songs have mostly focused on the stylistic aspects of the lyrics, such as figurative language, diction, imagery, and other stylistic devices used to create emotional expression in the songs. These studies tend to analyze how the language is constructed aesthetically and how stylistic elements contribute to the uniqueness of Joji's songwriting. However, there is still limited research focusing on the deeper meaning of Joji's songs, particularly how the lyrics represent emotional struggles, psychological experiences, and implied messages. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by focusing not on the stylistic form of the song, but on the meaning behind the lyrics and how the song reflects emotional struggles and personal experiences. Based on the above discussion, this study focuses on how the conflict between the Ego and the Id is represented in the song "Past Won't Leave My Bed." The aim of this study is to analyze the psychological conflict and the mechanisms of trauma repetition in the song's lyrics.

Although Joji's songs are often perceived as melancholic by listeners, such interpretations remain largely subjective and have not been systematically examined using a psychoanalytic approach. This indicates a research gap that needs to be addressed.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide a more theoretical and in-depth analysis of Joji's song lyrics. In addition to making an academic contribution, this study is also expected to raise awareness of the importance of mental health.

In line with this, the study is relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being, which emphasizes the importance of psychological well-being. Music can serve as a medium for emotional reflection and help individuals manage complex psychological experiences (Viatokha et al., 2025)

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, aiming to interpret the psychological meanings embedded in the lyrics of the song under investigation rather than to measure phenomena. A qualitative approach is highly relevant to this study because its focus lies on revealing unresolved trauma symbolically represented through language, tone, and repetition in Joji's song "Past Won't Leave My Bed." Rather than treating lyrics merely as expressions, this study positions them as a space where the tension between the ego and the unconscious becomes visible. Thus, this research not only describes the presence of trauma but also critically examines how that trauma resists resolution as the unconscious continuously disrupts the ego's efforts to maintain control and coherence.

The primary data source for this study is the lyrics of Joji's song "Past Won't Leave My Bed," which are regarded as a poetic narrative reflecting internal psychological struggles. Rather than assuming that the lyrics transparently represent the artist's intentions, this study treats them as a

constructed text open to various interpretations. To avoid a wholly subjective reading, the analysis is grounded in psychoanalytic theory, specifically Sigmund Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego. Supporting data is drawn from scholarly books and journal articles on psychoanalysis and trauma studies. This theoretical framework serves as both an interpretive tool and a means to demonstrate whether the lyrics reflect a stable self or a fragmented psyche shaped by unresolved past experiences. Data was collected through documentation and literature review. Song lyrics were carefully selected, transcribed, and reviewed multiple times to identify recurring words, metaphors, and emotional patterns. At the same time, relevant academic sources were gathered to contextualize the analysis within a psychoanalytic framework. This process was not merely mechanical but involved a critical engagement with both the text and the theory. For example, rather than simply aligning lyrics with Freud's concepts, this study examines the extent to which psychoanalytic theory can account for contemporary trauma particularly in modern music and where that theory has its limitations.

Data analysis followed the framework proposed by (M. Miles et al., 2013), which includes data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. However, this study applied the model reflectively rather than rigidly. During data collection, the selection of significant lines was treated as an interpretive act, shaped by the researcher's analytical lens. The data were then presented thematically to reveal patterns of repression, repetition, and emotional paralysis. In drawing conclusions, this study does not aim to produce a single fixed meaning, but rather explores how the lyrics represent an ongoing conflict in which the ego fails to

fully repress the id or the unconscious, thereby allowing the trauma to persist. (Creswell J. W. (2014).) steps for organizing data thorough reading, coding, generating themes, presenting descriptions, and interpreting meaning were also incorporated to ensure systematic analysis, while still allowing room for critical reflection.

As it was notes, qualitative research is concerned with understanding how meaning is constructed, rather than discovered as an objective truth. In line with this, this study does not claim to reveal the actual psychological state of the song, but offers an interpretation grounded in trauma theory regarding the trauma represented and perpetuated in the text. Similarly, (Miles et al., n.d.) emphasize that analysis involves not only organizing data but also understanding it through careful interpretation. Therefore, this methodology emphasizes analytical rigor and critical awareness by acknowledging that every reading of a text is shaped by theoretical assumptions and interpretive choices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Introduction

This study presents the results and discussion of an analysis of Joji's song "Past Won't Leave My Bed," situating it in relation to other works such as "Slow Dancing in the Dark," "Glimpse of Us," and "Will He." These songs consistently depict emotional experiences of loss, unresolved attachments, and recurring inner conflicts. In "Glimpse of Us," for example, the subject's inability to let go of the past is evident, while "Slow Dancing in the Dark" and "Will He" reflect emotional pain and insecurity still rooted in past experiences. This connection indicates a thematic pattern that underscores the enduring influence of

the past on an individual's psychological life.

In this context, "Past Won't Leave My Bed" offers a more explicit representation of the past as an intrusive psychological force. Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach, this section examines how the conflict between the ego and the unconscious manifests in the lyrics. The findings are then interpreted to demonstrate that the song is not merely an emotional expression but also represents a complex psychological process, particularly concerning unresolved trauma and the dynamics of intrapsychic conflict.

## B. Research Findings

The findings of this study reveal that representations of trauma in Joji's songs do not merely appear as emotional themes but are also structured within consistent psychological patterns. Based on an analysis of the lyrics in "Past Won't Leave My Bed," "Glimpse of Us," "Will He," and "Slow Dancing in the Dark," five main categories representing the dynamics of trauma were identified: (1) the persistence of trauma in the unconscious, (2) the conflict between the ego and the unconscious, (3) the emergence of intrusive thoughts, (4) superego pressure, and (5) a state of psychological helplessness leading to anxiety.

First, trauma is represented as a persistent entity that dominates the unconscious. In the song "Past Won't Leave My Bed," the lyric "past won't leave my bed" explicitly depicts the past as something that remains ever-present and occupies an individual's personal space. The use of the "bed" metaphor as an intimate space indicates that trauma is not merely external but has been deeply internalized. This finding is reinforced by the song "Glimpse of Us," particularly through the phrase "a glimpse

of us," which represents the emergence of past memories in the form of unintended flashes. This data indicates that traumatic experiences do not completely disappear but remain active and can resurface in consciousness beyond an individual's control.

Second, this study found a conflict between the ego and the unconscious, as evidenced by the tension between the desire to move forward in life and the resurgence of past memories. In "Past Won't Leave My Bed," the lyric "I try to move on" indicates a conscious effort to adapt to a new reality. However, this effort is not fully successful because in "Glimpse of Us," the lyric "I still see your shadows" shows that the shadows of the past persist and resurface repeatedly. The contrast between these two lyrics underscores the tension between rational consciousness (the ego) and unconscious drives, creating a psychologically unstable state.

Third, the analysis reveals the emergence of intrusive thoughts as a form of unresolved experience. In the song "Will He," the lyric "do you think about me?" appears as a recurring question reflecting uncontrollable thoughts. Meanwhile, in "Glimpse of Us," the lyric "perfect doesn't mean that it's working" indicates a disruption in the process of rational thinking, where an ideal-seeming reality remains unable to resolve deep emotional conflict. This pattern suggests that intrusive thoughts not only occur repetitively but also disrupt an individual's ability to interpret reality in a stable manner.

Fourth, there is evidence of superego pressure manifested in the form of demands for relationship perfection and feelings of inadequacy. In the song "Slow Dancing in the Dark," the lyric "I don't want a friend" reflects an emotional need that goes deeper than a casual relationship, while the lyric

“give me reasons we should be complete” indicates internal expectations of an ideal and whole relationship. These two pieces of evidence indicate that the individual is not only in conflict with the past but also with high internal standards, which ultimately intensify psychological tension.

Fifth, the accumulation of these various conflicts results in a state of psychological helplessness characterized by anxiety and a loss of control over one’s thoughts. In the song “Past Won’t Leave My Bed,” the lyric “I can’t escape” clearly indicates the individual’s inability to free themselves from internal pressure. This is reinforced by the lyric in “Will He,” namely “am I still in your heart?” which reflects recurring anxiety regarding acceptance and one’s place within past relationships. These findings suggest that unresolved trauma can develop into a psychological condition characterized by feelings of helplessness, emotional dependence, and recurring anxiety.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that trauma in the analyzed songs is represented not merely as an emotional experience, but also as a complex and multi-layered psychological process. This representation encompasses the interaction between various conflicting psychological structures, as well as the long-term effects that influence an individual’s emotional stability.

### C. Discussion

#### 1. The Persistence of Trauma in the Unconscious

The analysis reveals that trauma in the song “Past Won’t Leave My Bed” is represented as something that remains ever-present and cannot be eradicated from the subject’s life. This is evident in the lyric “past won’t leave my bed,” which depicts the past as an entity that resides within the individual’s personal

space. This representation aligns with the concept of the unconscious in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, where repressed traumatic experiences do not truly disappear but are stored and remain active in the unconscious (Freud 1915, 1957)

A similar phenomenon is also evident in the song “Glimpse of Us” through the phrase “I still see your shadows,” which suggests that emotional memories persist even when the individual is in a new situation. Thus, the trauma in Joji’s work is not merely passive but also persistent and intrusive, continuing to influence the individual’s psychological state (Cathy Caruth, 2021).

#### 2. Conflict Between the Ego and the Unconscious

The next finding indicates a significant conflict between the ego and the unconscious. The lyric “I try to move on” reflects the ego’s effort to adapt to reality and move forward with life. However, this effort is ineffective due to impulses from the unconscious that continually bring past experiences back to the surface.

This is reinforced by lyrics in “Glimpse of Us” such as “a glimpse of us,” which indicate that past memories surface unintentionally. From a Freudian perspective, this condition is termed an intrapsychic conflict; a clash between internal drives and rational consciousness (Freud, n.d.) The ego, in this context, appears weakened because it is unable to control the dominance of the unconscious, thereby creating psychological imbalance (Hall, n.d.)

#### 3. Intrusive Thoughts as a Form of the Return of the Repressed

The analysis also reveals the emergence of intrusive thoughts, which serve as an indication of the return of the repressed.

Lyrics such as “I can’t escape” in “Past Won’t Leave My Bed” and “do you think about me?” in “Will He” reflect the emergence of repetitive and uncontrollable thoughts.

According to Freud, repressed material tends to return to consciousness in an uncontrolled form (Freud, 1915/1957.). In this context, intrusive thoughts serve as a manifestation of unresolved trauma. This condition not only highlights the dominance of the unconscious but also reveals the failure of defense mechanisms to maintain mental stability (Laplanche, n.d.).

#### 4. The Role of the Superego in Intensifying Psychological Conflict

In addition to the conflict between the ego and the unconscious, the analysis also indicates pressure from the superego. Although not always explicit, the lyrical nuances in the song “Slow Dancing in the Dark”, for example, “give me reasons we should be complete”—suggest an internal demand for relationship perfection.

The superego functions as a moral structure that provides ideal standards for the individual. When these standards are not met, the individual tends to experience guilt and self-dissatisfaction (Freud 1923/1961, n.d.). This exacerbates internal conflict, as the ego must not only contend with pressure from the unconscious but also from the judgmental superego (Feist & Feist, 2008)

#### 5. Psychological Helplessness as the Final Outcome

The accumulation of conflict between the ego, the unconscious, and the superego ultimately results in a state of psychological helplessness. The lyric “I can’t escape what’s inside my head” indicates that the individual has lost control over their own thoughts.

This condition is further reinforced by lyrics in “Will He” such as “am I still in your heart?”, which reflect recurring anxiety and emotional dependence on the past. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this condition can be categorized as anxiety neurosis, in which an individual experiences anxiety due to unresolved internal conflicts (Freud, 1895/1955); (Corey, n.d.).

#### D. Implications

This study makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of the psychoanalytic approach proposed by Sigmund Freud in analyzing contemporary musical works, particularly in uncovering representations of trauma and the dynamics of intrapsychic conflict manifested in song lyrics. The results of the analysis indicate that concepts such as the unconscious, the conflict between the ego and the superego, and the mechanism of repression remain applicable in understanding modern artistic expression, thereby expanding the scope of psychoanalytic theory’s application in the study of literature and popular music.

In practical terms, this study provides listeners with a deeper understanding that the emotional experiences depicted in songs serve not only as artistic expressions but also as reflections of real and complex psychological states. Thus, these findings are expected to raise individuals’ awareness of the importance of recognizing and understanding unresolved traumatic experiences, as well as to encourage self-reflection as a first step toward achieving emotional balance.

Furthermore, to strengthen the interpretation of the findings, this study also employs comparative and causal analysis techniques. Through a comparative

approach, lyrics representing the ego's efforts to exercise self-control are contrasted with those indicating the dominance of the unconscious, revealing an imbalance between the two, where unconscious impulses tend to be more dominant than the ego's rational control. Meanwhile, through causal analysis, it was identified that unresolved past trauma acts as the primary factor triggering various psychological consequences, such as anxiety, an inability to move on emotionally, and recurring internal conflicts. Thus, the integration of these two analytical techniques not only strengthens the validity of the findings but also clarifies the relationship between psychological structures and emotional representations in song lyrics.

Based on the overall results of the analysis, this study shows that the songs examined not only represent expressions of sadness, but also provide a profound depiction of the psychological conflicts experienced by modern individuals. These representations reflect how unrecognized traumatic experiences continue to have a significant impact on individuals' emotional and mental states.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that unresolved trauma has the potential to become a persistent psychological burden, which continuously influences the way individuals think, feel, and respond to the reality around them. Therefore, it is important for individuals to consciously confront and reflect on these traumatic experiences in order to achieve emotional stability and reduce ongoing intrapsychic conflict.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that song lyrics, as a form of literary expression, serve not only as an artistic medium but also as a complex representation of an individual's psychological dynamics. Through the psychoanalytic approach proposed by Sigmund Freud, this study successfully demonstrates that modern musical works can reflect intrapsychic conflicts involving the interaction between the ego, the unconscious, and the superego.

Specifically, this study addresses the research question by demonstrating that in the song "Past Won't Leave My Bed," the conflict between the ego and the unconscious is represented through the dominance of the past that persistently lingers in the individual's consciousness. The ego, which strives to move forward with life, is unable to fully control the impulses from the unconscious, thereby generating recurring psychological tension. This is reinforced by the main findings consisting of five patterns of trauma representation: the persistence of trauma in the unconscious, the conflict between the ego and the unconscious, the emergence of intrusive thoughts, superego pressure, and a state of psychological helplessness leading to anxiety.

Furthermore, this study concludes that unresolved trauma is not passive, but rather active and intrusive, and continues to shape an individual's emotional experiences. This finding indicates a failure of psychological mechanisms to resolve internal conflict, leaving individuals trapped in a cycle of repeated traumatic experiences. Thus, this song not only depicts sadness but also represents a complex and ongoing psychological process.

The implications of this study suggest that a psychoanalytic approach remains relevant in analyzing contemporary musical works, while also providing an understanding that

emotional expression in songs can reflect real psychological conditions. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine the representation of trauma in popular music more broadly using a multidisciplinary approach, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between artistic expression and individual mental health.

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