FORMAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN MELANCHOLY AND GRIEF THEMED REALISTIC PORTRAITURE

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ABSTRACT

When emotions such as melancholia and grief are expressed in paintings, elements and principles of art are being applied to achieve the desirable visual outcome. In this study, nine melancholy portraits have been chosen to be analyzed and interpreted through formal analysis. Every artwork has recognized to have their respective prominent elements and principles of art that creates their own kind of unique impression of emotions intended.

Keywords: *Formal analysis, melancholia, grief, elements of art, principles of art, art and emotions.*

INTRODUCTION

According to Akiskal & Akiskal (2007), the concept of melancholia has existed as early as fourth century BC by Hippocrates in describing the person as insomnia, loss of appetite, complaining of fears and so on which points to depressive mixed state in today's diagnosis. Nowadays emotions of melancholia and grief are already known to be expressive. In representational art, in regard to art and emotions Collingwood (1958) mentioned that the painter may "only find out what the emotions are in the course of finding out how to express them". He also stressed that an act of expressing of an artist is an exploration of his own emotions. In addition, a person who expresses emotions is addressing the artwork primarily to the art maker himself before to the anyone who can understand (Collingwood, 1958).

Melancholic artmaking can be traced back to an engraving titled *Melencolia I* by Albrecht Dürer in 1514. In *Melencolia I*, the subject appeared in classic meditative of stooped posture suggests a gloomy mood. The somber mood is enhanced by the gray and grim atmosphere. Other living things appeared lifeless like a spiritless cupid and a starving dog with downcast features as well as the cluttering arrangement of scientific instruments symbolize hopeless and cureless (Akiskal & Akiskal, 2007). Other objects such as the ladder, the wings of angels, sun rising and so on are symbolic. The intentional arrangement and composition in

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paintings are designed with meanings attached. Therefore, by exploring the elements and principles of art, meanings are revealed and interpreted which subsequently brings us to a deeper understanding or truth of the paintings.

Figure1. Melencolia I by Albrecht Dürer, 1514

LITERATURE REVIEW

Melancholy and Grief

According to Freud (1917), mourning is a reaction to a loss, can be a loved person or one's country or liberty or so on. Freud further explained that it is a process that cannot be skipped or interfered but to be overcome after a certain period of time. Hence, it is not necessary a pathological condition unless some people produce melancholia under the same influences. Melancholia can be distinguished if a person has features of it like losing interest in the outside world, diminution of self-regard, constant dejection, self-reproaches, feeling of guilt and not being able to love. Melancholia may be a reaction to the loss too, like mourning, but to a more ideal kind of loss, an object-loss from unconsciousness. A person with melancholia embodied may aware "whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him" (Freud, 1917)

Brady & Haapala (2003) redefined melancholia as refined, mature, involving quiet reflection, calming a turbulent soul and enriching human life in many ways. It has qualities of its own and not a mental disorder of any kind. Whereas it involves recollection or contemplation of memories of a person or place or events, therefore it may overlap with sadness but involves some degree of pleasure and also feeling of longing, yearning and missing. For example, reminiscing the childhood while feeling melancholic about the loss relationship and connection with some meaningful people and places. In paintings, melancholia is always introduced in a setting of isolation. Brady & Haapala explained that solitude often create the characteristic backdrop for the melancholic atmosphere. Nevertheless, "solitude can be both cause and effect

of melancholy" that makes the subjects looks convincingly in desperate loneliness, emptiness and unbearable longing (Brady & Haapala, 2003).

Emotion of grief is a process rather than a state (Ratcliffe, 2017). According to Volkan & Zinti (2018), mourning is a psychological response to any loss or change and grief is the emotion that accompanies mourning. For Brinkmann (2019), grief is a manifest, embodied process rather than an inner mental phenomenon and including both psychological and bodily experiences. He further mentions grief is expressed through the body. Therefore, in the case of paintings, the postures and gestures of the subject become the clue of identifying the emotions such as grief and melancholy. As Marin (1984) states, the story the painter chooses to depict will help him in deciding the most suited body posture, gesture and facial expression. However, the work of grief comes from the painter who experienced and embodied grief. For instance, Edvard Munch who suffered from the loss of his dearest mother and sister at his young age created works of grief such as *The Scream* (1893), *The Sick Child* (1885) and *Death in the Sickroom* (1895. It is obvious that the pain that Munch suffered become the driving force of his artmaking.

Colors and emotions

Colors has been discussed of its association with the emotions in paintings. The meaning and connotations attached to colors are influenced by factors such as innate, personal and cultural background of a person (Zammito, 2005; Kaya & Epps, 2004). Both studies also agreed that each color may be associated with more than one emotion and vice versa. For example, blue is perceived as calm and peace but also brings a feeling of sadness and depression. Hence, each color has its own positive and negative impressions (Kaya & Epps, 2004; Clarke & Costall, 2008). Besides, parameters of colors, hue, brightness and saturation will affect the mood. Saturated colors associated to enjoyment and fun while desaturated sadness and languidness (Zammito, 2005). In short, the color has never been fixed of its boundaries of usage in regard to the mood expressed. Paintings of melancholy or grief are unnecessary specifically expressed or portrayed in black due to its association to Hippocrates' four humors theory that melancholic state is attributed to the excess of black bile. The term 'melancholia' has gone through an evolution in meaning (Telles-Correia & Marques, 2015). Therefore, depiction of melancholy can be evolved from time to time as well. Newton (2014) clarifies that to convey melancholic feeling, emotions and thoughts, a variety of colors can be used with subtlety to show that melancholy does have visual correlates. He further mentioned the complexity of melancholy itself will determine how numerous and varied those correlations can be.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to identify the prominent formal elements and principles in every melancholic work of art chosen by using the method of formal analysis. Later, a comparative analysis will be carried out in the discussion to recognize respective prominent elements and principles of art in the expression of melancholia and grief by time.

METHODS

Data reduction

Data reduction has been carried out to reduce the high-volume data of melancholy and grief themed works to nine portraits selected. Those paintings chosen are painted by different artist dated from early seventeenth century to early twentieth century. Every painting is prominent and worth analyzed to show its uniqueness compared with other paintings.

Formal analysis

Adams (2018) introduced formalism as "an approach to art that stresses the significance of form over content as the source of a work's subjective appeal". A formal analysis of paintings considers the formal elements that form the language of visual art. They are lines, shape, form, color, value, texture, space and movements. These are combined and composed to form a design by artists by the core aspects of design called principles like balance, rhythm, order, proportion, pattern, harmony, emphasis and so on. In the final composition of a work of art, how the elements arranged and designs formed contribute significantly to the overall impression of the piece of art can be discussed and analyzed through formal analysis. Certain elements and principles may stand out as iconic or highly recognizable in some of the works of art. Some concepts in describing elements and principle of art are adopted from a table presented in a study by Kim, Elgammal & Mazzone (2022) as the figure shown below.

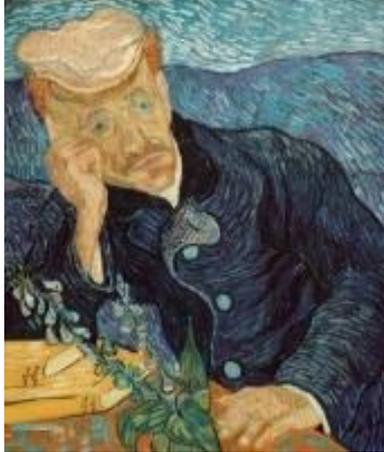| Elements and Principles of Art	Concepts
Subject	representational, non-representational
Line	blurred, broken, controlled curved, diagonal, horizontal vertical, meandering thick, thin, active, energetic, straight
Texture	bumpy, flat, smooth gestural, rough
Color	calm, cool, chromatic monochromatic, muted, warm, transparent
Shape	ambiguous, geometric, amorphous biomorphic, closed, open, distorted, heavy linear, organic, abstract, decorative, kinetic, light
Light and Space	bright, dark, atmospheric planar, perspective
General Principles of Art	overlapping, balance, contrast harmony, pattern, repetition, rhythm unity, variety, symmetry, proportion, parallel

**Figure2.** Concepts in describing elements and principle of art by Kim, Elgammal & Mazzone (2022)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A table is designed to the upmost to point out the significant and prominent elements that each painting presents. Elements such as line, color, light, space, texture and principles are being selected as investigation keys. Besides, posture and facial expression and symbolism/metaphor are two additional keys to investigate/identify more meanings from the paintings. The

explanations or interpretations have been stated in the table and in the discussion below the table.

Table 1. Visual analysis

ARTWORK AND TITLE	ASPECTS
\n\n*Portrait of Dr Gachet* by Dutch artist, Van Gogh, 1890	**Line and Texture** • Wavy lines • Directional Movement • Rough (thick brushstrokes) **Color** • Heavy and oppressive colors (Aronson & Ramachandran, 2006) • Unhealthy yellowish skin **Light and Space Setting** • A landscape of distant blue hills in the background **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Rhythm of lines forms a pattern • Warm hair and skin color and the object settings in front of the subject contrasted with the various blue tones of clothing and background **Posture and Facial Expression** • Slanted body with the head resting on a closed fist "Grief-stricken" expression, pinched mouth, anxious and averted gaze (Starobinski, 1993) **Symbolism/Metaphor** • A sprig of medical plant, foxglove on the table – a symbol of his profession two books by the Goncourt brothers – aesthetic interest of the subject (Starobinski, 1993)
\n\n*Democritus in Meditation* by Italian artist, Salvator Rosa, 1650	**Line and Texture** • Blurred contour of the subject and trees and objects in the background – create the effect of low visibility in the dark **Color** • Dull and muted colors **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric dark, chiaroscuro technique • The limbs of the subject especially the hands are lit to be stand out as well as the objects in the foreground **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • The small proportion of subject in the painting contrasted to the trees and sky in the background – the subject is overcome by the oppressive atmosphere surrounding him **Posture and Facial Expression** • Head-in-hand, slanted body **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Scattered skulls, bones and broken vessels on the ground – symbols of mortality and evanescence
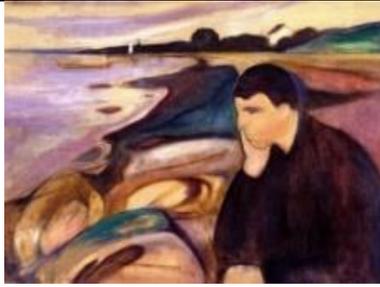
 Melancholy by Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch, 1892	**Line and Texture** • Curvy lines -slow movement of waves and clouds in sky **Color** • Brooding colors • Colors from dream – the vague sensation of memories **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric Bright **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Linear perspective (decreasing the sizes of objects) – create illusion of depth/distance **Posture and Facial Expression** • Body leaning slightly to one side with a hand supporting his head • Downcast gaze **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Pinkish purple may have romantic and love symbolism
 Melancholia by Italian painter, Domenico Fetti, 1615	**Line and Texture** • Wavy lines show all the folds and texture of the fabric of clothing **Color** • Fair skin tone, white sleeve of dress and opened book are the highlights in the painting **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric dark background • Lighting on foreground **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • The subject in the foreground is clearly detailed with the objects in her hand, on the table and on the ground contrasted with the blurry forms of the objects in the background **Posture and Facial Expression** • Head lies heavy in her hand • Her eyelids are heavy **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Skull facing the sitter – an analogue for a mirror/an object of the figure's contemplation (Hoare, 2010) • Paintbrushes, palette, small sculpture in the bottom right reveals the subject's occupation
 Melancholy by French painter, Edgar Degas, 1874	**Line and Texture** • Thick lines • Rough brushstrokes **Color** • Red creates and heightens intensity **Light and Space Setting** • Face and one hand are **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Dark subject on a light background

	Posture and Facial Expression • Body much leaning forward with arms around stomachPainful posture • Unease facial expression **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Painful facial expression may indicate suffering of pain of disease
  Femme assise (Melancholy Woman) by Spanish painter, Pablo Picasso, 1902	**Line and Texture** • Thick lines, Blurred lines **Color** • Monochromatic cool colors **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric lighting. Her face is illuminated by the light source from the window behind • In an empty bare room setting **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Three-dimensional space constructed by three planes: horizontal place (referring the lapse of the subject), vertical plane (the wall the subject lean against), the perpendicular the innermost wall at the right side of the subject **Posture and Facial Expression** • Slump downward and rest in her folded arms, crossed legs • Stern face and cold expression, staring at the wall of a cell - emotionally detached and distant, introspectively withdrawn **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Empty bare room signifies isolation
  Inconsolable Grief by Russian artist, Ivan Kramskoi, 1884	**Line and Texture** • Soft and blurry contour or lines of details of paintings with frames on the wall **Color** • Achromatic colors of black and gray heighten the mood of grief **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric shading • Theatrical lighting **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Central vertical proportion • Contrast of golden orange background with the black dress of the subject • Pale face contrasted with the dark gray wall **Posture and Facial Expression** • One hand pressing a scarf to her lips, another hand hangs exhausted • Eyes swollen and reddened • Standing motionless **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Arranged setting of grief with funeral wreaths • White scarf and • black clothing – mourning dress • Extinguished lamps may emphasize the death of a person

 Melancholy by French artist, Constance Marie Charpentier, 1801	**Line and Texture** • Smooth • Fabric texture **Color** • White clothing **Light and Space Setting** • Atmospheric dark shady landscape as background • Soothing shade on the subject in the foreground • Deep perspective in darkly wooded forest **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Light subject on a dark background • Bright detailed subject with her clothing and scarf contrasted **Posture and Facial Expression** • Slumped over, sitting on the ground • Legs are crossed gently • One arm hangs limply • Eyes are fixed on a single point (Hafera, 2015) **Symbolism/Metaphor** • White clothing signifies purity and innocence
 Eleven A.M. by American artist, Edward Hopper, 1926	**Line and Texture** • Blurred lines of the couch and the curtain **Color** • Dull muted colors • Pale skin color **Light and Space Setting** • A window brighten brings the light into the room **Principles (Rhythm, Contrast, Proportion, Perspective, Figure-Ground)** • Pale skin contrasted with other colors in the room, especially emphasized by the dark blue couch • Brightness increases from left to right **Posture and Facial Expression** • Hands clasped together, sitting naked • Looking out of her apartment window • Body is angled away from the viewer **Symbolism/Metaphor** • Urban apartment setting may signify isolation • Sunlight from the window – internal illumination and hope

Different artwork has their interpretations. Such as *Portrait of Dr Gachet* is interpreted as depiction of the mental state of the subject matter, Dr Gachet as well as the painter, Van Gogh's (Starobinski, 1993).

Landscape

Edvard Munch's *Melancholy* shows a distant isolation from the far away couple. The figures in the background had been suggested as friends of the artist and an amorous relationship between three of them resulted the artist in the foreground to be melancholy and jealous (Marcellán, n.d.). In this case, landscape plays the role in conveying the message of the far distance between them as connotation of their distant relationship.

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Color

Femme assise au fichu (Melancholy Woman) (1901) is portraying a woman in a prison, a place that housed numerous prostitutes at that time and many of them suffered from sexually transmitted diseases. In this painting, Picasso's usage of blue color is symbolic and he found highly compatible with the conditions with his subject matter – the poor, disabled and downtrodden (Ravin & Perkins, 2004). Although monochromatic but multiple unsaturated blue tones effectively evoke the melancholic mood. Furthermore, Hopper's *Eleven A.M.* is presented in muted colors to instigate mood of loneliness and isolation in the room. Meanwhile the light beam from the window introduces hope of freedom. The subject sits facing the window perhaps showing her desire for what is outside the window.

Posture

In *Melancholy* by Constance Marie, the lady who is sitting leaning forward on the ground looks drained of energy and in totally defeated mood. In contrast, in *Melancholy* by Edgar Degas, the subject much leaning forward with a painful facial expression showing the intense pain and suffering and a lot of energy needed in coping the situation. The desperation and intensity of mood is further pushed by the bright red color.

Symbolism of object

The books, geometrical figures, hour glass and skull in *Melancholia* by Domenico described by Starobinski (1993) as personifications of Black Bile and symbolism of the limits of knowledge and the transient nature of human existence. Despite of many things the subject possesses like how things are arranged and gathered around her, overwhelming her, the earthly value of those possession will fleet and eventually turn into nothingness. Rosa's depiction of skull as an analogue for a mirror as a meaning of reflection and self-discovery (Hoare, 2010). The small subject proportion arrangement in the painting contrasts to the trees and sky in the background indicates the weaknesses and vulnerability of the human.

Similarities

All the melancholia or grief artworks stand out the idea of isolation, the subjects are all alone. The color usage is mostly muted and atmospheric setting introduced. The posture are mostly rounded/hunched shoulders and closed body language. Mostly all of the subjects are not engaging with the audience or not showing interest in the spectators as their body are facing away from the viewers. They mostly have averted gaze or no eye contact with the viewers as they do not care and only immerse in their own thoughts and emotions.

Difference

The classical head-in-hand pose is conventional before 18th century to mean deep thinking or despair. The posture eventually is modified and undergoing a transition in 19th century and after with more people's daily relatable reactions or response and pose such as crossed arms, rounded shoulders sitting pose, both hands resting on thighs position in their encounter with melancholia. The usage of color not only dark background as the only way of portrayal but innovative ways such as Picasso's cool monochromatic blue and Hopper's muted colors.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, each painting definitely has achieved the outcome of impression of melancholy or grief even elements and principles of art applied may varied in different range. However, the similarity from the body language of melancholia and grief shared can conclude that body language is universal and continuation occurred from the past to the present. The elements and principles of art work mutually in expressing and conveying emotions.

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