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The Psychology of Loss: Mourning and Melancholia in Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran*

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ABSTRACT

Marjan Kamali's The Lion Women of Tehran (2024) traces the lifelong friendship of Elaheh "Ellie" Soltani and Homa Roozbeh amid the political and social transformations of twentieth-century Iran. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," this study examines how experiences of loss shape Ellie's psychological development. It focuses particularly on the deaths, separations, betrayal, guilt, and persistent attachment to the past that complicate her process of grieving. The study argues that Ellie's responses to loss oscillate between mourning, through which loss can gradually be acknowledged and worked through, and melancholic tendencies, in which unresolved loss remains psychologically internalized and intertwined with guilt and self-reproach. Homa consequently represents not only a lost friendship but also an internalized connection to Ellie's courage, authenticity, and earlier sense of self. The study further demonstrates how personal experiences of loss intersect with broader historical losses, including political freedom, security, belonging, and home. Ultimately, the novel portrays the confrontation and working-through of painful memories as essential to transforming unresolved guilt into responsibility and enabling reconciliation with the past.

Keywords: Mourning, Melancholia, Loss, Guilt, Identification, Psychoanalysis.

1. Introduction

Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* is a historical novel that explores friendship, class, political upheaval, memory, betrayal, and loss through the lifelong relationship between Elaheh "Ellie" Soltani and Homa Roozbeh. Set primarily against the social and political transformations of twentieth-century Iran, the novel follows the two girls from their childhood in 1950s Tehran into adulthood, separation, political conflict, and eventual attempts at reconciliation. Ellie's life is shaped by significant changes in her social circumstances, beginning with the death of her father and the subsequent transformation of her family's financial and social position. Her meeting with Homa introduces her to a different emotional and social world. Homa's confidence, intellectual curiosity, political awareness, and strong sense of justice contrast with Ellie's more cautious disposition. Their friendship consequently becomes central to Ellie's emotional development and continues to influence her even after circumstances repeatedly force them apart. The relationship between Ellie and Homa develops within a rapidly changing

Iranian society. Their childhood unfolds during a period marked by political tensions surrounding the nationalization of oil, the 1953 coup, and the subsequent political and social transformations of the Pahlavi era. As the characters grow older, the political environment increasingly enters their personal lives. Homa becomes more politically committed and eventually faces the consequences of her activism, while Ellie follows a comparatively safer and more privileged path. Their different responses to the political circumstances surrounding them contribute to the growing distance between them. The novel thus connects private relationships with larger historical forces, demonstrating how political repression, social inequality, and ideological conflict can enter intimate relationships and alter the course of individual lives.

Loss is one of the most persistent experiences in the novel. Ellie's early loss of her father is followed by changes in her family's circumstances and her separation from the world associated with her childhood. Her relationship with Homa also undergoes repeated cycles of connection and separation. Their friendship is interrupted by social differences, geographical distance, political circumstances, and, most significantly, Ellie's betrayal of Homa. These experiences produce not only external separation but also lasting emotional consequences. Later, Ellie's life in the United States does not erase her relationship with the past. Memories of Homa, her childhood, her choices, and the consequences of those choices continue to influence her understanding of herself. Loss in the novel is therefore cumulative rather than confined to a single bereavement: it includes the loss of loved ones, friendship, security, freedom, belonging, homeland, and unrealized possibilities. This representation of recurring and psychologically persistent loss provides a productive basis for applying Sigmund Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. In his essay *"Mourning and Melancholia"* (1917), Freud examines the psychological consequences of losing a loved person or an emotionally significant abstraction, such as a country, liberty, or ideal. He describes mourning as a painful but generally recognizable response to loss, in which the individual gradually withdraws emotional investment from the lost object and, through the process of "working through" the loss, becomes capable of redirecting that attachment. Melancholia, by contrast, is characterized by a more complicated relationship to loss. The subject may experience profound sadness, loss of interest in the external world, and a marked reduction in self-regard. Freud associates melancholia with an unconscious identification with the lost object, through which hostility or ambivalence connected to the object can become directed toward the self.

Freud's distinction is particularly relevant to Ellie's psychological trajectory because her losses are closely connected to memory, guilt, identification, and unresolved attachment. Homa is not merely an individual whom Ellie loses and later encounters again; she becomes associated with a formative period of Ellie's life and with qualities that Ellie admires but does not consistently embody herself. Homa represents courage, authenticity, political conviction, and a connection to the childhood self that Ellie gradually moves away from. Consequently, Ellie's separation from Homa involves more than the absence of a friend. It confronts Ellie with the consequences of her own choices and with aspects of herself that have become difficult to acknowledge. Her guilt following her betrayal further complicates the process of loss because the emotional conflict is directed not only toward what has been lost but also toward her own role in producing that loss. The concept of melancholia is therefore particularly useful for examining the persistence of the past in Ellie's consciousness. Her memories do not function simply as recollections of events that have ended; they remain emotionally active and influence how she understands her identity and responsibilities. At the same time, the novel should not be reduced to a simple diagnosis of Ellie as melancholic. Freud's distinction allows for a more

nuanced reading in which mourning and melancholic tendencies coexist and fluctuate. Ellie experiences losses that can be acknowledged and gradually integrated, while other losses remain complicated by guilt, ambivalence, and identification. Her eventual confrontation with her past consequently becomes significant because it creates the possibility of moving beyond passive attachment to unresolved loss toward recognition and responsibility.

The novel also expands the meaning of psychological loss beyond the individual. Ellie and Homa's personal experiences unfold within a history marked by political repression, violence, revolution, displacement, and changing ideas of freedom and belonging. Their individual losses can therefore be read alongside broader forms of collective and historical loss. The disappearance of political possibilities, the disruption of ordinary life, and the experience of leaving Iran contribute to the novel's larger concern with what individuals retain when the people, places, and futures they once valued are no longer accessible in the same way. Against this background, the study applies Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia to Ellie's psychological journey in *The Lion Women of Tehran*. It examines her responses to bereavement, separation, betrayal, guilt, memory, and attachment, with particular attention to her relationship with Homa. The study argues that Kamali represents Ellie's experience of loss through an ongoing tension between mourning and melancholic attachment. While certain losses can gradually be acknowledged, Ellie's relationship with Homa and the memory of her own betrayal remain psychologically active because they are bound to identification, guilt, and an unresolved sense of responsibility. Homa consequently functions both as a lost relational object and as an internal representation of a significant part of Ellie's identity. By tracing this movement between loss, internalization, guilt, and reconciliation, the study demonstrates how Kamali transforms a story of personal friendship into a broader exploration of the psychological consequences of losing people, places, ideals, and possible versions of the self.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* has been examined through themes of friendship, female courage, political conflict, and Iranian history, the psychological dimensions of loss in the novel remain relatively underexplored. Ellie experiences multiple forms of loss, including the death of her father, separation from Homa, betrayal, displacement, and the loss of her earlier sense of security and identity. These losses continue to influence her through memory, guilt, emotional attachment, and unresolved feelings toward the past. Therefore, this study applies Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia to examine how Ellie responds to these losses, how unresolved loss becomes psychologically internalized, and how her eventual confrontation with the past enables movement toward responsibility, reconciliation, and emotional resolution.

1.2 Research Questions

How does Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia illuminate Ellie's psychological responses to loss in *The Lion Women of Tehran*?

How do separation from Homa, guilt, identification, and attachment to the past contribute to Ellie's melancholic tendencies?

How does the novel portray Ellie's movement from unresolved loss toward psychological reconciliation and renewed connections?

1.3 Research Gap

Although emerging scholarship on Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* has examined themes such as feminist resistance, women's agency, identity, political change, and social transformation, its psychological representation of loss remains comparatively underexplored. In particular, Ellie's experiences of bereavement, separation from Homa, betrayal, guilt,

identification, and continuing attachment to the past have not been systematically examined through Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. This study addresses this gap by applying Freud's concepts of mourning, melancholia, identification, and self-reproach to explore how unresolved loss shapes Ellie's psychological development and how confronting the past contributes to responsibility, reconciliation, and renewed connection.

1.4 Significance

This study is significant because it offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of loss in Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* through Sigmund Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia. Rather than focusing only on friendship, feminism, and political history, the study examines Ellie's internal psychological responses to bereavement, separation, betrayal, guilt, and attachment to the past. It particularly explores how Homa's absence continues to shape Ellie's identity through memory, identification, and self-reproach. The study also connects personal experiences of loss with broader historical and political losses, including displacement, insecurity, freedom, and belonging. By applying Freud's framework while recognizing later developments in theories of mourning and identification, the study provides a nuanced understanding of Ellie's movement from unresolved grief and guilt toward responsibility, reconciliation, and renewed connection with the past.

2. Literature Review

Sigmund Freud's *"Mourning and Melancholia"* (1917) is a foundational psychoanalytic account of the psychological consequences of loss. Freud distinguishes mourning from melancholia by examining how the individual responds when an emotionally significant person or object is lost. His formulation has subsequently become an important point of reference not only in psychoanalysis but also in literary and cultural studies concerned with grief, memory, identity, and loss. Later scholarship has both clarified and challenged Freud's original distinction, particularly his understanding of detachment, identification, and the continuing presence of the lost object. Freud (1917) begins by defining mourning as a response to the loss of a loved person or an abstraction that has taken the place of such a person, including a country, liberty, ideal, or other valued object. Mourning is characterized by painful dejection, withdrawal of interest from the external world, and temporary inhibition of ordinary activity. Freud nevertheless regards mourning as a normal psychological process. The individual gradually confronts the reality of the loss and withdraws emotional investment from the lost object. Once this process has been completed, the subject becomes capable of redirecting emotional energy toward new objects. Freud therefore presents mourning primarily as a process through which the individual gradually works through the reality of loss.

Melancholia resembles mourning in several respects but differs significantly in its effect upon the subject's sense of self. Freud associates melancholia with profound dejection, loss of interest in the external world, diminished capacity for love, and inhibition of activity. Its most important distinguishing feature, however, is a disturbance in self-regard. The melancholic subject experiences intense self-reproach, self-criticism, and feelings of worthlessness. Freud proposes that these self-directed accusations are connected to the subject's relationship with the lost object. In melancholia, the ego becomes identified with the abandoned object, allowing hostility or ambivalence associated with the object relationship to be redirected toward the self (Freud, 1917). This distinction between mourning as a response to recognized loss and melancholia as a more complicated internalization of loss forms the theoretical foundation of the present study.

Middeke and Wald's *"Melancholia as a Sense of Loss: An Introduction"* by Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (2011) argument that melancholia is fundamentally connected with a sense of

loss. They explain that melancholia has a long intellectual and cultural history extending from antiquity to contemporary literary and cultural studies. Although melancholia has often been associated with psychological suffering, it has also historically been connected with philosophical insight, creativity, artistic achievement, and intellectual depth. This positive cultural valuation distinguishes the historical concept of melancholia from the modern psychiatric understanding of depression. The authors emphasize that the meaning of melancholia has changed across different historical and cultural periods. Rather than providing a single, fixed definition, they approach melancholia through a diachronic and interdisciplinary perspective, examining its development in medicine, psychology, philosophy, literature, art, and cultural theory. The study identifies two major forms of melancholic loss. The first concerns the awareness of lost time and mortality. Middeke and Wald explain that twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists have extended Freud's ideas beyond individual psychology to questions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, colonialism, race, and collective identity. The article also explains Freud's later development of this idea in "The Ego and the Id" (1923). Freud proposes that the ego itself is partly formed through the internalization of abandoned object relationships. The study further demonstrates that melancholia can operate at a collective level. Gilroy's concept of "postcolonial melancholia," for example, describes how unresolved and repressed histories of colonial violence can continue to affect contemporary British identity. Similarly, Cheng uses melancholia to examine racialization, arguing that internalized racial ideals can produce conflict and self-criticism within marginalized subjects (Gilroy, 2005; Cheng, 2000).

In "Melancholy Philosophy: Freud and Benjamin," Ilit Ferber (2006) contends that Walter Benjamin implicitly subverts Sigmund Freud's (1917) strict binary opposition between mourning and melancholia by reconfiguring melancholia as a philosophical mood rather than a pathological condition. Freud posits that mourning entails a conscious, locatable loss that, once acknowledged, allows the ego to detach from the lost object and leave the world empty while the ego remains intact, whereas melancholia involves an unconscious, unlocatable loss that compels the ego to internalize the object, splitting the ego and turning ambivalence into self-directed hostility, such that "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. Benjamin (1928/1998), however, collapses this distinction by using Trauer and Melancholie interchangeably, treating loss not merely as a thematic concern but as the foundational condition for the baroque Trauerspiel, which he characterizes as "stillborn" and perpetually in a state of "mortification" that renders it susceptible to critical legibility (Ferber, 2006). Moreover, Benjamin reworks Freud's model of melancholic loyalty: whereas Freud advocates the eventual severance of attachment to the lost object as necessary for mental health, Benjamin, through the figure of the courtier who betrays his human prince but remains utterly loyal to "the world of things," presents loyalty as a melancholic submission to material constellations that cannot be adequately directed toward ethical human relationships. Finally, Benjamin's notion of non-intentionality encapsulated in his assertion that "truth is the death of intention" positions melancholic sadness as boundless and without a clear object, in direct contrast to Freud's intentional, object-bound mourning, thereby establishing an alternative philosophical framework that occupies the interstices between Freud's two poles without conforming to either.

Radden (2002) emphasizes the significance of Freud's reconceptualization of melancholia through the category of loss. According to Radden, Freud's essay transformed melancholia from a general state of despondency into a psychological condition fundamentally associated with the loss of something meaningful. Radden also highlights Freud's importance in

developing concepts concerning the relationship between the ego and the lost object, particularly identification and introjection. Thus, Freud's account is significant because it shifts attention from the observable symptoms of sadness toward the underlying psychological relationship between the subject and what has been lost. Freud's concept of identification with the lost object has received particular attention in later psychoanalytic scholarship. In the melancholic process described by Freud, the lost object is not simply abandoned. Instead, the ego incorporates an aspect of the object through identification. Freud's formulation that "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" indicates that the loss becomes part of the subject's internal psychological structure. This mechanism helps explain why melancholia may involve self-reproach: criticism that is ostensibly directed toward the self may represent unresolved hostility toward the lost object. Contemporary accounts of Freud's theory continue to identify this relationship between loss, identification, and self-reproach as central to his distinction.

The historical development of Freud's concept has also been examined by Berliner (2019), who reconstructs the development of "Mourning and Melancholia" through Freud's exchanges with Karl Abraham and Sándor Ferenczi. Berliner demonstrates that Freud's formulation developed through an intellectual dialogue concerning narcissistic identification, introjection, and the relationship between the subject and the lost object. This historical perspective is important because it shows that Freud's theory was not produced as an isolated formulation but developed through ongoing psychoanalytic debates about loss and depression.

Dozois (2000) provides a critical examination of Freud's theory by placing "Mourning and Melancholia" within its historical and psychiatric context. He cautions against treating Freud's essay as either an unquestionable foundation of modern theories of depression or as a completely outdated account. Instead, he argues for attention to the historical assumptions underlying Freud's formulation. His discussion is particularly useful because it emphasizes distinctions within Freud's theory that can easily be simplified, including the difference between the interpersonal loss of an object and the psychological internalization of that loss, as well as the distinction between conscious and unconscious processes.

One of the most influential later critiques concerns Freud's understanding of the relationship between mourning and identification. Clewell (2004) argues that Freud's early account appears to suggest that successful mourning involves severing emotional attachment to the lost object and reinvesting libido elsewhere. However, Clewell points out that Freud's later writings, particularly *The Ego and the Id* (1923), complicate this distinction by treating identification with abandoned objects as an important part of ego formation. From this perspective, continuing psychological traces of the lost person are not necessarily evidence of pathological melancholia. Rather, the lost object can remain constitutive of the subject's identity. Clewell's argument is especially important for literary analysis because it challenges a simplistic opposition in which mourning represents healthy detachment and melancholia represents unhealthy attachment. Her interpretation suggests that mourning may involve an enduring relationship with the lost other rather than complete psychological separation. This allows literary scholars to examine characters who continue to carry memories, values, and aspects of lost relationships without automatically interpreting such attachment as pathological melancholia.

Kernberg (2004) likewise revisits Freud's distinction and places it within the subsequent development of psychoanalytic theories of normal and pathological mourning. He notes that Freud's essay remains a basic contribution to the psychoanalytic understanding of mourning, melancholia, depression, and identification, while also recognizing the contributions of later theorists such as Melanie Klein and Edith Jacobson. Kernberg's discussion demonstrates that

Freud's original formulation became a foundation for later theories of depressive reactions and object relations. The significance of Freud's mourning–melancholia distinction extends beyond clinical psychoanalysis into literary theory. Dalziell (2020) observes that mourning and melancholia have become major concepts in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literary theory. Freud's essay has provided a foundation for subsequent discussions of how literature represents loss, memory, identity, community, ethics, and political forms of mourning. Importantly, literary scholarship has expanded the discussion beyond individual bereavement to include cultural and historical losses. This expansion is particularly relevant to literary texts in which personal loss intersects with social and historical disruption. Freud himself allows such an extension because his definition of the lost object includes abstractions such as country, liberty, and ideals. Consequently, mourning can be examined not only in relation to death but also in relation to separation, displacement, political loss, and the collapse of previously meaningful attachments. Dalziell's account further demonstrates that contemporary literary criticism has used Freud's concepts to investigate the ethical and political implications of how individuals and communities remember and respond to loss.

More recent scholarship continues to reconsider Freud's categories in relation to identity and cultural difference. Khanna (2024) reviews the continuing use of Freud's mourning and melancholia in cultural analysis and discusses later developments associated with thinkers including Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, David Eng, David Kazanjian, Abraham and Torok, Derrida, and Anne Cheng. This scholarship demonstrates that Freud's original distinction has generated an extensive theoretical debate concerning incorporation, identification, difference, memory, and the relationship between individual and collective forms of loss. Overall, the literature demonstrates three important developments in the understanding of Freud's mourning and melancholia. First, Freud establishes a fundamental distinction between mourning as a process of confronting and working through loss and melancholia as a more complicated condition involving identification with the lost object and diminished self-regard. Second, later psychoanalytic scholarship complicates Freud's apparent opposition between detachment and identification by showing that continuing identification with the lost object can also contribute to the formation of the self. Third, literary and cultural theorists have extended Freud's concepts beyond individual bereavement to questions of memory, identity, historical trauma, political loss, and cultural belonging.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic distinction between mourning and melancholia, developed in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," as its principal theoretical framework. Freud's discussion provides a way of understanding how individuals psychologically respond to the loss of a loved person or a valued object. For Freud, loss may involve not only a person but also an abstraction such as a country, liberty, ideal, or other emotionally significant attachment. This broader conception of loss is particularly relevant to *The Lion Women of Tehran*, where personal bereavement and separation intersect with political upheaval, displacement, and the loss of security and belonging.

3.1 Loss and the Lost Object

Loss constitutes the starting point of Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. The lost object refers to the person, relationship, ideal, place, or other object toward which emotional attachment has been directed. Following loss, the subject must psychologically respond to the absence of that object. Freud emphasizes that the intensity and form of this response depend upon the nature of the individual's attachment to what has been lost.

3.2 Mourning and the Work of Loss

Freud defines mourning as a normal response to the loss of a loved person or valued abstraction. Its defining feature is the painful recognition that the object is no longer available. The subject gradually confronts memories, expectations, and emotional investments associated with the lost object. Freud describes this process as involving the withdrawal of libido from the lost object. Although mourning may temporarily produce withdrawal from ordinary activities and diminished interest in the external world, it does not necessarily involve the pathological reduction of self-esteem characteristic of melancholia.

3.3 Melancholia and Unresolved Loss

Freud distinguishes melancholia from mourning primarily through the melancholic subject's altered relationship with the self. Melancholia includes the painful loss of interest in the external world but is distinguished by a profound lowering of self-regard, self-reproach, and feelings of worthlessness. Freud argues that melancholia can emerge when the relationship with the lost object involves ambivalence and when the lost object becomes incorporated into the ego through unconscious identification.

3.4 From Mourning to Psychological Resolution

The final dimension of the framework concerns the difference between remaining psychologically attached to a loss and developing a more integrated relationship with it. Freud's account of mourning suggests that the painful process of confronting loss can eventually allow the subject to release emotional investment in the lost object. Melancholia, by contrast, involves a more complicated internalization in which the loss becomes entangled with the ego. This distinction allows the study to examine Ellie's eventual confrontation with her past and her relationship with Homa. Rather than treating reconciliation simply as the restoration of a friendship, the analysis considers it as an indication of Ellie's changing psychological relationship with loss, guilt, and memory. The central question is therefore not whether Ellie "forgets" what happened, but whether she can acknowledge the loss, accept responsibility, and integrate the past without remaining dominated by it.

4. Textual Analysis

The Lion Women of Tehran by Marjan Kamali is a historical novel about the lifelong friendship between Ellie (Elaheh) and Homa, two girls who meet in 1950s Tehran and develop a deep but complicated bond. Homa is courageous, politically active, and determined to become a strong woman who can fight for justice, while Ellie is more concerned with security, social status, and a comfortable life. Their friendship is disrupted by political turmoil and, most importantly, by Ellie's jealousy and careless disclosure of Homa's political activities, which leads to Homa's imprisonment. Although Homa experiences severe trauma, she survives, builds a family, and continues to resist injustice. Ellie moves to America but carries deep guilt over her betrayal. Years later, the two women reunite, and Homa's revelation that she had protected Ellie during her imprisonment opens the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through their relationship, the novel explores friendship, betrayal, guilt, trauma, loss, forgiveness, women's resistance, and the impact of Iran's political history on individual lives.

4.1 Loss and the Process of Mourning

In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, Homa can be understood as an important emotional object for Ellie. Ellie develops a strong attachment to Homa during childhood, and their friendship becomes associated with companionship, security, belonging, and emotional fulfillment. Therefore, when circumstances separate them, Ellie does not simply lose physical contact with a friend; she experiences the disruption of an emotionally significant relationship. Freud argues that mourning and melancholia begin when a person experiences the loss of something to which they are emotionally attached. When Ellie says, "I did not want a room of my own.

Above all I did not want to leave my friend” (Kamali, 2024, p. 50), she reveals that her primary concern is not the loss of physical comfort or personal space but the impending separation from Homa. From a Freudian perspective, Homa functions as a lost object because Ellie has invested considerable emotional attachment in their friendship. The possibility of leaving Homa therefore creates a psychological experience of loss even before the actual separation occurs. Ellie’s reaction therefore represents an early manifestation of the psychological response to loss: she struggles to accept separation because Homa has become closely connected with her sense of emotional security and belonging. The quotation establishes the foundation for understanding Ellie’s later difficulty in negotiating the absence and transformation of this important relationship.

4.2 Unresolved Loss and Melancholic Attachment

Freud’s concept of mourning and the “work of loss” is particularly useful because Ellie gradually recognizes that she cannot remain emotionally attached to the life and relationship she has left behind. The statement, “But slowly the reality transfixed me. The fancy school, the prestigious teachers, the constant flow of exciting frontiers. I couldn’t be homesick forever” (Kamali, 2024, p. 62), reflects Ellie’s gradual confrontation with the reality of separation. Initially, Ellie experiences homesickness because she remains emotionally attached to her previous life, particularly her friendship with Homa and the familiar environment associated with it. From Freud’s perspective, this process corresponds to the work of mourning, through which the individual gradually confronts the reality that the lost object is no longer available in the same way. Ellie does not immediately detach herself from her previous emotional world; instead, she moves gradually from longing and homesickness toward an acceptance of her new circumstances. Ellie begins to recognize new possibilities in her changed circumstances, allowing her attention to extend beyond the lost or absent world. Thus, the quotation illustrates mourning as a gradual process of psychological adjustment, rather than an immediate disappearance of attachment. Ellie’s continuing homesickness shows that the emotional bond has not simply vanished; instead, she is progressively learning to live with its absence.

4.3 Identification, Ambivalence, and Self-Reproach

Ellie’s relationship with Homa also reveals the ambivalence that Freud associates with melancholic attachment. Her unconscious thought, “You can’t take the girl out of Bottom of the City but you can’t take Bottom of the City out of the girl” (Kamali, 2024, p. 140), exposes a hidden hostility beneath her conscious affection for Homa. Ellie’s attachment to Homa is therefore not entirely idealized; it contains resentment and discomfort concerning Homa’s social background and identity. From a Freudian perspective, this is significant because melancholia can develop where attachment to an object is accompanied by ambivalent feelings, including love, resentment, anger, and hostility. Ellie’s thought demonstrates that her attachment to Homa is not emotionally uncomplicated. Her affection exists alongside unconscious negative feelings that she cannot openly acknowledge. The fact that the thought is described as an unconscious hatred is particularly relevant because Freud emphasizes the role of unconscious hostility in melancholic relationships. Ambivalence is significant because melancholic responses may emerge when love for a significant object coexists with unconscious hostility.

This emotional conflict becomes more intense after Ellie unintentionally reveals Homa’s political activities. Her subsequent statement, “My blabbing destroyed her” (Kamali, 2024, p. 165), demonstrates intense guilt and self-reproach. Rather than simply acknowledging that her disclosure harmed Homa, Ellie directs the responsibility toward herself, suggesting a harsh

judgment of her own actions. The two moments therefore demonstrate how Ellie's conflicting attachment to Homa becomes psychologically complicated by unconscious resentment, guilt, and self-accusation. Her inability to resolve these contradictory emotions contributes to an unresolved relationship with the lost or damaged object, making her experience more closely aligned with Freud's melancholic dynamics than with uncomplicated mourning.

4.4 Memory as a Form of Psychological Return

Memory functions as a psychological means through which Ellie continues to reconnect with Homa despite the physical and emotional distance between them. The line, "Sometimes I thought of my old friend Homa. Imagined walking the streets with her" (Kamali, 2024, p. 226), demonstrates that Homa remains emotionally present in Ellie's inner world even after their relationship has been disrupted. Ellie does not merely remember Homa as a person from her past; she actively imagines being with her again, mentally recreating the companionship they once shared. From a Freudian perspective, such memories can be understood as part of the process of mourning, in which the subject repeatedly confronts the lost relationship through recollection before gradually accepting its absence. At the same time, Ellie's imagined return to Homa suggests a deeper psychological attachment because the memory allows her to preserve an emotional connection with the absent object. Her repeated mental return to their shared past therefore reflects the tension between mourning and melancholia: while Ellie recognizes the loss of their former closeness, she continues to carry Homa as an internal emotional presence. Memory consequently becomes a psychological space in which Ellie temporarily restores what has been lost, revealing how the emotional significance of Homa continues to influence her sense of self and her understanding of the past.

4.5 From Melancholia to Reconciliation

The process of psychological resolution in Freud's theory does not imply the complete erasure of a lost relationship or the disappearance of emotional attachment. Rather, it involves the gradual confrontation and integration of the feelings associated with loss, including love, guilt, resentment, envy, and regret. In mourning, the individual progressively recognizes the reality of loss and becomes capable of redirecting emotional investment toward the external world. In contrast, unresolved melancholic attachment keeps the lost or damaged object psychologically active within the individual, often through ambivalence, self-reproach, and persistent guilt. In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, Ellie's later experiences suggest a gradual movement from such unresolved emotional conflict toward greater self-awareness and psychological integration. Her statement, "I wanted to say I was sorry" (Kamali, 2024, p. 190), marks an important shift from experiencing guilt internally to consciously acknowledging her responsibility within the damaged relationship. Her emotional development becomes even more evident when she recognizes, "My own envy was a living, breathing energy in the room" (Kamali, 2024, p. 286). The metaphor of envy as a "living, breathing energy" suggests that Ellie has become aware of a previously difficult-to-acknowledge emotion that had influenced her relationship with Homa. This recognition is significant from a Freudian perspective because Ellie is no longer simply repressing or denying her contradictory feelings; instead, she confronts the ambivalence underlying her attachment to Homa. Her eventual admission, "I didn't know it would lead you to your arrest. I am so sorry" (Kamali, 2024, p. 283), further demonstrates her acceptance of responsibility and remorse. Although Ellie did not consciously intend to cause Homa's arrest, she recognizes the consequences of her actions and expresses genuine regret. These moments collectively illustrate a movement from unconscious conflict, envy, and self-reproach toward conscious recognition of her emotional responsibility. Ellie does not resolve her relationship with Homa by simply forgetting or emotionally abandoning her; rather, she begins to develop a

more integrated understanding of the relationship by acknowledging both its affection and its painful contradictions. Thus, the novel presents psychological resolution not as the elimination of attachment, but as the capacity to confront, understand, and integrate the conflicting emotions associated with a significant loss.

The Freudian analysis of *The Lion Women of Tehran* demonstrates that Ellie's relationship with Homa can be understood through the psychological processes of loss, mourning, melancholia, ambivalence, guilt, and eventual emotional integration. The analysis begins with Ellie's strong attachment to Homa, as reflected in her reluctance to leave her friend, establishing Homa as an emotionally significant object in Ellie's psychological world. Ellie's subsequent homesickness illustrates the initial pain of separation and corresponds to Freud's understanding of mourning as a gradual confrontation with the reality of loss. However, Ellie's relationship with Homa is not characterized by affection alone. Her unconscious resentment, social insecurity, and envy reveal an underlying ambivalence that complicates her attachment and creates melancholic dynamics. This conflict becomes particularly intense after Ellie unintentionally reveals Homa's political activities, leading to Homa's arrest and producing profound guilt and self-reproach in Ellie. From a Freudian perspective, Ellie's repeated return to these emotions indicates that the relationship remains psychologically active within her rather than becoming a completely resolved past experience.

Nevertheless, Ellie's later acknowledgment of her envy, desire to apologize, and explicit expression of remorse indicate an important movement toward psychological resolution. She gradually becomes capable of confronting emotions that were previously unconscious or difficult to acknowledge. Therefore, the novel does not present healing as the simple forgetting of Homa or the complete withdrawal of emotional attachment. Instead, it presents resolution as the recognition and integration of contradictory feelings surrounding a significant relationship. Through Ellie's psychological development, Kamali illustrates how unresolved loss can become entangled with guilt, envy, and self-reproach, but also how conscious recognition of these emotions can enable a more mature relationship with the past. Ultimately, Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia illuminate Ellie's struggle to transform a painful and ambivalent attachment into an emotionally integrated understanding of her relationship with Homa.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* portrays loss as a complex and continuing psychological experience that shapes Ellie Soltani's identity, relationships, and emotional life. Through Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, the analysis shows that Ellie responds to multiple losses including her father's death, separation from Homa, childhood security, her homeland, and the guilt associated with her betrayal through both acceptance and unresolved emotional attachment. Homa remains an important internal presence for Ellie because she represents not only a lost friendship but also Ellie's childhood, courage, and a part of herself that she has left behind. Her guilt and self-reproach further intensify this melancholic attachment. At the same time, the novel connects personal loss with Iran's political upheavals, displacement, repression, and changing social conditions, demonstrating that psychological grief can also emerge from historical and collective experiences. Ultimately, the novel suggests that healing does not require forgetting the past but rather confronting painful memories, accepting responsibility, and integrating loss into one's present identity. Thus, Kamali presents mourning and melancholia as overlapping processes through which individuals learn to live with loss while moving toward reconciliation, emotional growth, and renewed human connection.

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