



## **SASTRA AND SONG AS WORK OF MOURNING**

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### **Abstract**

The experience of loss is the trail left by tragedies, yet it is the ultimate source of sublime creativity. The dominant source of art inspiration comes from the experience of loss: the loss of loved ones, freedom, humanity, culture, and even the loss of loss itself, which is referred to as melancholia. Etymologically, the word 'sastra' or literature comes from two Sanskrit words, namely *saś*, meaning text that provides guidance, and *tra*, meaning tool. Apart from written text, oral literature also takes the form of songs. Sastra and song are not just imagination; they are works of mourning, tools that leverage human consciousness to recognize, mark, and talk about loss. This article uses descriptive methods and content analysis to examine: *Antigone* by Sophocles, "Untuk Kita Renungkan" (For Us to Ponder) by Ebiet G.Ade, "Hilang" (Gone) by Black Brothers, and "Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona" (God Teaches Through Corona) by Gus Mus. The result of the discussion shows that these four literary works depict residues of loss and melancholia such as anger, disgust, pity, denial, depression, and acceptance.

**Keywords:** loss, melancholia, work of mourning

### **Introduction**

*"Ismene, saudariku! Beginilah warisan Oidipus kepada kita. Dewa telah melimpahkan ungun penderitaan kepada kita – duka demi duka, dari terhina semakin terhina"*

(Ismene, my sister! This is Oidipus' legacy to us. The gods have heaped a bed of misery upon us - sorrow upon sorrow, from dishonor to dishonor)

– *Antigone* by Sophocles<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article used the Indonesian translation by W.S. Rendra (1976) which was then freely translated into English.



*Anugrah dan bencana adalah kehendakNya*

*Kita mesti tabah menjalani*

*Hanya cambuk kecil agar kita sadar*

*Adalah Dia di atas segalanya*

(Grace and disaster are His will

We must be steadfast

Just a small whip for us to realize

He is above all)

– “Untuk Kita Renungkan”(For Us to Ponder) by Ebiet G Ade

*Hilang kesejukan, hilang kecerahan*

*Tinggallah penderitaan*

(Gone is the coolness, gone is the brightness

There is only suffering)

–“Hilang” (Gone) by Black Brothers

*Ketika corona datang, Engkau dipaksa mencari Tuhan*

*Bukan di Basilika Santo Petrus, Bukan di Kabah,*

*Bukan di dalam gereja, Bukan di mesjid,*

*Bukan di mimbar khotbah, Bukan di majelis taklim*

*Bukan dalam misa Minggu, Bukan pula dalam sholat Jumad*

*Melainkan pada kesendirianmu, pada mulutmu yang terkunci*

*Pada hakekat yang senyap, pada keheninganmu yang bermakna*

(When the corona comes, You are forced to seek God

Not in St. Peter's Basilica, Not in the Kaaba,

Not in the church, Not in the mosque,

Not in the preaching pulpit, Not in the taklim assembly

Not in the Sunday mass, Not in the Friday prayer.

Rather in your solitude, in your locked mouth

In your silent essence, in your meaningful silence)

–“Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona”

(God Teaches Through Corona) by Gus Mus

Excerpts of poetry, drama, and song lyrics show that most art and literature are inspired by individual and collective suffering. Great tragedies from Sophocles to Shakespeare, and poems by Emily Dickinson, Poe, Hughes, and Maya Angelou, often stem from grief, death, or racism. In Indonesia, poets like W.S. Rendra and Wiji Tukul speak against oppression, while singers like Ebiet G. Ade, Iwan Fals, and Didi Kempot voice heartbreak. Mourning has been a source of creative expression, responding to loss of loved ones, freedom, humanity, culture, or even “the loss of loss itself” (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003). As vulnerable beings, humans formulate ways to deal with loss through what is called the work of mourning. It assumes grief follows melancholia, the past cannot be recovered, and loss must be recognized and marked. These modes of expression link to the creative process: artistic works can identify loss and residues of melancholia, serving as cultural advocacy and mitigation for recovery. Loss produces symptoms Kübler-Ross (2009) calls the non-linear stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. To understand this in relation to creativity, another conceptual tool

is needed. The creative response to loss is part of the work of mourning. Leader (2008) formulated this after reading Freud's essay on mourning and melancholia (see Strachey, 1966; Gay, 1989). The work of mourning is an active process to move out of loss and melancholia, requiring the lost object to be marked, retrieved, and seen from all possible points of view.

The work of mourning enables people to recognize loss and, in Freudian terms, to mourn successfully by accepting the loss as real and slowly detaching emotional ties, freeing them to form new connections while retaining memory of the lost object. This intersects with the artistic process in melancholia. It can be hypothesized that the work of mourning parallels sublimation, where pain from loss combines with the pleasure of artistic expression. Sublimation explains creativity as libidinal drives redirected toward higher, socially accepted aims (Freud, 1974). Artists transform unconscious conflicts into symbolic forms through art, allowing audiences to identify with those conflicts in culturally acceptable ways. Desire thus becomes drive, a source of energy for creation. The ultimate goal of the work of mourning is not to recover the lost object but to restore the self before that loss. Through creative mourning, people free themselves from the lost object by producing a new object with a new gaze.

The work of mourning is often linked to melancholia, a topic widely studied in Western academia but rarely discussed in relation to artistic expression in Indonesia. One exception is Pratikno (2021), who uses melancholia to analyze modern architecture, showing how loss becomes a desire to create the world's largest *Joglo* house. He integrates Desire by Gilles Deleuze, Drive by Jacques Lacan, and Sublimation by Sigmund Freud to explain that, through mourning, melancholia turns into part of the creative process, producing new architectural work.

On the other hand, despite its scarcity, mourning rituals are present in many Indonesian traditions and share one common element: singing. This artistic practice corresponds to the work of mourning. Chanting as oral literature has long been part of customary rites for dealing with grief. In Biak, Papua, the *wor* and *dou sandik* are integral to ritual life, guided by the motto "*nggo wor ba ido, na nggo mar*" meaning "if we do not sing then we will die" (Rumansara, 2003; Warami, 2014), positioning song as a work of mourning to avoid the symbolic death of melancholia. In Batak tradition, the lament *Andung* functions in death rituals as an expression of sorrow, final farewell, and blessing to heirs, considered vital for healing and strengthening the bereaved (Tinambunan & Flora, 2014). In Tana Toraja, *Ma'Marakka* in the *rambu solo* death ceremony uses music and oral literature to express grief; "*ma*" is a verbal affix, and "*marakka*" means crying (Palimbong et al., 2022). These lament rituals operate as the work of mourning by providing material to represent loss, directing the mourning assembly to release sadness and grief.

Popular music has become a key medium for youth to articulate loss and pain, carrying cultural significance beyond entertainment. It fosters emotional attachment and serves as a site of resistance and protest. Winters (2013), drawing on Du Bois, argues hip hop echoes Black grief through themes of loss, suffering, and trauma, forcing listeners through moaning and crying toward a racially just world. Racism is also an Indonesian issue, often masked as ethnic discrimination, as in the "monkey" slur against Papuan students that triggered major protests (Sutrisno et al.,

2024). Hip hop tracks like “Usir Papua?” by Oncho Flash and “Save Papua” by Ecko Show & Epo D’Fenomeno voiced explicit anger, moving beyond coded resistance. Such protest songs reflect Kübler-Ross’s (2009) stages of grieving, in which anger aids recovery. Anthropocene and apocalyptic themes also dominate Indonesian music amid the biodiversity crisis. Indonesia ranks as a ‘Mega Biodiversity’ nation (National Geographic Indonesia, 2019), yet faces the highest diversity decline (Setiawan, 2022). Musicians respond: Navicula’s lyrics expose human exploitation of nature to mobilize awareness (Solilah et al., 2017); Tuan Tigabelas’ “Last Roar” highlights Sumatran tiger extinction from deforestation (Sinanda, 2023); KePAL-SPI and Burgerkill symbolically remind listeners of environmental issues (Dewi et al., 2022). These songs express concern, anger, and disgust over irreversible ecological loss. Studies on tragedy and horror also frame art as a work of mourning. Armstrong (2012) shows how the film *Genova* (2008) functions as a therapeutic exploration of grief. Smuts (2007) addresses the “paradox of painful art”: people seek horror and tragedy for rich emotional experiences impossible or risky in real life, feeling fear or pity without real consequences. Lovey (2016) applies Leader’s “dialogue of mourning” to film, arguing its language directs viewers into mourning processes, enabling self-reflexivity and proper grieving.

The 1980s melancholic song phenomenon in Indonesia illustrates what Smuts (2007) calls the “paradox of painful art”: why people desire painful art experiences. The New Order regime criticized sad songs as counter-productive for daily life (Dewanto, 2025), yet songs by Betharia Sonata, Obbie Messakh, and Nia Daniati remain enjoyed today for nostalgia. Smuts (2007) offers two answers: pleasure, or something “other.” This article elaborates on the second using Leader’s postulation. This answer positions artworks as engaged with human reality, not mere imagination. Through the language of mourning, art directs audiences to engage with mourning processes in the work. Leader (2008) calls this the work of mourning and mourning dialog, as also used by Lovey in her analysis. Thus, works of art, including *sastra* and songs, are a dialogue enabling people to begin mourning properly, providing material to represent loss. By witnessing others’ grief, the ‘other’ becomes real and comparable to our own experiences.

## Method

This study used a descriptive method and qualitative content analysis to study and draw valid, objective inferences from documents (Eriyanto, 2011). Content analysis is qualitative because it focuses on interpreting text and context, not limited to written material but also including “works of art, images, maps, sounds, signs, symbols, and even numerical records” (Krippendorff, 2018), as long as they provide meaning about a particular phenomenon. Given the diverse meanings of text, the text must be placed in a certain context to be inferred and further analyzed (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Data were collected from four purposively selected literary texts and songs: Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Ebiet G. Ade’s “Untuk Kita Renungkan,” Black Brothers’ “Hilang,” and Gus Mus’ “Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona.” To conduct the analysis, the writer employed close reading to identify textual and affective residues of loss, such as repeated motifs of absence, unresolved silences, lamentations, or emotional excess written in the text or implied through context. These markers were then contextualized within their socio-historical setting to

determine the type and scale of loss. Using the conceptual framework of Freud's work of mourning and melancholia and Leader's (2008) mourning dialogue, the data were coded to distinguish signs of successful mourning from melancholic incorporation. The interpretation focused on the purpose, message, and expected effect of the texts, and how *sastra* and songs function as a dialogue that enables audiences to begin the mourning process properly. To see more concretely the relationship between *sastra*, songs, work of mourning, and melancholia, the writer briefly discusses the four works that each present a different problematization of loss. Through this, the analysis examines how the work of mourning and melancholia appears in literary works and songs, and what we need to pay attention to in these phenomena.

### **Findings and Discussion**

To trace how residues of loss are configured across different genres and historical contexts, this study employs purposive sampling of four texts: Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ebiet G Ade's "Untuk Kita Renungkan" (For Us to Ponder), Black Brothers' "Hilang" (Gone), and Gus Mus' "Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona" (God Teaches Through Corona). The selection follows three criteria: genre variation across drama, popular song, and contemporary poetry; scale of loss from individual-familial in *Antigone*, to collective-national in "Untuk Kita Renungkan," to diasporic-political in "Hilang," and to pandemic-spiritual in "Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona"; and temporal span from classical antiquity to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All four texts explicitly thematize grief and contain textual markers of unresolved mourning, such as repeated motifs of absence, silences, and emotional excess, making them productive sites for analyzing the relationship between literature, song, and the psychoanalytic concepts of mourning and melancholia.

### ***Sastra* and song as an arena for exploration and experimentation of work of mourning**

In this study, *sastra* is not limited to canonical "belles lettres" but includes any textual practice, drama, poetry, or song lyrics that configure, stage, and experiment with affective responses to loss. Drawing on psychoanalytic and cultural perspectives, *sastra* functions as a symbolic arena where absence is textualized through formal structures, narrative, prosody, and refrain, making residues of loss, silences, repetitions, and emotional excess legible and workable. Thus, *sastra* and song operate as a laboratory of mourning: they do not merely represent grief but actively test ways of relating to loss, whether by naming, disavowing, or melancholically incorporating it. *Antigone*, "Untuk Kita Renungkan," "Hilang," and "Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona" are thus treated as *sastra* because each performs a distinct mode of working through loss, regardless of high or popular distinction. This definition supports the study's aim: to examine how mourning and melancholia are formally experimented with across genres and historical moments.

### ***Antigone* - Sophocles**

*Antigone* is one of Sophocles' (Greek) trilogy of tragedies: *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. *Antigone* is chosen as it is a relevant example to discuss the phenomenon of melancholia. The play tells the story of a family conflict that

leads to a state conflict (Thebes). *Antigone* is the continuation and final part of the tragedy that befalls the family of King Oedipus and the state of Thebes due to the curse and fate of the gods. The Oedipus family and the state of Thebes are plagued by disasters that come and go. Infighting, murder, rampant pestilence, plague, and disease ravaged their lives.

It is told in the tragedy that King Oedipus had four children, two sons (Eteocles and Polynices) and two daughters (Antigone and Ismene). After King Oedipus' absence, his two sons were entrusted to be king in alternating years. However, after the first year in power, Eteocles refused to abdicate. This led to conflict, Polynices became angry and attacked Eteocles, and the two then killed each other. Their deaths resulted in their uncle, Creon, being installed as king. The main conflict in the play starts with Creon's policy as the new king. He ordered the honoring and burial of Eteocles, who was considered a fallen hero of the country. Meanwhile, he forbade anyone from burying the body of Polynices because he was considered a rebel. The edict is textualized as a repeated motif of absence when Creon decrees: "*Biarlah mayatnya terkapar, tak terkubur, tak ditangisi, menjadi makanan burung dan anjing*" ("Let his body lie sprawled, unburied and unwept, left as carrion for birds and dogs"), denying not only burial but the very right to mourn.

This policy made Antigone unhappy. She went to her sister Ismene and invited her to bury Polynices' body. However, Ismene was afraid of the consequences, so she advised Antigone to abandon her intention. Because of her love and sincere intentions, she buried Polynices' body without anyone's help. When the guards found Polynices' body missing, they reported it to King Creon. He ordered them to find the perpetrator of the burial. It was eventually discovered that Antigone was the culprit. King Creon was angry and punished her after a heated argument over why Antigone had buried her brother's body. The unresolved silence of her loss appears in that exchange: when Creon asks, "*Kau berani melanggar hukum?*" Antigone hanya menjawab, "*Ya. Sebab bukan Zeus yang membuat larangan itu*" ("Do you dare to break the law?" Antigone answered only, "Yes. Because it was not Zeus who made that edict"). She never articulates personal grief for Polynices, indicating that the object of loss remains unconscious to her. Apart from her great love for her brother, Antigone also respected the religious values and traditions of burying the bodies of the dead so that they would find their way to heaven. Her determination to obey the law of the gods, which she saw as higher than human law, made her willing to risk the wrath of King Creon. Recognizing the authority of the gods made Antigone strong and brave, even though she had to risk losing her freedom.

King Creon exiled and locked Antigone in a cave and forbade anyone from visiting her. This news reached Haemon, Antigone's fiancé. Haemon was the son of King Creon. He then went to King Creon to beg for mercy for Antigone. He argued that what Antigone had done was right. However, King Creon was furious and accused Haemon of being too weak. They argued fiercely, not reaching an agreement. Haemon felt sad and angry and then left. This incident was also heard by Teirisias, an old, blind priest. He then came and advised King Creon, but he was ignored.

Haemon followed Antigone to the cave to keep her company, but he was too late. Once there, Antigone ended her life by hanging herself. Seeing his fiancée die,

Haemon also killed himself. The stage note describes: “*Haimon menghujamkan pedangnya ke lambungnya sendiri, sambil memeluk mayat Antigone*” (“Haemon drove his sword into his own body as he clasped Antigone’s lifeless form”), a double suicide that marks melancholia’s extreme symptom: self-annihilation when identification with the lost object is total. The death of Haemon and Antigone was finally known to King Creon. He was very sorry and sad. Having not finished mourning, he received news that his wife, Eurydice, had also taken her own life, unable to accept the loss of their son. King Creon was left alone with sorrow and regret, crying out, “*bawa aku pergi... Aku bukan apa-apa lagi, aku bukan siapa-siapa lagi*” (“Lead me away... I am nothing now, no one at all”), a textualization of the ego’s impoverishment that Freud defines as melancholia

The tragedy in *Antigone* provides a very clear picture of mourning and melancholia. This story confirms Butler’s (2004) opinion on the politics of mourning that mourning and melancholia are responses to the experience of loss. She argues, ‘some lives are grievable, and others are not,’ a politics made visible in Creon’s edict that distinguishes Eteocles as a hero from Polyneices as a traitor. The event of loss can give birth to types of social, political, and aesthetic relationships. Butler sees the emergence of psychic aspects in social and political issues and vice versa, social and political aspects in psychic reality. The conflict in *Antigone* shows this dimension, where undemocratic and unethical political policies become the main source of conflict that brings disaster. Although it is not strictly recognizable what kind of loss is experienced by both Eteocles and Polynices, we can identify it from the visible residue through the acts, such as denial, anger, and depression. The symptom of loss is the undemocratic attitude of Eteocles and the aggressiveness of Polynices. Eteocles’ reluctance to give up his position leads him to act defensively and break the rules. Polynices, on the other hand, feels that he is being deprived of his rights and acts brutally. Creon, who emerges to fill the leadership vacuum in Thebes, issues orders that hurt Antigone and also possibly Polynices’ sympathizers and followers. He has the power to allow mourning for the death of Eteocles, who is considered a hero of the state, while forbidding mourning for the death of Polynices, who is considered a traitor.

This story is used by Butler as a relevance to the condition of America after the 9/11 attacks by terrorists. It appears that loss is mourned, but the problem is that not all lives deserve to be mourned, and not all deaths count for public respect (McIvor, 2012). There are elements of power relations that influence social and political norms in determining who deserves and does not deserve to be mourned. There are souls that are considered more valuable than others (Butler, 2004). This view is Butler’s critique of American social and political discourse and policies in dealing with terrorists after 9/11. Aggressiveness through retaliation is a symptom that America experiences melancholia, or fails to lament properly. This loss creates another unconscious loss, which is the loss of humanity.

While the residue of melancholia that we encounter at the end of this tragedy is the suicides of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice. The failure to deal with loss appears through the most extreme pathological symptom of loss, which is an attempt to harm oneself, which can be fatal, such as suicide. Antigone’s final lament, “*Aku tak akan pernah naik ranjang pengantin... tak ada lagu perkawinan, tak ada lagu mempelai bagiku*” (“I shall never go to the marriage bed... no wedding song, no bride’s song for me”), reveals emotional excess: she mourns a marriage

she herself rejected, pointing to older, cumulative losses of her entire lineage. The subject felt depressed due to the loss of the object of her love. A feeling of emptiness arises, and sadness enters life at an extreme level, deeper than ever imagined. This depression feels as if it will last forever. From another point of view, depression is not a sign of mental illness. Losing a loved one is a very sad situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. If grief is a healing process, then depression should be one of the many necessary steps in that process, but tragically, in the story of Antigone, they failed and chose to end their lives.

In order for one to grieve well, a sacrifice of acceptance is required. One must be able to let go of identification with the lost object, which means the symbolic death of the lost object. This relationship with the object must result in a relationship with nothingness. To establish this relationship, one must create a 'framework for nothingness' (Leader, 2008). However, in melancholia, the sacrifice of one's identification becomes self-sacrifice, as the identification with the lost object is total. The identification can be a tangible self-sacrifice, e.g., suicide, or a sacrifice of one's world. This is literalized when Haimon "*menghujam pedangnya ke lambungnya sendiri*" ("plunged the sword into his own side") while embracing Antigone's corpse: the ego and the lost object die together. Herein lies the difference between mourning and melancholia.

Tragedy plays are aesthetically intended to provoke poignant and painful emotional reactions through depictions of suffering. Likewise, *Antigone* is specifically designed to make the audience or readers feel anger, disgust, sadness, pity, fear, and hatred. This breadth of emotional experience makes them unconsciously give themselves over to the tragic stories. The experience of enjoying the painful tragedy is converted and internalized into the self in exchange for enjoyment and contemplation of spiritual, moral messages. The meta-response to *Antigone* inspired major psychoanalytic figures such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, and Darian Leader in formulating their theories on mourning and melancholia.

Although the tragedy of the play is absurd in terms of the reality of everyday life, in its beauty, Sophocles' *Antigone* presents what Lacan defines as the 'Sublime Object'. Antigone embodies this when she chooses death over symbolic compromise, declaring, "*Aku pergi ke liang batuku, ke makam pengantinku yang asing*" ("I depart for my rocky grave, for that alien chamber of my wedding"), pursuing pure desire beyond the pleasure principle. Our ethical obligation as readers and analysts is to be faithful to this object to such an extent that it transcends all normative categories. Since Antigone does not succumb to her desires, neither can we assimilate her tragedy into pre-existing critical categories, even psychoanalytic categories. This is an obligation to the text, but it is simultaneously an obligation to our own desires as readers, critics, and subjects: for the encounter with the sublime object is one that must shake us to the core if it is not to become a factual or mechanical exercise in the application of reassuring truths. To fulfill our obligation to the sublime text, we must go beyond the dictates of the principles of pleasure and reality, beyond good and evil, to find pure desire (Miller, 2007). It means that the sublime transcends pleasure and that in real life, for us to survive and continue living, we must accept that absurdity can also exist, and sometimes it does not require answers and judgments about good and bad. That is what Lacan calls the

basic desire for the action that Antigone takes, even though she knows the consequences of her actions.

### **“Untuk Kita Renungkan” (For Us to Ponder) - Ebiet G Ade**

“Untuk Kita Renungkan” (“For Us to Ponder”) is a song by Ebiet, an Indonesian ballad singer, which is often played when there is a natural disaster. It becomes a kind of national lament or mourning song, signaling a moment for contemplation. The power of this song lies in its inspirational and positive suggestions and spiritual, moral messages.

Song as part of art and literature, has social, political, and aesthetic significance. It has the potential to motivate, advocate, and the capacity to influence action. It provides a kind of direction in societal ethics for those who truly listen to the message. Songs can act as an outlet of expression that connects and articulates the feelings of the listener. Writers and artists have used making and the creative process as a way to enable the work of mourning to take place. Only great poets and singers can understand the potential of themselves and music well and utilize it as a means of disseminating positive messages, as Ebiet does. His work combines the experience of grief or lamentation with aesthetic elements as a means of mitigation and advocacy for disaster victims.

The song's call for contemplation evokes the moral side of human spirituality that is more inclusive. This song is not aimed at only one religion, making it very acceptable to all groups. “*Anugrah dan bencana adalah kehendakNya*” (Grace and disaster are His will). God is mentioned with the possessive pronoun “*Nya*” (His). That joy and sorrow are always present side by side and not separated from the realm of divine authority. Both are used for the good of man, but how can sorrow or mourning be good? This question leads to an inquiry for defining and exploring ways of managing and dealing with the grief of loss by considering the rituals and artistic processes of art and literature that can enable the work of mourning: How the work of mourning can recognize what is lost to enable the reintegration of the self from loss.

This question is answered in the next line of the lyrics: “*kita mesti tabah menjalani, hanya cambuk kecil agar kita sadar, adalah Dia di atas segalanya*” (we must be steadfast, just a little whip to make us realize, He is above all). The line “*kita mesti tabah*” (we must be steadfast) refers to the action of acceptance as part of the process of loss that must be done to avoid the condition of melancholia. Stoicism, or to be steadfast, can be achieved when people can find, mark, and interpret what they have lost. Acceptance is achieved if one has previously felt anger, sadness, and depression in and out.

The tragedy of humanity and natural disasters leaves traces of trauma from the experience of loss, such as shelter (homes and ecosystems), property, and even the lives of loved ones. In order to mourn well, people will go through not linearly but several of the ritual processes of mourning, such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 2009). Stoicism and acceptance here do not mean that all is well. People who experience loss never feel okay. What underlies the act of stoic acceptance is about accepting the fact that what we love (the beloved object) is gone and recognizing that this new reality is permanent; it cannot come back. This is the new norm with which we must learn to live. We see that we cannot keep the past intact and so must adjust. We must learn to reorganize

roles, reassigning them to others or to ourselves. We replace what has been lost with a new gaze.

*“Anak menjerit-jerit, asap panas membakar. Lahar dan badai menyapu bersih. Ini bukan hukuman, hanya satu isyarat. Bahwa kita mesti berbenah.”*

(Children screaming, hot smoke burning. Lava and storms sweep away. This is not a punishment, just a sign. That we must clean up.)

The lines of this song describe a terrible condition that must be addressed as a message that humans must clean up. A mythical statement that is culturally rooted in Indonesia's religious society. Myth explains the universe, and it creates meaning. Once these myths are shared, most people can live through painful experiences, even grief, because there is now meaning in tragedy. Songs, just like myths, create meaning. Poignant horror stories give listeners the strength and explanation to move on. Ebiet's song lends itself to expressions of grief where mourning rituals become opportunities to grieve. Through this song, people are encouraged to speak up and share that horror and sad stories help them grieve.

Disasters and sorrows are “*cambuk kecil*” (small whips) so that humans realize their mistakes and immediately turn to seek God. Human nature is actually wild like a horse, so it needs to be scolded so that it does not take the wrong step again. As a form of education and mitigation, it is that nature has been created by God in a balanced manner. Both in the food chain to the natural ecosystem. If something is wrong, it will disturb the balance and bring disasters such as floods, landslides, famine, and disease. The message of the lyrics of the song “Untuk Kita Renungkan” (For Us to Ponder) indeed invites us to reflect and learn from the events that occurred so that in the future similar disasters will be minimized or not happen again.

### **“Hilang” (Gone) - Black Brothers**

The song “Hilang” by Black Brothers (henceforth BB) is chosen to give a glimpse of loss in Papua through a contextual reading by looking at the social and political background. BB is a Papuan group band that was popular in Indonesia in the 1970s. Although BB's career was very short in Indonesia (1976-1979), their works continue to resonate to this day, especially in Papua. BB's presence in the Indonesian music scene gave a new nuance at that time, because there had never been a Papuan band that had reached the national level. BB personnel consisted of several ethnicities in eastern Indonesia, such as Hengky Mirontoneng (Sanger / North Sulawesi), Jochie Pattipelohi (Ambon), Abdullah Yunus and Amry Kahar (Ternate), Stevie Mambor, Benny Bethay, and Agus Rumaropen (Papua). They agreed to call themselves the Black Brothers. As befits the intention of a name, BB refers to self-identity and Papuanness.

As a band that carries the name Papua, BB has a mission to uplift the dignity of Papuans who are marginalized by various forms of negative stereotypes and stigmas. This is implied through the word black in their name. It is very reasonable because previously they had named themselves 'Loss Iriantos primitif' or Loss Iriantos (al Qatiri, 2011). This effort is also evident in BB's songs, where each album always includes Papuan songs with popular music (slow pop, punk rock,

rock, jazz, disco, reggae, and also *keroncong*<sup>2</sup>). When performing live, BB personnel always wear traditional Papuan clothing. This is also reflected in some of their album covers.



Figure 1. Black Brothers  
(Source: kultur.media)

In general, there are three themes of BB songs: social criticism, pride in identity, and romance or love (Awom, 2015). However, the most dominant theme is romanticism (love). Songs under this theme discuss love stories under issues such as falling in love, breaking up, and the search for love. However, stories of suffering from love dominate almost all BB albums, such as “Hilang” (Gone). As the song title suggests, these songs of suffering from love are based on a condition, namely the experience of loss. The loss of a loved one due to a breakup, the search for love that is never found, the despair of unrequited love, and the sadness of the departure or death of a loved one.

Textually, the song “Hilang” is very straightforward about the departure of a lover without leaving any news: “*hari ini kau pergi sayang, hari ini kau menghilang, tiada senyum tiada pesan padaku yang kautinggalkan.*” (today you're gone baby, today you disappeared, no smile no message to me who you left). This results in a seemingly endless sadness for the man. The meaning of the word “*menghilang*” (disappeared) here can be twofold: the man was unilaterally broken up with by the woman, and the woman may have passed away. This event triggers pain and sadness because now he is alone.

*“kini ku sendiri lagi, melangkah dalam kesedihan, tiada penghibur hati, tertelan dalam kesepian”* (now I am alone again, stepping in sadness, no consolation, swallowed into loneliness).

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<sup>2</sup> Indonesian string band music, historically a hybrid of Malay and Portuguese.

It is interesting to note that the one lamenting here is a man. This is in stark contrast to the patriarchal gender discourse dominant in Indonesian culture. It shows that the issue of loss is something human and genderless. Almost 90% of BB's songs from a total of 66 songs in eight BB albums are dominated by songs with a sad theme (mellow mood). Behind the masculine appearance, it turns out that BB sings more songs of heartbreak. We can understand this paradoxical condition if the meaning of this song is contextualized with the social and political background in Papua. Although it seems apolitical, symbolically, BB's presence in Papua opens the way for political meaning.

The existence of BB in the public space through the music scene in Indonesia is in order to deal with the experience of loss. In the context of power relations, the presence of Papuans has often been marginalized by various negative stereotypes and stigmas. BB's attempt to penetrate the hegemonic and discriminatory public space through music is a face of mourning that we can read because traditional expression was not possible at that time during the New Order regime<sup>3</sup>. Often, Papuan culture is interpreted as a threat to Indonesian nationalism, and therefore, they are vulnerable to retaliation from the state apparatus. One such case is that of Arnold Ap, a Papuan musician and culturist who was executed for his cultural revival movement through the string band group Mambesak in 1984 (Aditjondro, 2000). BB themselves had to exile themselves in 1979. These kinds of things have left lasting wounds and trauma. BB's music and songs are a representation of Papuans' mourning of their experiences of loss due to social and political issues.

For too long, Papuan culture has remained on the margins in the context of national culture. Papuan language and culture were considered primitive and backward. On the other hand, by using popular music that has been favored by the public, BB could reach wider and more inclusive fans. In the national discourse, in a region that has the potential for disintegration, like Papua, traditional culture is only treated as an exotic object, like an artifact that becomes a display and spectacle in a museum. Meanwhile, BB music is an effort to counter such narratives and has the potential as an alternative educational medium about Papua that is fairer and more balanced. By looking at it from this perspective, we can understand the significance of BB's role in responding to the experience of loss in Papua. What BB does is a form of work of mourning through sublime art. The experience of suffering is creatively packaged into something that seems apolitical and is enjoyed by many people from various social backgrounds.

Meanwhile, from another perspective, BB itself is a symbol of loss. Political asylum and divisions due to conflicts of interest and politics dissolved BB long ago. Many personnel have passed away, leaving only two original members, Yochie and Amri. There is an attempt to deny this fact by continuing to try to revive BB through various live performances and also working on a new album that looked lively but is actually a lament of unconscious loss. Listening to BB's melancholic music today is like evoking painful regret and nostalgia, where the listener wants to return to the past but suffers from the realization that this desire will never be satisfied. However,

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<sup>3</sup> This era was marked by the authoritarian leadership of President Soeharto (1967-1998). During this time, military operations were carried out in Papua to suppress sentiments of Papuan nationalism.

some young musicians continue to inherit the spirit of BB's legacy to create new music to replace the loss of a loved object with a new gaze.

### **“Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona” (God Teaches Through Corona) - Gus Mus**

K.H. Mustofa Bisri, commonly known as Gus Mus, is a very complete Muslim scholar. Apart from being a scholar, he is also a culturalist, artist (painter), writer, and even a politician. His concern for religious life, nation, and state is often realized critically and constructively through his writings. In the world of poetry, his name is very much taken into account because of his beautiful, straightforward, and very offensive language style, but softened with humor. Gus Mus is classified as a prophetic poet with transcendental and Sufi works because it departs from the values of divinity and also the spirit to engage in humanitarian issues (Rifai, 2009). He has several collections of poetry and prose. One of his interesting poems is titled “Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona.” The poem is chosen because it has relevance to the topic of the work of mourning. The coronavirus outbreak has reminded the world that life is fragile and death is only a blink of an eye away. This poem describes the reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak with a literary and cultural approach.

In early 2020, the world was shocked by the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19), which spread in almost all parts of the world. The disaster has resulted in the World Health Organization (WHO) establishing it as a global emergency since January 2020. An extraordinary phenomenon because it paralyzes activities massively in various countries, including Indonesia. Many approaches were taken to reduce or stop the spread of infection. Some say this is a moment to test the ability of science in each country, especially in the medical field, which continues to compete for an antidote or vaccine. There are also those who say this is a time to test the governance of the country, which seems confused in taking the right policies to anticipate the social, political, and economic impacts of the disaster. Everyone feels called to contribute, including clergy, artists, culturalists, and writers.

The poem “Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona” is a religious-cultural response to an unavoidable disaster. By looking at the existing text, it can be concluded that Gus Mus's poem expresses anger in an elegant way with a stylized language. According to Kübler-Ross (2005), anger is an important part of the mourning mechanism. It is an anchor that provides a temporary structure to loss and grief that is like a vast, endless ocean. People must be willing to feel their anger, even if it seems endless. The more the anger is felt, the more it will begin to dissipate, and the process of healing will take place. There are many other emotions under anger, but anger is the emotion that humans manage most often. Anger has no boundaries. Anger can extend to friends, doctors, family, ourselves, our deceased loved ones, and even to God.

In this poem, Gus Mus positions himself as a cleric who translates the COVID-19 event as a form of God's anger (wrath) towards humanity. The text of this poem very clearly says that the coronavirus outbreak is a reprimand from God to humans, so that they can appreciate how to build a more harmonious and true relationship with God. That true worship is not in hypocritical rituals that are merely ceremonial in magnificent worship buildings. Nor is it in the pulpits of sermons, but rather in the silence and quiet solitude.

*‘Tuhan itu bukan melulu pada keramaian, Tuhan itu bukan melulu pada ritual, Tuhan itu ada pada jalan keputusasaanmu, dengan dunia yang berpenyakit.’*

(God is not merely in the crowd, God is not merely in the rituals, God is in your despair, with a diseased world).

This line of the poem illustrates that humans can truly find God in their despair and suffering. This is emphasized in the next line.

*“Corona memurnikan agama, bahwa tidak boleh ada yang tersisa kecuali Tuhan itu sendiri, datangi, temui, dan kenali Dia di dalam relung jiwa dan hati nuranimu sendiri...biarlah para pedagang, makelar, politikus, dan para penjual agama disadarkan oleh Tuhan melalui kejadian ini.”*

(Corona purifies religion, that there should be nothing left but God Himself, go, meet, and recognize Him in the recesses of your own soul and conscience...let the merchants, brokers, politicians, and sellers of religion be awakened by God through this incident).

The closing lines of this poem are a critique or sarcasm of who the poem is specifically aimed at, although it could apply to anyone. The coronavirus outbreak has resulted in many devastating losses for humans (loss of health, loss of work, poverty, and death). However, behind this incident, there is a message that can be taken, that humans can reflect and realize their misguidance to return to the path approved by God. With the COVID-19 outbreak, people are not asking “where is God in this?” but “what is God's intention for this?”, as a contemplative question of this poem. Behind the anger lies pain and another indication of love. The catharsis comes through the hope of better compensation than the pain. Only through suffering can human life be purified.

## **Conclusion**

The source of sublime creativity actually comes from the experience of pain. Pain comes from a sense of sadness and sorrow due to loss: loss of a loved one, loss of freedom, loss of humanity due to colonization, slavery, alienation, loss of culture, and even the most difficult, the loss of loss itself, which is referred to as melancholia. This creative and artistic response to the experience of loss and melancholia is what Darian Leader calls the work of mourning. This concept helps us to approach sastra (literature) and songs in a more engaged way, whether as researchers, creators, or organizers of artistic and literary activities. Conversely, talking about the work of mourning and melancholia through sastra (literature) and songs is expected to approach these psychological phenomena creatively and not in a medicalized and dogmatic way. Between art, sastra (literature), work of mourning, and melancholia, some intersections create areas that we can use to conduct more distinctive or visible studies.

In addition, through this article, the significance or role of artists and writers in dealing with various disasters and tragedies can be seen. Their works are a form of work of mourning to get out of the experience of loss and melancholia. Art and literature show the importance of an art and culture-based approach in responding

to it. Loss must be found, marked, and spoken through literary art and songs that have the potential to enlighten and awaken. Tragedy and disaster are not only the responsibility of medics, scientists, and statesmen but also of artists and writers. The responsibility of artists and writers is not to provide medical aid or policy, but to perform what Judith Butler calls “public grieving” and what Darian Leader calls “the work of mourning”: naming the loss, refusing its erasure, and creating a symbolic space where the dead can be counted. They do so first by naming what power forbids to name, acting as a counter-monument: when Creon decrees “*Biarlah mayatnya terkapar, tak terkubur, tak ditangisi,*” Antigone’s burial defies the state, just as Ebiet G. Ade’s “Untuk Kita Renungkan” names “bencana... kelaparan” (“calamity... starvation”) when official discourse is silent. Second, they embody unresolved grief as public lament: Antigone’s “*Aku tak akan pernah naik ranjang pengantin*” (“I will never ascend the bridal bed”) stages excess that makes private loss collective, like Black Brothers’ “*Hilang*” repeating “*sendiri... sepi*” (alone...lonely). Third, they refuse redemptive closure as ethical refusal: Antigone chooses “*liang batuku, makam pengantinku*” (“my rocky grave, my wedding tomb”), a Sublime Object that will not reconcile, paralleled by Gus Mus’ “Ketika Tuhan Mengajarkan Melalui Corona” ending in a question, not resolution. This is done not through propaganda, but through metaphor, repetition, silence, and excess. Leader’s “framework for nothingness” so audiences encounter loss without mastery. Thus, the artist’s duty is not to cure, but to ensure grief is not foreclosed and turned into aggression, as Butler warns, “To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics.” Without this, society repeats Thebes: melancholia becomes violence because loss remains unspoken.

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