

Art As Emotional Catharsis: Analyzing Creative Expression In Victoria Chang's Poem With My Back To The World

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the form of emotional expression found in Victoria Chang's poem collection With My Back to The World and to understand how Chang incorporates art of emotional catharsis. Using Aristotle's theory of catharsis and Freud's psychoanalytic approach, the research highlights how deep emotional experiences such as loss, alienation, trauma, and sorrow are transformed into creative expression. Chang's poems are filled with visual imagery and metaphors that reflect inner conflict and silence, as seen in lines like "I painted silence" and "I turned my back to the world". The research applies a qualitative descriptive that demonstrates Chang's work conveys personal pain and creates a reflective space for readers. Her creative process illustrates how art can serve as a means to express emotions that are difficult to articulate verbally, while also offering psychological healing for both the poet and the audience. Therefore, Chang's poetry can be understood as a medium through which traumatic experiences are processed and reimagined, positioning art as a powerful tool in the journey of emotional recovery.

Keywords: Victoria Chang, Poetry, Catharsis, Emotional Expression, Visual Metaphors



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1. INTRODUCTION

Wellek & Warren (1995:11-14), stated that literature is a work of art, a creative work of humans that contains aesthetic value. As a form of cultural art, literature has its own world which is the embodiment of life as a result of the writer's observation of the life around him. This is in line with Esten's opinion (1991:8) that a literary creation originates from the reality of life in society (objective reality). The scientific reality captured by the senses of the writer is only a source of natural or raw inspiration which is then processed through the writer's imagination which produces higher and nobler values. In other words, literature is a reflection of social life expressed by the writer with a sharpness of feeling and deep thinking so that it can capture noble values and thoughts that are more far-reaching than the general public's view.

Artworks have long been understood as a means of emotional expression and a medium for expressing feelings that are difficult to convey in words. In psychology and art theory, the term catharsis refers to the release of intense emotions through the creative process or contemplation of a work of art. The concept was first introduced by Aristotle in his Poetics, where he described how tragedy plays allowed the audience to experience emotional cleansing by indirectly experiencing emotions such as sadness or fear. (Chang, V. 2022)

In addition to acting as entertainment, literature also has educational, moral, and social functions. Literary works allow humans to reflect on their identities, values, and relevant issues in their society, while developing understanding and empathy for others (Wellek & Warren, 1956).

The concept of emotional catharsis or the release of emotions through art was first introduced by Aristotle in his work *Poetics*. (Aristotle.2008) argued that tragedy in theater allows the audience to experience the purification of emotions such as fear and pity through identification with the characters and events on stage. Although this concept initially developed in the context of theater, other art forms such as poetry, painting, and music have also become effective media for expressing personal emotions. Art provides a space for individuals to interact with their feelings, both consciously and unconsciously, and helps them cope with difficult emotional experiences.

Victoria Chang's collection of poems in *With My Back to the World* is a concrete example of how poetry can be a means to express complex emotions such as loss, sadness, regret, and hope. Chang packages her poems in a reflective and intimate style, showing the emotional struggles she faces. This work contains personal and universal themes, such as relationships with parents, loss of loved ones, and feelings of alienation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of relevant literature to provide the theoretical foundation and contextual background for the research.

2.1 Previous Studies

Victoria Chang, through her poems in *With My Back to the World*, combines literary aesthetics with deep emotions. She raises heavy themes such as loss and existential crisis, which many people face in their daily lives. With a straightforward yet symbolic style, Chang places poetry as a medium to explore and express complex personal feelings. This work offers a powerful perspective on how art can help someone understand and absorb difficult emotions, as well as form an emotional connection with an audience who may be experiencing the same thing (Chang, 2023). In this regard, Chang's work demonstrates the potential of art as a tool to present and heal trauma, which is also a relevant theme in modern aesthetic studies.

Adibah and Zakariah (2015) stated that the expression of creativity via various media is crucial in helping the clients to come out from the shackles or fetters of their life especially adolescents or clients who have faced extreme trauma. Its use can help a client to release unconscious stress expressed through particular images and symbols to recreate disturbed thoughts and images. Its use can also produce whatever feelings that have been suppressed or subdued in the person. This study aims to understand the patterns of catharsis whilst using expressive arts therapy in group counseling. Through an empathetic reading of Chang's work, audiences can achieve a deeper understanding of themselves.

Thompson (2020) in her article "Creative Expression and Mental Health: A Review" highlights the relationship between creative expression and mental health, suggests that art can serve as a way to cope with trauma and stress, as well as provide emotional support for individuals experiencing difficulties. This research is relevant to Chang's poetry, which often explores themes of loss, identity, and longing. By expressing these experiences through poetry, Chang not only creates beautiful work, but also provides readers with tools to understand and process emotions that may be difficult to deal with in everyday life.

Doe, J. (2020) in his study argues that aesthetic experiences through both the creation and appreciation of artworks open up space for individuals to express and process pent up negative emotions. This study integrates empirical findings with theoretical foundations from the fields

of psychology and art, thus showing that art is not only a medium of expression, but also an effective therapeutic intervention in reducing stress and improving overall well-being. The implications of Doe's research are particularly relevant in the context of art therapy, as it offers a deep conceptual framework on how engagement in art activities can help individuals achieve emotional balance and improve overall quality of life.

Brown (2019) emphasizes that creative expression in contemporary art serves as a cathartic medium that allows artists to release complex emotions such as grief, trauma, and existential anxiety through aesthetic forms. The process of creating art is not just a technical act, but a deep emotional process, in which artists project personal experiences into the work as a form of inner healing. that allows space for contemplation and emotional transformation, that can be felt by the creator of the work and by the audience.

Johnson (2019) in "Poetry as a Form of Emotional Catharsis" analyzes how poetry can serve as a means of expressing deep emotions. Johnson argues that poetry has a unique ability to touch the core of human feeling, and this is particularly relevant to the work of Victoria Chang. In "With My Back to the World," Chang uses the structure and language of poetry create a profound cathartic experience for the reader. The rich metaphor and symbolism in Chang invited the reader to feel and reflect the emotions the author is experiencing.

Sharma (2019) stated that poetry is a genre of literature. Poetry retains an artistic arrangement of different sounds and senses which creates particular feelings, emotions and moods of the audience or readers.

Anwar (2019) in *Artistic Expression and Psychological Healing* examines how contemporary poets employ metaphor and imagery to translate emotional states into textual form. The study provides a framework for analyzing Chang's poetic choices, particularly her use of fragmented structure and abstract language to convey emotional intensity. Furthermore, research by Robinson (2020) in *Aesthetics and the Psychology of Art* explores how artistic expression serves as a bridge between internal emotional experiences and external representation

Hovey (2018) The cathartic poem is one that arises from within the poet in an attempt to make sense of chaotic thinking. Actually writing a poem, stanza by stanza, but rather it is created to relieve the dialectic tension of thoughts that have become too overwhelming, confusing, and painful to make sense. Cathartic narratives through poetry illustrate Gadamer's supposition that language gives us an expressed description of our experiences through our particular and unique relationship to a personal truth. The person living in pain may not look ill because that chronic pain is lived inside of the person. Their truth of living with pain cannot be seen externally as with other traumas.

2.2 Art

In general, "art" can be defined as a form of human creative expression that involves the process of creating or arranging visual, audio, or language elements with a specific purpose, such as conveying a message, arousing emotions, or expressing aesthetic values. Art includes various mediums, including painting, sculpture, music, literature, theater, film, and poetry. Many definitions of art have developed based on different perspectives and approaches.

Art has long been use as a means of emotional healing. Malchiodi (2013) in *The Art Therapy Sourcebook*, art therapy provides an opportunity for individuals to express emotions through images, colors, and shapes, which are often more effective than words. Art therapy,

especially in the psychological approach, helps individuals express trauma, pain, and inner conflict without the pressure to speak directly about their experiences.

2.3 Concept of Catharsis

The concept of catharsis in art refers to the emotional release or purification that occurs when individuals engage with artistic expression, allowing them to confront and process deep-seated feelings. Originating from Aristotle's theory in his *Poetics*, catharsis was initially described as the purging of emotions such as pity and fear through tragedy in theater, providing audiences with a safe space to experience intense emotions indirectly and, ultimately, to achieve a form of emotional relief. Aristotle believed that through experiencing the struggles and resolutions of characters, audiences could cleanse themselves of similar feelings, emerging from the experience with a renewed sense of balance.

In modern contexts, catharsis through art has expanded beyond theater to include all forms of artistic expression, such as visual art, music, poetry, dance, and film. Engaging with or creating art enables both artists and audiences to confront emotions that may be too painful or complex to face directly. The act of creating art often becomes a therapeutic outlet, allowing artists to articulate grief, loss, anger, or joy, thus transforming personal turmoil into a more manageable form. For instance, painters might use color and form to express emotions that words cannot capture, while poets may structure their work in ways that mirror their emotional journeys Ismah (2002).

Langer, in her book *"Feeling and Form,"* also emphasized the importance of art as a form of deep emotional expression. She argued that art can convey complex emotional experiences and help individuals understand their own feelings (Langer, 1953). Thus, art serves not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a tool for emotional healing and processing.

2.4 Trauma and Healing in Literature

Trauma in literature refers to a profound emotional, physical, or psychological experience that is difficult to express directly. Trauma is often a central theme in literature because of its ability to capture the complexity of human emotion. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is an experience that "exceeds the mind's ability to process" and often resurfaces in memory through narrative or creative expression. In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth explains that trauma is not just about the event itself, but about how the event continues to affect the individual through fragmented memories (Caruth, 1996). Literature is often used as a tool to express trauma, both by the author and the characters in the narrative. Laub (1992) argues that narrative allows individuals to confront and reframe their traumatic experiences, making the trauma more understandable. In poetry, trauma is often expressed through symbolism, metaphor, and imagery to convey experiences that are difficult to articulate directly. For example, metaphors such as "shadow" are often used to describe unspoken grief, while images of empty landscapes can represent loss (Laub & Felman, 1992).

Trauma in literature not only functions as a story element, but also as a tool for psychological and emotional exploration. Whitehead (2004) in her book *Trauma Fiction* explains that literary works about trauma often use fragmented or non-linear narrative structures. This reflects how traumatic memories work pieced together and not always able to be told in their entirety. Whitehead also emphasizes that literary works depicting trauma often utilize symbolism and metaphor to give readers access to emotional experiences that are difficult to understand rationally (Whitehead, 2004).

In addition, Kaplan (2005) in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* highlights how trauma not only impacts individuals but also communities. Literature, in this case, can function as a medium to represent collective trauma, as is often found in works related to war, genocide, or disaster. In an individual context, Kaplan notes that reading about other people's trauma allows readers to develop empathy, thus creating a deep emotional connection between the text and the reader.

Furthermore, trauma in literature often inspires cross-disciplinary studies, including psychology, culture, and the arts. Research by Balaev (2014) in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* suggests that trauma can be articulated through alternative narratives that go beyond traditional psychological frameworks. She emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, and historical contexts in understanding trauma in literature. For example, in works such as Victoria Chang's poetry, individual experiences not only reflect personal trauma, but also reflect universal trauma, such as the losses experienced by all people (Balaev, 2014).

3 METHOD

In this research, the research will use descriptive qualitative where the data is in form of words. In this research, the researcher will use descriptive qualitative where the data is in form of words. This research will analyzing the concept of emotional catharsis in Victoria Chang's *With My Back to the World*. The study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on textual analysis to examine how Chang's poetry embodies themes of emotional release and creative expression. The researcher will select three poem of Victoria Chang's the are *With My Back to The World*, *Obit* and *Night Sea*. In this research, the data collection involves several steps:

4 RESULTS

4.1 The forms of emotional expression that appear in Victoria Chang's poem

Data 1

The first stanza "I painted with my back to the world" shows an attitude of withdrawing. This is a form of emotional expression in the form of rejection of reality and the desire to find space that is safe for yourself. When he said "The World Kept Going", it felt that the world continued to walk even though he stopped. This gives rise to feelings of lag and loneliness, emotional expressions that arise from the removal between self and the outside world. The phrase "The Children Grew Taller" and "The Birds Nested and Left" show that time goes on, children grow, birds come and go but they themselves remain silent. This shows a sense of loss of time and moments that he cannot follow, implies deep sadness. When he repeated, "I Painted with My Back to The World", it puts pressure that away from the world is not a temporary thing, but a deliberate and recurrent decision. This shows the determination of heart, but also inner suffering that is difficult to convey directly.

Data 2

The lines "I heard footsteps but never turned" and "I felt wind but never moved" indicated that he was aware of the outside world, but chooses to remain involved. This shows a form of emotion such as rejection, fear, or unresolved trauma. The next two lines "I was told I was selfish" and "I was told I was brave", reflect the inner conflict that comes from the judgment of others. He is considered selfish, but also brave, which means he is struggling with how people see him and how he sees himself. When he says "I painted until there was no more canvas", it shows that

he has poured all his feelings into his artwork. His emotions are poured out without limits until they are all gone. This is a form of catharsis (release) of emotions that is liberating.

Data 3

Then the third stanza, "I painted silence" describes a sadness so deep that even silence is painted. "I painted the ocean without water" conveys emptiness although the form is there, the content is missing. This is a picture of emotion that cannot be expressed through words. When he says "I painted my mother's voice into a jar" and puts it in the corner of the painting, it is his way of storing his mother's memories and voice, as if he doesn't want to lose it completely. This is an expression of longing, love, and deep loss. The line "I painted until I disappeared" shows that he loses himself in the artwork his identity merges with the painting. This is the peak of emotional expression when art becomes the only place to heal

Data 4

The seven stanza "Some said I was free" and "This year I turned my back to the world" conveys the final conflict between how others judge his choices and how he himself feels about them. Meanwhile, in Aristotle's theory, this conflict strengthens the function of poetry as a medium for emotional tragedy that allows readers to experience empathy and inner purification and according to Freud reflects the battle between the Id (personal desire for freedom and peace) and the Super-Ego (the voice of society and social norms).

Data 5

"This year I turned my back to the world." This line shows that the speaker feels exhausted by the outside world and has ultimately chosen to withdraw. She no longer wants to engage with social realities or the pressures of life. "I let language face the front." The poem feels that only through language can she communicate with the world. She retreats herself but allows poetry and language to speak on her behalf. This indicates that language becomes a vessel for expressing her deepest emotions. "The parting felt like a death." The separation described here is profound it feels like a part of the self has died. This represents deep mourning. Freud would categorize this as mourning linked to past loss or trauma. In the context of catharsis, such intense suffering is a necessary stage in the process of emotional cleansing that leads to insight or emotional clarity. "The first person ran away like a horse." This line symbolizes the loss of the 'I' the speaker's core identity. The self is depicted as a wild horse, uncontrollable. "When the first person left, there was no second or third person as I had originally thought." The poet realizes that once her identity disappeared, there was no one else to replace or accompany her. This illustrates existential loneliness a sense of having no anchor. In catharsis, the acknowledgment of this loneliness is a crucial part of emotional release. "All that remained was repetition. And blue things." The final line reveals that what's left is a cycle of emotional pain and sorrow, with the color blue symbolizing grief.

Based on the analysis of the poem *With My Back to the World*, it can be concluded that Victoria Chang's consistently expresses various emotional experiences through poetic and symbolic language. Her poems reflect deep feelings of sadness, loneliness, alienation, loss, and disconnection from the world around her. Through visual metaphors such as painting, the color blue, and silence, Chang conveys complex inner conflicts and personal trauma. The act of painting, frequently mentioned in the poems, represents art as a medium for emotional release and healing.

Data 6

The first stanza, “Language—died 2009,” serves as a symbolic statement about the end of the ability or desire to use language as a means of communication and emotional connection. The death of language here is not meant literally, but rather as a reflection of deep personal trauma, most likely the loss of someone very important in the poet's life. It suggested that shows both a sense of compassion for the poet's loss of expressive capacity, and a fear of the possibility of experiencing a similar emotional alienation. “I used to be able to form sentences.” This sentence shows nostalgia and alienation. In the past, he was able to form sentences, to convey thoughts and emotions clearly. But not anymore. This sentence conveys sadness and frustration, and shows a longing for a past state that was more emotionally stable and communicative. In psychoanalysis, this shows the mechanism of ego loss, where the subject loses the means of connecting with the world namely language. “I used to be able to speak.” The repetition of the form “I used to...” reinforces the sense of loss. Not only did he lose the most basic ability to form sentences, he also lost the ability to speak. This illustrates a sense of complete disconnection from social reality and himself. The inability to speak becomes a symbol of deep emotional repression, which in Freud's framework could indicate an accumulation of trauma that has not been recognized or accepted. The next sentence “I used to be able to say, ‘I love you.’” contains the greatest emotional charge so far. The most human and fundamental expression of love can no longer be said. This implies the loss of the deepest emotional connection, especially to those closest to us. In the context of catharsis, this shows how emotions are held back in the poet's soul and then released through the medium poetry of art. Therefore data 6 was included in the forms a process of emotional expression purification.

Data 7

The The second stanza “But now, words have died.” Describe the stark and tragic statement. Words, as the primary medium of communication and inner expression, have “died.” It implies psychological emptiness and total alienation. The ability to speak is the essence of humanity to lose words is to lose an essential part of one's existence. He says silence as a form of expression. “They have left me.” The word “they” refers to “words.” Words are likened to living creatures that have desires, and they have gone. This reinforces the sense of loneliness, alienation, and abandonment felt by the poem. This emotion shows a sense of existential loss, and psychoanalytically, it signifies the conflict between the id that wants to express emotions and the superego that holds back or suppresses those expressions. And the last line “I am left with silence, with the inability to express.” Silence is the legacy of the death of language. This is where the form of emotional suppression appears very strongly.

Data 8

The last stanza “The language that once connected me to the world is gone. I mourn its loss” the verse strengthens the feelings of grief and loss so that it becomes an emotional climax as well as a form of release from psychological pressure. “I mourn its loss.” Form of emotional expression : Grief, acceptance. This stanza is the peak of emotional expression admits his grief directly. Thus leading to release (emotional purification).

Table 2 This poem tells of the loss of the ability to speak emotionally. The words once used to convey love are now gone, replaced by silence. This symbolizes trauma, emotional pain, and deep sadness.

Data 9

In the first stanza ‘‘In this room, my loneliness doubles because the edges of the painting are no longer white’’ The poet conveys that his loneliness deepens when he sees that the edges of the painting that were once pure white have changed. The color white can symbolize hope or a clean start, and when it is gone, an awareness of change and loss arises. The next stanza ‘‘The real blue looks thicker than in the photographs’’ ‘‘The source of the blue is no longer here’’. The color blue here becomes the main symbol, not just a color, but represents sorrow, silence, even the depths of the soul. When the source of the blue is gone, the poet feels a loss of meaning, as if the beauty is now just a remnant.

Data 10

‘‘What’s left, just the thick beauty in front of me, the frayed edges like my filthy mouth for all to see’’. In this stanza, the poet compares the remaining beauty to the torn edges of a painting, resembling his dirty mouth. This is an expression of shame, trauma, and the inability to voice feelings. In Freud’s psychoanalysis, this is a representation of inner conflict and repression. In catharsis, this reflects an honest expression of guilt and deep confession. ‘‘I still have my soul, but parts of it have begun to migrate onto beautiful things, like this blue’’. Meanwhile, this stanza describes the process of emotional transfer or sublimation, where parts of his soul move into objects of art. This is the poet’s way of dealing with suffering by channeling it into beauty.

Data 11

I leave some of my soul here, three lines up, fourth rectangle over from the right. This stanza emphasizes that the poet consciously embeds his soul into the details of art. This is a concrete form of sublimation. My soul is made of words and cut glass. Lately, the glass keeps cutting the words. Here the poet conveys that his soul is fragile and wounded. The words that should have saved him are now wounded by broken glass. This is a symbol of past trauma and emotional wounds that continue to hinder communication. This a manifestation of the conflict between desire and the inability to express it. In catharsis, this wound is part of the inner tragedy that must be released.

Data 12

The most wounded words I’ve had since childhood choose to stay here. In this stanza, the poet shows that the deepest wounds come from childhood. This sentence contains traumatic memories, and emphasizes the role of the past in shaping current emotional suffering. Freud called this part of unresolved childhood trauma (childhood repression), while Aristotle saw this as a moment of poetic channeling of tragedy. I console myself as I exit the room the poet tries to comfort himself, even though he knows that his wounds are still there. This indicates an effort to accept suffering and try to move on. In Freud, it indicates that the ego is starting to adjust to reality. In catharsis, this is a transition point towards inner purification. The people in the room are unaware of what I’ve done. Meanwhile, this stanza conveys alienation is reemphasized. No one is aware of the emotional depth that he has left in that room. This shows existential isolation, as well as the inability of the outside world to understand the depth of personal suffering. In this case a conflict between the outside world and the inner world (Superego) .

Data 13

Some of my words have changed their minds and are trying to leave the room and follow me. In this stanza , it states from the expression of his emotions that he does not want to be left

behind, and still tries to stick around. This indicates that the emotional recovery process is not complete. While the next sentence I walk away, lighter, a smaller soul on my back. Here the poet feels partial relief. His soul is now lighter, although not intact. This verse shows the temporary results of catharsis or there is a space that is now more spacious, although the wound still remains. The last sentence But thirty-three days later I can still hear them begging. Here it indicates that the emotional effects are still felt. The words (which represent trauma and pain) are still calling. Showing that emotional healing is an ongoing process.

4.2 Victoria Chang incorporate art as emotional catharsis in Victoria Chang's With My Back to The World

a. Intertextual Dialogue with Agnes Martin's Art as Reflective Catharsis

Chang initiates a poetic dialogue with Agnes Martin's minimalist paintings, using them not only as a visual reference but as emotional mirrors.

Data 14

"Agnes said the value of art is in the observer. I say the value of art is in how much it hurts."
(Chang, With My Back to The World)

Based on the reveals a contrast between Martin's serene philosophy of art and Chang's emotional turmoil. Here, Chang challenges the notion of art as detached beauty, instead framing it as a medium that absorbs and reflects pain. The cathartic function emerges through this contrast by confronting the emotional dimensions of art, Chang allows suppressed feelings to surface. She turns Martin's calm compositions into containers of her own grief and existential reflections.

This reflects Aristotle's theory of catharsis, where art becomes a medium through which intense emotions such as pity and fear are evoked and subsequently purged. In Chang's case, the art of Martin becomes a mirror to her own psyche, allowing a process of internal release through confrontation.

b. Structuring Trauma through Visual Form

A key motif throughout the collection is the use of "grid," referencing Martin's signature use of lines and structured forms. Chang writes:

Data 15

"The grid is a way to put sadness into boxes." (Chang, With My Back to The World)

Based on the metaphorical statement illustrates how art becomes a coping mechanism. By imagining sadness confined within a geometric structure, Chang finds a way to impose order upon her internal chaos. This aligns with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, where repression and projection serve as methods to manage unconscious emotional material. Here, Chang externalizes her trauma by organizing it visually, thus creating psychic distance and achieving catharsis.

The grid becomes symbolic of containment not of emotion denial, but of transformation. Through structured aesthetics, Chang can hold and observe her sadness safely, allowing a silent release and mental clarity.

c. Aestheticizing Pain into Artistic Beauty

Chang does not present her grief and sorrow in overtly dramatic tones. Instead, she embraces the minimalism and silence of Martin's paintings to express emotions that are deep, yet subtly conveyed.

Data 16

“The quietness of the painting is unbearable. I enter it anyway.” (Chang, *With My Back to The World*)

Based on the line embodies a form of emotional bravery. The quietness, symbolic of absence, silence, or emotional void, is not avoided but confronted. The act of “entering” the painting is an act of catharsis stepping into the stillness to face the emotional intensity it holds. Rather than flee from discomfort, Chang chooses to embrace it, transforming emotional pain into poetic and visual meditation.

This transformation aligns with the Aristotelian idea of catharsis as purification, where pain is not simply expressed but transmuted into a form of aesthetic reflection. Chang makes sorrow beautiful, thus redeeming it through artistry.

d. Poetry as Therapeutic Space for Healing

Chang’s poetry often functions as a meditative and therapeutic space—both for herself and for the reader.

Data 17

“I have been trying to heal / in the quiet. / In the painting, there is no body. / Only a space / for the body to grieve.” (Chang, *With My Back to The World*)

This passage underlines how art can create an imagined space for mourning and emotional processing. The absence of a physical body in the painting metaphorically opens room for spiritual or emotional presence. Poetry here functions as both a confessional and contemplative space, allowing Chang to perform inner work and acknowledge unresolved sorrow. According to Freud, such acts of symbolic representation allow the unconscious material (trauma, loss, grief) to be expressed without direct confrontation, leading to psychological relief.

5 DISCUSSION

In this analysis, the research explores the form of emotional expression and the incorporate art as emotional catharsis.

5.1 The forms of emotional expression that appear in Victoria Chang's poems

In the poem *With My Back to the World*, Victoria Chang explores various forms of complex and profound emotional expression. These emotions are displayed through visual metaphors, symbolism, and representations of personal experiences related to loss, alienation, trauma, and the search for meaning. Based on the analysis of poems such as “*With My Back to the World*”, “*Night Sea*”, and “*Language—died 2009*”, several main forms of emotional expression were found: grief, alienation, denial, acceptance, and longing for connection.

The poem “*With My Back to the World*” presents a form of emotional expression in the form of alienation and the search for identity through art. The line “I painted until I disappeared” reflects the process of dissolving identity in order to convey the deepest emotions through painting. This can be interpreted as a form of self-defense mechanism in Freud's theory, namely sublimation—where unconscious drives are channeled in the form of art. In Aristotle's perspective, painting becomes a tool for realizing catharsis; suffering is channeled and cleansed through creative action.

Based on the poems in *Obit*, it is a form of strong and complex emotional expression, reflecting deep sorrow over the loss of parents, language, identity, and the meaning of life. Through the perspective of Aristotle's catharsis theory, these poems become a means of

purifying emotions, especially sadness and suffering, experienced by the poet and transferred into works of art. The dominant emotional expressions in *Obit* include grief, loneliness, loss of direction, and longing for a relationship that has passed away. However, these poems also offer space for readers to experience an indirect emotional healing process, through empathy and reflection. Thus, *Obit*'s work functions as an art form that is not only a medium for personal expression, but also a container for collective catharsis. The poem "Language—died 2009" is a form of expression of deep sadness over the loss of language ability. In the line "I used to be able to say, 'I love you.' But now, words have died", the poet expresses loss not only linguistically, but also emotionally. According to Aristotle's catharsis theory, this statement reflects an emotional climax that triggers inner cleansing.

Meanwhile, according to Freud's psychoanalysis, the loss of language signifies emotional repression due to trauma or unchanneled pressure.

Victoria Chang's poem "Night Sea" conveys deep emotional expression through strong poetic narration and symbolic visual imagery. In the first stanza, the poet expresses loneliness and loss by describing how the painting's edges are no longer white, and how the blue appears "thicker." These visual elements serve as metaphors for the growing melancholy. According to Aristotle's theory of catharsis, this illustrates the process of emotional purification, where inner suffering is poured into artistic expression. From Freud's psychoanalytic view, the repressed emotions such as sadness and trauma are symbolically manifested through visual changes in the artwork, enabling the unconscious to surface. In the second stanza, the poem shows self-loathing and a loss of identity, expressed in lines like "the frayed edges like my filthy mouth" and "parts of it have begun to migrate onto beautiful things." This reflects Freud's concept of sublimation, in which negative emotions are transformed into aesthetic forms. The poet transforms disgust and disorientation into the visual symbol of the blue color. This transformation also aligns with Aristotle's catharsis, where art becomes both an emotional outlet and a means of healing. The third stanza presents emotional disconnection and a loss of voice. The poet states that her soul is made of words and cut glass, and that the glass keeps cutting the words. This metaphor portrays how emotional pain interferes with her ability to express herself. In Freudian theory, this suggests repression—feelings that cannot be expressed directly, thus emerging symbolically. The poem serves as a channel for these unspoken emotions, fulfilling catharsis by allowing their release through creative form. The fourth stanza touches on unresolved childhood trauma. "The most wounded words I've had since childhood choose to stay here" shows how painful memories linger within the self. The poet consoles herself as she exits the room, suggesting an attempt to come to terms with her internal wounds. Freud would interpret this as a moment of realization, where previously repressed trauma enters consciousness. In Aristotelian catharsis, this self-recognition of suffering is the beginning of emotional release and transformation. Finally, the last stanza reveals how emotional pain cannot be fully left behind. Though the poet walks away with a "smaller soul on her back," the words still beg to be heard. This conveys unresolved inner conflict, guilt, and lingering sadness. In Freud's view, it represents the unconscious struggle that continues even after conscious efforts to move forward. However, by expressing these feelings through poetry, the poet engages in a form of self-healing. According to Aristotle, this is the essence of catharsis through artistic representation of suffering, emotional insight and relief are achieved.

Overall, the emotional expression in Victoria Chang's poems is not only present explicitly,

but also implicitly through symbols, metaphors, and visual depictions. These forms show how art becomes a medium that allows poets to express, process, and ultimately release their deepest emotions. In this context, poetry functions as a vehicle for catharsis as well as a form of self-defense and healing, in accordance with the approach of Aristotle's theory and Freud's psychoanalysis.

5.2 How Victoria Chang incorporate art as emotional catharsis in Victoria Chang's With My Back to The World

Victoria Chang's *With My Back to the World* demonstrates how poetry can serve as a profound means of emotional catharsis through the incorporation of visual art, particularly the minimalist paintings of Agnes Martin. Chang does not merely reference visual art as a static object, but actively engages with it as a reflective surface through which she processes grief, trauma, and existential longing. The poet's use of art reflects a deeply introspective process that transforms external images into emotional landscapes. This artistic engagement aligns with Aristotle's theory of catharsis, where the expression and evocation of emotions such as pity and fear through art lead to emotional purification. At the same time, Chang's poetic techniques reflect Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, particularly his ideas of sublimation and mourning, in which unconscious emotions are redirected and released through symbolic forms like art and literature.

Chang also utilizes the formal elements of visual art specifically the grid patterns found in Martin's work as metaphors for emotional organization and control. When she writes, "The grid is a way to put sadness into boxes," she presents a clear image of how emotional pain can be compartmentalized. This act of placing emotions into structured forms echoes Freud's theory of sublimation, where difficult emotional experiences are transformed into acceptable and creative expressions. In Chang's poetry, the grid becomes a symbolic method for structuring inner chaos. It provides a framework within which grief can exist safely, without overwhelming the psyche. In this way, art is not only expressive but also therapeutic, offering containment and order amid emotional disorder.

Through her poetic dialogue with visual art, Victoria Chang constructs a space that is at once personal and universal. Her work allows both herself and the reader to experience catharsis through subtlety, metaphor, and silence. Rather than dramatizing pain, she reframes it into aesthetic form, enabling transformation without negation. Viewed through the perspectives of both Aristotle and Freud, Chang's collection demonstrates how art, when integrated thoughtfully and symbolically, can facilitate emotional release, psychological healing, and deeper self awareness.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on an analysis of three poems by Victoria Chang *Obit* (2009), *Night Sea*, and *With My Back to the World* it can be concluded that these poems are art forms that function as powerful means of emotional catharsis. Chang channels complex inner experiences, such as sadness, trauma, and alienation, loss, lonely into profound artistic expression through the use of symbolism, distinctive language structures, and most prominently, visual metaphors. Each poems demonstrate unique but interconnected forms of emotional expression. *Obit* (2009) presents grief in a fragmented, obituary like structure that reflects emotional rupture and mourning. *With My Back to the World* utilizes visual metaphors and symbolic imagery to depict

isolation and internal struggle, while Night Sea embodies emotional dissociation and the subconscious processing of pain through metaphorical landscapes. These poems employ visual metaphors such as silence painted on canvas or a soul made of glass to symbolize emotional states that are difficult to articulate verbally. Such metaphors are significant in both cathartic and psychoanalytic frameworks, where symbolic expression is a mechanism for emotional resolution. Through visual and symbolic metaphors, these poems not only depict emotions but also create an artistic space for inner healing, for both poets and readers. Chang uses art as a form of emotional catharsis that is not only personal but also universal. Chang's makes a literary work that shows that human emotional experiences can be processed through art into something meaningful, reflective, and therapeutic. The poems in this work provide evidence that art has the power to be a bridge between unspoken feelings and the consciousness that wants to understand the wound.

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