

***"auroras and sad prose": A Study of Narrative Techniques in
Songwriting through Taylor Swift's Pandemic Album *folklore****

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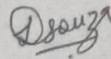
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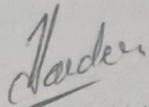
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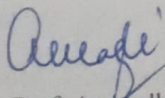
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, titled “*auroras and sad prose*”: **A Study of Narrative Techniques in Songwriting through Taylor Swift's Pandemic Album *folklore***, examines the narrative intricacies within Swift's acclaimed work. Focusing on the album's thematic depth and lyrical complexity, the study investigates Swift's narrative strategies, including not just symbolism, imagery, and literary devices but also musical aspects such as structural parallels, lyrical parallels and corresponding timestamps. Through a close analysis of selected tracks, the dissertation explores how Swift crafts vivid narratives that resonate with listeners, offering insights into themes of isolation, introspection, and nostalgia against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also tries to present insights about the impact the album had on its listeners which were gained through a self-reported survey. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the narrative potential of songwriting and the ways in which artists like Taylor Swift could provide solace and comfort to people during a global pandemic through music.

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I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to Taylor Swift herself, whose artistry and storytelling prowess have served as the cornerstone of my life and this dissertation. Her ability to weave intricate narratives and evoke profound emotions

has not only enriched the musical landscape but has also been a beacon of light in dark times for me and for countless others.

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CHAPTER 1 – “single glimpse”: an introduction

“In the dark times, will there also be singing?

Yes, there will be singing.

About the dark times.”

- Bertolt Brecht

Humanity has always found solace and joy in making and telling tales, sometimes carving them in stone, sometimes painting them on pots. Stories have always been the roads we lead children down to sleep and tools for coaxing or scary weapons to lure them into submission. They have been our companions in times of plenty and in times of grief. When a global pandemic, we saw humanity turn to arts and craft, cooking and baking. We felt the call to grieve and to create, to cry and to write down our tears.

Taylor Swift, a world famous popstar, turned to music, not as her profession, but as an escape mechanism. A new album was born without being boxed in the parameters of radio success or chart rankings, with a sound of indie-folk music, a genre distinct from Swift's defining pop sound. And yet, *folklore* turned out to be what people wanted – songs full of tales that would transport them away from the painful times they were living in. And thus, *folklore* became the escape pod which helped countless people to travel through the free fall of loneliness and grief.

1.1. Importance of the research

The Cambridge Dictionary defines Songwriting as the act or process of writing the music and words of songs. Therefore, songwriting has two aspects- the lyrics and

the music. A singer-songwriter is an artist who will be involved in composing, lyric writing, producing and finally recording and performing a particular song.

Owing to its two aspects, songwriting falls somewhere in between the domains of music and literature, two very distinct art forms. Lyric writing is an established but academically ignored part of literature. Scholars of literature have long debated if lyrics are equivalent to poetry and if songwriters should be treated as poets- a debate that gained momentum when singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016.

This study aims to establish songwriting, which includes both lyrics and music composition, as a literary art form. Focusing on the lyrics, the research seeks to understand the formation of narratives, an obvious literary undertaking, using Taylor Swift's album *folklore*. What makes this study unique is that it will also take into account the enhancement of a narrative through the aspects unique to songwriting.

Taylor Swift is an American singer-songwriter and has bagged 12 Grammy awards. Known for her storytelling, Swift has been hailed as the Artist of the Decade by the American Music Awards. Sir Jonathan Bate, a former Shakespeare professor at Warwick University, compared her to Shakespeare. In 2020, when the COVID pandemic shut down the world, Swift found herself turning from the pop genre towards indie-folk genre of music whose muted tones would bring out her full lyrical potential. Born during and because of a global pandemic, the album *folklore* became the soundtrack of the lockdown, ultimately winning the Grammy award for Album of the Year 2020.

The people involved in the songwriting process of *folklore* namely Taylor Swift, Jack Antonoff, Aaron Dessner, Bon Iver and William Boverly had to make this record in isolation. Swift recorded all of the songs from home, while the others contributed from the safety of their own homes. The collaborators were never in the same room but still managed to do a marvellous job in creating the whimsical storylines which are a part of this album.

1.2. Scope and limitations of the research

The research area includes songwriting as an important literary form. Just as other forms of writing, it has a narrative progression, themes, conflict and structure. The focus of this research will be the narrative techniques used in the album *folklore* by Taylor Swift. The deluxe version of the album contains seventeen songs but due to page limits only nine songs will be analysed.

The lyrics will be given primary importance in order to understand how they build the narrative. Aspects of music composition such as verse-chorus pattern, intro, outro, bridge, time and duration will be evaluated solely based on how they support the formation of a narrative and solidify the storylines formed through the lyrics. These aspects will be scrutinised as secondary components with the lyrics being the primary area of focus.

This study also tries to understand the influence of this album on its listeners, which is of special significance owing to the fact that it was released during a global pandemic and lockdown. An online survey will be conducted to gain the perspective of listeners. Also, relevant social media posts related to the album will be considered as listener response.

This study, being undertaken in the spirit of literature, will give only cursory attention to facets of composing / production due to lack of knowledge in that domain and also owing to the fact that it would be out of the purview of literature. A multidisciplinary approach may have yielded a more in-depth and balanced understanding of narrative formation through songwriting by analysing chord progressions, key changes, use of major or minor keys, key changes and other features of music.

1. 3. Research questions

1. What are the various narrative techniques used in the album *folklore*?
2. How did a global pandemic affect Taylor Swift and her art?
3. What effect did the album *folklore* have on the listeners?

1. 4. Relevance and necessity of the proposed research

1. 4. 1. Necessity in the field of languages and literature

Literature is defined as written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit. When Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature which is considered to be the greatest literary award, it rekindled the age old debate on whether songwriting is literature or not.

Many believe that no matter how great a singer-songwriter's lyrics are, he or she is not a "real writer". Some do not consider songwriting as literature arguing that it is a distinct form of art. The main argument is that no matter how beautifully a songwriter writes, his or her words can attain their full potential only in performance.

Darrel Bristow-Bovey, counters this argument in his article 'Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize for literature: poetic licence or literary lunch?' published in The National. Bovey traces the symbiotic relationship between music and literature which has existed since time. Citing examples of ancient Greek writers, he brings out the fact that they wrote in rhyming couplets so the lines could be memorised easily. Most often than out, these words would have a tune to make it easier for the singers to remember and captivate their listeners. As Bovey states, "Before it was literature, the Iliad was a song".

Coming to the heart of the argument, the idea that lyrics of a song can only be fully experienced when accompanied by music is undeniable. But stating this as the reason for its exclusion from the literary purview is problematic. Simply because this argument can be extended to literary works such as plays. Just like songs, plays can only attain their full glory on stage. However, plays are an established literary genre and some of the greatest literary giants like Shakespeare and Marlowe, were known for their plays.

Just as plays once dominated public entertainment consumption, that space has been taken up by series, movies and of course, music. Majority of music consumed consists of songs. Songs have become a medium of learning and trans-cultural understanding. A perfect example is the rise of K-pop in mainstream music, which led to the rest of the world focusing on Asian culture and literature and bringing something new to the table dominated by Euro-centricity.

However, with the rise of global streaming platforms like Spotify, the music industry is a profit-driven undertaking with a factory-like production of songs where the making of one song will have more than a dozen people involved in the

"creative" process. This is different in case of singer-songwriters. Very rarely do they perform songs that they have not contributed to in terms of creation.

Taylor Swift, at the age of 20, released an entirely self-written album titled 'Speak Now' which was her third studio album. Swift is known for her confessional, diary-like writing. *folklore*, which is her eighth studio album, was completely different from her previous albums. She quickly followed it with its sister album *evermore*, which was released in December 2020. These albums are different from the rest of Swift's discography because she moved into the folk-indie or the alternative music genre. Secondly, as she claimed, *folklore* is an "album of songs I've poured all of my whims, dreams, fears, and musings into ". This album is the peak of she's best known for- her storytelling.

1. 4. 2. Relevance to the society

folklore showcased Taylor Swift's artistic evolution, highlighting her ability to experiment with different musical styles and themes. The album's introspective lyrics and emotional depth provide a sense of catharsis for listeners. Many people found solace and comfort in music during challenging times, making *folklore* culturally relevant for emotional healing and connection.

The album's unexpected release and critical acclaim challenged traditional music industry norms. The album became a success with zero promotion since it was a surprise drop. It showcased the changing landscape of music consumption, emphasising the significance of digital platforms and artists' direct connections with their audience.

This album explores complex themes such as love, loss, nostalgia, and self-discovery. These themes are universal and resonate with listeners, making the

album relevant as it mirrors the human experience. Through some songs in the album, like *the last great american dynasty* and *mad woman*, Swift subtly comments on societal norms, expectations, and gender roles, encouraging listeners to reflect on broader social constructs.

folklore came at the time of a global lockdown. Swift decided to drop the album which turned out to be something everyone needed: a romantic escape. With whimsical themes and powerful narratives, it contributed to creating a sense of community among Taylor Swift's fans. The shared experience of enjoying the album brought people together, in spite of being socially distant, reinforcing the social aspect of music appreciation.

This study sheds light on the formation of narratives and their impact by trying to understand artistic expression, emotional connection, storytelling, societal commentary, creativity and their interplay. Its influence on the people and its ability to bring people together make *folklore* a culturally significant work in the contemporary social landscape.

1. 5. Objectives of the research proposed

1. To establish songwriting as a vital part of literary tradition.
2. To identify the narrative techniques used in *folklore* by Taylor Swift.
3. To analyse and evaluate the formation of narratives in *folklore*.
4. To understand the influence of the COVID pandemic on Taylor Swift as an artist by analysing the album
5. To study the impact of *folklore* on music listeners during a global lockdown.

1. 6. Literature review

Taylor Swift has been under academic scrutiny for various reasons. Studies have been conducted on her business models, her influence on culture, politics, trade and commerce, copyright laws, publishing, and of course, the music industry. Since this is a literary study, the focus is zoomed in on research conducted in the same spirit of literature.

In the research paper titled 'Cultural Views of a Society Through Taylor Swift's Song', D.Ginting and E.R.Levana study the deixis in select songs from folklore. By applying theories proposed by Levinson (1983) and Yule (1997), the lyrics of the songs are analysed to find the different types of deixis, their intended use and meaning.

Another research paper by M.R.Billauri, N.Hanafi and E.Fitriana named 'Deixis on the Song Lyrics of Folklore Album by Taylor Swift: A Pragmatic Study' also deals with the study of deixis. A.Z Arvellita has also published detailed research titled 'Exploring Song Lyrics of Taylor Swift's album folklore; Deictic Expression'. The study of deixis and reference helps with the understanding of the context and meaning of the lyrics.

In the research paper titled "Three Speakers' Perspectives on experience in Taylor Swift's Selected Lyrics from *Folklore* album", researcher Jonathan I.S.D. Max shows how the varying amounts of transitivity process types in each lyric suggest different perspectives on reality. It was published in the Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies.

Song lyrics establish a complex discourse structure whereby listeners are placed in a position to overhear 'the pretence of a conversation constructed to convey the performer's meaning', which is similar to dramatic performances and

plays. This is stated by C.Harrison and H.Ringrow in their research paper 'Disnarration and the performance of storytelling in Taylor Swift's *folklore* and *evermore*. It offers a stylistic analysis of songwriting and narrative structure through disnarration and how it establishes narrator-narratee relationship.

The research paper named 'A Corpus-driven Analysis of Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics' used corpus linguistics to reveal that Swift's writing style is highly personalised through the use of personal pronouns 'I' and 'you'. The researchers, F.A.Kendong, A.S.Daud and S.A.Joharry, also discovered that Swift refers to 'time' and frequently used the cognitive verb 'know'.

S.Nabila's thesis titled 'Figurative Language Found in Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics in the album *folklore*' deals with the use of figurative language used in the album. The study classified the figurative language used in the lyrics into various categories by using Kennedy's Theory (1983). The dominant type of figurative language used included metaphor, simile and hyperbole which, the researcher has concluded, made each story seem more alive.

Since metaphor is the most used figure of speech in folklore, writers K.Y.Frida and I.Zuraida, explore the type of metaphors used in their study 'Metaphor in The Folklore Album by Taylor Swift: A Semantics Study. By applying the theory of metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Hurford and Heasley (1983) to *folklore*, they classify the different metaphors and elicit their meanings, respectively.

Polysemy is another frequent occurrence in Swift's writing. It is a word or phrase which has varied meanings based on the context in which it is used. S.Septiandari studied the presence of polysemy in *the 1*, a song from *folklore*. The author found different types of polysemy in the lyrics of the song and presented it

in her thesis titled 'Analysis of Polysemy of the Song Lyrics in the Album of “*Folklore*” By Taylor Swift'.

A dissertation titled "Passed down like folk songs" written by Liv Shaw as a student from the University of York analyses the story and character in Swift's *folklore* and *evermore*. The characters presented in the selected songs are fictional. However, a few of them bear some semblance to people from Swift's life and others possess her personality traits. By analysing her lyrics, the researcher portrays Swift herself as a character present in the album.

John McGrath, Senior Lecturer in Music at University of Surrey, UK published a paper titled 'Return to Craft: Taylor Swift, Nostalgia, and Covid-19' in which he explored the rise of romanticism. The folk inspired cottage-core aesthetic dominated all spheres of life during and after the pandemic. McGrath analyses this phenomenon by making a case study of Swift's lead singles of the sister albums *folklore* and *evermore*, namely *cardigan* and *willow*, along with their music videos.

The book published by Brill, titled 'Disrupted Knowledge: Scholarship in a Time of Change' is a collection of essays by the faculty of School of Arts and Cultures at Newcastle University, England whose writing began during the pandemic, analysing the effects of COVID on all aspects of life. Chapter 13 is called ' 'Standing in Your Cardigan': Evocative Objects, Ordinary Intensities, and Queer Sociality in the Swiftian Pop Song'. Authors James Barker, Richard Elliott and Gareth Longstaff uncover how Swift uses mundane things to evoke strong and precise emotions by turning them into 'evocative objects'. These objects allow the listener to relate to these objects instead of relating to the writer, creating a distance between the narrator and the writer.

A very apparent research gap is that all of the above research only focuses on lyrics while completely ignoring the musical aspects of *folklore*. The studies that deal with disnarration, figurative language, polysemy etc try to analyse only the lyrics and their contribution to narrative structure but disregard how compositional features help in the formation of the narrative. This study will try to do exactly that by first understanding the narrative techniques used both in lyrics and composition. It will uncover how lyrics build narratives and how musical aspects cement and beautify these narratives.

1. 7. Hypothesis

The narrative formation in *folklore* relies on both literary devices and musical features as narrative techniques and show the influence of the covid pandemic on the art, the artist and the listeners.

1. 8. Research methodology for proposed research

This dissertation deals with formation of narratives in Taylor Swift's album *folklore*. Therefore, Narrative Theory will be the backbone of this research.

This research has a qualitative approach . The primary source for this study is the album *folklore* as found on Taylor Swift's YouTube channel in the form of lyric videos and on Amazon Music. The lyrics and music of each song will undergo a thorough analysis to identify narrative techniques, storytelling structure and influence of the COVID pandemic.

The study will also include a survey which will help in gaining the perspective of the listeners. Apart from the responses thus obtained, relevant social

media posts about the album will also be taken into consideration as listeners' response. These will be considered as the secondary sources.

There was also a documentary concert film released in November 2020 on Disney+ called *Folklore: The Long Pond Studio Sessions* and features the collaborators meeting in person and performing the songs together for the first time. Apart from this, Swift's other interviews will also serve as secondary sources.

1. 9. Chapter plan

This dissertation titled, *auroras and sad prose: A Study of Narrative Techniques in Songwriting through Taylor Swift's Pandemic Album folklore* is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1 is dubbed “*single glimpse*”: **an introduction** and it is the introduction to this research study.

Chapter 2 “*stolen lullabies*” will bring to light the various narrative techniques used in some of the songs and analyse the formation of narratives.

Chapter 3 named “*shattered edges glisten*” aims to reveal the influence of the covid pandemic on the album by examining the songs.

Chapter IV known as “*passed down like folk songs*” will display the collection of data obtained through the survey. It will also include social media posts by listeners related to the album and further scrutinise the data in order to draw conclusions.

Chapter V is called “*dream of some epiphany*” and it offers a conclusion to this study.

The title of this dissertation as well as the chapter titles and subtitles are taken from the lyrics found in the album. All the titles and subtitles are stylized differently as a nod to the style of the album *folklore* which was all in small case and italicised.



Fig. 1.1. *folklore* Album Cover

CHAPTER 2 – “stolen lullabies”

“That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.”

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

In tumultuous times, one seeks solace in the company of loved ones. The worst thing about the COVID pandemic was that it took away the possibility of any kind of communion. One could only escape in the worlds of fiction through visual media and books. Swift also found herself changing her highly personalised style of writing and turning towards fictional tales.

The album *folklore* is a collection of narratives, an anthology born of isolation and musing. Swift, moved by the spirit of escapism, created timeless fiction- tales of loneliness, betrayal, of love lost and love found. This chapter focuses on songs that embody Swift's flight of imagination into stories she weaves with threads of lyrics and music.

2. 1. “calamitous love”: the teenage love triangle

“There's a collection of three songs I refer to as The Teenage Love Triangle. These three songs explore a love triangle from all three people's perspectives at different times in their lives.”

- Taylor Swift

2. 1. 1. cardigan

"The song is about a lost romance and why young love is often fixed so permanently within our memories; why it leaves such an indelible mark."

- Taylor Swift

cardigan is thought to be the first segment of the story "Teenage Love Triangle," and is told from Betty's perspective. This is track 2 and the lead single of the album. Swift choosing this song as the lead single makes it quite apparent that Betty is the main character in this whirlwind romance. *cardigan* voices both- Betty's feelings of loss and betrayal and her knowledge that James would come back to her. In *Folklore: The Long Pond Studio Sessions*, a documentary concert on the album released in November 2020, Swift said that *cardigan* is Betty's perspective from like 20-30 years later, looking back on the love that caused her. Swift also conveyed that according to her, Betty and James ended up together. But even though she ends up with him, she cannot just forget the pain he put her through.

The song *cardigan* deals with the events that took place in the past. There is a gap between the time the narrated events took place which is termed as discourse time and its narration which is called narrative time (Genette, 1980). The gap between discourse time and narrative time is many years in the case of this song, as Swift herself has confirmed. The song has a first-person or homodiegetic voice. When a character from the story is the narrator, the narrative is called homodiegetic (Genette, 1980).

[Verse 1]

1. *"Vintage tee, brand new phone*
2. *High heels on cobblestones*
3. *When you are young they assume you know nothing*
4. *Sequin smile, black lipstick*
5. *Sensual politics*
6. *When you are young they assume you know nothing"*

(Swift 0:07 - 0:34)

The vintage t-shirt that the speaker is wearing is juxtaposed with her brand new phone in line 1. This juxtaposition mirrors how the speaker felt- an old soul in a teenager's body. Everyone assumed that she was naive and ignorant, but she believes she knew everything she needed to know. We also see the use of alliteration in lines 2 and 5 where the 'h' and 's' sounds are repeated respectively.

[Chorus 1]

1. *"But I knew you,*
2. *Dancing in your Levi's*
3. *Drunk under a streetlight,*
4. *I knew you*
5. *Your hand under my sweatshirt,*
6. *Baby, kiss it better"*

(Swift 0:36 - 0:50)

We again see alliteration in chorus 1 where the 'd', 's' and 'b' sounds are repeated.

The phrase "I knew you" is repeated in lines 1 and 4.

[Refrain]

1. *"And when I felt like I was an old cardigan*
2. *Under someone's bed*
3. *You put me on and said I was your favorite"*

(Swift 0:51 - 1:03)

Here, there is use of simile to draw a comparison between the speaker and an old cardigan. The speaker compares herself to an unused and forgotten cardigan under someone's bed (Yunos, Francis, 2023). Betty felt that James saw her and loved her when she felt neglected and ignored.

[Verse 2]

1. *"A friend to all is a friend to none*
2. *Chase two girls, lose the one*
3. *When you are young they assume you know nothing*"

(Swift 1:05 - 1:17)

The first line is a paradox. The speaker is trying to convey that you can't have everything. In the second line, she emphasises the fact that by going after another girl, James lost her.

[Chorus 2]

1. *"But I knew you*
2. *Playing hide-and-seek*
3. *And giving me your weekends*
4. *I knew you*
5. *Your heartbeat on the High Line*
6. *Once in twenty lifetimes*"

(Swift 1:20 - 1:35)

In line 5, there is a direct reference to the High Line, an elevated linear park in New York. This reveals the setting of the story. In the next line, we see the use of hyperbole. The speaker feels that what she and James have is so special and rare that she will not experience something like it ever again.

[Bridge]

1. *"To kiss in cars and downtown bars*
2. *Was all we needed*
3. *You drew stars around my scars*
4. *But now I'm bleeding"*

(Swift 2:03 - 2:19)

In the bridge, Betty expresses how they were happy by just being with each other. She says that James made her feel special and then broke her heart by making her feel discarded. Alliteration is used with the 's' and 'b' sound repeating.

[Chorus 3]

1. “‘Cause I knew you
2. *Stepping on the last train*
3. *Marked me like a bloodstain*
4. I knew you
5. *Tried to change the ending*
6. Peter losing Wendy
7. I knew you
8. *Leaving like a father*
9. *Running like water,*
10. When you are young they assume you know nothing

(Swift 2:20 - 2:47)

In the last chorus, we see the use of simile which invokes very vivid imagery. Each comparison speaks of the different facets of the damage caused. Where "bloodstain" symbolises a deep hurt, "leaving like a father" stands for betrayal and "running like water" means that she feels James is like water which flows not caring what it destroys in its path. There is also an allusion to J.M. Barrie's work Peter Pan in line 6. In the story, Peter eventually loses Wendy because he refuses to grow up along with Wendy. Here, the speaker feels that James did not consider the consequences of his actions. His immaturity ended up hurting Betty and causing him to lose her.

[Outro]

1. *"But I knew you'd linger like a tattoo kiss*
2. *I knew you'd haunt all of my what-ifs*
3. *The smell of smoke would hang around this long*
4. *'Cause I knew everything when I was young*
5. *I knew I'd curse you for the longest time*
6. *Chasing shadows in the grocery line*
7. *I knew you'd miss me once the thrill expired*
8. *And you'd be standing in my front porch light*
9. *And I knew you'd come back to me*
10. *You'd come back to me*
11. *And you'd come back to me*
12. *And you'd come back"*

(Swift 2:48 - 3:32)

In line 1, alliteration is used to convey the speaker's emotions. A tattoo kiss means a lasting mark that he has left on her. We see the use of anaphora in this verse with the words "I knew" being repeated in the beginning of some lines. The last four lines have a repetition to highlight the fact that James came back to her and that is all that mattered to the speaker.

The pattern of the song is two sets of verse-chorus-refrain followed by the bridge, then chorus, outro and refrain at the end. Every chorus has different lyrics but the zinc phrase "*I knew you*" is repeated after every two lines. Each verse has different lyrics except for the last line which is "*When you are young they assume you know nothing*", -a line also repeated at the end of chorus 3. When we move into the outro, we realise that this line is juxtaposed with "*I knew everything when I was*

young". The speaker supports this claim by recounting all the things she knew, which is conveyed through the anaphoric use of "*I knew*" in the outro. The outro provides the denouement to the narrative of the song which ends with the refrain.

2. 1. 2. *august*

"The idea that there's some bad, villain girl in any type of situation who takes your man is actually a total myth because that's not usually the case at all. Everybody has feelings and wants to be seen and loved, just like Augustine."

- Taylor Swift

Track 8 is named after the eighth month of the year, which is August. Following its release, fans quickly realised that the song was written from the perspective of the anonymous girl whom James had an affair with. She is a side character in James and Betty's highlight romance. Maybe that is why the songwriter did not give her a name. However, as internet discussions progressed, listeners began to refer to her as "the August girl". Of course, the reason was that she is the voice of the song *august*. Inadvertently, it can also mean "the girl James had a fling with in August".

Eventually, in the documentary Swift baptised the unnamed girl as Augustine. The songwriter said that *august* is about the girl that James had a summer with. So, she might seem like she is a bad girl but she is not. She is a sensitive person who really fell for him. She was trying to let him think that she didn't care, but she really did and she thought they had something very real.

[Verse 1]

1. *"Salt air and the rust on your door"*

2. *I never needed anything more*
3. *Whispers of "Are you sure?"*
4. *"Never have I ever before"*

(Swift 0:06 - 0:26)

Verse 1 is written as an analepsis or flashback. Analepsis is any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment (Genette, 1980). Line 1 of the verse gives us a clue about the setting using imagery. It suggests that the events took place near the beach. Line 1 is foreshadowing the future events through symbolism. The "salt air" and rusty door can be symbols for the addressee and the speaker, respectively. James can be compared to a sea breeze which remains unchanged but causes rust or permanent damage to the door which symbolically stands for the speaker. We also see the use of alliteration where the consonant sound 'n' is repeated in the second line. The following is the chorus:

[Chorus 1]

1. *"But I can see us lost in the memory*
2. *August slipped away into a moment in time*
3. *'Cause it was never mine*
4. *And I can see us twisted in bedsheets*
5. *August sipped away like a bottle of wine*
6. *'Cause you were never mine'*

(Swift 0:27 - 0:47)

We again see alliteration with the sound 'm' repeating in three consecutive lines: 'memory', 'moment' and 'mine'. In line 5, simile is used to compare the month

of August to a bottle of wine which gets over without it being noticed. It can also mean that people who drink do not want the wine to get over but it eventually does. The third and sixth line is repeated but with "you" replacing "it" in the latter line. The speaker is comparing the month of August with her lover, James. She feels that James too, went away too soon just like the month of August.

[Verse 2]

1. *"Your back beneath the sun*
2. *Wishing I could write my name on it*
3. *Will you call when you're back at school?*
4. *I remember thinking I had you"*

(Swift 0:48 - 1:09)

In verse 2, the sounds 'b' and 'w' are repeated, hence alliteration is used. Also, we see the use of synecdoche with "your back" being representative of James. The speaker wishes she could write her name on his back, which figuratively means that she wishes that he really belonged to her and she had his love.

[Bridge]

1. *"Back when we were still changing' for the better*
2. *Wanting was enough*
3. *For me, it was enough*
4. *To live for the hope of it all*
5. *Cancel plans just in case you'd call*
6. *And say, "Meet me behind the mall"*
7. *So much for summer love and saying "us"*
8. *'Cause you weren't mine to lose*
9. *You weren't mine to lose, no"*

(Swift 1:41 - 2:11)

In the first line, fifth line, sixth line and seventh line of the bridge, alliteration can be seen as the 'w', 'c', 'm' and 's' sounds are repeated respectively. We can also see repetition with the word "enough" to lay stress on the fact that for the speaker, loving James was fulfilling enough in spite of her feelings not being reciprocated. The relationship they had was special to her and she neither asked nor expected anything more from James.

[Outro]

1. *Remember when I pulled up and said, "Get in the car"*
2. *And then canceled my plans just in case you'd call?*
3. *Back when I was living for the hope of it all, for the hope of it all*
4. *"Meet me behind the mall"*
5. *Remember when I pulled up and said, "Get in the car"*
6. *And then canceled my plans just in case you'd call?*
7. *Back when I was livin' for the hope of it all*
8. *For the hope of it all*
9. *For the hope of it all*
10. *For the hope of it all*
11. *For the hope of it all*

(Swift 2:57 - 3:27)

The outro has a lot of alliteration and repetition. In line 3, the 'c' sound is repeated in 'canceled', 'case' and 'call' and in line 5, the 'm' sound is repeated in 'meet', 'me' and 'mall'. The phrase "for the hope of it all" is repeated throughout the outro with consecutive repetition in the last 4 lines. The songwriter is trying to

emphasise that the speaker harboured hopes against reason, that James may eventually come to love her.

The structure of the song is verse- chorus- verse- chorus, followed by the bridge and the chorus and an outro at the end. Apart from the verses, all other components are repeated. The chorus remains the same throughout the song. The outro has repeating lines, similar to the ones from the bridge with the last 4 lines being identical.

2. 1. 3. *betty*

"[James] has lost the love of his life and doesn't understand how to get it back... Everybody makes mistakes, everybody really messes up sometimes and this is a song that I wrote from the perspective of a 17-year-old boy."

- Taylor Swift

Track 14 is named *betty*, an eponymous song on the album which is written from the perspective of Betty's lover, James. The song refers to the aftermath of *august*. Listeners find that while the summer affair was taking place, James was still dating Betty. He eventually realises that he has strong feelings for Betty and ends up on her doorstep. In the songwriter's words, the song *betty* is from a teenage boy's perspective apologising after he loses the love of his life because he's been foolish.

[Verse 1]

1. *"Betty, I won't make assumptions*
2. *About why you switched your homeroom, but*
3. *I think it's 'cause of me*
4. *Betty, one time I was riding on my skateboard*

5. *When I passed your house*
6. *It's like I couldn't breathe*

(Swift 0:11 - 0:28)

The very first statement of *betty* is contradictory with James claiming that he will not make assumptions but then assuming that Betty changed her room because of him. James is an unreliable narrator and it becomes more apparent as we progress through the song. Line 6 features a hyperbole with the speaker expressing how he felt when he passed his ex-girlfriend's house.

[Pre-chorus 1]

1. *"You heard the rumours from Inez*
2. *You can't believe a word she says*
3. *Most times, but this time it was true*
4. *The worst thing that I ever did was what I did to you"*

(Swift 0:30 - 0:50)

Line 1 deftly introduces another character named Inez who is characterised as a busybody who informed Betty that James cheated on her. His tone therefore, is slightly snide towards Inez even though he accepts his mistake. There is also the alliterative use of the sound 'w' in line 4.

[Chorus 1]

1. *"But if I just showed up at your party*
2. *Would you have me? Would you want me?*
3. *Would you tell me to go fuck myself?*
4. *Or lead me to the garden?*
5. *In the garden would you trust me*
6. *If I told you it was just a summer thing?*

7. *I'm only 17, I don't know anything*

8. *But I know I miss you*"

(Swift 1:52 - 1:14)

In lines 2 and 3, anaphora is used as the phrase 'would you' is repeated in consecutive sentences. A paradox is used in lines 7 and 8, where James tries to use his age as an excuse for cheating on Betty. He claims his ignorance makes him unsure about everything except that he misses her dearly.

[Verse 2]

1. *"Betty, I know where it all went wrong*

2. *Your favorite song was playing from*

3. *The far side of the gym*

4. *I was nowhere to be found*

5. *I hate the crowds, you know that*

6. *Plus, I saw you dance with him"*

(Swift 1:23 - 1:41)

In verse 2, James gives his excuse for cheating on Betty. He saw her dancing in the gym to her favourite song with another guy. This verse has plenty of alliteration with the consonant sound 'w' repeating in line 1 and the 'f' sound repeating in lines 2, 3 and 4.

[Bridge]

1. *"I was walking home on broken cobblestones*

2. *Just thinking of you when she pulled up like*

3. *A figment of my worst intentions*

4. *She said, "James, get in, let's drive"*

5. *Those days turned into nights*

6. Slept next to her, but
7. I dreamt of you all summer long"

(Swift 2:35 - 2:56)

The bridge is an analepsis marking the moment James is approached by the unnamed girl. James uses a simile in line 2 to call her "a figment of" his "worst intentions". He tries to direct his guilt to the other girl for appearing right when he was having intentions to get back at Betty. In lines 6 and 7, we see the use of irony with James saying that even though he was physically next to the other girl, he could not stop thinking about Betty.

[Verse 3]

1. "Betty, I'm here on your doorstep
2. And I planned it out for weeks now, but
3. It's finally sinking in
4. Betty, right now is the last time
5. I can dream about what happens when
6. You see my face again"

(Swift 3:13 - 3:32)

A temporal merge occurs in verse 3. When the discourse time gets merged into the narrative time in the course of the narration it is termed as temporal merge. The narrative time of this song is when James appears at Betty's house in line 1.

[Pre-chorus 3]

1. "The only thing I wanna do is make it up to you
2. So I showed up at your party
3. Yeah, I showed up at your party"

(Swift 3:33 - 4:06)

The repetition in lines 2 and 3 is important because James going to the party is the first step towards mending their relationship. The speaker has finally made the decision to go and apologise to the love of his life, not knowing if he will be forgiven.

[Chorus 3]

1. *"Yeah, I showed up at your party*
2. *Will you have me? Will you love me?*
3. *Will you kiss me on the porch*
4. *In front of all your stupid friends?*
5. *If you kiss me, will it be just like I dreamed it?*
6. *Will it patch your broken wings?*
7. *I'm only 17, I don't know anything*
8. *But I know I miss you"*

(Swift 4:05 - 4:28)

In the final chorus we again see the use of anaphora. But there is a slight change compared to the choruses. In place of "would you", we see "will you" in the last chorus. "Would" is the past tense form of will and is sometimes used when we talk about something imaginary or hypothetical. In contrast, "will" is used to express beliefs about the present or the future. This change of a word in the last chorus underscores the temporal merge which takes place in the bridge and marks the shift from the speaker daydreaming to being proactive. It adds to the sense of immediacy we feel in the pre-chorus leading up to the final chorus. Line 6 is metaphorical, where "broken wings" signifies Betty's heartbreak. James is wondering if his apology will mend her broken heart.

[Outro]

1. "*Standing in your cardigan*"
2. *Kissin' in my car again*
3. *Stopped at a streetlight*
4. *You know I miss you"*

(Swift 4:29 - 4:42)

The outro is very short with just four lines. Lines 2 and 3 feature an analepsis, taking us back to when they were together. The verse-chorus pattern of *betty* is 2 sets of verse, pre-chorus, chorus - where the pre-chorus and chorus remain the same. Then we have the bridge, followed by a changed pre-chorus and chorus. The song ends with a four line outro. Compared to *august* and *cardigan*, this song has a simple pattern and has less repetition.

Swift uses many narrative techniques to connect the three songs of the "Teenage Love Triangle". One such method is corresponding timestamps. The songwriter gives the same information from two different perspectives in two different songs but at the corresponding timestamp in the duration of the songs. In the song *cardigan*, Betty sings,

"And you'd be standing in my front porch light"

(Swift 3:15)

She is addressing James and asserting that she knew he would end up coming back to her. In *betty*, at the same time, James says,

"Betty, I'm here on your doorstep"

(Swift 3:15)

Corresponding timestamps are also used to connect the songs *august* and *betty*. In *august*, Augustine addresses James and says,

"Remember when I pulled up and said, 'Get in the car'"

(Swift 2:47)

She is referring to the inciting incident of their affair. James also talks about the same thing in *betty*, saying,

"She said, 'James, get in, let's drive'"

(Swift 2:47)

The songs are also connected through use of lyrical parallels. Same, similar or contrasting words or phrases are used in different songs in order to connect the narrative. The first two lines of *cardigan* are,

"Vintage tee, brand new phone

High heels on cobblestones"

(Swift 0:07 - 0:13)

The word "cobblestones" is used as a lyrical parallel. It appears again in the bridge of the song *betty*,

"I was walking home on broken cobblestones"

(Swift 2:35 - 2:40)

There are other parallels used. The following are lyrics from *cardigan*.

"To kiss in cars and downtown bars

was all we needed"

(Swift 2:03 - 2:10)

Here the underlined phrase is used to connect the songs *cardigan* and *betty*. Another such parallel is the word "cardigan" itself. Both of these appear in the outro of *betty* when James sings,

"Standing in your cardigan

Kissin in my car again"

(Swift 4:29 - 4:37)

Also, the word "streetlight" appears in both the songs as a lyrical parallel. In *cardigan*, the lines are,

"Drunk under a streetlight"

(Swift 0:40 - 0:42)

In *betty*, line 3 of outro is as follows

"Stopped at a streetlight"

(Swift 4:38)

These parallels join the narratives of the two songs. Another such parallel is Betty asserting her knowledge in the song *cardigan* saying,

"I knew everything when I was young".

(Swift 2:58 - 3:02)

This is juxtaposed with James claiming ignorance owing to his age in *betty*,

"I'm only 17, I don't know anything".

(Swift 1:08 - 1:12)

This also relates to the line in *cardigan* - "*When you are young, they assume you know nothing*". James is playing to that assumption and using it as an excuse to shun responsibility for ruining three people's lives. Even though Betty and James are of the same age, we see their emotional maturity differs greatly.

Parallels are also used to relate the songs *august* and *betty*. In *betty*, the lyrics are,

"In the garden, would you trust me

If I told you it was just a summer thing"

(Swift 1:03 - 1:10)

James tries to put across his summer affair with Augustine as hardly significant.

Contrastingly, in *august*, the speaker sings,

"So much for summer love

And saying 'us' "

(Swift 1:58 - 2:02)

Interestingly, the unnamed speaker to whom we now refer to as Augustine and James see their relationship very differently. Augustine calls it "summer love" even though in the next line she admits that she knew that it would not last. James, on the other hand, casually refers to their affair as "just a summer thing". He never cared for Augustine and what they had means nothing to him. He clearly had feelings for Betty but that did not stop him from having an affair with Augustine. He tries to diminish their relationship in an attempt to convince Betty to ignore it and forgive him.

The songs *august*, *cardigan* and *betty* offer varied viewpoints and contrasting ideas. All three songs have a similar structure in terms of verse-chorus patterns. However, a comparison of *august* and *cardigan* revealed that in *cardigan*, every verse and chorus and even the outro had different lyrics. Only the refrain and a couple of phrases were repeated. In *august*, that is not the case at all. Apart from the verses, everything else is repeated. The chorus remains the same throughout the song.

The outro has repeating lines, with the last 4 lines being identical. This difference highlights the contrast between the narratives of *cardigan* and *august*. Betty, the speaker of *cardigan*, had a long-standing relationship with James and therefore her song is full of different scenarios and varied memories. In contrast, the speaker of *august* and James were together for just one summer. She has just a

handful of memories of her time with James. But this does not mean her relationship was not meaningful. The memories are burnt in the back of her mind and this is clear from the song because she quotes the exact words they said to each other and gives vivid descriptions of the events that took place.

2. 2. “winless fights”: fables of loss

2. 2. 1. *this is me trying*

"What I get from that song, when you're doing your damn best , and it's not good enough. And it rarely is. It's a very isolating feeling, which, I think, is funny because it actually is the thing that binds us. Because we're all doing our best and feeling like it's even close to good enough."

- Jack Antonoff

Track 9 on *folklore* is called *this is me trying*, a song which deals with topics such as addiction, mental illness and suicidal ideation. Written in first person, the song's narrator describes themselves as an undesired individual dealing with existentialism and alcoholism.

[Verse 1]

1. *I've been having a hard time adjusting*
2. *I had the shiniest wheels, now they're rusting*
3. *I didn't know if you'd care if I came back*
4. *I have a lot of regrets about that*
5. *Pulled the car off the road to the lookout*
6. *Could've followed my fears all the way down*
7. *And maybe I don't quite know what to say*

8. *But I'm here in your doorway*

(Swift 0:28 – 0:54)

Verse 1 applies anaphora with most of the lines beginning with "I". Line 2 uses metonymy, metaphor and antithesis. "Shiniest wheels" refers to a brand new car, which is said to be "rusting". This antithetical situation metaphorically refers to the fact that the speaker was very bright when he was younger but now, he is doing so well. We see the application of alliteration in lines 3 and 6. The song is addressed to someone the speaker loves but has wronged so he is unsure if he will be forgiven. He drives the car to a cliff and wonders if he should drive straight ahead and go down as directed by his personified "fears". But he backs up and goes to see his loved one.

[Chorus 1]

I just wanted you to know

That this is me trying

I just wanted you to know

That this is me trying

(Swift 0:55 – 1:08)

The chorus is simple with repetition of the first two lines and alliteration in the title drop. The speaker just wants the addressee to know that him not driving off the cliff is him trying, that he is giving his best.

[Verse 2]

1. *They told me all of my cages were mental*

2. *So I got wasted like all my potential*

3. *And my words shoot to kill when I'm mad*

4. *I have a lot of regrets about that*

5. *I was so ahead of the curve, the curve became a sphere*
6. *Fell behind on my classmates, and I ended up here*
7. *Pouring out my heart to a stranger*
8. *But I didn't pour the whiskey*

(Swift 1:24 – 1:51)

In verse 2, the narrator says in line 1 that everyone told him that it's just his thoughts which are holding him back. Here, the connotation is that it's easy to overcome depression and people don't take mental illness seriously. In line 2, we see both polysemy and simile where the word "wasted" meaning "being drunk" is compared to "wasted" meaning "unused or misused" potential of the speaker. Both personification and hyperbole is used in line 3, where personified words can kill which implies that when the speaker is angry, he says things which will be the most hurtful. Line 5 has a repetition of the word "curve". In lines 7 and 8, the idiom "pouring out my heart" is used to highlight that the speaker speaks about his problems instead of drinking alcohol as a means of escape.

[Bridge]

1. *And it's hard to be at a party when I feel like an open wound*
2. *It's hard to be anywhere these days when all I want is you*
3. *You're a flashback in a film reel on the one screen in my town*

(Swift 2:20 – 2:32)

In the bridge, the speaker conveys that being at a party, surrounded by alcohol is extremely difficult because he is trying to quit alcohol. A simile is used in line 1 to express his troubles. Alliteration is applied in lines 2 and 3. Metaphor is also utilised in line 3 where the speaker compares his loved one to a flashback on a

film reel meaning that he keeps thinking about her and that they are the only good thing in the speaker's life.

[Chorus 3]

1. *"And I just wanted you to know*
2. *That this is me trying*
3. *(And maybe I don't quite know what to say)*
4. *I just wanted you to know*
5. *That this is me trying*
6. *At least I'm trying"*

(Swift 2:33 – 2:51)

Chorus 3 is almost the same except for the addition of background vocals in line 3. The speaker says he doesn't know what to say, which makes it clear that the song is just his thoughts and he never actually tells his loved one how hard he is trying. He is unable to express his thoughts and he keeps them to himself.

this is me trying has a simple structure. It begins with a verse, followed by the chorus, verse, chorus, bridge and chorus. This song aptly captures the feelings of a person quietly suffering in life and trying his best to be better.

2. 2. 2. *my tears ricochet*

"It's a song about how somebody could be your best friend and your companion and the most trusted person in your life and then they could go and become your worst enemy who knows how to hurt you because they were once your most trusted person."

- Taylor Swift

my tears ricochet is the fifth song on the album. The narrator is the ghost of a murdered woman who shows up at her own funeral and finds that her killer, whom she loved dearly, is in attendance. The song features funereal symbolism to depict themes of loss and betrayal.

[Verse 1]

1. *We gather here, we line up*
2. *Weepin' in a sunlit room, and*
3. *If I'm on fire, you'll be made of ashes too*
4. *Even on my worst day, did I deserve, babe*
5. *All the hell you gave me?*
6. *'Cause I loved you, I swear I loved you*
7. *'Til my dying day*

(Swift 0:24 – 0:52)

In verse 1, imagery is used to give the idea of the setting of the narrative which is a funeral service. There is use of anaphora in line 1. In lines 4 and 5, the narrator asks her murderer if she deserves what he did to her. The quality of the question becomes rhetorical because she then proceeds to assert in lines 6 and 7 that she loved him till the day she was killed. There is repetition of the phrase "I loved you" in line 6 for emphasis.

[Chorus 1]

1. *I didn't have it in myself to go with grace*
2. *And you're the hero flying around, saving face*
3. *And if I'm dead to you, why are you at the wake?*
4. *Cursing my name, wishing I stayed*
5. *Look at how my tears ricochet*

(Swift 0:54 – 1:22)

The chorus employs alliteration in lines 1 and 2 with the sounds 'g' and 'f' respectively. Line 2 also relies on a metaphor where the speaker compares her beloved to a superhero who is flying around who isn't saving anyone but "saving face" that is avoiding humiliation. There is utilisation of juxtaposition in line 4 where the speaker's murderer is "cursing" her and at the same time "wishing" that she had not been dead. This points to the idea that her murder was not premeditated but took place in the heat of the moment.

Interestingly, line 2 is changed in Chorus 2 to " 'Cause when I'd fight, you used to tell me I was brave". Here, the speaker recounts how her lover was encouraging of her strong spirit. For the sake of the admiration, she once received from him, she refuses to go away easily.

[Verse 2]

1. *We gather stones, never knowing what they'll mean*
2. *Some to throw, some to make a diamond ring*
3. *You know I didn't want to have to haunt you*
4. *But what a ghostly scene*
5. *You wear the same jewels that I gave you*
6. *As you bury me*

(Swift 1:29 – 1:58)

Verse 2 relies heavily on metaphorical language and irony. In line 2, we see the use of anaphora and polysemy in case of the word "throw" which can be used in the context of "throw at others" or "throw out". Lines 3 and 4 present the irony of the speaker saying she never wanted to haunt her lover and at the same time

asserting that the scene is ghostly because of his deeds. In case of lines 5 and 6 , the irony is that the speaker's killer is wearing the jewels that she gave him.

[Bridge]

1. *And I can go anywhere I want*
2. *Anywhere I want, just not home*
3. *And you can aim for my heart, go for blood*
4. *But you would still miss me in your bones*
5. *And I still talk to you (when I'm screaming at the sky)*
6. *And when you can't sleep at night (you hear my stolen lullabies)*

(Swift 2:00 – 2:28)

Line 2 presents the paradox of having the ability of going anywhere as a ghost but the speaker cannot go back home because her home was with her beloved and he destroyed it when he killed her. There is also use of alliteration in lines 3 and 4 where the sound 'b' is repeated and in lines 5 and 6 where 's' sound is repeated. Here, the ghostly woman asserts that even though he shed her blood, her lover will always miss her and not be able to even fall asleep because he will hear her songs.

[Chorus 3]

1. *I didn't have it in myself to go with grace*
2. *So, the battleships will sink beneath the waves*
3. *You had to kill me but it killed you just the same*
4. *Cursing my name, wishing I'd stayed*
5. *You turned into your worst fears*
6. *And you're tossing out blame, drunk on this pain*
7. *Crossing out the good years*

8. *And you're cursing my name, wishing I stayed*

9. *Look at how my tears ricochet*

(Swift 3:05 – 3:50)

Chorus 3 has quite a few changes as compared to chorus 1. It is longer and uses more alliteration. Just like the rest of the song, there is a lot of metaphorical imagery. For example, in line 3, the speaker compares her death to the sinking of battleships, establishing it as the end of the tumultuous relationship with her beloved. She also describes what her lover is going through after her death and he can only try to erase her memories to lessen the pain of her loss.

2. 3. “*hunting witches*”: women of folklore

2. 3. 1. *the last great american dynasty*

the last great american dynasty is track 3 on *folklore*. Rebekah Harkness, an American socialite who formerly had lived in Swift's Rhode Island estate called Holiday House, inspired Swift to compose the song. Rebekah West Harkness, also known as Betty, was a composer, sculptor, and philanthropist who founded the Harkness Ballet.

The lyrics refer to Harkness' inherited fortune from her husband and her lavish lifestyle, which became the talk of the town. The last refrain draws parallels between Harkness' and Swift's lives, meaning that others scrutinised them both for their personal lifestyles. This is one of the few songs on the album where the narrator is the songwriter herself. The song has a faux third person narrative until the end of the bridge, where the narration is revealed to be homodiegetic.

[Verse 1]

1. *Rebekah rode up on the afternoon train, it was sunny*

2. *Her saltbox house on the coast took her mind off St. Louis*
3. *Bill was the heir to the Standard Oil name, and money*
4. *And the town said "How did a middle class divorcée do it?"*
5. *The wedding was charming, if a little gauche*
6. *There's only so far new money goes*
7. *They picked out a home and called it "Holiday House"*
8. *Their parties were tasteful, if a little loud*
9. *The doctor had told him to settle down*
10. *It must have been her fault his heart gave out*

(Swift 0:12 – 1:02)

In verse 1, the songwriter characterises Rebekah Harkness and her husband Bill, giving information about their wedding and married life. There is use of alliteration throughout the verse. There is a reference to Rebekah's hometown in St Louis in line 2. In line 7, the fact that the couple called their home "Holiday House" is ironic. The town's people are also characterised as accusers and gossips.

[Chorus 1]

1. *And they said "There goes the last great American dynasty"*
2. *Who knows, if she never showed up what could've been*
3. *There goes the maddest woman this town has ever seen*
4. *She had a marvelous time ruining everything*

(Swift 1:03 -1:27)

Chorus 1 and chorus 2 are very similar. Only one word is changed in line 3, where "maddest" is changed to "most shameless". There is a title drop in the chorus. Alliteration with the sound 'm' can be seen in lines 3 and 4. The chorus seems to be what the people of the town said about Rebekah.

[Verse 2]

1. *Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set forever*
2. *Flew in all the Bitch Pack friends from the city*
3. *Filled the pool with champagne and swam with the big names*
4. *And blew through the money on the boys and the ballet*
5. *And losing on card game bets with Dali*

(Swift 1:30 – 1:54)

Verse 2 features alliteration throughout with the first three lines repeating the sound 'f' and the remaining lines repeating the 'b' consonant sound. In the first line, there is a reference to Rhode Island, a state of the USA, which gives the setting of the narrative. Verse 2 uses imagery to give the details of Rebekah's activities after the death of her husband. She stopped interacting with her neighbours and instead invited her friends from other places.

[Bridge]

1. *They say she was seen on occasion*
2. *Pacing the rocks staring out at the midnight sea*
3. *And in a feud with her neighbor*
4. *She stole his dog and died it key lime green*
5. *Fifty years is a long time*
6. *Holiday House sat quietly on that beach*
7. *Free of women with madness*
8. *Their men and bad habits, and then it was bought by me*

(Swift 2:23 – 2:49)

The bridge relies on imagery to create vivid scenes of Rebekah's life. There is also use of alliteration throughout the bridge. The song has a lot of

reported speech to make it sound like a third person narrative, but at the end of the bridge, it is revealed that in fact, the narration is homodiegetic and the narrator is the new resident of Holiday House, fifty years after Rebekah's death.

[Chorus 3]

Who knows, if I never showed up what could've been

There goes the loudest woman this town has ever seen

I had a marvelous time ruining everything

(Swift 2:54 – 3:10)

There is use of structural parallels in this song where Chorus 1 and 2 deals with Rebekah Harkness, who is the main character of the narrative, and Chorus 3 talks about the narrator, drawing a comparison between the two of them. Chorus 3 is in the first person voice, along with the outro.

[Outro]

I had a marvelous time

Ruining everything

A marvelous time

Ruining everything

A marvelous time

I had a marvelous time

(Swift 3:12 – 3:37)

The outro repeats the last line of Chorus 3 where the narrator is contemptuously claiming to enjoy ruining everything. The structure of the song is quite simple with 2 sets of verse and chorus, followed by the bridge, chorus and outro.

2.3.2. *mad woman*

“This song is about female rage. [...] When we respond to bad male behaviour, that response is treated as the offence itself. I have absolutely no right to respond or I'm crazy. I have no right to respond or I'm angry. ”

- Taylor Swift

[Verse 1]

1. *What did you think I'd say to that?*
2. *Does a scorpion sting when fighting back?*
3. *They strike to kill and you know I will*
4. *You know I will*
5. *What do you sing on your drive home?*
6. *Do you see my face in the neighbor's lawn?*
7. *Does she smile?*
8. *Or does she mouth, "Fuck you forever"?*

(Swift 0:15 -0:48)

Verse 1 applies repetition in line 4 and alliteration throughout. "You know I will" is repeated, emphasising determination and certainty. Line 1 is a rhetorical question and it serves to provoke thought and emphasise a point. It also uses symbolism in line 2 where the scorpion represents aggression or retaliation. There is use of imagery of the addressee driving home and sees the woman he has wronged in other women.

[Chorus 1]

1. Every time you call me crazy, I get more crazy

2. What about that?
3. And when you say I seem angry, I get more angry
4. And there's nothin' like a mad woman
5. What a shame she went mad
6. No one likes a mad woman
7. You made her like that
8. And you'll poke that bear 'til her claws come out
9. And you find something to wrap your noose around
10. And there's nothin' like a mad woman

(Swift 0:49 – 1:29)

Chorus 1 uses a lot of repetition. The repetition of phrases like "Every time," "And there's nothin' like," and "mad woman" emphasises the central theme and emotions expressed in the narrative. The word "mad" is polysemic and can mean "crazy" or "angry". Here, the songwriter is making the point of how women's anger is equated to madness and not taken seriously. In line 8, the metaphor of a bear is used. Bears usually attack only when provoked. Here, the speaker is implying that she was made that way by someone else and portrays herself as a victim of societal expectations and judgments.

[Verse 2]

1. Now I breathe flames each time I talk
2. My cannons all firing at your yacht
3. They say, "Move on", but you know, I won't
4. And women like hunting witches, too
5. Doing your dirtiest work for you
6. It's obvious that wanting me dead

7. Has really brought you two together

(Swift 1:42 – 2:09)

In line 1, we see the image of a dragon where the speaker is metaphorically describing the intensity of anger she feels. Line 2 symbolises the speaker's actions as cannons firing at the "yacht" or the good things in the addressee's life. The speaker highlights the irony in the situation in lines 6 and 7 indicating that the antagonism towards the speaker has strengthened the relationship between two other individuals, one of whom is the addressee and the other is a woman.

[Bridge]

1. I'm takin' my time, takin' my time
2. 'Cause you took everything from me
3. Watching you climb, watching you climb
4. Over people like me
5. The master of spin has a couple side flings
6. Good wives always know
7. She should be mad, should be scathing like me
8. But no one likes a mad woman
9. What a shame she went mad
10. You made her like that

(Swift 2:50 – 3:31)

The repetition of phrases in lines 1 and 3 creates emphasis and reinforces the speaker's feelings. There is also the imagery of watching the addressee climb over people like the speaker, which paints a vivid picture of the feeling of being overlooked or oppressed. The bridge of the song adds to the characterisation of the people mentioned. The woman who is supporting the addressee is his wife. The

irony of the wife knowing about the addressee cheating on her but not being able to express anger is presented deftly.

The structure of the song is a little different. Starting with the verse and chorus, which is followed by second verse and chorus, it ends with the bridge. The bridge changes the focal point of the song from the rage of the speaker to her speaking out about the buried rage of another woman. The speaker is bringing attention to the plight of the addressee's wife who has to bottle up her anger because she is busy playing the role of the ideal wife.

CHAPTER 3 - “shattered edges glisten”

“In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.”

- Albert Camus

The COVID pandemic hit the world like a tsunami wave and brought the world to a standstill. Governments world over imposed lockdowns on the people which created separation and isolation. People could not go to work anymore, meetings were online, life was virtual. What happens to an artist in such a dystopian setting? How does she or he respond to such a life-threatening breakdown around them? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by analyzing the songs written by Taylor Swift, an artist known for her very personal and introspective lyrics.

3. 1. “sleepless nights”: pandemic prayers

3. 1. 1. epiphany

"I had been doing a lot of research on my grandfather who fought in World War II at Guadalcanal which was an extremely bloody battle, and he never talked about it. [...] I tried to imagine what would happen in order to make you just never be able to speak about something. [...] I realized that there are people right now, taking a twenty-minute break in between shifts at a hospital who are having this kind of trauma happen to them, that they will probably never want to speak about. And so, I thought this is an opportunity to maybe tell that story."

- Taylor Swift

Track 13 on the album is called epiphany and is a song where Swift delves into history and draws a comparison with the pandemic. The songwriter's paternal grandfather fought in the Battle of Guadalcanal against Japan during World War II. The Battle of Guadalcanal was the first prolonged campaign in the Pacific Ocean and lasted from August 1942 - February 1943. The US had such high losses during the operation that it declined to publicly divulge overall casualties for years.

Swift's grandfather survived the conflict, but he never shared his experiences with his family. After extensive research, they discovered that her grandfather was involved in some of the most violent conflicts that occurred. Swift connects the agony of war to the suffering endured by the medical community during the COVID outbreak. She attempts to put into words the anguish that these people have lived through but will probably never be able to speak about.

[Verse 1]

1. *"Keep your helmet, keep your life, son*
2. *Just a flesh wound, here's your rifle*
3. *Crawling up the beaches now*
4. *"Sir, I think he's bleeding out"*
5. *And some things you just can't speak about"*

(Swift 0:32 - 1:10)

Verse 1 is an analepsis that takes us back to World War II. The lyrics imply an ongoing conflict. Anaphora is used in line 1. Although lines 1 and 2 do not have inverted commas, they clearly belong to a conversation in which an older man—possibly a commander—asks a wounded soldier to continue fighting. In line 4,

another soldier reports that the soldier the commander ordered to fight is bleeding out on the beach and will not survive.

[Chorus 1]

1. *"With you, I serve*
2. *With you, I fall down, down*
3. *Watch you breathe in*
4. *Watch you breathing out, out"*

(Swift 1:13 - 1:30)

The chorus relies heavily on anaphora to create a rhythm and a memorable effect. It tries to emphasize that the survivors don't come back unscathed but are forever scarred by the war. When their fellow soldiers lose their lives, they too lose a part of themselves.

[Verse 2]

1. *"Something med school did not cover*
2. *Someone's daughter, someone's mother*
3. *Hold your hand through plastic now*
4. *"Doc, I think she's crashing out"*
5. *And some things you just can't speak about"*

(Swift 1:34 - 2:11)

Verse 2 brings the listener to the narrative time which was the duration of the COVID pandemic. Similar to verse 1 and the chorus, this verse also displays anaphora. Here, the setting is that of a hospital. The characterization is that of a doctor who is addressed by someone else in line 4. The doctor is informed that the patient is going through an adverse change and probably won't survive.

[Bridge]

1. "Only 20 minutes to sleep
2. But you dream of some epiphany
3. Just one single glimpse of relief
4. To make some sense of what you've seen"

(Swift 2:36 - 2:55)

The bridge has a lot of alliteration with the 's' sound repeating in all the lines. The bridge applies to the two distinct scenarios described in the two verses and is a unifying point in the song. The people living through such terrible times do not get time to even process the circumstances they are living in. They barely have twenty minutes to sleep, yet even that sleep is filled with grief and anguish. They spend their time striving to figure out what's going on around them.

epiphany is one of the most emotionally charged songs on the album and is the epitome of what it represents in terms of the themes covered. The structure of the song is verse, chorus, verse, followed by the bridge and chorus. Interestingly, in this song the bridge is repeated as the outro of the song as well. This may be due to the fact that the bridge is the most important part of the song because it presents the central idea of the song and also features the title drop.

Swift delves into her own ancestry and draws a comparison between World War II and the COVID pandemic using structural parallels. In songwriting, the verse-chorus pattern may be used to compare and contrast various concepts in recurring verses and choruses. This narrative technique is referred to as structural parallels. In this song, verse 1 gives us the perspective of an army commander, who watches the men die under his commands. In verse 2, this situation is compared to that of a healthcare worker during the pandemic. In spite of doing their best, many healthcare workers had to watch people die, some of whom they couldn't even tend

to, owing to the shortage of personnel. This song sheds light on the perils and helplessness the frontline workers were going through, comparing them to soldiers in a war zone.

3. 1. 2. *mirrorball*

"What makes it (mirrorball) a great piece of pandemic-time work is that it's not about the pandemic. It's about the experience of what happens to an artist when you're living through a pandemic. You start to dream."

- Jack Antonoff

mirrorball is the sixth song on the album. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to cancel a worldwide concert tour, Swift wrote this song addressing her fans expressing her feelings. She uses an extended metaphor of a mirrorball by comparing herself to it. An extended metaphor is a metaphor that unfolds across multiple lines or even paragraphs of a text, making use of multiple interrelated metaphors within an overarching one. Interestingly, the speaker in this song is the songwriter herself.

[Verse 1]

1. *I want you to know*
2. *I'm a mirrorball*
3. *I'll show you every version of yourself tonight*
4. *I'll get you out on the floor*
5. *Shimmering beautiful*
6. *And when I break it's in a million pieces*

(Swift 0:09 - 0:44)

In verse 1, the songwriter compares herself to a mirrorball in line 2. A mirrorball is made up of tiny pieces of mirror glass closely glued around a sphere so that light is reflected in changing patterns. They're usually used in clubs and ballrooms. The speaker says that she could show the listeners different versions of themselves just like a mirrorball with varying reflections. In line 6, a hyperbole is utilized when the speaker talks about breaking. She expresses how she's constantly in the public eye - present but isolated, just like a mirrorball. Even when she is going through a bad time it's for everyone to behold.

[Chorus 1]

1. *Hush, when no one is around, my dear*
2. *You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes*
3. *Spinning in my highest heels, love*
4. *Shining just for you*
5. *Hush, I know they said the end is near*
6. *But I'm still on my tallest tiptoes*
7. *Spinning in my highest heels, love*
8. *Shining just for you*

(Swift 0:45 - 1:18)

The chorus applies repetition and alliteration to create a rhythmic effect. Lines 3 and 4 are almost the same as lines 7 and 8 and we see the consonant sounds repeating 't', 's' and 'h' repeated in the chorus. In line 5, we see foreshadowing when the speaker says the end is near. This may refer to the pandemic. It can also be a reference to the fact that she's past the age of thirty, which is when female pop stars usually experience a decline in their success, something she spoke about in her documentary film *Miss Americana*.

[Verse 2]

1. *I want you to know*
2. *I'm a mirrorball*
3. *I can change everything about me to fit in*
4. *You are not like the regulars*
5. *The masquerade revelers*
6. *Drunk as they watch my shattered edges glisten*

(Swift 1:19 - 1:52)

When talking about this song, Swift explained how this song is also about people who feel the need to fit in and therefore constantly change their personalities in order to appeal to others. In reviews of the album, critics interpreted the track as a metaphor for female musicians' struggles to reinvent themselves to stay relevant. We see both of these sentiments reflected in line 3. In lines 4 and 5, the 'r' sound is repeated in alliteration. The "you" in this song stands for her fans who she says are not like the "regulars" who hide their identity by just being a part of a crowd. Structural parallels are also employed in this song wherein verse 1 had the image of a mirrorball breaking in a million pieces and verse 2 speaks about "regulars" who find her "shattered edges" or suffering as some kind of entertainment which is expressed in line 6.

[Bridge]

1. *And they called off the circus*
2. *Burned the disco down*
3. *When they sent home the horses*
4. *And the rodeo clowns*
5. *I'm still on that tightrope*

6. *I'm still trying everything to get you laughing at me*
7. *I'm still a believer but I don't know why*
8. *I've never been a natural*
9. *All I do is try, try, try*
10. *I'm still on that trapeze*
11. *I'm still trying everything*
12. *To keep you looking at me*

(Swift 2:28 - 3:03)

The bridge of this song is one of the most important writings on this album because it makes a direct reference to the pandemic times. The first four lines of the song describe what happened when lockdown began and everyone was made to stop their everyday activities. Performances of every kind were canceled including Swift's own concert tour. The bridge captures the need and still vying for her fans' attention and connection. To create a sense of desperation the bridge heavily relies on alliteration, repetition and anaphora. For alliteration, the sounds 'c', 'd', 'h' and 't' are repeated in the respective order. The sound 't' especially is found in words such as "tightrope", "trying" and "trapeze" which give the idea of performing with difficulty to try and hold people's attention. "I'm still" is repeated anaphorically in lines 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11 which again conveys the speaker's need to create art when nobody expects her to.

[Outro]

Because I'm a mirrorball

I'm a mirrorball

I'll show you every version of yourself tonight

(Swift 3:05 - 3:21)

The outro somewhat repeats the first three lines of the song giving it a circular ending. The structure of the song is two sets of verse and chorus, followed by the bridge and ending with the outro. In most songs, the chorus is repeated again after the bridge. In this song, however, we see the outro follows the bridge because unlike other songs, the bridge provides the climax of the song.

3. 2. “*marvelous time*”: nostalgic escapades

3. 2. 1. *seven*

" We can't be throwing tantrums all the time and we learn that that's not the right thing to do, but there's something lost there too."

- Taylor Swift

The seventh track on the album is called *seven* and is a throwback to the time when the songwriter was a child in the state of Pennsylvania. She recalls a childhood friendship and the love she still has for her friend. The seven-year-old speaker was unable to understand that her friend was facing domestic abuse, something she realizes years later. Critics called it a standout song on this album because it deals with a sensitive topic like child abuse.

[Verse 1]

1. *"Please picture me in the trees*
2. *I hit my peak at seven*
3. *Feet in the swing, over the creek*
4. *I was too scared to jump in*
5. *But I, I was high in the sky*
6. *With Pennsylvania under me*

7. *Are there still beautiful things?"*

(Swift 0:01 - 0:40)

In verse 1, we see the use of imagery to transport the listener back in time. The narrator is older and recalling her time as a seven-year-old. Alliteration is used with the 'p' sound repeating in line 1 and 2 and the 's' sound repeating in lines 2, 3 and 4. In line 2, there is enjambment which causes polysemy. Here, the word "seven" is followed by the word "feet" which might refer to the measurement telling us that the narrator went the highest distance of seven feet when she was swinging. It can also mean the age of seven which marked the peak of the narrator's life. In lines 4 and 5 there is also the juxtaposition of being scared of jumping in the creek and being high in the sky while swinging over the same creek. This points to the irrationality of childhood fears. Line 6 makes a direct reference to Pennsylvania, a state in the US, giving the location or setting of the song. The narrator asks a question in the last line which is rhetorical because she will never be able to experience the beauty she experienced as a child so it does not exist anymore for her.

[Chorus 1]

1. *"Sweet tea in the summer*
2. *Cross your heart, won't tell no other*
3. *And though I can't recall your face*
4. *I still got love for you*
5. *Your braids like a pattern*
6. *Love you to the moon and to Saturn*
7. *Passed down like folk songs*
8. *The love lasts so long"*

(Swift 0:43 - 1:05)

In the chorus, the narrator is sometimes speaking as a child and sometimes as an adult recalling her childhood. The first and last lines have alliteration and the word "love" is repeated in the chorus. Line 6 talks about the moon and Saturn which are symbolic of distance and vastness, both of which love can transcend. In line 7, the love the narrator and her friend share, is compared to folk songs using a simile because their love is timeless. Just like folk songs which are passed down through generations, the speaker feels that the pure childhood love they experienced will be experienced by children of the next generations for eternity.

[Bridge]

1. *"And I've been meaning to tell you*
2. *I think your house is haunted*
3. *Your dad is always mad and that must be why*
4. *And I think you should come live with*
5. *Me and we can be pirates*
6. *Then you won't have to cry*
7. *Or hide in the closet*
8. *And just like a folk song*
9. *Our love will be passed on"*

(Swift 1:22 - 1:51)

The bridge covertly depicts that the speaker's friend was being abused. The bridge is entirely narrated by a seven-year-old speaker who can tell that something is not okay in her friend's house but cannot tell what. So, she guesses that her house is haunted in line 1 which features alliteration. Line 7 utilizes a polysemy when the

speaker says "hide in the closet". This might refer to a literal closet or can also point to the friend's homosexuality or queerness.

[Verse 2]

"Please picture me in the weeds

Before I learned civility

I used to scream ferociously

Any time I wanted"

(Swift 1:52 - 2:13)

Verse 2 uses alliteration and symbolism in the first line. "Weeds" stand for being unwanted and untamed. Here, the speaker's behavior of screaming at will is unwanted by the adults around her.

[Chorus 2]

1. *"Sweet tea in the summer*
2. *Cross my heart, won't tell no other*
3. *And though I can't recall your face*
4. *I still got love for you*
5. *Pack your dolls and a sweater*
6. *We'll move to India forever*
7. *Passed down like folk songs*
8. *Our love lasts so long"*

(Swift 2:23 - 2:46)

Chorus 2 is similar to the other chorus except for change in lines 5 and 6. There is use of symbolism in line 5 where "dolls" symbolize innocence and "sweater" stands for safety and warmth. Line 6 refers to India, where the speaker

tells her friend that they run away there, a place far away from her violent household.

The structure of the song is fascinating because it's very distinct. The first verse is followed by the chorus and then the bridge, followed by the second verse and chorus. The bridge is placed centrally, may be because it is the only part of the song which is entirely from the perspective of the seven-year-old speaker.

3. 2. 2. *the lakes*

"I think 'the lakes' sort of sounds like a testament of what I've wanted to escape from and where I saw myself escaping. And that's really the overarching thing I felt when I was writing 'folklore' - I may not be able to go to the lakes right now or to go anywhere, but I'm going there in my head and this escape plan is working."

- Taylor Swift

the lakes is the final song on the deluxe edition of *folklore* which was released a little later after the standard version of the album. Swift admitted that a couple of years before the pandemic she had gone to the Lake District in England. It is the home of the Cumbrian mountains and is famous for its lakes and association with literary giants such as John Ruskin, Beatrix Potter and the Lake Poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This song encapsulates the songwriter's need to escape from her lived reality and go with her beloved, far away from the public eye, looking back and realizing that other artists who lived two centuries ago went ahead and successfully did that.

[Verse 1]

1. Is it romantic how all my elegies eulogize me?

2. *I'm not cut out for all these cynical clones*
3. *These hunters with cell phones*

(Swift 0:22 - 0:43)

Line 1 of the first verse tries to convey how the speaker feels that all the elegies she writes end up eulogizing her. Elegies are poems or songs lamenting someone's death. Here, the speaker is pointing out to her metaphorical death or the loss of her expected identity. This verse features alliteration in lines 2 and 3 where the 'c' sound is repeated. We see romanticism and cynicism juxtaposed to emphasize why the speaker feels she cannot fit in the society she currently lives in. Line 3 uses a metaphor to compare the paparazzi to hunters who follow her around taking pictures, making her feel uncomfortable.

[Chorus 1]

1. *Take me to the lakes where all the poets went to die*
2. *I don't belong, and my beloved, neither do you*
3. *Those Windermere peaks look like a perfect place to cry*
4. *I'm setting off, but not without my muse*

(Swift 0:44 - 1:03)

The chorus contains the title drop in line 1 which is a direct reference to the Lake District and a mention of "Windermere" in line 3 which is the largest natural lake in England. The district was the home of poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey and William Wordsworth who settled here into a 'poetic retirement'. Line 2 and 3 present alliterations with the sound 'b' and 'p' repeating, respectively. The phrase "setting off" which is found in line 4 means beginning a journey. Here, the phrase can mean two things - physically setting off and moving to the location or it can mean beginning to write. Both of these activities, as the

speaker asserts, cannot be done without her muse. A muse is a person who is a source of inspiration, a word derived from the nine Greek goddesses of the various branches of art who were known as the Muses.

[Verse 2]

1. *What should be over burrowed under my skin*
2. *In heart-stopping waves of hurt*
3. *I've come too far to watch some name-dropping sleaze*
4. *Tell me what are my words worth*

(Swift 1:04 - 1:25)

Verse 2 utilizes alliteration with the 'w' sound repeating in every line. Line 1 and 2 give sensory detail to express the emotions of the speaker. She believes that the events she should have gotten over are still impacting her significantly, and she gets heartache now and then, almost like in waves.

The songwriter also asserts that she has come too far to let any person question her abilities or tell her what her writing is worth. Line 4 features a polysemy with the phrase "words worth". Here, it may also reference William Wordsworth who was a resident of The Lakes and who also rose above the critique and ridicule thrown at him and kept writing.

[Bridge]

1. *I want auroras and sad prose*
2. *I want to watch wisteria grow right over my bare feet*
3. *'Cause I haven't moved in years*
4. *And I want you right here*
5. *A red rose grew up out of ice frozen ground*
6. *With no one around to tweet it*

7. *While I bathe in cliffside pools*
8. *With my calamitous love and insurmountable grief*

(Swift 1:47 - 2:31)

The bridge depends heavily on imagery to create a beautiful mental picture of being in the arms of nature. Just like verse 2, it also uses a lot of alliteration in almost every line. Lines 1, 2 and 4 show the presence of anaphora with the words "I want" appearing in the beginning of these lines. Lines 2 and 3 also speak about how the speaker feels like she wants to be wrapped up in nature with wisteria growing over her feet, which is a very hyperbolic use of imagery. She feels like mentally she is stuck in a place of grief and she hasn't moved from there.

The speaker paints a picture of a red rose growing up on icy white ground in line 5 and 6. She is using these symbols to showcase how her life was dull and freezing but the love she found bloomed in the midst of all that loneliness. She expresses that it only happened because there was no one around to criticize and pull apart her love life, or as she says, "tweet it". These words can be polysemic, with one meaning being "to post on Twitter" which is a social media platform where Swift has often found her love life being discussed and ridiculed.

The other meaning is "making a chirping noise" which may mean that even birds were not around. Here, she is stressing the importance of privacy for the success of romantic relationships. In lines 7 and 8, we again see the songwriter expressing grief and contrasting it with bathing in cliffside pools full of cool water.

The structure of the song is simple. There are two sets of verse and chorus, followed by the bridge. The speaker is expressing her love towards her beloved while simultaneously expressing the bittersweet sadness she feels at her core. She wants to be far away from the watchful, critical eyes which constantly follow her

around. She finds solace with her muse within the pages of her writing, mentally breathing in the wisteria laden air of The Lakes.

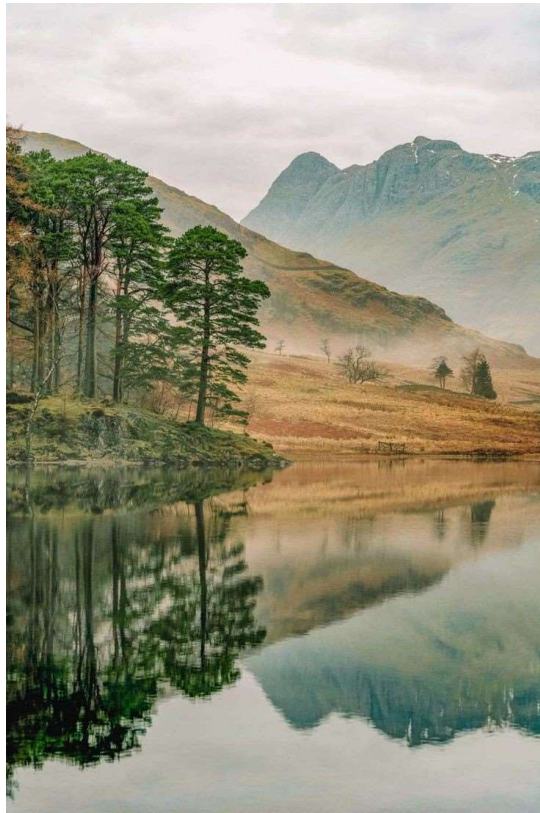


Fig. 3.1

CHAPTER 4 – “passed down like folksongs”

“We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep”

- William James

The album *folklore* was a surprise release with almost no promotion. Sonically, the album belonged to the folk or indie genre of music. Hardly anyone expected it have commercial success. But then, surprisingly it did. *folklore* was the best selling album of 2020 which indicated that people did listen to it. Some of these listeners were people who were unfamiliar with Taylor Swift’s previous work but most were Swift’s fans. Even though *folklore* was something new in comparison to Swift’s discography, it became a beloved piece of music and listeners chose it as a comforting escape. This chapter tries to understand the impact of *folklore* on its listeners during the pandemic.

4. 1. “and they said” : the survey

An online survey was conducted, to gain the perspectives of the listeners about the album and how it impacted their lives during the covid pandemic. A total of 487 people responded to the survey.

The initial questions tried to gain personal information such as the name and sex of the respondents. 81.9% of the respondents were females and 15% were males and the rest preferred not to answer. 56.1% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 18-24 and 19.9% respondents were below 18 years of age. 18.3% of respondents said their age was 25-30, 4.3% were in the age group of 30-40 and the

rest 1.4% said that they were above 40. This means that majority of the respondents were in the age group of 18-24. One of the preliminary questions was how often the respondents listened to the album during the COVID pandemic. People who answered “never” did not answer the main survey. After elimination, the main survey, which consisted of 10 questions, was answered by 468 people.

When asked if the themes explored in *folklore* resonated with them, 44% the respondents agreed very positively and almost the same percentage of respondents agreed somewhat positively. 7.3% of the respondents went with “not really”, 1.1% disagreed completely and the rest had not thought about it.

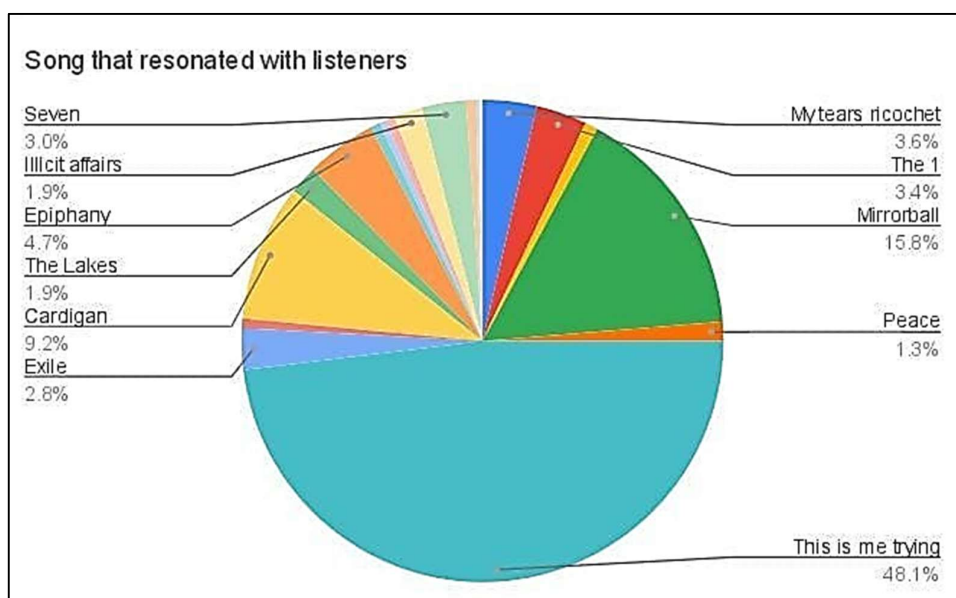


Fig. 4.1. Songs that resonated with the listeners

The second question asked for any specific song that resonated more deeply with the respondent during the pandemic. Fig. 4.1 shows the distribution of the responses. Interestingly, from this album consisting of seventeen songs, sixteen

songs were selected as a response. This points to the absolute cohesiveness and impact of this album.

Almost half of the people chose *this is me trying* as the song that resonated with them the most. *mirrorball* and *cardigan* were second and third most chosen songs. All three of these songs are very melancholic and we can conclude that many people saw their sadness reflected back to them.

The third question tried to understand if listening to the album helped relieve feelings of stress and anxiety during the pandemic. 55.8% of the respondents chose “yes, significantly” and 35.9% selected “yes, somewhat”. 4.5% denied any relief in stress by listening to the album and 3.8% were unsure of any of the above responses. A clear majority self-reported that the album helped alleviate feelings of stress.

One of the respondents said that, “*folklore* is a comfort album. For when you feel sad, empty, and even though the music is kind of sad, it make you smile in a bitter sweet kind of a way”. Another respondent said that, “*folklore* made lockdown a lot easier to get through”.

While dealing with grief, *folklore* helped one of the respondents who testified saying, “This album helped me in one of the worst times in my life when I was rediscovering myself and also dealing with the grief of breaking up with one of my best friends.”

When asked which narrative technique they think is most prevalent in *folklore*, metaphorical elements was selected by maximum respondents. We graphical representation of the responses of this question can be seen in fig. 4. 2.

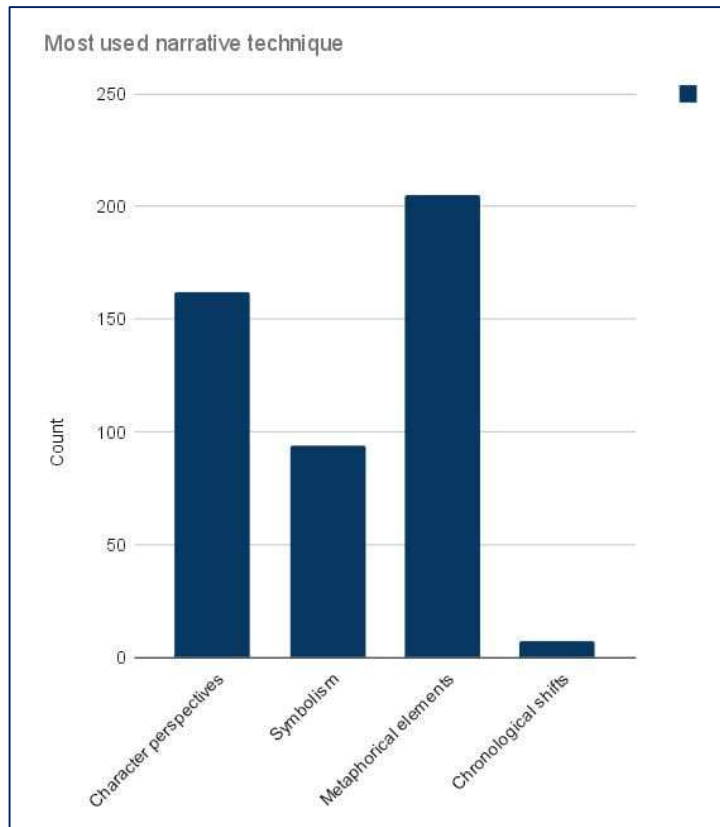


Fig. 4. 2. Most used narrative technique

Apart from metaphorical elements, character perspectives was the most used narrative technique and it was something unique. As one respondent puts it, “This album really brought out a number of perspectives and shows how much of an impact each character’s opinion has and shapes our perception towards a given situation.”

The respondents were presented with the statement “The musical aspects such as verse-chorus patterns, intro, outro, time and duration help in enhancing narratives in the folklore album”. 73.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement while 22.9% agreed somewhat. 0.9% of the respondents selected somewhat disagreed, 0.2% disagreed strongly and the remaining had no opinion on the statement. According to a respondent, “Sonically, I find this album extremely

soothing. I remember waking up to the surprise release, pressing play on “the 1”, and being struck by the beauty of the instrumentals and melody. [...]The songs seemed to express something quite universal, even those narrated events that I hadn’t actually experienced.”

Question 6 enquired if the respondents had engaged with any online communities and discussions related to the album on social media during the pandemic. The distribution of the responses can be seen in fig. 4. 3. Around half of the respondents engaged in online discussions or communities, either frequently or occasionally. One-fifth of the respondents said they rarely engaged, almost the same number of respondents said they never did while the remaining were unaware.

Engagement with online communities or discussions

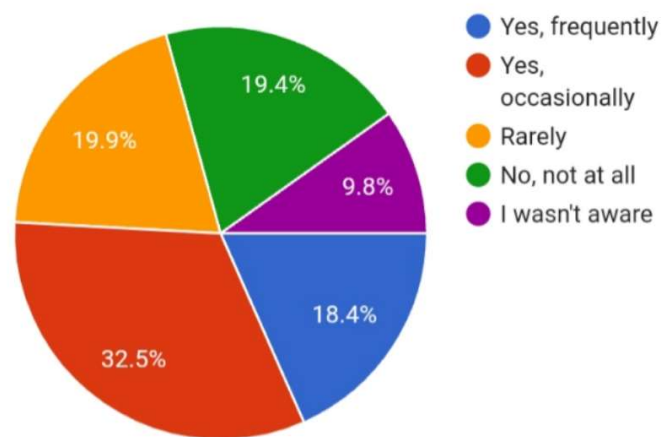


Fig. 4. 3. Engagement with online communities or discussions

When asked if they attended any virtual listening parties of the *folklore* album, majority of the respondents responded in the negative. 54.3% were unaware and 38.5% wanted to but did not actually attend. 5.6% said they attended once and a small minority of 1.7% did so more than once. A virtual listening party is an online

event where participants collectively listen to an album or playlist often with synchronised playback and engage in discussions in real-time through chat or voice interaction.

Question no.8 asked if the respondents recommended any songs from the album to their friends or family during the pandemic. 49.1% did so frequently while 37% did it occasionally. 9.4% of the respondents chose “rarely” as their answer and the rest said they never recommended.

When asked if listening to the album inspired the respondents to engage in any creative activity during the pandemic, about half of the respondents said no. The remaining said they engaged in writing, drawing, painting, journaling, poetry, songwriting, sewing, crochet, etc. One respondent said that she translated some of the songs into her mother tongue and wrote essays analysing the songs. Another respondent found the album cover very beautiful and said that it led her into nature photography.

The last question asked the respondents to look back and chose the option which best described the impact of the album on their emotional and mental well-being during the pandemic. Their responses can be seen in fig. 4. 4.

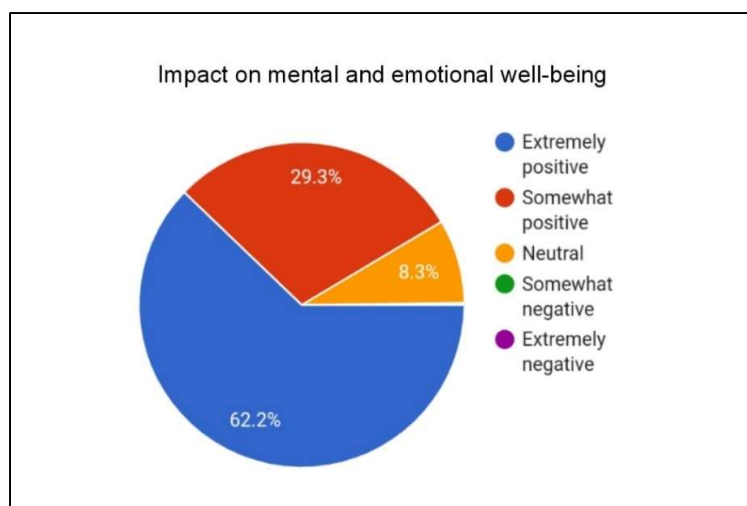


Fig. 4. 4. Impact on mental and emotional well-being

As can be seen from the graph, majority of the people reported positive impact on their mental and emotional well-being with no respondents reporting any negative impact. One of the respondents expressed that, “The lyrical power of this album cannot be understated. In a moment of global strife, Taylor found the words to unify everyone while simultaneously validating our individual pain and experiences.”

This album definitely helped people cope with the pressures the pandemic presented. A respondent shared – “During the lockdown period in China, I always listened to *folklore* when throwing out garbage, which was the only time I could go out. At that moment I felt free and warm.” Another respondent stated, “This album saved me from going insane. I so deeply connected with lyrics from almost every song (there’s always at least one line).” Yet another respondent added to that sentiment- “This album holds such a nostalgic feeling, bringing relief and calmness.”

One of the most heartfelt responses was as follows – “I wasn’t that much of a fan before “folklore”. [...]I listened to the whole album and felt like I found my soulmate in an album (crazy, I know). But I felt so understood, so not alone, I felt happy that the aesthetic that I’ve always dreamed about was so beautifully laid into an art form. I was sad and depressed before “folklore”, I had no major interests but slowly engaging with the Swiftie community made me so happy. Safe to say there has not been a day that I haven’t listened to a Taylor Swift song ever since.”

A respondent gave a very interesting tidbit. She replied, “Not only did “folklore” impact me and keep me sane during the pandemic, but it also influenced me heavily as a teacher (English 9-12). My students turn to “folklore” for literary device and analysis practice.”

One of the respondents expressed that, “Both my parents were essential healthcare workers during the pandemic, and it was anxiety day after day wondering if they would come home after long shifts. A doctor my mom talked with 2 weeks ago could have their death announced so suddenly on Facebook. It was a gruelling time, and Taylor writing “epiphany” made me feel seen. That what my parents are going through really was a battlefield, and I’m their child always waiting for them to come home. They are my heroes, and I’m happy Taylor thinks so too.”

Majority of the respondents expressed how *folklore* helped them deal with feelings of loneliness and depression. Songs like *this is me trying* and *mirrorball* helped them realise that their feelings of inadequacy are universal. This album created a sense of belonging among the listeners.

4. 2. “*thread of gold*”: *musings and speculations*

Since this chapter deals with gaining perspective of listeners, therefore this section deals with social media posts relating to the album.

A listener posted on Facebook, “It’s sad how “cardigan” and “betty” both have proper endings (means that James and Betty ended up together) but “august” just fades away, and it shows that Augustine’s story is still going on, and she’s still hoping, looking for love that she wants and deserves.” Here, the listener is talking about the outros of the songs. While both *cardigan* and *betty* have short and simple outros, *august* has a longer outro which just fades away. The listener understood it as a continuation of Augustine’s story which is left to the listener’s imagination.

A Tumblr post drew a contrast between *the lakes* and *invisible string* in the following way, “Okay but can we discuss how *the lakes* talks about wanting to escape from society and not have to worry about media and gossip but in invisible

string Taylor admits that her waitress recognised her in the lakes, therefore showing that even in her oasis away from the world she can never truly be free from society and criticism.”

A post on Twitter discussed the way age is viewed differently for men and women. The post reads, “One of my favourite things about the *betty/cardigan* song parallels is the way that Betty and James are the same age yet their gender drives them and their views of themselves. They are both viewed as being young and naïve, but for Betty, it is a put down, a way to diminish her impact and intelligence. But for James, being young and naïve is an excuse, a way for him to avoid responsibility for his mistakes.”

Many other listeners have shared their thoughts about how certain songs connect with the other songs and what implications can be derived from this. It shows how listeners actually delved deep into these stories and came up with new conclusions and helped create a rich tapestry out of all the connecting threads.

CHAPTER 5 – “dream of some epiphany”

“Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.”

- Robert Frost

This research study was undertaken in the spirit of literature. Taking Taylor Swift's first pandemic album *folklore* as the focal point, this research took a multifaceted approach and dealt with confluence of songwriting and literature, narrative techniques in songwriting, influence of a global pandemic on an artist and the impact of the art so created on its consumers. Through our exploration, we aimed to achieve several key objectives outlined at the onset of this investigation.

The first chapter outlined the avenues this research would go down and the precise maps of methodology that would be used for this journey. It also established that songwriting is a vital part of the literary tradition. Historically, there has been a tendency to separate music and literature as distinct art forms, with the latter often receiving more scholarly attention and recognition. However, as evidenced by the rich storytelling and poetic lyricism found in Taylor Swift's work and that of many other singer-songwriters, it is clear that songwriting deserves a place within the broader canon of literature. Songs, like poems or novels, have the power to evoke emotions, convey complex narratives, and offer profound insights into the human experience.

In the second and third chapters, by identifying and examining the narrative techniques used in *folklore*, valuable insights were gained about Swift's storytelling prowess. To create rhythm and make the songs memorable, she utilizes wands of alliteration, repetition and anaphora. Her work is highly nuanced and blank spaces are created using polysemy, so that the listeners can fill them with their imagination. From the use of vivid imagery and symbolism to the depth of metaphorical expression and relatable characterisation, Swift employs a variety of literary devices to weave intricate narratives that captivate listeners and invite them into her world.

The analysis also led to the unearthing of narrative techniques specific to songwriting such as lyrical parallels, structural parallels and corresponding timestamps. Swift creates songs by skilfully structuring the narrative by utilizing verse-chorus patterns to build cohesive narratives which are minutely crafted to propel the storylines further.

This study demonstrated Swift's remarkable ability to craft compelling narratives that resonate with audiences on a deep and personal level. Her songs serve as modern-day ballads, capturing the essence of human relationships, emotions, and societal issues with unparalleled authenticity and depth.

One of the aims of this research was also to evaluate the formation of narratives in *folklore*, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The album's release during a time of global uncertainty and isolation provided a unique lens through which to examine the impact of Swift's music on both individual listeners and society as a whole. As we navigated through the themes of introspection, nostalgia, and escapism present in *folklore*, it became evident that Swift's artistry has the power to offer solace and companionship during times of crisis.

Moreover, this study sought to understand the influence of the pandemic on Taylor Swift as an artist by analysing her album *folklore*. Through the album's introspective lyrics and stripped-down production, Swift reveals a newfound vulnerability and maturity that is reflective of the collective experiences of isolation and uncertainty faced by many during this time. In essence, *folklore* serves as a poignant reflection of the human condition in the midst of crisis, highlighting the resilience and creativity that can emerge from adversity.

Additionally, our exploration of *folklore's* impact on music listeners during a global lockdown underscored the transformative power of art in times of crisis. By understanding the insights gained through the survey, it could be concluded that the album had an immense impact on its listeners. Many listeners themselves took up some art or craft activities like painting, writing, embroidery, crochet and other such hobbies. Additionally, through its evocative storytelling and emotive melodies, the album provided a source of comfort, catharsis, and connection for listeners around the world, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity in the face of adversity.

Throughout this study, the evaluation of *folklore* helped in recognizing its merit as a work of art that transcends traditional boundaries of genre and medium. Swift's masterful storytelling, coupled with her introspective lyricism and evocative melodies, elevates *folklore* to the realm of literature, affirming the significance of songwriting in the literary tradition.

In conclusion, this research study has shed light on the intrinsic connection between songwriting and literature, showcasing the profound impact that music can have on the understanding of the human experience. Through the lens of *folklore*, there emerged a deeper appreciation for the artistry of singer-songwriters like

Taylor Swift, whose contributions to literature transcend the confines of genre and medium. As the exploration of the intersection of music and literature continues, may it lead to embracing the transformative power of storytelling in all its forms, recognizing the enduring legacy of songwriters as poets and storytellers.

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APPENDIX I – Survey Questions

Preliminary Question: How frequently did you listen to Taylor Swift's *folklore* album during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a) Daily
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

1. Did the themes explored in *folklore* resonate with your own experiences during the pandemic?

- a) Yes, very much so
- b) Somewhat
- c) Not really
- d) I haven't thought about it

2. Did any specific song from *folklore* resonate with you more deeply during the pandemic? If so, which one?

- a) "cardigan"
- b) "this is me trying"
- c) "mirrorball"
- d) "august"
- e) "epiphany"
- f) Other (please specify)

3. Did listening to *folklore* help relieve feelings of stress or anxiety during the pandemic?

- a) Yes, significantly
- b) Yes, somewhat
- c) No, not really
- d) I'm not sure

4. Which narrative technique do you think is most prevalent in the *folklore* album?

- a) Metaphorical elements
- b) Chronological Shifts
- c) Character perspectives
- d) Symbolism

6. The musical aspects such as verse-chorus patterns, intro, outro, time and duration help in enhancing narratives in the *folklore* album.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Somewhat agree
- c) No opinion
- d) Somewhat disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

7. Did you engage with any online communities or discussions related to *folklore* during the pandemic?

- a) Yes, frequently
- b) Occasionally

- c) Rarely
- d) No, not at all
- e) I wasn't aware of any online discussions

8. Did you attend any virtual listening parties of the album *folklore* organized by the official fan page or others during the pandemic?

(A virtual listening party is an online event where participants collectively listen to an album or playlist often with synchronized playback and engage in discussions in real-time through chat or voice interaction)

- a) Yes, multiple times
- b) Yes, once
- c) No, but I wanted to
- d) No, and I wasn't interested
- e) I wasn't aware of any virtual listening party

9. Did you share or recommend songs from *folklore* to friends or family during the pandemic?

- a) Yes, frequently
- b) Occasionally
- c) Rarely
- d) No, I prefer to keep music to myself

10. Did *folklore* inspire you to engage in any creative activities (e.g., writing, art, music) during the pandemic?

- a) No

b) Yes (please specify)

11. Looking back, how would you describe the impact of *folklore* on your emotional and mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?

a) Extremely positive

b) Mostly positive

c) Neutral

d) Mostly negative

e) Extremely negative

f) No impact