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A Semiotic Study on Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Taylor's Selected Song Lyrics from the Tortured Poets Department

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Abstrak
Lirik lagu populer menyampaikan pengalaman emosional dan nilai budaya melalui makna yang melampaui arti harfiah. Namun, penelitian tentang karya Taylor Swift belum sepenuhnya mengkaji hubungan denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos budaya dalam The Tortured Poets Department (2024). Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tanda linguistik merepresentasikan trauma emosional serta mencerminkan atau menentang ideologi sosial. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dan teori semiotika Roland Barthes, penelitian ini mengkaji 25 unit teks dari lima lagu, yaitu "Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," dan "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart." Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen, pembacaan mendalam berulang, dan verifikasi audio. Hasilnya menunjukkan 18 unit berkonotasi negatif (72%), lima netral (20%), dan dua positif (8%). Lirik menggambarkan kelelahan, perpisahan, konflik hasrat, keterikatan, serta penderitaan tersembunyi. Penelitian ini juga mengkritisi mitos kesabaran perempuan, pengorbanan romantis, idealisasi cinta, kontrol moral, dan ketahanan emosional, serta menghubungkan pergulatan pribadi dengan ekspektasi budaya melalui analisis semiotika terpadu.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Semiotika, Denotasi, Konotasi, Trauma.*

Abstract
Popular song lyrics express emotions and cultural values through meanings beyond literal words. However, studies of Taylor Swift's songwriting have not fully explored how denotation, connotation, and cultural myths interact in The Tortured Poets Department (2024). This study examines how linguistic signs portray emotional trauma and reflect or challenge social ideologies. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, it applies Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to 25 textual units from five songs: "Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," and "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart." Data were collected through document analysis, close reading, and audio verification. Findings reveal 18 negative (72%), five neutral (20%), and two positive (8%) connotations. The lyrics portray exhaustion, separation, conflicted desire, recurring attachment, and concealed suffering while questioning myths of feminine patience, romantic sacrifice, moral control, idealized love, and compulsory resilience. By integrating denotation, connotation, and myth, this study connects personal struggles with cultural expectations and highlights the emotional costs of relationships and performed strength.

Keywords: Semiotics, Denotation, Connotation, Trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Popular music offers more than entertainment, as song lyrics express personal experiences, social expectations, and cultural values through carefully chosen words. Beyond melody, listeners may overlook the figurative language and emotional tensions shaping a song's message. Mashuri, Hidayat, and Fauziah show that Taylor Swift's lyrics contain denotative and connotative meanings that extend beyond literal interpretations.[1] Their findings support treating lyrics as meaningful literary texts rather than merely musical products. Examining these expressions helps readers understand how ordinary words communicate complex emotions, memories, and relationships within contemporary popular culture across different social contexts and cultural backgrounds.

Lyrical analysis becomes particularly important when songs explore emotional distress, uncertainty, loss, and pressure to appear strong despite private suffering. These themes resonate because they connect personal experiences with broader ideas about love, identity, and acceptable emotional behaviour. Althavino, Mayasari, and Muslimah explain how literal images and symbolic expressions portray relationships approaching emotional collapse.[2] Their findings demonstrate that close reading reveals meanings overlooked through surface interpretation. Semiotic analysis therefore helps explain how lyrics communicate distress, how metaphors shape understanding, and how popular music reflects cultural expectations surrounding intimacy, emotional endurance, and vulnerability in contemporary society.

Taylor Swift's songwriting provides valuable material for examining how ordinary language conveys complex emotional experiences. Her lyrics often combine familiar expressions with imagery that suggests meanings beyond dictionary definitions. Context, symbolism, and listeners' associations shape how these expressions are understood. Kaka, Isu, and Suardana demonstrate that figurative language carries emotional and cultural associations beyond literal meaning.[3] Their findings support distinguishing what lyrics

[1] Mashuri, Arif Hidayat, and Nadhilah Fauziah, "The Denotation and Connotation in the Songs Entitled 'Exile', 'Illicit Affair' U, and 'Cardigan' by Taylor Swift," *JELL: Journal of English Language and Literature* 9, no. 1 (2024): 79–88, https://www.journal.stibaiec-jakarta.ac.id/ojs/index.php/jell/article/view/209.

[2] Khansa Althavino, Mayasari, and Tikka Muslimah, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Lirik Lagu 'You're Losing Me (From The Vault)' Karya Taylor Swift," *Jurnal KIBASP: Kajian Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajaran* 9, no. 1 (2025): 8–20, https://journal.ipm2kpe.or.id/index.php/KIBASP/article/view/16913.

[3] Paulina Bura Kaka, Emi Mura Isu, and I Putu Eka Suardana, "The Analysis of Connotative Meaning in Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics," *Focus Journal Language Review* 3, no. 2 (2025): 75–82, https://ojs.balidwipa.ac.id/index.php/sfjlg/article/view/426.

explicitly state from what they evoke. This distinction matters when songs explore heartbreak, regret, concealed suffering, and conflicted desire, because seemingly simple phrases can communicate deeper psychological experiences and reveal emotional tensions embedded within everyday language.

Previous studies have examined Taylor Swift's lyrics through semantic, figurative-language, and semiotic approaches, demonstrating that songwriting supports systematic textual interpretation. These methods identify meaningful expressions and explain their contributions to a song's message. Sinaga and Damanik identify literal meanings alongside associations with insecurity, anxiety, self-criticism, and inner conflict.[4] Their findings highlight the importance of distinguishing direct meaning from interpretations shaped by context and association. Each album develops distinctive imagery and emotional patterns, meaning earlier findings cannot fully explain the sign systems and themes of The Tortured Poets Department without focused examination of its selected lyrics and specific cultural contexts.

Research on Taylor Swift's lyrics also explores social meanings beyond personal emotions and romantic relationships. These studies show how popular music addresses gender roles, unequal treatment, and assumptions influencing perceptions of identity and behaviour. Fadila and Nisa apply Saussure's semiotic framework to examine gender inequality in selected songs.[5] Their findings illustrate how musical signs communicate social criticism alongside personal experiences. Research on gender representation alone does not explain how denotative and connotative meanings interact to portray psychological conflict, emotional performance, and tensions between private suffering and public expectations. Examining these relationships offers a broader understanding of cultural meanings within the selected album.

Studies of connotation demonstrate that lyrical meaning often extends beyond literal definitions. Metaphors, symbolic objects, and emotionally charged words transform ordinary descriptions into expressions of fear, attachment, disappointment, and recovery. Rahmawati identifies figurative expressions and connotative meanings that enrich emotional messages.[6]

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[4] Yenni Adelina Sinaga and Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik, "An In-Depth Semantic Analysis of Denotative and Connotative Meaning in the Song Lyrics of 'Let Her Go' by Passenger," *JINU: Jurnal Ilmiah Nusantara* 1, no. 4 (2026): 277–285, https://scriptaintelektual.com/scripta-humanika/article/view/1021.

[5] Wildania Fadila and Baiatun Nisa, "Unravelling Gender Inequality: A Semiotic Analysis of Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics," *Globish: English-Indonesian Journal for English Education and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2024): 187–196, https://jurnal.umt.ac.id/index.php/globish/article/view/11305.

[6] Astri Rahayu Rahmawati, "Analysis of the Use of Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics," *Critical Review of English-Arabic World Journal* 4, no. 2 (2025): 23–34, https://jurnalpasca.uinkhas.ac.id/index.php/crewjournal/article/view/2540.

This research provides a foundation for examining how language shapes emotional interpretation. Connotation alone cannot fully explain how signs form interconnected systems or reflect shared cultural beliefs. A broader semiotic framework is therefore necessary to investigate how linguistic choices communicate emotional complexity while connecting individual experiences with cultural assumptions and socially established expectations surrounding relationships and personal identity.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory provides a useful framework for distinguishing denotation, or a sign's direct meaning, from connotation, which involves associations shaped by culture and experience. These levels enable researchers to examine both explicit descriptions and their underlying emotional or cultural implications. Manueke et al. apply this approach to connect expressions in "You're Losing Me" with emotional distance, despair, and limited endurance.[7] Applying the framework to another album does not presume identical findings. It provides a consistent method for examining selected lyrics while considering their distinctive wording, imagery, contexts, and the cultural associations that influence interpretation.

This study examines five tracks from The Tortured Poets Department: "Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," and "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart." Together, these songs portray separation, longing, regret, inner conflict, and efforts to function despite emotional pain. Finery and Setyabudi demonstrate how lyrical imagery represents emotional vulnerability, identity exploration, and instability.[8] Their findings illustrate how individual signs can reveal broader psychological themes. Each album requires contextual analysis. Accordingly, this study compares denotative and connotative meanings across five tracks to explain how specific linguistic signs construct different representations of emotional experience.

Although previous Indonesian journal studies have examined Taylor Swift's lyrics, figurative expressions, and semiotic meanings, the selected tracks from The Tortured Poets Department warrant focused analysis. This study addresses that gap by examining how literal descriptions and associated meanings interact across five songs without assuming earlier findings apply universally. It also explores interpretations involving emotional suffering, public performance, and social expectations. The analysis is guided by two questions: How

[7] Ellen Gladys Yunita Manueke et al., "Connotative Meaning Found in Taylor Swift's Selected Songs," *Global Science* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1–11, https://globalscience.nusantara.ac.id/index.php/gs/article/view/13.

[8] Getta Eniddia Finery and Titis Setyabudi, "Emerging Adulthood in Taylor Swift's Folklore: A Lyrical and Semiotic Interpretation," in *Proceeding ISETH: International Summit on Science, Technology, and Humanity*, 2025, 3449–3459, https://proceedings.ums.ac.id/iseth/article/view/7475.

do denotative and connotative meanings construct sign systems representing emotional trauma in the selected lyrics? What cultural myths and societal ideologies are challenged or questioned through these songs?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative design and descriptive semiotic content analysis to examine denotative and connotative meanings in five songs from Taylor Swift's The Tortured Poets Department (2024): "Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," and "I Can Do It with a Broken Heart." According to Aspers and Corte, qualitative research explores phenomena through contextual interpretation and systematic investigation.[9] This approach suited the study's focus on linguistic signs, emotional experiences, and cultural ideologies rather than numerical measurement. According to Palinkas et al., purposive sampling selects information-rich cases relevant to research objectives.[10] Accordingly, five songs were selected for their figurative language, emotional complexity, and cultural significance. The corpus comprised 25 textual units containing relevant linguistic signs.

Data were collected through document analysis, repeated close reading, and audio verification to ensure textual accuracy and contextual consistency. According to Bowen, document analysis systematically examines written materials to develop meaningful findings.[11] Each lyric unit was recorded in an analytical matrix covering original text, denotation, connotation, and cultural implications. Analysis followed three stages based on Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. First, denotation was identified through direct meanings and dictionary definitions. Second, connotation was interpreted through figurative language, emotional associations, and song contexts. According to Braun and Clarke, systematic qualitative analysis helps identify patterns and develop interpretations from textual data.[12] Third, myth analysis examined cultural assumptions about gendered emotional labour, forced resilience, religious morality, and romantic idealization.

Research trustworthiness was supported through repeated textual examination, theoretical triangulation, peer debriefing, and an audit trail documenting analytical decisions.

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[9] Patrik Aspers and Ugo Corte, "What Is Qualitative in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Sociology* 42 (2019): 139–160, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7.

[10] Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health* 42, no. 5 (2015): 533–544, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4012002/.

[11] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.3316/qrj0902027/full/html.

[12] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

According to Nowell et al., transparent documentation and systematic procedures strengthen qualitative research credibility and dependability.[13] Interpretations were repeatedly compared with original lyrics and relevant theoretical concepts to minimize unsupported assumptions and maintain consistency between evidence and conclusions. According to Lub, qualitative research validity benefits from transparent research design, systematic analysis, and justified interpretations.[14] These procedures strengthened the examination of how denotative and connotative meanings represent emotional trauma and how selected lyrics reproduce or challenge broader cultural myths and societal ideologies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study analyzed 25 textual units from five songs on Taylor Swift's The Tortured Poets Department (2024): "Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," and "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart." Each unit was examined for denotative meaning, connotation, emotional classification, and cultural implications. The findings show that ordinary expressions, figurative language, and symbolic images communicate complex emotional experiences. Of the 25 units, 18 carried negative connotations, five were neutral, and two were positive. This distribution suggests that emotional distress dominates the selected lyrics, although uncertainty, reflection, and potential recovery also emerge as meaningful elements within the songs' emotional narratives and representations of relationships.

The distribution of connotative meanings reveals recurring emotional patterns across the five selected songs. Negative meanings account for 72% of the textual units, compared with 20% neutral and 8% positive. These percentages reflect the classifications provided in the analytical material rather than a new assessment of every lyric. The predominance of negative meanings highlights sadness, exhaustion, regret, and psychological conflict as central themes. These figures describe only the selected textual sample, not the emotional content of the entire album. The findings therefore provide a focused overview of emotional representation within the chosen lyrics while acknowledging the limitations of drawing broader conclusions from a restricted corpus of textual evidence.

The first pattern concerns the relationship between literal descriptions and emotional interpretations. At the denotative level, expressions describe familiar objects, physical

[13] Lorelli S. Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1–13, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1609406917733847.

[14] Vasco Lub, "Validity in Qualitative Evaluation: Linking Purposes, Paradigms, and Perspectives," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 14, no. 5 (2015): 1–8, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1609406915621406.

actions, locations, and human activities. Their connotations, however, suggest separation, disappointment, suppressed desire, and exhaustion. In "Peter," a window and an extinguished light may represent isolation and fading hope when interpreted within the song's narrative. Similarly, medical resuscitation in "So Long, London" literally describes an emergency procedure but metaphorically suggests efforts to preserve a failing relationship. These examples demonstrate how ordinary images acquire emotional significance through context, allowing familiar language to communicate psychological struggles and relational tensions beyond its immediate descriptive meaning.

The second pattern highlights prolonged attachment and unequal emotional responsibility within relationships. The selected lyrics portray individuals who continue waiting, seeking reconciliation, or maintaining commitments despite diminishing prospects of success. In "Peter," extinguishing the light suggests abandoning indefinite waiting and moving toward emotional independence. In "So Long, London," the resuscitation metaphor represents the realization that persistent effort cannot always restore a relationship. These images suggest that suffering arises not only from separation but also from repeatedly attempting to preserve something that has become unsustainable. The lyrics therefore present letting go as a difficult emotional process involving recognition, acceptance, and the reconsideration of personal commitments and expectations.

The third pattern explores tensions between personal desire and external moral expectations. In "Guilty as Sin?," images of chance, confinement, and boundary crossing communicate uncertainty surrounding private desire. Rolling dice suggests taking risks, while neutralizing a cell evokes release from restriction. These expressions portray an internal struggle between personal impulses and moral standards used to evaluate thoughts and behaviour. Although the supplied dataset classifies this unit as neutral, its symbolic meanings remain significant. The imagery presents uncertainty as an unresolved experience requiring personal negotiation rather than immediate judgment. The song illustrates how cultural expectations and internalized moral rules can complicate emotional choices and shape individuals' interpretations of desire, responsibility, and personal freedom.

The fourth pattern concerns recurring harmful relationships and pressure to maintain an acceptable public image. In "loml," waltzing back into rekindled flames combines graceful movement with dangerous fire, suggesting the attraction and risks of returning to a damaging relationship. Meanwhile, "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart" portrays someone pretending to remain capable despite personal suffering. These images represent contrasting responses to emotional difficulty: repeating familiar relationship patterns and fulfilling

public responsibilities. Both reveal how outward behaviour can conceal unresolved pain. The lyrics consequently question whether apparent strength reflects genuine wellbeing or merely the pressure to satisfy expectations while privately experiencing emotional distress and struggling to maintain everyday functioning.

The fifth pattern connects individual signs with broader cultural expectations surrounding romantic patience, self-sacrifice, moral restraint, and professional performance. Examining these signs beyond their immediate narrative meanings reveals tensions between personal feelings and socially accepted behaviour. In "Peter," the extinguished light suggests ending prolonged waiting, while the resuscitation metaphor in "So Long, London" questions the limits of relationship sacrifice. The performance imagery in "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart" exposes the gap between public behaviour and private suffering. Collectively, these findings suggest that the selected songs communicate more than individual heartbreak. Their linguistic signs also invite reflection on cultural assumptions about relationships, emotional control, personal responsibility, and the expectation to remain strong despite unresolved difficulties and suffering.

Discussion

The findings show that denotation and connotation work together to construct emotional meaning in the selected lyrics. Denotation identifies the direct meaning of an expression, while connotation develops through emotional, symbolic, and cultural associations. This distinction explains how familiar objects and ordinary actions can express experiences that lyrics do not explicitly describe. Ariyadi, Vidhiani, and Puspidalia demonstrate that both meanings offer complementary ways to interpret song lyrics.[15] Building on this perspective, the present study examines selected English-language songs from Taylor Swift's The Tortured Poets Department and explores how their linguistic signs connect personal emotions with relationships, self-understanding, and wider social expectations through contextual interpretation and cultural reflection.

The predominance of negative connotations indicates that emotional suffering shapes much of the selected corpus, although the lyrics communicate more than sadness alone. Negative meanings encompass disappointment, relational exhaustion, fear of repeating past mistakes, concealed suffering, and recognition that certain attachments have become unsustainable. These experiences emerge through different signs and narrative contexts,

[15] Tara Merischa Ariyadi, Yuli Rika Vidhiani, and Yuenti Sova Puspidalia, "Makna Denotasi Dan Makna Konotasi Dalam Lagu Era 1990an Dan 2000an," *Alegori: Jurnal Mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia* 4, no. 3 (2024): 261–271, https://jim.unindra.ac.id/index.php/alegori/article/view/11207.

requiring careful interpretation. Mabruroh, Tabrani, and Maharany show how lyrical symbols express loss, alienation, longing, and existential concerns beyond literal meanings.[16] Their findings support examining emotional categories through relationships among signs rather than isolated expressions. The present analysis distinguishes several forms of suffering and considers how their linguistic representations reveal the complexity of emotional experiences across the selected songs and their narratives.

The portrayals of waiting and relational exhaustion in "Peter" and "So Long, London" reveal concerns about emotional responsibility and personal limits. The extinguished light suggests that prolonged waiting has reached an endpoint, transforming an ordinary action into a symbol of emotional closure. Similarly, resuscitation portrays a relationship requiring continuous intervention, raising questions about unequal effort and the cost of preserving an increasingly unsustainable attachment. Lestari, Dzarna, and Vardani identify connections between literal expressions, emotional wounds, and cultural understandings of love as a struggle involving sacrifice.[17] These parallels suggest that romantic commitment becomes burdensome when sacrifice is treated as an obligation, particularly when personal boundaries and unequal emotional responsibilities remain unacknowledged.

Barthes' concept of myth clarifies how the selected lyrics may reflect cultural assumptions presented as natural or unquestionable truths. Here, myth refers to socially established beliefs reinforced through familiar representations, rather than fictional stories or supernatural narratives. Expectations that women remain patient, genuine love requires unlimited sacrifice, and resilience demands concealed suffering can therefore be examined critically. Antika, Ningsih, and Sastika demonstrate how denotation, connotation, and myth reveal cultural meanings within the song "Lathi."[18] Similarly, Taylor Swift's lyrics invite reflection on whether romantic endurance represents freely chosen commitment or socially reinforced obligation. This perspective highlights how cultural expectations may normalize unequal sacrifice and discourage individuals from recognizing emotional exhaustion and setting necessary boundaries.

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[16] Nuriyah Mabruroh, Akhmad Tabrani, and Elva Riezky Maharany, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Lirik Lagu Album Tanpa Aku Karya Panji Sakti," *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, dan Pembelajaran* 20, no. 18 (2025): 1–14, https://jim.unisma.ac.id/index.php/jp3/article/view/28737.

[17] Febrianti Dwi Lestari, Dzarna, and Eka Nova Ali Vardani, "The Symbolic Premise in Nadin Amizah's Album: A Peircean Semiotic Approach," *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Leterature, and Language Teaching* 9, no. 2 (2025): 1076–1091, https://jurnal.uisu.ac.id/index.php/languageliteracy/article/view/12191.

[18] Tamia Rindi Antika, Nurmada Ningsih, and Insi Sastika, "Analisis Makna Denotasi, Konotasi, Mitos Pada Lagu 'Lathi' Karya Weird Genius," *ASAS: Jurnal Sastra* 9, no. 2 (2020): 61–71, https://jurnal.unimed.ac.id/2012/index.php/ajs/article/view/20582.

"Guilty as Sin?" presents desire as a conflict between personal uncertainty and moral judgment. Rolling dice suggests accepting unpredictable consequences, while the image of a cell evokes restriction and possible release. Together, these signs represent tension between private desires and beliefs about socially or morally acceptable behaviour. This interpretation does not imply a complete rejection of religion or morality; rather, it highlights ongoing negotiation between personal feelings, guilt, and external expectations. Parhusip and Damanik show that contextual interpretation can reveal emotional vulnerability, loss, and relational uncertainty within song lyrics.[19] Their findings support examining symbolic expressions carefully while recognizing that meanings depend on context and may permit several plausible interpretations rather than one definitive explanation.

In "loml," returning to rekindled flames portrays romantic repetition as a tension between attraction and danger. Waltzing suggests graceful movement, whereas rekindled flames evoke renewed intensity and potential harm. Their combination questions whether reconciliation necessarily demonstrates lasting compatibility or romantic destiny. Although repeated reconciliation is not always harmful, nostalgia may obscure the problems underlying an earlier separation. Aulia, Akbar, and Allifiansyah similarly examine how imagery in Taylor Swift's "Mirrorball" represents vulnerability and pressure to meet others' expectations.[20] This comparison illustrates how lyrical signs can contrast outward attractiveness with hidden emotional costs. The selected imagery therefore encourages readers to consider whether familiar romantic patterns genuinely support personal wellbeing or reproduce difficulties that remain unresolved beneath renewed affection and apparent harmony.

"I Can Do It With a Broken Heart" extends the analysis from intimate relationships to public performance and professional expectations. The instruction to pretend until success becomes possible suggests that visible competence may be demanded despite private emotional difficulties. Its significance lies in the contrast between fulfilling responsibilities and concealing the psychological costs of doing so. The lyric consequently questions assumptions that productivity, professional achievement, and emotional stability necessarily coincide. Agusty, Utari, and Alkhajar demonstrate how contextual imagery and symbolic

[19] Nadya Y. P. Parhusip and Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik, "Investigating Literal and Figurative Meaning in Song Lyrics: A Semantic Analysis of 'Fix You' by Coldplay," *Journal of Social Humanities and Education* 1, no. 4 (2026): 216–225, https://scriptaintelektual.com/scripta-humanika/article/view/994.

[20] Farah Aulia, M. Fikri Akbar, and Sandy Allifiansyah, "Representasi People Pleaser Dalam Lirik Lagu 'Mirrorball' Karya Taylor Swift (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes)," *JSC: Journal of Science Communication* 8, no. 2 (2026): 116–129, https://jurnal.untirta.ac.id/index.php/jsc/article/view/36100.

associations construct representations of loss and longing in song lyrics.[21] Although their research examines different songs, it supports interpreting linguistic signs through context. This perspective helps explain how outward success may coexist with suffering that remains largely invisible to others.

This study contributes a comparative analysis of five songs from The Tortured Poets Department through denotation, connotation, and cultural myth. Rather than treating heartbreak as a single experience, it distinguishes prolonged waiting, relational exhaustion, conflicted desire, repeated attachment, and performed competence despite suffering. These representations are connected to cultural assumptions about feminine patience, romantic sacrifice, moral regulation, idealized destiny, and compulsory resilience. The classification of 25 textual units provides a descriptive overview of emotional meanings, while close reading explains how specific expressions construct them. However, the findings remain limited to the selected songs and cannot establish universal conclusions about Taylor Swift's entire discography, popular music generally, or listeners' actual psychological responses across different cultural contexts and personal experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that denotative and connotative meanings interact to represent emotional trauma in Taylor Swift's The Tortured Poets Department (2024). An analysis of 25 textual units from five songs ("Peter," "So Long, London," "Guilty as Sin?," "loml," and "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart") shows how ordinary expressions and symbolic images communicate experiences beyond literal meanings. Of these units, 18 (72%) carry negative connotations, five (20%) are neutral, and two (8%) are positive. These findings highlight sadness, regret, exhaustion, uncertainty, and psychological conflict. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, images of extinguished lights, resuscitation, dice, rekindled flames, and performed competence represent different responses to emotional difficulties. They portray letting go, the limits of sacrifice, conflicts between desire and morality, repeated painful relationships, and concealed suffering. Thus, the lyrics communicate emotional trauma through symbolic language connecting personal struggles with relationships, identity, and emotional wellbeing.

[21] Mayang Firmanda Agusty, Prahastiwi Utari, and Eka Nada Shofa Alkhajar, "Semiotic Analysis of Niki's Song Lyrics Using Barthes' Theory: Loss and Longing," *Lektur: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 9, no. 3 (2026): 75–83, https://journal.student.uny.ac.id/index.php/ilkom/article/view/28194.

Furthermore, the findings reveal cultural myths concerning feminine patience, romantic sacrifice, moral regulation, idealized love, and compulsory resilience. These expectations can normalize prolonged waiting, excessive sacrifice, and concealed suffering, while the lyrics invite readers to question their emotional costs. “Peter” and “So Long, London” explore the limits of waiting and relational endurance, whereas “Guilty as Sin?” examines tensions between desire and moral expectations. “loml” questions repeated painful attachments, while “I Can Do It With a Broken Heart” exposes the gap between outward competence and inner suffering. This study contributes by integrating denotation, connotation, and cultural myth to explain differing representations of emotional trauma across five songs. However, its findings remain limited to 25 textual units and cannot represent Swift’s entire discography or establish listeners’ psychological responses. Future research could examine additional songs, compare albums, and investigate audience interpretations to deepen understanding of lyrical signs, emotional experiences, and cultural values in popular music.

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