An Exploration of Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's Midnight Rain

Cathlyne Fonda[1)*], **Shenny Ayunuri Beata Sitinjak**[2)]

[1)2)]*Universitas Buddhi Dharma*
Tangerang, Indonesia

[1)]cathlynecath@gmail.com
[2)]shenny.ayunuri@ubd.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines Taylor Swift's song Midnight Rain to explore its depiction of gender roles, societal pressures, and personal ambition through stylistic and figurative language. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes Swift's use of metaphor, personification, and irony to construct a narrative contrasting traditional gender expectations with individual independence. The findings highlight Swift's critique of societal norms surrounding family, conformity, and relational expectations. Her lyrics challenge conventional female roles by emphasizing autonomy and self-fulfillment over domestic aspirations. Through symbolic language, Midnight Rain conveys themes of regret and the emotional complexity of defying societal pressures in pursuit of personal goals. Swift employs figurative elements, such as light and darkness metaphors, to symbolize the conflicting desires between ambition and stability. For instance, "sunshine" represents warmth and consistency, while "midnight rain" reflects emotional depth and transformation. Irony further underscores societal paradoxes, where women's ambition is often criticized, while conformity is idealized. The song critiques restrictive social environments through metaphors like "cages" and "fences," symbolizing small-town confinement. It also deconstructs the pressure to maintain "picture-perfect" family ideals, highlighting the hidden sacrifices and tensions behind such facades. This research contributes to understanding popular music as a medium for engaging with societal issues. Swift's lyrics offer a commentary on the tensions between personal ambition and societal norms, inviting listeners to reflect on their own experiences of balancing identity and expectations. By analyzing Midnight Rain, this study underscores the role of contemporary music in addressing themes of gender, identity, and societal pressures, revealing how artists like Swift articulate these challenges through layered figurative language and personal narrative.

[*] Corresponding author

I. INTRODUCTION

Music can not be separated from our life. For songwriters, songs are not only made some music and to entertain their listeners but also conveys their feelings, experience, perspective, ideas, etc. Campo mentioned that song occupy a very important space in their life, such as altering moods, shaping aspect related to strengthening interpersonal relationships (Ginting et al, 2021). This shows that some people like music because the lyrics relate to the listener's personal life. For example, Taylor Swift listeners, because generally the lyrics that she created are related to young people. This is proven by winning many album of the year awards at the Grammy awards in 2021 & 2022.

Taylor Swift entered the world of music in 2006 and released the album "Taylor Swift" and there have been 10 albums created. Each album produces songs that are loved by many groups. This is proven by several songs on the billboard top 10 charts, such as love story, shake it off, style, blank space, wildest dream, cruel summer, daylight, lover, and the newest songs in 2022 are midnight rain and anti hero. In previous research entitled "A Feminist-Stylistic Analysis of The Taylor Swift Song Entitled The Man" by Caroline et al., (2023) showed that the song titled the man highlights the observable differences in the lives of women and men and also double standards. The words, phrases and sentences chosen explain the gaps and challenges faced by women in society.

Other previous research, entitled Figurative language use in Taylor Swift's song (A semantic analysis) by Bouti et al., (2023) found out there were seven types of figurative language. The seven types were metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, irony, and paradox. However, the songs that they analyzed were blank space and new romantic from the "deluxe (1998)" album in 2014. This also shows that other Taylor Swift songs on the 2020 album are still likely to be released. This research focuses on the album "midnights (2022)" which contains the songs midnight rain. Researchers analyzed the stylistic and figurative language in this song.

Taylor swift's "midnights" album is a tapestry of emotions, woven with intricate threads of narrative and masterfully wielded language. Two standouts, midnight rain and anti hero are not mere catchy tunes; they're lyrical labyrinth teeming with figurative devices that illuminate and dissect themes of power, gender, and the complexities of the social landscape. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of stylistic and figurative language in Taylor Swift's song entitled midnight rain. By examining Swift's use of metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, the paper seeks to highlight the deeper societal commentary embedded in her lyrics. The purposes of this research are 1) to find out the meaning of midnight rain song, 2) to examine what are figurative language contains in this song and 3) to examine the meaning of the word choices that Swift used.

According to (Leech, 2013) figurative language divide into eight types such as personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, litotes, metonymy, and oxymoron. Personification is attributing human qualities or characteristics to non-human things. For example, "The wind whispered through the trees." Simile is a comparison between two things using the words "like" or "as." For example, "Her eyes were like sapphires." Metaphor is a comparison between two things that directly states that one thing is another. For example, "She was a ray of sunshine." Hyperbole is an exaggeration used for emphasis or effect. For example, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse." Irony is the use of words that mean the opposite of what is intended. For example, "Nice weather we're having" (said on a rainy day). Litotes is an understatement used for emphasis or effect. For example, "He's not exactly the sharpest tool in the shed." Metonymy is the use of a part of something to represent the whole. For example, "The crown" (meaning the

king or queen). Oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines two contradictory terms. For example, "jumbo shrimp" or "deafening silence."

Stylistics is a field of linguistics that discusses in detail the individual language styles of other individuals. Simpson., (2004) mentioned that stylistics is a study dealing with technique of creativity and invention in a language. Leech and Short., (2015) define stylistics as "the linguistic study of style". It is undertaken as an exercise in describing what use is made of language. In another opinion, stylistics refers to the systematic study of language choices, structures, and literary devices used in texts to convey meaning and evoke certain effects.

Leech describes stylistics as a field focused on analyzing linguistic style, bridging linguistics with literary criticism. He suggests that an author's style reveals their attitude and the intended message of the text, highlighting how language choices can express various emotions, values, and beliefs (Caroline et al, 2024). Through studying these stylistic decisions, stylistics offers deeper insights into how language shapes ideas and perceptions, revealing the intricacies of human communication.

II. METHODS

The researchers used a qualitative approach method using a combination of textual analysis, close reading, and thematic analysis. According to (Moleong, 2010) the qualitative method is used as a research technique that obtains a description of the words that can be observed. To delve into the complex themes of power, gender, and social roles within Taylor Swift's song "Midnight Rain" a qualitative descriptive research approach would prove insightful. This method focuses on understanding and interpreting lived experiences and phenomena through rich textual analysis, allowing us to unpack the nuances embedded within the lyrics, musicality, and cultural context. The research use library research for data collecting in "Midnight rain" And "Anti-Hero" Songs.

The primary data source will be the lyrics itself, accessed through online platforms like Spotify. Additional supporting information will be gathered from academic journals and relevant internet sources. Following Rasmuson's in (Deamesya, 2023) definition of library research as information gathering for writing, the analysis will proceed in four steps such as:
1. Lyric Analysis: the first step involves carefully reading the lyrics of Midnight rain.
2. Figurative Language Identification: researchers will then identify and isolate words, phrases, and sentences that employ figurative language (e.g., metaphors, similes, hyperbole).
3. Meaning Interpretation: the researchers will delve deeper to understand the intended meaning and function of the identified figurative language within the song's context.

Data Classification and Analysis: finally, the identified instances of figurative language will be categorized, cross-checked for accuracy, and then analyzed to draw conclusions about their thematic and stylistic significance.

III. RESULTS

The researchers analyze into three parts such as the meaning of the lyrics, the figurative language that contains (personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, and oxymoron) and the meaning of the lyrics or words choices that contains the gender roles, power, and social in the Taylor Swift's Midnight rain.

In order to get the meaning of the song, the first step involves carefully reading the lyrics. Below are the meaning that researchers divided based on the verse of the song.

[intro]

"Rain, he wanted it comfortable
I wanted that pain, He wanted a bride
I was making my own name Chasing that fame
He stayed the same
All of me changed like midnight"

The first line of the bridge the person which "he" wanted serious and long term relationship while the second line the person which "I" just wanted play around and want short term relationship. However, when "he" wanted a bride and want to propose the person "I", the third line told us the person which "I" choose to pursuing her dream and chasing the fame in her own name. Then, in the fourth line told us that the person "he" never changed and stay same, while in the fifth line the person which "I" changed like "midnight" refers to as the bad person in the relationship and the negative one.

[verse 1, line 1-4]

"My town was a wasteland
Full of cages, full of fences.
Pageant queens and big pretenders
But for some, it was paradise"

The first line of the verse "town" is refers to the person which "I" live and the opportunity, "full of cages, full of fences" refers to a lack of freedom both physical and emotional. In addition the second line embody the "pageant queens and big pretender" means the pursuit of external validation and beauty and embody the facade of success and contentment. Moreover, the other words the person which "I" told us about dissatisfaction with her hometown and the norms it represent. Then, the third line told to us that for some people "that situation" is like good things.

[verse 1, line 5-9]

"My boy was a montage
A slow-motion, love potion
Jumping off things in the ocean
I broke his heart cause he was nice
He was sunshine, I was midnight rain"

The fifth line of verse 1 "my boy was a montage" refers to a boy or person that she could not even forget because that person is still the important part of her life even though the relationship is over. The sixth line "a slow-motion, love potion" means that love is slowly but exactly and it could be improve day by day (the love). The seventh line the shows listeners that "jumping off things in the oceans" is a sense of freedom, adventure, and willingness to take a risk in the name of love because we know that ocean is represent the unknown depth, and here, the word "jumping" also refers to willingness. Thea eighth line the person which "I" broke his heart just because he was nice. Lastly, in the ninth line refers to he was someone who's warmth, positive and bring light and joy while the person "I" showing the reverse as "midnight rain".

[verse 2, line 1-4]

"It came like a postcard
Picture perfect, shiny family
Holiday, peppermint candy
But for him it's every day"

The first line of the verse 2 means like something she or he would not expect. It is written in the second line "picture perfect, shiny family" refers to the person which "his or her" family that is perfect and be a happy family. Then, the third line "holiday" and "peppermint candy" refers to

their love was an exciting and special event. It is also assumed like a holiday or a treat and giving something fresh like peppermint candy, but to him it is like just an ordinary part of his life.

[verse 2, line 5-9]
"So I peered through a window
A deep portal, time travel
All the love we unravel
And the life I gave away
Cause he was sunshine, I was midnight rain"

The first line of the verse refers to the person which "I" trying to gain and understand into something about "he or him". Then, in second line "a deep portal, time travel" means that the she is deep seated yearning to revisit past moments of love and connection. Meanwhile in the third line, they are re-examining past experience of love and try to understand to cover the heartbreak he hidden emotions. Therefore, the person "I" shows listeners the sacrifice and the regrets in her past relationship and put her own dreams aside in order to pursue a relationship that will ended in.

[outro, line 1-4]
"I guess sometimes we all get
Just what we wanted, just what we wanted
And he never thinks of me
Except when I'm on TV"

The person which "I" told audience that they were both get all that they wanted like in the second line of the lyrics. However, the person which "he" never think of the person which "I" except when she's on TV.

[outro, line 5-9]
" I guess sometimes we all get
Some kind of haunted, some kind of haunted
And I never think of him
Except on midnights like this (midnights like this)"

The person which "I" told us that they're both get all some kind of haunted by memories of her past relationship, the lingering, emotions of the heartbreak and regrets. In the third line, it is written 'And I never think of him" this means that she never thinks the person except when in the middle of the night. This also means that "him" as her past that she can not forget, not only that but this line also inform listeners that it was her regretless.

After the identifications phase, researchers found out the seven types of figurative language based on this song. The figurative languages were displayed in table below;

Table 1. Types of Figurative Language in Midnight rain

Figurative language	Lyrics	Meaning
Personification	*Rain, he wanted it comfortable*	Rain is given human qualities of desire and preference, symbolizing the ex's longing for stability.
Simile	*My boy was a montage* *A slow-motion, love potion*	The ex's passionate but fleeting nature is compared to a romanticized film sequence, emphasizing the intensity and impermanence of their relationship.
Hyperbole	*Chasing that fame* of success.	This exaggerates the narrator's ambition, emphasizing her single-minded pursuit
		This hyperbolic imagery intensifies the

	Full of cages, full of fences.	feeling of entrapment within the narrator's hometown.
Metaphor	*All of me changed like midnight.*	The narrator's dramatic transformation is compared to the shift to darkness, symbolizing her growth and independence.
	He was sunshine, I was midnight rain.	Their contrasting personalities are metaphorically portrayed as light and darkness, highlighting their fundamental differences.
	My town was a wasteland	This metaphor describes the town's stifling and limiting environment, full of expectations and pressures.
Irony	*I broke his heart cause he was nice*	This situational irony highlights the unintended consequences of the narrator's actions, where his positive qualities become the reason for his pain.
	But for some, it was paradise	This contrasts the narrator's perception of her hometown with those who find comfort and fulfilment within its limitations.
Metonymy	*Picture perfect, shiny family*	The family represents an idealized version of life, emphasizing the superficiality of societal expectations.
	So I peered through a window	The window signifies a portal to the past and lost memories.
Oxymoron	*Some kind of haunted*	This oxymoron describes the complex emotions of yearning and regret, suggesting a bittersweet mix of feelings.

Based on the two analysis above, researchers then conclude the thematic and stylistics significances of the Midnight rain lyrics. Researchers found out that Swift's word choices explained and highlight the role reversal and gender expectations as the above analysis.

[intro, line 2-3]
I wanted that pain, He wanted a bride
I was making my own name Chasing that fame

……

There were two phrases that researchers highlights form line 1-2 of the intro. Phrases "chasing fame" vs "wanting a bride" established a contrast in desires. The female narrator prioritizes ambition and independence by stating "making her own name". Meanwhile, the male character seeks comfort and domesticity "wanted a bride". This subverts traditional gender roles where women are expected to seek marriage and family.

[verse 1, line 8-9]
I broke his heart 'cause he was nice
He was sunshine, I was midnight rain

Line eight above shows that the female narrator breaking his heart "because he was nice". The narrator's harsh actions stem from his very positive qualities, highlighting the conflict between societal expectations of femininity which is being kind and nurturing. This also explained that 'broke his heart" is her own desire for autonomy and strength. Meanwhile, the ninth line narrator

mentioned "sunshine" and "midnight rain". This showed to listeners that both of them are different side. This metaphor symbolizes their contrasting personalities. He represents warmth and stability, while she embodies complexity and emotional depth. Through this song Swift shows that she was defying the stereotype of women needing to be cheerful and agreeable.

[verse 1, line 1-2]

My town was a wasteland
Full of cages, full of fences

The lines above explain narrator town as wasteland, full of cages and fences" This likely convey a sense of desolation and restriction within the Swift's environment. The term "wasteland" implies an abandoned, lifeless, or bleak place, suggesting that the town is devoid of vibrancy or opportunity. The "cages" and "fences" reinforce this feeling by symbolizing confinement and limitation, as if the inhabitants or the speaker feel trapped, unable to escape or move freely. Together, these lines evoke an image of a place that is both physically and emotionally stifling, where barriers prevent growth, freedom, or fulfillment. From these word choices, researchers conclude that Swift wanted to actively breaks free from the restrictive social norms of her town, reclaiming her power and agency.

[verse 1]

Pageant queens and big pretenders
But for some, it was paradise

The lines "Pageant queens and big pretenders'' suggest a setting or environment where people may put on a facade or engage in superficial displays, such as beauty pageants or other forms of public performance. "Pageant queens" symbolize people who play a role to appeal to societal expectations of beauty, charm, or perfection, while "big pretenders" hints at individuals who mask their true selves, possibly to gain approval or social standing. Despite this seemingly artificial or insincere atmosphere, the phrase "for some, it was paradise" implies that some individuals find joy, fulfillment, or purpose in this world of appearances. These lines might reflect the complex nature of certain environments—places that, although superficial or performative, still offer a sense of belonging or success for those who thrive within their norms. Researchers conclude that through these word choices, Swift critiques the superficiality and pressure to conform imposed by small-town communities, particularly on women.

[outro, line 3-4]

And he never thinks of me
Except for when I'm on TV

The lines "And he never thinks of me / Except for when I'm on TV" suggest a relationship marked by emotional distance or a lack of genuine connection. This word choices implied that "he" rarely considers her in his everyday life, only acknowledging her existence or thinking of her when she appears publicly, as on television. This limited attention hints that his interest in her may be superficial, tied more to her visibility or status than to a personal or meaningful bond. It portrays a sense of neglect or unreciprocated affection, where she may desire a deeper connection, but his regard for her is conditional and tied to her public image rather than her true self. Researchers conclude that these word choices reflecting the societal pressure on women to conform to beauty standards and achieve external validation.

[verse 1]

My town was a wasteland
Full of cages, full of fences

In this verse, "My town was a wasteland / Full of cages, full of fences," the imagery paints a bleak picture of the narrator's environment. A "wasteland" implies desolation, barrenness, or a lack of life and vibrancy, suggesting the town feels empty or void of opportunities. The "cages" and "fences" further underscore themes of confinement and limitation, as though the town physically or emotionally restricts its inhabitants. These word choices suggest that people in this town might feel trapped or unable to pursue freedom and growth. Altogether, through this lines Swift evokes a setting where boundaries—whether imposed by society, circumstances, or even personal limitations—prevent her or others from escaping or thriving, creating an atmosphere that feels both isolating and oppressive.

[verse 2, line 1-3]
Picture perfect shiny family
Holiday peppermint candy
But for him, it's every day

In these lines, "Picture perfect shiny family / Holiday peppermint candy / every day," the narrator contrasts the idealized image of family life with its actual experience for "him." The "picture perfect shiny family" and "holiday peppermint candy" evoke images of polished, festive moments. These lines as the image of those we see in holiday advertisements or on greeting cards, where everything appears flawless, joyful, and celebratory.

However, by saying "for him, it's every day," there's an implication that the constant expectation to maintain this facade becomes overwhelming, repetitive, or even monotonous. This line suggested that the appearance of perfection, which might seem special in limited doses, becomes exhausting or confining when it must be maintained all the time. The verse may hint at the pressure to uphold an idealized family image, where genuine, imperfect human experiences are masked by an ever-present, staged sense of happiness. Based on the above analysis, researchers conclude that This highlights the hypocrisy of societal expectations around family life, presenting an idealized version that hides the complexities and challenges of real-life relationships.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research used Midnight rain lyrics as the data to be analyed. Researchers found out that the meaning of this song is the desires between societal expectations and personal ambitions. The narrator chooses independence and self-fulfillment over conventional roles, sacrificing a stable relationship for the pursuit of her dreams. Through symbolic imagery and contrasting themes, Swift critiques societal pressures around conformity and idealized family life. The song captures the emotional consequences of these choices, revealing a haunting sense of regret and unresolved feelings.

Meanwhile the figurative languages that researchers found out in this song are personification, simile, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, metonymy, oxymoron. In addition the word choices of Swift used in this song explained about three issues. First about the role reversal and gender expectations as written in intro line 2-3 "I wanted that pain, He wanted a bride / I was making my own name Chasing that fame". Second power dynamic and societal pressure, for example as written in outro line 3-4 "And he never thinks of me / Except for when I'm on TV". Lastly, Swift used Picture perfect shiny family / Holiday peppermint candy/ But for him, it's every day highlights about social commentary and breaking free that presents a nuanced reflection on the challenges of balancing personal goals with relational expectations.

Researchers' suggestions for the future research on Taylor Swift's Midnight Rain could expand by examining thematic continuity across her albums to observe how her portrayal of gender roles and societal expectations has evolved. Comparing Midnights to earlier works could reveal shifts in her perspective on independence and social critique. An interdisciplinary analysis combining feminist theory and sociolinguistics would provide deeper insights into how her lyrics reflect and shape modern conversations about identity. Additionally, exploring audience interpretations of these themes could further illustrate her cultural impact. Finally, a comparative study with other artists could highlight Swift's distinctive contributions to contemporary music and social discourse.

REFERENCES

Bouti, Suleman. Podungge, Rusni. Umar, Irmawaty. Dasinsingon, Meity. 2023. Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's Songs (A Semantic Analysis). JBSB:Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Budaya 13 (1):16-30.

Caroline, Yohanna Pebrianti. Zahrani, Tasya. Sitompul, M. Riyadhil. Rangkuti, Rahmadsyah. 2023. A Feminist-Stylistic Analysis of The Taylor Swift Song Entitled The Man. KLAUSA:Kajian Linguistik, Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra 7 (2): 115-124.

Deameysa, Helena G., Zulfri, Alda F., Amanda, Azzahrah P., Sari, Dwi L. 2023. Figurative Language Analysis in Taylor Swift 'Exile' Song Lyrics. JELLT (Journal of English Language and Literature Teaching) 8 (1): 415-422.

Ginting, Daniel. Levana, Eldana Reza. 2021. Cultural Views of a Society Through Taylor Swift's Song. INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa 8 (1): 34-49

Leech, Geoffrey. 2013. Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding. Third Avenue, New York: Routledge.

Moleong, L. J. 2010. Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Simpson, Paul. 2004. Stylistics A Resource Book for Students. West 35th Street, New York: Routledge.

Short, Michael H. Leech, Geoffrey N. 2015. Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose. New Fetter Lane, London: Routledge.