

# Conceptual Metaphor Analysis on ‘The Greatest Showman’ Soundtrack Album

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## **Abstract**

Music serves as a medium of communication through words that rhyme, accompanied by the sounds of instruments to enhance enjoyment. Lyrics often use rhyming sentences and are frequently crafted using metaphors. Metaphors play a significant role in music creation, as they simplify complex ideas into messages that are easier to understand. The interpretation of metaphors, however, depends on their context, which can lead to varying meanings. This study aims to analyze metaphorical lines in music and explore their intended meanings. Focusing on the album from *The Greatest Showman*, a film of the same name, the study examines four selected songs: "A Million Dreams," "From Now On," "This is Me," and "Rewrite the Stars." These songs were chosen for their rich lyrical content and meaningful metaphors. The analysis identifies the use of conceptual metaphors as a key element in the lyrics, showing how they convey profound and relatable messages. The findings of this study highlight the prevalence and importance of conceptual metaphors in musical lyrics. They serve not only as artistic tools but also as bridges for listeners to connect emotionally with the music. By breaking down the metaphors in these four songs, the study provides insights into how simple yet powerful messages are conveyed through metaphorical expressions, making the lyrics resonate deeply with audiences.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor can have two meaning; according to Oxford dictionary (Oxford Dictionary, 2024); the first meaning of metaphor is a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable; an instance of this, a metaphorical expression. The second meaning of metaphor is something regarded as representative or suggestive of something else, esp. as a material emblem of an abstract quality, condition, notion, etc.; a symbol, a token.

According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* (2003), "Metaphors are not just language tools, they are the way we understand and interact with the world." In each song, there are evocative images, describing life's journey, struggles, and self-

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discovery. The metaphors used in the lyrics create deep emotional layers, reinforcing the movie's main themes of having the courage to be yourself and celebrating differences. The metaphors in the songs enrich the meaning, anchoring the listener in their Imagination.

Metaphors and semantics are closely intertwined, as both explore how meaning is constructed in language. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors shape our conceptual framework and influence how we understand abstract ideas, suggesting that our everyday language is laden with metaphorical expressions that reveal deeper semantic connections (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Similarly, Max Black emphasizes that metaphors create new meanings by drawing parallels between different domains, which enhances our understanding of language and enriches the semantic landscape (Black, 1962). By using metaphors, we not only convey complex ideas more effectively but also expand the semantic field of language, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of concepts and experiences. This interplay highlights the significance of metaphors in deepening our comprehension of meaning in communication.

A conceptual metaphor comprises two principal elements: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain represents a concept with which the reader is already familiar, providing a framework for comprehension. In contrast, the target domain is a more abstract concept, the understanding of which is facilitated by the lens of the source domain. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson emphasize this structure in their work, illustrating how everyday metaphors assist in comprehending complex ideas by relating them to more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

To illustrate, the "time is money" metaphor employs time as the target domain, an abstract and often intangible concept, while money serves as the source domain, a concrete and familiar resource. This metaphor enables the conceptualization of time in terms of value and scarcity, which in turn influences the perception and behavior of individuals with regard to the allocation of time. Cognitive linguist Mark Turner further posits that this mapping from source domain to target domain not only enriches our understanding but also shapes our attitudes and actions, thereby facilitating the comprehension and management of abstract ideas (Turner, 1996). Thus, conceptual metaphors serve as efficacious cognitive instruments that connect our experiences with abstract concepts, underscoring the pivotal role of the source and target domains in shaping our thought processes.

According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), metaphors have three types; Structural metaphors provide a framework for understanding one concept in terms of another, often organizing complex ideas within a coherent structure. For instance, in the metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR," arguments are conceptualized as battles. This metaphor influences how we discuss arguments, using phrases like "defending a position" or "attacking a point." According to Lakoff and Johnson, this structural metaphor shapes our interactions and reasoning about arguments as if they were confrontational.

Oriental metaphors relate to spatial orientation, providing a framework for understanding concepts through physical space. Common examples include "happy is up" and "sad is down," where happiness is associated with an upward direction and sadness with a downward one. Phrases like "I'm feeling down today" exemplify this metaphorical mapping. Lakoff and Johnson argue that these metaphors reflect cultural beliefs and emotional experiences, guiding how we conceptualize feelings and moods.

Ontological metaphors treat abstract concepts as entities or objects, allowing us to conceptualize them in more concrete terms. For example, in the metaphor "the mind is a container," we think of thoughts and emotions as things that can be stored or removed. This can

lead to expressions like “he’s filled with anger” or “she let her feelings out.” Lakoff and Johnson explain that ontological metaphors enable us to talk about abstract experiences as if they were tangible objects, facilitating clearer communication and understanding.

Using metaphor is a powerful tool for people to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences in ways that are more engaging and relatable than literal language. The way people convey metaphors are either through communication or writing. One of these writing comes from musical lyrics. These two aspects allow artists to convey complex emotions, ideas, and experiences in a more vivid and relatable way. Through metaphor, songwriters can transform abstract feelings into a concrete image, making their messages resonate with the listeners.

By transforming these ideas through metaphor, musicians can express emotions that might otherwise be difficult to articulate directly. This artistic approach allows them to address themes such as love, heartbreak, personal growth, or social issues in a way that connects deeply with their audience. The beauty of metaphor in music lies in its ability to evoke multiple interpretations, making each song personal to each listener. In doing so, metaphor doesn’t just make the language more engaging—it adds layers of meaning to the lyrics. The subtlety and complexity allow listeners to reflect on the deeper messages.

“The Greatest Showman” which being released in 2017 is not only an album of mesmerizing songs which captivate the listener, but also connect the listener to understand the plot and feeling of the film with the same title. Each song on the album functions as an immersive narrative, using powerful symbolism to illustrate themes such as struggle, self-acceptance, and courage in the face of others’ judgement. Listening to this album will take you to the world of fantasy. The depiction in the lyrics of these songs drive us through many emotions. With those stated, the researches chose it to be analyzed metaphorically.

In this research, writers want to analyze the metaphor in the song based on the types of conceptual metaphors by George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen (2003). Conceptual metaphors are divided into 3 types: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

Through this analysis, we will explore some striking examples of metaphors, uncovering how they contribute to the overall narrative of the album and the emotional resonance it offers. By understanding these metaphors, we can better appreciate the profound messages they convey, as well as how these lyrics serve as a mirror to the universal human experience.

## II. METHODS

In this analysis, the researchers choose a qualitative research approach rather than quantitative research. Qualitative research is a research method to explore and understand the meaning that some individuals or groups of people think come from social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). Meanwhile, quantitative research is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2013). The researchers choose qualitative over quantitative is because the data found by the researches is from the lyrics of the song chosen. The result for this analysis is found and analyzed by the researches themselves with the guide from the theory of conceptual metaphor by George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen (2003).

The steps that the researchers conducted first is listening to the song. The researches listen to 4 songs titled A Million Dreams, This is Me, Rewrite The Stars, and From Now On. After listening to the songs, researches collect the data to analyzed by searching for the lyrics of the song which is collected from Genius.com. The next step is the researches collect the lyrics which has a metaphor in the lyrics to analyzed. The researches divide the metaphors based on the conceptual

metaphor types and analyzed the meaning behind the metaphor. Then at the end, researches write the analysis result and draw a conclusion from it.

### III. RESULTS

“The Greatest Showman” album consist of 11 songs. The songs in the album perfectly captures the film’s theme of ambition, resilience, and the power of dreams. Writers took 4 out of 11 songs to analyze titled A Million Dreams, From Now On, This is Me, and Rewrite The Stars.

From this research, the researchers found the total of 30 data of metaphor from 4 songs that are being analyzed. There are 9 data structural metaphor, 4 data orientational metaphor, and 17 data ontological metaphor. The researchers conclude that ontological metaphor dominate the other conceptual metaphor while orientational metaphor is the least that can be found in the songs. The percentage of data found is explained in the table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors in the Data

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR	DATA FOUND	PERCENTAGE
Structural metaphor	9 data	30%
Oriental metaphor	4 data	13,33%
Ontological metaphor	17 data	56,67%

The explanation of the data found are explained below.

#### **Structural Metaphor**

*We are warriors (This is Me, Line)*

The lyrics “We are warriors” indicates a sense of unity, strength, and shared purpose within a group, just like a warrior. By comparing the group to warriors, the metaphor implies that they are united, strong, and determined to achieve a goal together.

*I close my eyes (A Million Dreams)*

Symbolizes introspection or dreaming. We understand imagination as the act of seeing with the “mind’s eye”. Imagination denotes a limitless world where we are free to dream. Sometime when we realize a mistake, we will close our eyes, feel it and try to introspect ourselves. In addition, it also shows the challenges in life that are full of contemplation.

*A world that’s waiting up for me (A Million Dreams)*

“A world that’s waiting up for me” signifies the opportunities in life in the future. A person may have to face many challenges and they can have the chance to become a great person. “Waiting” indicates the hard life that is always waiting for us. The researchers know that the world is full of opportunities and problems, that is why it waits for the character as a sign that they can grab the opportunities and continue to dream big and fulfill their desire.

*Through the dark, through the door (A Million Dreams)*

“Through the dark, through the door” states the journey into the unknown is represented through the “dark”. People do not know what they will face in the future, what will happen. The journey they will go through is like a mystery and full of challenges. The door explains our ignorance of the future and the new beginnings or new challenges that must be overcome.

*Rewrite The Stars (Rewrite the Stars)*

“Rewrite the Stars” means rewrite their destiny. The used of the word “stars” as an object that is very far from the reach of human grasp. That conclusion leads to the destiny in which is also an object that no humans have a control over it. Hence, that it is entirely impossible for us humans to write our own destiny.

*Hands are tied (Rewrite the Stars)*

“Hands are tied” represent that a person is incapable of doing anything. Being incapable of doing things born to be difficult to enjoy something. In this case, it is about love between the two of characters who have a huge different social status and have different race. Even though they love each other, they couldn’t do anything about it. Hence, the line “hands are tied” present in the song.

*I drank champagne with kings and queens, the politicians praised my name (From Now On)*

This line describes the drinking champagne with kings and queens,” it metaphorically suggests being in elite, exclusive circles and having high social power. The phrase “the politicians praised my name” further enhances this by implying recognition and admiration from those in power, underscoring a place of prominence and respect.

*And we will come back home (From Now On)*

And we will come back home” uses a structural metaphor to represent a return to one’s true self, core values, or a place of authenticity and belonging. Here, “home” is not just a physical location but a metaphor for comfort, identity, and the grounding essence of who someone is. In structural metaphors, one concept (in this case, a journey toward self-discovery or personal integrity) is understood through the structure of another concept (coming back to a familiar, safe place like “home”). It implies that, despite worldly distractions or ambitions, the person ultimately seeks to return to a place or state that feels fundamentally true and fulfilling. This metaphor frames “home” as more than a place, representing the journey back to authenticity.

*From now on, these eyes will not be blinded by the lights (From Now On)*

A structural metaphor to signify clarity, awareness, and a new resolve to avoid distractions or illusions. Here, “the lights” symbolize superficial attractions, fame, or external validation that may have previously clouded one’s vision or judgment. In structural metaphors, one concept (like seeing clearly or remaining grounded) is understood through the structure of another (eyes that are no longer blinded). This line expresses a conscious choice to not let the dazzle of fame or external pressures obscure what truly matters, suggesting a newfound focus on what is real and meaningful. It transforms “lights” into a metaphor for temptations or false promises, indicating a commitment to seeing and pursuing the truth with clear vision.

### **Oriental Metaphor**

*But, I won’t let them break me down to dust (This is Me)*

This metaphor shows the idea of resisting negative forces that threaten them. The “break me down” implies a downward movement. It can also mean a decline of someone’s identity or spirit. The “to dust” implies a complete destruction that make someone loss their self or purpose.

*A world that’s waiting up for me (A Million Dreams)*

“Up” is associated with positive things like opportunities and potential. The world offers many opportunities for us to grow and develop. It gives us everything we want to achieve. The world becomes a comfortable place when we can enjoy our time and be grateful for what we have. “The world is waiting for me” means good things are waiting for the person.

*For years and years, I chased their cheers (From Now On)*

This line employs a spatial metaphor indicating distance because for Barnum, the ‘cheers’ were always the goal that he seems to have ‘chased’ but could never reach. The “cheers” signify the public’s applause, a distraction that motivated him to pursue attention rather than nurturing real connections.

*From now on, these eyes will not be blinded by the lights (From Now On)*

This is a visual metaphor for having clear insight. The “lights” which are associated with fame and wealth ‘blinded’ Barnum from what was indispensable, however, now ‘his eyes’ signify his

will to have them as his secondary objectives, family, friends, and loyalty. With every repetition of this line, it also emphasizes once again Barnum's determination to resist the tempting distraction of fame. While the light imagery is suggestive of fame, Barnum has resolved that as much as there will be external recognition, his values will not be defined or shaken by such.

### **Ontological Metaphor**

*I'm not a stranger to the dark (This is Me)*

This line shows that the person is familiar with darkness which can symbolize as uncertainty, danger, or failure. The metaphor implies that the person experienced the "dark" situations before. The "I'm not a stranger to the dark" explains that the person have familiarized with the dark which in the song, the person have familiarized with failure and also bad experience such as being mocked down by others. The researchers conclude that the line indicates that they develop a certain level of comfort in dealing with it.

*When the sharpest words wanna cut me down (This is Me)*

This metaphor conveys the feeling of being emotionally hurt or attacked by negative words or criticism. The "sharpest words" implies that the words are hurtful, cutting like a weapon through the heart. The "wanna cut me down" implies that the words are trying to harm them. Those being stated, it shows that as if words are threatening for the person.

*I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out (This is Me)*

This lyric conveys anger, or resentment towards other. The "flood" implies a destruction that someone wants to direct to others so that it can hurt them. The "drown 'em out" implies that the person intends to submerge the person who hurt them. The "drown" here shows that the person is determined to make the villain powerless.

*And I'm marchin' on to the beat I drum (This is Me)*

"I'm marchin' on to the beat I drum" indicates independence and self-determination. The "marching on" implies a determination to move forward to their goal. The "to the beat I drum" implies that the person is setting their own pace. It means that the person is moving forward in their own pace, their own will, and without someone's help.

*Another round of bullets hits my skin (This is Me)*

This metaphor shows a feeling of being attacked. The "bullets" in this lyric according to the film refers to hurtful words, criticism, or negative experiences. The references are perceived as sharp and damaging like a bullet. The "hits my skin" implies that the "bullets" are felt, implying a trauma.

*I won't let the shame sink in (This is Me)*

"I won't let the shame sink in" indicates that the person resists the feeling of shame. The "sink in" implies that the shame can gradually absorbed to the person's heart. The shame that already absorbed to the person is considered difficult to resist. The purpose of resisting the feeling of shame is that the person won't be dragged down by anything and can stand up for themselves.

*We are burstin' through the barricades (This is Me)*

This line explains that the person is overcoming the obstacles. They are breaking free from whatever obstacles they face. The "barricades" refers to obstacles, restriction, or limitations which prevent them from freedom or progress. The "burstin' through" implies an energetic action that breaks through the obstacles.

*And reachin' for the sun (This is Me)*

"Reachin' for the sun" states that the person determined to achieve the goals which may be unable to attain. The "sun" symbolizes something perfect, far from being attained. The "reaching

for” implies the determination of someone to achieve something. It tells that the person still believe and try to achieve the most likely unattainable goals.

*A world that we design (A Million Dreams)*

“A world that we design” means a life that the person builds by their own. The "world" refers to a place where we live in comfort and peace. The word "design" means to build the world they want, not just a dream, but really try to build one as they desire. Overall, it can be interpreted as an effort to build a better world.

*The brightest colors fill my head (A Million Dreams)*

The "bright colors" can be interpreted as a real idea or imagination. Someone who has a lot of colors may experience a very strong inspiration to come up with new ideas. This line clearly tells that the person is imagining a lot of ideas in their head especially the good one. It can be their dreams, their desire, their achievement, etc.

*A million dreams are keepin' me awake (A Million Dreams)*

A million has an infinite value that will continue to flow and grow. The “dream” in here can be defined as a real idea or imagination. “Keepin’ me awake” means that the dreams that the person imagining are circulating on their thoughts. It is living in their mind and constantly there – keeping the hopes up –.

*You claim it's not in the cards (Rewrite the Stars)*

The meaning of the line is an indicator to the destiny that is a reading of a card, possibly ‘tarot card reading’. Tarot card reading performed by someone reading the future of the person using a card. This lyric implies that his future being together with his lover is nowhere to be found, just like what his lover said.

*But there are mountains (Rewrite the Stars)*

This metaphor indicates that there are obstacles in front of them. “Mountain” here refers to the huge obstacles. Mountain must be climbed up to reach the mountain peak. A person must make a huge effort and sacrifices to conquer the mountain. In the film, the mountain that the characters have to fight lays on the social status.

*And there are doors that we can't walk through (Rewrite the Stars)*

“Door” implies that there is barrier between two area. Someone needs to cross the door if they want to go to the other side. This metaphor shows that they can't cross the door, they can't fight the obstacles. The answer for them to open the door lays on the key, but they couldn't find the solution. In this film, the characters inciting that again their relationship together is a just a fairytale.

*Because we're able to be just you and me within these walls (Rewrite the Stars)*

“Wall” here refers to their own space. The circus within the film is a safe space for the characters, where they are working together as a partner. They can love each other without them minding their obstacles. They are safe in their walls when no one can enter, no one will know how much they love each other.

*But those are someone else's dreams, the pitfalls of the man I became (From Now On)*

“But those are someone else’s dreams, the pitfalls of the man I became” uses an ontological metaphor to give abstract ideas—dreams and pitfalls—the qualities of physical objects or entities belonging to someone else. from the existence he had.

*And all that glitters is gold (From Now On)*

Referring to the common adage “All that glitters is not gold,” this expression draws attention to the false notion of achievement. Barnum is transparent that while the society's attainments seemed alluring, they were in the end, vacuous.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research has found out the conceptual metaphor types; structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor within 3 songs that are being analyzed. Ontological metaphor leading with 17 data as the most shown in the songs. The next one is structural metaphor in 9 data. The least metaphor shown of the 3 types of conceptual metaphor is orientational metaphor with only 4 data.

The researches found out that in the three of chosen music, ontological metaphor is the most used out of the three types of conceptual metaphor. This result stated that most of the music dominantly used ontological metaphor to explain an abstract concepts as an object or entities. This also can be because ontological metaphor is rather easy to think and everyone can understand quickly about the implied meaning in every words and sentences.

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