

## AN ANALYSIS OF AFFECTIVE MEANING AND IMAGERY IN SONG LYRICS OF TAYLOR SWIFT'S "THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT" ALBUM

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### ABSTRACT

*Affective meaning is related to how the feelings and attitudes of the writer are reflected in their communication. Besides affective meaning, the writer often use imagery to visualize the scene and understand the meaning of the song lyrics more deeply and connect with the emotions conveyed in the song lyrics. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct this research using Leech (1981), Larson (1984), and Abrams (1999) theory. This research aimed to find out types of affective meaning and imagery that occur in the song lyrics in Taylor Swift's album entitled "The Tortured Poets Department". The method used in this research was qualitative research method. The researcher identified 174 data of affective meaning; 41 data of positive meaning and 133 data of negative meaning. The researcher also found 167 data of imagery; 131 data of visual, 15 data of auditory, 3 data of tactile, 2 data of thermal, 2 data of olfactory, 2 data of gustatory, and 12 data of kinesthetic imagery.*

**Keywords :** *Flouting Maxim, Islam Makachev, Press Conference*

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature reflects human thoughts, emotions and experiences. Therefore, literature is often used as a means to express human feelings, such as love, hatred and other emotions. This emotional expression is expressed artistically through language in various forms of literary works, such as prose, poetry, etc.

Song lyrics are included in the category of literary works, especially in the form of poetry. Lyrics play a role not only in conveying emotions, but also in communicating the hidden meaning of the writer. The emotions conveyed in song lyrics can be positive or negative, depending on the phenomena and experiences experienced by the writer. The positive and negative emotions expressed in the lyrics of this song can be classified as affective meaning, which refers to how the author's feelings and attitudes are reflected in the way they communicate (Leech, 1981).

Affective meaning can be divided into two, namely positive meaning and negative meaning. Positive meaning refers to words with good connotations that can influence the recipient positively, while negative meaning refers to expressions that contain rejection or criticism of someone or something, which is the opposite of positive meaning (Larson, 1984). Apart from that, many writers also use imagery to create visualizations in the minds of readers or listeners. The use of imagery in song lyrics can bring certain texts, objects, scenes or elements

to life for the reader, either through direct descriptions, indirect references (allusions), or comparisons such as similes and metaphors (Abrams, 1999).

Researchers chose topics regarding affective meaning and imagery because they play a crucial role in enriching the reading and listening experience, as well as in deepening emotional and psychological understanding in literary works, especially song lyrics. The song lyrics in the album "The Tortured Poets Department" by Taylor Swift were chosen as the data source. Taylor Swift is known for her deep and reflective lyrics, often with layers of implied meaning. Therefore, researchers conclude that the lyrics in Swift's latest album can be a very valuable data source for analyzing affective meaning and imagery in literary works, such as song lyrics. After extensive repeated listening to the album, the researcher observed that the album's lyrics contain significant emotional depth as well as strong use of imagery, making it very rich material for this analysis. Additionally, this data source has not been used in previous research on a similar topic. Taylor Swift is known for her deep and reflective lyrics, often with layers of implied meaning.

The aim of this research is to reveal the affective meaning and imagery contained in song lyrics. Considering the important role of affective meaning and imagery in literary works, especially in song lyrics as previously mentioned, it is important to conduct this research. Research of affective meaning and imagery has been carried out by previous research such as; Alyanita Nurizki (2023) research "Imagery and Affective Meaning Analysis of Niall Horan's Song Lyrics in 'The Show' Album" which studied the affective meaning and imagery in Niall Horan song lyrics in "The Show" album using Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory of imagery as well as Leech theory of meaning which uses a qualitative descriptive methodology to conduct the research.

### **Affective Meaning: Definition and Types of Affective Meaning**

Leech (1981) explains that affective meanings related to emotions are often conveyed clearly through the literal (conceptual) meaning and related (connotative) meanings of words. For example, when someone says "I am thrilled" the conceptual meaning of "thrilled" as well as the way we connotatively and complexly interpret that joy come into play. Thus, our emotional expressions depend on these layers of meaning to convey messages effectively. Meanwhile, according to Barrett (2017), our emotional experience is greatly influenced by the way our brain works to interpret what we feel from our body. For example, we may learn that a fast heartbeat signals fear or anxiety. Our brain, receiving signals from the body, begins to predict and categorize this information based on what we already know.

From the theory explained by Leech (1981) and Barrett (2017), it can be concluded that affective meaning arises from the interaction between the use of words to express feelings and how signals originating from various parts of the body are processed by the brain. Emotions depend not only on the literal and connotative meaning of words, but also on the way our brain organizes and predicts information based on past experiences and prior knowledge. Affective meaning also has two different forms of expressive meaning, namely positive meaning and negative meaning, as explained by Larson (1984):

1. **Positive Meaning:** Positive meaning refers to words with good meanings that can influence the subject towards the speaker positively (Larson, 1984).

2. Negative meaning: Negative meaning, on the other hand, pertains to expressions that reject or criticize a person or thing, representing the opposite of a positive meaning (Larson, 1984).

### **Imagery: Definition and Types of Imagery**

Imagery in literature involves creating a clear picture or sensation in the reader's mind to help them understand the meaning or emotion the author wants to convey. "Imagery (i.e., 'images' taken collectively) are used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in poetry or other literary works, whether through literal description, allusion, or in the vehicle (secondary reference) of similes and metaphors." (Abrams, 1999). Meanwhile, according to Kenney (1966), literal imagery functions fundamentally to fulfill readers' needs for precise and real details, such as descriptions of how something looks, sounds, smells, feels, and feels. There are seven types of imagery according to Abrams (1999), such as:

1. Visual Imagery: It refers to creating mental pictures or visual representations in our minds (Abrams, 1999).
2. Auditory Imagery: This type of imagery allows the reader to experience the sounds described in the poetry (Abrams, 1999).
3. Tactile Imagery: Tactile imagery includes descriptions of sensations related to touch (Abrams, 1999).
4. Thermal Imagery: Thermal imagery is a type of imagery that depicts temperatures such as heat or cold (Abrams, 1999).
5. Olfactory Imagery: Olfactory imagery is the representation of smell (Abrams, 1999).
6. Gustatory Imagery: It refers as the representation of taste (Abrams, 1999).
7. Kinesthetic Imagery: This type of imagery related to the sensations of movement (Abrams, 1999).

### **Song and Lyrics: Definition and Function**

A song is more than just a lyric poem or a ballad melody. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a song is "a melody to a lyric poem or ballad." Songs are a powerful medium that combine music and lyrics to convey emotions, tell stories, and express ideas. Songs use musical elements such as rhythm, melody, harmony, and instrumentation to enhance the emotional impact of the lyrics. This synergy between music and language allows songwriters to evoke a variety of emotions and create unforgettable experiences for listeners.

Lyrics are generally written to convey the author's personal emotions and thoughts as defined by Hornby (1995). Lyrics can be considered a form of personal expression conveyed through music. When listening to a song, the lyrics are designed to provide insight into the songwriter's experiences and emotions, as if they were sharing their story or feelings at the time.

Lyrics function as a form of personal expression of the writer which is channeled through music. The lyrics provide insight into their feelings and experiences. Apart from that, lyrics also function as a means of interaction between the writer and the listener, with the aim of conveying a certain message and encouraging the listener to reflect on it. The form and purpose of these interactions are influenced by cultural context, including musical preferences, time period, and other relevant factors. Thus, lyrics not only reflect the author's personal expression, but also

function as a medium of communication related to the culture and society in which the lyrics are created.

## METHOD

Researchers used qualitative methods to identify the affective meaning and imagery contained in Taylor Swift's song lyrics on her latest album entitled "The Tortured Poets Department". Qualitative methods involve developing specific methods for research that focus on understanding individual experiences and perspectives. This method provides readers with information about the research process, encourages researchers to consider their own impact on the research, and analyzes data collected through several stages as stated by Creswell (2018). The aim of this method is to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under study. The theories applied in this research include affective meaning theory by Leech (1981) and Larson (1984) and image theory by Abrams (1999).

The source of data taken by the researcher in conducting this research is from Taylor Swift's song lyrics in her latest album titled "The Tortured Poets Department". This album is released through *Republic Records* on April 19, 2024, with Taylor Swift, Jack Antonoff, Aaron Dessner, and Patrik Berger as the producers of this album. Meanwhile the data taken in conducting this research is through the lyrics that contained positive and negative affective meaning and also imagery, from the 16 songs namely *Fortnight*, *The Tortured Poets Department*, *My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys*, *Down Bad*, *So Long London*, *But Daddy I Love Him*, *Fresh Out The Slammer*, *Florida!!!*, *Guilty as Sin?*, *Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?*, *I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)*, *loml*, *I Can Do It With a Broken Heart*, *The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived*, *The Alchemy*, and *Clara Bow*, in Taylor Swift's latest album "The Tortured Poets Department".

The researchers conduct this research by collecting data by listening to songs from Taylor Swift's album "The Tortured Poets Department" and analyzing the lyrics based on theories of affective meaning and imagery. The lyrics were then categorized to identify positive or negative meaning according to the theories of Leech (1981) and Larson (1984), and classified the type of imagery according to Abrams' theory (1999), before drawing conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher identified various types of affective meaning based on Leech's (1981) and Larson's (1984) theory as well as several types of imagery in accordance with Abrams' theory (1999) that appeared in the song lyrics in Taylor Swift's album "The Tortured Poets Department". As detailed below:

**Table 1** Result of the Research of Types of Affective Meaning

No.	Type of Affective Meaning	Total Data
1.	Positive Meaning	41
2.	Negative Meaning	133
TOTAL		174

**Table 2** Result of the Research of Types of Imagery

No.	Type of Imagery	Total Data
1.	Visual Imagery	131
2.	Auditory Imagery	15
3.	Tactile Imagery	3

4.	Thermal Imagery	2
5.	Olfactory Imagery	2
6.	Gustatory Imagery	2
7.	Kinesthetic Imagery	12
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>167</b>

## Positive Meaning

Positive meaning refers to words with good meaning that can influence the subject positively towards the speaker (Larson, 1984). The word "rose" from the lyrics "You'd be picked like a rose" in *Clara Bow* has deep symbolism and is universally recognized as a symbol of beauty, love, and value. Therefore, the phrase "picked like a rose" evokes such associations, indicating that the subject was chosen for its beauty or value, similar to how one would choose a rose for its aesthetic beauty and symbolic meaning. This statement is in accordance with Larson's (1984) view which states that positive meaning refers to words with good meaning that can influence the subject positively towards the speaker.

## Negative Meaning

Negative meaning, on the other hand, refers to expressions that reject or criticize someone or something, which is the opposite of positive meaning (Larson, 1984). The lyric "I love you, it's ruining my life" from the song *Fortnight* illustrates how affective meaning, as explained by Leech (1981), is conveyed through the literal and connotative meaning of words. Although "I love you" generally has a positive connotation, the addition of "it's ruining my life" gives it a negative dimension, highlighting suffering and hardship. In addition, in accordance with Larson (1984), negative meaning involves expressions that reject or criticize, which is the opposite of positive meaning. Therefore, this phrase reflects a negative affective meaning by showing how love, which is usually considered a source of happiness, can give rise to deep emotional pain and sadness, as well as emphasizing the role of literal and implicit meanings in conveying such negative experiences.

## Visual Imagery

Visual imagery refers to the creation of mental images or visual representations in our minds (Abrams, 1999). From the lyrics "Shirts off, and your friends lift you up over their heads" in the song *The Alchemy*, the effect is to imagine a scene with clear visual details. The phrase "shirts off" describes the condition of the body without clothes, while "your friends lift you up over their heads" adds an element of dynamics and movement by describing the act of lifting someone by their friends. This produces a clear and detailed mental image in the listener's mind, making this sentence effective in creating a strong visual representation.

## Auditory Imagery

Auditory imagery allows readers to experience the sounds described in poetry (Abrams, 1999). An example can be seen from the lyrics "Clutching their pearls, sighing 'What a mess'" in the song *But Daddy I Love Him*. The phrase "sighing 'What a mess'" specifically presents a sound in the form of an audible sigh or groan. This makes the reader imagine the sound of the sigh,

which adds emotional depth to the situation depicted. Therefore, the lyrics of this song use auditory imagery to convey the more complex nuances of the situation depicted.

### **Tactile Imagery**

Tactile imagery includes descriptions of sensations related to touch (Abrams, 1999). In the lyrics "I touched you for only a fortnight" from the song *Fortnight*, the phrase "I touched you" directly refers to the physical experience of touch between a subject and an object. The term "touched" emphasizes the physical interaction and sensations experienced.

### **Thermal Imagery**

Thermal imagery is a type of imagery that depicts temperatures such as hot or cold (Abrams, 1999). From the lyrics "There was danger in the heat of my touch" in the song *My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys*, referring to Abrams' theory (1999) which defines thermal imagery as a representation of temperature such as hot or cold, this sentence refers to the word "heat" or heat that goes beyond the physical aspect, reflecting the potential danger and emotional intensity hidden behind the touch. Through this thermal imagery, readers are invited to feel the tension and danger contained in the touches depicted, as if they were experiencing the temperature and its emotional impact directly.

### **Olfactory Imagery**

Olfactory imagery refers to the representation of smells (Abrams, 1999). This can be seen in the lyrics "And my friends all smell like weed or little babies" from the song *Florida!!!*. This sentence clearly describes two different smells: the smell of marijuana (weed) and the smell of babies (little babies). By specifically mentioning these smells, the sentence not only provides a sensory description of how the speaker's friends appear socially, but also adds an emotional or atmospheric dimension to the context.

### **Gustatory Imagery**

Gustatory imagery is related to the representation of taste (Abrams, 1999). An example of this is seen in the lyrics "You smoked, then ate seven bars of chocolate" from the song *The Tortured Poets Department*. This theory focuses on the representation of taste, and this sentence explicitly describes the experience of taste through activities carried out by the subject. First, the phrase "ate seven bars of chocolate" presents the sweet taste sensation and texture of chocolate in detail, allowing the reader to imagine the taste experience.

### **Kinesthetic Imagery**

This type of imagery is related to the sensation of movement (Abrams, 1999). This can be seen in the lyrics "Throwing spikes down on the road" in the song *The Tortured Poets Department*. In this sentence, the phrase "throwing spikes" indicates an active, dynamic action, where the word "throwing" emphasizes a throwing motion involving force and energy. Thus, this sentence conveys the sensory experience associated with movement effectively to the reader, making it a perfect example of kinesthetic imagery.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in types of affective meaning and types of imagery that occurred in the song lyrics in Taylor Swift's album titled "The Tortured Poets Department" using Leech's and Larson's theory of affective meaning and Abrams' theory of imagery. The researcher found a total of 174 data of affective meaning, namely positive meaning with 41 data, and negative meaning with 133 data. The researcher also found a total of 167 data of imagery, namely visual with 131 data, auditory with 15 data, tactile with 3 data, thermal with 2 data, olfactory with 2 data, gustatory with 2 data, and kinesthetic imagery with 12 data.

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