



Semiotic analysis of the teenage love triangle trilogy as portrayed in the Taylor Swift *Folklore* album: *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August*.

Indah Windy Khoerunisa

English Language and Literature Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature Education,
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Dr. Setiabudhi No 229, Bandung 40154

Corresponding author email: kindahwindy17@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

This article presents the semiotic analysis of the teenage love triangle in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's songs folklore album entitled *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August* by using Barthes' (2013) and Horney's (2013) psychological concept of love triangle. The research method used a qualitative method with an interpretive approach. The data were acquired by gathering and analyzing the lyrics of these songs to find the meaning of the teenage love triangle supported by journals and relevant data to enforce it. The meanings obtained through this analysis are connotation, denotation, and myth. The findings show that through denotation, connotation, and myth creation, Taylor Swift intertwines these songs to tell a broader story beyond the confines of a love triangle. They become a narrative trilogy that reflects the multifaced nature of relationships, the layers of emotions involved, and the resonance these experiences hold in the broader context of life and love. The characters in these songs portray different facets of human behavior showcasing various neurotic tendencies. This study can contribute positively in understanding how semiotics can be applied to song lyrics, helping us decipher the sign and communicative aspects of music and lyrics.

Keywords: Connotative; denotative; *love triangle*; myth; semiotics

How to cite (in APA 7th edition style):

Khoerunisa, I. W. & Imperiani, E. D. A. (2024). Semiotic analysis of the teenage love triangle trilogy as portrayed in the Taylor Swift *Folklore* album: *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August*. *Passage*, 12(1), 34-45.

INTRODUCTION

A love triangle is a romantic or dramatic situation involving a central character and two other characters. According to Horney (1951), love triangles result from insecurity, internal conflict, and various competing emotional needs in individual relationships. Love triangles typically involve intense emotions, including love, guilt, and heartbreak. It is very complex and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Those caught in the love triangle may struggle with emotional turmoil, stress, and anxiety due to their conflicting feelings for two different people. They can lead to broken friendships, damaged trust, and even the end of a relationship altogether. Horney (2013), a psychoanalyst, focused on the idea that a "love triangle" is a psychological concept representing three basic neurotic trends in relationships. They are moving toward

people, moving against people, and moving away from people.

This case is prevalent since many people, especially teenagers, have been in that phase. Teenagers' heightened sensitivity to what others may be thinking of them and lack of an experienced perspective might make love for them feel more passionate (Seaton, 2019). Hence during teenage years, when everything feels bigger and it's all happening for the first time, the ups and downs in love can be even more extreme. The teenage love triangle is commonly found in music, among others, through song lyrics and themes exploring teenage relationships' complexities. Music is a fundamental form of human expression used for various purposes, including entertainment, storytelling, conveying emotions, and cultural preservation. Nattiez (1990), states that music is a total social fact. This means that

song lyrics may contain messages drawn from real-life concerns and expressed as literal art. In a song lyric, songwriters talk to the listeners with various messages they want to convey. Songwriters draw inspiration from their or other experiences, emotions, and the world around them to create unique and relatable songs. From their work, songwriters indirectly share stories to connect with the audience deeply and emotionally.

Many famous songwriters usually create a musical catalog based on their own or other life experiences and make it into a narrative story. One of them is a gorgeous and talented American singer-songwriter Taylor Allison Swift known as Taylor Swift. She has received many prestigious awards, such as the Grammy Award, American Music Awards, and Billboard Music Awards. Her music has evolved over the years, transitioning from country to pop. On July 24th, 2020, Taylor Swift released the eight-studio album *Folklore*. The indie folky-sounding album *Folklore* is known for its narrative storytelling and character-driven songs. Narrative or personal stories can shape understanding of social issues, identity, and power dynamics. Individuals and groups can exert a form of "narrative power" by sharing their stories and experiences. (Plummer, 2019). The track of the *Folklore* album explores themes of nostalgia, lost love, introspection, one-sided love, and a love triangle.

The most well-known track list from the Taylor Swift *Folklore* album includes *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August*. These three songs are a trilogy telling the teenagers' experience of a romantic relationship. Uniquely, in a YouTube Q&A interview announcing the album's release, Swift explained that the selected tracks examine a love triangle from the views of all three people at different times in their lives. Swift also explains in *Folklore: The Long Pond Studio Sessions* Podcast that *Cardigan*'s song is *Betty*'s perspective from 20 to 30 years later looking back at her 17 when she found her boyfriend seeing another girl. The song *Betty* comes from a teenage boy's point of view, James (the name is mentioned in the song) to clarify his mistakes in the past. And finally, the song that flips the love triangle on the third and final side is *August*. This song represents the perspective

of a girl who is considered the third person in this trilogy. The unnamed girl loved James, and she thought he was hers, turns out she realized that James was in love with another girl and only considered her as a fleeting crush. This third girl is the most important role in the love triangle narrative, it will build tensions and create a complicated atmosphere for the whole story.

The meaning of the teenage love triangle above can be analyzed through the study of signs called semiotics. Semiotics can help the interpretation of both verbal and nonverbal signs, for instance in understanding the meaning of song lyrics. This research employed Roland Barthes' stage of significance system, namely denotation, connotations, and myths to analyze the data. In Barthes' semiology, denotation is the initial level of signification (meaning) that refers to the literal, primary meaning of a sign, word, or image. It's the basic, objective meaning level typically defined in a dictionary. Connotations, in contrast, represent the secondary, cultural, or symbolic meanings associated with a sign, word, or image. These connotations can be subjective and may vary depending on the cultural context and the individual's interpretation. In contrast, myth is the connotative meaning attached to certain signs or cultural phenomena in society. These myths often serve to reinforce dominant ideologies and values. According to Barthes (2013), semiology aims to delve into the intricacies of signs and symbols, uncover hidden meanings, decode cultural myths, and critique representation in various cultural contexts.

Research on semiotic analysis by Roland Barthes in song lyrics has been conducted by Amara & Kusuma (2021). The research is about examining mental disorder issues from the BTS *Magic Shop* lyrics. The results indicate that the lyrics of this song signified and signified regarding mental health. The second reviewed study is written by Perangin-Angin, et al. (2023) entitled *Semiotic Analysis of the Saviour in Nadin Amizah's "Bertaut"*. The lyrics of this song denoted and signifier referencing savior, with the term "savior" referring to a rescuer who has the power to deliver us from the suffering that we endure. The study of semiotics does

not only examine lyrics in music but also the data from music videos. For instance, the study about Semiotic Analysis of Toxic Relationships in *Story of Kale: When Someone's in Love* movie by Yulita, Marlina, & Kencanasari (2021). The results showed that there are some signs of toxic relationships portrayed in the movie such as jealousy/possessiveness, social restriction, personal put-downs, verbal aggression, and exit-control tactics. Sagimin & Sari (2020) also analyze The Denotative, Connotative, and Mythical meanings of signs in LAY's and EXO's Selected Music Videos. Based on their analysis, it was found that the properties, gestures, expressions, and activities in both music videos produced the meanings.

Unlike the semiotic study by Roland Barthes mentioned above, this previous research conducted by Max (2022) has examined 3 perspective speakers in Taylor Swift's selected lyrics from a *Folklore* album using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday (2004). The results show that the speaker uses material processes prominently in Betty's song. In *Cardigan*'s lyrics, the speaker uses mental processes dominantly. Meanwhile, in *August*, the speakers equally discuss material and relational processes.

The songs *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August* by Taylor Swift became public discussion since these songs are considered to have a narrative story about a love triangle. Thus, as narrative storytelling, it means that these song lyrics are worth studying as a literary work. In contrast to previous research which examined three speakers' perspectives on experience in these three songs using SFL theory, this research was conducted with the same data to prove the trilogy about the love triangle in terms of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings developed by Barthes (2013) and psychological concept by Horney (2013) so that it can explain the meanings of love triangle based on three perspectives to the listener. This study can contribute to our understanding of how semiotics can be applied to song lyrics, helping us decipher the sign and communicative aspects of music and lyrics.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative method with an interpretive approach, in which the main focus was to find out the description of connotative, denotative, and mythical meanings of the teenage love triangle contained in the song lyrics. This approach is highly interpretive because it does not start with preconceived theories or hypotheses but allows the theory to emerge from the data itself (Collins & Stockton 2018). Interpretive research, according to Sugiyono (2010), is a qualitative research approach that focuses on comprehending and interpreting the meanings, experiences, and views of individuals or groups. It emphasizes reality's subjective character and seeks to identify the underlying meanings, values, and beliefs that drive people's actions and behaviors. In this study, researchers seek to understand and interpret the phenomenon by examining the data's patterns, relationships, and meaning. Thus, this research design is suitable for this study.

Data Source and Research Context

The data of this study were taken from three of Taylor Swift's song lyrics entitled *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August* identified based on the concept of semiotics by Barthes's (2013) theory. The researcher collected audio and lyrics data on Spotify and took some purposive samples of words, phrases, and sentences that contain connotative, denotative, and mythical meanings in the song lyrics.

Data Collection

In this study, the data were acquired by using both primary and secondary sources. The primary data began with gathering the complete and accurate lyrics of the songs *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August* by Taylor Swift that were taken from Spotify. Secondary data in this study were from research-related materials such as journals, books, websites, podcasts, and so on, which are used to collect information about the song, its artist, genre, and any relevant historical or cultural background. It aims to help comprehend the teenage love triangle issue depicted in song lyrics.

Data Analysis

The collected data were then analyzed using specific criteria by considering certain verses that contain particular meanings about the teenage love triangle. The semiotics technique of Barthes (2013) was utilized to determine the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myths presented in this study. Also, psychological concepts from Horney (2013) were used to conclude the psychological teenage characters in each song. Furthermore, conclusions were drawn regarding the interpretation of messages comprising the teenage love triangle in the songs investigated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined three Taylor Swift songs entitled Betty, Cardigan, and August. In this study, each sign related to the Teenage Love Triangle trilogy was analyzed by identifying the denotation, connotation, and mythical meaning according to Barthes's (2013) theory that contained in several parts of lyrics. A more detailed analysis was carried out to describe and interpret the trilogy and psychological analysis by Horney (2013) from different points of view of the songs.

1. Betty

Betty by Taylor Swift is a song from her 2020 album *Folklore*. It is a folk-pop track that tells a story from the perspective of a teenage boy, James, who is apologizing to a girl named Betty for his mistakes. The song explores themes of youthful mistakes, remorse, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Verse 1

*Betty, I won't make assumptions
About why you switched your homeroom
but
I think it's 'cause of me
Betty, one time I was riding on my
skateboard
When I passed your house
It's like I couldn't breathe*

Denotation: The denotation in verse 1 here refers to the literal or surface-level meaning of the lyrics. In the second line, James, the speaker, is addressing Betty and

acknowledging that he does not want to make assumptions about why she changed her homeroom. He then recalls a specific incident where he rode his skateboard passing Betty's house and felt a strong emotional reaction.

Connotation: These whole lines' connotations involve the emotional and symbolic meanings associated with the words and themes. James' reluctance to make assumptions indicates his desire to be honest and straightforward with Betty. The act of riding his skateboard past her house conveys a sense of longing, nostalgia, and the impact she has on him. The mention of feeling like he "*couldn't breathe*" suggests that Betty holds a special place in his heart, and his emotions are deeply connected to her.

Myth: In these verse 1 lyrics, a personal and relatable narrative is being created, akin to a myth. The story touches upon the universal themes of young love, regret, and the complexity of teenage relationships. It's a common experience for people to wonder and feel a strong emotional connection to someone they care about during their youth. The myth here is the portrayal of a teenager's inner turmoil and longing, which resonates with listeners who have experienced similar emotions.

Denotation: The denotation here refers to the literal meaning of the pre-chorus. James mentions that Betty heard rumors from Inez, expresses skepticism about Inez's credibility, and admits to having done something regrettable to Betty.

Connotation: The connotation meaning contained in these lyrics is the mention of rumors that James had found another girl and disbelief suggesting a strained relationship and a lack of trust. The phrase "*the worst thing that I ever did*" has a strong emotional meaning, implying that James sincerely regrets his actions and the impact they had on Betty.

Myth: The story revolves around rumors, betrayal, and remorse, which are prevalent elements in human experiences and relationships. The myth here is the portrayal of a troubled relationship, the consequences of one's deeds, and the complexities of

forgiveness and reconciliation. Listeners who have gone through comparable struggles in their own lives can relate to these issues.

Chorus

*But if I just showed up at your party
Would you have me?
Would you want me?
Or lead me to the garden?
Would you tell me to go fuck myself?
In the garden would you trust me
If I told you, it was just a summer thing?
I'm only 17, I don't know anything
But I know I miss you*

Denotation: The denotative meaning of the lyrics is relatively straightforward. James is questioned whether he would be welcome at a party, would be accepted, wanted, or if he might be directed to a specific place, the garden. The mention of age "I'm only 17" adds a literal dimension, highlighting James's youth at that time.

Connotation: In these lyrics, there are emotional elements tied to feelings of uncertainty, longing, and perhaps a sense of youth and innocence. The mention of the "garden" could carry connotations of a private or intimate space, adding a layer of complexity to the lyrics. The phrase "just a summer thing" conveys a sense of temporality, suggesting to Betty that the relationship between James and the third girl will not be long-lasting.

Myth: The setting in a garden, the reference to summer, and the speaker's age contribute to a story of youthful romance and exploration. The myth is the creation of a tale that captures the essence of a fleeting summer romance and the uncertainty that comes with being young and inexperienced.

Bridge

*I was walking home on broken cobblestones
Just thinking of you when she pulled up like
A figment of my worst intentions
She said "James, get in, let's drive"
Those days turned into nights
Slept next to her, but
I dreamt of you all summer long*

Denotation: James describes thinking of someone while strolling home on broken cobblestones and running into an unexpected visitor. This person, referred to as "she" who is considered as the third person in James and Betty's relationship. She invites James to get in the car and drive. James also stated even though he is with this third girl, James is still thinking about Betty during summer.

Connotation: Phrases like "broken cobblestones" might carry connotations of hardship or a challenging path. The description of the person as a "figment of my worst intentions" suggests a connection fraught with complications or negativity which in this context is the third person. The act of dreaming about someone else while physically present with another person introduces emotional tension, highlighting a sense of longing or unfulfillment.

Myth: The myth that is produced is that of juxtaposition — being physically present with one person while emotionally connected to another. This narrative may resonate with listeners who have experienced the struggle with contradictory feelings and desires.

Verse 3

*Betty, I'm here on your doorstep
And I planned it out for weeks now
But it's finally sinkin' in
Betty, right now is the last time
I can dream about what happens when
You see my face again*

Denotation: James says he's been waiting weeks for this time to arrive at Betty's door. He admits that the realization that this may be the only opportunity he has to envision what will transpire when Betty sees his face again is beginning to set in.

Connotation: The mention of being on Betty's doorstep carries connotations of vulnerability, openness, and a desire for reconciliation. The phrase "planned it out for weeks" suggests careful consideration and intention to see Betty, because James feels guilty about what he has done to her.

Myth: The myth's meaning here relates to making plans for a visit; the feelings, together with introspection and hesitation, are common when we commit a mistake and wish

to meet with the other person to express our regret.

Outro

*Standing in your cardigan
Kissin' in my car again
Stopped at a streetlight
You know I miss you*

Denotation: The lyrics describe a scene where they are standing in a cardigan, kissing in a car, and stopping at a streetlight. The straightforward description captures a moment of physical closeness and affection.

Connotation: The mention of standing in a cardigan might carry connotations of comfort, intimacy, or familiarity. Kissing in the car suggests a private and romantic setting while stopping at a streetlight introduces a pause or a moment of reflection. The phrase "*You know I miss you*" reveals James's desire or longing for the person being addressed, Betty, adding an emotional depth.

Myth: The myth here is the portrayal of a tender and possibly nostalgic moment that captures the essence of the relationship. Listeners may project their own experiences onto this narrative, finding resonance in the simplicity and warmth of the depicted scene. On the whole, as the denotation, connotation, and myth are interpreted in the song lyrics of *Betty*, James is the central character in a complex love triangle. In this song, James represents a combination of sorrow, regrets, apology, and longing for Betty, whom he was misled by his relationship with another girl. In Horney's (1951) psychological framework, individuals can adopt coping strategies known as moving toward people, moving against people, or moving away from people. Applying this to the song *Betty* by Taylor Swift, one could analyze James' behavior to see if he tends to seek approval and connection by (moving toward people), confronting and asserting himself (moving against people), or withdrawing and avoiding conflict (moving away from people).

James' actions and behaviors in the song, such as attempts to apologize and reconcile with Betty could be interpreted as a desire for connection and approval. His willingness to confront the situation by confessing and seeking forgiveness aligns with Horney's idea

of addressing conflicts directly, indicating elements of a "moving against people" strategy. This aligns with the findings from Olivia and Kinasih (2023) which highlighted that the main character Tonya's neurotic trend is moving against people. Both characters struggle with fully accepting fault or taking complete responsibility for their actions. Tonya, despite her circumstances, often deflects blame or struggles to confront her role in certain situations. James, too, shows elements of this struggle; while he apologizes, there's a hint of reluctance in fully owning up to his mistakes, representing moving against taking complete responsibility

2. Cardigan

The song *Cardigan* is narrated from the perspective of Betty, a female character reflecting on a past romantic relationship with her lover. Taylor Swift's lyrics in *Cardigan* embody a sense of nostalgia and longing for a lost love. The song vividly depicts a prior love tale and the emotions connected with revisiting those memories.

Verse 1

*Vintage tee, brand new phone
High heels on cobblestones
When you are young, they assume you know
nothing
Sequin smile, black lipstick
Sensual politics
When you are young, they assume you know
nothing*

Denotation: The song's lyrics in verse 1 depict a juxtaposition of items, such as a new phone next to an old tee, high heels on cobblestones, references to sensual politics, a sequin smile, black lipstick, and remarks about assumptions made about youth "*When you are young, they assume you know nothing*".

Connotation: The combination of a vintage tee and a new phone might symbolize blending old and new aspects of oneself or a mix of nostalgia and modernity. High heels on cobblestones might connote grace or discomfort. The repeated phrase "*When you are young, they assume you know nothing*"

pointed to James, who was still 17 years old at the time, and people believe that level of maturity is normal to commit mistakes.

Myth: The mythical meaning in these lyrics arises from the juxtaposition of different elements, highlighting the complexities and misunderstandings inherent in youthful relationships. It depicts adolescent life in which they are underestimated by society based on their appearance and political opinions, echoing Wordsworth's concept of romanticism.

Refrain

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

Denotation: The speaker here, Betty, compares their feelings of being discarded, likening themselves to an old cardigan left under someone's bed. However, another person picks up the cardigan and declares it as their favorite, symbolically wearing it.

Connotation: Feeling like an "old cardigan under someone's bed" suggests a sense of neglect or being disregarded by possibly someone that Betty cared for deeply. In this case, it is James. The line "You put me on and said I was your favorite" represents James' preference for Betty over Augustine, which is an answer the third person, Augustine, did not receive in the song "August." It shows that James eventually realizes that he loves Betty more.

Myth: In these lyrics, the myth occurs when another person, possibly involved in a love triangle, rescues and treasures the discarded item, suggesting a shift in affections or feelings. This story could symbolize the complexities of changing feelings within a love triangle, as well as the evolving dynamics among the individuals involved.

Verse 2

*A friend to all is a friend to none
Chase two girls, lose the one*

Denotation: "A friend to all is a friend to none" suggests that someone who tries to befriend everyone might not have deep or meaningful connections with anyone. "Chase two girls, lose the one" implying that

attempting to pursue or sustain connections with numerous people may end in the loss of an important relationship with one of them.

Connotation: The line "Chase two girls, lose the one" carries the connotation that James tries to attempt to have multiple romantic interests with Betty and the other girl. It resulted in the loss of a chance or connection with one of them due to broken attention or effort.

Myth: The first line reveals a myth about the limitations of being overly accommodating or attempting to please everyone, which might lead to shallow or insignificant connections. The effects of dividing love interest across multiple people, mean that striving to juggle relationships could lead to losing a significant connection.

Chorus 2

*But I knew you
Playing hide-and-peek and
Giving me your weekends, I
I knew you
Your heartbeat on the High Line
Once in twenty lifetimes, I*

Denotation: The whole lines in chorus 2 convey the speaker's and the song's subject's familiarity and intimacy. They bring up memories of playing hide-and-peek and spending weekends together.

Connotation: The phrase "Playing hide-and-peek" can imply a sense of secrecy or evasion. It suggests that the person engaging in the cheating behavior is trying to conceal their actions, similar to how one hides while playing the game of hide-and-peek. Essentially, Betty recognizes that James cheated on her and says that James would hang out with her on weekends but hide from her during the week since he was hiding out with the other girl.

Myth: The myth emerging from these lyrics revolves around the complexities of a love triangle. In this context, it could signify the struggle to balance time and attention between multiple partners, with one person choosing to dedicate significant time to the speaker.

Bridge

To kiss in cars and downtown bars

*Was all we needed
You drew stars around my scars
But now I'm bleedin'*

Denotation: The denotation meaning of these lines shows a transition from gaining comfort or healing to once again feeling emotional misery or pain.

Connotation: "You drew stars around my scars" connotes James who provided solace or support during Betty's difficult times. James was very special to her. However, the subsequent phrase "But now I'm bleeding" suggests that this support in the end causes pain instead. James's kindness to Betty resulted in a betrayal; he was having an affair with another girl.

Myth: In these lyrics, a narrative or myth emerges concerning the evolution of a relationship within a love triangle. The drawing of stars around scars may represent a temporary sense of comfort or healing; yet, sad stories usually come to an end when one of the characters is betrayed.

*Chorus 3
I knew you
Tried to change the ending
Peter losing Wendy, I
I knew you
Leavin' like a father
Running like water, I*

Denotation: These lines allude to an attempt to change the predicted ending, likening it to the moment in Peter Pan where Wendy leaves, and may even represent a wish to stop or rewrite the planned outcome.

Connotation: The connotation of these lines expresses that cheating was James' fault. Both of them know that. Looking back, Betty sees James trying to turn it around. Betty felt James' regret and sincerity in apologizing for what he did to her. Peter losing Wendy- the best thing in his life, his youth and love. Betty forgives him, even though she got hurt.

Myth: The reference to "Peter losing Wendy" from the story of Peter Pan introduces a mythical element, symbolizing a desire to rewrite or prevent an anticipated conclusion in a relationship, similar to Peter's wish to avoid Wendy's departure.

Verse 3

*I knew you'd miss me once the thrill expired
And you'd be standin' in my front porch light
And I knew you'd come back to me*

Denotation: The denotation in these lyrics expresses a conviction or expectation that the addressed person would begin to feel longing or desire for the speaker to come back to her. Depicted through the imagery of them standing in the speaker's front porch light

Connotation: These lyrics carry connotations of anticipation or expectation that result in a sense of longing or nostalgia for the speaker. James eventually wants to come back to Betty, after he hurt her. This possibly suggests a cyclic pattern in their relationship or interactions.

Myth: These lines may correspond to a recurring theme in myths or stories in which a character expects the return of another after a separation or departure. This could be due to the motif of returning to the recurrent nature of relationships, which is frequently described in mythology and literature.

Overall, *Cardigan's* song presents Betty as an important character in this trilogy, embodying teenage relationships' emotional intricacies and obstacles, such as mistakes, forgiveness, and the desire for reconciliation. The denotation, connotation, and myth meanings in the song deliver a moving story about the complexities of adolescent love and the consequences of deeds inside a love triangle. In this song, Betty's characterization might be analyzed through Karen Horney's (1951) psychological concepts. Betty's portrayal as a character who is remembered fondly by James in the song could align with the concept of "moving toward people," indicating a desire for connection and acceptance. This contrasts with the results of a study conducted by Olivia and Kinasih (2023), in which they examined the neurotic tendency in Tonya, the character from the *I, Tonya* movie. They found Tonya's character exhibits a more pronounced of moving against people's tendencies. She often responds to adversity with a mix of defiance, aggression, and withdrawal due to the overwhelming challenges she faces. Betty, on the other hand, while displaying moments of

withdrawal and subtle defiance, predominantly demonstrates a desire for reconciliation and resolution in her relationship with James.

3. August

The song *August* by Taylor Swift, from her album "Folklore", narrates a summer romance from the perspective of a girl involved in a fleeting love affair. The song delves into the emotions and memories associated with a passionate but temporary relationship that took place in August.

Verse 1

*Salt air, and the rust on your door
I never needed anything more
Whispers of "Are you sure?"
"Never have I ever before"*

Denotation: These lyrics describe sensory impressions like salt in the air, which suggests a coastal or seaside location in the summer, and the appearance of rust on a door, which could indicate weathered or old surroundings. "Whispers of 'Are you sure?'" It implies a conversation about uncertainty. Combined with a statement reflecting an experience of something new ("Never have I ever before").

Connotation: The line "Salt air, and the rust on your door, I never needed anything more" could indicate a feeling of nostalgia, familiarity, or a powerful sensory memory related to an emotional place or environment to the speaker, Augustine. "Whispers of 'Are you sure?' 'Never have I ever before'" is the situation where Augustine starts to try something new with someone she loves, James. James' whisper made her melt, and she was willing to try anything, even if it was risky and she had never done it before since Augustine was blinded by James' love at the time.

Myth: These lyrics may conjure up mythic or metaphorical images, representing an important or transforming moment in the speaker's emotional journey. People who fall in love are willing to take any risk as long as they can do it with their lover. It symbolizes a critical discovery or turning point in a complex relational dynamic, similar to themes seen in mythological narratives.

Chorus

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

Denotation: The denotation here refers to the speaker's ability to recall or visualize a past moment. The mention of "August slipped away" indicates the passing of August, suggesting it transitioned swiftly into a fleeting memory or experience.

Connotation: This line connotes a sense of nostalgia or longing for a past James and Augustine relationship from Augustine's point of view. The phrase "August slipped away into a moment in time" could be evidence that Augustine and James' affair was brief and fraught with uncertainty for her. However, Augustine then discovered that their relationship was not genuine. The line "Cause you were never mine" implies that James was never truly into her all along. She recalls thinking it was real when obviously he loves Betty.

Myth: These lyrics may possess a mythic or allegorical aspect, portraying the fleeting nature of time and relationships. The visual of August fading and being compared to a bottle of wine represents the fleeting nature of feelings that we constantly sense throughout the day.

Verse 2

*Your back beneath the sun
Wishin' I could write my name on it
Will you call when you're back at school?
I remember thinkin' I had you*

Denotation: The literal meaning here refers to someone's back being exposed to sunshine, and the speaker conveys a wish to leave a personal mark or imprint on the person, presumably representing a desire for a long-term relationship.

Connotation: Augustine thought that James did not love her entirely; she could only sense a portion of his love. "Wishin' I could write my name on it" implies that Augustine wishes her

name would remain in James' mind so that she would be the only one.

Myth: These lyrics express themes of Longing, yearning for connection, hope, and reflection on past assumptions within a relationship or interpersonal dynamic. These themes are frequently seen in stories and narratives showing unrealized connections or missed opportunities in relationships.

Bridge

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

Denotation: The denotational meaning of these lyrics implies a time in the past when there was a belief or an effort from the speaker who was deeply in love. The speaker also expresses their love story during the summer and her willingness to change or forego existing plans in anticipation of a possible call for a secret meeting.

Connotation: The lines bring nostalgia for a time when essential desires were enough to keep hope and excitement alive. The statement "*Meet me behind the mall*" implies that James and Augustine's relationship was not overtly expressed. They had a backstreet relationship due to James having affairs with Betty and Augustine. The admission that James "*wasn't mine to lose*" may resonate with Augustine's misconceptions about accepting and letting go of what cannot be possessed or controlled.

Myth: These lyrics could depict the paradigm of unrequited love or the pursuit of an unrealized backstreet relationship. The concept of "*summer love*" might be viewed as a myth, reflecting an idealized type of romance that frequently fails to reflect the intricacies of real relationships.

In this song, *August* is retelling the story of a young girl named Augustine (as Swift described her in *Folklore: The Long Pond Session*) appears as the third person due to

Betty and James's relationship. The lyrics reflect Augustine's emotional journey through a summer fling filled with tremendous emotions that are ruined by her crush. Augustine loved James, and she thought he was hers, turns out she realized that James was in love with another girl and only considered her as a fleeting crush.

Within Horney's (2013) concepts, Augustine's actions may reflect a "moving toward people" disposition, seeking connection and satisfaction within the brief romance. Horney's concept of seeking acceptance and emotional attachments is consistent with the need for closeness and intimacy during this affair. Augmenting this analysis with prior studies on temporary or casual relationships might indicate that Augustine's behaviors reflect characteristics often associated with short-term connections: seeking pleasure, experiencing the moment, and possibly needing commitment or deeper emotional involvement. This is similar to Joan's characterization in the study entitled *Joan's Neurotic Trends and Idealized Image in Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle* by Hanifah & Rokhman (2020). Their study found that "moving toward people" or the compliant type is believed to be Joan's predominant neurotic trend. In the story, Joan loves Arthur and believes that he is the one to whom she belongs. Everything she does is directed to make her feel loved, accepted, wanted, desired, needed, and approved by Arthur. It is exactly like what occurred to Augustine to capture James' love.

Based upon the results of the data analysis above, the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth found in Taylor Swift's songs *Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August* related to the Teenage Love Triangle using Roland Barthes' (2013) concept. These three songs intertwine to narrate a complex story from multiple viewpoints within a teenage love triangle. Each song adds layers to the narrative, exploring themes of love, heartbreak, nostalgia, and the complexities of relationships from different perspectives. The trilogy showcases Taylor Swift's storytelling ability and her knack for crafting interconnected narratives through her music. The ideology present is the exploration of the nuances and imperfections within

relationships. Rather than painting a simplistic picture of love, Swift portrays its messiness, showcasing the mistakes, regrets, and attempts at reconciliation within the love triangle. This echoes the idea that relationships are complex and often fraught with misunderstandings and miscommunications. Horney's (2013) psychological analysis also serves to illustrate how they behave in dealing with the intricate scenario of this teenage love triangle.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, a trio of tracks from Taylor Swift's "Folklore" album—*Betty*, *Cardigan*, and *August*—are collectively called the "Teenage Love Triangle." This collection of interconnected tracks tells a story from different perspectives, creating an emotional narrative centered on a complex love triangle involving three characters: James, Betty, and an unnamed girl (commonly assumed to be named Augustine).

Overall, Betty's song uses denotation to tell a specific story of apology and reconciliation, while its connotations dive deeper into the emotional landscape of regret and the desire for forgiveness. The song's overarching narrative contributes to the myth's meaning by providing insight into the characters and their relationships, portraying the intricacies of young love and the complexities of human emotions. Through denotation, connotation, and myth, *Cardigan* delivers a tale that goes beyond the tangible object, utilizing it as a metaphor to portray the depth of emotions involved with lost love and the yearning for a connection that persists in the narrators. Besides the literal meaning, *August* carries emotional connotations of nostalgia, longing, and the transient nature of seasonal love between James and Augustine. The song also adds layers to the album's overall narrative, creating a myth around the fleeting nature of summer romance and the emotions attached to such evanescent relationships.

Each character in these songs portrays different facets of human behavior and relationship coping mechanisms, showcasing various neurotic tendencies. Betty and Augustine share the same

personality trait, "Moving Toward People." Meanwhile, James employs a "Moving Against People" approach. These tendencies illustrate how individuals navigate emotions, intimacy, and conflicts in their interpersonal connections.

REFERENCES

- Amara, V. R., & Kusuma, R. S. (2022). Semiotic analysis of Mental Disorders in BTS Magic Shop Lyrics. *Advances in Social Science, Education, and Humanities Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220501.021>
- Barthes, R. (1967). *Elements of semiology*. Cape.
- Barthes, R. (2013). *Mythologies: The complete edition, in a new translation*. Macmillan.
- Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 160940691879747.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>
- Hanifah, L., & Wedawati, M. T. (2020). Kepribadian Neurotika Pada Tokoh Utama Chen Nian dalam Film *Better Days* 《少年的你》. *Journal UNESA (Universitas Negeri Surabaya)*.
<https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/manadarin/article/view/47156>
- Hanifah, U., & Rokhman, M. A. (2021). Joan's Neurotic Trends and Idealized Image in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*. *Lexicon: Journal of English Language and Literature*, 7(1).
<https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v7i1.64591>
- Horney, K. (2013). Neurosis and human growth. In *Routledge eBooks*.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315010526>
- Ishak, R., & Irawan, A. M. (2022). Semiotic Analysis of The Denotation and Connotation Meaning of the Beatles' Songs Lyrics. *English Language & Literature Study Program of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang*.
<http://ejournal.unp.ac.id/index.php/jell>

- Jones, N. (2020, August 4). Untangling Taylor Swift's 'Teenage Love Triangle' trilogy. *Vulture*.
<https://www.vulture.com/2020/08/folklore-love-triangle-explained.html>
- Jones, N. (2020, August 4). Untangling Taylor Swift's 'Teenage Love Triangle' trilogy. *Vulture*.
<https://www.vulture.com/2020/08/folklore-love-triangle-explained.html>
- Kolej Yayasan UEM Research Institute. (2023, July 15). Folklore Love Triangle: an analysis of a shattered love story and its depiction of Wordsworth's legacy on romanticism. *Medium*.
<https://medium.com/@kyrinstitute/folklore-love-triangle-an-analysis-of-a-shattered-love-story-and-its-depiction-of-wordsworths-6c1361e08708>
- Max, J. I. S. D. (2022). Three speakers' perspectives on experience in Taylor Swift's selected lyrics from Folklore album. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics, and Culture*, 11(1), 11–18.
<https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v11i1.50485>
- Mib. (2022, April 1). *To live for the hope of it all: the folklore love triangle – The Taylor Swift Passion Blog*.
[https://doi.org/10.18860/prdg.v6i1.19627](https://sites.psu.edu/thoughtsonswift/2022/04/01/95/Nattiez, J.-J. (1990). Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.</p><p>Olivia, O., & Kinasih, P. R. (2023). NEUROTIC TRENDS OF TONYA HARDING IN i, TONYA MOVIE. <i>Paradigm</i>, 6(1), 21–38.
<a href=)
- Perangin-Angin, A. B., Andayani, W., Jalil, Z. A., & Nurlela, N. (2023). Semiotic analysis of the savior in Nadin Amizah's "Bertaut." In *Advances in social science, education, and humanities research* (pp. 52–58). https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-002-2_
- Plummer, K. (2019). *Narrative power: The Struggle for Human Value*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sagimin, E. M., & Sari, R. P. (2020). A Semiotic Analysis on LAY's and EXO's Selected Music Videos. *Twelfth Conference on Applied Linguistics (CONAPLIN 2019)*.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200406.010>
- Seaton, J., & Seaton, J. (2021). The Science Behind Teenage Relationships: A Teen's First Love. *Your Teen Magazine*.
<https://yourteenmag.com/social-life/tips-teen-dating/teenage-relationship-science>
- Sugiono. (2010). Pintar Menulis Karya Tulis Ilmiah. Yogyakarta: Andi
- Yulita, O., Marlina, M., & Kencanasari, Y. (2021). A semiotic analysis of toxic relationships as portrayed in *Story of Kale: When Someone's in Love*. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(4), 8737–8747.
<https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i4.2836>