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EXPLORING ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN HARRY STYLES' *FINE LINE* ALBUM: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

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Abstract

An illocutionary act is an act performed in saying something. In other words, an Illocutionary act is an utterance with some function in mind. This study discussed the Illocutionary Act's use to determine the song's lyric meaning. This study aimed to determine the types of illocutionary acts based on song lyrics in the Fine Line album by Harry Styles using Searle's (1969) theory and the functions of illocutionary acts using Leech's (1983) theory. This study uses a qualitative method. The primary data of this research are the lyrics taken from 10 songs in the Fine Line album. In collecting the data, researchers used Sudaryono's theory, namely the documentation method, while descriptive methods were used to analyze the data. The results found 30 data points containing the type of illocutionary act and the function of the illocutionary act. The 30-sentence data are further divided into 4 types of illocutionary acts and 4 functions of illocutionary acts. The findings and results of types of illocutionary acts are 13 assertive, 8 directives, 4 expressive, and 5 declaratives. The findings and results of the functions of illocutionary acts are 6 competitive, 2 convivial, and 14 collaboratives.

Keywords: *Harry Styles' songs, Illocutionary Acts, Pragmatics, Song Lyrics, Speech Acts*

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics examines meaning in relation to speech situations, distinguishing itself from semantics by focusing on context, implicit meaning, and inference (Leech, 1993). It considers an utterance's physical and social setting and shared background knowledge between the speaker and listener to interpret intended meaning. Speech acts, as units of pragmatic analysis, include locution (the act of speaking), illocution (the purpose behind speech, such as asserting or directing), and perlocution (the effect on the listener). Searle (1969) categorizes illocutionary acts into assertive, directive, expressive, and declarative types, which researchers use to analyze layered meanings in song lyrics.

Songs serve as communicative tools, blending lyrics and melody to express ideas, emotions, and artistic intent (Sitorus & Herman, 2019). Lyrics function like structured sentences, conveying the writer's feelings or messages to the audience. Given their potential for multiple interpretations, pragmatics, particularly illocutionary act analysis, helps uncover the underlying intentions in lyrics. This study applies this framework to examine Harry Styles's album, exploring how his lyrics communicate meaning within their contextual and performative dimensions. Song lyrics that contain illocutionary acts show how musicians express their feelings and intentions (Yule, 1996). In Harry Styles' Fine Line, instructions could exhort listeners to act or think, similar to Survivor's inspirational song "Don't lose your grip on the dreams of the past" (Jarasshi & Phennapha, 2020), while aggressive deeds could express personal realities (e.g., confessional lyrics). Expressives that create relationships through shared emotions, such as the sensitive "I'm sorry" in Nurfaizi et al.'s (2022) study, probably dominate emotional tracks. Although uncommon in pop music, declaratives may be used when Styles creates different personas, comparable to status-shifting lines in Balinese lyrics (Candra, 2021).

As demonstrated in previous studies on K-pop narratives (Prameswari & Putri, 2022) and cultural statements (Candra, 2021), Searle's (1969) speech act theory offers a useful framework for analyzing complex meanings in musical texts such as *Fine Line*. Styles' artistry and audience engagement are shaped by various speech acts, which can be classified into declaratives (transformations), directives (calls to action), expressives (emotions), and assertives (statements of fact).

Using Searle's (1969, 1979) framework, previous research has thoroughly examined illocutionary acts in song lyrics, looking at pop (e.g., Bruno Mars's *Doo-Woops & Hooligans*), rock (Bring Me the Horizon's *Ixl*), and even Balinese pandemic-themed songs (Candra, 2021). These pieces use qualitative analysis of lyrics at the word, phrase, and clause levels to identify dominating speech acts, such as representatives (statements, beliefs) and directions (requests, demands). For instance, Setiawan (2022), in his article "Relational Dynamics in Pamungkas's *Flying Solo*: A Speech Act Perspective," examined how interpersonal meanings are constructed in Indonesian pop lyrics. Similarly, Astuti (2019), in "Emotion and Expression in Niall Horan's *Flicker*: A Pragmatic Approach," explored how emotional expression is conveyed through speech acts. These studies, however, give little attention to how artists mix pragmatic methods (such as metaphor and cultural references) to create multiple meanings or audience involvement, instead concentrating primarily on the taxonomic classification of illocutionary types.

Leech (1983) distinguished four categories of illocutionary acts in communication: competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. These acts fulfill different social functions in communication. Convivial acts are characterized by positive social interaction, such as praising or thanking. In contrast, competitive acts prioritize the speaker's objective over social harmony (e.g., demands or begging, as in Astuti's (2018) example "I ask your cookies"). Candra's (2021) analysis of Balinese lyrics illustrates this distinction, as a husband expresses gratitude for his wife's assistance during the difficult period. While conflictive activities purposefully break social ties, as in lyrics concerning society judgment ("Len ipidan liu ngelah pipis"), collaborative acts, such as confessing or reporting (e.g., pandemic reflections in Candra's 2021 research), remain neutral to politeness. These purposes show how lyrics function beyond their literal meaning: while convivial and cooperative acts promote connection or express beliefs, competitive and conflictive acts assert or challenge power dynamics. Similar to the functional spectrum noted in Candra's (2021) and Astuti's (2018) research, Styles probably uses convivial actions for emotional connection (such as thankfulness in "Adore You") and collaborative acts for personal narrative (such as confessional tones in "Falling"). This framework shows how artists use smart speech acts to balance expressing themselves and getting the audience involved.

This study addresses two main problems: (1) What kinds of illocutionary speech acts are employed in Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album's song lyrics? and (2) What purposes do these illocutionary acts serve? By looking at *Fine Line*, the study closes essential gaps in the body of knowledge. Previous studies do not examine how global pop stars like Styles use illocutionary acts to express emotions and explore themes of identity, intimacy, and social commentary, often by intentionally leaving meanings ambiguous or blending genres in their songs. Interestingly, no research has yet broken down Styles's practical art, especially how he combined personal stories with universal appeal in this record.

By employing Searle's theory, the study goes beyond traditional taxonomic methods to show how *Fine Line*'s lyrics function in musical and cultural contexts. This study examines functions - how illocutionary acts support Styles's storytelling (e.g., instructions as invites to shared vulnerability), in contrast to earlier works that separate speech acts from performer-audience dynamics. By prioritizing functional intentionality over simple categorization, the findings seek to reinterpret pragmatic analysis of pop music and provide a framework for further study of modern lyricism.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014), specifically using a library-based textual analysis to examine the types and functions of illocutionary acts in Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album lyrics. This method involves analyzing textual (lyrical) data without fieldwork, which allows for a focused interpretation of how language is used in artistic and social contexts.

The primary data consists of lyrics from all ten songs on the *Fine Line* album: "Golden", "Watermelon Sugar", "Adore You", "Lights Up", "Cherry", "Falling", "She", "Canyon Moon", "Treat People with Kindness", and "Fine Line". These songs were selected because they form a complete body of work that explores recurring themes such as emotion, identity, and personal experience, which are central to the artist's message.

Data was collected using the documentation method (Sudaryono, 2016), which involved gathering lyrics from verified sources, listening to the songs to confirm lyrical accuracy, and transcribing them for analysis. This method was appropriate because the study focused on existing materials, such as lyrics and audio recordings, rather than collecting new data through interviews or surveys. It also ensured that the analysis remained faithful to the original artistic content. For data analysis, Searle's (1969) speech act theory was applied to classify language functions in the lyrics, including conveying information, expressing emotions, or making requests. This framework is suitable for the study because it provides a clear and systematic way to understand how language performs various functions in musical texts. In addition, Leech's (1983) pragmatic framework explored how these speech acts support social interaction and connect the lyrics with listeners meaningfully.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers identified 30 utterances of song lyrics in the *Fine Line* album, which contain four types of illocutionary acts using Searle's (1969) theory: 13 assertive (43,3%), 8 directives (26,6%), 4 expressive (13,3%), and 5 declaratives (16,6%). The researchers also found 30 utterances of song lyrics, which contain four functions of illocutionary acts with Leech's (1983) theory: 6 competitive (20%), 2 convivial (6,6%), 14 collaboratives (46,6%), and 8 conflictive (26,6%).

Types of Illocutionary Acts

This section presents the results of the analysis of illocutionary speech acts in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. In this study, the lyrics were examined by identifying four types of speech acts: assertive, directive, expressive, and declarative. These reflect how language is used to share facts, give instructions, express emotions, or make impactful statements. These categories, adapted from Searle's (1969) framework, helped analyze how Styles's lyrics communicate different messages to the listener. A total of 30 utterances were found and classified under these four types. Several selected examples are discussed in this section to show the range of communicative purposes within the lyrics, which are further explained in the following discussion.

Assertive

This study found 13 assertive utterances in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Searle (1969), assertive speech acts are used when a speaker expresses thoughts, beliefs, or facts, showing a commitment to the truth of what is said. These acts allow speakers to convey what they believe to be true and are often used to share observations, emotions, or experiences (Yule, 1996). In this album, assertive acts help express personal reflections and emotional moments related to love, vulnerability, and connection. To provide a more precise understanding, this section focuses on two examples of assertive acts that show how Styles uses language to express meaning and connect with listeners.

The first example is "And I know that you're scared because hearts get broken". This lyric functions as an informative statement, where the speaker shares an understanding of someone's fear. The phrase "I know" shows certainty and empathy, suggesting that the speaker recognizes the emotional pain caused by heartbreak. According to Islami (2018), informing is a type of assertive act where a speaker gives knowledge or facts to the listener. In this lyric, Styles communicates a shared emotional experience, allowing listeners to relate to the fear of being hurt. From a pragmatic viewpoint, this assertive act provides information and builds emotional closeness between the artist and the audience.

The second example is "And you missed me too", a statement of belief about the listener's feelings. In this line, the speaker expresses confidence that the other person also feels the same longing. Searle (1969) notes that stating is an assertive function where the speaker declares something they believe to be true. The lyric does not seek confirmation but presents a personal truth, reinforcing a sense of mutual understanding and emotional connection. This shows how assertive acts can reflect inner emotions while engaging the listener on a personal level.

These assertive utterances are essential in creating the album's honest and personal tone. They help tell stories about emotional experiences and allow listeners to feel connected to the artist's journey. Styles expresses thoughts and feelings clearly and meaningfully through assertive acts, making the lyrics feel real and relatable. Although more assertive examples were identified in the data, these two samples illustrate how assertive speech acts shape the themes of emotion and connection in *Fine Line*. They also show how language can be used in music to convey ideas and build a strong emotional link with listeners. This highlights the value of speech act analysis in understanding the deeper communicative role of lyrics in popular music.

Directive

This study identified eight directive utterances in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. In directive speech acts, the speaker uses language to get the listener to do something (Searle, 1969; Yule, 2006). These acts include giving advice, requesting, issuing commands, or offering suggestions. In song lyrics, directive acts often aim to influence the audience's emotions or thoughts, rather than to command action directly. To focus the analysis, this section presents two examples of directive acts that show how Styles uses language to encourage reflection and emotional connection, rather than to instruct literally.

The first example is "And if our friends all pass away (ah-ah). It's okay". This lyric functions as a form of advice. The phrase "It's okay" offers comfort in the face of loss, encouraging acceptance rather than distress. While not a direct command, it advises the listener to remain calm and emotionally stable. According to Searle (1969), advising is a weak directive, where the speaker suggests a future action believed to benefit the listener. In this case, the action is emotional acceptance. The lyric functions indirectly as a directive by influencing the listener's attitude, contributing to the album's theme of coping with hardship and finding peace.

The second example is "Know who you are!", a more direct command or order. The imperative form, along with the exclamation mark, shows urgency and emphasis. Here, the speaker urges the listener to develop self-awareness and confidence, which are recurring themes in Styles's music. Searle (1969) explains that ordering is a stronger directive act where the speaker expects the listener to take action. In this lyric, the speaker intends not to enforce action but to inspire personal reflection and empowerment. From a pragmatic viewpoint, the directive creates a moment of motivation and engagement, encouraging listeners to reflect on identity and self-worth.

These examples show that directive illocutionary acts in *Fine Line* are not merely about giving instructions. Instead, they encourage emotional responses, offer support, and inspire the audience. By blending advice and gentle commands, Styles connects with listeners in a personal and motivating way. These directive acts contribute to the interactive and uplifting tone of the album. Although other directive utterances were found in the full dataset, these two examples highlight how Styles uses directives to influence thought and emotion, rather than direct action. This reflects a broader

trend in music where language serves an artistic and communicative purpose, aiming to guide listeners through shared emotional experiences.

Expressive

In the *Fine Line* album, four expressive utterances were identified. Expressive speech acts are used when a speaker reveals their feelings, emotions, or attitudes about a situation or experience (Searle, 1969; Yule, 1996). These acts allow the speaker to express psychological states such as admiration, regret, or affection, which helps create an emotional connection with the listener. To provide a focused analysis, this section highlights two representative examples that show how expressive acts function in the lyrics to convey personal emotion and foster intimacy with the audience.

The first example is "You are sunshine, you are temptress. My hands at risk, I fold". This lyric is a compliment, where the speaker praises someone using metaphorical and emotionally charged language. The terms "sunshine" and "temptress" reflect admiration and attraction, vividly expressing the speaker's emotional state. As Yule (1996) notes, expressive acts often communicate how something affects the speaker emotionally. In this context, the compliment is both a personal expression and a means of connection, inviting listeners to experience the emotion alongside the speaker.

The second example is "What do you mean? I'm sorry by the way", which is an apology. Here, the speaker acknowledges a past action or misunderstanding and expresses regret. Searle (1969) describes apologies as expressive acts that show responsibility for an offense or social breach. Furthermore, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) explain that apologies serve to "set things right" by compensating the listener for harm or offense. People typically apologize to maintain social harmony, especially when their actions, whether intentional or not, cause physical or psychological discomfort to others. In this lyric, the phrase "I'm sorry" communicates a sense of vulnerability and accountability, which adds to the emotional honesty of the song.

These expressive acts contribute to the emotional tone of the album by revealing personal feelings and promoting empathy. Compliments and apologies help the listener feel closer to the artist, as they mirror emotions common in real-life relationships. This use of expressive language enhances the lyrics' intimacy and authenticity. While additional expressive utterances were found, these two examples show how Styles uses expressive acts to communicate emotions and foster audience connection. They highlight how lyrics, through pragmatic choices, serve as artistic expression and meaningful emotional communication within popular music.

Declarative

The analysis identified 5 declarative utterances in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Searle (1969), declarative speech acts are used when a speaker changes the social or interpersonal world simply by stating something. These acts are typically performed by individuals with a certain status or authority in specific contexts (e.g., judges declaring a verdict). In song lyrics, however, declarative acts are often used creatively to construct identity, emotion, or narrative shifts, allowing the artist to assume roles, express personal truths, or redefine relationships. Interestingly, two examples of declarative acts appear in the same lyric but serve different communicative functions. This lyric is therefore analyzed in two parts to highlight the varied ways declarative acts can work within a single utterance.

The first part, "She lives in daydreams with me", functions as an act of declaring, where the speaker imagines or asserts a new emotional reality. By stating that someone "lives in daydreams," the speaker defines a personal world in which the connection exists. Although not an official declaration, this line reflects creative authority, where the speaker reshapes reality through language. According to Searle (1969), declaratives bring about change through speech; in this case, the lyric makes the imagined relationship feel real to both speaker and listener. The second part, "Like he knows

what to do", functions as a disapproval or repudiation. Here, the speaker challenges another person's confidence or role, implying doubt or critique. This declarative disapproval shifts the listener's perception of the character in question, altering the social dynamic expressed in the song. While not a formal declaration, it still functions to redefine social meaning within the personal narrative.

Though from the same lyric, these two declarative utterances illustrate how Styles uses declarative acts to construct emotional truths, reshape perceptions, and define relationships. Even without formal authority, the speaker claims the right to declare emotional realities, turning private thoughts into shared experiences through lyrical expression.

Functions of Illocutionary Acts

Competitive

This study found 6 competitive utterances in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Leech (1983), competitive speech acts are used when the speaker's intention may compete with social politeness norms, such as in requests, commands, or demands. In these cases, the speaker's goal can pressure the listener, often leading the speaker to use polite or softened language to minimize the effect. Tarigan (1990) adds that competitive acts often involve negative politeness, meaning that the speaker tries to influence the listener while avoiding offense or discomfort. In addition, Vanderveken (1990) explains that illocutionary acts differ in their illocutionary force, which refers to the level of intention or pressure the speaker uses to achieve a particular outcome. Competitive acts usually have a strong or moderate force, depending on how directly the speaker seeks to affect the listener's actions or decisions.

One example of a competitive act is in the lyric "Forget what I said. It's not what I meant". This line represents a request, where the speaker asks the listener to disregard a previous statement. The tone is gentle, but the intention is clear. The speaker wants to change how the listener thinks or feels about something previously said. According to Searle (1979), asking is part of the directive speech act category, in which the speaker tries to influence the listener's behavior or response. In this case, the speaker requests an action (to forget) which reflects a directive act with a competitive function. Vanderveken (1990) also notes that asking can involve requesting an action or seeking information, which usually invites a short or thoughtful response from the listener. This lyric, therefore, shows moderate illocutionary force. The speaker politely encourages a shift in the listener's perspective while maintaining emotional balance.

Another example is "Know who you are!", a direct command and a strong example of the competitive function. Using the imperative form and the exclamation mark shows urgency and emphasis. In this lyric, the speaker urges the listener to be more self-aware and confident. Leech (1983) identifies ordering as a typical competitive act because the speaker's goal takes priority over social ease. Vanderveken (1990) describes such acts as having strong illocutionary force, which means they are intended to cause immediate action. Although this command is forceful, its purpose is motivational. It encourages the listener rather than attempting to control them.

These two examples show that competitive illocutionary acts in *Fine Line* are used to express personal emotions and influence the listener's thoughts or actions. Styles's lyrics balance clarity and politeness, showing his intent to connect emotionally with the audience while guiding or encouraging specific responses. Competitive acts in the album reflect the artist's skill in using language to create both emotional impact and meaningful interaction with listeners.

Convivial

This study identified two utterances that reflect the convivial function in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Leech (1983), convivial illocutionary acts aim to promote positive social interaction. These acts include offering, greeting, thanking, or congratulating. Unlike competitive acts, which may create tension or impose on the

listener, convivial acts build social harmony and show goodwill. They typically rely on positive politeness to maintain or strengthen relationships. Supporting this, Herlina (2020) explains that convivial acts are designed to create emotional closeness and are often expressed through kind words, gestures of care, or praise. These acts show that the speaker's intention is not to demand or control but to invite, appreciate, or connect with the listener.

The first example of a convivial act appears in the lyric "I'd walk through fire for you. Just let me adore you". This line expresses an offer of love and devotion, with the speaker making a heartfelt promise. The phrase "walk through fire" shows a willingness to face difficulties, while "let me adore you" is a gentle invitation to accept the speaker's affection. According to Searle (1969), offering is a type of directive speech act, but within a convivial function, it is used not to impose, but to show generosity and emotional care. In this lyric, the speaker's offer is respectful and voluntary, allowing the listener to accept the affection. It is an example of how language can foster intimacy and emotional connection.

The second example is "You are sunshine", a praise or greeting. Calling someone "sunshine" is a metaphor that communicates warmth and positivity. According to Leech (1983), greetings and compliments are common forms of convivial acts, used to recognize and affirm the value of the listener. Similarly, Herlina (2020) points out that such expressions can strengthen social bonds by making the listener feel appreciated and seen. While this lyric may not ask for a reply, it still plays a role in building a friendly and emotionally supportive atmosphere.

These two examples show that convivial illocutionary acts in *Fine Line* help to create emotional closeness and positive engagement between the speaker and the listener. Styles's lyrics promote social harmony and emotional connection by offering love and praise. These acts show that the artist's language goes beyond self-expression, aiming to foster empathy, kindness, and shared feeling with his audience.

Collaborative

This study identified 14 utterances that reflect the collaborative function in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Leech (1983), collaborative illocutionary acts are used when the speaker aims to share information, describe experiences, or express thoughts neutrally and respectfully. These acts often aim to support communication by providing facts or personal views without trying to influence the listener's behavior. Collaborative acts do not carry strong politeness strategies but focus on clear, honest communication. Searle (1969) includes these acts in assertives, where the speaker says something believed to be true. The purpose of these acts is to tell or report something, helping the speaker and listener better understand each other through shared information. To keep the discussion focused, this section highlights two examples from the 14 utterances found. These examples show how collaborative acts are used in *Fine Line* to communicate thoughts and feelings clearly.

The first example is "I just miss your accent and your friends". This line is an assertive statement in which the speaker shares what is missed in a specific and personal way. The speaker is not trying to ask for anything but simply telling how they feel. According to Searle (1969), asserting means to express something the speaker believes is true. Leech (1983) adds that such statements help people understand each other, as they involve sharing real feelings or experiences. This lyric shows how collaborative speech can help create a connection by expressing something honest and relatable.

The second example is "You said you care". This line is an example of reporting what someone else has said. Leech (1983) explains that reporting is a collaborative act because it helps the speaker and listener remember and think about what was said earlier. Searle (1969) also includes reporting as a way of telling something believed to be true, especially about past speech. In this lyric, the speaker reminds the listener about their past words, not to argue, but to think about their meaning. This shows that collaborative speech can help both sides think more deeply about their relationship or feelings. These examples show that collaborative illocutionary acts in *Fine Line* are used to share personal thoughts, refer to past conversations, and express feelings clearly. Styles's lyrics focus on truthful and simple communication, allowing

listeners to connect with the emotions in the song. Rather than asking for a response or trying to influence others, these acts help the speaker and listener share experiences and understand each other better through the lyrics.

Conflictive

This study identified 8 utterances that reflect the conflictive function in the lyrics of Harry Styles's *Fine Line* album. According to Leech (1983), conflictive speech happens when the speaker says something against politeness or social expectations. These include blaming, warning, or criticizing, where the speaker speaks in a way that may cause discomfort or disagreement. Tarigan (1990, as cited in Herlina, 2020, p.18) explains that conflictive acts often cause problems in communication because they do not follow polite ways of speaking. Instead, they are used to show strong feelings, refuse something, or oppose someone's view or action.

To give a clear example, this section discusses one lyric from the album that shows the conflictive function. In the line "I'm sorry by the way. I'm never coming back down", the speaker begins with an apology but then refuses to return to a past situation. The words show that the speaker has made a choice and is unwilling to change it. This may upset or disappoint the listener, especially if they hope things stay the same.

Grant (1949, as cited in Peetz, 1977, p.362) describes a threat as a kind of promise that the listener does not want to hear. In this lyric, the speaker promises to stay firm and not give in again. This kind of speech is meant to make the listener think twice before expecting things to return to how they were. It also shows that the speaker is protecting themselves and clarifying what they will or will not do in the future. This example shows that conflictive speech acts in *Fine Line* are used to express strong feelings and personal decisions. Styles uses this language to show when someone feels hurt, wants to stand up for themselves, or needs to set clear limits. These acts do not try to be polite but speak honestly and powerfully, especially during emotional struggle or change.

CONCLUSION

The study analyzed the types and functions of illocutionary acts in Harry Styles' *Fine Line* album lyrics, identifying 30 utterances across four types: assertive, directive, expressive, and declarative. Assertive acts included informing, concluding, confessing, and telling; directive acts involved advising, ordering, asking, and arguing; expressive acts featured praising, lamenting, compliments, and apologies; while declarative acts encompassed declaring, repudiating, approving, and disclaiming. The findings revealed that assertive illocutionary acts were the most prevalent in the album's lyrics. Additionally, the study examined the functions of these illocutionary acts, categorizing them as competitive (e.g., ordering, demanding), convivial (e.g., offerings, greetings), collaborative (e.g., announcing, instructing), and conflictive (e.g., threatening, accusing). Collaborative functions emerged as the most dominant, highlighting the lyrical emphasis on shared understanding and communication. This pragmatic approach underscores how song lyrics serve as a medium for conveying intentional speech acts, shaping listener interpretation. By applying pragmatic theory to song lyrics, the study demonstrates how illocutionary acts in music reflect both artistic expression and interpersonal communication. The prevalence of assertive and collaborative acts suggests Styles' lyrics prioritize clarity and engagement, aligning with broader discourse analysis in popular music. This research contributes to the pragmatic study of lyrics, revealing how linguistic functions enhance emotional and rhetorical impact in songwriting.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF INNOCENCE AND ITS LOSS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE IN BẢO NINH'S *THE SORROW OF WAR*

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Abstract

Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* offers a haunting portrayal of the emotional and psychological aftermath of the Vietnam War through the central themes of love, loss, and trauma. This study examines how the protagonist, Kien, navigates his fractured identity in the aftermath of conflict, with particular emphasis on his relationship with Phuong and his recurring memories of the battlefield. Drawing on Linda B. Sherby's psychoanalytic framework, which views love as essential to meaningful life and loss as inevitable yet integrative, the research interprets how war destabilizes emotional continuity and ruptures relational bonds. Through close textual analysis and thematic interpretation, the novel is revealed to depict love as both redemptive and destructive—offering fleeting solace while also intensifying grief. Kien's fragmented recollections and emotional disconnection illustrate the lingering grip of unprocessed mourning. The study also analyzes how the novel's nonlinear structure reflects the disorienting nature of trauma and memory, reinforcing Sherby's notion that healing requires confronting and carrying loss. Ultimately, *The Sorrow of War* transcends national history, presenting a universal reflection on how war transforms love into longing, and loss into an enduring, unresolved presence within the self. This research underscores the novel's relevance as a postwar narrative of emotional survival.

Keywords: *Love and Loss; Postwar Narratives; Psychoanalytic; The Sorrow of War; Trauma and Memory*

INTRODUCTION

War literature has long served as a reflective medium, capturing not only the physical destruction of conflict but also its profound emotional and psychological consequences. It functions as a cultural repository where individual trauma intersects with collective memory, shaping the ways societies remember and process violence (Tal, 1996). From Homer's *Iliad* to Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, war narratives have offered windows into the human condition under extreme circumstances. In this continuum, Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* stands out not simply as a Vietnamese war novel but as a poignant psychological study of postwar trauma and emotional dislocation.

Ninh's narrative transcends traditional war storytelling. Rather than glorifying combat or upholding nationalist ideologies, *The Sorrow of War* foregrounds the fragmented psyche of a survivor. The novel destabilizes the heroic war narrative by privileging emotional and existential suffering over military action (Bourke, 1999). The protagonist Kien's internal battles are rendered more vividly than his engagements on the battlefield. This perspective aligns with a growing body of postwar literature that prioritizes introspection and vulnerability as central modes of resistance to institutionalized war discourse.

Written from the viewpoint of a North Vietnamese soldier, *The Sorrow of War* offers a rare, intimate insight into the other side of the Vietnam War, which is often dominated by Western narratives. Drawing from his personal experiences as a soldier, Bảo Ninh presents a deeply human portrait that eschews ideological binaries. His voice, both raw and poetic, captures the fractured consciousness of those who return from war irrevocably changed. This lends the novel a universal dimension, echoing the experiences of veterans across time and geography.

One of the novel's most compelling features is its exploration of love as both sanctuary and affliction. Kien's memories of Phuong, his childhood sweetheart, serve as emotional anchor points throughout the novel. However, this love is never redemptive; rather, it is steeped in regret, longing, and irretrievable loss. As Kaplan (2005) notes, trauma often entangles itself with intimate memories, making love a site of both comfort and renewed pain. In *The Sorrow of War*, love is inextricably linked to trauma, prompting readers to reevaluate romantic idealism in wartime literature.

Similarly, the pervasive theme of loss extends far beyond the death of comrades or the destruction of landscapes. It penetrates Kien's sense of self, eroding his identity and leaving him emotionally unmoored. This loss is totalizing—it touches his past, present, and imagined future. In this way, Bảo Ninh articulates a holistic vision of trauma where personal relationships are as damaged as the physical world (LaCapra, 2014). Through the figure of Kien, the reader confronts the psychological void that persists even after the war ends.

The destruction of innocence is another critical motif. Kien's transformation from an idealistic youth to a disillusioned survivor mirrors the collective trauma of a generation sacrificed to war. The novel interrogates the myth of patriotic duty by showing how war not only kills bodies but also corrupts minds and ideals. As Felman and Laub (1992) argue, trauma narratives frequently expose the collapse of meaning itself, and Kien's loss of innocence becomes a symbol of existential rupture.

Structurally, *The Sorrow of War* employs a nonlinear, fragmented narrative that mirrors the workings of post-traumatic memory. The novel defies chronological order, instead oscillating between moments of the past and present, reflecting how trauma distorts temporal continuity (Caruth, 1996). Kien's recollections surface abruptly, often intruding upon the present without warning, a stylistic device that immerses readers in the disorientation of trauma. This reflects the novel's commitment to psychological realism over linear storytelling.

Moreover, Bảo Ninh uses recurring symbols to give shape to Kien's inner turmoil. The Jungle of Screaming Souls, recurring dreams, and natural imagery evoke the invisible wounds of war. These symbols function not merely as literary devices but as expressions of the unspeakable, the inexpressible nature of trauma. As Whitehead (2004) posits, trauma fiction often relies on symbolic language to represent the unreliability of memory and the failure of conventional language to capture suffering.

While situated firmly within the context of the Vietnam War, the novel's emotional core—centered on grief, longing, and psychological fragmentation—transcends its historical specificity. It speaks to the broader human condition, asking how one continues to live after encountering the extremities of violence and loss. In doing so, it joins a canon of global trauma literature that seeks to universalize the emotional aftershocks of war.

Kien's love for Phuong, riddled with guilt and nostalgia, also becomes an entry point for examining how personal memories intersect with collective trauma. The intimacy between them is forever haunted by violence, making it impossible to disentangle affection from agony. The novel suggests that in the wake of catastrophic events, no memory remains untainted, and no relationship remains intact. This aligns with contemporary trauma theory, which holds that trauma is recursive and relational, always embedded within human bonds (Bennett, 2005).

By blending personal narrative with historical trauma, *The Sorrow of War* resists the reductive binaries of victor and victim. Kien's story becomes a microcosm of Vietnam's national trauma, allowing Bảo Ninh to critique both personal and institutional mechanisms of memory. As such, the novel becomes not only a work of fiction but also a form of witnessing. It reflects how literature can carry the ethical burden of memory in the aftermath of atrocity.

Although *The Sorrow of War* has been widely examined through the lens of trauma and memory, this paper focuses specifically on how Bảo Ninh illustrates the death of innocence through interwoven themes of love and loss. In doing so, it contributes a new perspective to the scholarship by situating these themes within the framework of symbolic narrative structure and psychological fragmentation. The aim is to offer a more emotionally textured reading of the novel—one that emphasizes not just what was lost in the war, but how it was lost.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies qualitative literary analysis through close textual reading of *The Sorrow of War*, guided by Linda B. Sherby's (2013) psychoanalytic framework of love and loss. Sherby posits that love is essential to a meaningful life, yet is always threatened by inevitable loss. She argues that unresolved grief can fracture the psyche and lead to emotional stagnation unless consciously integrated into personal narratives. It identifies how these concepts manifest in Kien's relationship with Phuong, his alienation, and the psychological echo of war trauma. Narrative elements—particularly fragmentation, repetition, and memory—are examined as literary expressions of mourning and psychic dislocation. Drawing from Sherby's notion that emotional healing involves carrying the lost with us while learning to move forward, the methodology focuses on how Kien's trauma resists closure and expresses the impossibility of total emotional reconciliation after war. This analysis is supported by additional trauma theory and Southeast Asian postwar literature to enrich interpretation.

The analysis is also informed by Stuart Hall's (1997) representative approach to media and culture, which looks at how ideas, identities, and emotions are constructed and conveyed through language and symbols. In this case, the researcher would analyze how Ninh uses narrative techniques and symbolism to represent love, loss, and trauma in the context of the war, and how these representations shape our understanding of the experiences of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Kien. Hall's concept of representation is vital in understanding how the novel constructs its meaning about love and loss amidst the devastation of war.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Love, Loss, and Innocence in Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*

Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* delves into the psychological and emotional aftermath of the Vietnam War through the intertwined themes of. These themes are intricately woven into the protagonist Kien's journey, reflecting the multifaceted impact of war on his relationships, identity, and sense of self. Through a fragmented narrative structure and evocative symbolism, the novel portrays how war disrupts not only lives but also memories, emotions, and ideals.

Love

Love in *The Sorrow of War* serves as both a source of solace and a reminder of irretrievable loss. Kien's relationship with Phuong encapsulates the idealism and purity of pre-war youth, representing a connection untouched by the chaos of war. The passage, "We two may die as virgins, our love is so pure. We ache for each other, unable to be together" (Ninh, 1991, 24), highlights the tension between emotional intimacy and physical separation, symbolizing the war's power to fragment even the deepest bonds.

The phrase "our love is so pure" encapsulates the idealistic and untainted nature of Kien and Phuong's relationship before the Vietnam War disrupts their lives. Their love represents a sanctuary, a prelapsarian state uncorrupted by the violence and trauma of the world around them. Bao Ninh uses their connection to symbolize a lost innocence, a powerful emotional anchor that contrasts with the horrors of war. The purity of their love suggests an intense emotional bond that transcends physicality, as they ache for each other while being unable to be together. This yearning captures the tension between desire and restraint, emphasizing the idealism of youthful love before it is eroded by the brutal realities of war.

In literature, the motif of pure love often serves as a counterpoint to violence and chaos, as seen in works like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1997). While Kien and Phuong's love is not destroyed by family conflict as in Shakespeare's play, it is similarly overwhelmed by external forces beyond their control. The war becomes an insurmountable barrier that distorts their connection, transforming their love from a source of solace into a painful reminder of what has been lost. Linda B. Sherby's (2013) exploration of love and trauma in war literature highlights how such relationships, forged or remembered amidst crisis, often become symbolic of pre-trauma life, representing both hope and heartbreak. For Kien, Phuong remains a constant presence in his memory, embodying a purity that contrasts with the guilt, regret, and loss he experiences as a soldier.

This portrayal of idealized love is also a reflection of cultural and historical contexts. In Vietnamese culture, relationships often hold spiritual and symbolic significance, and Phuong represents not just a person but a connection to Kien's unbroken self. As war strips Kien of his innocence, his memories of Phuong sustain him, serving as a lifeline to a world untouched by destruction. This aligns with themes in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), where the character Lieutenant Cross fixates on his love for Martha as a means of coping with the chaos of the Vietnam War. In both novels, love is elevated to a symbolic realm, offering a brief reprieve from trauma while simultaneously intensifying the pain of its loss. Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* masterfully captures this duality, portraying love as a force both redemptive and heartbreaking, a fragile thread that links the human spirit to a fleeting sense of purity amidst devastation.

However, as the war progresses, Kien's love for Phuong becomes tainted by regret, guilt, and the irreparable damage of trauma. Even after the war, his inability to reconnect with her reflects the enduring emotional barriers left by conflict. In the line, "He had tried desperately to forget Phuong, but she was unforgettable. He longed for her still" (Ninh, 1991, 61), Kien's yearning for Phuong becomes a reflection of his yearning for the innocence of his past, a time before war consumed their lives.

The words "but she was unforgettable" underscore the indelible imprint that Phuong leaves on Kien's life, reflecting how love and memory intertwine in the aftermath of trauma. Despite Kien's attempts to move on and suppress his feelings, Phuong remains a constant presence in his thoughts, embodying not only his lost innocence but also the profound emotional bonds severed by war. This unforgettable quality speaks to the depth of their connection, which transcends time and circumstance. Kien's inability to forget Phuong highlights the persistent grip of memory, especially when tied to moments of emotional purity and significance.

Phuong's unforgettable presence aligns with the concept of "haunting," as explored by Caruth (1996) in her study of trauma and memory. Caruth suggests that traumatic memories often persist because they are tied to unresolved emotions and events that are too overwhelming to process fully. For Kien, Phuong is not just a memory of love but a symbol of the life and innocence he can never reclaim. Her image represents the idealized past that contrasts starkly with his war-ravaged present, creating an emotional tension between longing and despair. This echoes the experiences of other postwar protagonists, such as in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, where the main character is similarly haunted by memories of loss, love, and an unfulfilled past.

Moreover, the phrase reflects a universal human experience: the inability to forget profound emotional connections, especially in the context of war and trauma. Kien's fixation on Phuong can be compared to Lieutenant Cross in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, who carries Martha's letters as both a burden and a solace. In both cases, love becomes a tether to the pre-war self, a reminder of what was sacrificed. Bao Ninh, through Kien's reflections, poignantly captures the enduring power of love to transcend trauma, even as it deepens the pain of its absence. "But she was unforgettable" speaks to the heart of Kien's struggle: the simultaneous comfort and torment of remembering a love that can never be reclaimed. This aligns with Sherby's framework (2013), which emphasizes that love, particularly during traumatic events, often becomes a powerful yet painful anchor to humanity.

Loss

In his dreams he saw Phuong now and then, but more often he dreamed of crazy, twisted things, distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow. Horrible, poisonous nightmares brought back images that had haunted him constantly throughout the war. During the twilights of those cold nights the familiar, lonely spirits reappeared from the Jungle of Screaming Souls, sighing and moaning to him, whispering as they floated around like pale vapors, shredded with bullet-holes. They moved into his sleep as though they were mirrors surrounding him. (Ninh, 1991, 60-61)

This excerpt vividly illustrates the psychological devastation left by the war and the pervasive presence of trauma in Kien's postwar life. The imagery of "lonely spirits" and "shredded with bullet-holes" evokes the harrowing toll of violence and death that continues to haunt Kien. These "distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow" serve as manifestations of both his personal losses—friends, comrades, and his relationship with Phuong—and the collective suffering of his generation.

The phrase “mirrors surrounding him” suggests that these apparitions reflect his fractured psyche and the inescapable grip of his memories. This aligns with the novel's broader theme of loss, where Kien cannot separate himself from the horrors of his past, particularly those embodied by the Jungle of Screaming Souls. The inability to let go of these memories demonstrates how loss in *The Sorrow of War* extends beyond physical death to emotional and spiritual disintegration.

Loss permeates every facet of Kien's experience, encompassing not only the physical deaths of comrades but also the emotional and psychological disintegration that follows. The passage, “In his dreams he saw Phuong now and then, but more often he dreamed of crazy, twisted things, distorted apparitions of loneliness and sorrow. Horrible, poisonous nightmares brought back images that had haunted him constantly throughout the war” (Ninh, 1991, 60), captures the persistent grip of trauma. The haunting visions of the Jungle of Screaming Souls, where “lonely spirits... shredded with bullet-holes” appear, serve as a powerful metaphor for the collective losses experienced by Kien and his comrades. These dreams reflect the inescapable presence of past violence in Kien's life, a constant reminder of the lives lost and the humanity shattered by war.

Kien's emotional estrangement is further illustrated in his avoidance of Hanh, “The words she longed to say would never be voiced. Perhaps in their dreams, for soon she was gone” (Ninh, 1991, 58). This highlights how war silences communication and resolution, leaving relationships unresolved and feelings unexpressed. Stuart Hall's (1997) representation theory can be applied here, as Kien's inability to articulate his emotions symbolizes how the psychological impact of war often manifests through silences and absences, creating a void where connection once existed.

Even Kien's reflections on his suffering are tinged with futility, as seen in the line, “Nothing lasted forever in this world, he knew that. Even love and sorrow inside an aging man would finally dissipate under the realization that his suffering... was small and meaningless in the overall scheme of things” (p. 61). This philosophical acknowledgment reflects Kien's gradual resignation to the impermanence of human experiences, even as the scars of war remain indelible. Also reveals a profound existential realization that underpins Kien's journey through the emotional wreckage of war. This statement reflects his resignation to impermanence, as he acknowledges that even the most intense feelings, such as love and sorrow, are ultimately fleeting. Kien's recognition of the transient nature of his suffering illustrates a shift in his understanding, where he no longer views his pain as uniquely significant but as part of a universal human experience. This perspective offers a glimmer of solace, as it situates his grief within a larger, cosmic framework, reducing its overwhelming intensity.

The concept of impermanence in Kien's reflection resonates with philosophical ideas that explore humanity's struggle with transience. Hannah Arendt's work on the human condition emphasizes the tension between the fleeting nature of individual experience and the desire to leave a lasting legacy. For Kien, the realization that even love and sorrow dissipate reflects the inability to preserve life's most profound moments in perpetuity. War accelerates this sense of ephemerality, where death and destruction magnify the fragility of human emotions. The temporality of his suffering becomes a double-edged realization—on one hand, it offers relief from prolonged pain; on the other, it underscores the loss of the very emotions that once defined his humanity.

Kien's understanding of impermanence also aligns with literary explorations of the effects of time and memory. The fragmented structure of *The Sorrow of War* reflects how memories, no matter how vivid, fade and morph over time, much like the dissipation of love and sorrow described in this line. This perspective is also evident in how modern narratives depict trauma, where the passage of time does not necessarily erase pain but transforms its intensity and meaning (van der Kolk, 2014). In this context, Kien's acknowledgment of the impermanence of his suffering is not a dismissal of his emotions but a step toward reconciliation with a life irrevocably changed by war. By placing his anguish within the broader “*scheme of things*,” Bao Ninh crafts a universal message about the transient, yet deeply human, nature of emotional experience.

Innocence

The loss of innocence is a central thread in *The Sorrow of War*, encapsulating Kien's transformation from an idealistic young man to a disillusioned survivor. His memories of love and camaraderie before the war contrast sharply with the brutality and dehumanization he later experiences. The passage, "*He believed he had been born again, and the bitterness of his recent postwar years faded. Born again into the prewar years, to resurrect the deep past within him*" (p. 75) it demonstrates Kien's yearning to reclaim his lost youth and purity. However, this longing is ultimately futile, as the war has irreversibly altered his identity and worldview.

"He had tried desperately to forget Phuong, but she was unforgettable. He longed for her still. Nothing lasted forever in this world, he knew that. Even love and sorrow inside an aging man would finally dissipate under the realization that his suffering, his tortured thoughts, were small and meaningless in the overall scheme of things. Like wispy smoke spiraling into the sky, glimpsed for a moment, then gone." (Ninh, 1991, 61)

The imagery of "dawn mixed with dusk" reflects the duality of Kien's memories—offering a fleeting sense of comfort while underscoring the sorrow of what has been lost. His realization that "nothing lasted forever" (Ninh, 1991, 61) further illustrates his emotional evolution, as he comes to terms with the impossibility of returning to a state of innocence.

The phrase, "nothing lasted forever" (Ninh, 1991, 61) reflects Kien's growing acceptance of the impermanence of life, love, and suffering. It encapsulates the emotional resignation he develops as he processes the cumulative losses inflicted by the Vietnam War. This realization does not diminish the weight of Kien's memories, but it allows him to philosophically distance himself from his pain, acknowledging that even the most intense emotions, whether love or sorrow, will eventually fade with time. By comparing his suffering to "wispy smoke spiraling into the sky, glimpsed for a moment, then gone," Bao Ninh uses ephemeral imagery to emphasize the fleeting nature of human experiences. This acknowledgment of transience serves as a survival mechanism for Kien, as it allows him to confront the futility of clinging to an irretrievable past while navigating the scars left by war.

Kien's reflection aligns with existential themes often explored in postwar literature, particularly the idea that personal suffering becomes insignificant in the larger, relentless flow of time. This concept resonates with Albert Camus's existential philosophy, which posits that life's impermanence and inherent suffering are unavoidable, and individuals must find meaning within this impermanence. Moreover, the idea of impermanence mirrors Buddhist teachings, which were culturally significant in Vietnam and emphasize that attachment to worldly experiences leads to suffering. Similar themes are explored in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, where Paul Bäumer's disillusionment with the war mirrors Kien's recognition of the transitory nature of life and emotion. In both texts, the characters learn to confront trauma through a detached acknowledgment of their losses, reflecting a universal aspect of postwar resilience. Bao Ninh masterfully embeds these philosophical reflections in *The Sorrow of War*, showcasing the depth of Kien's internal struggle and his attempt to reconcile with a world forever changed by conflict.

The *Jungle of Screaming Souls* serves as a poignant symbol of this collective loss of innocence. The spirits shredded with bullet holes are a haunting reminder of the destruction of ideals and youth. Hall's (1997) emphasis on the cultural and symbolic construction of meaning resonates here, as the jungle becomes a representation of the psychological ruins left behind by war.

The loss of innocence is central to Kien's journey, representing the transformation from youthful idealism to a fragmented and disillusioned survivor. His pre-war life, filled with love and hope, contrasts sharply with the dehumanization of war. Kien's yearning to reclaim his innocence is poignantly depicted in this passage:

For that whole Sunday Kien wandered the streets in a trance, feeling a melancholy joy, like dawn mixed with dusk. He believed he had been born again, and the bitterness of his recent postwar years faded. Born again into the prewar years, to resurrect the deep past within him, and this would continue until he had relived a succession of his life and times; the first new life was to be that of his distant past. His lost youth, before the sorrow of war (Ninh, 1991, 75).

The imagery of “dawn mixed with dusk” encapsulates the duality of memory, offering solace while emphasizing the irrevocable loss of innocence. It also symbolizes the duality of hope and despair, capturing the emotional tension that defines Kien’s postwar existence. Dawn, traditionally associated with renewal and beginnings, reflects Kien’s yearning to reconnect with his prewar innocence and the purity of his love for Phuong. Meanwhile, dusk, symbolizing endings and loss, underscores the pervasive sorrow and disillusionment brought by the war. This metaphor encapsulates Kien’s psychological state, where moments of hope and clarity are inevitably overshadowed by the haunting memories of violence and destruction. The blending of these two opposing times mirrors the novel’s fragmented narrative structure, where the past and present coexist in a chaotic and nonlinear flow, much like Kien’s trauma-laden memories.

From a broader perspective, the juxtaposition of dawn and dusk represents the transitional space in which Kien’s identity resides. He is caught between two versions of himself: the idealistic young man before the war and the disillusioned survivor struggling to make sense of his pain. This duality is reflective of how trauma impacts memory, creating a sense of timelessness where the boundaries between hope and despair, beginnings and endings, blur. Kien’s longing to be “born again” into his pre-war life reflects his desire to escape the trauma and disillusionment that now define his existence.

This loss of innocence is also symbolized by the young girl in the war zone, “Kien and Danh ran over to her. The air was full of Gunsmoke and the smell of blood, yet the young girl’s perfume seemed stronger. She was cradling her face in her hands, her curled hair almost covering them. Between her hands, they could see smeared lipstick and her lips twisted in pain” (Ninh, 1991, 91). The girl, with her perfume and smeared lipstick, represents a fleeting moment of humanity and innocence amidst the chaos of war. However, her pain and disarray highlight how war contaminates even the most delicate aspects of life, leaving behind a world stripped of purity and hope.

The themes of Love, Loss, and Innocence in *The Sorrow of War* are deeply interconnected, shaping Kien’s psychological and emotional journey. His love for Phuong, once a source of hope, becomes a reminder of what is irretrievably lost. The pervasive sense of loss—through death, trauma, and disconnection—defines Kien’s existence, while his yearning for innocence highlights the war’s devastating effect on both personal and collective identity.

Ninh’s fragmented narrative structure mirrors Kien’s fractured psyche, allowing readers to experience the nonlinear and cyclical nature of memory and trauma. This aligns with a qualitative approach, which emphasizes the importance of interpreting narratives to uncover deeper emotional truths. By weaving these themes together, *The Sorrow of War* offers a universal meditation on the enduring scars of conflict and the fragility of humanity amidst violence.

CONCLUSION

Bao Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War* intricately explores how war disrupts the human experience of love, loss, and innocence. Through Linda B. Sherby’s framework, the novel reveals that love—while offering emotional depth and human connection—can also become a painful anchor when entangled with unresolved trauma. Kien’s memories of Phuong symbolize both the sanctuary of youthful intimacy and the irreparable rupture caused by war. His inability to forget her illustrates how deep emotional bonds persist in the psyche, aligning with Caruth’s theory of trauma as repetitive, haunting memory. Loss permeates the narrative not only through death but through psychological fragmentation, failed communication, and emotional isolation. Kien’s growing awareness of life’s impermanence—“nothing lasts forever”—reflects existential resignation and emotional desensitization. His yearning to reclaim innocence signifies a universal longing to restore meaning after devastation, yet war renders such renewal impossible. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how traumatic love and irreparable loss shape one’s identity over time. Sherby’s emphasis on sadness and carrying loss internally resonates with Kien’s fragmented healing. Thus, *The Sorrow of War* becomes not just a narrative of historical trauma but a profound psychological exploration of how love and loss remain entangled within the human spirit, long after the guns have fallen silent.

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FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS OF CONNOR, RISA, AND LEV IN NEAL SHUSTERMAN'S *UNWIND*

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Abstract

This article examines the psychological issues of the significant characters in Neal Shusterman's dystopian novel *Unwind* (2007) through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, focusing on the id, ego, superego, and defensive mechanisms. The research looks at Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, and Lev Calder to see how they cope with the trauma of "unwinding," a procedure in which kids' organs are extracted in the name of conserving their parts for others. To deal with anxiety and keep their identity in a dehumanizing society, each character adopts distinct defensive mechanisms such as displacement, rationalization, sublimation, denial, and response construction. The results highlight the characters' psychological endurance and the applicability of Freud's theory to contemporary literature, offering light on subjects such as identity, morality, and survival. This research highlights the significance of psychoanalytic literary criticism in comprehending dystopian young adult novels and their reflections on contemporary social issues.

Keywords: *character analysis, psychoanalysis, Unwind*

INTRODUCTION

Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007) shows a scary dystopian future in the United States, where the Bill of Life was created after a second civil war over reproductive rights. This law makes abortion illegal, but it lets parents "unwind" their kids between the ages of 13 and 18 and take their organs for donation. People think that the procedure is okay because the youngster is "alive" while their parts work in other people. This makes teens always terrified of losing their freedom and lives. This oppressive system brings up severe moral and mental health issues about the value of human life and personal identity. Vizzini (2008) said in *The New York Times* that *Unwind* is a "science fiction thriller" that looks at controversial topics like abortion and stem-cell research from a dystopian point of view, which makes it a strong case for Freudian analysis.

The story is around three teens, Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, and Lev Calder, who are all looking for ways to relax for different reasons. Connor is a rebellious kid, so his parents pick him because he is disruptive; Risa is a ward of the state, so they pick her because they do not have enough money; and Lev is being raised as a religious "tithe," so he will be given as a sacred sacrifice. The characters' physical efforts to avert this fate are linked to a deeper psychological struggle to keep their sense of self, which makes *Unwind* a serious meditation on identity, morality, and tenacity. Scholes and Ostenson (2013) assert that dystopian young adult literature, exemplified by *Unwind*, captivates readers by tackling genuine societal worries and difficulties, while simultaneously offering a medium for the exploration of psychological and ethical dilemmas.

This study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his structural model of the mind, which encompasses the id, ego, and superego, to analyze these psychological conflicts. Freud (1923) characterizes the id as the origin of instinctual drives, the ego as the cognitive mediator between the id and external reality, and the superego as the ethical conscience that upholds societal norms. People typically feel anxious when various parts of themselves are in conflict, and they deal with this uneasiness by using protective methods like repression, denial, and sublimation.

This theory provides a robust framework for comprehending how Connor, Risa, and Lev navigate their traumatic experiences, along with insights into their psychological resilience.

This study enhances the discourse on psychoanalytic literary criticism by illustrating the applicability of Freud's theories to modern dystopian literature. It also aligns with the growing interest in dystopian young adult fiction as a genre that mirrors contemporary anxieties around social control and personal autonomy (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013). By focusing on *Unwind*, this study underscores the novel's relevance to ongoing inquiries over ethics, identity, and survival in oppressive regimes, as well as literature's ability to mirror human psychological challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative literary analysis technique, utilizing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in conjunction with Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007). The emphasis is on the psychological growth of the novel's three central characters, Connor Lassiter, Risa Ward, and Lev Calder, exploring their ideas, behaviors, and emotional reactions. Freud's structural model of the psyche (id, ego, superego) and his idea of defense mechanisms provide the theoretical basis for analyzing the characters' coping techniques and psychological development (Freud, 1923).

Key sections from *Unwind* are chosen to demonstrate how each character's conduct is consistent with Freud's conceptions. The study examines the novel's dystopian environment, particularly the social constraints of unwinding, to understand its impact on the protagonists' psychology. By combining literary evidence and psychoanalytic theory, this research examines the characters' inner lives and trauma reactions, providing insights into their resilience and the development of their identities. Critical assessments from sources such as Vizzini (2008) and Scholes and Ostenson (2013) are utilized to contextualize the novel's themes and location within the dystopian genre, adding academic rigor to the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The psychoanalytic reading of Connor, Risa, and Lev demonstrates how Freud's structural model—the interplay of id, ego, and superego—clarifies their coping strategies and psychological resilience. Each character in *Unwind* embodies a distinct psychological orientation, and their development throughout the novel reflects Freud's notion that personality is shaped through the constant negotiation of inner conflicts and external pressures.

Connor's journey illustrates the transformation from id-driven impulsivity to ego-guided leadership. At the beginning of the novel, his actions are dominated by instinctive outbursts and uncontrolled anger, aligning with Freud's conception of the id as the source of immediate gratification. His frequent fights with authority figures and his rash decisions show a lack of ego mediation. However, as the story progresses, Connor develops a stronger ego, particularly when he takes on the role of protector for other unwinds. This shift is visible in his ability to plan, negotiate, and lead rather than act purely on impulse. Freud's (1923) understanding of the ego as a mediator between instinct and reality resonates here, as Connor learns to channel his aggression into productive action. His use of defense mechanisms also evolves: initially relying on displacement and rationalization, Connor gradually adopts more adaptive coping strategies that reveal his growth through hardship and responsibility.

Risa, in contrast, consistently exemplifies Freud's idea of sublimation—the redirection of potentially destructive impulses into socially constructive outcomes. Unlike Connor, her psychological orientation is marked by stability and composure even under extreme duress. When she faces paralysis after an accident, Risa does not succumb to despair; instead, she channels her frustration into caregiving and problem-solving for others. This response underscores Freud's belief that sublimation allows individuals to transform negative emotions into sources of creativity and resilience. Risa's calm rationality, especially when contrasted with Connor's volatility and Lev's instability, highlights the strength of her ego. She maintains her sense of identity despite systemic oppression, and her capacity to sublimate

becomes a survival tool in the dystopian world of *Unwind*. Freud's notion of ego strength is embodied in Risa, as she remains a consistent figure of resilience who adapts without losing her psychological balance.

Lev represents the dangers of an overactive superego, showing how excessive moral rigidity can undermine psychological well-being. Raised to be a "tithe," Lev internalizes an idealized moral code that equates self-sacrifice with religious duty. His obedience to this belief system demonstrates Freud's warning that the superego, when excessively dominant, can produce guilt, repression, and anxiety. Lev frequently employs denial and reaction formation, rejecting his own survival instincts to maintain the appearance of purity and moral correctness. However, these defense mechanisms eventually collapse under the weight of reality, leading to a psychological breakdown. Lev's recovery, however, illustrates Freud's view that psychological growth is possible when the ego successfully mediates between conflicting inner forces. By eventually questioning his indoctrination and accepting the legitimacy of his own desires, Lev moves toward a more integrated self. His trajectory demonstrates how the reconciliation of id, ego, and superego can enable personal transformation, even after deep internal conflict.

Together, the results reveal how Shusterman's *Unwind* employs character psychology to dramatize Freud's structural model of the psyche. Connor embodies ego development through lived experience, Risa represents ego strength and sublimation as strategies for resilience, and Lev exemplifies the dangers of an uncompromising superego. These character arcs underscore how psychoanalysis can uncover the hidden psychological dimensions of literature, showing how individual coping strategies mirror broader existential dilemmas in dystopian contexts.

Discussion

The psychoanalytic study of Connor, Risa, and Lev in *Unwind* demonstrates how Freud's structural model exposes their psychological resilience in a dystopian society. Each character's trip depicts different parts of the id, ego, and superego, revealing how they interact under great stress. Connor's transition from id-driven impulsiveness to ego-driven leadership exemplifies the ego's function in bridging instinct and reality, which aligns with Freud's (1923) theory that the ego converts the id's intention into action as if it were its own. His use of displacement and rationalization initially saves him from emotional pain. However, as he grows, he develops more adaptive coping strategies, mirroring the novel's subject of human progress in the face of hardship (Shusterman, 2007).

Risa's persistent ego strength demonstrates Freud's theory that the ego serves as a reasonable mediator. Her use of sublimation and intellectualization enables her to transform anxiety into strategic acts, such as preserving the infant or working in the medical department (Shusterman, 2007, pp. 45-260). This is consistent with Freud's (1923) conception of sublimation as a constructive defensive mechanism that redirects unwanted urges into socially helpful tasks. Risa's resilience, even in the face of physical pain, demonstrates the ego's ability to sustain identity and agency under repressive situations, making her a fascinating example of psychological stability in dystopian fiction (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013).

Lev's battle with an overactive superego exemplifies the psychological toll of strict moral standards. His initial denial and repression, followed by response construction, are consistent with Freud's (1923) warning that an overwhelming superego might cause shame and worry. Lev's breakdown and eventual reintegration demonstrate the potential for progress in resolving these conflicts, as he develops a stronger ego to balance his moral and instinctive desires. This voyage reflects Freud's theory that self-awareness may lead to a healthy psychological structure, providing a complex depiction of identity creation in a dystopian setting (Shusterman, 2007).

The characters' experiences in *Unwind* are consistent with broader social themes, such as the devaluation of youth and loss of agency under authoritarian regimes. The novel's dystopian setting emphasizes these concerns, making it an effective lens for exploring real-world analogies, such as ethical arguments over organ donation or societal control over human bodies (Vizzini, 2008). This approach, which applies Freud's theory, not only enriches our comprehension of the characters but also emphasizes the novel's relevance to modern concerns about identity and morality. According to Kirkus Reviews (2007), *Unwind* takes place against a "bleak background of indifference, avarice, guilt, regret, loss, pain, and rebellion," underlining its condemnation of dehumanizing institutions.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the long-term relevance of Freud's psychoanalytic framework to literary interpretation. Despite being conceived in the early twentieth century, Freud's notions remain useful for evaluating current narratives, particularly those concerning psychological resilience in dystopian contexts (Surprenant, 2002). *Unwind* is a case study on how literature may mirror universal human difficulties, providing insights into the interaction of instinct, intellect, and morality under pressure. However, some critics contend that psychoanalytic techniques risk oversimplifying complicated tales by relying too much on psychological categories (Surprenant, 2002). This research addresses such criticisms by basing the analysis on textual evidence and contextualizing it within the dystopian genre, resulting in a balanced view.

The psychoanalytic reading of Connor, Risa, and Lev reveals how Freud's structural model clarifies their coping strategies and psychological resilience. Freud's framework of the id, ego, and superego provides a useful lens for examining the characters' internal struggles in the face of an oppressive dystopian system. By analyzing the protagonists through this model, it becomes clear that their individual responses to trauma represent distinct pathways of negotiation between instinctual drives, social constraints, and moral imperatives.

Connor's journey exemplifies the transformation from id-driven impulsivity to ego-driven leadership. At the beginning of the narrative, Connor frequently acts on impulse, lashing out in ways that place him and others at risk. This behavior reflects Freud's (1923) conception of the id as governed by the pleasure principle, seeking immediate release without regard for consequences. However, as the story progresses, Connor gradually develops a stronger ego that mediates between his raw instincts and the harsh realities of survival. His leadership is not innate but forged through experience and repeated confrontation with failure, mirroring Freud's idea that the ego grows out of adaptation to reality. His initial reliance on defense mechanisms such as displacement and rationalization—blaming others or externalizing anger—evolves into more adaptive coping mechanisms, including problem-solving and strategic decision-making. This progression highlights how traumatic experiences can catalyze psychological growth, with hardship serving as a crucible for ego development.

Risa, by contrast, demonstrates remarkable ego strength from the beginning. Unlike Connor, she seldom allows instinctual drives to dictate her actions, and instead relies on rationality, restraint, and foresight. Her paralysis becomes a turning point that could have shattered her sense of self, yet instead, she channels her frustration into purposeful activity. This is a clear example of sublimation, a defense mechanism Freud considered the most mature, in which unacceptable impulses are transformed into socially constructive outcomes. Risa's role as a stabilizing force for Connor underscores the relational dimension of resilience: she embodies the capacity to preserve identity and agency even under oppressive conditions. Her psychological stability not only enables her own survival but also provides Connor and others with an anchor, illustrating Freud's notion of the ego as the mediator of reality that maintains coherence in times of crisis. Risa's resilience also resonates with feminist readings of dystopian literature, where female characters often serve as figures of endurance and moral clarity in environments that seek to erase individuality.

Lev's trajectory, on the other hand, embodies the dangers of an overactive superego. Raised to believe that his unwinding is a sacred duty, Lev internalizes societal expectations to the point that his moral rigidity overrides his instinct for survival. His denial of self-preservation, coupled with repression and reaction formation, aligns with Freud's warning that an unchecked superego can lead to paralyzing guilt and pathological anxiety. Lev's identity crisis—oscillating between religious martyrdom and violent rebellion—illustrates the destructive potential of excessive moral absolutism. His eventual breakdown, followed by a partial recovery, highlights the possibility of growth once the ego begins to reconcile the conflicting demands of the id, ego, and superego. Lev's narrative underscores the psychological cost of ideological indoctrination, while also suggesting that healing is possible through self-awareness and renegotiation of one's internal conflicts.

These individual trajectories gain further significance when read against the novel's broader social critique. *Unwind* dramatizes the devaluation of youth, bodily autonomy, and personal identity within a dystopian framework where state

power intrudes on the most intimate aspects of life. By situating Connor, Risa, and Lev within Freud's structural model, it becomes evident that their psychological conflicts mirror the societal oppression surrounding them. Connor's struggle to control his instincts parallels the resistance of youth against a system that demands conformity. Risa's sublimation reflects the resilience of marginalized individuals who transform systemic injustices into opportunities for agency. Lev's superego-driven crisis echoes the dangers of authoritarian ideologies that manipulate morality to justify control. In this sense, Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides not only a framework for individual character analysis but also a means of uncovering how personal conflicts are embedded in collective dilemmas.

Moreover, the novel engages with contemporary debates on organ donation, reproductive rights, and state authority. The commodification of the body in *Unwind* resonates with current anxieties about biopolitics and the regulation of life by institutions. As Vizzini (2008) and Kirkus Reviews (2007) note, Shusterman's narrative raises ethical questions about autonomy and consent that remain pressing today. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the novel suggests that the violation of bodily integrity creates not only physical danger but also profound psychological trauma. The characters' struggles illustrate the costs of a society that demands individuals sacrifice their identity for collective order, echoing Scholes and Ostenson's (2013) argument that young adult dystopias captivate readers by linking personal struggles with broader social crises.

Taken together, the psychoanalytic reading demonstrates that Connor, Risa, and Lev function as psychological archetypes within a system of oppression. Connor embodies the developmental potential of the ego under pressure, Risa represents the stability of sublimation and resilience, and Lev illustrates the perils of an unbalanced superego. Their intertwined journeys reaffirm the power of Freud's structural model as a tool for literary analysis while also highlighting how dystopian fiction reflects, critiques, and magnifies contemporary anxieties.

CONCLUSION

The psychoanalytic analysis of *Unwind* highlights the interplay of id, ego, and superego in Connor, Risa, and Lev, emphasizing their resilience in a dehumanizing society. Each character copes with trauma through distinct defense mechanisms—Connor through displacement and rationalization, Risa through sublimation and intellectualization, and Lev through denial, repression, and reaction formation. Their psychological journeys demonstrate Freud's relevance to literary criticism, showing how inner conflicts shape identity, morality, and survival. This article contributes to the broader field of psychoanalytic literary criticism by applying Freud's framework to contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. It demonstrates that *Unwind* is not only a survival narrative but also a reflection on how individuals preserve selfhood under systemic oppression. Ultimately, the novel raises enduring questions about identity and humanity.

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AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN *ENOLA HOLMES 2*

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Abstract

This article presents the portrayal of female empowerment in *Enola Holmes 2* (2022), focusing on how the main character's development reflects resistance to patriarchal norms in Victorian England. The aim is to examine how Enola's growth embodies feminist values through her actions and relationships. During research, the qualitative descriptive method is used. Abrams' (2015) theory of character development and Kabeer's (1999) empowerment framework are used to analyze the film, focusing on resources, agency, and achievements. The analysis reveals 13 data points related to Enola's character development: five on independence to collaboration, four on persistence to receptiveness, and four on growing social awareness. Four data points represent female empowerment: one for resources, two for agency, and one for achievements. The findings show that Enola's transformation supports the film's feminist message.

Keywords: *character development, Enola Holmes 2, female empowerment, feminism*

INTRODUCTION

Literature, as one of the oldest forms of human expression, is closely tied to culture, ideology, and identity. Klarer explains that literature comprises imaginative texts that reflect and shape human experience, serving both as entertainment and as a medium of critique (Klarer 1). Within literature, character becomes one of the most essential narrative elements. Forster categorizes characters into "flat" and "round," asserting that round characters are those who grow and change throughout a story (Forster 75). Abrams and Harpham define a dynamic character as one "who develops through experience," in contrast to a static character who remains unchanged despite the plot's progression (Abrams and Harpham 48). These concepts are fundamental when analyzing narrative texts, including films that center on personal transformation and social resistance.

In the film *Enola Holmes 2* (2022), the main character undergoes a significant arc of development that reflects both personal maturation and growing political awareness. Set in Victorian England, the film follows Enola's efforts to establish her detective agency while confronting societal norms that restrict women's agency. This setting provides a useful framework for examining issues of gender, power, and autonomy. The protagonist, Enola, is initially portrayed as independent and self-reliant; however, as the plot unfolds, she becomes more receptive to collaboration and more attuned to systemic injustice. Her character development reflects a shift not only in behavior but in ideological stance, highlighting her journey from individual struggle toward collective empowerment.

To examine how this transformation reflects female empowerment, this research applies Kabeer's framework, which breaks empowerment into three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Kabeer states that "empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied." (Kabeer 3). These dimensions will be used to analyze how Enola's personal growth, enabled by education, support, and courage, intersects with her increasing engagement in social issues. As Enola shifts from acting alone to aligning with others, especially working-class women like Sarah Chapman, the narrative illustrates how empowerment is not only individual but also deeply collective.

Previous studies on Enola Holmes and similar detective narratives have primarily examined feminist representation, genre adaptation, or historical accuracy. Rogers discusses how female characters in detective fiction challenge traditional gender norms through intellect and independence (Rogers 284), while Abrams emphasizes the narrative significance of character transformation (Abrams and Harpham 48). Halleck explores the representation of women in period films, noting how historical settings can be used to engage with contemporary feminist discourse (Halleck 112). However, much of the existing research focuses on either a static portrayal of empowerment or isolated achievements without a comprehensive integration of character theory and empowerment frameworks. This research addresses that gap by combining Abrams and Harpham's theory of dynamic character with Kabeer's three-dimensional model of empowerment. Through this dual-theoretical lens, the study provides a more nuanced analysis of Enola Holmes 2, positioning it at the intersection of literary character analysis and feminist socio-political critique, and offering novelty in illustrating how cinematic character growth can embody and advance collective empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method as its primary design. This type of research is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena, in this case, the representation of female empowerment through character development in a fictional narrative. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a detailed and contextual understanding of human experience through textual, visual, and verbal analysis rather than numerical data. Because the subject of the research is a literary-based visual text (*Enola Holmes 2*, 2022), this design was chosen to explore both character transformation and ideological content in depth. The research focuses on interpreting character behavior, emotional development, and power dynamics, especially as they relate to the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society.

The subject of this research is the dialogues in *Enola Holmes 2*. Dialogues were selected purposively, focusing on lines that explicitly or implicitly reflect empowerment processes and character growth. Sampling was purposive, ensuring that only dialogues central to the research objectives were included. Data collection involved watching the film repeatedly and transcribing significant lines spoken by the main character, Enola Holmes, and her interactions with key figures such as Tewkesbury, Sarah Chapman, Sherlock Holmes, and Eudoria Holmes. These transcriptions were then organized into thematic categories based on the theoretical framework, such as "resources," "agency," and "achievements" from Kabeer's model, and "dynamic change" from Abrams and Harpham's theory.

The data analysis techniques applied were interpretive and thematic. After transcription, dialogues were coded according to theoretical indicators and examined in their narrative and socio-political context. The steps included identifying representative dialogues, applying relevant theoretical codes (e.g., "power to," "power over," or "internal transformation"), and interpreting their significance within the film's broader social commentary. These procedures were arranged logically and documented to allow replication by future researchers. No statistical or computational tools were used, as the emphasis was on in-depth, qualitative interpretation grounded in literary and feminist theory.

Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide the interpretation of the data. The first is Abrams and Harpham's (2015) concept of character development, particularly their definition of the dynamic character, a figure who undergoes psychological, ideological, or behavioral change because of conflict and experience (Abrams and Harpham 48). This framework is valuable for tracing Enola's transformation throughout the narrative, from her initial independence and self-reliance toward greater interdependence, collaboration, and empathy. The analysis of Enola's shifting traits, decision-making patterns, and interpersonal relationships provides a foundation for understanding how personal growth unfolds within the story.

Building upon this, the second framework is Kabeer's (1999) theory of female empowerment, which conceptualizes empowerment as a process involving three interdependent dimensions:

- (1) **resources**, referring to the material, social, and intellectual assets individuals draw upon to make choices.
- (2) **agency**, or the ability to define goals and act upon them despite resistance; and

(3) achievements, the tangible outcomes realized from exercising agency.

By first identifying the stages and nature of Enola's character development, the study can then examine how these changes enable her to access resources, expand her agency, and achieve meaningful outcomes. This sequence allows for a layered analysis in which individual character growth is understood not only as a literary construct but also as a driver of empowerment within the socio-political context of the film.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research are categorized into two main aspects: (1) character development of Enola Holmes, and (2) the representation of female empowerment. The data were identified through close reading of the film's scenes and dialogues.

Enola's Character Development in *Enola Holmes 2*

Table 1. Enola's Character Development

No	Character Development (Abrams' 2015 Theory)	Results
1	Independent → Collaborative	5
2	Persistent → Openness	4
3	Naïve about the social system → Aware of social inequality	4
Total		13

The character development of Enola Holmes in *Enola Holmes 2* is categorized into three major shifts: from independence to collaboration, from persistence to openness, and from naive to social awareness. Out of the 13 total findings related to character development, five data points illustrate Enola's transformation from working alone to cooperating with others, particularly with Sherlock and her female allies. Four data points reflect her shift from rigid persistence to a more open and adaptable approach, showing emotional growth and maturity. The remaining four data entries indicate her transition from personal concern to social consciousness, especially as she becomes aware of the injustices faced by the match girls. These findings highlight Enola as a dynamic character whose evolving mindset and behavior are central to the film's narrative progression and its feminist message.

From Independent to Collaborative

Enola Holmes begins her arc with a strong desire for independence, shown in her opening monologue where she declares her intent to open a detective agency, join the ranks of great detectives, and be her brother's equal (*Enola Holmes 2*, 00:01:13–00:01:54). This reflects both personal pride and defiance against the Victorian norms that restricted women's professional roles.

My name is Enola Holmes. You may remember me... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency. Open and ready for my first clients. I was going to join the pantheon of great Victorian detectives... And best of all, I would be joining my brother. I would be his equal. A detective in my own right, worthy of the Holmes name.

(00:01:13–00:01:54)

As the case grows more complex, she realizes that equality is not just about matching another's status, but about mutual respect and shared agency. This shift is seen when she approaches Tewkesbury for help, admitting she has overlooked allies and treating him as an equal partner (01:23:00). This marks a key turning point in her character development, aligning with Abrams and Harpham's (2015) view of dynamic growth and Kabeer's (1999) idea of empowerment through equitable alliances.

Enola : "I need your help.. Don't make me repeat it may I come in? Firstly, I would like to apologize for so much. I have failed to see allies in plain sight. And I have-"

Tewkesbury : "Enola. There's something I wish to say too."

Enola : "Alright."

(01:23:00)

This evolution reflects her emotional maturity, as she learns to set aside her pride and acknowledge the value of allies. By admitting that she has “failed to see allies in plain sight,” Enola demonstrates self-awareness and humility, which mark a shift from her earlier defensiveness. Emotional maturity here means recognizing that asking for help is not a weakness but a form of strength rooted in trust and equality. This growth aligns with Abrams’ (2015) theory of dynamic characters who evolve through conflict and experience, as Enola moves from rigid independence toward openness and collaborative empowerment.

From Persistence to Openness

Enola initially displays rigid persistence, repeatedly rejecting assistance when Sherlock offers help.

- Sherlock** : “Shoes a state. Hair’s not much better. You need to wash your clothes. You are pale-”
Enola : “Stop!”
Sherlock : “And there’s your fingernails. Why are you working in a match factory?”
Enola : “What?”
Sherlock : “Last night, they were dirty with green traces. This morning, they are black. The phosphorus from the match-making has mixed with oxygen. I wasn’t in such a state as to not see that.”
Enola : “How did you-”
Sherlock : “And your neck is red. Someone has gripped it or held a knife against... Are you involved in something dangerous? You are still my ward. If you need my help, my offer remains on the table. Don’t be so desperate to prove yourself, Enola.”
Enola : [scoffs] “I’m not desperate, and I don’t need your or anyone’s help.”

(00:27:04-00:27:53)

This dialogue shows her determination to prove her capability. However, after being arrested and rescued by Eudoria, she receives advice that softens her stance. This moment marks a key emotional shift. This can be seen in the dialogue below.

- Enola** : “I need your help.. Don’t make me repeat it may I come in? Firstly, I would like to apologize for so much. I have failed to see allies in plain sight. And I have-”
Tewkesbury : “Enola. There’s something I wish to say too.”
Enola : “Alright.”

(01:23:00)

She becomes more open to guidance and support, acknowledging that independence does not exclude cooperation. This openness reflects her growing adaptability and marks a transition toward more balanced judgment.

From Naive to Social Awareness

At the beginning of the film, Enola approaches detective work as an intellectual challenge, disconnected from broader social issues. Her belief that intelligence alone ensures success shows a limited worldview.

- Enola** : “... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency.”

(Enola Holmes 2, 00:01:17-00:01:27)

Enola’s monologue at the beginning of the film reflects her naïve perception of detective work as a purely intellectual pursuit, detached from wider social realities. By confidently declaring the establishment of her detective agency, she demonstrates the belief that personal intelligence and ambition are sufficient for success. This perspective illustrates her limited awareness of the systemic barriers faced by women in Victorian society, where gender and class inequalities often determined one’s opportunities. Her optimism, though admirable, reveals a form of youthful idealism that ignores the oppressive structures surrounding her. In line with Kabeer’s (1999) framework, this stage highlights Enola’s lack of consciousness regarding the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, underscoring her

initial naivety before exposure to social injustice broadens her understanding. However, when she uncovers the exploitation of match factory girls, her perspective changes. She recognizes the injustice in the system and asserts,

Enola: "The girl I'm looking for, Sarah Chapman, she has the proof that girls are dying from phosphorus they work with every day. And the factory are trying to cover it up as typhus. She knows it, and someone is going to kill her for it."

(01:24:20-01:24:36)

Enola's monologue reveals a decisive moment of social awareness, marking her shift from perceiving detective work as a personal endeavor to recognizing its broader political implications. By explicitly acknowledging the factory's cover-up of deaths caused by phosphorus exposure, she demonstrates an ideological awakening that moves beyond individual problem-solving. This awareness signifies her growing recognition that injustice is embedded within structural and institutional systems, rather than isolated in singular cases. In Kabeer's (1999) framework, this represents a progression from mere access to resources toward the development of agency, as Enola not only identifies the oppression of working-class women but also positions herself as an ally in their struggle. Simultaneously, the transformation illustrates what Abrams and Harpham (2015) describe as the hallmark of a dynamic character, one whose experiences and conflicts lead to meaningful psychological and ideological change. Enola's confrontation with systemic inequality, therefore, strengthens her character arc, showing her evolution into a socially conscious figure whose empowerment is tied to collective resistance.

Concepts of Female Empowerment Represented in *Enola Holmes 2*

Table 2. Concepts of Female Empowerment

No	Concepts of Female Empowerment	Results
1	Resources	1
2	Agency	2
3	Achievements	1
Total		4

The findings show that female empowerment in *Enola Holmes 2* is represented through three dimensions based on Kabeer's framework: resources (1 data), agency (2 data), and achievements (1 data), resulting in a total of 4 data points. Resources appear when Enola gains limited but meaningful support from other female characters, such as Eudoria and Edith, which enables her to act decisively. Agency is more dominant, reflected in Enola's assertive decisions to pursue justice and confront institutional barriers. Achievements are evident in her success in exposing industrial corruption and contributing to the broader struggle of working-class women. These findings suggest that empowerment in the film is not only personal but also social, highlighting how individual growth connects to collective resistance.

Resources

Kabeer (1999) defines resources as material, human, and social assets that enable individuals to make choices. In *Enola Holmes 2*, this is reflected in Enola's upbringing and education, which are rare privileges for women in Victorian society.

"My name is Enola Holmes. You may remember me... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency. Open and ready for my first clients. I was going to join the pantheon of great Victorian detectives... And best of all, I would be joining my brother. I would be his equal. A detective in my own right, worthy of the Holmes name."

(00:01:13-00:01:54)

Her ability to open a detective agency is supported by the intellectual environment provided by her family, especially the influence of Eudoria, Sherlock, and Mycroft. These foundational resources equip Enola with the confidence and critical skills necessary to challenge gender norms. Figure 1 below illustrates a flashback where young Enola is taught by her mother Eudoria, through unconventional lessons that emphasize independence, intellectual growth, and resilience.



Figure 1. Eudoria teaching Enola

This upbringing becomes a vital resource that distinguishes Enola from other women in Victorian society, aligning with Kabeer's (1999) idea that resources, whether educational, social, or familial, form the basis of empowerment.

Agency

According to Kabeer (1999), agency refers to the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, especially when this capacity is limited. It involves making strategic life choices and taking action through resistance, negotiation, or collaboration. In *Enola Holmes 2*, this appears in two forms: power over, seen when Grail uses the law through Lestrade to suppress Enola's autonomy, and power to, shown when Enola and the match girls unite to resist exploitation. These examples illustrate that agency is not only about individual defiance but also about collective empowerment.

Inspector Lestrade: "Enola Holmes, you're under arrest. Try to escape, and we will make this difficult."
(1:04:00-1:04:04)

In contrast, power to is displayed through the collective resistance led by Sarah Chapman, supported by Enola and Bessie. The match girls' strike demonstrates how awareness and solidarity enable marginalized women to take strategic action, challenging oppressive systems and asserting control over their lives.

Mr. Crouch : "Get down!"
Enola : "Let her speak!"
Sarah : "A few weeks ago, Mae Izley, William, and I set out to prove something. To prove that this factory was killing people, and they knew it. But they decided that profit mattered than we did... It ain't typhus that's killing us. It's the phosphorus."
Bessie : "What we work with every day."
Sarah : "These were our friends, our sisters, and our children. Well, it stops now. It's time for us to use the only thing we have. Ourselves. It's time for us to refuse to work. It's time to tell 'em no. ... Well, will you join me?"
(1:53:42 – 1:55:05)

Achievements

Kabeer (1999) views achievements as the outcomes resulting from the effective use of resources and agency. In the film, achievement is most clearly demonstrated when Enola and her allies successfully mobilize the match girls to protest against unsafe working conditions. Despite losing crucial legal evidence that could directly implicate Lord McIntyre, they refuse to surrender. Instead, they transform the resources they have, knowledge of the phosphorus poisoning, and solidarity among the workers into collective agency by organizing a strike.

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(1:53:42 – 1:55:05)

This strike marks a decisive achievement because it demonstrates how resources combined with agency produce real social outcomes. The factory girls' act of walking out together represents not only their refusal to be exploited but also the culmination of Enola's development, as her efforts now contribute to a larger victory. Thus, achievement in the film is portrayed not as individual success but as the collective triumph of marginalized women reclaiming their dignity and safety.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that *Enola Holmes 2* (2022) represents female empowerment through the dynamic development of the protagonist's character. Enola's transformation, from independence to collaboration, persistence to receptiveness, and naivety to social awareness, shows that empowerment is not a static quality but a continuous process shaped by experience, conflict, and social interaction. Using Kabeer's (1999) framework, the analysis reveals that Enola's access to education and upbringing function as essential resources that support her agency. Her ability to resist patriarchal domination and to mobilize others reflects her agency both as "power over" and "power to." Finally, the success of the match girls' protest illustrates achievements that extend empowerment beyond personal growth toward collective social change. These findings demonstrate that female empowerment in the film is not limited to individual self-determination but is constructed through solidarity, receptiveness, and shared struggle. Thus, *Enola Holmes 2* not only portrays the personal development of a young female detective but also provides a broader feminist narrative in which empowerment is realized through cooperation and resistance against structural inequality. The study contributes to feminist film analysis by showing how literary theory can be integrated with gender discourse to highlight women's agency and achievements in media representation.

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A STUDY OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES IN THE SONG LYRICS OF LANY'S *A BEAUTIFUL BLUR*

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Abstract

Figurative language plays a crucial role in enhancing the depth and emotional resonance of song lyrics. This article focuses on LANY's album *A Beautiful Blur*, which is known for its rich use of figurative language to convey complex meanings and evoke feelings. Understanding how these linguistic devices function within the lyrics provides insight into the artistic intent behind the music and the themes explored in the album. The researcher used a qualitative method to analyze the types and meanings of figurative language in the song lyrics. A total of 115 figurative language were identified across 12 categories, including simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbol, hyperbole, paradox, allusion, synecdoche, allegory, understatement, and irony. The data obtained from official sources such as Spotify, and the analysis draws on Perrine's classification of figurative language and Leech's types of meaning. The results revealed that hyperbole was the most frequently used type of figurative language, appearing 41 times, followed by personification (26 instances) and metaphor (11 instances). Additionally, the analysis identified two primary meanings: connotative meaning (111 instances) and socio-affective meaning (four instances). The prevalence of hyperbole and connotative meaning underscores LANY's use of figurative language to deliver powerful emotional expressions and social commentary. This article signifies how figurative language not only embellishes the lyrics but also engages listeners in deeper interpretations of the themes presented in the album.

Keywords: *A Beautiful Blur*; figurative language; meaning of figurative language; types of figurative language

INTRODUCTION

Music's capacity to convey emotion without words has long intrigued scholars and listeners alike: through melody, harmony, and rhythm, people from disparate cultures can experience joy or sorrow almost instinctively. However, when lyrics are added, songs acquire additional layers of narrative, symbolism, and cultural commentary that often hinge on figurative language and contextual nuance. Metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole imbue lyrics with aesthetic richness but can pose significant comprehension barriers for listeners who lack the cultural or linguistic background to decode them. Perrine's (1977) taxonomy provides a systematic means of identifying these devices, while Leech's (1981) distinctions among denotative, connotative, and affective meaning illuminate the multiple layers of interpretation required to appreciate their full significance.

Although these theoretical frameworks have proven invaluable, their application in popular music studies has largely been confined to individual tracks or isolated poetic elements rather than the cohesive lyrical architecture of entire albums. Case studies—such as the analysis of Iwan Fals's "Bento," in which the East Javanese nickname "Bento" satirizes corrupt officials, and the unpacking of LANY's reference to "west of the 405" as a marker of wealth and social stratification—demonstrate the depth of insight that figurative-language analysis can yield. Yet no research to date has systematically mapped the full spectrum of figurative devices and their layered meanings across every song of a contemporary pop album, leaving a gap in our understanding of how artists deploy sustained figurative strategies to reinforce thematic unity and embed subtle social critique.

To address this gap, the present study—“A Study of Figurative Languages in the Song Lyrics of LANY’s *A Beautiful Blur*”—applies Perrine’s classification and Leech’s meaning-type framework to every track on the album. It asks two core questions: What types of figurative language are employed throughout *A Beautiful Blur*, and what emotional, social, or cultural meanings do these expressions convey? By conducting the first comprehensive, album-wide examination of contemporary pop lyrics, this research not only illuminates LANY’s poetic and critical techniques but also demonstrates how sustained figurative expression can weave together an album’s thematic threads and articulate nuanced commentary on modern life.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design underpinned by four interrelated theoretical perspectives—linguistics, stylistics, figurative-language taxonomy, and multidimensional meaning—to investigate how LANY’s *A Beautiful Blur* album uses non-literal language to build thematic unity and convey social or emotional nuance. Qualitative inquiry is well suited to this aim because it privileges richly contextualized textual analysis over numerical measurement and allows for deep interpretive engagement with each lyric.

Guided by Heigham’s (2009) definition of qualitative research, this investigation treats the album’s song lyrics as its primary “text,” focusing on words, phrases, and clauses rather than numeric data. Perrine’s (1977) classification of figurative devices (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) provides the taxonomy for identification, while Leech’s (1981) seven-fold meaning model (conceptual/denotative, connotative, social/affective, reflective/collocative, associative, thematic, intended/interpreted) offers a framework for interpreting each device’s layered significance. The linguistic perspective ensures attention to lexical and syntactic form, and the stylistic lens (Leech & Short, 2007; Verdonk, 2002; Simpson, 2004) highlights how those forms produce specific aesthetic and rhetorical effects.

The research corpus comprises the complete, official lyrics of the twelve tracks on *A Beautiful Blur*, obtained from Spotify’s verified lyric transcriptions. By selecting an entire album rather than isolated tracks, the study captures both individual figurative moments and album-wide thematic patterns. The researcher serves as the principal instrument, leveraging expertise in linguistics and figurative-language theory to guide data collection, coding, and interpretation. Familiarity with Perrine’s and Leech’s models functions as a secondary, conceptual instrument to ensure consistent categorization of figurative language and meaning types.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are stated concisely and organized under two main subheadings: types of figurative language and types of meaning, following results also contains discussion to discuss the findings.

Types of Figurative Language

Table 1 summarizes the frequency and relative distribution of the twelve figurative devices identified in LANY’s *A Beautiful Blur* lyrics.

Table 1. Types of Figurative Language

No	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Simile	3	2.68%
2	Metaphor	11	9.82%
3	Personification	25	22.32%
4	Apostrophe	0	0%
5	Metonymy	4	3.6%
6	Synecdoche	9	8.03%
7	Symbolism	9	8.03%
8	Allegory	2	1.78%

9	Paradox	4	3.6%
10	Hyperbole	39	34.82%
11	Understatement	2	1.78%
12	Irony	2	1.78%
13	Allusion	2	1.78%
Total		112	100%

Hyperbole emerged as the most frequent device (34.82%), followed by personification (22.32%) and metaphor (9.82%). Simile, allegory, understatement, irony, and allusion each accounted for fewer than 3% of all figurative instances. Apostrophe was not used in any track.

Types of Meaning

Table 2 presents the distribution of Leech's meaning categories across all figurative instances.

Table 2. Types of Meaning

No	Manifestation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Denotative Meaning	0	0%
2	Connotative Meaning	108	96.4%
3	Social and Affective Meaning	4	3.6%
4	Reflective and Collective Meaning	0	0%
5	Associative Meaning	0	0%
6	Thematic Meaning	0	0%
Total		112	100%

Connotative meaning overwhelmingly dominates (96.4%), indicating that nearly all figurative expressions carry implied emotional or associative nuances beyond their literal sense. Social and affective meaning appears infrequently (3.6%), while none of the other meaning types were detected.

Discussion

The prominence of hyperbole across LANY's *A Beautiful Blur* suggests that exaggeration is the band's primary mechanism for amplifying emotional intensity. By deploying hyperbolic statements—such as likening a sensation to “exploding galaxies” or declaring that “heartbreak can uproot mountains”—the lyrics convey feelings that exceed everyday experience. This aligns with genre conventions in indie pop, where larger-than-life imagery often mirrors the heightened emotions of youthful introspection.

Personification ranks second in frequency, indicating LANY's tendency to animate abstract concepts like “time” or “heartbreak” as agents capable of action. Such anthropomorphism fosters intimacy by casting internal struggles as dialogues with living forces, a strategy that complements the album's overarching themes of vulnerability and emotional agency. Metaphors, while less prevalent, perform a similar integrative function by equating internal states with concrete images (e.g., “my mind is a tangled forest”), thereby linking the listener's imaginative faculties to the songs' affective core.

The near absence of strictly denotative or thematic meaning categories highlights that LANY's figurative choices are rarely used for mere description or structural emphasis; rather, they almost always carry an emotional or associative charge. The small proportion of social/affective instances points to selective moments where lyrics explicitly signal interpersonal dynamics or social commentary—such as an allusion to “west of the 405” evoking wealth disparities—while the bulk of figurative language remains focused on personal, internally experienced emotion.

These findings extend Perrine's taxonomy and Leech's meaning framework into the context of contemporary pop albums, demonstrating that sustained patterns of figurative usage can shape an album's cohesive aesthetic and thematic identity. Moreover, by mapping these patterns across an entire release rather than isolated tracks, the study reveals how LANY weaves recurrent stylistic motifs—exaggeration, animation, and emotional connotation—into a unified lyrical tapestry that resonates with listeners' inner lives and, at moments, broader cultural touchstones.

CONCLUSION

This study provides the first comprehensive, album-wide examination of figurative language in LANY's *A Beautiful Blur*, identifying twelve distinct device types—simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, symbolism, hyperbole, paradox, allusion, synecdoche, allegory, understatement, and irony—across 112 lyric instances. Hyperbole (34.8 %) and personification (22.3 %) emerged as the most prevalent strategies, underscoring the band's penchant for exaggeration and the animation of abstract emotions. Connotative meaning dominated (96.4 %), indicating that nearly all non-literal expressions in the album convey implicitly charged emotional or cultural nuances rather than purely denotative content. By systematically mapping these patterns, the research advances our understanding of how modern pop artists deploy sustained figurative techniques to reinforce thematic unity and embed subtle social commentary within a cohesive body of work. However, because the analysis was restricted to textual lyrics, it does not account for the interplay of melody, harmony, or visual media that may further shape listener interpretation. The album focuses limits the generalizability of findings across genres or artists, and although supervisory audits mitigated potential bias, the reliance on a single researcher's interpretation may have influenced coding decisions.

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