Unraveling Taylor Swift's Love Story: A Formalistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Like in structure and themes, song lyrics and literature share the elements of rhythm, melody, and harmony, mirroring the flow of language in literature. This allows both forms to tell stories, evoke emotions, and inspire audiences. A songwriter's biographical background, much like an author's, enhances the appreciation of their work. Using Formalistic Criticism, this research analyzes Taylor Swift's "Love Story." Results reveal literary devices like flashback, anaphora, metaphor, foreshadowing, allusion, colloquialism, situational irony, and the use of visual, auditory, and tactile imagery. Ultimately, this research uncovers Swift's artistry and personal evolution, showcasing the song's powerful imagery, literary devices, and narrative structure.

KEYWORDS: formalistic analysis, love story, imagery, rhythm, melody.

INTRODUCTION
Love Story

Taylor Swift
We were both young when I first saw you
I close my eyes and the flashback starts
I'm standin' there
On a balcony in summer air
See the lights, see the party, the ball gowns
See you make your way through the crowd
And say, "Hello"
Little did I know
That you were Romeo, you were throwin' pebbles
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet"
And I was cryin' on the staircase
Beggin' you, "Please don't go, " and I said
Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone
I'll be waiting, all there's left to do is run
You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes"
So I sneak out to the garden to see you
We keep quiet, 'cause we're dead if they knew
So close your eyes
Escape this town for a little while, oh oh
'Cause you were Romeo, I was a scarlet letter
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet"
But you were everything to me
I was beggin' you, "Please don't go, " and I said
Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone
I'll be waiting, all there's left to do is run
You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes"
Romeo, save me, they're tryna tell me how to feel
This love is difficult, but it's real

Unraveling Taylor Swift's Love Story: A Formalistic Analysis

Don't be afraid, we'll make it out of this mess
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes"
Oh, oh
I got tired of waiting
Wonderin' if you were ever comin' around
My faith in you was fading
When I met you on the outskirts of town, and I said
Romeo, save me, I've been feeling so alone
I keep waiting for you, but you never come
Is this in my head? I don't know what to think
He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring
And said, "Marry me, Juliet
You'll never have to be alone
I love you and that's all I really know
I talked to your dad, go pick out a white dress
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes"
Oh, oh, oh
Oh, oh, oh, oh
'Cause we were both young when I first saw you

Poetry and music have been intertwined for thousands of years. In ancient Greece, lyric poets performed their work to accompany the lyre, and the Shijing was the oldest Chinese poetry anthology. In southern Europe, troubadour poets gained unprecedented freedom of speech and social influence, influencing European poetry for centuries. The ballad form remains standard for poems and songs, with Emily Dickinson famously writing her poems to church hymns. Recent poets like W.H. Auden, J.D. McClatchy, and Eileen Myles have written successful opera libretti (Poetry & Music, n.d.).

Poetry and song convey meaning using rhythm, meter, rhyme, stress patterns, alliteration, and assonance. There are many similarities between poetry and music lyrics. Both are emotive, rely on powerful language, and include rhyme and imagery (Kennedy, 1979). They are creative acts that can change lives, providing emotional solace and self-understanding and revealing deep feelings through lyrics or tone of voice. Music and poetry are often praised for their poetic expression and musical sound. Music has its sense, causes, meaning, and aesthetics, while poetry has its sensibilities. In art songs, composers blend music and poetry, making them impossible to separate. The combination creates a unique and immersive experience, making music and poetry a cohesive and interconnected entity (Song, n.d.).

This research uses a formalistic approach to analyze the lyrics of the song "Love Story" by Taylor Swift. Formalism is a literary criticism style that focuses on the features of the literary text, excluding biographical, historical, or intellectual contexts. It is rooted in the belief that the form of a work of literature is inherently part of its content and that separating the two is fallacious. Formalists believed that the focus of literary studies should be on the text itself, not the author's life or social class. Art is produced according to specific rules and internal logic, and new forms represent a break with past forms and introduce new rules and logic. The critic's goal is to examine this feature of art, particularly the text's "literariness," which makes it a work of art rather than a piece of journalism. This attention to the details of the literary text aimed to turn literature's discipline into a science (Formalism - New World Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Furthermore, according to Newton, K.M., literary criticism focuses on the unity of a literary work, examining the relationship between its parts and the whole. It emphasizes the importance of form and content in a successful work, as the form is meaning. Literature is metaphorical and symbolic, addressing general and universal issues through concrete and particular contexts. It is not a substitute for religion and does not address specific moral problems. Criticism principles define the relevant area, not a method for criticism (Newton, 1997).

Within the parameters of this research, this paper was conceived.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized qualitative research using a textual analysis through a formalistic approach. In utilizing the formalistic analysis, the researchers investigated the use of imagery, literary devices, and structural analysis. This research delved into the intricate layers of the song's imagery, literary devices, narrative structure, and personal connections, offering a holistic understanding of its artistic and emotional impact.

Unraveling Taylor Swift's Love Story: A Formalistic Analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing the lyrics of the songs under the formalism theory does not rely on the author's context, history, the time when the work was written, or the author's beliefs. It is solely concerned with the "text in itself." It explores the uniqueness, structure, and organization of the lyrics. This study investigates imagery and its types, literary devices, themes, and structures that may contribute to the meaning of the song "Love Story."

In "A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature," Horace advises poets to focus on simplicity and unity, incorporating formalism in classical, medieval, and Renaissance treatises (Guerin, 2011). In connection with the book's content, this study employs analysis of the literary devices. It shows that there are nine literary devices present in the song. These devices are metaphor, foreshadowing, allusion, paradox, personification, alliteration, repetition, and situational irony.

I. Literary Devices from Taylor Swift's song "Love Story"

Flashback

According to Stephens & Sedillo (2023), **a** flashback in literature is an instance that takes place before the story begins and interrupts the chronological order of the plot to provide context information integral to the text. In this research, a flashback is evident in the line, "We were both young when I first saw you," This line aims to transport the listeners back in time. Flashback interrupts the present action and brings back in time to a previous moment of the female character's experience when she encounters the male character. The line above evokes a sense of nostalgia in the listeners and provides a context for the love story that unfolds throughout the song. Also, this is a technique that helps the songwriter to establish a starting point for the story.

Anaphora

Malewitz (2020**)** stressed that this literary device repeats words or phrases in sentences, clauses, or poetic lines. However, the repetition only occurs at the beginning of the lines. The following lines reveal an anaphora:

See the lights, see the party, the ball gowns
See you make your way through the crowd.

The word "See" that is repeated in the first two lines in the second stanza creates a rhythmic and lyrical effect. The use of the repetition effect aims to create a vivid visual image of the "lights," "the party," "the ball gowns," and the act of making one's way through the crowd to say "Hello."

Metaphor

This figure of speech describes an object or action in a way that is not true but helps explain an idea or make a comparison without as or like. The song contains a metaphor, as evident in the following lines :

You will be the prince, and I will be the princess

This line is categorized as a metaphor since there are two implied comparisons in one line. Taylor Swift compares his male character to a prince while herself, as the female character, is compared to a princess. These characters are like in a fairy tale that implies the idea of being a prince and a prince pursuing a romantic relationship.

You were throwing pebbles.

Romeo is trying to get Juliet's attention. The act of throwing pebbles implies a form of playful or gentle interaction. The pebbles are being compared to small and innocent tokens of affection.

Foreshadowing

- I'll be waiting. All there's left to do is run.

In the line above, foreshadowing suggests a future action of the young couple. The princess, Juliet, will wait for his prince, Romeo, and their only option after meeting is to run away. The writer of this song creates a sense of anticipation and curiosity by adding this line. In addition, this adds suspense, and the listeners will expect something dramatic to happen.

Allusion –Three lines belong to the category allusion, and these are the following:

That you were <u>Romeo</u>

The song's character references the play, "Romeo and Juliet," written by William Shakespeare, which highlights the theme of forbidden love.

I was a <u>scarlet letter.</u>

The "Scarlet Letter" is an allusion to the novel written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which was published in 1850. Taylor is alluding to the character Hester Prynne, whom the people judged because of her choices. According to McDonald (2023), Hester wears a gold-tinted scarlet letter A, representing oppositions in the book, such as order and transgression, civilization and wildness, and maturity and childhood. It is a badge of shame and a beautifully crafted human item (McDonald, 2023). Like in the novel, Taylor suggests in her lyrics that the princess also experiences societal judgment.

Unraveling Taylor Swift's Love Story: A Formalistic Analysis

Sway away from Juliet.

Again, This alludes to the play "Romeo and Juliet". Romeo is a Montague, and Juliet is a Capulet. They both came from a feuding family. Juliet's parents want Romeo to avoid her because of their longstanding feud with the Montagues.

Colloquialism

They are <u>trying to</u> tell me how to feel.

The word "tryna" here is a contraction of "trying to." It is an informal speech used by the writer of the song, who is young, and young people are comfortable using informal language, especially to their lovers or friends.

We'll make it out of this mess.

"Mess" here is another informal term used in an informal setting. The word "mess" means a challenging situation. Instead of "chaos," the writer prefers to use "mess" to signify that the lovers are young and confident of overcoming their complicated situation.

Situational Irony

The song has allusions and inspiration from the play by William Shakespeare; however, the song's ending, "Love Story," differs from the play. In Swift's version, the young lovers successfully conquered the odds. They lived happily ever after, while in the play "Romeo and Juliet," the two lovers have a tragic ending when Romeo commits suicide after concluding that Juliet is already dead, although she is just sleeping.

Types of Imagery found in the Lyrics

Imagery is also one of the literary devices; however, the researchers separated its data to show its various types.

A. Imagery

Visual Imagery

We were both young when I first saw you

"Saw" here appeals to the sense of sight for the listeners to imagine when the female character first sees the male character.

I am standing there / On a balcony in summer air.

These two lines describe the female character, Juliet, standing on a balcony in the summer air, which indicates a warm summer day. It sets a mental picture to transport the listeners to the time and place she recalls seeing him.

See the lights, see the party, the ball gowns.
See you make your way through the crowd.

The writer uses several descriptive words to describe a place having a party because of the words "lights," "party," "ball gown," and "crowd." The "lights" signify a festive atmosphere, and the "ball gowns" imply that the people are dressed elegantly. Because of this visual imagery, one can imagine the people's attire and the extravagant celebration. On the other hand, "See you make your way through the crowd" is a line that gives a visual description of the male character moving through the crowd. All in all, these lines describe the festivity, ambiance, and people.

I sneak out to the garden to see you.

It produces an image of the speaker heading to the garden. The phrase "sneak out to the garden" conveys that the action being done is discrete. Also, the word "garden" is another detail that helps suggest a picturesque of their meeting place.

Using visual imagery in the song brings the scene to life and adds depth to the song's narrative. It invokes imagination and brings them to the world of the song, making them feel like they are part of the narrative.

B. Auditory Imagery

Moreover, I say, 'Hello.'

This line indicates greeting the male character when approaching her from the crowd. The word "hello" is associated with vocalization, which can appear to the listener as being said aloud.

Begging you, Please don't go.

The abovementioned line is an auditory imagery that the song's writer uses. It is used for the listeners to imagine the sense of desperation on the part of the female character when her father asks Romeo to leave her.

Marry me, Juliet

The phrase "Marry me" is a direct marriage proposal usually spoken aloud. These words can arouse their imagination of hearing someone say them; therefore, it is an auditory imagery. This enables them to "hear" the lines and emotions being conveyed by Romeo.

Unraveling Taylor Swift's Love Story: A Formalistic Analysis

C. Organic Imagery

Crying on the staircase

The focus of this imagery is for the listeners to have an emotional experience of crying. The "word" crying denotes an intense sadness or emotional pain by "Juliet" when he begs Romeo not to go.

D. Tactile Imagery and Kinesthetic Imagery

He knelt on the ground and pulled out a ring.

This one line contains tactile and kinesthetic imagery. The word "knelt" imposes the action of a person lowering down onto their knees. This action gives a physical sensation to the listeners, while the "pulled out a ring" describes Romeo pulling out the ring. This act can create a sense of tension or anticipation, which adds to the excitement or emotional impact of the song.

II. Structure

Love Story, a song from Swift's second country album, Fearless, is the hottest single inspired by the famous story Romeo and Juliet. The song follows her first narrative writing style, written by Swift herself, showcasing her unique storytelling abilities. (Cao, 2023)

The information below is a detailed breakdown of the structure of the song "Love Story" by Taylor Swift:

Verse 1:
  - Introduces the characters and the initial meeting.
  - Creates a flashback to the moment the speaker first saw the love interest.
  - Describes the scene and the setting ("On a balcony in summer air").
  - Visual imagery sets the mood and transports the listener to the past.

Pre-Chorus:
  - Builds anticipation and emotion.
  - Mentions the love interest's actions ("See you make your way through the crowd").
  - Sets up the first interaction between the speaker and the love interest ("And say, 'Hello.'").

Chorus:
  - Reflects on the innocence and naivety of the beginning of the relationship.
  - Expresses the desire for a romantic and idyllic love story ("It's a love story. Baby, just say 'Yes'").

Verse 2:
  - Continues to narrate the progression of the relationship.
  - Introduces conflict and obstacles through the mention of parental disapproval.
  - Describes the emotional turmoil and the plea for the love interest not to leave.

Pre-Chorus:
  - Repeats the pre-chorus, emphasizing the emotional connection between the characters.

Chorus:
  - Reiterates the desire for a fairytale-like love story.
  - Reinforces the theme of overcoming obstacles for love.

Bridge:
  - Shifts the focus to the speaker's inner thoughts and feelings.
  - Addresses the difficulties and challenges of the relationship.
  - Expresses determination to persevere despite external pressures.

Chorus:
  - Repeats the chorus, reinforcing the central theme of the song.

Coda:
  - Summarizes the entire narrative, highlighting the journey from the initial meeting to a marriage proposal.
  - Provides closure to the story by returning to the opening line and the theme of young love.

"Love Story" is a country pop song with a three-minute instrumental introduction, nine verses, and two repeated choruses. It is set in ordinary time with a moderate tempo of 120 beats per minute. Swift croons softly, with a slight country twang based on a pop

hook. The simple melody grows and ends in a crash, with Swift repeating the first line softly. ("Love Story" | Country Music Project, n.d.)

The song's structure follows a precise sequence of events, emotions, and complications in the speaker's relationship with her love interest. The chorus's repetition of specific phrases and themes helps emphasize the song's central message, making it musically and narratively appealing.

III. Theme

Love Story is a song by Taylor Swift inspired by William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The story follows a forbidden union between two young lovers, Romeo and Juliet, who meet secretly to escape Juliet's father's restrictions. Despite their forbidden union, the story ends happily, with the couple agreeing to tie the knot (The True Meaning of 'Love Story' by Taylor Swift, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of Formalistic Criticism, "Love Story" by Taylor Swift is a captivating literary masterpiece with a rich tapestry of imagery, literary devices, and narrative structure. Formalistic Criticism emphasizes the text's depth and resonance with a mosaic of literary devices and structural elements. The song's structure unfolds like a timeless tale, with opening lines introducing characters and scenes, pre-choruses building anticipation, and choruses encapsulating innocence and yearning. Verses and bridges reveal emotional complexities, and a poignant coda captures the essence of youthful love's triumph over adversity.

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