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**“No One Likes a Mad Woman”: Women’s
Folklore and Representation in *folklore* by
Taylor Swift**

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ABSTRACT

Folklore is American singer and songwriter Taylor Swift's eighth studio album. This dissertation will analyse twelve songs from the album in relation to women's folklore, feminist coding strategies and common themes and topics that appear in the representation of women in popular culture and in literature. Some of these topics are female rage, female madness, guilt, or the different expectations from men and women. The strategies that are used to deal with these topics are appropriation, trivialization, or incompetence, among others. This dissertation will also explore the limitations of Swift's representation related to the newest wave of feminism. Ultimately, this analysis will try to prove the contribution of Taylor Swift's *folklore* as part of women's folklore and culture, as it has been considered as a piece of art written by a woman, about women, and meant for women to understand.

Key words: folklore, *folklore* (album), Taylor Swift, feminism, coding strategies, women's representation.

RESUMEN

Folklore es el octavo álbum de estudio de la cantante y compositora estadounidense Taylor Swift. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado analizará doce canciones contenidas en el álbum en relación al folklore de las mujeres, estrategias de codificación feministas y temas frecuentes que aparecen en la representación de las mujeres en la cultura popular y en la literatura. Algunos de estos temas son la ira femenina, la locura femenina, la culpa o las diferentes expectativas que se tienen respecto a los hombres y las mujeres. Las estrategias usadas para hablar de estos temas son apropiación, trivialización o incompetencia, entre otras. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado también explorará las limitaciones de la representación que Taylor Swift hace en relación a la última ola de feminismo. En general, este análisis tratará de demostrar la contribución de *folklore* de Taylor Swift como parte del folklore y la cultura de las mujeres, puesto que se lo considera una pieza artística escrita por una mujer, sobre mujeres, y pensada para mujeres.

Palabras clave: folklore, *folklore* (álbum), Taylor Swift, feminismo, estrategias de codificación, representación de las mujeres.

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1. Introduction

Folklore (stylized in all lowercase, along with the titles of the songs¹) is American singer and songwriter Taylor Swift's eighth studio album. It was released on July 24th, 2020 and produced by Aaron Dessner and Jack Antonoff, who also collaborated in the songwriting. It includes sixteen songs and an extra bonus track. In an Instagram post coinciding with the release of the album, Swift described it as "a collection of songs and stories that flowed like a stream of consciousness". This dissertation will analyze the representation of women in twelve out of the seventeen songs, as well as the reasons why the album might be considered as folklore.

Among the numerous definitions of folklore that have been proposed throughout the history of folk tradition, one of the broadest ones was proposed by Francis Lee Utley: "orally transmitted literature wherever found, among primitive isolates or civilized marginal cultures, urban or rural societies, dominant or subordinate groups" (197). More specifically, women's folklore appeared as its own subgenre given that folklore has historically been used as propaganda and, consequently, it is not a new concern that feminists would use folklore to try and reverse the traditional roles that have been imposed onto them. Moreover, women's speech has proven to be distinct as opposed to men's speech, and female artists and writers have developed their own coding strategies to convey messages that only their target audience will understand. This dissertation will try to prove that *folklore* makes use of these strategies as it is a piece of art made by a woman, about women and for women.

Furthermore, the topics and themes that appear in the album are common motifs in the representation of women in literature. Some of these themes and topics are female rage and female madness, and how women's legitimate rage has often been regarded as insanity by men in order to try and silence women; how women are repeatedly blamed for the faults and mistakes of the men in their lives and around them; the male gaze and how it shapes the way women see and present themselves; or how young boys and young girls are raised differently based on what is expected from them. This analysis will try to uncover the feminist purpose behind bringing these topics up and how Swift uses different strategies to criticize and try to reverse these harmful stereotypes about women, thus contributing to the general purpose of women's folklore.

¹ The title of the album and of each song is intentionally written in all lowercase in the source text and, therefore, it will be written as such in this dissertation.

Finally, this dissertation will discuss the limitations of Swift's representation in relation to contemporary, intersectional feminism.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical background of this dissertation will be divided in two sections: on the one hand, the definition and purpose of folklore and folk literature, and, more specifically, women's folklore and the different coding strategies that female authors and artists use with feminist purposes. On the other hand, the representation of women in popular culture and the themes and topics that are linked to them.

Regarding the definition of folklore, this dissertation will follow the ideas proposed by American linguist and folklorist Francis Lee Utley: after exploring the utility and limitations of an authoritative and a theoretical definition of folklore, he proposed an operational definition in 1961. From an authoritative point of view, Utley searched for "key words which might find their place in an austere common definition." These key words are "oral, transmission, tradition, survival, and communal." His research showed that "quite as important are the various materials of folklore: (1) literature and the other arts, (2) beliefs, customs and rites, (3) crafts like weaving and the mode of stacking hay, and (4) language or folk speech" (193). This dissertation will primarily take into account the first and fourth elements, as the texts under analysis are part of literature as well as music, and they will be analyzed by looking at how language and speech are used for specific purposes. From a theoretical point of view, Utley argues that such an approach "would be easier if we could accept the American anthropological definition, and define folklore as 'art and literature orally transmitted', excluding custom, belief, crafts, and language" (195). The deficiencies of this approach led Utley to propose an operational definition of folklore, stating that "folk literature is orally transmitted literature wherever found, among primitive isolates or civilized marginal cultures, urban or rural societies, dominant or subordinate groups" (197). This broad definition is primarily concerned with the oral transmission of folk literature and, therefore, allows to include music in general, and *folklore* by Taylor Swift in particular, as a part of folklore.

Regarding women's folklore, this dissertation will apply the ideas of Mary Ellen B. Lewis and Claire R. Farrer. Lewis argues that folklore is meant to have some function and that it has historically been used for propaganda; thus, "the feminists' recent use of folklore is not without precedent" (85). Moreover, she states that "traditional stereotypes, whether originating or circulating in literature, in the mass media, or in oral tradition, have been targets for feminist invective because they limit a person's movement and

potential” (85). Farrer agrees with Lewis in that “folklore scholarship pertaining to women is not a new concern” (5). This dissertation will analyze this feminist purpose of folk literature and tradition in the album *folklore* by Taylor Swift, and how she makes use of these stereotypes and folklore motifs regarding women in order to point out the way in which they represent and damage them.

The analysis will be carried out mainly by identifying the feminist coding strategies proposed by Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, who argue that “in the creations and performances of women—and indeed of other oppressed groups—one can often find covert expressions of ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings and attitudes that the dominant culture—and perhaps even the oppressed group itself—would find disturbing or threatening if expressed in more overt forms” (414). Radner and Lanser defined and described six coding strategies that will be identified in Swift’s album: appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization and incompetence. In addition to identifying these strategies, this dissertation will analyze the purpose behind applying them and how they contribute to convey the feminist message.

To try to identify the purpose behind using these coding strategies, the analysis will relate them to Belgian linguist and philosopher Luce Irigaray’s *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, as well as *The Sex Which Is Not One*. As one of the most influential theorists of difference feminism, which argues that the differences between men and women should not define their moral status, Irigaray’s works will help understand the contrast between women’s speech and men’s speech. Moreover, the representation of women in popular culture and the themes and topics that are common in women’s folklore will be analyzed in the album by looking at works about the male gaze (Susan R. Bowers and Terri Murray); about female rage (Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill); about the motif of the mad woman (Jessie Hewitt); about the differences in the expectations from young boys and girls (Susan Jones and Debra Myhill); about the use of swear words (Susan E. Hughes); and about women’s experiences sharing stories in groups of women as opposed to mixed groups (Susan Kalčík).

Finally, the conclusions drawn by Sarah Banet-Weiser in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* about popular feminisms that “become visible precisely because they do not challenge deep structures of inequities” (11) will be used

to identify the limitations and deficiencies of Swift's representation and revindications regarding feminism and women's issues.

3. Analysis

3.1. *Talking Shit with a Purpose: Female Rage, Appropriation, and Other Coding Strategies*

The first coding strategy proposed by Radner and Lanser is appropriation, which they describe as “adapting to feminist purposes forms or materials normally associated with the male culture” (415). One of these forms associated with male culture is swearing; as an American proverb says, “a whistling sailor, a crowing hen and a swearing woman ought all three to go to hell.” Moreover, Hughes argues that there is a distinction between female and male swearwords and that “it is still considered as aggressive and ‘unfeminine’ for women to swear” (292).

Appropriation by swearing already appears in the first song of the album, which is called “the 1”. The narrator is a woman addressing a former lover (presumably but not explicitly a man) telling him how her life is going at the moment and wondering what could have been if he had been “the one” for her. It includes lines such as: “If my wishes came true / it would have been you” (Swift 1:03) or “it would’ve been fun / if you would’ve been the one” (Swift 1:16). However, the narrator seems to blame her former lover for their failed relationship, for instance in the line: “If you wanted me, you really should’ve showed” (Swift 0:45). The opening line of the song (and thus the opening line of the album) is: “I’m doing good, I’m on some new shit”. The use of a swear word in the very first line seems to be a statement as well as a form of appropriation. The feminist purpose in these lines is for the narrator to reject the weakness that has traditionally been linked to women as well as sought in women by men; as Irigaray (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 203) puts it: “The fragility and weakness of the beloved woman are the means by which the male lover can experience love of self as of a beloved who is powerless”. In “the 1”, Swift challenges this idea of women being weak by stating that the female narrator is “doing good” after their relationship has ended.

This is not the only instance of Swift using swear words in the album, as the word “shit” also appears in the song “peace”. In this song, the female narrator is warning her potential lover of the difficulties of having a relationship with her, while also stating that she can make up for them and asking if that would be enough. This theme is summarized in the chorus:

But I'm a fire and I'll keep your brittle heart warm
 If your cascade, ocean wave blues come
 All these people think love's for show
 But I would die for you in secret
 The devil's in the details, but you got a friend in me
 Would it be enough if I could never give you peace? (Swift 1:14)

Apart from stating her love for the addressee, the narrator also expresses how she feels and sees herself in relation to her partner. In the second verse of the song, Swift sings:

Your integrity makes me feel small
 You paint dreamscapes on the wall
 I talk shit with my friends
 It's like I'm wasting your honor. (Swift 1:39)

The use of the word “shit” in the third line of this verse sounds sudden and shocking as the song has a clear poetic tone to it up until this point, including metaphors of her passion as “fire” and his sadness as “ocean wave blues”. However, this poetic tone is broken by the use of the swear word, which also serves a purpose; the content of this verse is a comparison between the narrator and her potential lover: she seems to feel he is above her, describing him as someone who has integrity and does something valuable, while she just “talks shit with her friends”. The different tone in the lines that talk about him and about herself matches the way she perceives both. Again, Swift is using appropriation by swearing to represent how she feels in comparison to the addressee.

However, there are other strategies that appear in these lines to help convey the message: juxtaposition and trivialization. About juxtaposition, Radner and Lanser state that “the ironic arrangement of texts [...] is a major technique of feminist coding” (416). The contrast between his actions and hers is similar to the one Irigaray (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 7) describes between men being the subject of the discourse and women lacking complete access to said discourse and being “left the so-called minor arts: [...] poetry, painting, and music”. Consequently, this leads to the use of trivialization, that “involves the employment of a form [...] that is considered by the dominant culture to be unimportant, innocuous, or irrelevant” (Radner and Lanser 420). One of these forms is gossiping, which is what is meant in the song by “talking shit”; gossip has been

traditionally regarded as a women's activity, and Farrer argues that "women's expressive vehicles are the nonlegitimate forms", as opposed to male genres, that "assume the status of 'legitimate' folklore genres" (14). Swift's mention of gossip as something trivial that makes the narrator unworthy, while expressing it through appropriation and in an ironic juxtaposition with the worthy male forms (both in content and in tone), seems to be a critique of this traditional perception. The use of appropriation by swearing seems to be a recurrent motif throughout the album and one of Swift's most used coding strategies. Apart from "shit", the word "fuck" appears in two songs: "betty" and "mad woman".

Regarding "betty", one of the most interesting elements of the song is its narrative voice, who is a teenage boy (James) trying to apologize to her girlfriend (Betty) after cheating on her. This choice of a male narrative voice constitutes a different coding strategy, distraction, which will be further explored in the next section. About the use of appropriation by swearing, the song includes the following lines in the chorus:

But if I just showed up at your party
 Would you have me?
 Would you want me?
 Would you tell me to go fuck myself? (Swift 0:52)

Even though the song is narrated by a man, he is not the one actually saying these words; instead, he is putting them (or imagining them) in Betty's mouth. Despite trying to justify himself, he recognizes Betty's reasons to be angry at him. With these lines, Swift is implying that it would be appropriate for Betty to say these words to James after the hurt he has put her through; she is recognizing women's right to rage. This constitutes a form of appropriation as rage has traditionally been reserved for men, and it is often considered a sign of insanity or "overreacting" when the subject of said rage is a woman.

As in the previous songs, there are other strategies that appear in "betty" to clarify the point, such as juxtaposition. The events narrated in "betty" take part in a story that is told through three different songs, "august", "cardigan" and "betty" itself. "Cardigan" is narrated from Betty's point of view, while "august" is narrated by the woman with whom James has an affair, who is not explicitly named in the album, although Swift has revealed that her name is either Augusta or Augustine (*Folklore: The Long Pond Studio Sessions* 45:15-45:25), so she will be referred as Augustine henceforth. There are crossed

references between “betty” and the two other songs to present a juxtaposition between how the male narrator perceives the events as opposed to how the two women do so. One instance of this juxtaposition is how in “august”, the narrator sings “so much for summer love and saying ‘us’ / ‘cause you weren’t mine to lose” (Swift 1:58), while in “betty”, the narrator asks “would you trust me if I told you it was just a summer thing?” (Swift 1:03). This contrast between Augustine calling it “a summer love” and James calling it “a summer thing” implies that Augustine was deceived by James. Moreover, another instance of juxtaposition is how in “cardigan”, the narrator says “when you are young they assume you know nothing” (Swift 1:13), whereas in “betty”, the male narrative voice says “I’m only seventeen, I don’t know anything but I know I miss you” (Swift 1:08). With this contrast, Swift seems to be criticizing the double standard that is often used when talking about expectations from men and women in general and teenage boys and girls in particular; as Jones and Myhill state, gender stereotypes “not only posit a view of girls as compliant, but posit a counterbalancing view of boys as confidently immature” (553). In “betty”, James seems to expect Betty to be compliant with his actions and forgive him while excusing said actions because he is immature. However, as stated before, despite his attempts to excuse himself, he is still aware of Betty’s right to be angry at him.

Female rage and madness are the central topics of the aforementioned song “mad woman”. Already from the title, Swift is playing with the double meaning of the word “mad”, which can mean either insane or angry. The concept of the mad woman (more specifically, the mad woman in the attic) has been a common motif in folklore and literature, including works such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*. However, as most topics that appear in literature, it has its roots in real life; Hewitt states that if women “failed to conform to dominant beliefs regarding women’s proper roles, doctors deemed them insane” (171). In the song, narrated by a woman who has been deemed as “mad” due to her rage, Swift argues that her anger is nothing else but a result of the way she has been treated. The opening lines of the song are as follows: “What did you think I’d say to that? / Does a scorpion sting when fighting back?” (Swift 0:15). In these lines, Swift uses the metaphor of the scorpion to picture a woman who is just trying to defend herself. Later on, in the chorus, she uses another animal-related metaphor to convey the same idea: “And you’ll poke that bear ‘til

her claws come out” (Swift 1:14). The bear in these lines is a representation of the woman, which is made clear through the use of the pronoun “her”.

The whole point of the song is for the narrator to express and justify her anger, and it seems appropriate that Swift makes use of swearing for that purpose. The first verse of the song includes the following lines:

Do you see my face in the neighbor’s lawn?
Does she smile?
Or does she mouth “Fuck you forever”? (Swift 0:38)

As in “betty”, the word “fuck” appears in these lines directed to someone specific, who is the receiver of the narrator’s rage. The lines also imply that this person is being haunted by the narrator, conveying once again the idea that this man deserves the anger. The song continues:

Every time you call me crazy, I get more crazy
What about that?
And when you say I seem angry, I get more angry (Swift 0:48)

As mentioned before, these lines start to depict the reasons behind the narrator’s rage and so-called “madness”: she is not “overreacting”, but simply reacting to what it is being said to her. In the chorus, Swift sings:

And there’s nothing like a mad woman
What a shame she went mad
No one likes a mad woman
You made her like that (Swift 1:01)

Swift is using a sort of irony to express how most people feel about “mad women”, saying things like “what a shame” and just not liking them, while failing to acknowledge the rage behind the supposed insanity. At the same time, Swift drives her point home with the fourth line “you made her like that”; at this point the narrator is clearly expressing that her rage (again deemed as madness) is a result of a man’s actions. In the second verse of

the song, the narrator seems to be yet more willing to embrace and defend her rage: “Now I breathe flames each time I talk / My cannons all firing at your yacht” (Swift 1:42).

The narrator is aware of her anger and unapologetic about it. However, this does not mean that the rest of the world is ready to recognize the legitimacy of her rage. In relation to this, Orgad and Gill state that even though “more and more women are getting publicly and unapologetically angry”, it is clear that “powerful mechanisms continue long legacies of pathologizing this anger, situating it as a problem with a woman’s body, her hormones or her mental state” (1). Finally, in the bridge of the song, Swift sings:

I’m taking my time, taking my time
 ‘Cause you took everything from me
 Watching you climb, watching you climb
 Over people like me (Swift 2:50)

The narrator seems to recognize the motivation behind men’s attempts to trivialize female rage and, moreover, label it as madness: to be able to “climb”. This is part of the powerful mechanisms that Orgad and Gill talk about. If a woman is mad, no one will listen to her, no one will consider her rage as valid and no one will question the actions of men who had made her like that. After all, no one likes a mad woman.

3.2. Obscuring the Truth: Distraction and Indirection

Other coding strategies proposed by Radner and Lanser are distraction and indirection. They state that distraction is used to “describe strategies that drown out or draw attention away from the subversive power of a feminist message” and that it “involves creating some kind of ‘noise’, interference, or obscurity that will keep the message from being heard except by those who listen very carefully or suspect the message is there” (417). On the other hand, they explain that “indirection is so vast a category” that they need to “distinguish within it at least three modes”, one of which is impersonation: “the substitution of another persona for the ‘I’” (419). A different mode of indirection is what they call hedging, which is used “for equivocating about or weakening a message” (420), that is, seemingly expressing one thing while actually trying to convey something different.

The strategy of distraction appears in the song “seven”, whose narrative voice is a woman reflecting on her childhood and her friendship with another girl. These are the opening lines of the song:

Please picture me in the trees
 I hit my peak at seven
 Feet in the swing over the trees
 I was too scared to jump in (Swift 0:01)

The listener learns from the beginning that the song talks about childhood because of the mention of the age of seven. However, Swift uses a zeugma in these lines, mentioning the word “seven” once but applying in two different sentences with two different meanings: on the one hand it refers to the age, while on the other hand it refers to the height of the swing the narrator is in. The way in which these lines are sung, with a clear pause after “seven”, help understand the double sense of the number. The song addresses the aforementioned childhood friend and continues to describe their relationship. In the chorus, Swift sings:

Sweet tea in the summer
 Cross your heart, won't tell no other
 And though I can't recall your face
 I still got love for you
 Your braids like a pattern
 Love you to the moon and to Saturn
 Passed down like folk songs
 The love lasts so long (Swift 0:42)

These lines let the listener know that this recalling of events happens when the narrator is an adult, as she can no longer remember the face of her friend, but still remembers the love they had for each other. The second line of the chorus implies that this pair of friends share a secret, which is the main reason behind the use of distraction. This distraction begins by changing the traditional scheme of the song, in which the bridge appears towards the end; however, the bridge appears in the middle of the song in “seven”. The

listener can understand that this next part is the bridge because of the change of rhythm, which comes back again for the second verse. This breaking of the original structure of the song has a purpose, revealing the secret, and it implies a change of tone, which becomes clearer when looking at the lyrics:

And I've been meaning to tell you
 I think your house is haunted
 Your dad is always mad and that must be why (Swift 1:23)

One of the first noticeable things of these lines is the change of the narrative voice, that comes back to the voice of the seven-year-old child; this can be seen in the use of the present tense and it is necessary to take it into account for the interpretation of these lines. It is at this point when the distraction takes place in terms of the lyrics. Although these lines might seem like a normal thing for a child to say, it makes one wonder what is the relation between the house being haunted and the friend's dad being always mad. Consequently, one possible interpretation of this part is that the children (or just the narrator) might have heard something such as "he is always mad because of the spirits", the spirits referring to alcoholic drinks, but in the mind of a child it would make more sense that it refers to ghosts. The implication of the father being an alcoholic and possibly abusive towards her daughter makes the motivation behind the use of the distraction apparent: abuse and violence against women is a sensitive topic and potentially too risky or triggering to express overtly. The bridge continues:

And I think you should come live with
 Me and we can be pirates
 Then you won't have to cry
 Or hide in the closet (Swift 1:33)

Again, it is important not to forget that this is a child speaking, a child, however, that is able to recognize that her friend is being abused and wants to save her. The mention of the closet in the last line can have different interpretations: the most literal one would be that she needs to hide in order to feel safe. However, the expression "being in the closet" has traditionally been linked to LGBTQ+ people who have not publicly disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity. This does not necessarily mean that this child is

queer, but this intended choice of words implies that, in some way, she cannot express herself as she is in front of her father. The strategy of distraction that Swift uses becomes clearer after the bridge: this seems like a song about childhood and not like a song about abuse, but if the listener thinks twice about it, they can understand that it actually is.

It is necessary to point out that the last two lines of the chorus, “passed down like folk songs / the love lasts so long” (Swift 0:57), are the only instance in the whole album in which Swift makes an explicit reference to folklore, using the words “folk songs” and describing the purpose of folklore: to be passed down so it can last. This reference coincides with the operational definition of folklore proposed by Utley, as he considers that the main differential element of folklore is to be orally transmitted. Moreover, the fact that the only explicit mention of folk happens in a song that talks covertly about violence against women seems to agree with Radner and Lanser’s idea that the creations of women usually convey covert expressions of experiences that might be disturbing or threatening by the general public.

“Seven” is not the only instance of distraction being used in the album. The song “exile” is a collaboration with folk band Bon Iver, whose lead singer is Justin Vernon, and it involves two narrative voices, a man and a woman, talking about their failed relationship and blaming each other. As the two narrative voices cannot seem to agree, and the listener has no way to know which one is in the right, the strategy of distraction is used in relation to the extralinguistic elements of the song to try to convey a message that, as stated before, will only be heard by those listeners who pay close attention. Before the distraction takes place, the two verses of the song express the two narrative voices perspectives. The first verse is sung by Vernon as he seems unable to understand why his partner has left him. It includes lines like:

And it took you five whole minutes
To pack us up and leave me with it
Holding all this love out here in the hall (Swift 0:27)

The male narrator blames her former partner for leaving him, in his opinion, with no apparent motivation. However, in the same part of the second verse, Swift sings:

Second, third, and hundredth chances
 Balancing on breaking branches
 Those eyes add insult to injury (Swift 1:33)

With these lines, the female narrator implies that she did in fact have a reason for leaving her partner, at least in her opinion, and that it is not the first time she feels unsure about the relationship. Up until this point, the song just portraits two people seeing the same events from different perspectives, each of them thinking that they are in the right. However, the bridge of the song is when the distraction takes place, and it is useful to clarify who is actually in the right. They sing as it follows:

Justin Vernon *Taylor Swift*

All this time

We always walked a very thin line

You didn't even hear me out

You didn't even hear me out

You never gave a warning sign

I gave so many signs

All this time

I never learned to read your mind

Never learned to read my mind

I couldn't turn things around

You never turned things around

'Cause you never gave a warning sign

I gave so many signs

So many signs, so many signs

You didn't even see the signs (Swift 2:24)

Just by looking at the lyrics, it might seem that the situation has not changed: they are still defending their own perspectives. However, the distraction comes in the way they sing the song: Swift begins each of her lines after Vernon has finished his; on the contrary, Vernon does not wait for Swift to finish her lines to keep singing, thus constantly interrupting her. These interruptions also support the female narrator's point: she left him

because he would not listen to her, and he still does not understand because of the very same reason. Swift is criticizing this tendency of men not listening to women, which is nothing new. When talking about her experiences with two Women's Liberation groups, Kalčík reveals that, in the context of conversations in which both men and women are involved, most women felt that “the ‘you talk-I listen, I talk-you listen’ rule was broken often” (5). Once again, this critique of men not letting women speak is very subtle and will only be heard if the listener is able to identify the distraction by paying close attention, not only to the lyrics but also to the way they are sung.

The topic of women being blamed for something that is not their fault does not only appear in “exile”. In fact, this is the central theme of the song “the last great American dynasty”, in which Swift uses the other strategy mentioned in this section: indirection, and, more specifically, impersonation. The song is based on true events as it narrates the story of Rebekah West Harkness (1915-1982), an American composer and socialite who married Bill Hale Harkness, the heir to the Standard Oil company, with whom she lived in a mansion in Rhode Island (Woytus). All of this information is presented in the first verse of the song. After this, Swift sings:

Their parties were tasteful, if a little loud
 The doctor had told him to settle down
 It must have been her fault his heart gave out (Swift 0:52)

These lines introduce the topic of Rebekah being blamed for the death of her husband, even though it was a result of his own habits. The topic is further explored in the chorus:

And they said
 “There goes the last great American dynasty”
 “Who knows if she never showed up, what could've been”
 “There goes the maddest woman this town has ever seen”
 “She had a marvelous time ruining everything” (Swift 1:02)

In the second chorus, the words “the maddest woman” are substituted with the words “the most shameless woman” (Swift 2:10). Rebekah is not only blamed for the death of her husband but also for the death of his dynasty. Swift uses again the motif of the mad woman to explain how the town sees her now, as shameless and guilty for not having kids

with Bill (and thus killing the dynasty), even though she did nothing wrong and supported her husband; as Irigaray (*The Sex Which Is Not One* 211) states: “We [women] remain distant from ourselves to support the pursuit of their ends. That would be our flaw. If we submit to their reasoning, we are guilty. Their strategy, intentional or not, is calculated to make us guilty.” This quote seems more relevant when the bridge of the song makes the use of indirection apparent: Swift reveals that the narrative voice of this song is herself, thus using impersonation to identify herself with Rebekah Harkness:

50 years is a long time
 Holiday House sat quietly on that beach
 Free of women with madness, their men and bad habits
 And then it was bought by me (Swift 2:35)

Swift actually bought the Rhode Island house in which Rebekah and Bill Harkness lived in 2013 (Woytus). With this revelation, the listener learns that Swift’s statements about how unfairly she feels Rebekah was treated are actually applicable to herself as well. The fact that the connecting element between Swift and Rebekah Harkness is a house can be interpreted as another subtle reference to the mad woman in the attic motif. The change of subject in the last chorus makes the impersonation clear:

Who knows if I never showed up what could've been
 There goes the loudest woman this town has ever seen
 I had a marvelous time ruining everything (Swift 2:55)

The purpose behind this impersonation is to complain about the unfair treatment she feels she has received in a way that would make it easier for the listener to sympathize with her, as well as easier for herself to express as she is distancing herself from the narration. This is not the only instance of impersonation being used in the album; as mentioned in the previous section, the narrative voice of “betty” is a man. In that case, the purpose might be to point out how easy it is for the general audience to justify men’s wrongs as opposed to women’s.

The other mode of indirection proposed by Radner and Lanser, hedging, is used by Swift in the song “invisible string”, in order to apparently express one message when actually conveying a different one. The motif of a thread representing fate, connecting

two people together, has been popular in folklore from all over the world since the very beginning of oral tradition. It already appears in Greek mythology, in the legend of Ariadne, who fell in love with Theseus and used a thread of jewels to help him escape the Minotaur Labyrinth (Britannica). Moreover, it also appears in Chinese folklore; an old Chinese proverb says that “an invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place or circumstances. The thread may twist, stretch or tangle but will never break.” (Liu 9). Furthermore, the concept appears in more recent literature; in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester says: “I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame” (384).

Within this context, it would be safe to assume that “invisible string” is centered around the concept of fate and love between two people. The verses of the song do, indeed, talk about two people that seem to be destined to meet; in the bridge, Swift sings:

A string that pulled me
 Out of all the wrong arms right into that dive bar
 Something wrapped all of my past mistakes in barbed wire
 Chains around my demons, wool to brave the seasons
 One single thread of gold tied me to you (Swift 2:05)

It becomes clear in these lines that the narrator feels her encounter with her lover is a result of fate, something that is inevitable as there is a string pulling her. Moreover, she feels this lover has saved her from a worst fate, saying things like “out of all the wrong arms” or “chains around my demons”. However, a close look at the chorus might reveal something different:

Time, curious time
 Gave me no compasses, gave me no signs
 Were there clues I didn't see?
 And isn't it just so pretty to think
 All along there was some
 Invisible string
 Tying you to me? (Swift 0:34)

The line “isn’t just so pretty to think” seems to be an allusion to Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. At the end of the novel, Brett and Jake, the two protagonists, are having a conversation: Brett says to Jake “we could have had such a damned good time together”, to which Jake replies “isn’t it pretty to think so?”. This is the very last sentence of the novel and it implies that there was never a real chance of them having “such a damned good time together”, but it was just a possibility in their heads, something that they would have liked to happen. Under this light, “invisible string” is not a song about love and fate anymore; instead, it is a song about a failed romance, a relationship that could have been but was not. Swift is using, once again, indirection to make a song that seems to talk about one thing when it is actually talking about something very different. The allusion to Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* is quite specific, while being a key element to understand the actual message of the song, making it hard for the listener to realize that this is not a love song. One possible purpose behind this intentional misleading, given that the coding strategies that Swift uses are only for women to understand, is for said women to be aware that what seems like love might possibly not be so. After all, *folklore* is, among other things, an album meant to warn women about the difficulties of living in a society made by and for men, even when those difficulties are not blatantly obvious.

3.3. “I’ve Never Been a Natural”: Incompetence and the Male Gaze

The last coding strategy proposed by Radner and Lanser is “incompetence at conventionally feminine activities” (421). This strategy appears in the song “mirrorball” and “this is me trying” in relation to the male gaze. Ever since the beginning of oral tradition, the representation of women has been intended for a masculine audience. Bowers argues that “the mythological figure of Medusa, that primary trope of female sexuality, is a good example of how profoundly the male gaze structures both male and female perceptions of women” (217). As a result of this, Murray explains that a woman will “turn herself into an object, and most particularly an object of vision, a sight” (32).

This concept of the male gaze and how it shapes the way women present themselves is the central topic of the song “mirrorball”; the narrator of the song is indeed identifying herself with an object. Just the title serves as a double metaphor: on the one hand, a mirrorball is something shiny, that catches attention; on the other hand, as any other mirror, it reflects what it is in front of it. In the first verse of the song, Swift further explains this double metaphor:

I want you to know
 I'm a mirrorball
 I'll show you every version of yourself tonight
 I'll get you out on the floor
 Shimmering beautiful
 And when I break it's in a million pieces (Swift 0:08)

From the very beginning, the narrator makes clear that this song is addressed to someone specific, presumably a man. She continues with the metaphor of the mirrorball by alluding at her own vulnerability, as a mirrorball is also a fragile object, just like the narrator considers herself fragile. In the chorus, Swift sings:

Hush
 When no one is around, my dear
 You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes
 Spinning in my highest heels, love
 Shining just for you (Swift 0:45)

These lines make it clearer that the song is talking about the male gaze, as opposed to being in the public eye in general, as the narrator says that even when no one else is looking, she still wants to present herself in the best way possible for her “love”. It is interesting to note the mention of high heels as a symbol of something that is linked to women and that, although not being generally comfortable, is used to appear more attractive. Moreover, the line does not simply mention high heels but its superlative, “my highest heels”, as a metaphor for the narrator’s desire of not being just attractive, but the most attractive for the male gaze. The second verse continues with the metaphor and includes the following lines:

I want you to know
 I'm a mirrorball
 I can change everything about me to fit in (Swift 1:19)

The third line is a direct reference to the narrator’s willingness to change herself in order to be more appealing for the public eye in general and for the male audience in particular.

Up until this point, it might seem that the narrator is trying to say that it is her choice to present herself this way. However, the bridge reveals a different message:

And they called off the circus
 Burned the disco down
 When they sent home the horses
 And the rodeo clowns
 I'm still on that tightrope
 I'm still trying everything to get you laughing at me
 I'm still a believer but I don't know why
 I've never been a natural
 All I do is try, try, try
 I'm still on that trapeze
 I'm still trying everything
 To keep you looking at me (Swift 2:29)

The metaphor of the circus is introduced as the narrator expresses how she feels she is just something to look at; not only that, but she feels the need to be looked at. She needs the attention, even when everything has been called off, as it seems to be the only way for her to feel valuable. The lines “I’ve never been a natural, all I do is try, try, try” introduce the use of incompetence as a strategy. The lines reveal the complex duality of being a woman in a men’s world: the narrator knows that she does not have the natural ability to appear attractive to men, but she still tries as it is what is expected from her and her source of validation, even though, in order to do that, she needs to put herself in dangerous positions such as a tightrope or a trapeze. These two elements also serve as a metaphor for the instability of trying to maintain oneself in such a position. The purpose of revealing her own incompetence is to express her “resistance to patriarchal expectations” (Radner and Lanser 423) even though she does try to fit into those expectations, she needs to make clear that it is not her choice to do so, that this is not who she is, but she has to do it because it is a men’s world.

The topic of incompetence, mixed with a desire to fulfill the expectations, is also the theme of the song “this is me trying”. In the first verse, Swift sings:

I've been having a hard time adjusting
 I had the shiniest wheels, now they're rusting
 I didn't know if you'd care if I came back
 I have a lot of regrets about that
 Pulled the car off the road to the lookout
 Could've followed my fears all the way down
 And maybe I don't quite know what to say
 But I'm here in your doorway(Swift 0:29)

The narrator is expressing that she is having a complicated time in her life right after having a period of happiness, to the point of thinking about ending her life, which is subtly expressed in the lines “pulled the car off the road to the lookout, could’ve followed my fears all the way down.” It definitely seems that this is her lowest point; however, these dark thoughts are not enough for her to stop trying to fit into the expectations:

I just wanted you to know
 That this is me trying (Swift 0:55)

These lines of the chorus imply that she is not trying for herself, but for someone else to see. Even at her lowest, the narrator is not concerned about her own wellbeing but about the male spectator seeing that she can still fit into what is expected from her. The last line of the song is “at least I’m trying” (Swift 2:48), manifesting once again her incompetence and that, despite not being “a natural”, she is still willing to try to be good enough for the male gaze.

4. Conclusion

Folklore by Taylor Swift is an album written by a woman, about women, and for women. It makes use of the topics and strategies that have been common in women's folklore since it exists. Said strategies exist so that women can produce art, literature and tradition that only other women can understand, making it less dangerous for them to do so. Some of the aforementioned topics are female rage, madness and guilt; the male gaze; the different expectations that women have to fulfill as opposed to men; and, in general, the harm that it produces in women to live in a world made by and for men.

Although *folklore* serves a purpose in making these issues visible and trying to reverse the stereotypes traditionally linked to women, it is only fair to admit that this is not enough within the context of the new wave of feminism that has been gaining relevance in the past few years. It can be said that Swift's *folklore* belongs to what Banet-Weiser (2018) describes as "popular feminism", which "exists most spectacularly in an economy of visibility, where it often remains just that: visibility." Banet-Weiser also argues that "popular feminism recognizes the vulnerability of women [...], but it then turns to already established structures of paternalistic power to challenge that vulnerability." This is in fact true about Swift's *folklore*, and it can be seen in some of the strategies she uses, especially in the use of appropriation and trivialization; instead of questioning and challenging the system itself, which belittles the role of women and only deems them as vulnerable and fragile, she just seems to be trying to prove that she is as capable as men are. Moreover, it is also necessary to recognize that Swift is a woman, specifically a famous woman, and thus a victim of misogyny over and over again; however, she is a privileged person in every other aspect of her existence: she is white, she fits into the beauty standards, she is powerful and she is a millionaire.

Nevertheless, it would not be fair either to demand any kind of activism from her as if it was mandatory; doing so would, in fact, contribute to the idea that women have to fulfill certain expectations. Whether these expectations have to do with the role of women in a patriarchal society or with being "the perfect feminist", women do not owe the world anything and women do not have to earn the right to exist and make art. Swift's contribution to women's folklore cannot be denied or overlooked, as she has made an album only for women to enjoy, and thus contributing to the making of a common, shared

culture that for once, leaves the men outside. After all, “she had a marvelous time ruining everything” (Swift, “the last great american dynasty” 1:23).

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6. Anexos

“the 1”

I'm doing good, I'm on some new shit
Been saying "yes" instead of "no"
I thought I saw you at the bus stop, I didn't though
I hit the ground running each night
I hit the Sunday matinée
You know the greatest films of all time were never made
I guess you never know, never know
And if you wanted me, you really should've showed
And if you never bleed, you're never gonna grow
And it's alright now
But we were something, don't you think so?
Roaring 20s, tossing pennies in the pool
And if my wishes came true
It would've been you
In my defense, I have none
For never leaving well enough alone
But it would've been fun
If you would've been the one
(Ooh)
I have this dream you're doing cool shit
Having adventures on your own
You meet some woman on the internet and take her home
We never painted by the numbers, baby
But we were making it count
You know the greatest loves of all time are over now
I guess you never know, never know
And it's another day waking up alone
But we were something, don't you think so?
Roaring 20s, tossing pennies in the pool

And if my wishes came true
 It would've been you
 In my defense, I have none
 For never leaving well enough alone
 But it would've been fun
 If you would've been the one
 I, I, I persist and resist the temptation to ask you
 If one thing had been different
 Would everything be different today?
 We were something, don't you think so?
 Rosé flowing with your chosen family
 And it would've been sweet
 If it could've been me
 In my defense, I have none
 For digging up the grave another time
 But it would've been fun
 If you would've been the one

“cardigan”

Vintage tee, brand new phone
 High heels on cobblestones
 When you are young, they assume you know nothing
 Sequin smile, black lipstick
 Sensual politics
 When you are young, they assume you know nothing
 But I knew you
 Dancin' in your Levi's
 Drunk under a streetlight, I
 I knew you
 Hand under my sweatshirt
 Baby, kiss it better, I

And when I felt like I was an old cardigan
Under someone's bed
You put me on and said I was your favorite
A friend to all is a friend to none
Chase two girls, lose the one
When you are young, they assume you know nothin'
But I knew you
Playing hide-and-seeK and
Giving me your weekends, I
I knew you
Your heartbeat on the High Line
Once in 20 lifetimes, I
And when I felt like I was an old cardigan
Under someone's bed
You put me on and said I was your favorite
To kiss in cars and downtown bars
Was all we needed
You drew stars around my scars
But now I'm bleedin'
'Cause I knew you
Steppin' on the last train
Marked me like a bloodstain, I
I knew you
Tried to change the ending
Peter losing Wendy, I
I knew you
Leavin' like a father
Running like water, I
And when you are young, they assume you know nothing
But I knew you'd linger like a tattoo kiss
I knew you'd haunt all of my what-ifs
The smell of smoke would hang around this long
'Cause I knew everything when I was young
I knew I'd curse you for the longest time

Chasin' shadows in the grocery line
 I knew you'd miss me once the thrill expired
 And you'd be standin' in my front porch light
 And I knew you'd come back to me
 You'd come back to me
 And you'd come back to me
 And you'd come back
 And when I felt like I was an old cardigan
 Under someone's bed
 You put me on and said I was your favorite

“the last great american dynasty”

Rebekah rode up on the afternoon train
 It was sunny
 Her saltbox house on the coast
 Took her mind off St. Louis
 Bill was the heir to the Standard Oil name and money
 And the town said, "How did a middle-class divorcée do it?"
 The wedding was charming, if a little gauche
 There's only so far new money goes
 They picked out a home and called it "Holiday House"
 Their parties were tasteful, if a little loud
 The doctor had told him to settle down
 It must have been her fault his heart gave out
 And they said
 "There goes the last great American dynasty"
 "Who knows if she never showed up, what could've been"
 "There goes the maddest woman this town has ever seen"
 "She had a marvelous time ruinin' everything"
 Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set, forever
 Flew in all her Bitch Pack friends from the city
 Filled the pool with champagne and swam with the big names

And blew through the money on the boys and the ballet
 And losin' on card game bets with Dalí
 And they said
 "There goes the last great American dynasty"
 "Who knows if she never showed up, what could've been"
 "There goes the most shameless woman this town has ever seen"
 "She had a marvelous time ruinin' everything"
 They say she was seen on occasion
 Pacing the rocks, staring out at the midnight sea
 And in a feud with her neighbor
 She stole his dog and dyed it key lime green
 50 years is a long time
 Holiday House sat quietly on that beach
 Free of women with madness, their men and bad habits
 And then it was bought by me
 Who knows if I never showed up what could've been
 There goes the loudest woman this town has ever seen
 I had a marvelous time ruinin' everything
 I had a marvelous time ruinin' everything
 A marvelous time ruinin' everything
 A marvelous time
 I had a marvelous time

“exile” (feat. Bon Iver)

I can see you standing, honey
 With his arms around your body
 Laughin', but the joke's not funny at all
 And it took you five whole minutes
 To pack us up and leave me with it
 Holdin' all this love out here in the hall
 I think I've seen this film before
 And I didn't like the ending
 You're not my homeland anymore

So what am I defending now?
You were my town
Now I'm in exile, seein' you out
I think I've seen this film before
I can see you starin', honey
Like he's just your understudy
Like you'd get your knuckles bloody for me
Second, third, and hundredth chances
Balancin' on breaking branches
Those eyes add insult to injury
I think I've seen this film before
And I didn't like the ending
I'm not your problem anymore
So who am I offending now?
You were my crown
Now I'm in exile, seein' you out
I think I've seen this film before
So I'm leavin' out the side door
So step right out, there is no amount
Of crying I can do for you
All this time
We always walked a very thin line
You didn't even hear me out (you didn't even hear me out)
You never gave a warning sign (I gave so many signs)
All this time
I never learned to read your mind (never learned to read my mind)
I couldn't turn things around (you never turned things around)
'Cause you never gave a warning sign (I gave so many signs)
So many signs, so many signs
You didn't even see the signs
I think I've seen this film before
And I didn't like the ending
You're not my homeland anymore
So what am I defending now?

You were my town
Now I'm in exile, seein' you out
I think I've seen this film before
So I'm leavin' out the side door
So step right out, there is no amount
Of crying I can do for you
All this time
We always walked a very thin line
You didn't even hear me out (didn't even hear me out)
You never gave a warning sign (I gave so many signs)
All this time
I never learned to read your mind (never learned to read my mind)
I couldn't turn things around (you never turned things around)
'Cause you never gave a warning sign (I gave so many signs)
All this time (so many signs)
I never learned to read your mind (so many signs)
I couldn't turn things around (I couldn't turn things around)
'Cause you never gave a warning sign (you never gave a warning sign)
You never gave a warning sign

“mirrorball”

I want you to know
I'm a mirrorball
I'll show you every version of yourself tonight
I'll get you out on the floor
Shimmering beautiful
And when I break it's in a million pieces
Hush
When no one is around, my dear
You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes
Spinning in my highest heels, love
Shining just for you
Hush

I know they said the end is near
But I'm still on my tallest tiptoes
Spinning in my highest heels, love
Shining just for you
I want you to know
I'm a mirrorball
I can change everything about me to fit in
You are not like the regulars
The masquerade revelers
Drunk as they watch my shattered edges glisten
Hush
When no one is around, my dear
You'll find me on my tallest tiptoes
Spinning in my highest heels, love
Shining just for you
Hush
I know they said the end is near
But I'm still on my tallest tiptoes
Spinning in my highest heels, love
Shining just for you
And they called off the circus
Burned the disco down
When they sent home the horses
And the rodeo clowns
I'm still on that tightrope
I'm still trying everything to get you laughing at me
I'm still a believer but I don't know why
I've never been a natural
All I do is try, try, try
I'm still on that trapeze
I'm still trying everything
To keep you looking at me
Because I'm a mirrorball
I'm a mirrorball

I'll show you every version of yourself

Tonight

“seven”

Please picture me

In the trees

I hit my peak at seven feet

In the swing

Over the creek

I was too scared to jump in

But I, I was high in the sky

With Pennsylvania under me

Are there still beautiful things?

Sweet tea in the summer

Cross your heart, won't tell no other

And though I can't recall your face

I still got love for you

Your braids like a pattern

Love you to the moon and to Saturn

Passed down like folk songs

The love lasts so long

And I've been meaning to tell you

I think your house is haunted

Your dad is always mad and that must be why

And I think you should come live with

Me and we can be pirates

Then you won't have to cry

Or hide in the closet

And just like a folk song

Our love will be passed on

Please picture me

In the weeds

Before I learned civility
I used to scream ferociously
Any time I wanted
I, I
Sweet tea in the summer
Cross my heart, won't tell no other
And though I can't recall your face
I still got love for you
Pack your dolls and a sweater
We'll move to India forever
Passed down like folk songs
Our love lasts so long

“august”

Salt air, and the rust on your door
I never needed anything more
Whispers of "Are you sure?"
"Never have I ever before"
But I can see us lost in the memory
August slipped away into a moment in time
'Cause it was never mine
And I can see us twisted in bedsheets
August sipped away like a bottle of wine
'Cause you were never mine
Your back beneath the sun
Wishin' I could write my name on it
Will you call when you're back at school?
I remember thinkin' I had you
But I can see us lost in the memory
August slipped away into a moment in time
'Cause it was never mine
And I can see us twisted in bedsheets

August sipped away like a bottle of wine
'Cause you were never mine
Back when we were still changin' for the better
Wanting was enough
For me, it was enough
To live for the hope of it all
Cancel plans just in case you'd call
And say, "Meet me behind the mall"
So much for summer love and saying "us"
'Cause you weren't mine to lose
You weren't mine to lose, no
But I can see us lost in the memory
August slipped away into a moment in time
'Cause it was never mine
And I can see us twisted in bedsheets
August sipped away like a bottle of wine
'Cause you were never mine
'Cause you were never mine, never mine
But do you remember?
Remember when I pulled up and said, "Get in the car"
And then canceled my plans just in case you'd call?
Back when I was livin' for the hope of it all, for the hope of it all
"Meet me behind the mall"
Remember when I pulled up and said, "Get in the car"
And then canceled my plans just in case you'd call?
Back when I was livin' for the hope of it all (for the hope of it all)
For the hope of it all
For the hope of it all

“this is me trying”

I've been having a hard time adjusting
I had the shiniest wheels, now they're rusting
I didn't know if you'd care if I came back

I have a lot of regrets about that
Pulled the car off the road to the lookout
Could've followed my fears all the way down
And maybe I don't quite know what to say
But I'm here in your doorway
I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
They told me all of my cages were mental
So I got wasted like all my potential
And my words shoot to kill when I'm mad
I have a lot of regrets about that
I was so ahead of the curve, the curve became a sphere
Fell behind on my classmates, and I ended up here
Pouring out my heart to a stranger
But I didn't pour the whiskey
I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
At least I'm trying
And it's hard to be at a party when I feel like an open wound
It's hard to be anywhere these days when all I want is you
You're a flashback in a film reel on the one screen in my town
And I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
(And maybe I don't quite know what to say)
I just wanted you to know
That this is me trying
At least I'm trying

“invisible string”

Green was the color of the grass
Where I used to read at Centennial Park
I used to think I would meet somebody there
Teal was the color of your shirt
When you were sixteen at the yogurt shop
You used to work at to make a little money
Time, curious time
Gave me no compasses, gave me no signs
Were there clues I didn't see?
And isn't it just so pretty to think
All along there was some
Invisible string
Tying you to me?
Ooh
Bad was the blood of the song in the cab
On your first trip to LA
You ate at my favorite spot for dinner
Bold was the waitress on our three year trip
Getting lunch down by the lakes
She said I looked like an American singer
Time, mystical time
Cuttin' me open, then healin' me fine
Were there clues I didn't see?
And isn't it just so pretty to think
All along there was some
Invisible string
Tying you to me?
Ooh
A string that pulled me
Out of all the wrong arms right into that dive bar
Something wrapped all of my past mistakes in barbed wire
Chains around my demons, wool to brave the seasons
One single thread of gold tied me to you
Cold was the steel of my axe to grind

For the boys who broke my heart
 Now I send their babies presents
 Gold was the color of the leaves
 When I showed you around Centennial Park
 Hell was the journey but it brought me heaven
 Time, wondrous time
 Gave me the blues and then purple pink skies
 And it's cool, baby, with me
 And isn't it just so pretty to think
 All along there was some
 Invisible string
 Tying you to me?

“mad woman”

What did you think I'd say to that?
 Does a scorpion sting when fighting back?
 They strike to kill and you know I will
 You know I will
 What do you sing on your drive home?
 Do you see my face in the neighbor's lawn?
 Does she smile?
 Or does she mouth, "Fuck you forever"?
 Every time you call me crazy
 I get more crazy
 What about that?
 And when you say I seem angry
 I get more angry
 And there's nothin' like a mad woman
 What a shame she went mad
 No one likes a mad woman
 You made her like that
 And you'll poke that bear 'til her claws come out
 And you find something to wrap your noose around

And there's nothin' like a mad woman
Now I breathe flames each time I talk
My cannons all firin' at your yacht
They say, "Move on", but you know, I won't
And women like hunting witches, too
Doing your dirtiest work for you
It's obvious that wanting me dead
Has really brought you two together
Every time you call me crazy
I get more crazy
What about that?
And when you say I seem angry
I get more angry
And there's nothin' like a mad woman
What a shame she went mad
No one likes a mad woman
You made her like that
And you'll poke that bear 'til her claws come out
And you find something to wrap your noose around
And there's nothin' like a mad woman
I'm takin' my time
Takin' my time
'Cause you took everything from me
Watchin' you climb
Watchin' you climb
Over people like me
The master of spin
Has a couple side flings
Good wives always know
She should be mad
Should be scathing like me
But no one likes a mad woman
What a shame she went mad
You made her like that

“betty”

Betty, I won't make assumptions
About why you switched your homeroom but
I think it's 'cause of me
Betty, one time I was riding on my skateboard
When I passed your house
It's like I couldn't breathe
You heard the rumors from Inez
You can't believe a word she says
Most times, but this time it was true
The worst thing that I ever did
Was what I did to you
But if I just showed up at your party
Would you have me?
Would you want me?
Would you tell me to go fuck myself?
Or lead me to the garden?
In the garden would you trust me
If I told you it was just a summer thing?
I'm only 17, I don't know anything
But I know I miss you
Betty, I know where it all went wrong
Your favorite song was playing
From the far side of the gym
I was nowhere to be found
I hate the crowds, you know that
Plus, I saw you dance with him
You heard the rumors from Inez
You can't believe a word she says
Most times, but this time it was true
The worst thing that I ever did
Was what I did to you

But if I just showed up at your party
Would you have me?
Would you want me?
Would you tell me to go fuck myself?
Or lead me to the garden?
In the garden would you trust me
If I told you it was just a summer thing?
I'm only seventeen, I don't know anything
But I know I miss you
I was walking home on broken cobblestones
Just thinking of you when she pulled up like
A figment of my worst intentions
She said "James, get in, let's drive"
Those days turned into nights
Slept next to her, but
I dreamt of you all summer long
Betty, I'm here on your doorstep
And I planned it out for weeks now
But it's finally sinkin' in
Betty, right now is the last time
I can dream about what happens when
You see my face again
The only thing I wanna do
Is make it up to you
So I showed up at your party
Yeah, I showed up at your party
Yeah, I showed up at your party
Will you have me?
Will you love me?
Will you kiss me on the porch
In front of all your stupid friends?
If you kiss me, will it be just like I dreamed it?
Will it patch your broken wings?
I'm only 17, I don't know anything

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

“peace”

Our coming-of-age has come and gone
 Suddenly the summer, it's clear
 I never had the courage of my convictions
 As long as danger is near
 And it's just around the corner, darling
 'Cause it lives in me
 No, I could never give you peace
 But I'm a fire, and I'll keep your brittle heart warm
 If your cascade ocean wave blues come
 All these people think love's for show
 But I would die for you in secret
 The devil's in the details, but you got a friend in me
 Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?
 Your integrity makes me seem small
 You paint dreamscapes on the wall
 I talk shit with my friends
 It's like I'm wasting your honor
 And you know that I'd swing with you for the fences
 Sit with you in the trenches
 Give you my wild, give you a child
 Give you the silence that only comes when two people understand each other
 Family that I chose, now that I see your brother as my brother
 Is it enough?
 But there's robbers to the east, clowns to the west
 I'd give you my sunshine, give you my best
 But the rain is always gonna come if you're standing with me

But I'm a fire, and I'll keep your brittle heart warm
If your cascade ocean wave blues come
All these people think love's for show
But I would die for you in secret
The devil's in the details, but you got a friend in me
Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?
Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?
Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?