



Universidad de Valladolid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

**“Romeo, save me, I’ve been feeling so
alone”: A Feminist Analysis of the
Representation of Romantic Ideals in Taylor
Swift’s Lyrics.**

Hafssa Wafi Asrih

Tutora: Laura Álvarez Trigo

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

Curso: 2023-2024

My sincere thanks to Laura, who truly understood my world and provided me with constant guidance. And the deepest gratitude to my family, especially my parents, for all of the sacrifice. Everything I do is for you and thanks to you, A&J.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the evolution of Taylor Swift's music in terms of its representation of romantic ideals, femininity, gender roles, and female empowerment from a feminist perspective. Through a detailed analysis of thematic, contextual, linguistic elements, and public persona, the research examines how Swift both challenges and perpetuates traditional gender norms. Using a qualitative analysis and drawing on her biography, Swift's lyrics were analyzed in three eras: romantic love, heartbreak, and empowerment. The findings revealed that although Swift attempts to subvert gender norms and promote female autonomy, she often perpetuates emotional dependency and traditional narratives. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Swift's feminist approach, though impactful, is focused on individuality and commercial success and often aligns with white, neoliberal feminism, lacking intersectionality, and it limits her ability to promote systemic change.

Key Words: Taylor Swift, Feminism, Gender roles, Romantic love, Empowerment, Femininity.

Resumen

El presente trabajo de fin grado investiga la evolución de la música de Taylor Swift en términos de su representación de los ideales románticos, la feminidad, roles de género y empoderamiento femenino desde una perspectiva feminista. A través de un análisis detallado de los elementos temáticos, contextuales y lingüísticos, así como de su figura pública, la investigación examina cómo Swift desafía y perpetúa las normas de género tradicionales. Utilizando un análisis cualitativo y basándose en su biografía, se analizaron las letras de Swift en tres eras: amor romántico, desamor y empoderamiento. Los hallazgos revelaron que, aunque Swift intenta subvertir las normas de género y promover la autonomía femenina, a menudo perpetúa la dependencia emocional y las narrativas tradicionales. En última instancia, el trabajo concluye que el enfoque feminista de Swift, aunque impactante, se centra en la individualidad y el éxito comercial, y a menudo se alinea con el feminismo blanco y neoliberal, careciendo de interseccionalidad, lo que limita su capacidad para promover cambios sistémicos.

Palabras Clave: Taylor Swift, Feminismo, Roles de género, Amor romántico, Empoderamiento, Feminidad.

TABLE OF CONTENT

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Theoretical Framework.....	6
3.	Chapter I: The Romantic Love Era.....	11
3.1	<i>Love Story</i>	11
3.2	<i>You Belong with Me</i>	13
4.	Chapter II: The Heartbreak Era	16
4.1	<i>I knew you were Trouble</i>	16
4.2	<i>All Too Well</i>	19
5.	Chapter III: The Empowerment Era	22
5.1	<i>Lover</i>	23
5.2	<i>Mastermind</i>	25
6.	Conclusion	29
7.	References	32
8.	Annexes	38

1. Introduction

In the hectic landscape of the music industry, where new artists are constantly emerging and trends are rapidly shifting, one star has shone as an innovator in contemporary music, as recognized by the *2023 iHeartRadio Music Awards* (Mier, 2023). Taylor Alison Swift arises as a revolutionary figure in the present-day music industry. This statement is not based merely on subjective perception but is supported by the highly regarded *Time* magazine, which claimed the artist as person of the year 2023 (Lansky, 2023). The journalist Sam Lansky, who served as the “ghostwriter” for Britney Spears’ memoir, classifies the singer in a league of her own among pop stars, comparing her to legendary music icons such as Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, and Madonna. Her business success cannot be overshadowed as she has built an empire. According to *Guinness World Records*, she has formally secured her place as having the most successful world music tour of all time, breaking the historic milestone of being the first to surpass the remarkable 1-billion-dollar revenue threshold (Atwal, 2023). Debuting in March 2023 and scheduled to conclude in December 2024 after a total of 151 performances worldwide, the tour has surpassed this year’s two most lucrative tours, those of Beyoncé and Bruce Springsteen combined, in terms of revenue (Atwal, 2023).

The present dissertation focuses on issues such as the gender norms imposed on women, the female empowerment that emerged in the third wave and the representation of femininity in the present day and the established gender roles to come to grips with the lyrics of the successful American singer-songwriter, Taylor Swift. Her biography has proven to be an essential resource for the contextualization and personalization of her lyrics. This approach facilitates a more accurate interpretation that aligns with the events of her life, occurring at specific points in time and space. By integrating significant moments of Swift’s personal and professional trajectory - including her romantic interests, public conflicts, and stages of personal growth - it is possible to analyze the songs individually and at the same time, understand how they reflect her evolution as an artist and as a woman.

From her early beginnings in the country music scene to growing as a massive pop singer, Swift has firmly established herself as an icon of the decade. In accordance with the prestigious *Billboard* magazine, internationally renowned for its music charts, the singer was recognized as “one of the most prominent music artists of all time during

the 2010s” she was named Billboard Women in Music 2019, claiming her as “Woman of the Decade” (Staff, 2019). It is not only her musical success that is celebrated with the award, but also her commitment to diverse causes. She has been praised for her advocacy for creative rights, her contributions to literacy programs, cancer research and her involvement with the Time’s Up initiative (Staff, 2019). Such recognition reflects her illustrious career, as well as her positive impact and commitment to social and humanitarian causes. In her acceptance speech, she addresses the challenges faced by women in the music industry, especially her personal struggles since the very beginning of her career (Swift, 2019).

Her debut album in 2006, *Taylor Swift*, marked her initial steps in the industry, followed by two more successful country albums, *Fearless* released in 2008, and *Speak Now* in 2010. After the Grammy win for the *Fearless* album, where she became the youngest solo artist to win the category of “Album of the Year”, she faced unexpected criticism in 2010 (Forman, 2017). According to Swift’s words in the acceptance speech previously mentioned, there were sudden doubts about her vocal power and her authenticity as a songwriter, mainly due to former collaborations with co-writers in the creation of some songs: “So then I decided that I would be the only songwriter on my third album and that I would tour constantly, work on my vocals every day, and perfect my stamina in a live show. I decided I would be what they said I couldn’t be” (Swift, 2019). She also sought to showcase her artistic abilities, particularly considering the incident that involved Kanye West. In 2009, during her MTV Video Music Awards speech, West interrupted her and forcibly removed the microphone from her hands and declared that Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” deserved the award instead (Grady, 2019). In response to the humiliation, she assumed the songwriting role on her third album *Speak Now* and demonstrated her ability to reinvent herself introducing a new album called *Red* in 2012, which combined elements of country and pop and was later criticized for a significant number of songs about romantic breakups, as well as for being a radical departure from her previous musical style (Swift, 2019). Subsequently, in 2014, the album *1989* marked a pivotal moment in her career, establishing her as a pop star. This contemporary and mature pop sound was a resounding success both commercially and with the critics (Lansky, 2023).

Following this transition, she expanded her music catalogue with *Reputation* in 2017 after disappearing from the public eye for over a year due to her dispute with West,

which arose when he released a song with lyrics that were vulgar in their reference to Swift. Consequently, she denied that she had accepted being called as mentioned in the song, but the situation was further complicated when Kim Kardashian, then West's wife, posted an edited and fake video of a conversation between the two artists in which Swift appeared to have approved the lyrics (Lansky, 2023). Later, she released *Lover* in 2019, which addressed the fact that women may sometimes face obstacles when fighting for their freedom because of gender discrimination (Ayu et al., 2023). Particularly, In the music video for the song "The Man", Swift disguises herself as a man to explore the implications of gender identity. The video highlights the discrepancy between men's and women's societal experiences, with men often receiving greater acceptance and privilege (Ayu et al., 2023). The lyrics also allude to the "#MeToo" movement and are closely connected to Taylor's personal experience in 2013, when she was a victim of sexual harassment, which resulted in a trial that she won in 2017, as reported by BBC News (2017).

During the 2020 pandemic, Swift caught her fans by surprise with the release of two albums, conceptually linked as "sisters", *Folklore* and *Evermore*. These albums, co-written and co-produced in conjunction with Aaron Dessner, Jack Antonoff and Justin Vernon from the group Bon Iver, are considered a fusion of "melancholic and indie" sound (Shaffer, 2020). Lastly, her tenth original studio album was released in 2022, *Midnights*. Within just four days, she broke the record for the highest weekly sales and surpassed her own record by reaching a notable 185 million streams on the day of its release, which enshrined her as one of the most significant female artists of the 21st century (Balasaygun, 2022).

With the best-selling female tour of 2023, she has become one of the most successful female artists who not only performs normativity and tradition but is also considered to be the current role model for female empowerment (Pollock, 2014). On the one hand, Swift's figure provides a paradigmatic view in terms of embodying the vivid image of innocence while serving as a key reference for teenage girls in the United States (Fogarty & Arnold, 2021). Her appearance in the public sphere has shaped a representation beyond the merely aesthetic, establishing her as a cultural icon that personifies the values of normative femininity and innocence. On the other hand, aside from being a "white, blonde, thin, wealthy all-American girl next door", she chooses to embrace and show her own innocence to provide relatability and serve as a role model

(Pollock, 2014). In Pollock's words, Swift's empowerment represents the normativity against female power that is supposed to rebel, rather than defying convention (Pollock, 2014).

Furthermore, the term "normative" is closely associated with Swift, who is meant to be enclosed as the current feminist model, just as the concept of empowerment is to modern feminism. Both ideas are nowadays influenced by celebrity culture and capitalism, which has given rise to a new form of feminist activism that draws on celebrity culture (Chidgey, 2021). As stated by *USA Today*, Taylor Swift has enough power to sway her fans, called "Swifties", to register during the National Voter Registration Day (Trevor, 2024). In September 2023, as a result of an Instagram post from Swift, it was reported a record of over 30,000 people signed up through Vote.org. This type of activism acknowledges the impact that celebrities have in promoting social movements and advocacy (Chidgey, 2021). While her sense of empowerment may be contingent on the dynamics of celebrity culture, her ability to influence the public opinion and advocate for important causes reinforces her contemporary relevance as a celebrity icon, enriching the debate around the value of empowered women in modern society.

Taking all of this into consideration, an analysis is done based on a close reading of Taylor Swift's songs from her beginnings to the present day. The exploration focuses on the thematic elements, contextual nuances, popular culture references, metaphors, the language used, and feminist issues present in her work. In particular, it approaches these elements from a feminist perspective. The analysis is structured around three chapters, each corresponding to a specific era in Swift's discography: two songs from every era have been selected to follow a narrative thread that reflects the evolution of her music. The attention that this work pays to a possible evolution in her lyrics regarding gender roles and the position of the woman is meant to question any possible contradictions that emerge when confronting themes of female empowerment and traditional gender roles throughout her career. Besides evaluating if and how these lyrics challenge or align with traditional notions of gender and femininity, the songs are also analyzed to explore whether there is a strong portrayal of traditional gender roles in romantic relationships.

The first chapter, *the Romantic Love era*, explores Swift's beginnings in the music industry, by examining the songs "Love Story" (2008) and "You Belong with Me" (2008). A traditional approach to romantic love dominates this era, emphasizing gender

stereotypes and societal expectations for women. The objective of the analysis is to identify the instances where Swift either reinforces or challenges these norms early on. The second chapter, *the Heartbreak era*, examines the representation of failed romantic relationships through the songs “All too well” (2012) and “I knew you were trouble” (2012). This era is concerned with the presence of dysfunctional relationships, emotional dependence, and a lack of agency, among other significant issues. Lastly, the third and final chapter, *the Empowerment era*, attempts to identify various elements that reveal a new narrative of love and self-determination. The songs “Lover” (2019) and “Mastermind” (2022) address the notion that romantic love should be a freely chosen act, rather than an obligation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Firstly, to make this research more academically valuable, an exhaustive review of the existing studies and specified articles analyzing significant details of Swift's career and music has been achieved. This study completes the existing work by integrating an analysis of previous research, including academic articles and critical reviews in order to provide a nuanced approach of the Swift's impact and talent. Despite the abundance of available material on Swift, analyzing her lyrics remains something that is relatively superficial. It mainly focuses on elements such as metaphors, rhetorical figures, and imagery, while omitting other more complex aspects. This study seeks to go beyond the existing superficial analyses, but it also acknowledges and incorporates them into the analysis, which provides an in-depth vision of the meanings of Swift's lyrics and their relationship with the social, cultural, and personal contexts surrounding the artist.

The growth of women's empowerment in our society has not been limited to the emergence of social media, albeit it is a powerful tool in a contemporary society. During the 19th and 20th centuries women challenged the limits imposed on them by men; for instance in the US, women relied on openly organized protest methods to find confidence and strength for themselves, and they made their views evident to society by holding speeches, lectures and, through their writings (Malinowska, 2020). As specified by Beatriz Lindemann (2023): "The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 signified the end of the first wave of feminism as it symbolized a new era of feminism and a new American identity". The main purpose of the first wave of feminism was to fight for women's right to vote, access to education, reproductive autonomy, and the right to own property (Lindemann, 2023).

The second wave, which emerged in the 1960s and 1980s, was concerned with gender and sexuality, challenging the societal norms and roles assigned to women (Malinowska, 2020). According to Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), there was a problem within society that was not related to women's romantic relationships, but rather a problem that she referred to as "the problem that has no name". Many housewives of that time shared a common thought: there was a sense of discontent even though they were living the ideal suburban life (Friedan, 1963). Such a broader approach, and the identification of an underlying problem, brought a layer of complexity to the different perspectives on sexual liberation at the time. Whereas some feminists

perceived progress, others claimed that the sexual revolution had barely made a difference in breaking down sexual double standards (Payne, 2010). Women such as Angela Davis, a dedicated activist who has argued against the individual narratives of women's progress, emphasize the importance of self-awareness and learning the history of women's suffrage to recognize the connection between sexism, racism and class exploitation in order to develop an effective multiracial feminist movement (Davis, 1982).

In the 1990s came the digital revolution and with it the third wave of feminism. At this time, the role of women in the evolution of technology began to be a matter of interest, including the use of media for activism and political representation, the inclusion of sexuality issues in the feminist conversation as well (Malinowska, 2020). Within this wave, there were some female singers who revolutionized the music industry by addressing the issues mentioned before. A study conducted by Marybec Griffin, Adele Fournet, Angela Zhai, and Dianney Mascary (2024) found significant correlations between the lyrics written by female artists about their sexuality and the sexual identities constructed by adolescent girls and young women. The research suggests that R&B/Hip Hop lyrics include more sexually explicit content than Pop lyrics, while the number of references to female sexual pleasure is roughly twice the number of mentions to male sexual pleasure in both genres. For instance, a renowned pop singer, performer and 90s icon, Britney Spears, had been at that time the target of public criticism and comparisons with other female artists in pop music because of her representations of female sexuality, as it was mainly based on a hyper sexualization of her dances, lyrics, and clothing (Griffin et al., 2024).

Following this, a new wave emerged to raise awareness around intersectionality and the need to include the voices of women of different races, ethnicities, strata, and sexual orientations, in order to overcome stereotypes and amplify the voices of women from diverse backgrounds (Malinowska, 2020). As Davis herself stated: "And believe me, my sisters, I get very upset when I see the media portraying the executive with her briefcase as indicative of the advances that the women's movement has made over the last ten years" (Davis, 1982, p.8). Her point highlights how limited representations in media and society, which fail to encompass the experiences of women facing additional challenges due to intersecting identities, such as race, class, or other factors. This, in turn, highlights the potential value of a movement that advocates for intersectionality. During the fourth wave of feminism, gender-based violence, abortion, sisterhood, and self-

determination were relevant issues to be addressed, albeit they had already been prominent in the previous waves of feminism (Peroni & Rodak, 2020). This wave condemns the sexist and stereotypical portrayal of women in the media (Malinowska, 2020).

The problem that has “no name” was closely related to how culture and society perceived the heterosexual relationships and the romantic love, a feature that is particularly prominent in Western societies. In their book on the portrayal of women in modern film and television (*La representación de las mujeres en el cine y la televisión contemporáneos*), Pedro Colón and Juan Plaza argue that gender distinction has historically been a defining element of all societies, manifesting itself in the division of tasks by sex and in the assignment of differentiated roles to men and women (Colón & Plaza, 2010, p. 22). This distinction is not only established at an early age through the simple question of whether babies are boys or girls at birth but is also reinforced through exposure to stereotypes and myths in popular culture, such as fairy tales. The authors propose that discourses which justify gender distinction have been incorporated into culture through a variety of means, including myths, literature, and the media.

Furthermore, an analysis of the theoretical, social, and emotional conceptualization of love in Western culture by Alicia Pascual (2016) revealed that the myth of romantic love is a sociocultural construct that has perpetuated a patriarchal system and gender inequality. This myth has developed from earlier forms of love, such as courtly, bourgeois, and Victorian love. It is created as a consequence of gender differentiation, disparate socialization of men and women, and the effect of the media and cultural products on the formation of identity and subjectivity (Pascual, 2016). This myth has served to perpetuate a patriarchal social system that has the effect of promoting inequality between men and women. In Western society, men and women receive differential forms of socialization, whereby manhood is associated with strength, reason, independence and the public sphere, while femininity is associated with instability, passivity, and the private sphere (Pascual, 2016). One example of this is the prevalence of romantic love narratives in cinematic adaptations of traditional stories - or fairy tales - that perpetuate gender stereotypes, where the princess typically assumes the passive role while the prince assumes the active role (Colón & Plaza, 2010, p. 24).

Nevertheless, as proposed by Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), gender is not an inherent or essential quality, but rather a performance executed through

actions, behaviors and appearances. This performative nature of gender allows individuals to navigate societal expectations of masculinity and femininity, and these performances can be subverted or challenged. Butler explores the distinction between sex and gender: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1949, as cited in Butler, 1986). This distinction allows us to differentiate between sex, which is a biological fact, and gender, which is a cultural construction, challenging the notion that anatomy determines destiny since sex is understood as the anatomical and invariable characteristic of the female body, while gender is the cultural meaning that body acquires (Butler, 1986). In their essay on *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), Butler posits that gender transformation is possible through the subversive repetition of gendered acts, thereby breaking with the established norms. Additionally, they assert that there is no such thing as a true or false gender identity, as these concepts are social constructions that are sustained by performance (Butler, 1988).

The study carried out by Adriane Brown (2016) explores how Swift’s fans identify with her image as an “authentic” girl and questions the notion of “authenticity” in her music and how it relates to post-feminist ideals of white, heterosexual, middle-class femininity. In this article, an analysis is done of fan forums and websites, in which only compliments to her were posted since everything else was banned, teenage girls considered Swift to be an all-American girl with whom they identify. It concluded that the singer’s fans position her as a perfect idol, with no margin for error, in order to portray the image of a role model in the American society (Brown, 2016).

Another article of relevance is the one written by Mary Fogarty and Gina Arnold in 2021, an introduction to a special edition of the *Contemporary Music Review Journal* that discusses how Swift uses strategies with her team and talent to manage challenges inside the music industry, as well as to deal with issues of politics, cultural appropriation, gender identity and media scrutiny. The authors compare the singer to important artists in terms of cultural and political impact, such as Bob Dylan and Beyoncé. It is stated that Swift remained out of politics throughout most of her career, earning both criticism and praise from different sides of politics. Yet in 2018, she broke her silence by endorsing specific candidates and spoke out on issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and racism. This fact caused controversy among the minorities, who viewed it as cultural appropriation of black and queer movement elements and regarded her as the epitome of whiteness in the world of popular music (Fogarty & Arnold, 2021).

In a sociology thesis on gender, agency and image in Swift's lyrics over time by Emily Patel (2023), they argue to be the first in analyzing the content behind the lyrics of the singer which revolves around normative notions of femininity. In the thesis, the author examines her first seven albums, from *Taylor Swift* to *Lover*, questioning if her lyrics depict different types of femininity and whether they show a normative or distorted version over time. In the first chapter, the author refers to female empowerment as one of the aims of the research project, as it seeks to analyze how Swift reflects on her self-perceptions of agency and identity. According to Patel, she has transitioned into three main phases: the good girl, the temptress and the redemption/comeback, being all of them influenced by the "lifecycle" she was going through at the time (Patel, 2023).

3. Chapter I: The Romantic Love Era

Music and poetry have the power to convey emotions that are often difficult to express. Through the use of lyrics, melodies, metaphors and figures, it is possible to communicate these emotions in a different way. For this reason, the theme of love has become a common occurrence in music and the universality of love experiences allows artists to delve into and express a wide range of emotions through their songs (Madanikia & Bartholomew, 2014). Songwriters use music as a medium to express their own feelings of love as well as to create deeper emotional connections with their audiences. While seeking to establish an authentic connection, the songwriter also allows the audience to identify with their experiences and inner thoughts. The ability of a songwriter to share one's feelings through music reinforces the creation of an emotional bridge between the audience and the song (Pollock, 2014). The deepening of this connection is sometimes reinforced through a narrative construct, in this case, as does Taylor Swift in her songs. This chapter explores two popular songs from Taylor Swift's album *Fearless*, focusing on themes of love, gender roles, normativity, innocence, and adolescence.

3.1 *Love Story*

In Taylor Swift's second album *Fearless*, the singer expresses from a position of vulnerability her deepest desire to love and to be loved through a narrative: *Love Story* (see Annex 1). This song has achieved unprecedented fame, breaking records on multiple music platforms and maintaining its impact over time (Taylor Swift albums and songs sales, 2023). It stands as a contemporary tribute to William Shakespeare, particularly towards his romantic tragedies that have endured through centuries (Tuan, 2020). Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been adapted in many forms, including movies, theatrical plays, and musical compositions, and continues to be a source of inspiration for new artistic creations in the present day (Shabat, 2022).

Swift uses extratextual and paratextual references in her songs to enrich and contextualize the narrative world she creates. Choosing to recreate this story as a first-person point of view, Taylor Swift, who features as Juliet in the song, alters the fate of the forbidden lovers from the original narrative. Swift declares the following: "I was really inspired by the story. Except for the ending. I feel like they had such promise...and if that had gone just a little bit differently, it could have been the best love story ever told" (Pollock, 2014, p. 28). She breaks with the real scheme of the original story to provide a

joyful ending by making both characters, Romeo and Juliet, able to be together and become engaged, deviating from the original story's expectations and perpetuating the "happily ever after" trope.

The song unfolds from the first encounter between the lovers, drawing attention to how the narrator, Swift, and her alter ego, Juliet, recalls this moment as a nostalgic one. The first verse of the song describes an encounter in which two young people see each other for the first time at a party. From a toxic and dependent love to a story infused with classic drama, clandestinity and traditional symbolism, the song is presented as a clear call for help: "Romeo, save me", which reflects a power dynamic within the couple and further perpetuates a patriarchal structure. As Colón and Plaza claim that this kind of dynamic situates women in a more passive role, establishing a dynamic in which the male character, Romeo, must take on a brave and risk-taking role to become the main executor for the change, while the main female character, in this case personified by Juliet, or Swift by extension, tends to adopt a more dependent role (Colón & Plaza, 2010). These elements are based on fairy tales and other popular narratives where gender roles are deeply rooted.

"Romeo, save me, they're tryna tell me how to feel.

This love is difficult, but it's real.

Don't be afraid, we'll make it out of this mess.

It's a love story, baby, just say yes."

Nonetheless, in an attempt to break this pattern, Juliet directly invites Romeo by repeatedly exclaiming: "It's a love story, baby, say yes", three times during the song. It may also be seen as the romantic love that defies social norms; however, the song ultimately endorses heteronormativity as the exclusive path to true love. Ironically, she returns to the tradition by depicting Romeo kneeling to propose to her - though previously imploring her with a "Marry me, Juliet"- and at the same time, following the custom of approaching Juliet's father to get his consent. Besides attempting a supposed alteration of gender roles, which results in an explicit assumption of them, Romeo continues to have the dominant role in major decisions within the relationship and acts as a savior and protector simultaneously. It can be explicitly seen that the father also exerts a dominant influence on the relationship. The construction of a heterosexual marriage based on sexual reproduction has become culturally naturalized over time, thereby guaranteeing the

reproduction of specific gender patterns that perpetuate the family kinship system, which may be referred to as the “heterosexual contract” (Butler, 1988).

All of these aspects make the song an expression varying from the vulnerability of a complicated love to the utter affirmation of a persistent *cliché*: the belief in the power of love to overcome all adversity. This statement has been a subliminal falsehood for centuries: women have always obeyed their husbands, and if they did not, violence would be used against them (Bernárdez, 2018). Betty Friedan argues in *The Feminine Mystique* (1960) that women faced a social and personal unknown problem in the context of the post-World War II. They were forced to relegate their ambitions to the role of mother and housewife to achieve the idealized status imposed by the men of time, thus becoming unfulfilled and lacking a proper sense of identity beyond their traditional roles (Friedan, 1960). Although declarations in the song such as: “You’ll never have to be alone, I love you and that’s all I really know” are made to portray an image of a perfect romantic love, the idea of this kind of love discussed by feminists during the second wave has to do with the pressure on women to seek fulfilment and identity within heterosexual relationships, which makes them subordinate to men eventually (Payne, 2010).

Furthermore, since Juliet “has got tired of waiting, wondering if Romeo was ever coming around” shapes the fact that women should find their happiness in marriage and romantic relationships and their fate remains to be the “happy woman at home in the American suburb” that was once universally desired, as Friedan would point out. In this sense, the allusion to the main characters of Shakespeare’s play and the entire lyrics are unwittingly a reflection of a reality in which, regardless of attempting to defy some patterns, the traditional and societal expectations continue to have an impact on how love and gender roles are perceived.

3.2 *You Belong with Me*

Continuing the analysis of Taylor Swift’s most popular love songs, the 2009’s second most played country song, after “Love Story”, that according to *Billboard*, outsold all others in all genres: “You Belong with Me” (Trust, 2024). Despite their different narratives, both songs share a similar premise: the expectations of romantic love and the assumption of gender roles. This song is inspired by a personal story shared by Taylor Swift on a forum, where she revealed overhearing a phone conversation between a male friend of hers and his girlfriend: “She was just yelling at him! I felt so bad for him at that

moment” (Big Machine Records, 2010). “You Belong with Me” (see Annex 2) opens with a revealing statement: “You’re on the phone with your girlfriend, she’s upset”. As in the previous song, Swift chooses to narrate the story from a first-person perspective, but this time she involves three characters instead of two. Swift, who guides this narrative, becomes the creator of a love triangle, including herself in it and assuming the role of a supportive, caring, and empathetic girl, which suggests that she is the one who can offer him the emotional support that his current girlfriend cannot.

“I'm listening to the kind of music she doesn't like.

And she'll never know your story like I do”.

“I'm the one who makes you laugh,

When you know you're 'bout to cry,

And I know your favorite songs”.

There is a duality between her and the girlfriend that creates a dichotomy of the “good girl” versus the “bad girl”. The character of the girlfriend is depicted negatively as she speaks to the boyfriend on the phone in an angry manner for an unknown reason, which may even be attributed to the boyfriend’s own actions, but Swift decides to defend him (Tearle, 2023). This dichotomy not only captures the narrator’s inner struggle to capture her friend’s love and attention, but also mirrors the power dynamics and gender stereotypes embedded in popular culture. The archetype of the “bad girl” meets several characteristics regarding her image, such as her clothing, because she dresses provocatively, rebelliously, or carelessly: “She wears short skirts [...] she wears high heels” (Mickey et al., 2013). On the other hand, the “good girl” dresses in a more “traditional” fashion outfit: “I wear t-shirts [...] I wear snickers”. The bad girl is trying to achieve a position of higher status since she embraces traditional standards of femininity and beauty which would be the opposite point of being a “pick-me” girl and it may be an indication of internalized sexism, as differentiating oneself from others is seen as a way of attracting male attention (Rosida et al., 2022). While the girlfriend embodies a traditional image of a popular and self-confident girl, Swift presents herself as more authentic and innocent “nerd” by sitting “on the bleachers”, reflecting the normativity and promiscuity of her image.

From the beginning of her career to the present day, Swift's innocence has been a topic of discussion. In her analysis "Forever Adolescence" (2014), Pollock claims that Swift's innocence is commodified through her products, but is also highly eroticized, which serves to both sexualize her image and position her as the ideal version of an All-American girl in popular media. This same image of an innocent woman conforms to the imposed societal norms and gender roles, which Friedan encouraged to reject for the sake of their personal development and growth. As the song progresses, the character is further establishing her innocent persona while also expressing her affection for the love interest: "Can't you see that I'm the one who understands you, been here all along". Subsequently, the narrative takes a darker and more obsessive turn, where Swift employs repetition as a literary device, repeating the sentence "you belong with me" twelve times throughout the song. Yet she attempts to disguise her fixation by softening the title, instead of "you belong **to** me", opting for a less possessive and intense phrase (Tearle, 2023). However, the contradiction between the persistent repetition of the phrase and the gentler title, which reflects the internal struggle to appear less intense while expressing her feelings, she seeks to persistently reaffirm her connection with her friend.

On the whole, through these songs, Swift illustrates the emotional journey from the nostalgia of an idealized love to the internal struggle of unrequited love. Despite this attempt to challenge traditional expectations, "Love Story" continues to perpetuate the heteronormative romantic ideal, where love is presented as the unique source of happiness and fulfillment in a woman's life. Moreover, in "You Belong with Me", the narrator strives to win the affections of her friend, who is in a relationship with another girl who is depicted as the "bad girl" in contrast to the narrator's innocent and authentic image.

4. Chapter II: The Heartbreak Era

“It’s all the different ways that you have to say goodbye to someone. When you’re experiencing the ups and downs of a relationship, especially when you’re 22 years old, they all strike you different ways” (Gallo, 2012).

These words from Taylor Swift, in an interview with *Billboard* magazine, foreshadowed the direction she would follow in her album *Red*. In 2012, Swift released an all-new album that explored new interpersonal interactions, depicted relationships in which she seemed to lack control, and often presented herself as passive and powerless, a departure from her previous album, *Fearless*, which was characterized by an absolute innocence. (Patel, 2023). Embracing a more nuanced and authentic narrative that reflected her growth and maturity in terms of romantic relationships, the album represents a significant shift in Swift’s career. She takes the perspective of a teacher rather than a student, unlike her previous releases, sharing lessons about life and love, experimenting with different musical genres and styles, moving away from her country origins, and accepting pop influences (Roberts, 2012). The lyrics of this album explore different types of love, including the treacherous and sad, as well as the romantic and tragic, dealing with the fleeting nature of love and time, and the loss of relationships and sounds (Nast, 2019). This chapter provides a detailed analysis of two emblematic songs from the *Red* album. The analysis covers themes such as dysfunctional relationships, guilt and responsibility, emotional dependence and toxicity, social and gender expectations, and lack of agency.

4.1 *I Knew You Were Trouble*

During an interview on *Good Morning America* in 2012, Swift was asked about the motivation behind her song “I knew you were trouble” (see Annex 3). She explained that the song addressed the responsibility of starting a dysfunctional relationship and the choice to accept a partner despite clear “red flags”, ultimately leading to a heartbreak (ABC News, 2012). The repetition in the song of self-accusatory phrases such as “the blame is on me”, “the joke is on me” and “so shame on me”, are clear examples of the tendency that places the fault of a failed relationship on herself, suggesting that she should have acted differently because she was aware that he was no good in the first place (Patel, 2023). “I knew you were trouble” provides a glimpse into an emotionally raw narrative that runs through the song, where she describes a relationship in which the male character

does not care for her, is emotionally disconnected, and shows no empathy, while she is deeply attached and blames herself for it.

The song begins with a traditional opening phrase commonly found in fairy tales: “once upon a time”, suggesting an idealized and magical perception of the relationship at the beginning. However, the following verse reveals an utterly different reality. Although it is unclear whether the narrator is Swift or not, her partner begins to ignore her and pay no attention to her, which she finds in some manner pleasing: “I guess you didn’t care, and I guessed I liked that”. In her study, “The Eroticization of Dominance, Submission, and Coercive Control in Contemporary Pop Music” (2021), Natasha Mulvihill posits that contemporary pop music frequently portrays problematic relationships in an eroticized manner, where domination and submission are the primary issues. These scenes, where the threatening and attractive create a scenario where pain and pleasure are intertwined and ultimately normalized in our society, serve to reinforce this idea in our culture. Moreover, themes of submission are frequently present in sexual fantasies, particularly those involving rape.

According to the article of Joseph W. Critelli and Jenny M. Bivona on “Women’s Erotic Rape Fantasies” (2008), although submission fantasies are not exclusively related to rape (as there are other fantasies that focus on women’s sexual desire even if the actual rape is written by a female author, gaining the agency in narrative), they do represent an expression of women’s innate masochism. It is suggested that in many species, including humans, female submission and male dominance are basic patterns in the animal world, and that these biological tendencies may influence the attraction of rape as a fantasy topic for women (Critelli & Bivona, 2008, p. 65). The authors also emphasize that the desire for submission is not equivalent to a desire for actual rape, as there is no evidence to suggest that women would have a natural propensity to engage in rape. Consequently, contemporary pop music, by portraying problematic relationships in an erotic manner can contribute to the normalization of the idea that dominance and submission are acceptable components of sexuality by feeding these fantasies.

The decision to continue a relationship despite the possibility of harm may indicate signs of a toxic relationship, where harmful behaviors are being tolerated and an unequal power dynamic is being allowed to continue. It is a clear modern instance of the dynamic that Betty Friedan criticized in the 1960s: the tendency for women to engage in unbalanced or toxic relationships because of societal or even feminine expectations about

romantic love. Although the song does not explicitly address indicators of domestic violence, it does suggest an emotionally toxic relationship dynamic. This can be referred to as emotional violence. This form of violence involves using psychological or verbal tactics to control, manipulate, or emotionally harm another person (Duran & Eraslan, 2019). The song's narrator describes a relationship in which her partner is emotionally distant, lacks empathy and seems disinterested: "And he's long gone, when he's next to me", "no apologies, he'll never see you cry". According to Virginia Goldner's paper "Treating Abusive Relationships" (2004), such relationships are highly dramatic and arise from passionate emotional connections, developing a prevalent pattern of traits that lead to power manipulation: "Flew me to places I'd never been, now I'm lying on the cold hard ground". They are characterized by manipulation and control, which result in the victim developing an emotional dependency, making it challenging for them to distinguish between the moments of apparent happiness and suffering.

On a different note, Friedan would suggest that these representations in popular music reinforce the social effects that contribute to women's lack of agency. As a result, women may pursue relationships that simultaneously are genuinely harmful and provide a form of validation within society. In a world where patriarchal norms prevail, women face pressure to find the ideal love in order to establish their own identity within a heterosexual relationship (Payne, 2010). Therefore, if the desire to achieve a perfect relationship fades due to the partner's absent-mindedness, the feeling of losing oneself can become overwhelming. Swift portrays this sensation in the same way as seen in instances of Chapter 1, through the use of repetition: "without me, without me, without me"; "trouble, trouble, trouble". This approach emphasizes the lack of reciprocity and the partner's inability to commit emotionally.

From the beginning, she is confronted with the painful realization that the relationship was unhealthy, that her partner was unwilling to love her as she loved him, or anyone else, as she describes in the song, seeking to remove the guilt within herself. Ultimately, the song captures a narrative in which Swift takes responsibility for all her relationship problems and feels the lack of agency that results in an internalization of the cultural norms and the remoteness of achieving autonomy in all aspects of life, as Friedan would discuss (Payne, 2010). It is also revealed the peril of tolerating harmful attitudes and allowing dynamic that are unbalanced, which second-wave feminists would call power inequality.

4.2 *All Too Well*

“All Too Well” (see Annex 4) is a song of a storytelling of heartbreak, loss, and nostalgia through the use of metaphors, symbolism, and literal descriptions. It has become both critically acclaimed and acclaimed by the public, marking a significant peak in Taylor Swift’s career. Notwithstanding that the original version was released in 2012, a full-length version of 10 minutes and 13 seconds was released in 2021 as part of her re-recording album *Red (Taylor’s Version)* (McIntyre, 2022). The main difference between the two songs is the addition of verses that had been removed from the original version, which provide a better understanding of the narrative. The extended version had the privilege of being adapted into a short film, which was personally written and directed by the singer herself and has starred recognized actors such as Dylan O’Brien and Sadie Sink (Mier, 2022). The song, listed by *Rolling Stone* as one of the top 100 songs of all time out of their 500-song list, describes the experience of a woman who believed she had found the love of her life in her teens and she was promised eternal love, only to discover that he planned to end the relationship when she refused to conform to his expectations (Sofian & Sawardi, 2022). The analysis of the song is focused on the original version as it is most faithful to the year of release, but also some extracts from the extended version are included.

In contrast to the previous song, where the narrator already recognized the warning signs of getting involved in a dangerous relationship, the narrator in “All Too Well” begins the romance with great expectations and high hopes. The first verse reveals how she felt about her boyfriend at the time because “it felt like home somehow”, demonstrating the word “home” as a metaphor that describes a place where someone feels a sense of familiarity and comfort (Meidiska & Hapsarani, 2023). Metaphors often capture the essence of abstract feelings, like love, so they have the means to deliver an accurate description of the relationship. The symbol used twice throughout the song, and Swift describes it as her innocence: a scarf. This common object represents the loss of innocence, as he ultimately keeps it to himself and demonstrating he once got power over her. Moreover, it can also be used to bind someone, meaning it has the power to create the warmth and connection of a relationship as well as distance and memories (Kapurch, 2020).

“But you keep my old scarf from the very first week,
cause it reminds you of innocence and it smells like me.”

According to one fan theory, Swift's partner at the time of writing may have been Jake Gyllenhaal, based on the age difference suggested by the concept of innocence, when she was almost twenty-one years old and he was twenty-nine (Kapurch, 2020). It is worth noting that in the extended version, there is a verse where she mentions that despite getting older, his lovers remain the same age. This difference in age often influences the decision-making in different gender relationships, with a partner typically holding more power than the other, as has been shown in a number of studies (Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga, M. L., Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, M. T., & Cardelle-Elawar, M., 2007). These metaphors can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of how women are compelled to relinquish their own innocence and agency in unequal relationships.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that there are other metaphors. The symbol of the car in Swift's song is not just a simple object, but an emotional vehicle. Swift uses the car in her music to escape or avoid problems, to enjoy a private space, and for romantic encounters (Sartika & Max, 2022). In "All Too Well", the car is used as a metonymy that implies the emotion of starting a new love: "we're singing in the car getting lost upstate". This hope that she portrays at the beginning of the song is gradually lost as the narrative progresses. Despite moments of confusion and resignation, such as when she recognizes that "he's long gone" and "there was nothing else she could do" but suddenly they are dancing together in their kitchen as if nothing has changed. Returning to the feeling of guilt, as expressed in the song "I knew you were trouble", she blames herself for the breakup, stating "maybe I asked for too much", perpetuating a toxic relationship dynamic in which the other party is not held accountable and she carries the burden. This toxic dynamic has the ability to perpetuate emotional dependence, as she experiences feelings of being caught in a cycle of delusion. It may appear desirable to stay in a dysfunctional relationship than to face the sense of loss and loneliness that accompanies a break-up.

As an ultimate point, the phrase "all too well" is repeated on numerous occasions throughout the song, which could be interpreted as an indicator of assimilation that evokes nostalgia for a lost love. The line "wind in my hair, I was there, I remember it all too well" delivers the power of memory, which has the potential to bring both joy and grief. She is not only processing and reflecting upon her own experience but also reminding him of the pain he caused during and after the relationship by transmitting a message of "I remember everything too well, do you?".

In this chapter, the songs “I knew you were trouble” and “All too well” show different aspects of relationships and heartbreak yet offer a common perspective on the dynamics of power, toxicity, and emotional dependency. Through introspective and self-accusing lyrics, the song reveals an emotionally damaging dynamic in which the narrator blames herself for relationship failures and struggles to find her own agency. In addition, both songs emphasize the importance of identifying the warning signs in dysfunctional relationships and the tendency to assume blame for the failures, thus reflecting the social pressures and gender expectations that might influence women. At the same time, they reflect societal pressures and gender expectations that can influence women to seek validation through romantic relationships, often at the expense of their emotional well-being.

5. Chapter III: The Empowerment Era

Nowadays, the union of popular music and feminist movements is often reflected on social media platforms like Instagram, X, YouTube, and Facebook, which are essential spaces for feminist representation and mobilization (Ma et al., 2022). The fourth wave of feminism uses these platforms as a means of witnessing an unprecedented online mobilization, where women's voices unite and demand for gender equality but also for the opposite because of confrontations that occur (Malinowska, 2020). Celebrities like Emma Watson, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé are using their status to promote feminist activism, and while they have roots in the culture of celebrity and capitalism, they are able to contribute to the conversation and awareness of feminism (Chidgey, 2021). In 2013, a DJ for a country radio station sexually assaulted Taylor Swift during a pre-show encounter. She bravely confronted the situation when the DJ reached under her dress and grabbed her private parts while they posed for a photo. Her testimony about the case had a profound impact on the public, and *Time* magazine named her person of the year 2017, along with other women in the “#MeToo” movement, because her 2017 court victory is a strong reminder of the power of women's voices (Dockterman, 2017).

Despite her courage in speaking out about her own experience, some have mocked and rejected her, questioning the veracity of her claims. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to mistrust women and question the veracity of their accounts, while men's statements are automatically given credibility (Ayu et al., 2023). In her song “The Man”, Swift forcefully protests gender inequality and unfair societal expectations. In one of the lines, she sings: “I'd be a fearless leader, I'd be an alpha type. When everyone believes ya, what's that like?” There has been speculation among fans that the song is targeted towards Scooter Braun, a prominent figure in the music industry who is the manager of numerous high-profile artists, including Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber. He acquired the royalties to her music through a controversial agreement with her former record label without her consent, and by releasing the song, she makes a statement about her frustration with dominant male figures who control her work and career. She wrote it as a reflection on how she would be treated if she were a man, highlighting the additional difficulties women face to succeed. The music video, directed by Swift herself, won Best Direction at the 2020 MTV Video Music Awards and has been praised for its feminist message and for addressing issues such as the objectification of women and gender inequality (Martín, 2022). While Swift has undeniably used her platform to address feminist issues and

advocate for women's rights, some have criticized her motivations and authenticity in this area. They argue that her involvement in the feminist movement is opportunistic, and that she is taking advantage of a popular movement to improve her public image and increase her fan base (McNutt, 2020).

Swift's feminism aligns with a neoliberal approach that does not challenge the patriarchal and capitalist structures within which the music industry operates, limiting its ability to promote broader systemic change and perpetuating existing inequalities that benefit a group of privileged women rather than addressing the needs of marginalized women (Fahadi, 2024). Critics argue that her strategies, such as the "Voice Memos" on her 1989 album to proclaim her songwriting authorship and challenge gender hierarchies in the music industry, are limited by the neoliberal values of post-feminism, which prioritize individualism and commercial success over addressing systemic gender injustices (McNutt, 2020). In this chapter, the songs "Lover" and "Mastermind" are examined to explore how they may embody a more equitable representation of gendered roles in loving, but it may not turn out as intended. These songs may challenge traditional expectations and promote a new narrative of love and self-determination, reflecting Swift's evolution as an influential voice in contemporary popular culture.

5.1 *Lover*

Taylor Swift's album *Lover* is noted by the *New York Times* for its return to a more optimistic and hopeful tone, in contrast to her previous release *-reputation-*, which presented a darker atmosphere, yet romantic. The songs on this album reflect themes of hope, love, and renewal since Swift attempts to look forward and leave behind significant public conflicts, such as her feud with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian in 2016 (Caramanica, 2020). The song "Lover" (see Annex 5), which shares name with the album, has been described as "a romantic and lighthearted track that is likely to become a popular choice for first dance songs at weddings in the coming years", a rich portrait of intimacy and commitment that transcends the boundaries of traditional conventions (Vettorino, 2019).

This "love letter to love", according to the singer, explores the happiness and security of being involved in a stable and satisfying love relationship, in contrast to her previous songs (Aniftos, 2019). Swift offers a vision of love that celebrates authentic emotional connection and mutual understanding, and that undermines assumptions of

female submission. In this context, it is rumored that this song may have been dedicated to Swift's boyfriend at the time, Joe Alwyn, since she sings about loving her partner for three summers, confirming their 2016 dating anniversary (Gibson, 2024). At the beginning of the song, the invitation to leave the Christmas lights until January evokes a sense of warmth and comfort, depicting a wish to keep the magic and intimacy of the relationship alive over time. The line "this is our place; we make the rules" reinforces the idea that they share responsibility for their common space - also their relationship - and there is a sense of a common commitment and belonging. Moreover, the romance continues when the adjective "dazzling" is used to describe how he is surrounded by a haze that enchants her. In the *Tiny Desk Concert of 2019*, Swift explained that the song is about finding the right person after experiencing multiple breakups. The line "with every guitar string scar in my hand, I take this magnetic force of a man to be my lover" is particularly meaningful to her because she has spent a lot of time writing break-up songs, finally finding a place where she feels comfortable because she has chosen it and accepted it as it is (Harmata, 2019).

Nevertheless, the romantic narrative begins to fall apart when, in the chorus, she asks her lover if she "can go where he goes", or even if they "can be close forever". While this may seem romantic, especially when she makes an invitation as if it were the wedding vow - "Ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand?" - announcing her decision to love and choose him, it also reveals her dependence on him. The use of phrases such as "take me out" and "take me home" suggests a need for him to accept her as his lover, as if she begged him to do so. Additionally, through the song, she uses the verbs "could", "can", "will" which convey a sense of uncertainty about the request, implying that the action in question depends on the willingness or ability of the other person to perform it. The choice of modal verbs indicates that there is nothing certain about their actual relationship and how she may fear the rejection from her "lover". Furthermore, it is evident from her subsequent assertion: "And at every table, I'll save you a seat, lover", is open to interpretation. One possible interpretation is that he is unavailable for her in important matters, hence the empty seat. Another interpretation is that she is demonstrating her dependence on him. Although she shows that she has control of the relationship and has chosen him, the reality is uncertain: has he chosen her?

Furthermore, there are instances where she idealizes the relationship to demonstrate that it is indeed a true love, perpetuating the idea that she is meant for one

person: “Have I known you 20 seconds or 20 years?”. The ambiguity in time shows that they are destined to meet and be together, interpreting it as a manifestation of social expectations of eternal and true love, which in turn reflects a tendency towards the search for a “better half” or a perfect partner to complete one’s life. It is important to add the phrase where she states that “all’s well that ends well to end up with you”. Swift references Shakespeare’s idiomatic expression and play “all’s well that ends well” to convey an optimistic message that any situation, no matter how difficult, can be considered satisfactory if it is resolved positively at the end. This reflects her current happiness. This is in contrast to a previous song analyzed, “All too well (Taylor’s Version)”, where she states, “they say all’s well that ends well, but I’m in a new hell”. This parallelism is used to illustrate her evolution on love and relationships.

5.2 *Mastermind*

Taylor Swift’s latest album, *Midnights*, won the Grammy for “Best Album of the Year”, making her the artist with the most wins in this category in history (BBC News, 2024). The album features 13 songs inspired by “13 sleepless nights” of her life. The songs cover a range of topics, including her relationships, public image, and childhood, all of which based on her intrusive thoughts (Spanos, 2022). In the last song of the album, Swift presents herself as a “mastermind”. She plays with this concept, as she has been criticized for many years of her career for being a “calculated manipulator” instead of a smart businesswoman, as she stated in her speech at Billboard Women in Music 2019. It is true that she has been accused of presenting herself in a way that is contradictory to her desired image, because in her early performances she embodied different female roles that were perceived as contradictory; it was not possible to distinguish what was real and what was an act (Fogarty & Arnold, 2021).

Throughout the song (see Annex 6), she reveals her carefully planned steps in the relationship, from the initial meeting to the final commitment. She acknowledges that they met in the same place at the same time thanks to the universe, but then states in the chorus:

“What if I told you none of it was accidental,
and the first night that you saw me, nothing was gonna stop me?”.

During her career, Swift has examined the notion of fate in her relationships, emphasizing the idea that individuals are subject to larger forces beyond their control, as

seen in the previous song analyzed (Chow & Gutterman, 2022). However, this perspective changes drastically when she begins to take a more strategic approach to her search for love. Swift adopts the role of the active agent - rather than the passive one like in her earlier songs - rejecting fatalism and taking responsibility of controlling her own destiny. In her assertion of personal agency, she describes her tactics as part of a master plan, uses the metaphor of love as if it were a game of chess, and portrays her romantic interest as an opponent: "Checkmate, I couldn't lose". As a result, she receives the position of power in the game, assuming the role of a grandmaster who plays with her opponent like a toy, discarding the idea of gender norms that dictate that men should take the lead in romantic relationships (Chow & Gutterman, 2022).

In addition, this multi-faceted character challenges the traditional stereotypes of women in love, which Swift adopts, and plays in her favor as a *femme fatale* who challenges the social norms that perceive women in a certain way: "You see all the wisest women had to do it this way / cause we were born to be the pawn in every lover's game" (Washington, 2022). This female representation is at odds with expectations of feminine normativity, so Swift asserts her autonomy and justifies the fact that she cannot be only the typical archetype of the innocent and normative woman, but that she can also show other faces (Patel, 2023). Therefore, by being both the innocent and the villain, as she states in her song "The Archer" from *Lover*: "I've been the archer, I've been the prey" - she turned the label of calculator, which she once declared as "highly offensive" in the context of the dispute with Kanye West, to her advantage (BBC News, 2015). In the music industry, a frequent target of criticism, particularly after the release of her 2020 documentary, *Miss Americana*, directed by Lana Wilson. In the documentary, she breaks her silence, which was mainly interpreted as a tacit adherence to conservative values, by endorsing Democratic candidates in the U.S. midterm elections, a significant and surprising shift for someone who had previously maintained a neutral image (Arnold, 2021). This was a crucial moment in her career because her presentation as an authentic singer was undermined by her adherence to a conservative ideology, resulting in a tension between her public image and her music: "*Reputation* reveals inconsistencies in Swift's presentation of herself as an authentic artist in charge of her own creative and career choices, and these cracks are complicated by a second documentary, *Miss Americana*, in which her thrall to a conservative ideology becomes even more visible and problematic, even to herself" (Arnold, 2021).

Although the strategies she plays in the song could be understood as a feminist call for empowerment, critics such as Sydney Jordan, in their dissertation on “The Ideology of Commodification in the Music Industry” (2016), argue that Swift’s feminism is focused on privileged women who can have the same opportunities as her, and thus defines a white feminism. From a young age, her family moved to support her musical career and she had access to singing and drama lessons, in contrast to the fact that many women do not have such support and must struggle on their own, resulting in criticism of her representation of both feminism and the empowered woman, which some view as an unrealistic and overly idealized version (Jordan, 2016, p. 19). She is considered a feminist, but she has also been criticized for exploiting black women for profit. In one of her viral music videos, “Shake it off” from the album *1989*, she crawled underneath a line of Black women twerking, perpetuating the long-standing stereotypes that the Black community has always faced, and losing all the ties to a feminism that includes race, class or sexual identity and disregarding intersectionality in feminism (Garrido, 2021). Thus, she has gained popularity as a feminist icon in contemporary music due to the relatability of her songwriting and her “girl next door” authenticity, her songs are highly relatable to the audience. The following lines confirm that Swift shows a vulnerability that contrasts with the image of control and mastery projected in the song “Mastermind”.

“No one wanted to play with me as a little kid,
so, I've been scheming like a criminal ever since,
to make them love me and make it seem effortless,
this is the first time I've felt the need to confess,
and I swear, I'm only cryptic and Machiavellian cause I care’.

All in all, Taylor Swift examines the fusion of love, power, and self-determination from a feminist perspective, challenging conventional gender expectations and advocating for more equitable relationships. In “Lover”, she presents an optimistic and hopeful vision of love, with emotional authenticity and mutual understanding in a relationship. Nevertheless, it is also observed that there is an emotional dependency and the need for validation within the relationship which may contribute to the traditional conventions of female submission. Moreover, in “Mastermind” Swift takes a more strategic approach to love, rejecting fatalism and taking control of her own romantic destiny. While she portrays herself as the “mastermind” who reclaims her autonomy in

relationships, it has been argued before and I have tried to highlight through her lyrics that her feminism is limited to a neoliberal approach that does not question underlying patriarchal and capitalist structures.

6. Conclusion

Taylor Swift has emerged as a revolutionary figure in the contemporary music industry, having been recognized by the esteemed *Time* magazine as its Person of the Year for 2023. She has achieved remarkable business success, securing her place in the *Guinness World Records* as the artist with the most successful world music tour of all time, surpassing the billion-dollar revenue milestone. From her modest beginnings in the genre of country music to her current status as a pop icon, she has been able to connect with wide audiences through her music around the world.

This study has examined the evolution of Taylor Swift's music across three eras of her career: romantic love era, heartbreak era, and empowerment era. From a feminist perspective, aspects such as the thematic, contextual, and linguistic elements of her work have been scrutinized to identify the representation of traditional and contemporary gender roles, as well as the inconsistency between traditional expectations and female empowerment in Swift's narrative. Through this analysis, an intriguing pattern arises: despite Swift's efforts to challenge gender roles and traditional norms in some of her lyrics, she ultimately perpetuates these same models in her music. This phenomenon manifests consistently throughout all three chapters of this dissertation.

In the first chapter, it is illustrated how, at an early stage in her career in the music industry, Taylor Swift draws a vision of love that reflects traditional gender stereotypes and deeply fixed social expectations. Although in "Love Story" she tries to challenge some gender roles patterns, she ultimately affirms "Romeo" as the savior figure, thus reinforcing the traditional idea of female submission and romantic idealization. In "You Belong with Me", she is portrayed as the "good girl" and the most suitable choice for the male protagonist, while his current partner is shown as inadequate, or the "bad girl". This merely serves to compare the women and set them against each other for the sake of attracting a male partner, supporting the traditional narrative.

The second chapter, through the songs "All Too Well" and "I Knew You Were Trouble", shows a protagonist who is more aware of her own agency yet lacks the capacity to utilize it effectively. Swift portrays a woman who is the victim of emotionally troubled and unavailable men, providing a narrative that remains deeply rooted in the idea of romantic love; in other words, a woman experiencing grief due to the loss of a man with whom she has been romantically attached.

Lastly, in the third chapter, where Swift appears to attempt to subvert traditional gender expectations and promote a more equitable narrative of love and self-determination, “*Lover*” and “*Mastermind*” become indications of emotional dependency. Despite these attempts to subvert gender norms, Swift often finds herself caught in a paradoxical situation in which she attempts to challenge traditional notions of femininity while continuing to operate within a cultural and social system that reinforces them.

Taylor Swift has recently presented herself as someone in control of her own destiny, or the architect of her life. In this way, she attempts to regain control and autonomy over her romantic life and her public persona. This also raises questions about the truth behind her motivations: is it as simple as it seems or is it a strategy to reinforce her public image as an empowered and successful businesswoman in a world that is mainly dominated by men? Moreover, Swift has identified with a particular form of feminism: white feminism, which is only focused on the experiences and privileges of white and middle-class women. Despite her advocacy of matters such as gender equality, the lack of intersectionality in her position has been noteworthy. Furthermore, Swift’s inclination toward neoliberalism has limited her from advocating for those less represented within the music industry and society in general, and also, to perpetuate the existing inequalities that benefit a privileged group of women rather than addressing the needs of those who are marginalized.

This study is motivated by the necessity to acknowledge and address the intersections of oppression faced by women from different identities and experiences, as well as to break with the patterns of a traditional approach to romantic love, gender roles and norms. It is also important to notice that even the most renowned figures, such as Taylor Swift, may ultimately contribute to their perpetuation through their work, even when at first glance it appears that they are challenging these norms. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of a critical approach to key figures in popular culture, such as Taylor Swift. This study serves as a call to action for greater awareness in the production and consumption of popular music, with the aim of building a more inclusive world for all people. Although she is a person who benefits from a massive platform without doubt, it is proposed that, in conditions of having such a privileged position, she should address social injustices within the feminist movement.

For future research, it is recommended that further analysis of gender representations in contemporary popular music can be achieved using the approach employed in this

study about Taylor Swift's lyrics and music. In order to offer additional insight into the current cultural trends and dynamics, it is important to examine the ways in which other prominent icons in the music industry address gender roles, stereotypes or romantic ideals in their lyrics. Lastly, it would be valuable to examine the ways in which these representations of gender affect the perception and construction of gender identity in different demographic groups in order to contribute to the field of gender studies.

7. References

- ABC News. (2012, October 22). *Taylor Swift "GMA" Interview 2012: Star on new album "Red," hit single "Never Getting Back Together"* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqSl5C8Zlfc>
- Aniftos, R. (2019, August 8). Taylor Swift calls 'Lover' album her 'Love Letter to Love,' details 2 unreleased tracks. *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-vogue-interview-lover-two-new-songs-8526948/>
- Arnold, G. (2021). I Don't Give a Damn About Your Bad Reputation: Taylor Swift, Beyoncé Knowles, and Performance. *Contemporary Music Review*, 40(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1945224>
- Atwal, S. (2023, December 5). Taylor Swift's Eras tour breaks record as highest-grossing music tour ever. *Guinness World Records*. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2023/12/taylor-swifts-eras-tour-breaks-record-as-highest-grossing-music-tour-ever-762285>
- Aylward, K. M. (2013). *Good Girl/Bad Girl*. [Master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin]
- Ayu, P., Damayanti, D., Lirishati Soethama, P., & Udayana, N. (2023). An Analysis of Taylor Swift's Song Lyric The Man using Feminist Literary Criticism Theory. *Langua: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Education*, 6(1), 81–88. <http://jurnal.stkipkieraha.ac.id/index.php/langua/article/view/459>
- Balasaygun, K. (2022, November 1). How Taylor Swift went back to the past and turned «Midnights» into her biggest album success yet. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/11/01/how-taylor-swift-made-midnights-her-biggest-success-yet.html>
- Bernárdez Rodal, A. (2018). *Soft Power: heroínas y muñecas en la cultura mediática*. Editorial Fundamentos.
- Big Machine Records. (2010). Web Cite query result. Cut by Cut. *WebCite*. <https://webcitation.org/5rXkDwe4d>
- Brown, A. (2016). "She isn't whoring herself out like a lot of other girls we see": Heteronormative propriety and "authentic" American girlhood on Taylor Swift fan forums. *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies: Third Edition*, 5(1), 400–411. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315697215-52>
- Butler, J. (1986). Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex. *Yale French Studies*, (72), 35–49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930225>
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Thinking Gender)*. Routledge.
- Caramanica, J. (2020, January 24). Taylor Swift emerges from the darkness Unbroken on 'Lover.' *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/23/arts/music/taylor-swift-lover-review.html>
- Chidgey, R. (2021). PostfeminismTM: celebrity feminism, branding and the performance of activist capital. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(7), 1055–1071. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1804431>
- Chow, A. R., & Gutterman, A. (2022, October 21). A close read of every line of Taylor Swift's 'Mastermind.' *TIME*. <https://time.com/6223855/taylor-swift-mastermind-lyrics-explained/>
- Colón, P. S., & Plaza, J. F. (Eds.). (2010). *La representación de las mujeres en el cine y la televisión contemporáneos*. Laertes.
- Critelli, J. W., & Bivona, J. M. (2008). Women's erotic rape fantasies: An evaluation of theory and research. *Journal of Sex Research*, 45(1) 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490701808191>
- Davis, A. (1982). Women, race and class: An activist perspective. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 10(4), 5. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/women-race-class-activist-perspective/docview/1292042468/se-2>
- Dockterman, E. (2017, December 6). 'I was angry.' Taylor swift on what powered her sexual assault testimony. *TIME*. <https://time.com/5049659/taylor-swift-interview-person-of-the-year-2017/>
- Duran, S., & Eraslan, S. T. (2019). Violence against women: Affecting factors and coping methods for women. *J Pak Med Assoc*, 69(1), 53-7.
- Fahadi, D. (2024). 'The Man': Taylor's feminism could go so much further. *Pursuit*. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/the-man-taylor-s-feminism-could-go-so-much-further>
- Fogarty, M., & Arnold, G. (2021). Are You Ready for It? Re-Evaluating Taylor Swift. *Contemporary Music Review*, 40(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1976586>
- Forman, B. (2017, May 15). Deep 10 Taylor Swift's Fearless. *The Recording Academy*. <https://www.grammy.com/news/deep-10-taylor-swifts-fearless>
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gallo, P. (2012, October 10) Taylor Swift Q&A: The Risks of 'Red' and The Joys of Being 22. *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-qa-the-risks-of-red-and-the-joys-of-being-22-474565/>

- Garrido, S. (2021, November 11). Is Taylor Swift revolutionary or is she just white? *The Berkeley Beacon*. <https://berkeleybeacon.com/is-taylor-swift-revolutionary-or-is-she-just-white/>
- Gibson, K. (2024, April 19). Looking Back at All of Taylor Swift's Love Songs Inspired by Joe Alwyn. *People*. <https://people.com/music/taylor-swift-songs-about-joe-alwyn/>
- Grady, C. (2019, August 26). The Taylor Swift-Kanye West 2009 VMAs scandal is an American morality tale. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/8/26/20828559/taylor-swift-kanye-west-2009-mtv-vm-as-explained>
- Griffin, M., Fournet, A., Zhai, A., & Mascary, D. (2024). There's Some Whores In This House: An Examination of Female Sexuality in R&B/Hip Hop and Pop Music, 1991–2021. *Sexuality & Culture*, 28(2), 610-631. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10136-5>
- Harmata, C. (2019, October 16). Taylor Swift says she knew 'Lover' would be her title track and shares its 'Special' meaning. *People*. <https://people.com/music/taylor-swift-opens-up-about-lover-and-its-special-meaning/>
- Jordan, S. (2016). *The Ideology of Commodification in the Music Industry, as Exemplified by Taylor Swift*. [Senior Project, California Polytechnic State University]
- Kapurch, K. (2020). Unvaulting “Disney Plus Pop” in 2021: Romance, Melodrama, and Remembering in Taylor Swift’s All Too Well, McCartney’s Lyrics, and The Beatles: Get Back. *AMP: American Music Perspectives*, 1(2), 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.5325/ampamermusipers.1.2.0159>
- Lansky, S. (2023, December 6). Person of the Year: Taylor Swift. *TIME*. <https://time.com/6342806/person-of-the-year-2023-taylor-swift/>
- Lindemann, B. (2023). The First Wave of Feminism: A Movement Created by and for Americans. *Journal of Student Research*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v12i4.5637>
- Madanikia, Y., & Bartholomew, K. (2014). Themes of lust and love in popular music lyrics from 1971 to 2011. *SAGE Open*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014547179>
- Malinowska, A. (2020). Waves of Feminism. *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, 1, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc096>
- Martín, S. (2022). *Songs of Empowerment: Women in 21st century popular music*. Universitat Autònoma De Barcelona. 250–256.
- McCready, M. (2022, November 24). Why “Mastermind” by Taylor Swift is One of the Saddest Tracks on Her New Album “Midnights.” *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@morganmccready008/why-mastermind-by-taylor-swift-is-one-of-the-saddest-tracks-on-her-new-album-midnights-73dcb900e230>

- McIntyre, H. (2022, April 21). Nearly a decade after it was first released, Taylor Swift's 'All Too Well' could hit No. 1. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2021/11/15/nearly-a-decade-after-it-was-first-released-taylor-swifts-all-too-well-could-hit-no-1/?sh=4a539bf4639e>
- McNutt, M. (2020). From “mine” to “ours”: Gendered hierarchies of authorship and the limits of Taylor Swift's paratextual feminism. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 13(1), 72–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/CCC/TCZ042>
- Meidiska, A., & Hapsarani, D. (2023). Commodification of toxic relationship in all too well, short movie adaptation by Taylor Swift. *Lingua Scientia*, 30(1), 120-131.
- Mickey, S., Isackes, R., & Dawson, K. (2013). *Good Girl / Bad Girl APPROVED BY SUPERVISING COMMITTEE*.
- Mier, T. (2022, December 13). How Taylor Swift's 'All Too Well' film channeled her 'Girlhood calcifying into this bruised adulthood.' *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-reflects-directing-all-too-well-1234646792/>
- Mier, T. (2023, March 27). Taylor Swift says to 'Give yourself permission to fail' as she accepts iHeartRadio Innovator Award. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-innovator-award-speech-iheartradio-music-awards-2023-1234703674/>
- Nast, C. (2019, August 19) Taylor Swift: red. *Pitchfork*. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/taylor-swift-red/>
- Pascual, A. (2016). Sobre el mito del amor romántico. Amores cinematográficos y educación. *Dedica: Revista de Educação e Humanidades*, 10, 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.30827/dreh.v0i10.6850>
- Patel, E. (2023). “Got a Long List of Ex-lovers, They'll Tell You I'm Insane”: Gender, Agency, and Image in Taylor Swift's Lyrics Over Time. [Sociology Undergraduate Senior Theses, Dartmouth College]
- Payne, R. K.-M. (2010). *Love and Liberation: Second-Wave Feminisms and the Problem of Romantic Love*. xi+357.
- Peroni, C., & Rodak, L. (2020). Introduction. The fourth wave of feminism: From social networking and self-determination to sisterhood. *Onati Socio-Legal Series*, 10(1S), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.35295/OSLS.IISL/0000-0000-0000-1160>
- Pollock, V. (2014). Forever Adolescence: Taylor Swift, Eroticized Innocence, and Performing Normativity. [Thesis, Georgia State University] 1–62.
- Roberts, R. (2012, October 22). Album review: Taylor Swift's “Red” burns with confidence - Los Angeles Times. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-xpm-2012-oct-22-la-et-ms-album-review-taylor-swifts-red-brims-with-confidence-20121022-story.html>

- Rosida, I., Mona Ghazali, M., Dedi, D., & Shafa Salsabila, F. (2022). The Manifestation of Internalized Sexism in the Pick Me Girl Trend on TikTok. *Alphabet, A Biannual Academic Journal on Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 5(1), 8–19. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.alphabet.2022.05.01.02>
- Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga, M. L., Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, M. T., & Cardelle-Elawar, M. (2007). Factors that affect decision making: gender and age differences. *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy*, 7(3), 381-391.
- Sartika, J. I., & Max, D. (2022). Mythical Car: Metonymy in Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.22219/celtic.v9i2.23139>
- Shabat, M. (2022). Scènes à Faire in Music Copyright Cases: Why Don't the Courts Make Scènes About Music? *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal*, 320. <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/aelj-blog/320>
- Shaffer, C. (2020, December 11). Taylor Swift deepens her Goth-Folk vision on the excellent 'Evermore' *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/taylor-swift-evermore-folklore-1101778/>
- Sofian, E. S., & Sawardi, F. X. (2022). Analysis of the Metaphors in the Song 'All Too Well' by Taylor Swift as a Tool for Storytelling. *Jurnal Lingua Idea*, 13(2), 234-243.
- Spanos, B. (2022, October 21). Taylor Swift lets us into her darkest dreams on 'Midnights.' *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/taylor-swift-midnights-1234611211/>
- Staff, B. (2019, November 18). Taylor Swift will receive First-Ever Woman of the Decade Honor at Billboard's Women in Music. *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/pop/taylor-swift-first-ever-woman-of-the-decade-award-8543996/>
- Stone, R. (2024, February 20). The 500 greatest songs of all time. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/best-songs-of-all-time-1224767/elvis-presley-suspicious-minds-2-1225268/>
- Swift, T. (2008a). *Love Story*. On *Fearless*. Big Machine Records.
- Swift, T. (2008b). *You Belong with Me*. On *Fearless*. Big Machine Records.
- Swift, T. (2012a). *All Too Well*. On *Red*. Big Machine Records.
- Swift, T. (2012b). *I Knew You Were Trouble*. On *Red*. Big Machine Records.
- Swift, T. (2019a). *Lover*. On *Lover*. Republic Records.
- Swift, T. (2019b, December 13). Taylor Swift accepts Woman of the Decade Award at Billboard's Women in Music in R. Schiller (Trans.), Read her full speech. *Billboard* <https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/taylor-swift-woman-of-the-decade-speech-billboard-women-in-music-8546156/>

Swift, T. (2022). *Mastermind*. On *Midnights*. Republic Records.

Taylor Swift albums and songs sales. (2023, July 11). ChartMasters. <https://chartmasters.org/taylor-swift-albums-and-songs-sales/#:~:text=Love%20Story%20is%20now%20her,tracks%20are%20even%20more%20outstanding>

Taylor Swift says it's "highly offensive" when people call her calculating. (2015, October 16) BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-34550092>

Taylor Swift Sexual assault case: Why is it significant? (2017, August 15). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40937429>

Tearle, O. (2023). The Meaning of 'You Belong with Me' by Taylor Swift. *Interesting Literature*. <https://interestingliterature.com/2023/05/taylor-swift-you-belong-with-me-meaning/#>

Trevor, H. (2024). Swifties may be able to sway 2024 elections: All Taylor Swift has to do is say the word. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/01/22/taylor-swift-effect-voter-registration/72201394007/>

Trust, G. (2024, February 22). Taylor Swift's 50 Biggest Billboard Hot 100 Hits. *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/lists/top-taylor-swift-songs-top-100-hits/>

Tuan, I. H. (2020). Shakespeare and Popular Culture: Romeo and Juliet in Film and Pop Music. *Pop with Gods, Shakespeare, and AI*, 9–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7297-5_2

Vettorino, M. (2019, August 22). Taylor Swift's "Lover" is dramatic and dazzlingly romantic. *Atwood Magazine*. <https://atwoodmagazine.com/tslv-taylor-swift-lover-song-review/>

Washington, J. (2022, October 21). Taylor Swift reveals Joe Alwyn relationship origin story in her "Mastermind" song. *Seventeen*. <https://www.seventeen.com/celebrity/music/a41735667/taylor-swift-mastermind-lyrics-explained/>

Winners at Grammy Awards 2024 – the full list. (2024, February 4) BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-67380225>

8. Annexes

1 - "Love story"

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
 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

2 - "You Belong with Me"

You're on the phone with your girlfriend, she's upset
 She's going off about something that you said
 'Cause she doesn't get your humour like I do
 I'm in the room, it's a typical Tuesday night
 I'm listening to the kind of music she doesn't like

And she'll never know your story like I do
But she wears short skirts
I wear T-shirts
She's Cheer Captain, and I'm on the bleachers
Dreaming about the day when you wake up and find
That what you're looking for has been here the whole time
If you could see that I'm the one
Who understands you
Been here all along
So, why can't you see?
You belong with me
You belong with me
Walk in the streets with you in your worn-out jeans
I can't help thinking this is how it ought to be
Laughing on a park bench thinking to myself
Hey, isn't this easy?
And you've got a smile
That can light up this whole town
I haven't seen it in a while
Since she brought you down
You say you're fine, I know you better than that
Hey, what you doing with a girl like that?
She wears high heels
I wear sneakers
She's Cheer Captain, and I'm on the bleachers
Dreaming about the day when you wake up and find
That what you're looking for has been here the whole time
If you could see that I'm the one
Who understands you
Been here all along

So, why can't you see?
You belong with me
Standing by and waiting at your backdoor
All this time how could you not know, baby?
You belong with me
You belong with me
Oh, I remember you driving to my house
In the middle of the night
I'm the one who makes you laugh
When you know you're 'bout to cry
And I know your favorite songs
And you tell me 'bout your dreams
Think I know where you belong
Think I know it's with me
Can't you see that I'm the one
Who understands you?
Been here all along
So, why can't you see?
You belong with me
Standing by and waiting at your backdoor
All this time how could you not know, baby?
You belong with me
You belong with me
You belong with me
Have you ever thought just maybe
You belong with me?
You belong with me

3 - "I Knew you were Trouble"

Once upon a time
A few mistakes ago
I was in your sights
You got me alone
You found me
You found me
You found me
I guess you didn't care
And I guess I liked that
And when I fell hard
You took a step back
Without me
Without me
Without me
And he's long gone
When he's next to me
And I realize
The blame is on me
'Cause I knew you were trouble when you walked in
So shame on me now
Flew me to places I'd never been
'Til you put me down, oh
I knew you were trouble when you walked in
So, shame on me now
Flew me to places I'd never been
Now I'm lyin' on the cold hard ground
Oh, oh
Trouble, trouble, trouble
Oh, oh

Trouble, trouble, trouble
No apologies
He'll never see you cry
Pretends he doesn't know
That he's the reason why
You're drowning
You're drowning
You're drowning
And I heard you moved on
From whispers on the street
A new notch in your belt
Is all I'll ever be
And now I see
Now I see
Now I see
He was long gone
When he met me
And I realize
The joke is on me, hey
I knew you were trouble when you walked in (oh)
So shame on me now
Flew me to places I'd never been
'Til you put me down, oh
I knew you were trouble when you walked in
So shame on me now
Flew me to places I'd never been, yeah
Now I'm lyin' on the cold hard ground
Oh, oh (yeah)
Trouble, trouble, trouble
Oh, oh

Trouble, trouble, trouble
And the saddest fear
Comes creepin' in
That you never loved me
Or her
Or anyone
Or anything
Yeah
I knew you were trouble when you walked in
So shame on me now
Flew me to places I'd never been (never been)
'Til you put me down, oh
I knew you were trouble when you walked in (knew it right there)
So shame on me now (knew it right there)
Flew me to places I'd never been
(Ooh) now I'm lyin' on the cold hard ground
Oh, oh
Trouble, trouble, trouble (oh)
Oh, oh
Trouble, trouble, trouble
I knew you were trouble when you walked in
Trouble, trouble, trouble
I knew you were trouble when you walked in
Trouble, trouble, trouble

4 - "All too well"

I walked through the door with you
The air was cold
But something about it felt like home somehow

And I, left my scarf there at your sister's house
And you've still got it in your drawer even now
Oh, your sweet disposition
And my wide-eyed gaze
We're singing in the car, getting lost upstate
Autumn leaves falling down like pieces into place
And I can picture it after all these days
And I know it's long gone and that magic's not here no more
And I might be okay but I'm not fine at all
'Cause there we are again on that little town street
You almost ran the red 'cause you were lookin' over at me
Wind in my hair, I was there
I remember it all too well
Photo album on the counter
Your cheeks were turning red
You used to be a little kid with glasses in a twin-sized bed
And your mother's telling stories 'bout you on the tee-ball team
You told me 'bout your past thinking your future was me
And I know it's long gone and there was nothing else I could do
And I forget about you long enough to forget why I needed to
'Cause there we are again in the middle of the night
We're dancing 'round the kitchen in the refrigerator light
Down the stairs, I was there
I remember it all too well, yeah
And maybe we got lost in translation
Maybe I asked for too much
But maybe this thing was a masterpiece 'til you tore it all up
Running scared, I was there
I remember it all too well
And you call me up again just to break me like a promise

So casually cruel in the name of being honest
I'm a crumpled up piece of paper lying here
'Cause I remember it all, all, all
Too well
Time won't fly, it's like I'm paralyzed by it
I'd like to be my old self again
But I'm still trying to find it
After plaid shirt days and nights when you made me your own
Now you mail back my things and I walk home alone
But you keep my old scarf from that very first week
'Cause it reminds you of innocence
And it smells like me
You can't get rid of it
'Cause you remember it all too well, yeah
'Cause there we are again when I loved you so
Back before you lost the one real thing you've ever known
It was rare, I was there, I remember it all too well
Wind in my hair, you were there, you remember it all
Down the stairs, you were there, you remember it all
It was rare, I was there, I remember it all too well

5 - "Lover"

We could leave the Christmas lights up 'til January
And this is our place, we make the rules
And there's a dazzling haze, a mysterious way about you dear
Have I known you 20 seconds or 20 years?
Can I go where you go?
Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out, and take me home

You're my, my, my, my

Lover

We could let our friends crash in the living room

This is our place, we make the call

And I'm highly suspicious that everyone who sees you wants you

I've loved you three summers now, honey, but I want 'em all

Can I go where you go?

Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out, and take me home (forever and ever)

You're my, my, my, my

Lover

Ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand?

With every guitar string scar on my hand

I take this magnetic force of a man to be my lover

My heart's been borrowed and yours has been blue

All's well that ends well to end up with you

Swear to be overdramatic and true to my lover

And you'll save all your dirtiest jokes for me

And at every table, I'll save you a seat, lover

Can I go where you go?

Can we always be this close forever and ever?

And ah, take me out, and take me home (forever and ever)

You're my, my, my, my

Oh, you're my, my, my, my

Darling, you're my, my, my, my

Lover.

6 - "Mastermind"

Once upon a time, the planets and the fates
And all the stars aligned
You and I ended up in the same room
At the same time
And the touch of a hand lit the fuse
Of a chain reaction of countermoves
To assess the equation of you
Checkmate, I couldn't lose
What if I told you none of it was accidental
And the first night that you saw me, nothing was gonna stop me?
I laid the groundwork and then, just like clockwork
The dominoes cascaded in a line
What if I told you I'm a mastermind?
And now you're mine
It was all by design
'Cause I'm a mastermind
You see, all the wisest women
Had to do it this way
'Cause we were born to be the pawn
In every lover's game
If you fail to plan, you plan to fail
Strategy sets the scene for the tale
I'm the wind in our free-flowing sails
And the liquor in our cocktails
What if I told you none of it was accidental
And the first night that you saw me, I knew I wanted your body?
I laid the groundwork and then, just like clockwork
The dominoes cascaded in a line
What if I told you I'm a mastermind?

And now you're mine
It was all my design
'Cause I'm a mastermind
No one wanted to play with me as a little kid
So I've been scheming like a criminal ever since
To make them love me and make it seem effortless
This this the first time I've felt the need to confess
And I swear
I'm only cryptic and Machiavellian 'cause I care
So I told you none of it was accidental
And the first night that you saw me, nothing was gonna stop me
I laid the groundwork and then saw a wide smirk
On your face, you knew the entire time
You knew that I'm a mastermind
And now you're mine
Yeah, all you did was smile
'Cause I'm a mastermind