Semiotic Analysis of Taylor Swift's 'Midnight Rain' Using Peirce's Triadic Model Signs

Atika Hasna Nadia Yusuf

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia
msnadiayusuf@gmail.com

Muzakki Afifuddin

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia
muzakki@uin-malang.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to unveiling the symbolic meanings within the lyrics of Taylor Swift's 'Midnight Rain' through Peirce's triadic model of representamen, object, and interpretant, with the aim of providing more insight into our understanding of the interpretation of the song "Midnight Rain" in semiotic theory. This study is a literary study since the data source is the song lyrics in the "Midnight Rain, which is considered as a piece of Poetry and presented as the symbols in the forms of nouns and noun phrases. The findings of this study show eight symbols in the song lyrics of Midnight Rain such as "wasteland", "montage", "midnight", "postcard", "window", "the present simple" and "midnight rain". These symbols have some interpretants such as negative and *positive qualities, transformation, irony, portal and regret, progression and unhappiness*, presented after analyzing and establishing the representamen and objects of these symbols. According to the analyzed symbols, the meaning of "Midnight Rain" song lyric is mostly related to the celebrity sad life of a celebrity who is trapped in a celebrity world and this sadness and the regret is expressed through the phrase "midnight rain".

Keywords: *Peirce Triadic Model Sign, Taylor Swift, Song Lyrics, Semiotic, Celebrity*

Introduction

Taylor Swift has recently created history with the album *Midnights* by winning Album of The Year at the Grammy Awards 2024, the highest honor in the music industry, putting her in the most honored artist of all the time.[1] On the Billboard 200 chart on 5 November, Taylor Swift's album *Midnights* debuted with the biggest sales for any album in nearly seven years, earning her 11th No. 1 ranking.[2] As a standout track from the Grammy-winning album 'Midnights,' 'Midnight Rain' offers a rich tapestry of lyrical themes and musical elements worthy of academic analysis. Its exploration of complex emotions and innovative sonic landscapes make it a compelling case study for scholars of popular music. Based on the popularity of *Midnights*, this research aims to analyze Taylor Swift's song called

---

[1] Douglaz Markowitz, "2024 GRAMMYs: Taylor Swift Makes GRAMMY History With Fourth Album Of The Year Win For 'Midnights,'" Grammy Awards, 2024, https://www.grammy.com/news/taylor-swift-album-of-the-year-2024-grammys-speech.

[2] Keith Caulfield, "Taylor Swift's 'Midnights' Blasts in at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart With Biggest Week for an Album in 7 Years," Billboard, October 30, 2022, https://www.billboard.com/music/chart-beat/taylor-swift-midnights-debut-number-one-billboard-200-albums-chart-1235163377/.

'Midnight Rain' as a case study in popular music and explore the meaning of the symbols in the song lyrics and conclude the main meaning of the song "midnight rain" through Peirce's Triadic Model Sign.

Almost every description of semiotics is variance of the exact same equation: semiotics is the study of signs.[3] Semiotics corresponds to a conceptual history which addresses to procedures for creating and interpreting meaning in every type of text, in every form of literary works.[4] Several specific definitions illustrated from semiotic figures are signifier as a sound of image and signified as the idea of language unit according to Ferdinand de Saussure,[5] denotation, connotation, and myth are Roland Barthes's framework of sign system,[6] and representamen, object, and interpretant within triadic sign model as Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of sign.[7] Unlike Saussure determines the sign as the lowest possible symbol, Peirce's way of thinking refers more to "logic" which comes from Scholastic philosophy where logic is explained as a general theory of how something can represent something else.[8] In the Peircean sign, the semiotic user applies one phenomenon (Representamen) as a representation for other phenomenon (Object) and in a more practically context, it should explain how the user of the sign is able to recall the "memory" of one phenomenon (Object) by facing another phenomenon (Representamen).[9] Furthermore, the act of transaction meaning (Interpretant) implicates the practice of interpretation or interpretative thought as a requirement for signification and invariably entails an interpreter (a person who gives meaning to things).[10]

Some previous researchers used different semiotic theories in researching a song or prose, such as Ma'arif, Jatmika & Marlinda (2023) examining humanity song entitled *We are the World* with Saussure (1983)[11], Abdullah & Yusuf (2023) investigating Paramore's *Brick by*

---

[3] Yiheng Zhao, "Redefining 'Sign'/'Symbol' and Semiotics," *Signs and Media* 2, no. 1–2 (January 27, 2023): 55–70, https://doi.org/10.1163/25900323-12340022.

[4] Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2007), 223.

[5] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 2011), 67.

[6] Salsa Nabilla Chairun Nisa and Indira Fatra Deni, "Moral Messages in the Film Wedding Agreement The Series (Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis)," *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2023): 24–31.

[7] Farhan Muhammad Ramadhan, Shavira Nisa Delardhi, and Ula Nisa El Fauziah, "SIGN ANALYSIS OF THE INSTAGRAM USER USING SEMIOTIC CHARLES S. PEIRCE," *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)* 1, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 631, https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v1i5.p631-644.

[8] Robert E. Innis, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology* (Indiana University Press, 1985).

[9] Mogens Kilstrup, "Naturalizing Semiotics: The Triadic Sign of Charles Sanders Peirce as a Systems Property," *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology* 119, no. 3 (December 2015): 563–75, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbiomolbio.2015.08.013.

[10] Natalia A. Lukianova and Elena V. Fell, "Meaning Making in Communication Processes: The Role of a Human Agency," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 200 (August 2015): 614–17, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.08.047.

[11] Hilman Mahmud Akmal Ma'arif, Sidik Jatmika, and Ajeng Puspa Marlinda, "Music as Propaganda for Humanitarian Diplomacy: Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure in the Song We Are the World," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 9, no. 9 (2022): 144–57, http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i9.3944.

Boring Brick with Peirce's Triadic (1931) [12], Adelia, Rozi, & Abidin (2023) analyzing Muhammad Tulus Rusydi's song called *Self* with Barthes (1982).[13] In this paper, Charles Sanders Peirce's trichotomy in semiotic theory will be used in order to answer some research questions. While the field of semiotics has demonstrably served to illuminate hidden meanings in works like films and stories, this paper will take a different approach by using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model sign in order to semiotically understand the meaning behind several signs in Taylor Swift's 'Midnight Rain' song lyrics through revealing representamen, object and interpretant. Peirce's triadic sign model, with its emphasis on the dynamic relationship between representation, object, and interpretant, offers a framework that focuses on each interpreter's understanding and experience for analyzing 'Midnight Rain', allowing for a more nuanced and flexible interpretation of the song's symbolic elements than traditional approaches.

Methods

This study applied literary study methods that focus on texts that emphasize the internal elements of a literary work.[14] Literary studies encompass the exploration of creative works such as poetry, drama, and fiction, alongside their academic analysis,[15] while a semiotic approach allows us to delve into the intricate network of signs and symbols within a poem, revealing the multifaceted layers of meaning that enhance its overall significance.[16] This research begins by identifying the symbols within the song lyrics. It then analyzes how these symbols interact to construct the meaning. This involves understanding the symbols and cultural context. Ultimately, the aim is to provide deeper insights into the literary work's messages and values.

The data source in this study was a song lyric entitled "Midnight Rain" written by Taylor Swift and produced by Jack Antonoff and Taylor Swift which was released on October 22nd, 2022, as a track 6 of the *Midnights (3am Edition)* album. The researchers utilized the data source of the "Midnight Rain" song lyric from Genius.[17] The use of analytical data from the Genius website relies on their specific annotations of a small portion of the lyrics which allows for a more detailed analysis of the song's structure in this

---

[12] Abdullah Abdullah and Imran Said Yusuf, "Investigating Symbols And Messages in The Song and Music Video Of Paramore's 'Brick By Boring Brick' Using Peirce's Triadic Analysis," *Tamaddun* 20, no. 1 (August 31, 2021): 32–45, https://doi.org/10.33096/tamaddun.v20i1.85.

[13] Adelia, Fakhrur Rozi, and Syahrul Abidin, "Representation of Self Healing in the Song Lyrics 'Self' by Muhammad Tulus Rusydi Rholand Barthes' Semiotic Analysis Study," *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2023): 95–105.

[14] Ferdinal, Seswita, and Edria Sandika, "Literary Studies," in *INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY STUDIES*, 1st ed. (Padang: CV. Panawa Jemboan, 2020), 8.

[15] Ferdinal, Seswita, and Sandika, 9–10.

[16] Prilimercy E. Kojongian, "Semiotic Analysis of the Poetry 'Morgenlied' by Martin Opitz," *JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)* 7, no. 3 (November 30, 2021): 430, https://doi.org/10.29210/020211187.

[17] "Taylor Swift – Midnight Rain Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," Genius, 2022, https://genius.com/Taylor-swift-midnight-rain-lyrics.

academic research.[18] These annotations are often closely related to the song, album, artist, or genre.

This study thus systematically pursued result from the Peirce's triadic model of Semiotics consisting of representamen, object and interpretant in the "Midnight Rain" song lyric. First, identifying the representamen in the song lyrics by looking at words or phrases that directly refer to certain objects in the lyrics. Second, determining the object of the representation based on a literal definition based on dictionaries and general definitions in society. Third, focusing on the interpretant, namely understanding that is formed based on representations and objects by exploring the relationship between words relatively. This involves the consistency with the lyric's theme, the emotional impact it evokes and its relevance to the interpretation the listener may hear. Most of the data taken from the data source were in the forms of nouns and noun phrase in accordance with Peirce's argument that anything can be a sign, as long as it has the ability to represent something according to individual interpretation and thought.

Result and Discussion

The "Midnight Rain" song lyric mainly has four parts or four stanzas. When it is sung by Taylor Swift, the [Chorus] part is sung as an [Intro] or introduction and followed by [Verse 1] then followed by [Chorus], [Verse 2], [Chorus], and ended by [Outro]. To simplify, the song lyric is presented below and added by numbers of the lines.

[Verse 1]
My town was a wasteland
Full of cages, full of fences
Pageant queens and big pretenders
But for some, it was paradise
My boy was a montage   5
A slow-motion, love potion
Jumping off things in the ocean
I broke his heart 'cause he was nice
He was sunshine, I was midnight rain
[Intro] and [Chorus]
He wanted it comfortable, I wanted that pain   10
He wanted a bride, I was making my own name
Chasing that fame, he stayed the same
All of me changed like midnight
[Verse 2]
It came like a postcard
Picture perfect shiny family   15
Holiday peppermint candy

---

[18] Derek Lim and Austin R. Benson, "Expertise and Dynamics within Crowdsourced Musical Knowledge Curation: A Case Study of the Genius Platform," *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 15 (May 22, 2021): 373–84, https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v15i1.18068.

But for him, it's every day
So I peered through a window
A deep portal, time travel
All the love we unravel   *20*
And the life I gave away
'Cause he was sunshine, I was midnight rain
[Outro]
I guess sometimes we all get
Just what we wanted, just what we wanted
And he never thinks of me   *25*
Except for when I'm on TV
I guess sometimes we all get
Some kind of haunted, some kind of haunted
And I never think of him
Except on midnights like this   *30*
(Midnights like this, midnights like this)

In accordance with the song lyric above, the signs discussed in this section will be presented based on each stanza since the stanza provides context in discovering representamen, object, and interpretant. Then, each sign discussed from each stanza will be summarized to support the symbolization of the phrase "*Midnight Rain*" in the title of the song lyric.

3.1 [VERSE 1]

In the first stanza or [Verse 1], this study finds the words "*wasteland*" and "*montage*" as the focus of the discussion since these words provide as the metaphor of the contradiction between the narrator ("*I*") and the person the narrator was describing ("*my boy*" or "*he*"). The contradiction is later emphasized in lines 8-9 of the stanza. The findings are discussed in this section below.

3.1.1 Wasteland

The word "*wasteland*" in the first line is a metaphor of the "*town*" where the narrator lives. Since the word become a metaphor, then it is selected as the first representamen [R] in this discussion since representamen is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.[19] Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the word "*wasteland*" has four stands.[20] There are two stands that this study finds as the most related meaning to the context of the song lyric. The first, the word "*wasteland*" stands for a place, time, or situation that does not contain or produce anything positive, or that is completely without a particular quality or activity. Semiotically, the first stand becomes the first object [O] in understanding "*wasteland*". In the stanza, the wasteland is described as having "*Full of cages, full of fences / Pageant queens and big pretenders*" (ll. 2-3). The line "*Full of cages, full of fences*" describes the negativity of the town where the narrator lives which implies the rules and

---

[19] Innis, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*.

[20] "WASTELAND | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 28, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wasteland.

regulations of living in the town are not providing positive impact towards the narrator. The line "*Pageant queens and big pretenders*" is related to the second object [O] of the representamen "*wasteland*" that stands for something, as a period of history, phase of existence, or locality, that is spiritually or intellectually barren (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The line "*Pageant queens and big pretenders*" represent the people living in the town. However, since the town was a wasteland, then these people might have lack of spirituality and intellectuality, so that they had to immensely pretend to be as spiritual and intellectual as queens to cover their real self, and other people might think that being queens and pretenders provided wealth and fame and thus became "*paradise*" (l. 4).

Based on the findings above, the representamen [R] "*wasteland*" is having two objects. The first object [O]^1 is a surrounding with negative impact, while the second object is [O]^2 is people with negative traits. Thus, the interpretant [I] of the [R] is negative qualities because both [O]^1 and [O]^2 create an equivalent sign in the process of interpretation and develop an interpretant [I] of negative qualities in the mind of the readers. The triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the word "*wasteland*" is as follows.
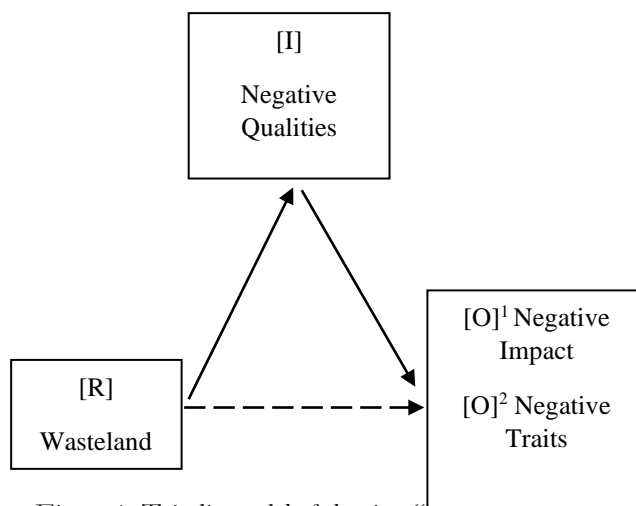

Figure 1: Triadic model of the sign "wasteland"

3.1.2 Montage

The word "*montage*" in the fifth line is a metaphor of the phrase "*my boy*", the person the narrator was thinking about. Since the word become a metaphor, then it is selected as the second representamen [R] in this discussion. Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the word "*montage*" has only one stand.[21] The word "*montage*" stands for a piece of work produced by combining smaller parts, or the process of making such a work. Semiotically, this stand becomes the main object [O] in understanding "*montage*". In the stanza, the montage is described as "*A slow-motion, love potion / Jumping off things in the ocean*" (ll. 6-7). The word "*things*" (l.7) provides an emphasis on the way a montage works, which is combining smaller parts. Based on the lyric, the montage consisted of "*love potion*" that was "*jumping off things in the ocean*" in a "*slow motion*" manner. The repeated sound /-ʃən/ in lines 6-7 in the words "*motion*", "*potion*", and "*ocean*" is undeniably too close with the word

---

[21] "MONTAGE | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 28, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/montage.

"*emotion*" which is not mentioned in the lyric but implied by the combination of the sound /-ʃən/ and the word "*love*" that makes an undeniable relationship with how love can make happy feelings like things being jumped off in the ocean, thus making happy feelings or positive emotion as the Object [O] of the "*montage*" [R]. The positivity of the person the narrator described is also emphasized in lines 8-9 of the stanza. The narrator described herself as a negative person since she "*broke his heart 'cause he was nice*" (l. 8). This line describes that the narrator did not want to have a relationship with the person because he was a "*nice*" person and emphasized by comparing his positive personality with her negative quality in "*He was sunshine, I was midnight rain*" (l. 9). However, word "*sunshine*" and the phrase "*midnight rain*" will be explored more later in this discussion.

Based on the findings above, the representamen [R] "*montage*" is having one object. The object [O] is positive emotion and feelings. Thus, the interpretant [I] of the [R] is positive quality because the [O] creates an equivalent sign in the process of interpretation and develop an interpretant [I] of positive quality in the mind of the readers. The triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the word "*montage*" is as follows.
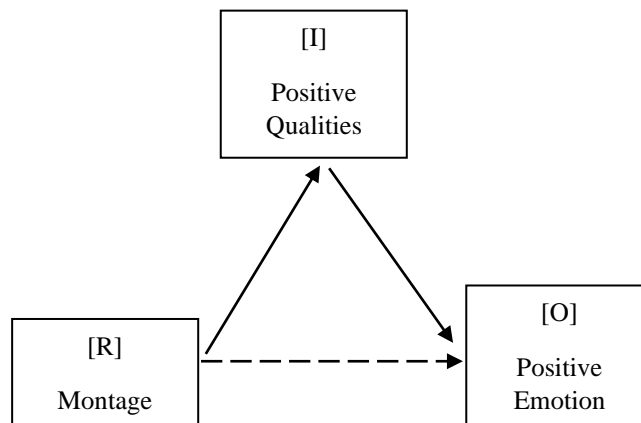

Figure 2: Triadic model of the sign "montage"

3.2 [CHORUS] Midnight

In the second stanza or [Chorus], this study finds the word "*midnight*" as the focus of the discussion since the word provide as comparison towards a certain kind of condition that the narrator was describing in line 13. Since the comparison uses the word "*like*" as the tool, thus such comparison is identified as a simile. The simile emphasizes the stanza, and its signification is discussed below.

The word "*midnight*" in the thirteenth line is a simile that is being a comparison to the "*change*" of the narrator. Since the word become a comparison, then it is selected as the third representamen [R] in this discussion. Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the word "*midnight*" has only one stand.[22] The word "*midnight*" stands for twelve o'clock in the middle of the night. Semiotically, this stand becomes the main object [O] in understanding "*midnight*" in this stanza. In the stanza, the contradictive qualities of the characters are

---

[22] "MIDNIGHT | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 28, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/midnight.

further emphasized. Both characters are described as having contradictive desires and the narrator realized that she could not continue the relationship because they had too different desires. The narrator realized that when she was busy "*Chasing that fame,*" the boy "*stayed the same*", thus making the narrator's life "*changed like midnight*". Based on the finding, the word "*midnight*" is being compared to a change. However, in the sense that the word "*midnight*" stands for twelve o'clock in the middle of the night, there are two possible interpretations to relate between midnight and a change. The first interpretation is when it is twelve o'clock in the middle of the night, it happens only in one second. In relation to a life change, when a life changes, it may take a very long process. However, based on the thirteenth line and the first interpretation, since the narrator's life "*changed like midnight*", so the life changed fast only in a second. The second interpretation is when it is twelve o'clock in the middle of the night, it is a change from night to morning and it is a change of day. In relation to a life change, when a life changes, it may change drastically just like how a day changes at midnight, from night to morning. If both interpretations are combined, the thirteenth line can be interpreted as a drastic decision that the narrator had to make swiftly about her relationship and her dream.

Based on the findings above, the representamen [R] "*midnight*" is having one object. The object [O] is the time of twelve o'clock in the middle of the night. However, since the [R] is a comparison to the change of the narrator's life, the interpretant [I] of the [R] is influenced by the concept of change of life. Thus, in relation to the [R] and the [O], there are two interpretants of the [R]. The first interpretant or $[I]^1$ is a swift change while the second interpretant or $[I]^2$ is a drastic change. Thus, the triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the word "*midnight*" is as follows.
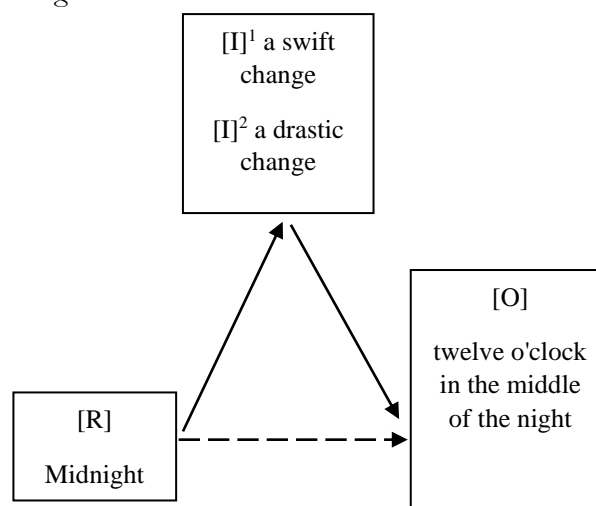

Figure 3: Triadic model of the sign "midnight"

3.3   [VERSE 2]

In the third stanza or [Verse 2], this study finds the words "postcard" (l. 14) and "window" (l. 18) as the focus of the discussion since these words provide heightened meanings based on the figurative language forms used. The findings are discussed in this section below.

3.3.1   Postcard

The fourteenth line is a simile comparing the way "it came" to a "postcard". Since the word "postcard" becomes a comparison, then it is selected as the fourth representamen [R] in this discussion. Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the word "postcard" has only one stand.[23] The word "postcard" stands for a card, often with a photograph or picture on one side, that can be sent without an envelope. Semiotically, this stand becomes the main object [O] in understanding "postcard" in this stanza. The sentence "*It came like a postcard*" provides the narrator's perspective of a certain "*it*" which came in a simple manner, like a postcard, which can be sent without an envelope. However, the irony of a postcard is heightened in this line. In real life, postcards are usually sent by people who are on vacation to people are unable to go on vacation. The senders most probably feel happy being on vacation, however, the receivers may feel sad because they can only see pictures of the places, without being able to go on vacation. The irony of the "*postcard*" is further emphasized by lines 15-16. In the stanza, the "*postcard*" contains "*Picture perfect shiny family / Holiday peppermint candy*". Figuratively, the narrator expressed that such picture was only an image she could not reach. She felt that such perfect life was only a picture she could enjoy through a postcard. On the contrary, in the perspective of the man that the narrator was thinking about, such perfect life "*it's every day*" (l. 17).

Based on the findings above, the representamen [R] "*postcard*" is having one object. The object [O] is a card, often with a photograph or picture on one side, that can be sent without an envelope. However, since the [R] is a comparison to the perfect life, the interpretant [I] of the [R] is influenced by the concept of irony of a picture of a perfect life appeared in the postcard. Thus, in relation to the [R] and the [O], there is one interpretant of the [R]. The interpretant or [I] is an irony of a perfect life that the narrator could not have. Thus, the triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the word "*postcard*" is as follows.
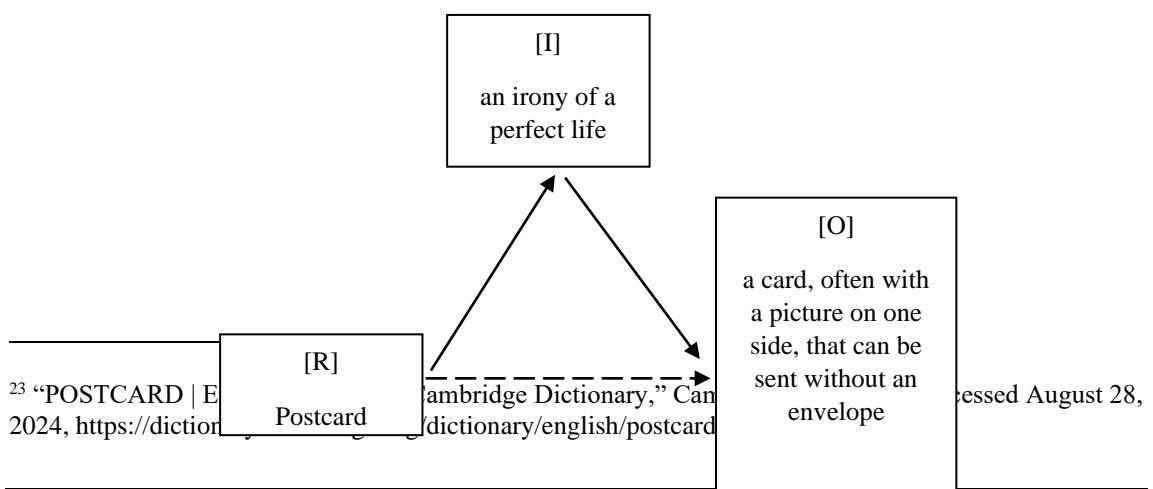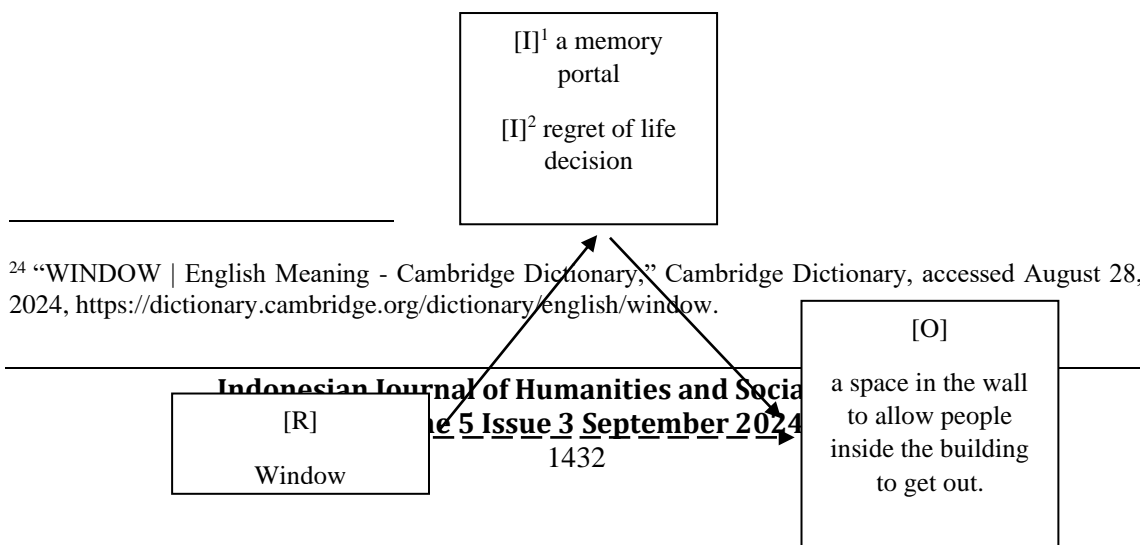
Figure 4: Triadic model of the sign "postcard"

3.3.2 Window

The word "*window*" in the eighteenth line becomes an important word in this stanza because of the heightened meaning of the word in this stanza. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word "window" has only one stand.[24] The word stands for a space usually filled with glass in the wall of a building or in a vehicle, to allow light and air in and to allow people inside the building to see out. Based on this stand, the word "window" in "*So I peered through a window*" (l. 18) may stand for the real object of a window since the narrator was peering through a space filled with glass in the wall of a building that allows the narrator inside the building to see out. However, this "*window*" is not just a usual window, but "*A deep portal, time travel*" (l. 19) that allows the narrator to see "*All the love we unravel / And the life I gave away*" (ll. 20-21). The phrase "*time travel*" provides a perspective that the narrator was thinking about the past, evidenced by the utilization of the simple past tense in this stanza, especially in "*And the life I gave away*" (l. 21). What happened in the past, based on the lyric, was the narrator had to choose to be a celebrity rather than having a love relationship with the man that the narrator was thinking about. The choice is implied by the line "*All the love we unravel*" (l. 20) that provides evidence about the unsuccessful love relationship between the characters. Since the narrator failed to have a love relationship, she also emphasized that the decision that she took made her gave the life away. The use of the determiner "*the*" in the clause "*the life I gave away*" (l. 21) provides a reference to the life presented by "*Picture perfect shiny family / Holiday peppermint candy*" (ll. 15-16) in this stanza. Thus, what is implied from the word "*window*" is the regret the narrator felt when she chose a life that seemed to be unfortunate and different from the man's life as emphasized in the last line of the stanza "*'Cause he was sunshine, I was midnight rain*" (l. 22).

Based on the findings above, the representamen [R] "*window*" is having one object. The object [O] is a space usually filled with glass in the wall of a building or in a vehicle, to allow light and air in and to allow people inside the building to see out. In this stanza, the [R] has two interpretants. The first interpretant or [I]^1 is a portal to the memory in the past while the second interpretant or [I]^2 is the regret of a life decision. Thus, the triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the word "window" is as follows.
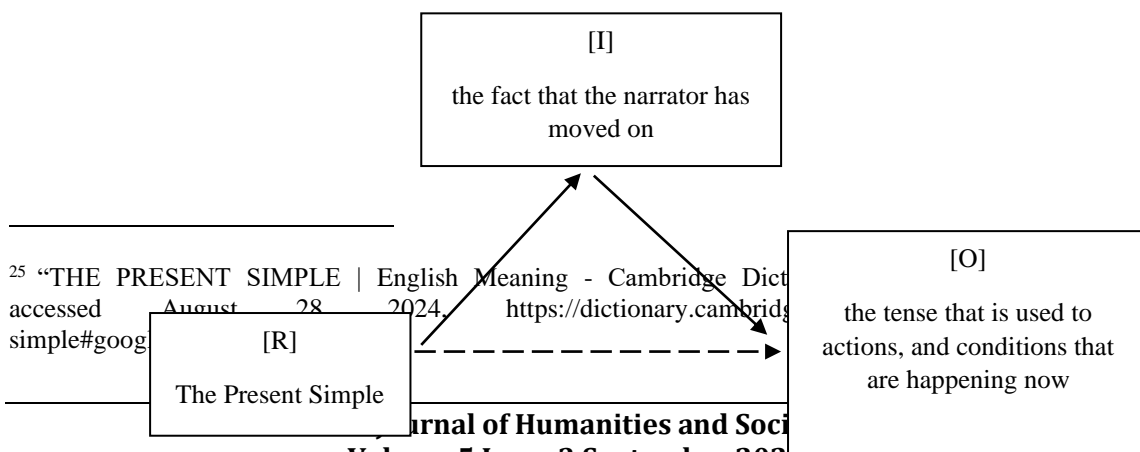

[I]^1 a memory portal

[I]^2 regret of life decision

[O] a space in the wall to allow people inside the building to get out.

[R] Window

Figure 5: Triadic model of the sign "window"

3.4   [OUTRO]

In the third stanza or [Outro], this study does not find any words that can be assumed as providing heightened meanings and interpretation. However, what needs to be discussed in this stanza is the narrator utilizes the present simple which is different from the other stanzas that utilize the past simple in elaborating the actions. Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the present simple stands for the tense that is used to refer to events, actions, and conditions that are happening all the time, or exist now, while the past simple stands for the form of a verb used to describe an action that happened before the present time and is no longer happening.[25] In this stanza, the narrator seems to be thinking about the past and her decision to live as a celebrity. In lines 23-26, the narrator realizes that both she and the man get what they wanted in the past. She has become a superstar and appears regularly on TV, while the man lives a happy life watching TV as mentioned in "*And he never thinks of me / Except for when I'm on TV*" (ll. 25-26). The narrator then assumes that both she and the man may be thinking about each other and the past in "*I guess sometimes we all get / Some kind of haunted, some kind of haunted*" (ll. 27-28). The word "*haunted*" (l. 28) in this context is closely related to the idiomatic expression "*haunted by the past*". Even though the narrator realizes she actually has moved on and never thinks of the man, however, on some midnights, she thinks of him and the regret of her decision.

Based on the findings above, this study finds that the present simple is the representamen [R] in this stanza. The object [O] is the tense that is used to refer to events, actions, and conditions that are happening all the time, or exist now. The interpretant [I] of the [R] is the fact that then narrator has moved on. Thus, the triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the present simple is as follows.

[I]

the fact that the narrator has moved on

[O]

the tense that is used to actions, and conditions that are happening now

[R]

The Present Simple

Figure 6: Triadic model of the sign "the present simple"

3.5 "MIDNIGHT RAIN"

This study finds that the line "*'Cause he was sunshine, I was midnight rain*" is repeated twice in the lyric (l. 9) and (l. 22). The repetition provides a parallelism between the first stanza and the third stanza. Such parallelism becomes a foreground and an emphasis on the positive qualities of the man and the negative qualities of the narrator. However, in this section, this study only focuses the discussion on the phrase "*midnight rain*" since it becomes the title of the song lyric and provide more heightened meanings related to the narrator's expressed emotions through the song lyric as a poem.

As a phrase "*midnight rain*" consists of a combination of a modifier and a head: "*midnight*" as the noun modifier, and "*rain*" as the noun head. As discussed in the previous section, the word "*midnight*" stands for twelve o'clock in the middle of the night. The word "*rain*", based on Cambridge Dictionary, stands for drops of water from clouds.[26] However, rain can sometimes be associated with unhappiness, since unhappiness brings tears, and a tear, based on Cambridge Dictionary, stands for a drop of salty liquid that flows from the eye, as a result of strong emotion, especially unhappiness, or pain.[27] This association is closely related to the contradiction of qualities between the metaphors presented in the line "*'Cause he was sunshine, I was midnight rain*". In this line, the narrator metaphorized the man as sunshine, but herself as midnight rain. This line emphasizes the contradiction of qualities elaborated throughout the song lyric. When the narrator lived in a wasteland and could only see the man's life through a window, the man lived a life in a postcard and a montage of happiness. In this situation, the narrator thought that the man was a spotlight of happiness, but she was the heart of unhappiness. Furthermore, since the phrase "*midnight rain*" provides a metaphor of unhappiness, in line 22, the meaning is more contextualized to the regret represented by the third stanza. As a negative feeling, regret is closely related to unhappiness, since regret may bring unhappy feeling to the person experiencing the thought of having chosen a bad decision. Lastly, the phrase "*midnight rain*" provides a sense of hope since midnights swiftly change into mornings and rain provides water to the land so that the "*wasteland*" will not be as dry as before, and the rain ceases eventually and sunshine comes and, possibly, rainbow too. This sense of hope is actually found in the last stanza where the narrator had actually moved on from the relationship and accepted the

---

[26] "RAIN | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 28, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rain.

[27] "RAIN | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary."

reality that she had become a celebrity. Thus, the phrase *"midnight rain"* can also be interpreted as a sense of hope.

Based on the findings above, this study finds that the phrase *"midnight rain"* is the representamen [R] in this song lyric. The object [O] is drops of water from clouds that fall at twelve o'clock in the middle of the night. Furthermore, the phrase *"midnight rain"* has three interpretants. The first interpretant [I]^1 of the [R] is unhappiness. The second interpretant [I]^2 of the [R] is regret. The last interpretant [I]^3 of the [R] is sense of hope. Thus, the triadic model of the semiotic analysis of the phrase *"midnight rain"* is as follows.
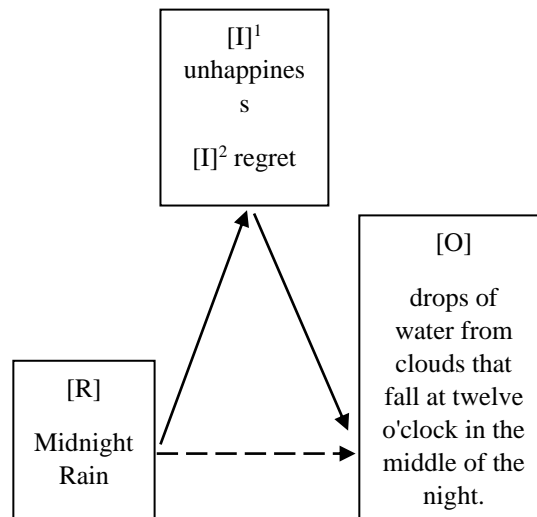

Figure 7: Triadic model of the sign "Midnight Rain"

Conclusion

Based on the findings above, the signs are mostly selected due to the heightened meanings and the contextuality with the song lyric. The signs selected as representamen are *"wasteland"* which stands for "negative qualities", *"montage"* for "positive qualities", *"midnight"* for "a swift change" and "a drastic change", *"postcard"* for "an irony for a perfect life", *"window"* for "a memory portal" and "regret of life decision", *"the present simple"* for "the fact that the narrator has moved on" and *"midnight rain"* for "unhappiness" and "regret." The triadic model of Semiotics that is illustrated in the discussion provides the logic in finding the meaning and the interpretation of the selected signs. The triadic model shows that the relationship between the representamen, interpretant, and object is denotational and connotationally contextual. The polysemous characteristics of English words may provide ambiguity in each meaning, however, this study finds it significant to contextualize the meaning based on the song lyric only. This study thus reveals, that based on the representamen, object, and interpretant, the meaning of the "Midnight Rain" song lyric is mostly related to the sad life of the narrator who is trapped in a celebrity world and the sadness, the regret, and the sense of hope is expressed throughout the song lyric.

This study understands that the study has its limitations. The use of only one dictionary to discover the denotational meaning of the representamen may become one of the hindrances that this study faces. Thus, this study suggests further studies in analyzing the meaning of the signs in the song lyric by utilizing other dictionaries. Another limitation

that this study also admits that this study may provide limited understanding upon Peirce's triadic model of Semiotics. Thus, this study suggests that further studies in utilizing Peirce's triadic model of Semiotics in other song lyrics and other literary texts.

Acknowledgments

References

Abdullah, Abdullah, and Imran Said Yusuf. "Investigating Symbols And Messages in The Song and Music Video Of Paramore's 'Brick By Boring Brick' Using Peirce's Triadic Analysis." *Tamaddun* 20, no. 1 (August 31, 2021): 32–45. https://doi.org/10.33096/tamaddun.v20i1.85.

Adelia, Fakhrur Rozi, and Syahrul Abidin. "Representation of Self Healing in the Song Lyrics 'Self' by Muhammad Tulus Rusydi Rholand Barthes' Semiotic Analysis Study." *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2023): 95–105.

Cambridge Dictionary. "MIDNIGHT | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/midnight.

Cambridge Dictionary. "MONTAGE | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/montage.

Cambridge Dictionary. "POSTCARD | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/postcard.

Cambridge Dictionary. "RAIN | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rain.

Cambridge Dictionary. "THE PRESENT SIMPLE | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/present-simple#google_vignette.

Cambridge Dictionary. "WASTELAND | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wasteland.

Cambridge Dictionary. "WINDOW | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." Accessed August 28, 2024. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/window.

Caulfield, Keith. "Taylor Swift's 'Midnights' Blasts in at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart With Biggest Week for an Album in 7 Years." Billboard, October 30, 2022. https://www.billboard.com/music/chart-beat/taylor-swift-midnights-debut-number-one-billboard-200-albums-chart-1235163377/.

Chandler, Daniel. *Semiotics: The Basics*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2007.

Ferdinal, Seswita, and Edria Sandika. "Literary Studies." In *INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY STUDIES*, 1st ed. Padang: CV. Panawa Jemboan, 2020.

Genius. "Taylor Swift – Midnight Rain Lyrics | Genius Lyrics," 2022. https://genius.com/Taylor-swift-midnight-rain-lyrics.

Hilman Mahmud Akmal Ma'arif, Sidik Jatmika, and Ajeng Puspa Marlinda. "Music as Propaganda for Humanitarian Diplomacy: Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure in the Song We Are the World." *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 9, no. 9 (2022): 144–57. http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i9.3944.

Innis, Robert E. *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology.* Indiana University Press, 1985.

Kilstrup, Mogens. "Naturalizing Semiotics: The Triadic Sign of Charles Sanders Peirce as a Systems Property." *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology* 119, no. 3 (December 2015): 563–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbiomolbio.2015.08.013.

Kojongian, Prilimercy E. "Semiotic Analysis of the Poetry 'Morgenlied' by Martin Opitz." *JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)* 7, no. 3 (November 30, 2021): 430. https://doi.org/10.29210/020211187.

Lim, Derek, and Austin R. Benson. "Expertise and Dynamics within Crowdsourced Musical Knowledge Curation: A Case Study of the Genius Platform." *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 15 (May 22, 2021): 373–84. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v15i1.18068.

Lukianova, Natalia A., and Elena V. Fell. "Meaning Making in Communication Processes: The Role of a Human Agency." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 200 (August 2015): 614–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.08.047.

Markowitz, Douglaz. "2024 GRAMMYs: Taylor Swift Makes GRAMMY History With Fourth Album Of The Year Win For 'Midnights.'" Grammy Awards, 2024. https://www.grammy.com/news/taylor-swift-album-of-the-year-2024-grammys-speech.

Ramadhan, Farhan Muhammad, Shavira Nisa Delardhi, and Ula Nisa El Fauziah. "SIGN ANALYSIS OF THE INSTAGRAM USER USING SEMIOTIC CHARLES S. PEIRCE." *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)* 1, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 631. https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v1i5.p631-644.

Salsa Nabilla Chairun Nisa and Indira Fatra Deni. "Moral Messages in the Film Wedding Agreement The Series (Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis)." *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2023): 24–31.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics.* New York: Philosophical Library, 2011.

Zhao, Yiheng. "Redefining 'Sign'/'Symbol' and Semiotics." *Signs and Media* 2, no. 1–2 (January 27, 2023): 55–70. https://doi.org/10.1163/25900323-12340022.