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The Generative Economy of Agony: Latent Structures of Meaning and Resilience Mechanisms in the Lyrical Work of Taylor Swift

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Abstract

This article employs the methodology of Objective Hermeneutics to reconstruct the latent structures of meaning and resilience mechanisms within the lyrical oeuvre of American songwriter Taylor Swift. Moving beyond intentionalist and biographical reductionism, the analysis identifies a generative case logic structured around four sequential dimensions: the dialectic of emotional staging and drive structure, the somatization and material reification of psychological trauma, the establishment of a generative economy of agony, and the ultimate transition toward absolute indifference. Drawing on the sociology of emotion and theories of emotional capitalism, the study demonstrates how the lyrical subject converts vulnerability, powerlessness, and rage into highly liquid aesthetic and emotional capital, culminating in a structural resilience defined as a "sequin armor". Furthermore, the paper integrates the Aristotelian concept of catharsis to illustrate how this autofictional narrative serves as a therapeutic script, facilitating collective emotional regulation, purification, and empowerment within transnational fan communities. Ultimately, the work is analyzed as a late-capitalist protocol of emotional labor, where private suffering is systematically economized and transformed into a globally resonant resilience framework.

1. The Work of Taylor Swift in the Focus of the Bournemouth Conference

In the contemporary reception of popular culture phenomena, the work of American songwriter Taylor Swift occupies a solitary position (McCann et al., 2025a). In both journalistic critique (Kornhaber, 2024) and academic discourse (Faichney, 2025; McCann et al., 2025b), the artist is frequently discussed as the paradigm of a confessional, almost exhibitionistic pop poetics. Methodologically, however, this perspective falls short, as it typically remains trapped in intentionalist and biographical reductionism. Texts arguing through such deductive subsumption merely decode lyrical texts as one-to-one representations of real-world romantic relationships, grievances, and triumphs, thereby quickly succumbing to subjectivizing fallacies. The genesis of meaning of the literary artifact is erroneously short-circuited with its biographical causality, rather than focusing on the autonomous aesthetic and sociological structure of the textual material itself (Oevermann, 2002, p. 9).

The lyrics themselves anticipate this methodological trap in a remarkable manner. In the song *The Manuscript* (Swift, 2024e), the lyrical subject reflects ex post on a traumatic relationship experience and her own artistic processing of it. The statement "The only thing that's left is the manuscript […] But the story isn't mine anymore" functions as an explicit indication of the text's detachment from the creator's biography. Once the lived experience is transferred into an objective artifact (the manuscript), it eludes the private ownership and intentional control of the author; it becomes an independent hermeneutic object. A sociological analysis that seeks to account for this finding must consequently employ a method capable of uncovering the latent structures of meaning and significance that lie beneath the manifest level of interpretation (Franzmann et al., 2023; Wernet, 2021).

The present paper utilizes the methodology of Objective or Structural Hermeneutics for this purpose (Jindra & Jindra, 2003; Oevermann et al., 1979; Reichertz, 2014; Wernet, 2014). The interpretive goal is not to psychologize the subjective dispositions of the empirical person Taylor Swift, but to reconstruct the case logic objectified and materialized within the text corpus. It is argued that the theme of "emotions" within this lyrical cosmos is not a mere psychological epiphenomenon. Rather, structural analysis reveals it to be the generative principle of a case logic that unfolds across central dimensions: the dialectic of staging and drive structure, the somatization and materialization of the psyche, the establishment of a generative economy of pain, and the sequential transition to indifference.

This approach directly connects to the core questions of the internationally renowned *Media and Emotion Conference* held in September 2026 at Bournemouth University, organized by the *Centre for the Study of Conflict, Emotion and Social Justice (CESJ)* (Pullen et al., 2026). This academic forum centered on how emotions function in contemporary media consumption and production as a nexus of intimate, vulnerable reflexivity, while also being instrumentalized as mechanisms of division, exclusion, and material value creation. Swift's work (Loichen, 2026) is precisely situated at the intersections of the keynote topics discussed there.

The keynote contributions at the Bournemouth Conference (2026) closely intersect with Swift's lyrical corpus. For instance, Kristyn Gorton (2022, 2026) demonstrates how serial melodrama utilizes emotional excess to mark spaces where viewers work through narratives of social change; analogously, Swift’s staging of hyper-verbal intimacy generates horizontal spaces of empathy, functioning as excessive resonance spaces (Rosa, 2019) where audiences empathetically negotiate their own traumas. Similarly, Kim Akass’s (2023, 2026) exploration of female rage against patriarchal restrictions—such as the overturning of Roe v. Wade (1973)—mirrors the manifestation of revenge fantasies in Swift’s work (*Picture to Burn*, Swift, 2006b; *thanK you aIMee*, Swift, 2024g) as energetic fuel to regain agency, articulating a specifically female economy of anger. Furthermore, Lisa Blackman’s (2019, 2026) concepts of "Haunted Data" and transmedia affect networks align with Swift's transmedia universe, where relics and digital traces serve as sentimental storage forcing constant re-affection. The systematic transformation of this psychological trauma into highly liquid commercial and emotional capital reflects Christa van Raalte's et al. (2025; 2026) analyses on the economics of emotion. Ultimately, as detailed in the author's own conference contribution (Loichen, 2026), Swift’s practice as a director and performer acts as a "Resilience Laboratory", establishing a structural resilience or "sequin armor" that serves fans as a template for mastering their own crises through transformative appropriation (Rosa, 2019).

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

To theoretically frame the reconstructed structures of meaning, this paper draws upon an integrated socio-theoretical vocabulary. Based on the sociology of emotion (Hochschild, 2012), concepts of emotional labor and feeling rules are applied to reconstruct the permanent coercion toward emotional self-regulation within the examined corpus (Lyrics: N = 315; Videos: N = 5; cf. Oevermann, 2000, pp. 97–

100). The material documents a pathogenic alienation arising when the subject must discipline its affective structure according to market laws, reflecting a late-modern dissolution of boundaries where emotional labor permeates the digital attention economy.

This aligns with the sociology of the therapeutic narrative and emotional capitalism (Illouz, 2008, 2012, 2025, 2026), where emotional pain becomes highly liquid emotional capital. Swift's work can thus be interpreted as a late-capitalist self-help manual providing performative tools for resilience production. Bourdieu's (2012, 2018a, 2018c) capital theory adds a structural-analytical dimension, highlighting how traumatic experience is strategically accumulated to secure positional power within the field of popular culture. Furthermore, affect and transmedia theory (Blackman, 2019; Stiegler, 1998) allows Swift's lyrical work to be viewed as a transmedially networked affective archive kept alive through the continuous circulation of digital traces and emotional resonances.

Finally, bridging the sedimented case logic with the performative practice of reception requires the Aristotelian concept of catharsis (Aristotle, 335 BC/2025). Rather than a mere instinctual unchaining, aesthetic experience acts as a space of transformation across three dimensions: medical-psychological purgation of pent-up tensions (Bernays, 1880), ethical-moral purification and ennoblement of affects (Lessing, 1786), and cognitive-structural clarification of latent meaning structures (Golden, 1962, 1973; Nussbaum, 2001).

3. Methodology: Reconstruction of the Central Dimensions of the Case Logic Regarding Emotions in the Lyrical Work of Taylor Swift

The objective-hermeneutic analysis (Oevermann, 2000) of the lyrical material (N = 315) allows for the reconstruction of a total of four sequentially interrelated dimensions, which together form the fundamental, generative case logic of the complete works to date. In this highly expanded analysis, the author relies on concrete case reconstructions that uncover the latent structures of meaning of the texts. The subject of the analysis also includes rather unknown and non-mainstream songs by Swift, since it is in the protocols of the extraordinary that crisis-ridden structures become particularly evident (Oevermann, 2000, p. 88).

3.1 The Dialectic of Staging and Drive Structure

The first dimension concerns the permanent inner conflict of the subject between rigid societal role expectations and the implosion of the inner emotional space. While the manifest level frequently celebrates the iron will, professionalism, and triumphant success of the performing subject, the hermeneutic in-depth analysis reveals a relentless, almost violent coercion toward emotional self-regulation, which extends to manifest self-alienation.

In the earliest stages of the case development, this conflict still manifests in a micro-sociological, almost juvenile dimension. In *Teardrops on My Guitar* (Swift, 2006c) it says: "Drew looks at me / I fake a smile so

he won't see / That I want and I'm needing". In the sense of surface acting (Hochschild, 2012), the strategically staged smile ("fake a smile") serves as a facade-like protective barrier. Emotion is understood here as a disruptive danger which, should it leak out uncontrollably, would destroy the social order (the platonic friendship). Here, the subject first learns the internalization of feeling rules: one's own desire must be actively masked in order to remain functional in social interaction.

This structure radicalizes diachronically throughout the body of work and shifts from the private interaction sphere to the sphere of the professional market, where emotions are entirely commodified. In the song *The Manuscript* (Swift, 2024e), this transformation is completed: "And the years passed like scenes of a show […] Then the actors were hitting their marks […] And the tears fell in synchronicity with the score". The metaphor of the theater ("scenes of a show") establishes a latent structure of emotional distancing from one's own lived experience. One's own life is hermeneutically negotiated as a foreign script ("what you know"), pointing to a protective mechanism to reflexively process past traumas and pains. The total submission to a predetermined structure leads to a profound alienation. It is particularly significant that even the deepest psychological agony and crying ("tears fell") are mechanically and temporally precisely synchronized with the external musical score ("in synchronicity with the score"). The subject no longer experiences itself as an autonomous feeling being, but as a cog in an emotional exploitation machinery. Emotions are no longer experienced authentically, but are subjected to the rhythm of the market.

The absolute culmination of this dialectic of emotion work and inner collapse is found in the more mature work *I Can Do It With a Broken Heart* (Swift, 2024a): "They said, 'Babe, you gotta fake it 'til you make it' and I did" […] I was grinnin' like I'm winnin' / I was hittin' my marks / 'Cause I can do it with a broken heart". Manifestly, a triumphant overcoming motif is articulated here: Despite a broken heart, the subject is capable of delivering a gigantic stage show (Weiss, 2025). However, the hermeneutic micro-analysis deconstructs this triumph as the protocol of extreme psychological fragmentation, which perfectly illustrates the concept of emotive dissonance (Hochschild, 2012). The market-shaped imperative "fake it 'til you make it" is radicalized into an existential survival strategy. The subject functions under unbearable pressure, mimics absolute happiness ("grinnin' like I'm winnin"), and precisely fulfills professional requirements ("hittin' my marks"), while the inner self has structurally collapsed. The show facade becomes an emotional cage that must not show any cracks, since the economic and social existence of the subject is coupled to the flawless functioning and continuous performance of emotional labor.

In the late work (Swift, 2025e), this theme is generalized via the metaphor of the "showgirl", such as in the theoretical reflections on *The Life of a Showgirl* (Swift, 2025f): "Pain hidden by the lipstick and lace / Sequins are forever". Here, the fundamental conflict between the glittering appearance and the brutal devaluation of the subject fully erupts. The "lipstick and lace" function as material masks of surface acting, behind which the pain must be hidden. The "sequins" outlast the ephemeral, suffering subject. In this sense, as elaborated in the conference paper *Cinematic Agency and the Architecture of Resilience* (Loichen, 2026), the sequins function as a metaphorical "sequin armor". This armor is not a mere

costume, but an architecturally designed barrier that shields the vulnerable private life from the synoptic and consuming gaze of the public. The disciplined staging makes visible the permanent threat from disruptive inner affects, which must be continuously tamed so as not to endanger the aesthetic illusion.

According to the theory of life praxis (Garz & Raven, 2015) and through the analysis using Objective Hermeneutics (Oevermann, 2000), however, the flip side of this cage also emerges: resignation. In *tolerate it* (Swift, 2020d) it is stated: "I wait by the door like I'm just a kid / Use my best colors for your portrait / Lay the table with the fancy shit / And watch you tolerate it". The action sequences ("wait", "use my best colors", "lay the table") represent an enormous effort of emotional labor. The latent structure of meaning tips at the moment when this effort meets mere endurance ("tolerate it"). This encodes bitter resignation within an unequal power relationship, radically exposing the asymmetry of devotion.

Likewise, in works such as *Beautiful Ghosts* (Swift, 2019a), the deep vulnerability hidden beneath the armor manifests: "Scared to call them my friends and be broken again / Is this hope just a mystical dream?". The explicit fear of being hurt again massively disrupts the burgeoning hope. The latent structure reveals a deep breach of trust in the past, leading to the present (hope) being immediately questioned hermeneutically ("mystical dream?"). It encodes a highly vulnerable skepticism that shines through the armor.

3.2 Somatization and Materialization of the Psyche

A second essential structural mechanism of the textual material lies in the systematic objectification of emotions. Psychological suffering in Swift's lyrical cosmos does not remain in the vague, abstract, or purely discursive. Rather, it occurs in a double movement of physical somatization and material reification. This level of analysis corresponds to the "documenting level"[1], on which meanings are consciously constructed and physically inscribed through performative craftsmanship (Oevermann et al., 1996, p. 305; Oevermann, 2000, p. 87).

The Somatization of Suffering

The body functions here as an involuntary seismograph and recording clerk of emotional overload. Pain and shock manifest in somatic reactions that evade the conscious control of the subject. In *Maroon* (Swift, 2022d), this is thematized via uncontrollable blushing: "And how the blood rushed into my cheeks / So scarlet, it was maroon". The involuntary rush of blood to the cheeks is the physiological protocol of an acute emotional confrontation. The body reacts faster and more truthfully than the subject could articulate linguistically. This physical implosion of asymmetrical relationship structures is shown even more radically in *So Long, London* (Swift, 2024f): "My spine split from carrying us up the hill / Wet through my clothes, weary bones caught the chill".

The breaking of the spine ("spine split"), imagined metaphorically yet profoundly physical in its depiction, as well as the soaked clothes and weary bones, document the total physical depletion of the subject.

Bearing the burden of a dysfunctional relationship leads to somatic deformation. The pain sediments itself directly into the skeletal system of the body. Even in moments of collective triumph, the body remains the criminological recording organ of the crisis, as a hermeneutic analysis of *Long Live* (Swift, 2010a) illustrates: "i said remember this moment / in the back of my mind / and we stood with our shaking hands / the crowd in stands went wild" (Liner Notes Version). The physical reaction ("shaking hands") in combination with the cognitive conservation ("remember this moment") points, in Objective Hermeneutics, to a latent structure of total overwhelming by a collective event. The emotion is not explicitly named, but reconstructed through the involuntary physical state of emergency before a celebrating crowd, which harbors a strong identification potential for charismatic fan cultures (Durkheim, 2008). The body processes the affective intensity of the experience with a time delay and documents the existential state of exception even before any discursive classification.

Materialization in Relics (Securing of Material Traces)

Parallel to somatization, a systematic materialization of the psyche can be reconstructed. Inanimate objects become carriers, witnesses, and conservators of latent emotional attachments. The most famous example of this is found in the work *All Too Well* (Swift, 2012): "and i left my scarf there at your sister's house / and you've still got it in your drawer even now […] cause it reminds you of innocence" (Liner Notes Version). The red scarf in the cinematographic (Swift, 2021b) and lyrical (Swift, 2012, 2021a) universe of the song is not merely a simple prop. Rather, it is staged as a material relic of lost innocence that outlasts time in the counterpart's drawer. The inanimate object conserves the emotional content of the relationship over years within physical space, even when the interactive bond has long been severed. Through her cinematic staging as a director (e.g., in *All Too Well: The Short Film*, 2021b), Swift deliberately situates these objects on the "documenting (formative) level" (Oevermann et al., 1996, p. 305) in order to regain distributive interpretive sovereignty.

This motif of securing material traces runs through numerous works, such as in *New Year's Day* (Swift, 2017a): "There’s glitter on the floor after the party / Girls carrying their shoes down in the lobby / Candle wax and Polaroids on the hardwood floor / you and me from the night before […] I'll be cleaning up bottles with you on New Years Day". The material remains of a celebration ("glitter", "candle wax") form the latent contrast between the past collective euphoria and the present isolation. The reduction to "you and me" against this quiet backdrop reveals a deep, vulnerable togetherness that braces against the transience of the moment. The shared, almost ritualistic cleaning up on *New Year's Day* resembles a forensic securing of traces (Loichen, 2019, 2025), in which the altered emotional content of the relationship is reconstructed and comprehended ex post based on the material legacies.

This trauma-like materialization is negotiated even more profoundly in *Carolina* (Swift, 2022b): "Carolina stains on the dress she left / Indelible scars, pivotal marks / Blue as the life she fled". The latent references to permanence ("Indelible scars", "pivotal marks") in combination with the "stains" (blemishes/marks) represent an un-washable, deep-seated traumatic experience. In objective

hermeneutic terms, the color "Blue" is read here not only as a color, but as a state of permanent melancholy from which one has fled.

This ex-post analysis takes on explicitly forensic traits in *Hits Different* (Swift, 2022c): "I find the artifacts, cried over a hat […] I trace the evidence, make it make some sense / Why the wound is still bleedin'". Here, the subject shows itself incapable of processing the pain purely psychologically in the moment of experience. It must analyze the material legacies ("artifacts", "evidence") like a detective in order to retrospectively decipher its own inner state via the material world. Emotional processing is thus staged as a scientific-forensic search for traces. These material relics can be excellently interpreted in the sense of haunted media (Blackman, 2019) and the concept of tertiary retention (Stiegler, 1998). The objects are sedimented, externalized memory fragments that build a psycho-temporal bridge, allowing the ghosts of the past to protrude into the subject's present with relentless materiality.

3.3 The Generative Economy of Agony

This dimension reveals the most resilient structural mechanism of the material: the paradoxical functionalization of suffering. Emotional pain in this lyrical cosmos is not reconstructed as the dysfunctional endpoint of a case development, but as a necessary, productive transitional stage toward achieving autonomy, resilience, and artistic sovereignty. This can be observed especially in Swift's lyrics from the transition from *The Tortured Poets Department* (Swift, 2024h) to the album *The Life of a Showgirl* (Swift, 2025e). As Akass points out in her conference contribution on "Female Rage" (Akass, 2026), anger increasingly functions in contemporary media formats as a reaction to powerlessness and restrictions. In the work of Taylor Swift, a veritable economy of agony is established, which systematically converts such traumatic experiences or female rage into symbolic, aesthetic, and above all, emotional capital (Illouz, 2008, 2012).

The powerless rage is impressively shown in *Only The Young*: (Swift, 2020c) "You're screaming inside and frozen in time / You did all that you could do / The game was rigged, the ref got tricked". The paradoxical construction of "screaming inside" and "frozen in time" manifests the climax of an emotional blockade. The realization of systemic injustice ("game was rigged") leads to a latent frustration that cannot flow outward, but freezes internally. The desperate powerlessness in *I Don't Wanna Live Forever* (Swift, 2016) also testifies to this loss of control: "Baby, baby, I feel crazy / Up all night, all night and every day / Give me somethin', oh, but you say nothin' / What is happening to me?". The repetitive temporal dissolution of boundaries bears witness to a latent structure of absolute loss of control. The discrepancy between the direct demand and the complete emptiness of the counterpart manifests an extreme emotional asymmetry.

In the prologue to *In Summation* (Swift, 2024d), this economic logic, which turns powerlessness into productivity, is articulated with remarkable clarity: "A smirk creeps onto this poet's face / Because it's the worst men that I write best. / And so I enter into evidence / My tarnished coat of arms / My muses, acquired like bruises". The poet's "smirk" in the face of the suffered injury reveals the conscious, strategic

reinterpretation of the trauma. The destructive behaviors of the counterpart are not experienced as the annihilation of the self, but are grasped as the most valuable aesthetic and economic resource ("the worst men that I write best"). The muses, which were inflicted on the subject like "bruises," are introduced into the artistic process as "evidence." Through this, the pain sheds its passive quality of pure suffering; in the sense of Illouz's (2008) concept of compensatory emotionality, it becomes a value-creating act of self-assertion and marketability.

This transformation logic from aggression into defensive strength is also found in *New Romantics* (Swift, 2014b): "'Cause, baby, I could build a castle / Out of all the bricks they threw at me". The attacks and destructive attempts of the environment ("bricks") are not fended off, but systematically used as building material for a new, more resilient foundation ("castle"). The subject does not break under the hostilities, but accumulates them to build an impregnable symbolic fortress. It performs an alchemy of late-modern subjectivation: The injured self invests its pain as emotional capital to achieve symbolic sovereignty.

Even moments of total amorous delirium fit into this economy, as in *Crazier* (Swift, 2009): "Feels like I'm fallin' and I am lost in your eyes / You make me crazier, crazier, crazier". The falling motif ("fallin'") and being lost do not point to a negative, but to an intentional, intoxicating dissolution of boundaries. The intensified "crazier" encodes the abandonment of rational control in favor of an overwhelming romantic euphoria, which is appropriated as creative fuel.

This structure runs diachronically through the entire body of work. Even in the juvenile early work *I Heart ? [pronounced "I Heart Question Mark"]* (Swift, 2006a), this seed can be traced: "But just look what I've created / I came out alive, but I'm black and blue / Before you ask me if I'm alright / Think about what I had to do, yeah". Even here, the painful suffering through a crisis ("black and blue") is directly justified with the reference to the created product ("look what I've created"). The injury is the necessary price for the birth of autonomous artistic expression and the accumulation of market value.

In the work *thanK you aIMee* (Swift, 2024g), this structure is finally perfected: "All that time you were throwin' punches, I was buildin' somethin' […] But I can't forget the way you made me heal" / "I wrote a thousand songs that you find uncool / I built a legacy that you can't undo". The hostile destructiveness of the aggressor ("throwin' punches") is decoded ex post as the actual motor behind one's own maturation and healing process, thus becoming visible as resilience. Through massive aesthetic production ("a thousand songs"), the subject generates a lasting symbolic inheritance ("legacy") that is untouchable for the aggressor. The suffered damage thus becomes the basis of an impregnable position in the emotional field, which finally elevates the subject above its tormentors.

3.4 The Structural Transition from Crisis to Indifference

The fourth and final dimension describes the sequential lawfulness (Oevermann, 2000, pp. 89–97) under which the definitive emancipation from a pathogenic structure occurs. It becomes apparent that the

actual dissolution of the attachment to the destructive object succeeds neither through manifest reconciliation nor through the perpetuation of hatred.

Hatred and Revenge as Energetic Fuel

At a sequential intermediate stage of crisis management, the aggressive orientation toward the injuring object (in the form of revenge and hatred fantasies) is functionalized. As Akass (2023) argues, female rage often functions as a catalyst in media narratives. A succinct example is provided by the early song *Picture to Burn* (Swift, 2006b): "there's nO time for tears, i'm just sittin' here planning mY revenge / as far as i'm concerned, you're just another picture to burn"(Liner Note Version).[2] Planning revenge ("planning my revenge") serves here to actively end the passive mourning phase ("no time for tears") and to regain one's own agency. Burning the picture ("picture to burn"), however, latently shows that the subject is still massively bound to the object. Hatred and revenge require enormous psychological energy; they maintain the structural bond to the aggressor purely formally, since the object continues to form the center of psychological activity.

Achieving Absolute Indifference

Actual emancipation only occurs when the subject leaves the poles of love and hate and reaches the state of absolute indifference. This is paradigmatically explicated in *I Forgot That You Existed* (Swift, 2019b): "I forgot that you existed / And I thought that it would kill me, but it didn't / And it was so nice / So peaceful and quiet / It isn't love, it isn't hate, it's just indifference". This track describes the complete dissolution of the pathogenic structure. Only when the destructive object ceases to possess any relevance at all in the psychological space of the subject—when it is simply "forgotten"—does the anticipated existential annihilation give way to a deep, peaceful quiet ("peaceful and quiet"). Indifference ("it's just indifference") is the objective and final endpoint of successful crisis processing.

This sequential erasure is described in *Clean* (Swift, 2014a) as a state of structural and somatic purity: "And by mornin', gone was any trace of you / I think I am finally clean". The disappearance of all objective traces of the other in the psychological and physical space marks the successful conclusion of the therapeutic work. The subject experiences liberation from the traumatic bond as an existential relief.

That this indifference is irreversible is shown in *closure* (Swift, 2020a), where the subject actively refuses the offered reconciliation from the former partner: "I know that it's over, I don't need your / Closure, your closure […] I'm fine with my spite / And my tears and my beers and my candles". By rejecting the offered harmonization, the subject demonstrates that the counterpart has lost any structure-relevant definitional power over its inner state. The subject thus no longer requires an interactive confirmation of the end; it has completely regained interpretive sovereignty over its own biography.

This complete biographical depersonalization culminates—as already indicated—once again in *The Manuscript* (Swift, 2024e): "The only thing that's left is the manuscript / One last souvenir from my trip to your shores / Now and then I reread the manuscript / But the story isn't mine anymore". The traumatic

experience is completely externalized and commodified here. That the story "isn't mine anymore" proves absolute detachment: The traumatic object no longer possesses any affective or destructive potential and has coagulated into pure, indifferent history—into a perfectly marketable literary product. Yet, as the objective-hermeneutic reading reveals, this song also contains the cognitive-structural dimension of catharsis: "and the tears fell / in synchronicity with the score / and at last / she knew what the agony had been for". Knowing the purpose of the torment ("what the agony had been for") deconstructs pure suffering and encodes an enlightening, almost therapeutic relief, which alone makes the transition into indifference possible.

4. Therapeutic Narrative - Reproduction and Furious Subversion

The structuring (not: structured) sequence analysis (Oevermann, 2000) of the lyrics from Taylor Swift's corpus reveals that her lyrical oeuvre can be read as a prime example of the reproduction, but also the furious subversion, of the therapeutic narrative (Illouz, 2008). If one subjects the texts to a micro-interpretation (Oevermann et al., 1979), exactly those mechanisms can be reconstructed that Illouz describes as foundations for the enormous cultural resonance of therapeutic discourse.

Logical All-Inclusion and Contradictory Emotions

The phenomenon of attributing opposing emotional states to the same psychological script runs through the texts like a golden thread. In *The Way I Loved You* (Swift, 2008), the ambivalence between the "sensible, incredible" partner and the longing for destructive, "insane" relationship chaos becomes explicit: "But I miss screamin' and fightin' and kissin' in the rain […] So in love that you act insane". In *imgonnagetyouback* (Swift, 2024c), the decision between healing and destruction collapses entirely into an irresolvable paradox: "Whether I'm gonna be your wife or / Gonna smash up your bike, I haven't decided yet". The latent structure of meaning clarifies that feelings in the late-modern subject are coded as maximally ambivalent, leaving the therapeutic script as the only instance capable of capturing this inner conflict. Every emotional extreme (total devotion vs. absolute aggression) legitimizes itself as a fixed component of the "complicated" life praxis and inner nature of the subject.

Secularized Promise of Salvation and Biographical Continuity

The linking of regression (past) and progression (future) to establish biographical coherence is the fundamental structural principle of songs like *The Manuscript* (Swift, 2024e) and *The Fate of Ophelia* (Swift, 2025c). In *The Manuscript* (Swift, 2024e), processing the trauma (revising the manuscript) is described as the only viable path to transformation: " Lookin' backwards / might be the only way to move forward […] And at last / she knew what the agony had been for".

In the album track *The Fate of Ophelia* (Swift, 2025c), this eschatological (redemptive) structure is mythologically elevated: "Late one night / You dug me out of my grave and / Saved my heart from the fate of / Ophelia". Inspired by Shakespeare's Hamlet tragedy (Shakespeare, 1603/2022), in which Ophelia drowns due to heartbreak and madness, Swift outlines a fundamental recoding: The subject is saved

from the wet grave of melancholy by a redeeming partner before the tragic fate of passive self-annihilation can be fulfilled. The latent structure of meaning proves that the suffering of the past is not meaningless; it is the necessary narrative preliminary stage (catharsis) for attaining emotional maturity. The subject recreates itself in a therapeutic sense by making its own tragedy controllable through narration.

Relief from Moral Guilt alongside Functional Responsibility

Illouz (2008) describes how fixation on childhood or external instances frees the individual from moral guilt, but simultaneously holds them responsible for their well-being. In *Mastermind* (Swift, 2022e), one's own manipulative strategy is causally traced back to a deficient childhood: "No one wanted to play with me as a little kid / So I've been scheming like a criminal ever since". At the same time, *Anti-Hero* (Swift, 2022a) radically shifts responsibility into the interior of the subject, beyond classical moral categories: "Did you hear my covert narcissism disguise as altruism […] It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me". The latent structure of meaning shows that guilt is psychologized and thus disempowered as a moral category. The "pathological people pleaser" (*You're Losing Me*, Swift, 2022f) is not constituted as morally reprehensible, but as a wounded person who has the duty to optimize themselves through introspection.

Performativity of Self-Experience

In therapeutic discourse, articulating and writing down emotions is considered the act of healing itself (Illouz, 2008, 2012). The entire album concept of *Speak Now* (Swift, 2010b) is based on this premise. The prologue (booklet) explicitly states: "These songs are made up of words I didn't say […] But I think the words you stop yourself from saying are the ones that will haunt you the longest." In *Clean* (Swift, 2014a) on the later album *1989*, the linguistic reorganization of pain is executed: "The rain came pouring down / When I was drownin', that's when I could finally breathe […] I think I am finally clean". Whoever does not speak remains traumatized. The transformation from passively suffering victim to an articulate, morally competent subject takes place exclusively via the performative act of the pop song as an "open letter."

The Commodification of Biography

Over the course of her releases, the artist's intimate life story is increasingly transformed into a perfect late-modern commodity. The album *The Life of a Showgirl* (Swift, 2025e) represents a metatheoretical reflection on exactly this Illouzian point (2012). In the song *Eldest Daughter* (Swift, 2025b), suffering is directly negotiated as aesthetic currency: "Every eldest daughter was the first lamb to the slaughter / So we all dressed up as wolves and we looked fire". This economization becomes particularly clear in *In Summation* (Swift, 2024d): "A smirk creeps onto this poet's face / Because it's the worst men that I write best. […] My muses, acquired like bruises". Emotional pain is externalized, compressed into narrative units, and exploited as aesthetic capital on the market. The subject participates in emotional capitalism by successfully transforming the most remote chambers of its inner life into commercially successful art.

The Subversion of the Narrative

Although the texts are deeply anchored in therapeutic vocabulary, a fundamental critique and exhaustion of this compulsion for permanent self-optimization breaks through at the margins of the corpus. In *Eldest Daughter* (Swift, 2025b), the subject formulates an open refusal of the late-modern imperatives of apathy, coolness, and the staging of the "savage status": "Apathy is hot […] I've been afflicted by a terminal uniqueness / I've been dying just from trying to seem cool / But I'm not a bad bitch / And this isn't savage".

Likewise, in *I Hate It Here* (Swift, 2024b), the therapeutic promise of inner healing collapses, giving way to a melancholic escape into pure fantasy. "I hate it here so I will go to secret gardens in my mind […] I'll save all my romanticism for my inner life". The recent case development thus shows the crisis-like exacerbation of the discourse. The subject increasingly suffers from the exhaustion of having to be a phoenix that must permanently rise from the ashes (*You're Losing Me*, Swift, 2022f). Therapeutic "work on the self" is exposed as a pathogenic overload; at its limits, the subject rejects the merciless logic of the permanent striving for salvation and retreats into the inaccessible zones of its own "Secret Garden." However, when testing these readings for their validity or falsification, the question remains interpretatively unanswered whether this retreat represents true emancipation or is rather just another market-shaped, commodified pose of refusal. Is this exhaustion to be interpreted as a genuine break from the logic of emotional capitalism, or is it merely the expression of a new, coquettish aesthetic currency on the attention market?

Autofiction and the Mediatization of Pain

To decipher the aesthetic mechanisms of this emotional economy, a systematic comparison with the feminist cult novel *I Love Dick* (Kraus, 2016) is worthwhile. Both Kraus and Swift (particularly in *The Tortured Poets Departmen*t, Swift, 2024h) operate under a genuinely autofictional logic, destabilizing the boundary between empirical reality and literary fictionalization to regain control over their own narration. While Kraus subverts the classic epistolary novel to expose patriarchal structures of desire, Swift subverts the romantic love song to draft a hyper-verbal, poetic confessional. Both employ "oversharing" as an emancipatory instrument—Kraus through performative humiliation, and Swift by inviting fans to "secure traces" (Easter Eggs), parodying intimate sharing as a sales strategy. This involves a splitting of the subject, oscillating between the suffering persona and the strategic author (Kraus) or multiplying the lyrical "I" into intentionally contradictory roles (Swift). Ultimately, both achieve enormous economic usability, transforming unhappy obsession or catastrophic breakups into highly profitable literary or streaming empires. Both demonstrate that radical disclosure is not naive transparency, but a parodic play with audience voyeurism, self-ironically unmasked by Swift in *Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?* (Swift, 2024i): "So tell me everything is not about me / But what if it is?". The pain is no longer merely suffered, but becomes a consciously staged pose that permanently reflects upon its own profitability.

The Transnational Affect Economy and the "Cinema of Suffering"

The enormous reach of this emotional syntax can be comprehended in media-theoretical terms via the concept of the "Transnational Affect Economy." As cultural studies analyses of the global reception of *All Too Well [10 Minute Version]* (Swift, 2021a) show, Swift succeeds in transforming a deeply specific, Western-influenced sentimental vocabulary (red scarves, autumnal landscapes, Thanksgiving dinners) into a globally readable cipher (Loichen, 2026). The accompanying short film artifact establishes a veritable "Cinema of Suffering": Through visual contrasts—such as the cool light of a distanced party gathering as opposed to the warm, yet manipulative lighting of an intimate kitchen scene—a visual grammar of emotional abuse is created (Swift, 2021b).

This "Cinema of Suffering" transforms private pain into a prestigious, global consumer good. It is remarkable that these affective streams are adapted and localized in entirely different cultural contexts. For example, Indonesian artists like Hindia (2019) and Nadin Amizah (2020, 2023) take up exactly this model of curated vulnerability in order to merge it with the local concept of *galau* (a specifically urban, youth melancholy under the conditions of precarious late-modern lifeworlds) (e.g., Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018). This cultural translation is fundamentally anchored in a latent structure of 'Swiftian Saudade' (Clipperton & Bitsikoko, 2025)—a pervasive, melancholic longing that actively aestheticizes the absence of a lost past. By mobilizing this specific semantic coding of nostalgia, the lyrical subject establishes a universal emotional currency that fluidly translates localized grief into globally readable resonance spaces. This reveals a transnational circulation of affect structures that function as highly standardized templates for processing biographical crises in the digital age.

Neo-Austenism and Metamodern Oscillation

This oscillation between radical, vulnerable intimacy and cool, parodic distance can be theoretically framed as "Neo-Austenism"—a specifically metamodern, feminist sensibility whose historical roots lie in the literary work of Jane Austen (1815/2025, 1818/2026). While male-dominated metamodern currents (like neoromanticism) often remain entrenched in melancholic longing, Neo-Austenism here establishes a female grammar of irony, self-reflection, and relational ethics (Sánchez Cabrera, 2025). The metamodern condition is characterized by a permanent pendulum swing between modern ideals (enthusiasm, hope, empathy) and postmodern attitudes (irony, melancholy, apathy, fragmentation). Swift's lyrical subject, particularly evident in the lyrics on the album *folklore* (Swift, 2020b), embodies this oscillation par excellence: It is described as a dialogical subject that continuously constitutes itself in relational confrontation with the "Other" (Harrison & Ringrow, 2022). In this sense, the personal wound is not cultivated in solipsistic pain but is transferred through collective pop-cultural rituals into a horizontal community of care and mutual consolation. Fragility is thus not understood as a deficiency, but reconceptualized as a resource for collective agency (Sánchez Cabrera, 2025).

5. Discussion on a Late-Capitalist Syntax of Feelings

From a sociological perspective, the reconstructed textual material documents a highly modern, late-capitalist syntax of feelings. The transformation of emotions in the work of Taylor Swift follows a case

logic that seamlessly integrates into analyses of subjectivation in flexible capitalism.

Emotions are consistently treated like a currency in the examined corpus (Hochschild, 2012). They are invested in relationships, suffered somatically, strategically hidden, and finally transformed into aesthetic and psychological capital within the creative process. This practice corresponds to the diagnosis of "emotional capitalism" (Illouz, 2012), in which emotional and economic discourses inextricably merge. The suffering subject (Illouz, 2008) is no longer a passive victim, but becomes a rational actor who manages their emotional portfolio and manages to extract a yield even from ruin. At the same time, the permanent performance-depression dialectic points to the dark legacy of the emotional labor described by Hochschild (2012). The emotive dissonance that the subject suffers when having to function "with a broken heart" (*I Can Do It With a Broken Hear*t, Swift, 2024a) is in this sense no longer a purely private pathology. Rather, it is the systemic price of a commodified subjectivity, in which the boundaries between the authentic self and marketable emotional performance irrevocably collapse.

The resilience structure reconstructed here—building a fortress out of the thrown stones (*New Romantics*, Swift., 2014b; *thanK you aIMee*, Swift, 2024g)—points to a specifically modern type of subject. This subject is conditioned not only to overcome traumas but to use them, in the sense of the therapeutic narrative, as a productive catalyst for its own optimization and emancipation. From a critical perspective, however, it must be asked whether this form of resilience does not represent a highly functional adaptive achievement to a precarious social environment characterized by permanent crises. The compulsion to "do it with a broken heart" celebrates total self-discipline under the conditions of the market. Agony is no longer taken as an occasion for social critique but is understood as a privatized, productive raw material. The vulnerable self thus becomes a highly crisis-resistant, yet simultaneously maximally disciplined neoliberal asset.

Instead of classical, authoritarian domination structures, the artist's untouchable position within the global fan culture is constituted via the establishment of a highly structured, intersubjective emotional field in the sense of the theories of Bourdieu (2012, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) and Illouz (2008, 2012, 2025, 2026). The shared experience of the therapeutic script forms the symbolic link of this social relationship.

This highly structured field is further stratified by what Carroll (2023) identifies as intra-fandom hierarchies, where a fan's status is significantly elevated through the accumulation of 'attention capital'—often achieved via strategic consumptive practices that mirror a dedicated 'leisure career' aimed at securing direct engagement with the celebrity. Consequently, the pursuit of this attention not only solidifies the fan's allegiance but simultaneously reinforces the commodified boundaries of the fandom community itself.

By ruthlessly exposing its intimacy and vulnerability, the subject provides its recipients with precise templates for processing their own biographical crises (Oevermann, 2016). Collective experience is thus founded not on the passive admiration of infallible strength (Durkheim, 2008), but on the circular exchange of emotional capital: The audience validates the subject's pain through consumption and symbolic recognition, while the subject provides the audience with a normative guideline for their own

resilience production. The "manuscript" (understood here as the complete artistic work of Taylor Swift) thus becomes the canonical text of a collective therapeutic field.

As discussed at the Bournemouth Conference (Pullen et al., 2026) in the panel "Celebrity, Star Persona, Fandom" using the example of sequence locations from the video of *All Too Well* (Swift, 2021b), the performative framing and cinematic appropriation (Cinematic Agency) by the artist constitutes specific resonance spaces for neo-tribes (Loichen, 2026). Through transformative appropriation (Rosa, 2019), fans internalize the crisis management demonstrated by Swift in order to strengthen their own resilience in dealing with crises. This establishes a form of "Fan Governance" in which conscious artisanal and artistic framing restores human authenticity in a digital space characterized by algorithmic uncertainty, serving fans as a blueprint for their own biographical resilience.

This intersubjective emotional field manifests itself par excellence in the collective, performative act of the "Swifties" singing together at large concerts like the *Eras Tour* (Weiss, 2025; Wrench, 2023) or at specifically organized fan events (Swift, 2017b). The arena, club or private estate advances here to the functional equivalent of the ancient polis theater, in which the highly narrative lyrical corpus is collectively restaged. The shared articulation of highly affect-laden key works—from the epic reconstruction of relationship decay in *All Too Well* (Swift, 2012, 2021a, 2021b) to the painful deconstructions of intimate relationships on the album *The Life of a Showgirl* (Swift, 2025e), such as in the tracks *Father Figure* (Swift, 2025d) or *CANCELLED!* (Swift, 2025a)—can be deep-structurally decoded via the three integrated dimensions of the Aristotelian catharsis model (Aristotle, 335 BC/2025).

Under the prism of medical-psychological purgation, singing together in the stadium acts like a highly efficient psychosomatic discharge mechanism. The arena functions as a protected, liminal space in which everyday conventions of emotional restraint are temporarily suspended. When tens of thousands of individuals simultaneously scream out the same lines, the Aristotelian primal affects of eleos (pity) and phobos (fear)—modernized as collective heartbreak, existential grievance, and the fear of isolation—are discharged in a controlled manner in the physical act of screaming, crying, and synchronous dancing. This collective ecstasy serves as a ritual valve (Durkheim, 2008) that drains off pent-up emotive dissonances of everyday life and relieves the psychological system of the individual.

In ethical-moral terms, the collective performance effects a fundamental ennoblement and transformation of the affects, reflecting Lessing's (1786) concept of purification. The fan's isolated, private trauma is socialized through synchronous articulation. The subject status threatened in crisis situations and the blocked agency of the individual are reactivated in the mode of the mass. In the mirror of the collective, dull, egocentric suffering transforms into an affirmative, shared power. The shuddering before one's own vulnerability is purified by comprehending it as a universal component of the human condition; out of the passive powerlessness of the victim, a collective empowerment arises via the choral singing.

Finally, a profound cognitive process of realization (clarification) takes place on the cognitive-structural level. Through singing along, an intense affection occurs, in which the foreign narrative of the artist

inextricably merges with one's own biography. Biographical failure, the tragic flaw (hamartia), or suffered abuse are lifted out of the diffuse, unstructured chaos of everyday suffering and transferred into a coherent aesthetic form. In singing together, the recipients attain the pleasure of rationally and emotionally understanding their own life story by grasping the latent meaning structures of pain as part of a larger, meaning-generating cultural script. Kristyn Gorton named this phenomenon very aptly in her keynote address "Empathy and Intimacy" (Gorton, 2026): The spaces marked by such emotional excesses serve the viewers (or here: listeners) as platforms to work through narratives and cultivate empathy. The emotional field of fan culture thus proves to be a highly functional, late-modern resilience mechanism that sustainably secures the psychosocial stability of the subjects in social space.

6. Conclusion and Media Studies Outlook

The objective-hermeneutic reconstruction of Taylor Swift's lyrical work demonstrates that it points far beyond individual sensitivities, documenting the fundamental crisis-ridden nature and coping strategies of the late-modern subject. By eschewing biographical reductionism, the textual material becomes visible as a sociological protocol of an era.

The reconstructed case logic reveals how the initial conflict between rigid role performance (surface acting) and injured inner emotional space leads to a somatization and material reification of pain. Crucially, this crisis is not passively suffered but productively turned around within a paradoxical economy of agony. Pain is systematically transformed into aesthetic, symbolic, and emotional capital, whereby the vulnerable subject forms a resistant, resilient structure (the "sequin armor"), whose emancipatory endpoint lies in the attainment of absolute indifference.

The integration of the Aristotelian catharsis model clarifies that this structural resilience production finds its ritual completion in the collective execution of fan culture. As the presentations at the *Media and Emotion Conference* show (e.g., Blackman; Akass; van Raalte et al.), singing together in the stadium transforms private agony into a collective script of healing and stabilization via mechanisms of purgation, moral purification, and cognitive clarification, inextricably intertwined with contemporary media-technological paradigms.

At the same time, newer texts and albums by Taylor Swift indicate a significant late-modern turning point: the subject's exhaustion from the imperative of permanent self-healing and optimization breaks through in the aesthetics of apatheia and the escape into the fantasy of the "Secret Garden." For future cultural and emotional-sociological research, the linkage of reconstructive methods, classical poetics, and contemporary pop poetics offers an immensely fruitful field. It reminds us that popular culture texts contain highly condensed, objective structures of meaning that must be read as seismographs of societal transformation and subjectivation processes, thus contributing substantially to the ongoing media and affect studies debate.

Ultimately, the present analysis deliberately establishes a methodological tension between two contrasting epistemological poles: the strict objective-hermeneutic reconstruction of the text's

autonomous, latent structures of meaning on the one hand, and the sociological critique of the highly strategic, intentional commodification of these same emotions within a late-capitalist attention economy on the other. This conscious juxtaposition is not to be understood as an analytical contradiction. Rather, it serves to actively explore the highly ambivalent space where unconscious psychological sedimentation intersects with curated autofictional performativity. The question of exactly how the unyielding, objective latency of a cultural artifact interacts with the highly calculated, generative market logic of its creator constitutes a central methodological and theoretical desideratum. Exploring the precise mechanisms operating within this epistemological gap—where genuine trauma crystallizes into both a resilient structural architecture and a profitable aesthetic currency—must become the subject of future empirical investigation. Consequently, addressing this specific intersection will form the focal point of subsequent research endeavors, aiming to further integrate structural hermeneutics with the critical analysis of contemporary pop poetics and transnational affect economies.

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Ethical Approval

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Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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M.L. is the sole author of this manuscript. M.L. conceived the conceptual framework, conducted the objective-hermeneutic analysis, and wrote and reviewed the entire manuscript.

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Data Availability

The primary data underpinning this research consists of published lyrics and audiovisual material by Taylor Swift. The textual corpus was compiled using publicly accessible internet sources and meticulously verified manually against official printed text protocols (e.g., liner notes) obtained from purchased physical media, including CDs, DVDs, vinyl records, and special fan editions. A supplementary Word file containing the verified lyrics analyzed in this study is provided for the peer review process. Please note that this file is a continuous working document; it is regularly expanded, and the complete transfer of all physical liner notes is still ongoing.Methodologically, the data selection process utilized Qualitative Content Analysis according to Mayring to filter the comprehensive text corpus for songs exhibiting high emotional density. Subsequently, the selected texts were treated as individual cases and subjected to deep sequential analysis using the methodology of Objective Hermeneutics. This approach serves to rigorously reconstruct latent structures of meaning (independent of subjective speculation) and condense them into structural generalizations. Each analyzed case ultimately reveals its own narrative regarding the experience of emotions as crisis situations and their subsequent coping mechanisms, which are then contextualized through the lens of resonance theory as transformative appropriation.For the analysis of the audiovisual material, publicly accessible YouTube videos were utilized. To make this dynamic visual data compatible with the strict methodological requirements of Objective Hermeneutics, representative stand-stills (static frames) were generated. These static images capture the overall composition and emotionally charged artifacts (e.g., the red scarf), allowing for a precise reconstruction of the latent meaning behind the arranged spatial constellations and objects.

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66. Swift T (2017a) New Year's Day [Song]. On reputation. Big Machine Records
67. Swift T (2017b) The reputation Secret Sessions [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/kGOmPmILndU
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69. Swift T (2019b) I Forgot That You Existed [Song]. On Lover. Republic Records
70. Swift T (2020a) closure [Song]. On evermore (Deluxe Version). Republic Records
71. Swift T (2020b) folklore [Album]. Republic Records
72. Swift T (2020c) Only The Young [Song]. Republic Records
73. Swift T (2020d) tolerate it [Song]. On evermore (Deluxe Version). Republic Records
74. Swift T (2021a) All Too Well (10 Minute Version) [From The Vault] [Song]. On RED (Taylor's Version). Republic Records
75. Swift T (2021b) All Too Well: The Short Film [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/tollGa3S0o8
76. Swift T (2022a) Anti-Hero [Song]. On Midnights (The Late Night Edition). Republic Records
77. Swift T (2022b) Carolina [Song]. On Where The Crawdads Sing (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack). Republic Records
78. Swift T (2022c) Hits Different [Song]. On Midnights (The Late Night Edition). Republic Records
79. Swift T (2022d) Maroon [Song]. On Midnights (The Late Night Edition). Republic Records
80. Swift T (2022e) Mastermind [Song]. On Midnights (The Late Night Edition). Republic Records
81. Swift T (2022f) You're Losing Me (From The Vault) [Song]. On Midnights (The Late Night Edition). Republic Records
82. Swift T (2024a) I Can Do It with a Broken Heart [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
83. Swift T (2024b) I Hate It Here [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
84. Swift T (2024c) imgonnagetyouback [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
85. Swift T (2024d) Summation [Poem for TTPD]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records

86. Swift T (2024e) The Manuscript [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
87. Swift T (2024f) So Long, London [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
88. Swift T (2024g) thanK you aIMee [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
89. Swift T (2024h) The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology [Album]. Republic Records
90. Swift T (2024i) Who's Afraid of Little Old Me? [Song]. On The Tortured Poets Department - The Anthology. Republic Records
91. Swift T (2025a) CANCELLED! [Song]. On The Life of a Showgirl. Republic Records
92. Swift T (2025b) Eldest Daughter [Song]. On The Life of a Showgirl. Republic Records
93. Swift T (2025c) The Fate of Ophelia [Song]. On The Life of a Showgirl. Republic Records
94. Swift T (2025d) Father Figure [Song]. On The Life of a Showgirl. Republic Records
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Footnotes

1. In the objective-hermeneutic analysis of Taylor Swift's work, the "documenting level" designates the tangible, artisanal dimension of cultural production. It refers to the concrete sphere in which the artist actively manufactures the artifact. This level encompasses the deliberate, hands-on "tinkering" with the musical and lyrical craft. It captures the entire generative process: from the very first

solitary voice memos recorded on her phone, to the subsequent stages of arranging, editing, and refining the material, whether executed independently or in collaboration with co-producers. On this level, raw emotional or biographical material is meticulously processed and structurally sedimented into the final song. It represents the practical artistic labor through which latent meaning is not just passively expressed but consciously crafted and materially recorded.

2. Following the principle of textual fidelity (Oevermann, 2000) which demands that the material is analyzed exactly as documented, rendering even idiosyncratic orthography and typographical errors legitimate objects of interpretation—the lyrics were reproduced directly from the booklet. These idiosyncrasies operate at the documenting level of objective hermeneutics, functioning as an intentional encoding device in which the altered uppercase letters convey an embedded message, deciphered as DATE NICE BOYS.