

“You understand now why they lost their minds and fought the wars”:

Comparing how William Shakespeare and Taylor Swift use figurative language when writing about  
love

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## **Abstract**

This thesis studies and compares William Shakespeare's sonnets with the song lyrics of the American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift. The aim is to observe the differences and similarities in their use of figurative language, specifically metaphors and metonymies when referring to romantic love and relationships. The 400-year-gap between them alone means that the language, as it is constantly evolving, will be different and so will be the metaphors and metonymies. This study examines what kind of differences there are and what has remained the same. The materials for this study are a selection of songs from Taylor Swift's complete discography (2006-2020) as well as selected sonnets by William Shakespeare (1609).

## **Tiivistelmä**

Tässä tutkielmassa etsin ja vertailen kuvaannollisen kielen käyttöä William Shakespearen soneteissa ja amerikkalaisen laulaja-lauluntekijä Taylor Swiftin kappaleiden sanoituksissa. Tutkielman tavoite on tutkia eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä siinä, miten he käyttävät kuvaannollista kieltä, eritoten metaforia ja metonymioita, kirjoitessaan romanttisesta rakkaudesta ja ihmissuhteista. Heidän elinaikojensa välillä oleva 400 vuoden väli itsessään takaa sen, että alati muuttuva ja kehittyvä kieli on erilaista heidän teksteissään ja siten myös heidän käyttämässään metaforissa ja metonymioissa. Tarkastelen tutkielmassa kappaleita Taylor Swiftin koko tuotannosta vuosilta 2006-2020 sekä valikoituja sonetteja William Shakespearen sonettikokoelmasta vuodelta 1609.

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# 1 Introduction

Love is a fascinating concept. It takes more than a degree in humanities to fully grasp what goes on inside the human mind when we fall in love. Countless artists and writers over the history of humankind have attempted to put it into words and paintings and many have done so successfully. However, every person feels what is essentially the same feeling so differently that it is difficult and to some degree even unnecessary to compare such works which have been created in different places, times and mindsets. Nevertheless, there is something quite fascinating about the different ways in which people describe the feeling of love. The different interpretations can be observed side by side to identify what is different and what is similar about them, without making one seem less important or valuable than the other. That is also the purpose of this thesis: to observe what is different and what has stayed the same without any competitive elements.

I chose to compare the works of William Shakespeare and Taylor Swift because I wanted my research materials to be far apart from each other in terms of time. This allows me to explore how the figurative language that is used to describe love has changed over time but also, in which ways it has stayed the same. I chose William Shakespeare because the themes in his sonnets revolve around beauty and, among other human emotions, love. For comparison I wanted to study the lyrics of a modern-day artist to create contrast and for that I chose an American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift. Not only is she widely known to deal with relationships in her songs, but I have also personally supported her career for over a decade now, which has familiarized me with her work rather well. I do not have a similar personal connection to William Shakespeare, however, I am familiar with some of his plays and getting to know his sonnets, which are among the most well-known poetry in the world, is an exciting process.

My analysis will contain 15 songs from Swift and 12 sonnets from Shakespeare and I will look into them using semantics as my research approach. The main focus of the analysis is to identify and analyse metaphors and metonymies within the research materials. In my analysis I will show that Taylor Swift's lyrics depict love often as light or fire. These types of metaphors mimic the physical feeling of warmth in the body when falling in love. William Shakespeare's sonnets follow along with similar themes and in my analysis I will show that in addition Shakespeare uses metaphors such as "the object of love is a deity" with the intent of putting their love interest on a pedestal. In my research I will show that while Swift often focuses on what the experience of falling in love feels like, Shakespeare's focus is more on describing the love interest themselves. In summary, language is constantly evolving but love has the tendency to stay the same; this is what creates an intriguing research topic for my thesis. In the following sections I will discuss the

research materials and then move on to a brief introduction of both artists. After that I will present my analysis and finally the conclusion.

## 2 Research materials

In this section I will introduce the materials that I will use for my research. In sections 2.1 and 2.2 I will introduce Taylor Swift and William Shakespeare, respectively, and give overviews of their careers as writers and artists. I will also present full lists of the songs and sonnets that I have chosen to examine more closely in this thesis. The main research materials consist of the collection of sonnets written by William Shakespeare (1609) and the complete discography of Taylor Swift (from 2006 to 2020). Out of these, I have chosen works that are the most similar thematically and therefore the most relevant to examine in a comparative manner. I will not analyse the entire song or sonnet but rather select parts that include the themes that I have chosen to analyse and that are thematically comparable.

### 2.1 Taylor Swift

Taylor Alison Swift was born on the 13th of December in 1989 in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania (Jepson 6). From a young age Swift started showing interest towards music. According to her parents, she was only around three years old when she would go up to people and start singing songs from Disney movies to them. She also recalls remembering the soundtracks to movies as a child more vividly than the storylines (Jepson 7). At a young age Swift started participating in school plays and productions and was given some big roles, such as Sandy in *Grease* and Maria in *The Sound of Music* (Jepson 12). When she was in high school a record company RCA Records offered Swift a ‘development deal’ which did not mean that she was fully signed and ready to record an album, but rather that the record label was interested in her and wanted to see how she progresses in a year. After signing the development deal, Swift moved to Tennessee with her family so that she could fully pursue her career (Jepson 20).

Swift’s career began to take off and her first album *Taylor Swift* was released in 2006. Her first albums leaned towards the country pop genre; however later as her fourth album *Red* came out in 2012, Swift’s style had shifted more towards mainstream popular music and the country elements were nearly gone. Her following album *1989* that came out in 2014 also leaned further and further away from the country scene as her style progressed towards popular music. After keeping

low profile for a few years, Swift came out with her sixth album *Reputation* in 2017. The sound on this album was completely new for her and it was clear that her country singer days were over. The tracks on the album included more electronic sounds than what Swift's fans were used to, as the stripped-down guitar sound and lively pop songs used to be her trademark until the release of *Reputation*. In 2019 Swift released her seventh studio album, *Lover*. The genre of music sounded more like Swift's older, trademark material, bringing back the lighthearted pop sound from her earlier albums. In 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic Swift released two surprise albums, *Folklore* and *Evermore*, where the sound was a little different yet again; this time it was more acoustic and calm.

Swift's songs are mostly autobiographical because writing about her feelings and emotions has been a coping method for her from a young age. After she became better known, she started occasionally dating other celebrities and writing songs about them after the relationship was over. This became her way of dealing with the heartbreaks and many people became curious about who she was writing about. Especially in 2010 when Swift put out *Speak Now*, an album that was more personal and confessional than before, bloggers and journalists started nitpicking her lyrics in hopes to figure out who the people were that Swift was writing about (Jepson 89). None of this stopped Swift from putting her feelings into words. In the prologue *Speak Now* she wrote:

I think most of us fear reaching the end of our life, and looking back regretting the moments we didn't speak up. When we didn't say, "I love you." When we should've said, "I'm sorry." When we didn't stand up for ourselves or someone who needed help. These songs are made up of words I didn't say when the moment was right in front of me.

I chose 15 songs from Swift for closer study. I went through her discography album by album and ended up with the following ones as I figured they were thematically what I was looking for and also included rich figurative language. Because of my previous familiarity with Swift's work, I knew pretty well where to look and which albums provided the types of lyrics that I was looking for. What made the selection process more interesting, however, was the fact that Swift released two new albums while I was working on this thesis. I familiarised myself with her new work as well and I chose one song from each of her newer albums for closer study; "Invisible string" from *Folklore* and "Ivy" from *Evermore*. All the songs that I chose deal with similar things thematically, which include love in many different forms; lost love, new love and everything in between. The wide emotional range in the songs also allowed me to explore the figurative language

rather extensively. Below I will provide a list of songs that I chose to analyse. They appear in the list in the same order as they do in the analysis.

SONG TITLE	YEAR OF PUBLIFICATION	ALBUM
Invisible string	2020	Folklore
Ivy	2020	Evermore
Getaway car	2017	Reputation
Blank space	2014	1989
You belong with me	2008	Fearless
This love	2014	1989
Sparks fly	2010	Speak now
Clean	2014	1989
You are in love	2014	1989 – Deluxe edition
Dear John	2010	Speak now
All too well	2012	Red
Call it what you want	2017	Reputation
Dress	2017	Reputation
False God	2019	Lover
Cornelia street	2019	Lover

## 2.2 William Shakespeare

The exact date for Shakespeare's birth is not known; however, there is a record of a boy under the name of Gulielmus, son of Johannes Shakespeare being christened on the 26th of April in 1564. At that time there was a Catholic custom to christen children very soon after their birth, which suggests that Shakespeare was born not too many days before that date. His parents Mary Arden and John Shakespeare had a total of eight children out of which William was the third. However, he was the first one to live beyond infancy (Burgess 22). William himself died at the age of 52. There is not much information out there about his siblings and as Anthony Burgess explains, knowing at least something about Shakespeare's siblings would be a helpful factor in "solidifying Will's physical background" (Burgess 25). There is no certain information about whether William's parents were

literate. John used to sign documents with a cross but that does not mean that he was illiterate (Burgess 26). William likely enjoyed reading as a child even though at the time when he was at school there was not much to read, nor did the public school encourage the children to read the same way they do nowadays (Burgess 27).

There has been some debate about the inconsistencies between the education that Shakespeare received and the works that he has written. There is no record of him ever studying at university for instance, yet he was somehow able to create complex and intriguing texts with barely any education, only the free grammar school (Burgess 40). Some people have even speculated that it was someone else entirely who wrote his texts. However, Burgess points out that one does not necessarily need a lot of wealth or education to be creative; the only thing that is truly needed is imagination. Burgess goes on to argue that anybody can teach themselves to be a good writer by reading literature and taking inspiration from the surrounding world (Burgess 40). Another thing to note is that even though Shakespeare wrote about scholars, world travelers and courtiers, that does not mean that he had to be one himself. As Burgess suggests, “it may be his task to create such men out of his imagination”. In other words, it was Shakespeare’s talent in writing that showed through, to be able to convince his readers that he had experienced the things that he wrote about himself or that he knew about them on the basis of an expensive education. During his lifetime William wrote many widely successful plays and poems. Some of his most famous works include *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *King Lear*. Even though he is best known for his plays, his sonnets are still some of the most widely read poetry in all of English literature. When he started to write the sonnets, his readers assumed them to be autobiographical, which is possible (Burgess 127).

From Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets I chose twelve for closer study. I was not previously familiar with the collection of sonnets, with the exception of a couple more widely known ones, such as sonnet number 18, “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”. Because of the lack of previous knowledge of the sonnets, the selection process was a little bit more laborious than the selection of Swift’s songs. During the process of going through each sonnet, I started marking the ones that had the type of figurative language that I was looking for. The twelve that I chose talk about romantic love, however, Shakespeare’s sonnets also talk a lot about other subjects such as beauty and youth. For the sake of comparison I chose the ones that include figurative language and descriptions of romantic feelings. Because of the time gap between the two artists, Shakespeare’s language was a little bit difficult in places to understand which made the process of selecting the sonnets slightly more time consuming. I was still able to pick out sonnets that talk about subjects, similarly to Swift, such as love that has been lost or other hardships in romantic relationships, also



the good parts such as love that has been found. Below I will present a list of sonnets that I chose for closer inspection.

#### SONNET NUMBER/FIRST LINE (NAME)

87/Farewell! Thou art too dear for my possessing  
45/The other two, slight air and purging fire  
153/Cupid laid by his brand, and fell asleep  
43/When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see  
116/Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
60/Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore  
46/Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war  
57/Being your slave, what should I do but tend  
47/Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took  
129/The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
85/My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still  
80/O! how I faint when I of you do write

### 3 On sonnets and song lyrics

In this section I will present some of the previous research done on the topic and explain how I am going to utilise that research in my own thesis.

Previous research on finding metaphors for love in poems and song lyrics from different eras and comparing them to see how they have changed over time seems to be quite uncommon. However, there is previous research done on figurative language in general, which offers a helpful theoretic framework for my study. A master's thesis by Janne Harpela "Love, Kylie or metaphors of love in the lyrics of Kylie Minogue" done in the University of Oulu in 2015 focuses on the metaphors for love in Kylie Minogue's song lyrics. It is similar to mine in the sense that it observes and analyses metaphors in popular music. There has also been a plenty of research done that explores William Shakespeare's language and the use of metaphors in all his works, including the collection of sonnets, which I will discuss later in this section. There is also a good amount of studies done

specifically about Taylor Swift's lyrics. All in all, previous research is available on both of the writers' works, only not together in one paper but separately explored by different people.

Harpela's thesis, being the closest to my own thematically, is an example of how song lyrics can be explored as poetry. Harpela categorises and explores his examples by theme, which is the same approach that I decided to use, for the sake of clarity of the analysis. From opposites like "up – down" to "here – there", Harpela explores how Kylie Minogue's lyrics utilise figurative language through metaphors. He also explains love as a concept and then goes on to further explain the theoretical background of the key concepts that he later continues to use in his analysis, such as conceptual metaphors which I will also explore in my analysis. In his conclusion Harpela identifies a problem with the organisation of the analysis. In his words "there are cases of overlapping and metaphoric expressions matching the conceptual metaphor but not the type of metaphor under which the conceptual metaphor has been placed". I also found out during the organisation process of my own analysis that it is indeed not always black and white how the expressions should be categorised in a way that makes the most sense, nor is figuring out to which category a certain metaphor should be placed in.

Harpela also quotes Heikki Salo, who argues that because love as a concept is timeless, it is not easy to create new figures of speech to describe it. Harpela's main point is that even though love has been talked and written about for so long, it can still be fresh and new ways to describe it, without only using what he calls "recycled conventional metaphors". In the end Harpela arrives at the conclusion that while Minogue's lyrics include some pretty traditional metaphors, they also have elements of something fresh and new: "Some of the metaphoric expressions utilise conventional patterns but there is enough novel feel in the way Minogue uses figurative language". This is also something that I am expecting to discover within my own materials; something old mixed with something new.

Another relevant paper concerning analysis of song lyrics and especially those of Taylor Swift is "An Analysis of Figurative Language in Taylor Swift's song lyrics" by Wilya Setiawati and M. Maryani. This paper discusses Taylor Swift's songs using descriptive qualitative method to explore the figurative language in the selected songs. The figures of speech are explored widely as Setiawati and Maryani go through similes, metaphors, hyperboles, paradoxes, ironies and personifications as they analyse Swift's songs *Red* and *22*. As a result they found out that *hyperboles* and *similes* were the most commonly found forms of figurative language in the selected songs. A *hyperbole* is an exaggeration of an idea and in Swift's lyrics it was found in her song *Red* where Swift writes "Loving him is like trying to change your mind once you're already flying

through the free fall". What Setiawati and Maryani also found to be common in Swift's lyrics was a *simile*, which is one way to compare one thing to another by combining words or use comparators such as: "as, as if, like, such as", etc. A simile in Swift's lyrics was also found in her song *Red*: "Forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you're never met". Setiawati and Maryami also noted that "to know and understand the hidden meaning in a song can use figurative language so that there will be no misunderstanding in interpreting the meaning".

Additionally, another study that explores Swift's use of figurative language "Imagery in song lyrics of Taylor Swift" by Yasanti, Unpris and Susilawati goes on to argue that song lyrics are in fact a form of poetry; they argue that song lyrics are a short poem that expresses perception, thought and feeling in text and sung by a singer. According to Krisna Tankaruba "song is categorized as lyric poetry. Song is a combination of beautiful melody and lyric. Song does not tell a story which portrays characters and actions. The song writers addresses the reader directly, portraying his or her own feeling, state of mind, and perceptions". While this is true, it is also possible that songwriters do not necessarily write about their personal life experiences and some songs do in fact portray characters and their actions. Nevertheless, song lyrics can be count as poetry and can therefore be discussed within the same context as more of a classic style of poetry, such as Shakespeare.

If there are multiple research papers done on Taylor Swift's lyrics, that amount is manifold when it comes to Shakespeare. A study by Vivi Melaty Ruslida, Drs. Barnabas Sembiring and Indah Damayanti from the University of Bengkulu "Figurative Language in William Shakespeare and William Wordsworth's Poems" argues that Shakespeare was a "poetic and dramatic person". This argument is based on the findings of the research that show how Shakespeare compares his lover to natural elements such as summer's day and winter's wind. I also noted this on my own research; Shakespeare's language is in a way much more dramatic than Swift's. This type of research is relevant to my own because I am able to identify that other people have made similar observations as I have. Another similar research "The Language of the Emotion of LOVE in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: Conceptual Metaphors, Metonymies and their Interactions" by Alexandra Christakidou explores the metaphors for love not in Shakespeare's sonnets but instead in his famous play *Romeo and Juliet*. Christakidou's approach is to "show that emotion language is complex and this complexity may be the reason for its impact on the hearer/listener". I agree with her; figurative language tends to lean on the element of exaggeration, which then makes it more impactful to the reader or listener.

Finally, Christina Flores Moreno discusses Shakespeare's use of metaphors in "Time, life and death metaphors in Shakespeare's sonnets: The Lakoffian approach to poetic metaphors".

According to Moreno, Shakespeare sometimes equates life with fire. She explains that the connection is formed likely because "fire extinguishes little by little until light and heat disappear. Therefore, lifetime is metaphorically understood as the progressive loss of life till there is complete darkness and coldness in death." I find that this observation ties in with mine in the sense that I look into, among other themes, love being compared to fire. I also talk about the physical warmth in the body when falling in love. Although Moreno's study focuses on the concepts of time, life and death and not love, I still believe there is a connection to my findings. Moreno mentions "heat" disappearing when life comes to an end. In a way it all ties in together; fire, light and other warmth-inducing things remind us of life and love. Warmth stands for lively and joyful events, whereas coldness represents death and darkness.

Based on the previous research that I uncovered above, what other people have found out about Taylor Swift's and William Shakespeare's figurative language use seems to be in line with my own research. The main takeaway for me is that song lyrics can definitely be analysed as or together with poetry. The previous research on this field also sets a good framework for my own study about figurative language use.

#### 4 Methods and key concepts

In this section I will introduce the theoretical framework behind this thesis. I will introduce my main research approach and also explain the main concepts that I will utilise in my analysis.

The main research approach for this thesis is semantics. In his book "The study of language" George Yule defines semantics as the "study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences." According to Yule, semantics is always trying to find the conventional meaning behind words and not only what an individual speaker might think they mean, or want them to mean (Yule 109). Semantics as a field is "a general area of meaning characterized by two or more words that denote some common area of experience or thought" (Montgomery et al. 353). In other words, semantics is a study of meaning; either literal or metaphorical. To achieve a metaphorical meaning, the tool to use is figurative language. Figurative language is a "general term for a number of non-literal uses of language" (Montgomery et al. 344). It can be used as an umbrella term for many different variations

that it includes (Montgomery et al. 124) but the two main types that I will attempt to identify from my research materials are *metaphor* and *metonymy*.

A metaphor is “a figure of speech in which one thing or idea or event is spoken of as if it were another (revealingly similar) thing, idea or event: the two fields are blended together by the use of the metaphor” (Montgomery et al. 348). The word “metaphor” originally comes from a Greek word *metaphora*, which means ‘to transfer’ or ‘to carry over’ (Montgomery et al. 125). Thus, metaphors are used as symbols; one thing represents another. Metaphors are not meant to be interpreted literally and it is up to the reader or the listener to make the connection as to what the metaphor stands for. It is also good to remember that when interpreting poetry, or in the case of this thesis, sonnets and song lyrics, the interpretations can vary from person to person as everybody’s personal experiences, culture and norms can affect how the symbolism is understood.

A metonymy as a concept is rather similar to a metaphor, however, there are differences. “While metaphor works through similarity, metonymy works through other kinds of association (e.g. cause – effect; attribute; containment etc.)” (Montgomery et al. 126). Essentially, what this means is that there can be many different types of relationships between the metonymy and its meaning. A common way to use a metonymy is for instance a phrase: “The White House has announced...” (Yule 118). It is generally understood that The White House stands for the President of the United States or anyone working close to him. There are generally no misunderstandings about such statement, although it is not interpreted literally.

My analysis will be based on the selected themes introduced by Zoltán Kövecses in “The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought”. The themes I will include in my analysis are “love is a bond”, “love is fire”, “love is a natural force”, “love is war”, “love is insanity”, “the object of love is a deity”, “intimate sexual behaviour stands for love“ and “loving visual behaviour stands for love”. In addition to these, I have one more category of metaphor, “love is light” which was not included in the list by Kövecses but that I came up with on my own and wanted to include in the analysis. The list provided by Kövecses includes specifically conceptual metaphors and metonymies, which will also be the specific area of focus in my analysis. According to Kövecses,

in general, it can be suggested that a conceptual metaphor consists of a source and a target domain and that the source domain is, at least in the everyday cases, typically a better understood and more concrete domain than the target domain. Clearly, this generalization has certain limits, as, for instance, the conceptual metaphor “the object of love is a deity” indicates (Kövecses 381).

The concepts that Kövecses built his list of themes around are anger and love. This is convenient, as in my analysis I will focus on metaphors and metonymies for love and romantic relationships.

## 5 Analysis

In this section I will present my observations and analysis of the research materials. I will analyze the selected songs and sonnets based on their use of metaphorical language and categorize the results by theme. In section 5.1 I will cover metaphors and in 5.2. metonymies.

### 5.1 Metaphors

In this section I will analyse the metaphors for love in the respective works of Taylor Swift and William Shakespeare and categorise the results in the following categories: “love is a bond”, “love is fire”, “love is light”, “love is a natural force”, “love is war”, “love is insanity” and finally, “the object of love is a deity”. In each of the categories above there will be short excerpts from both writers, followed by the analysis.

#### *Love is a bond*

All along there was some invisible string tying you to me  
(Swift: Invisible string)

Your ivy grows and now I'm covered in you  
(Swift: Ivy)

In this category love is described as a close tie between two people. In the examples above the narrator describes the bond between themselves and their love interest as something that feels like it is physically bonding the two together. In *Invisible string* it is described as a nearly physical feeling of an invisible string pulling the two together, whereas in *Ivy* the bond is represented by ivy, a vine plant that is known to grow we long and sturdy. “Love is a bond” is a common theme between Swift and Shakespeare:

The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing; my bonds in thee are all determinate  
(Shakespeare: Farewell! Thou art too dear for my possessing)

In this sonnet the narrator talks about a broken bond between two people. He mentions that their lover is released from them. In this case, Shakespeare directly uses the word “bond” when he talks about the close tie between the two; Swift chose to use metaphors to explain how the bond feels. Although in this example Shakespeare does not use figures of speech, the theme is common and can be found in both of the writers’ works.

### *Love is fire*

I struck a match and blew your mind  
(Swift: Getaway car)

It’s a fire, it’s a goddamn blaze in the dark and you started it  
(Swift: Ivy)

Describing love as fire is another common theme that can be found in both writers’ works. In the examples above the narrator of the songs compares love to fire. Fire is a common metaphor for love, as it usually represents the physical feeling of warmth that being with the love interest causes. Fire must also be attended to; it will not burn unless someone throws in firewood and takes care of it. This represents the work that relationships require in order to work and remain healthy. While fire can keep you warm, it can also cause destruction if it is not attended to. In the first example it is indicated that there is an explosion which refers to sudden and very powerful emotions that the person feels. In the latter song love is referred to as a “blaze in the dark” which adds another meaning to the fire metaphor; it brings light into the darkness. Fire is also referred to in Shakespeare’s works:

The other two, slight air, and purging fire,  
Are both with thee, wherever I abide  
(Shakespeare: The other two, slight air and purging fire)

Which borrowed from this holy fire of love  
(Shakespeare: Cupid laid by his brand, and fell asleep)

In the first excerpt the narrator indicates that there is fire within the person whom he writes about. In that case fire could also represent passion within a person. In the second example the narrator talks about the “holy fire of love”, indicating similar things as Swift above; the feelings they experience resemble fire with all of its warmth, light and possibilities of destruction. In these examples referring to love as fire generally indicates positive, although cautious feelings, however, fire does not always stand for good things:

So its' gonna be forever or it's gonna go down in flames  
(Swift: Blank space)

In this example the fire represents a failed relationship. Nevertheless, this example ties in with the previous ones because it indicates the destruction that happened when the fire was not attended to.

### *Love is light*

And you've got a smile that can light up this whole town  
(Swift: You belong with me)

This love is glowing in the dark  
(Swift: This love)

Similarly to the previous theme, love is often referred to as light. References where the love interest is portrayed as someone who lights up the space around them or brings light into the darkness are quite common. Examples like these support the idea that being in darkness is an equivalent of being sad or feeling down in some way and the love interest's mere existence can light up the dark.

All days are nights to see till I see thee,  
And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me  
(Shakespeare: When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see)



It is the star to every wandering bark

(Shakespeare: Let me not to the marriage of true minds)

In the first example from Shakespeare the narrator explains how every day feels like a night if they do not see their love interest and how their dreams are brighter at night if they have a dream about their loved one. In the latter excerpt light is referred to as a star that leads boats back to shore. Referring to love as light is common in both Shakespeare's and Swift's works; above are only a few examples. Similarly to fire, light also feels warm and represents that warm physical feeling that falling in love causes. Light is also a symbol to other positive emotions that are affiliated with love such as happiness, joy and hope.

*Love is a natural force*

The way you move is like a full on rainstorm and I'm a house of cards

(Swift: Sparks fly)

Love can also be referred to as a natural force which indicates something that humans have no control over. Here it is implied that the experience of falling in love is involuntary; the love interest sweeps the narrator off of their feet, so to speak. With the phrase "house of cards" the narrator of the song implies that they are powerless in the presence of their loved one and cannot resist their charm; hence collapsing like a house of cards in a storm. The phrase "to fall in love" itself suggests the involuntary nature of the action; you fall.

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end

(Shakespeare: Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore)

In the excerpt from Shakespeare, the narrator takes a slightly different approach to the idea of a natural force representing love: he suggests that the time he has with his loved one is limited and runs out in the same way that the waves hit the shore.

*Love is war*

It's a war, it's the goddamn fight of my life and you started it  
(Swift: Ivy)

Hung my head as I lost the war and the sky turned black like a perfect storm  
(Swift: Clean)

In this category war symbolises love. In both of the excerpts from Swift above it is indicated that the relationship feels or felt like a war. In the latter example the narrator claims they “lost the war” which implies that their partner felt more like an opponent than a lover and the two were competing over who “wins”. Winning in the context of relationships usually refers to, for instance, getting back on their feet after a breakup before their former partner, finding a new partner first or being the one who initiated the breakup, whereas the one getting broken up with “loses” which is the indication in the latter example.

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war, how to divide the conquest of thy sight  
(Shakespeare: Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war)

Shakespeare on the other hand has a different approach. He also compares love to war but slightly differently. The narrator in the sonnet above talks about an internal conflict within himself. His eyes and his heart are at war because he cannot decide whether to view his loved one through his eyes or through his heart. In this example the relationship itself does not resemble a war but it does cause conflicts within the person who is in love.

*Love is insanity*

My mother accused me of losing my mind but I swore I was fine  
(Swift: Dear John)

You understand now why they lost their minds and fought the wars  
(Swift: You are in love)

Love is often compared to insanity. This is likely because when a person falls in love, the love interest might occupy their mind so much that the person cannot think straight. They might also do things for the sake of their loved one that are in some way unlike their usual behaviour or something completely impulsive or extreme. Their actions might also be self-destructive, even if the person does not realize that at the time, like in the first excerpt above. In the latter example the narrator talks about someone who has fallen in love and experienced it first hand and now understands why it is that people “lose their minds” when they fall in love. There is, however, a slight difference in tone between these two examples. In *Dear John* the narrator’s change in mood and “insanity” caused by love appears a lot more negative than in *You are in love* where the tone is more positive and optimistic. The narrator admits that love is indeed insanity and war but they also think it is worth it in the end.

So true a fool is love, that in your will, though you do anything, he thinks no ill  
(Shakespeare: Being your slave, what should I do but tend)

In Shakespeare’s example the narrator also feels like love makes them a fool. They talk about how being in love makes a person a fool because whatever their loved one does, good or bad, they allow them to; this refers to the person’s judgement getting cloudy because of love. They are allowing things from their partner or love interest that would be unacceptable from others and have put their partner on a pedestal, thinking that they can’t do no wrong.

*The object of love is a deity*

And like unlettered clerk still cry ‘Amen’ to every hymn that able spirit affords, in polished form of well-refined pen. Hearing you praised, I say ’tis so, ’tis true,’ and to the most of praise add something more  
(Shakespeare: My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still)

O! how I faint when I of you do write, knowing a better spirit doth use your name, and in the praise thereof spends all his might, to make me tongue-tied speaking of your fame  
(Shakespeare: O! how I faint when I of you do write)

In a way this category ties in with the previous one in the sense that it also includes the element of putting one's love interest on a pedestal. However, in this category the love interest is seen as something more than a human being; some kind of a higher power. The protagonist in the examples above thinks so highly of their loved one that they "praise" them, in a similar way that believers praise God. There are also other hints that imply the religious aspects, as the words "spirit" and "praise" are mentioned in both excerpts and the first one additionally mentions an illiterate clerk crying "amen". This category of metaphor is most commonly found in my materials within Shakespeare's works. He has multiple sonnets that include implications to religious themes in the sense that the object of love is a deity. In Swift's lyrics this is not as common. There is the odd religious reference here and there but Shakespeare utilises this more. The use of such references is also quite different as I will show in the following examples:

Religion's in your lips, even if it's a false god we'd still worship, we might just get away with it. The altar is my hips, even if it's a false god, we'd still worship this love  
(Swift: False God)

Sacred new beginnings that became my religion, listen  
(Swift: Cornelia street)

Swift's religious references are slightly different in tone than those of Shakespeare. Out of these two excerpts the first one could be interpreted as rather sexual which is a different approach to Shakespeare's. Both of Swift's examples imply that it is the experience of falling in love that feels religious, whereas Shakespeare compares his loved one directly to a deity. The comparison of love to religion is not uncommon in general as they both require a deep devotion and both can offer experiences that feel spiritual.

As demonstrated above, both Taylor Swift and William Shakespeare use a wide variety of metaphors in their works. There are similarities between both writers' works despite the differences in eras; after all they are describing the same thing. Both writers acknowledge that falling in love feels like fire or light because of the warm feeling in the body. Both of them also have seemingly positive feelings towards love and it is acknowledged as something that brings the recipient happiness and hope. On the other hand, both Swift and Shakespeare also address the darker side of love as they use metaphors such as war or insanity to describe the negative feelings that love can

also sometimes cause. Also comparing love to a natural force is something that both writers do, implying that falling in love is out of human control, just like nature.

## 5.2 Metonymies

In this section I will demonstrate how metonymies are used to represent romantic feelings and love in the works of William Shakespeare and Taylor Swift. I will analyse the metonymies and divide them into following categories by theme: “intimate sexual behaviour stands for love” and “loving visual behaviour stands for love”. In both categories there will be short excerpts from both writers, followed by the analysis.

### *Intimate sexual behaviour stands for love*

And your shoulders brush, no proof, one touch but you felt enough  
(Swift: You are in love)

Carve your name into my bedpost cause I don't want you like a best friend, only  
bought this dress so you could take it off  
(Swift: Dress)

A common metonymy I found for both writers is referring to love by intimate sexual behaviour. The first example from Swift sounds more innocent as it refers to the earlier stages of a relationship where even the slightest physical contact induces strong feelings. The latter is more sexual but both stand for the same thing; intimate touch stands for love. This metonymy just like the metaphors is based on the physical feeling. In the first excerpt above the narrator talks about the two lovers' shoulders brushing against each other; if it was just two friends with no romantic feelings involved, the shoulder brushing would not have the same meaning.

Is lust in action: and till action, lust  
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust  
(Shakespeare: The expense of spirit in a waste of shame)

Shakespeare's approach is a little bit different when it comes to intimate sexual behaviour. The narrator in this sonnet explains how in their opinion physical lust for another person makes people untrustworthy and even murderous, cruel and other negative things. It could be argued that this type of lust does not necessarily have much to do with actual love; love and sex are different things after all. Then again, unlike Swift, Shakespeare uses quite graphic figurative language from time to time when he talks about love. However, because the tone of this sonnet is rather dark, it could be argued that the narrator experienced disappointment in an intimate relationship which caused them to write about in such negative way.

*Loving visual behaviour stands for love*

All the drama queens taking swings, all the jokers dressin' up as kings, they fade to  
nothing when I look at him  
(Swift: Call it what you want)

You almost ran the red cause you were looking over at me  
(Swift: All too well)

Another common metonymy I found is to use loving visual behaviour to symbolise love. In both of these examples from Swift, looking at the person's loved one distracts them other things. In the first excerpt the narrator talks about how looking at their partner makes the trivial things around them fade into the background. In the second example the narrator's partner almost did not notice the traffic lights turning red because they were so focused on looking at each other.

When that mine eye is famish'd for a look,  
Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,  
With my love's picture then my eye doth feast  
(Shakespeare: Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took)

Similarly, the narrator in this sonnet expresses how they are longing to look at their loved one. They talk about how with their “love’s pictures then my eye doth feast” which means that they are “feasting” on the sight of their partner; this person is pleasant to look at and induces feelings of happiness and love in their significant other. Both writers have a similar idea that looking at the person they are in love with causes them to feel happy and forget about the troubles in the surrounding world.

Metonymies are not as extensively represented in my research materials as metaphors, but there are still a few that give a good overall idea of how both Swift and Shakespeare utilise them in their respective works. Overall I found that metonymies occur more regularly in Swift’s works. This is still something that can be found in both writers’ works. Both Swift and Shakespeare imply when they use the metonymy “loving visual behaviour stands for love”, that looking at their loved one causes a feeling of happiness, calmness and even the sense of forgetting about the world around them for a moment. Both also equate intimate sexual behaviour with love or romance and that intimately touching their loved one suggests non-platonic feelings.

## 6 Conclusion

After closer inspection, as surprising as it may seem, a man from the 1600’s and a young woman from four hundred years later do have some things in common as writers. The common themes in metaphors I was able to identify were comparing love to a bond, a fire, a light, a natural force, a war and insanity, and also comparing the object of love to a deity. In metonymies the common themes were “intimate sexual behaviour stands for love” and “loving visual behaviour stands for love”. There were examples of these themes from both authors. The tone was different in some examples, Shakespeare’s more often being slightly more serious or dark. These themes have stood the test of time because they are directly connected to the physical emotion. “Love is light” and “love is fire” represent the physical feeling of warmth in our bodies when we fall in love; even though the language itself evolves, the human biology stays the same. That being said, the writers had their own ways of talking about these themes but essentially they were talking about the same thing. Also, the theme “love is a bond” was mentioned by both writers. The feeling that a person is inseparable with their partner was relevant four hundred years ago just as much as it is now. There were similarities between the works of these authors also because both of them seem to express

themselves best in writing and both of their texts were intended for the masses, despite the personal topics.

Something I found that was an interesting aspect to the sonnets especially, was Shakespeare directly mentioning himself in his texts. In particular, he sometimes comments on his own writing, which he does not think is very good. However, as an outsider looking into these texts, I cannot assume that Shakespeare is writing about himself. Actually, this is the case with both writers; there is really no way of knowing which songs, sonnets or parts of them are actually biographical. I believe the inspiration for many of the works that I analysed came from personal experience but I cannot assume that Shakespeare, for instance, is referring to himself when he discusses his poor writing abilities; this could be just the protagonist of the sonnet, who is struggling with writing.

Shakespeare also often writes about how difficult is it to put it into words what he is feeling and claims that his words do not do justice to the people he writes about. He also mentions that other artists' works at the time, such as paintings do also not do justice to their objects. Swift has one similar notion in her song *You are in love* where she writes: "I've spent my whole life tryin' to put it into words", and with that she, just like Shakespeare, addresses the difficulty of putting her feelings into words.

I also found that Shakespeare often refers to love as a prison. He sometimes writes in a very condescending or submissive way about himself which is not that common in Swift's works; in fact, many of the sonnets fell under the category "the object of love is a deity", where the love interest is put on a pedestal. Swift and Shakespeare also refer to religion in different ways; Swift does not directly compare her love interest to a deity but she rather explains that the experience of falling in love feels religious or spiritual in a way. Shakespeare talks about the people he writes about very highly, almost making them seem like god-like creature. He writes a lot about how he adores these people and at the same time writes about himself in a very condescending manner; almost as if it is a love affair between a god and a mortal. Shakespeare is also often more graphic when mentioning sexual relations whereas Swift only hints at them a little bit more conservatively. This is probably her personal decision but also her target audience is partially quite young so graphic sexual language would not be appropriate. Swift's lyrics are also generally a little bit more playful and less serious which, again, is likely a result of the different eras that the writers are from, but other factors such and the genders of the writers could also play a role in this.

In conclusion, the results of this study scraped the surface of the versatile and vivid figurative language that both William Shakespeare and Taylor Swift have used in their respective works. All in all the metaphors and metonymies that I found were rather traditional. I found that there were many themes in common between the two writers but also differences in the writing



styles resulting from different eras, genders, ages and the state of the world at the time that they wrote and also many other factors. What I found was that it was common for both writers to use figurative language to put a feeling into words, especially a physical one that can be difficult to describe without comparing it to something. Both of their works have and will continue to reach the masses worldwide because of their relatable nature.

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