

## INTERPRETING METAPHORS OF LOVE AND IDENTITY IN LANA DEL REY'S MARGARET: A SEMANTIC PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

This research explores the use of metaphors in Lana Del Rey's song Margaret through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson. The research aims to identify and analyze the metaphorical expressions in the lyrics and how they represent deeper meanings related to love and identity. The metaphors found in the song are categorized into three types: structural, ontological, and orientational. Structural metaphors illustrate love as a journey, inner conflict, or emotional transformation. Ontological metaphors turn abstract experiences into concrete objects. Orientational metaphors use spatial direction to reflect emotional states, such as hope pointing upward or despair pulling downward. In total, 15 metaphorical expressions were identified and analyzed. The study uses a qualitative method by closely examining the lyrics and interpreting the symbolic meanings behind them. All of these metaphors reveal Lana Del Rey's view of love as something fragile but meaningful, and identity as something that continues to grow through life experiences and social pressures. The song *Margaret* becomes a space for Del Rey to express her feelings and thoughts in a poetic and meaningful way.

### Keywords

**Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lana Del Rey, Metaphor, Love, Identity**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics are a form of literary expression that is rich in meaning both symbolically and emotionally. Song lyrics are usually used to convey very complex themes such as themes of love, identity, culture to existential experiences. According to Uprety and Khanal (2022), song lyrics are not only a medium of entertainment, but also a means of artistic communication that describes the deepest feelings and thoughts of its creators. In this context, Lana Del Rey is a contemporary artist who has been widely recognized for her highly poetic and metaphorical songwriting. The song Margaret, released in March 2023, is part of the album Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd. It is a very emotional piece and was written as a tribute to her best friend, Margaret Qualley, and her relationship with musician Jack Antonoff. Although narratively the song appears to be telling someone else's love story, in-depth analysis shows that Del Rey also inserts intimate personal reflections and doubts about love and her own role in social relationships (Ghazal, 2024).

This research focuses on the use of metaphorical language in the lyrics of Margaret by Lana Del Rey. This research aims to reveal the hidden meanings behind the symbols and images used in each lyric. Metaphor here is used as a conceptual tool used to understand and convey human experience in depth. The approach used in this research is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson, which explains that humans understand abstract things such as love, identity, and emotions through metaphors sourced from concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sutopo & Rahmawati, 2021).

In this research, the metaphors found in Margaret's song lyrics will be classified into three main types, including structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. Structural metaphors help explain how complex ideas such as love or identity are constructed through the structure of other concepts; ontological metaphors render abstract experiences as concrete entities; while orientational metaphors use spatial orientation to convey certain emotional values (Rahmat & Dianita, 2024; Kamandanu, Puspani, & Setianingsih, 2024). The analysis of these metaphors is expected to reveal Del Rey's in-depth perspectives on love, self-discovery, and the social pressures that are often attached to female identity.

Previous research analyzing metaphors in song lyrics has become increasingly common in recent years. Apriyanti and Santosa (2020) examined Taylor Swift's songs and found that structural metaphors were frequently used to describe relationships and inner conflict. Astuti and Wahyuni (2021) examined K-pop songs and concluded that ontological metaphors help listeners visualize the artist's feelings more realistically, such as depicting heartache as "broken glass." Meanwhile, Pratiwi (2022) found that Indonesian indie songs frequently use orientational metaphors, such as "falling in love" or "falling into loneliness," to indicate emotional direction or position. These findings demonstrate that song lyrics are not merely entertainment but can also serve as a medium for conveying profound emotions and identity.

However, although there has been much research on metaphor in music, not many have specifically discussed Lana Del Rey's song Margaret, especially in relation to the themes of love and self-discovery. Most previous studies have not discussed the meaning of metaphor in depth using Conceptual Metaphor theory. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap by analyzing the lyrics of Margaret based on three types of metaphors: structural, ontological, and orientational. This study aims to see how these metaphors are used to describe feelings and the process of self-discovery in the song.

Based on the above background, the following problems are identified and the research questions in this study are formulated as follows: (1) What types of metaphors are found in the lyrics of *Margaret* by Lana Del Rey?, (2) How do these metaphors reflect deeper meanings related to love and identity?

### **Metaphor in Song Lyrics**

Song lyrics are often considered a modern form of poetry that incorporates figurative language and expressions of deep emotion. Through these metaphors, lyrics in songs can convey very complex ideas symbolically and imaginatively. Uji Citra and Hendrasari (2023) explain that metaphors in a song play an important role in building emotional connections between singers and listeners, especially in conveying experiences that are personal and universal at the same time. Thus, the use of metaphors can strengthen the aesthetic appeal of a song and expand the potential for interpretation of meaning.

In addition, song lyrics are considered cultural artifacts in representing social dynamics, values, and identity struggles. Fitri and Mustikasari (2022) explain that figurative language in songs can reflect the ongoing social and cultural conditions of a particular society. Therefore, metaphors here function as a means of representing ideology, identity and emotional conflict. In this context, the song Margaret by Lana Del Rey can be seen as a figurative expression that reflects the narrative of both the personal and social sides of the songwriter.

### **Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)**

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) approach introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) states that metaphors are not mere rhetorical ornaments, but the primary

way humans understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences. They point out that the human mind works by conceptualizing intangible things like time, emotions, or life through tangible, physical terms. As in the phrase “time is money”, where time is understood in economic terms. This confirms that metaphors are instrumental in shaping the way we think, feel and act in life.

CMT categorizes metaphors into three main types: structural, ontological, and orientational. The structural type of metaphor involves understanding one concept through another, as in “life is a journey”. Ontological metaphors make an abstract idea a concrete object or entity, as in “her sadness is a deep hole”. While orientational metaphors are related to space and position such as “up” for positive emotions and vice versa “down” for negative emotions. Recent research by Nisa (2023) shows that these three types of metaphors are often found in modern pop song lyrics, including songs that contain emotional and spiritual content. Maghfira and Wibowo (2025) also explained that the existence of these metaphors is not only to beautify the lyrics, but can also be a reflection of cultural values and psychological conditions of singers and listeners.

### **Interpretation and Identity in Music**

Based on the hermeneutic approach, song lyrics are analyzed based on the social and personal contexts behind them. In addition, songs can reflect the author's experiences, traumas, hopes, and identity construction. In this context, the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's songs are often associated with female self-discovery, nostalgia for American culture, and exploration of complex emotions. Rahmani (2024) explains that Lana Del Rey's songs, including *Margaret*, show an emotional narrative form that involves deep questions about love, fear and social expectations of a woman.

This interpretation of the song *Margaret* can be seen as a combination of Lana Del Rey's tribute to her close friend, Margaret Qualley, and the outpouring of her personal feelings. Wilson (2019) explains that Lana Del Rey often uses metaphors in her lyrics to describe inner turmoil, loss, and expectations about love that often do not match reality. In this song, there are personal and social meanings that are interconnected through word choices that are full of emotional meaning.

## **2. METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative method to analyze the use of metaphors in the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's *Margaret*. This method is used because it is suitable for interpreting the meanings implied in literary texts, especially in the lyrics of a song related to emotional and symbolic experiences. This research uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson which is used as a tool to identify, classify and interpret the types of metaphors that appear in the lyrics of this song. By using this approach, it can explore how metaphors can be used to convey deeper meanings about love, identity and personal experiences in the song.

The data source used in this research is the lyrics of *Margaret* by Lana Del Rey. The lyrics were analyzed to identify metaphorical expressions, both implied and explicit. The analysis process was carried out in three stages: identifying metaphors in the lyrics, classifying them into three types of metaphors based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) namely structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors whose classification results are presented in a table, and analyzing and interpreting the symbolic meanings within them that represent the concepts of love and identity, based on these metaphors in the overall context of the song.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of Lana Del Rey's *Margaret* song lyrics, three main types of metaphors were found, including structural, ontological and orientational metaphors. These three types of metaphors describe Lana Del Rey's views on love, self-discovery, and personal reflection. Each type of metaphor carries deep meaning and shows how she conveys emotional and social messages through figurative language. The following are the results of the data found in song lyrics that fall into these three types of metaphors:

**Table 1. Number of Metaphors Found in the Song Margaret by Lana Del Rey**

Types of Metaphors	Number of Findings
Structural Metaphor	4
Ontological Metaphor	7
Orientalional Metaphor	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

#### Structural Metaphor

*"He had **flashes** of the good life"*

The word "*flashes*" is a metaphor that represents memories or imaginings of an ideal life. Usually, the concept of a good life is understood as something that appears suddenly like a blinding light. In the context of love, this shows that by looking at someone (*Margaret*), the male character can immediately imagine an ideal life with her. Love here is metaphorized as the spark of imagination of a life full of hope but not necessarily reality. *"Should I **jump off this building** now or do it on the double?"*

In this lyric, an emotional decision in love is likened to an extreme action: jumping off a building. This metaphor is a structural metaphor about inner conflict, where emotions are approached as if they were a state of physical crisis and emergency. In this context, love is portrayed as a powerful force that can trigger panic, even an existential threat. There is an irony between the imagination of "*the good life*" and the impulse to "*jump*" an extreme depiction of love.

*"It kinda makes me laugh, running down that **path**"*

These lyrics depict love or emotional decisions as a journey to be taken. It uses the structure of a "*path*" or "*road*" to represent the intuitive process of recognizing true love. When love feels right, everything flows naturally and makes sense, as if someone is on the right track. The journey is enjoyable, even if it's a bit confusing and full of laughter.

*"One that makes me see... in a **minor key**"*

The phrase is a structural metaphor resulting from emotions or inner feelings arranged within the structure of a musical system. A *minor key* in music is typically associated with sadness, melancholy, or a soft and emotionally rich atmosphere. The person the narrator loves makes them see the world differently through a melancholic yet honest lens. This signifies a love that is imperfect but profound, as well as a process of emotional reflection, where one experiences a depth of feeling that isn't always happy, but is real and deeply meaningful.

#### Ontological Metaphor

*"I'm messy with the **pen**"*

The word "*pen*" here is represented as a process of self-expression or creative work. "*Messy*" indicates that the chaotic feelings or thoughts are reflected through the writing. In this context, which relates to identity and self-reflection, the songwriter

reveals that they are in an emotionally disordered state. This illustrates vulnerability, honesty, and an effort to understand oneself through art.

*"My **shirt** is inside out"*

The word "*shirt*" here is used as a symbol of an unstable or chaotic internal state, yet one that is clearly visible from the outside. This portrays inner feelings as something that can be "*worn*" or seen. This metaphor presents identity as an outer layer that reflects the turmoil within. The writer allows their imperfect side to be visible, reflecting honesty and openness toward both themselves and others.

*"If your love is **in trouble**"*

Love is metaphorically depicted here as something that can have a condition, namely "*in trouble*." This gives a concrete form to an abstract concept, as if love were an object or a living being experiencing a crisis.

Love is personified as something that can be healthy, sick, or troubled. This reflects how humans tend to assign tangible meanings to emotions.

*"There are **red flags**, they are not nice"*

"*Red flags*" is a metaphor for warning signs in a relationship, turning emotional signals into something that can be seen or visually recognized. The phrase in the lyrics reflects a process of evaluating the state of a relationship and how someone can assess the situation through signs that are often overlooked.

*"Like **Hollywood** in me"*

The word "*Hollywood*" is represented as something within a person, not merely a physical location. It makes "*Hollywood*" a part of identity that can be "*possessed*" or "*embedded*." In this context, it illustrates how image, past experiences, or lifestyle become part of one's personality. Meanwhile, in the context of relationships, it suggests that people enter relationships carrying certain "*baggage*" or identity constructions, including impressions or pasts that are glamorous yet complex.

*"The **soul** that you bring to the table"*

The abstract concept of "*soul*" is visualized as a physical object that can be carried and placed on the table. This is a classic ontological metaphor that objectifies something non-physical to make it discussable in concrete terms. It reflects the wholeness of emotional participation in love. Loving is not just about physical presence, but about 'bringing' our entire being soul, wounds, values, and honesty into the relationship.

*"The **diamond** on your ring"*

The diamond ring becomes a tangible symbol of commitment and value. "*Diamond*" is not merely an object, but represents something rare, precious, and enduring. This metaphor illustrates that true love is reflected through actions and symbols of acknowledgment, such as the commitment found in marriage. The diamond also symbolizes the purity of intention and the emotional bond that has been chosen and mutually agreed upon.

### **Orientational Metaphor**

*"He met Margaret on a **rooftop**"*

The word "*rooftop*" as the meeting location carries a spatial symbol a high place that is often metaphorically associated with significant, transcendental moments or enlightenment. The fact that love first appears in this elevated place suggests that the meeting feels important or pivotal. There is great potential behind the encounter, whether it leads to glory or destruction.

*"Gotta run, gotta run around like your **head's on fire**"*

*"Run away like your **head is on fire**"*

Panic or emotional urgency is depicted through the sensation of heat in the head and the impulse to run away. “Head’s on fire” implies a psychologically unstable or distressed state. These lyrics reflect a reaction to a relationship that is emotionally harmful. Avoidance becomes a form of self-protection; this metaphor expresses an awareness of the ability to choose emotional safety over staying in a painful relationship. “When you’re old, you’re **old**”

The word “old” literally refers to age, but here it is used as a metaphor to indicate an existential or psychological state. “Old” is interpreted as a point of maturity and acceptance. It suggests that in love and in life, there comes a moment when a person knows enough, no longer searches, and simply accepts. This is an expression of emotional maturity and inner peace in one’s identity.

“If you don’t know, don’t give up / Cause you never know what the **new day** might bring”

“New day” is interpreted as a forward or upward direction in terms of time and hope. The concept of hope is positioned as something that is future-oriented (forward/upward).

This phrase carries the meaning that present uncertainty is not the end of everything. In the context of love and the search for identity, there is always a new possibility in tomorrow. It expresses an existential hope that time can heal, and understanding will come in due course.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the lyrics of *Margaret* by Lana Del Rey, it was found that the use of metaphors in this song is not only meant to beautify the language, but also to express deep emotions and the search for self-identity. Structural metaphors portray love as a journey, inner conflict, and major emotional decisions. Ontological metaphors turn feelings and identity into something more concrete, like “an inside-out shirt” or “a soul on the table,” which reflect Del Rey’s personal experiences and emotions.

In addition, orientational metaphors give direction to emotions, such as hope being associated with upward or forward movement, and despair with downward direction. All of these metaphors reveal Lana Del Rey’s view of love as something fragile but meaningful, and identity as something that continues to grow through life experiences and social pressures. The song *Margaret* becomes a space for Del Rey to express her feelings and thoughts in a poetic and meaningful way.

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