

Love's a game, wanna play? The Proverbiality of Taylor Swift's Lyrics

For my Swiftie grand-niece Emily Busker

Taylor Swift (born 1989) is an internationally acknowledged musical superstar whose songwriter/singer status with twelve albums to her credit is indeed phenomenal. She is without doubt a first-class performer on stage as well as in videos and films, who plays several instruments, composes her own songs, and writes her own lyrics as a remarkable poet. Certainly, her lyrics touch a deep nerve in her fandom of young, so-called Swifties, but she also touches listeners, viewers, and readers (of her texts) of all ages. The question arises why she has had such incredible success among people throughout the world, as could be witnessed in her international “The Eras” concert tour of 2023/24. This article argues that her relatability is at least in part due to her proverbial language with which everybody can identify. Her lyrics are replete with proverbial expressions and proverbs that often appear as leitmotifs both musically and textually. In fact, there are quite a few songs with proverbial titles that are repeated in the poetic stanzas. As stated by herself, she enjoys twisting such metaphorical language, creating her own fascinating anti-proverbs. In addition, she also has her very own sententious style that might well become proverbial due to her universally distributed musical art. Her proverbial language is enhanced by allusions to fairy tales and nursery rhymes that give her the opportunity to communicate indirectly about various types of emotions, of which love is the most important. Proverbs and proverbial phrases have always been part of the musical scene, from operas to country music and on to popular music of all types, but Taylor Swift is a quintessential artist in what might be called unique and lasting proverb songs.

Keywords: allusion, anti-proverb, fairy tale, folklore, folksong, indirection, leitmotif, literature, lyrics, metaphor, music, nursery rhyme, poetry, proverb song, songwriting, proverbial expression, song, Taylor Swift

Love's a game, wanna play? Die Sprichworfhaftigkeit von Taylor Swifts Songtexten

Taylor Swift (geb. 1989) ist ein international anerkannter Musik-Superstar, dessen Status als Songwriterin und Sängerin mit zwölf Alben in ihrer Diskografie in der Tat phänomenal ist. Sie ist zweifellos eine erstklassige Performerin sowohl auf der Bühne als auch in Videos und Filmen, die mehrere Instrumente spielt, ihre eigenen Songs komponiert und als bemerkenswerte Dichterin ihre eigenen Texte schreibt. Sicherlich treffen ihre Texte einen tiefen Nerv bei ihren jungen Fans, den sogenannten Swifties, aber sie berührt auch Zuhörer, Zuschauer und Leser (ihrer Texte) jeden Alters. Es stellt sich die Frage, warum sie bei Menschen auf der ganzen Welt einen so unglaublichen Erfolg hat, wie man an ihrer internationalen „The Eras“-Konzerttournee von 2023/24 sehen konnte. Dieser Artikel argumentiert, dass ihre Nahbarkeit zumindest teilweise auf ihre sprichwörtliche Sprache zurückzuführen ist, mit der sich jeder identifizieren kann. Ihre Texte sind reich an sprichwörtlichen Ausdrücken und Sprichwörtern, die oft sowohl musikalisch als auch textlich als Leitmotive auftreten. Tatsächlich gibt es nicht wenige Lieder mit sprichwörtlichen Titeln, die in den poetischen Strophen wiederholt werden. Wie sie selbst sagt, hat sie Freude daran, solche metaphorische Sprache zu verdrehen und ihre eigenen faszinierenden Anti-Sprichwörter zu kreieren. Darüber hinaus

hat sie auch ihren ganz eigenen sentenziösen Stil, der aufgrund ihrer weltweit verbreiteten Musikkunst durchaus sprichwörtlich werden könnte. Ihre sprichwörtliche Sprache wird durch Anspielungen auf Märchen und Kinderreime bereichert, die ihr die Möglichkeit geben, indirekt über verschiedene Arten von Emotionen zu kommunizieren, von denen die Liebe die wichtigste ist. Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redewendungen waren schon immer Teil der Musikszene, von der Oper über Country-Musik bis hin zu Popmusik aller Art, doch Taylor Swift ist eine Künstlerin par excellence, wenn es um das geht, was man als einzigartige und zeitlose Sprichwort-Songs bezeichnen könnte.

Schlüsselwörter: Anspielung, Anti-Spruchwort, Märchen, Folklore, Volkslied, Indirektion, Leitmotiv, Literatur, Liedtext, Metapher, Musik, Kinderreim, Poesie, Sprichwortlied, Songwriting, sprichwörtlicher Ausdruck, Lied, Taylor Swift

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Proverbial language has been part and parcel of poetry for centuries adding considerable metaphorical expressiveness to poetic texts from the Middle Ages to modern times (Doyle 1975, Sobieski/Mieder 2005). Traditional folksongs are replete with proverbs, proverbial expressions, and proverbial comparisons that provide wisdom or colloquial language to the lyrics, with some of them appearing as leitmotifs at the end of each stanza (Sackett 1963, Mieder 1978). But folksongs, including narrative ballads, are only part of the interrelationship of music and poetry. The lyrics of operas and even more so musicals often include proverbial texts (Bryan 1999, Konstantinova 2012) and so do popular songs from decades past (Bryan 2001). It has also been established that proverbs play a considerable role in the lyrics of the blues (Taft 1994) and in reggae music from Jamaica (Prahla 1995 and 2001, Coteus 2011). In modern times, popular music of all sorts relies on proverbs to add a didactic tone to the lyrics that is particularly noticeable in American country songs (Folsom 1992, 1993, 1996). Of course, the tendency of integrating proverbial language into popular songs (Mieder 1988 and 1989, Wilbert 2015, Unseth 2019, Suchorab 2020, Tosina Fernández 2024: 91–103) has led to the study of such well-known artists as Johnny Cash (Gutmann 2007) and Prince Rogers Nelson (Williams 2024).

In fact, there are songs that have proverbs as a title with repetitions throughout. An example from 1952 is the song „Takes Two to Tango“ written by Al Hoffman and composed by Dick Manning with the first stanza stating:

*Takes two to tango, two to tango,
Two to really get the feeling of romance.
Let's do the tango, do the tango,
Do the dance of love.*
(Mieder/Bryan 1983, Mieder 2004: 233).

The song became so popular by way of the celebrated African American singer Pearl Bailey that its first line turned into an internationally disseminated proverb (Doyle/

Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 266). Another well-known song is „Everyday People“ (1968) by Sly and the Family Stone with the proverbial refrain *Different strokes for different folk* that elevates this modern African American proverb from around 1945 to a slogan of equality among all the people (Mieder 1989: 317–332, Mieder 2006). But to give a third example of a song based on a proverbial allusion there is Bob Dylan's celebrated „Like a Rolling Stone“ (1968) whose refrain is based on the truncated proverb *A Rolling stone gathers no moss* from the sixteenth century:

*How does it feel?
How does it feel?
To be without a home
Like a complete unknown
Like a rolling stone.*

(Bowden 1982: 77–80, Mieder 1989: 211–212, Summerville 2019).

Finally there is Bruce Springsteen's proverb song „My Best Was Never Good Enough“ (1995) that consists of nothing but proverbs that continues the tradition of such *tour de force* songs and poems:

*“Every cloud has a silver lining, every dog has his day.”
She said: “Now don't say nothin'
If you don't have something nice to say”
The tough now they get going when the going gets tough
But for you, my best was never good enough*

*“Now don't try a home run baby
If you can get the job done with a hit
Remember a quitter never wins
And a winner never quits
The sun don't shine on a sleepin' dog's ass.”
And all the rest of that stuff
But for you my best was never good enough*

*“If God gives you nothin' but lemons then you make some lemonade
The early bird catches the fuckin' worm, Rome wasn't built in a day
Now life's like a box of chocolates
You never know what you're going to get
Stupid is as stupid does” and all the rest of that shit
Come on pretty baby call my bluff
'Cause for you my best was never good enough.*

(Sobieski/Mieder 2005: 215).

Other proverb songs also come to mind as, for example, „[Money] Can't Buy Me Love“ (1964) by the Beatles, „Apples Don't Fall Far from the Tree“ (1973) by Cher, and „Two Sides [to Every Situation]“ (1977) by the Carpenters (Mieder 1989: 210–220). It can be assumed that Taylor Swift knows these songs and plenty of country songs with their rich proverbial repertoire. But there is one more song that needs to be mentioned where

perhaps a more direct influence on Swift's proverbial language might be observed. It is known that her parents chose her first name Taylor in reverence of their favorite singer James Taylor (born 1948) who to this day is a friend of Taylor Swift. Surely she knows James Taylor's song „Shower the People [You Love with Love]“ (1976) that contains several proverbs and proverbial phrases:

*You can play the game
And you can act out the part
Though you know it wasn't written for you
But tell me how you can stand there
With your broken heart
Ashamed of playing the fool
One thing can lead to another
It doesn't take any sacrifice
Oh father and mother
Sister and brother
If it feels nice
Don't think twice
[...]*

*You can run but you cannot hide
This is widely known
And what you plan to do
With your foolish pride
When you're all by yourself alone
Once you tell somebody the way that you feel
You can feel it beginning to ease
I think it's true what they say
About the squeaky wheel
Always getting the grease
[...]*

*They say the rain must fall
Just like a pouring rain
Make it rain
Make it rain
Love is sunshine
Oh yes
Everybody, everybody
Shower the people you love with love
(Mieder 1989: 217–218).*

Somehow one can almost hear Taylor Swift here as she relates with her usually personalized love songs to her enthused audience of so-called Swifties that by now include admirers of all generations. But while Taylor at least to a certain extent stands on the shoulders of previous proverbial songs ranging from anonymous folksongs to the

popular music of today, she is without doubt the magisterial innovator as the amazing singer/songwriter of the modern age.

Born on August 13, 1989, she became a child prodigy writing and composing her country songs as a girl still in school reaching almost instantaneous fame with her first self-titled album „Taylor Swift“ (2006) at the mere age of seventeen! Since then she has produced, at times with the help of other writers and musicians, eleven more albums in a more or less two-year sequence (Sheffield 2024: X–XIII): „Fearless“ (2008), „Speak Now“ (2010), „Red“ (2012), „1989“ (2014), „Reputation“ (2017), „Lover“ (2019), two albums during the Covid-19 pandemic! – „Folklore“ (2020) and „Evermore“ (2020), „Midnights“ (2022), „The Tortured Poets Department“ (2024), and „The Life of a Showgirl“ (2025). When she undertook her phenomenally successful international tour of „The Eras“ during 2023 and 2024, she drew on some of her remarkable songs from them enchanting thousands of concert goers who joyfully and enthusiastically sang along her memorized lyrics. There can be no doubt that Taylor Swift is the quintessential songwriter and performer of the twenty-first century who has touched millions with her songs, proving herself not only to be a superb musical artist but also a knowledgeable businesswoman, a committed advocate for sociopolitical causes, a philanthropist, and also an impressive actress in videos and films (Perone 2017: 69–71, Théberge 2021, Volpe 2021).

By now the secondary literature about her life, her songwriting, her performance, and her worldview as expressed in her songs is barely manageable any longer, with interviews and short accounts appearing in the visual and print media without end. But there are also academic articles and book-length studies about her music and her art (see attached bibliography), among them James Perone, „The Words and Music of Taylor Swift“ (2017); Rachel Feder and Tiffany Tatreau, „Taylor Swift by the Book. The Literature Behind the Lyrics, from Fairy Tales to Tortured Poets“ (2024); Nicole Pomarico, „Long Live. The Definitive Guide to the Folklore and Fandom of Taylor Swift“ (2024); Rob Sheffield, „Heartbreak Is the National Anthem. How Taylor Swift Reinvented Pop Music“ (2024); Betsy Winakur Tontiplaphol and Anastasia Klimchynskaya, „The Literary Taylor Swift. Songwriting and Intertextuality“ (2024); Christa Anne Bentley, Kate Galloway, and Paul Clare Harper (eds.), „Taylor Swift. The Star, The Songs, The Fans“ (2025); Kevin Evers, „There's Nothing Like This. The Strategic Genius of Taylor Swift“ (2025); Catherine M. Robb and Georgie Mills, „Taylor Swift and Philosophy. Essays from the Tortured Philosophers Department“ (2025); and Stephanie Burt, „Taylor's Version. The Poetic and Musical Genius of Taylor Swift“ (2025). They all draw a convincing picture of Taylor Swift as the unmatched musical superstar, stressing her „lyrical ambiguity“ (Evers 2025: 84), her insistence on „authenticity and authorship“ (Watkinson 2025: 119), and her „virtuosic relatability and recognizability“ (Bentley/Galloway/Harper 2025: 3, Burt 2025: 8–14). In short, „Taylor Swift is the girl-next-door/millionaire [billionaire by now], the hopeless romantic/savvy businesswoman, and a silly teenager/serious adult singer-songwriter“ (Fogarty/Arnold 2021: 2). Indeed, Swift

would not have come this far without a solid work ethic and a sense of perfectionism that drive her as a poet and musician (Sloan 2021: 13, Burt 2025). For part of her lyrics she relies on intertextuality (Hooper 2025: 98), i. e., she repeats her own images, cites literary quotations from Shakespeare, Dickens, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and others, and also relies on commonly known proverbs, proverbial expressions, nursery rhymes, fairy tale motifs, etc. These intertextual references in her songs create a common bond with her listeners and readers (the songs can definitely be read as poems) who self-identify with some of their messages. Such stylistic elements, usually working as indirections (Daugherty 2024: XXII), add to the literary quality of Swift's poems/songs and transfer them from her autobiographical concerns, often written in the first person pronoun (Ledbetter 2025: 33), unto the life experiences of her audience.

Taylor's intertextual use of Robert Frost's lines *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – / I took the one less traveled by* from his poem „The Road not Taken“ (1916) may serve as an example (Max 2022: 220; Daugherty 2024: XI; Feder/Tatreau 2024: 16–17, 160, 173; Smith 2024: 78–80; Burt 2025: 206). Swift begins her early song „A Place in This World“ with these lines:

*I don't know what I want, so don't ask me
'Cause I'm still trying to figure it out
Don't know what's down this road, I'm just walking
Trying to see through the rain coming down
Even though I'm not the only one
Who feels the way I do
(„A Place in This World“; 2006, 1; the year and page number refer to the album and the page of the printed song lyrics on the Internet; see bibliography).*

The image of walking down a road and not knowing where it will lead could well be an allusion to Frost's famous line, but young listeners and why not also older ones can well identify with Swift's feeling of trying to find her way. Just two songs later in „The Outside“ she speaks of the same feelings, citing Frost's line quite explicitly for her own situation:

*I didn't know what I would find
When I went looking for a reason
I know I didn't read between the lines
And, baby, I've got nowhere to go
I tried to take the road less traveled by
But nothing seems to work the first few times
Am I right?
(„The Outside“; 2006, 8).*

Why would a teenage girl or anybody else not respond to that question in the affirmative while confronted with the multitude of life's choices? Again, Taylor succeeds to bond with her audience with the added proverbial phrase of *reading between the lines* acting as a metaphor for not having investigated various options. In any case, years

later, her poem „Illicit Affairs“ employs Frost's phrase more directly in the form of an imperative:

*Make sure nobody sees you leave
Hood over your head
Keep your eyes down
Tell your friends you're out for a run
You'll be flushed when you return
Take the road less traveled by
Tell yourself you can always stop*
(„Illicit Affairs“; 2020, 217).

In the same year Taylor wrote the song lyrics of „Tis the Damn Season“ where now she cites the line as a five times repeated leitmotif as *And the road not taken looks real good now*, adding the proverb *Time flies* twice for good measure (2020, 230–231).

Just by way of these textual titbits one gets the idea of Taylor Swift's inclination towards „storytelling“ (Evers 2025: 81). As she recalls the fairy tales of her youth, notably in her second album „Fearless“ (2008) but also in later songs, she uses indirect allusions to them by also liberating herself from the stereotypical subordinate female role in them (Feder/Tatreau 2024: 26–27, Barker 2025: 137–141, Fagan 2025: 219–220). Thus, in „White Horse“, she declares not at all romantically three times:

*That I'm not a princess, this ain't a fairy tale
I'm not the one you'll sweep off her feet*
(„White Horse“; 2008, 30).

And do note the negation of the proverbial phrase *to sweep someone of their feet*, yet another message of denying *prince charming* his expected conquest. And yet, as life would have it, sometimes things work out as described in „Today Was a Fairytale“ eleven songs later on the same album:

*Today was a fairytale
You were the prince
I used to be the damsel in distress
You took me by the hand and you picked me up at six
Today was a fairytale*
(„Today Was a Fairytale“; 2008, 42–43).

The phrase *Today was a fairytale* reappears fourteen times in this blissful account of *this magic in the air* as she calls the occurrence of love.

Often there are simple allusions to fairy tale motifs, as for example just the formulaic beginning *Once upon a time* of many fairy tales („Forever & Always“; 2008, 37). In „The Best Day“ one finds two allusions to the „Snow White“ fairy tale:

*Don't know if Snow White's house is near or far away
But I know I had the best day with you today*

[...]
It's the age of princesses and pirate ships and seven dwarfs
And Daddys smart
And you're the prettiest lady in the whole wide world
 („The Best Day“; 2008, 38; Hooper 2025: 112).

Speaking of *Snow White*, Swift is obviously playing with the well-known question *Mirror, mirror on the wall / Who's the fairest of them all* when she asks *Who's the baddest in the land?* („Honey“; 2025, 21). In fact, in the German verse it is *Who's the fairest in the land* due to the rhyme with *Wand* meaning wall in that language (Mieder 1987: 27).

In her song „Seven“ Taylor also shows that she is aware of folksongs that are handed down from generation to generation just as her songs are passed on today by more modern means of albums, concerts, and the media (Keddie 2025: 110–112). Here a young man talks of his love for a braided girl that will be passed along:

And though I can't recall your face
I still got love for you
Your braids like a pattern
Love you to the moon and Saturn
Passed down like folksongs
The love lasts so long
 („Seven“; 2020, 213).

And there are other folklore elements in Swift's songs: In „Everything Has Changed“ one finds the medieval folk formula *You'll be mine and I'll be yours* (2012, 99; Taylor 1960) and in „You're on Your Own, Kid“ the lines *I see the great escape / So long, Daisy May / I picked the petals, he loves me not / Something different bloomed* (2022, 260) which is an allusion to the old flower game of plucking the petals of a daisy as the love oracle *loves me, loves me not* (Mieder 1987: 84–117 and 243–248). She returns to this motif at the beginning of her very new song „Wood“ (2025, 17–18):

Daisy's bare naked, I was distraught
He loves me no, he loves me not
Penny's unlucky, I took him back
And then stepped on a crack
And the black cat laughed.

Such lines as *Fingers crossed until you put your hand on mine* and *I ain't got to knock on wood* continue this preoccupation with proverbial superstitions which are, in fact, circumvented in this love song relating to her relationship with the NFL football player Trevor Kelce. After having been engaged, she does not sense the need to knock on wood to make their love secure, as becomes clear by employing the negation of the superstition five times as a lyrical leitmotif. But the song then ventures deeper into the nature of their love:

*And baby, I'll admit I've been a little superstitious
The curse on me was broken by your magic wand
Seems to be that you and me we take our own luck
New heights (New heights) of manhood (Manhood)
I ain't got to knock on wood.*

There is plenty of sexuality hidden in this stanza if one looks for it. The *new heights of manhood* is a reference to the masculinity of Trevor and his sexual prowess expressed by his *magic wand*, a folkloric/slang term for penis in this case (Green 2010: 1504 and 1908) and not the tool of the fairy godmother of fairy tales. The title „Wood“ of the song, while also related to *knocking on wood*, is also yet another reference to the penis as well as an erection (Green 2010: 2065). Perhaps not surprisingly the song ends with the rather explicit line *His love was the key that opened my thighs*. This then is probably the most sexual Taylor Swift song with the last image coming as somewhat of a shock for younger and perhaps innocent Swifties. But clearly Swift is addressing a more mature audience with her latest album „The Life of a Showgirl“ as she herself at the age of thirty-six has reached a new stage in her life with a marriage in the future and most likely also preparing for the start of a family with Trevor. In any case, had she wanted to, she could have employed the somatic proverbial phrase *to open one's eyes* in the last line. *His love was the key that opened my eyes* would have been a less obvious sexual metaphor to be sure. Nevertheless, the song is without doubt one of Taylor Swift's most innovative rendering of a sincere love relationship in which sex plays its justified role.

Taylor is also well versed in nursery and counting rhymes, with „The Archer“ ending with a variation of the well-known Humpty Dumpty rhyme: *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; / All the king's horses, / And all the king's men, / Couldn't put Humpty together again*. Here she expresses how damaged she feels (Hooper 2025: 113):

*All the king's horses
All the king's men
Couldn't put me together again
'Cause all of my enemies
Started out as my friends
(„The Archer“; 2019, 183).*

And in „Champagne Problems“ Swift changes the counting rhyme *One for the money, two for the show; three to make ready, and four to go* to stress how lost she feels:

*One for the money, two for the show
I never was ready, so I watch you go
Sometimes you just don't know the answer
(„Champagne Problems“; 2020, 228).*

With all these folkloric references as well as using the title „Folklore“ (2020) for her eighth album, it comes as no surprise that in „Gold Rush“ Swift talks of her mind turning *life into folklore* (2020, 229) that enables her to communicate her thoughts and above all emotions by way of indirection. And proverbs and proverbial expressions, more often than not expressed metaphorically, are ready-made to be employed figuratively or indirectly (Mieder 2004: 8) with Taylor Swift being a truly magisterial practitioner of proverbial language. Her figurative language has been analyzed in three scholarly articles, but it remains a conundrum why they contain not a single word about the considerable role that proverbial wisdom and metaphorical phrases play in her poems/songs (Setiawati/Maryani 2018, Fatikha/Masykuroh 2022 and Taufik/Cahyati 2022). A fourth article lists at least the simile or proverbial comparison *tale as old as time* from her song „Anti-Hero“ as an example of figurative language (Santika/Syafryadin 2023: 6). In the following lines it becomes clear that she is talking about the fact that everybody as well as she herself has their own story about breakups:

*I should not be left to my own devices
They come with prices and vices
I end up in crisis
(Tale as old as time)
I wake up screaming from dreaming
One day, I'll watch as you're leaving
'Cause you got tired of my scheming
(For the last time)
(„Anti-Hero“; 2022, 257).*

The scholarly picture concerning proverbs and proverbial phrases looks somewhat better but most assuredly does not do justice to Taylor Swift's proverbial prowess! There is, however, Rachel Feder's and Tiffany Tatreau's splendidly annotated compilation „Taylor Swift by the Book. The Literature Behind the Lyrics, from Fairy Tales to Tortured Poets“ (2024) containing numerous literary quotations and colloquial phrases together with a few proverbs that are, however, not identified as such. Of special interest is *All's well that ends well* that did not originate with Shakespeare's comedy title of 1602 since it has long been traced back to the fourteenth century (Mieder/Kingsbury/Harder 1992: 14). When Swift scholars argue that she is in fact quoting Shakespeare in her use of it (Feder/Tatreau 2024: 72 and 138, Hooper 2025: 113), that might be true but she could just as well be citing it as one of the most popular English proverbs. The fact that she introduced it in the first of the following two song references with the marker *they say* would lead me to conclude that Shakespeare was not necessarily on her mind:

*They say all's well that ends well, but I'm in a new Hell
Every time you double-cross my mind
You said if we had been closer in age maybe it would have been fine
And that made me want to die
(„All Too Well“; 2012, 86–87)*

*My heart's been borrowed and yours has been blue
All's well that ends well to end up with you
(„Lover“; 2019, 181).*

It is of interest that in the first instantiation of the proverb the love relation did not last, while in the second reference the lovers have worked things out. By expanding the traditional proverb (or Shakespeare) just a bit, Taylor succeeds in expressing two different messages in a compressed fashion (Thors 224: 229). Since *hell* is mentioned in the first reference, it might be of interest that she also uses the word emphatically in a somewhat elliptical sentence *Don't care where the hell you been, 'cause now you're mine* that appears three times in the song „The Fate of Ophelia“ (2025, 1–2).

There are numerous obvious or hidden allusions to literary references as discussed in the chapters of Betsy Winakur Tontiplaphol's and Anastasia Klimchynskaya's edited volume „The Literary Taylor Swift. Songwriting and Intertextuality“ (2024). They reveal that Taylor Swift is well read and enjoys integrating references from such authors as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lewis Carroll, and others into her song lyrics (Pomarico 2024: 121). It has rightfully been observed that her songs/poems can well be treated as literature of high value deserving the serious study by scholars of different fields (Tontiplaphol/Klimchynskaya 2024: 2). Her tributes to other authors are for the most part indirect and not easily recognized, but that changes when she cites sententious one-liners that have become proverbial in some cases. An example in point is the beginning of her song „Getaway Car“ with its sententious leitmotif *No, nothing good starts in a getaway car* becoming a metaphor for a failed (criminal) relationship: *It was the best of times, the worst of crimes* (2017, 166). At first glance this appears to be a rather strange poetic start, but it helps, of course, if one recalls that Charles Dickens begins his famous novel „A Tale of Two Cities“ (1859) with *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times* that has long made it as a literary quotation into dictionaries (Shapiro 2021: 212). For those readers/listeners who can juxtapose the two statements in their minds, this innovative „anti-quotation“ has a special effect. Younger Swifties, who might not know the novel and/or its first sentence, the rest of the song, with its own story, will explain it all, of course.

A third example appears in her song „Cruel Summer“ that speaks of serious problems in a relationship. The second four-line stanza includes the two proverbial expressions *to roll the dice* and *to roll the eyes* with devils and angels as actors! The concluding statement is another anti-quotation, this time based on a well-established aphorism by Friedrich Nietzsche:

*Killing me slow, out the window
I'm always waiting for you to be waiting below
Devils roll the dice, angels roll their eyes
What doesn't kill me makes me want you more
(„Cruel Summer“; 2019, 179).*

Nietzsche's original statement „What does not destroy me, makes me stronger“ from 1888 is popularly rendered as *Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger* (Shapiro 2021: 591) which Swift alters into a declaration of fighting on for her love. Swift's variant is perfectly understandable without awareness of Nietzsche's original, but Swift most surely hopes that the juxtaposition of both texts will occur in the minds of her audience. Nietzsche's statement is on its way to become generally known, i. e., approaching a proverbial status. But again, Swift's linguistic play expects a lot and is yet another proof of the considerable literary quality of her songwriting. In fact, Swift herself has it at the ready, as becomes clear when she manipulates it once again five years later:

*I was in my tower weaving nightmares
Twisting all my smiles into snares
They say what doesn't kill you makes you aware
What happens if it becomes who you are?*
(„Cassandra“; 2024, 322).

A vexing thought, to be sure, but Swift is quite shrewd as the songwriter by introducing her anti-proverb as it were with the rather standard marker *they say*. It adds authority to her statement that is, as she well knows, not commonly known but rather her very own formulation (Mills 2025: 234; with no mention of Nietzsche or that his maxim has become proverbial).

But to turn to the discussion of proverbial expressions in Taylor Swift's songs, it can be observed that they are easily integrated into lyrical texts since they lack any particular structure or rhyme. But they usually add metaphorical and emotional expressiveness to poetic texts and help to establish a certain relatability between the author and readers/listeners. Here are a few selected references with but little context:

*Got the radio on, my old blue jeans
And I'm wearing my heart on my sleeve*
(„A Place in This World“; 2006, 6)

*It's hard to make a conversation
When he's taking my breath away*
(„Stay Beautiful“; 2006, 10)

*At fourteen, there's just so much you can't do
And you can't wait to move out someday and call your own shots*
(„Never Grow Up“; 2010, 58)

*These are the hands of fate
You're my Achilles heel*
(„State of Grace“; 2012, 107)

*New money, suit and tie
I can read you like a magazine [book]*
(„Blank Space“; 2014, 119. Tosina Fernández 2024: 96)

*You always knew how to push my buttons
You give me everything and nothing
(„I Wish You Would“; 2014, 128)*

*Remind myself the more I gave, you'd want me less
I cannot be your friend, so I pay the price of what I lost
(„Now That We Don't Talk“; 2014, 147)*

*I, I loved you in secret
[Love at] First sight, yeah, we love without reason
(„Dancing With Our Hands Tied“; 2017, 170)*

*The wine is cold
Like the shoulder that I gave you in the street
(„Paper Rings“; 2019, 189)*

*But diesel is desire
You were playing with fire
(„The Great War“; 2022, 274)*

*A greater woman stays cool
But I howl like a wolf at the moon
(„The Prophecy“; 2024, 320)*

*This is just a storm within a teacup
But shelter here with me, my love
(„Opalite“; 2025, 6)*

*I showed you all the tricks of the trade
All I ask is for your loyalty
(„Father Figure“; 2025, 7).*

Of course, always ready to innovate traditional phrases, she also changed the clichéd turning *rags to riches* to *rags to gold* with the same meaning.

But here is another little verse to the lover where she simply strings three common proverbial phrases together that express that she would do anything for their relationship to which she adds what *they* (people) would say about her commitment, couching their comment in yet another standard phrase, i. e., that of going too far:

*For you
I would cross the line
I would waste my time
I would lose my mind
They say: „She's gone too far this time.“
(„Don't Blame Me“; 2017, 156–157).*

Of special interest is Swift's use of the proverbial *Cheshire cat smile* that dates back to the mid-eighteenth century but was popularized by its appearance in Lewis Carroll's „Alice

in Wonderland“ (1865) where the cat has a wide but sneaky smile (Rachel/Tatreau 2024: 98):

*Don't they tell us don't rush into things?
Don't you flash your green eyes at me?
Don't you calm my fears with a Cheshire cat smile?*
(„Wonderland“; 2014, 130).

The entire song is an allusion to Carroll's well-known account, and listeners who know it or its somewhat older proverbial expression would certainly enjoy its tongue-in-cheek question.

It has also been noticed that Taylor Swift puts an interesting addition unto the proverbial phrase *to bury the hatchet* that usually means that a disagreement has come to an end and is forgotten (Haywardhani 2019: 178, Thors 2024: 229). By adding an unexpected twist, she let it be known that a person does in fact still hold a grudge:

*I hit you like bang, we tried to forget it, but we just couldn't
And I bury hatchets, but I keep maps of where I put 'em*
(„End Game“; 2017, 153).

It should also be pointed out that Swift only rarely cites phrases from the Bible, but here are at least three references with the first from Daniel 5: 25–28 (the writing on the wall), the second from John 8: 7 (to throw the first stone), and the third from the „Book of Common Prayers“ (1666) where she twists the word order of the well-known marriage vow *for better or for worse* to stress that she is more than willing to maintain their bond even in troubled times:

*Maybe I should have seen the signs, should've read the writing on the wall
And realized by the distance in your eyes that I would be the one to fall*
(„A Perfectly Good Heart“; 2006, 17)

*Not a single word was heard
When the first stone's thrown there's screamin'*
(„Cassandra“; 2024, 322)

*I want you for worse or for better
I would wait forever and ever
Broke your heart, I'll put it back together*
(„How You Get the Girl“; 2014, 13).

When Taylor Swift employs a proverbial expression in the various verses of a song as a colloquial leitmotif, she is following an established pattern of other authors. Usually such texts appear at the beginning or end of each stanza, but occasionally they are also interspersed within, as in the song „Tied Together with a Smile“ in which the following stanza appears three times including the proverbial phrases *to lose it*, *to be the golden one*, and *to come undone*:

*Hold on, baby, you're losing it
 The water's high, you're jumping into it
 And letting go
 And no one knows
 That you cry, but you don't tell anyone
 That you might not be the golden one
 And you're tied together with a smile
 But you're coming undone*
 („Tied Together with a Smile“; 2006, 9).

The song appeared on Taylor Swift's first album in 2006 when she was but seventeen years old. It shows that she integrated proverbial language right from the beginning that has continued in similar fashion throughout her songwriting career. Still in her country music phase, but gaining in reputation, one can understand that young Swifties and her more mature audience could relate to such colloquial texts by comparing them to their own experiences.

The song „Invisible“ with its three identical refrains containing the proverbial leitmotif *to look through someone* in the middle must also have touched a nerve as so many Taylor texts do. After all, that is the secret of her art, knowing how to let her audience be part of her experiences and thoughts:

*I just wanna show you
 She don't even know you
 She's never gonna love you like I want to
 And you just see right through me
 But if you only knew me
 We could be a beautiful
 Miracle
 Unbelievable
 Instead of just invisible*
 („Invisible“; 2006, 16).

Altogether an amazing statement from someone who would so very much like to be loved by someone who shows no interest and literally looks through her in the sense of ignoring her. Thus the figurative meaning of the phrase, i. e., to understand a person, does not come into play. A fine distinction, but convincingly and poetically executed by Swift!

In another song, once again hoping for a loving relationship that seems removed or *untouchable*, a two-line repeated refrain including the proverbial phrase *to come undone* expresses the pain:

*But you're untouchable, burning brighter than the sun
 And now that you're close I feel like coming undone*
 („Untouchable“; 2008, 20).

In the song „You're not Sorry“ about a break-up Swift adds emotional depth to the aggravation with the proverbial phrase *to be the last straw* in three stanzas:

*You don't have to call anymore
 I won't pick up the phone
 This is the last straw
 There is nothing left to beg for
 And you can tell me that you're sorry
 But I don't believe you baby
 Like I did before
 You're not sorry ... no, no, no
 („You're not Sorry“; 2008, 35).*

But then there is „Starlight“, a song of love and dreams of impossible things with music in the air. The following refrain appears four times with the place – not the person! – dressed to the proverbial nines – certainly an innovative application of the phrase implying perfection:

*I said, “Oh my, what a marvelous tune.”
 It was the best night, never would forget how we moved
 The whole place was dressed to the nines
 And we were dancing, dancing
 Like we're made of starlight, starlight
 Like we're made of starlight, starlight
 („Starlight“; 2012, 100).*

In yet another song about a broken relationship, Swift employs the phrase *to have someone in the palm of the hand* four times to argue that things could have worked out since one person had already completely surrendered:

*Hey, all you had to do is stay
 Had me in the palm of your hand
 Then why'd you have to go and lock me out when I let you in?
 („All You Had to Do Is Stay“; 2014, 124–125).*

And there is also the song „Superstar“ where a girl wishes that the unreachable idol would just tell her that he can't keep or take his eyes off of her, to put it proverbially in three identical stanzas:

*So dim that spotlight, tell me things like
 I can't keep/take my eyes off of you
 I'm no one special, just another wide-eyed girl
 Who's desperately in love with you
 Give me a photograph to hang on my wall, superstar
 („Superstar“; 2008, 23).*

In this song Swift, the actual superstar, is perfectly capable to project how infatuated people wish to get in closer but impossible contact – something that she clearly experiences by her fandom Swifties.

Of course, not all songs are this romantically inclined with more or less saccharine vocabulary. Especially with her albums „Midnights“ (2022) and „The Tortured Poets Department“ (2024) Swift also relies on more aggressive word choices including scatological terms and expletives like *shit* and *fuck* (Frida/Zuraida 2022: 616). Thus in her song „Hits Different“ she reacts to a love gone awry three times with the phrase *to say shit* when perhaps she could have gotten away with the euphemistic variant *to say stuff*, both with the meaning of making irrelevant or nonsensical statements:

*Oh, my, love is a lie
Shit my friends say to get me by
It hits different
It hits different this time
(„Hits Different“; 2022, 284–285).*

In her „Renegade“ Single it is the phrase *to get one's shit together* with the meaning of getting organized or acting responsibly that is cited three times by a lover to get the partner moving, as it were:

*Is it insensitive for me to say
Get your shit together
So I can love you?
Is it really your anxiety
That stops you from giving me everything
Or do you just not want to?
(„Renegade“; 2021, 337–338).*

And there is also „Down Bad“ where the idiom *Fuck it* expressing indifference or frustration pops up about ten times as *Fuck it if I can't have him* (2024, 294–295). That's doubtlessly a bit overkill and certainly not a particularly poetic utterance. There are other such statements used several times in songs, as for example *Would you tell me to fuck myself* in „Betty“ (2020, 221), *Weird, but fuckin' beautiful* in „Snow on the Beach“ (2022, 258 and 286), and *All her fuckin' lives* in „The Bolter“ (2024, 325–326). In one of her most recent songs from the album „The Life of a Showgirl“ (2025) she perhaps overdoes this a bit by repeating the following three lines four times:

*I just want you, huh
Have a couple kids, got the whole block looking like you
We tell the world to leave us the fuck alone, and they do, wow
(„Wish List“; 2025, 15–16).*

But in all fairness, with Taylor Swift having found her true love with Trevor Kelce, the two of them are looking forward to get married and probably start a family. Stars that they both are, they obviously long at times to have some privacy and that is probably what these somewhat frustrated lines are getting at. Finally, then, when she sings that

something *might piss your ex off* („Ruin the Friendship“; 2025, 12), she is also not exactly poetic but brings across sincere feelings just the same! Clearly Taylor Swift feels that she hits a nerve with her audience with such ever more acceptable terms in colloquial parlance. It should also be remembered that her musical performance of the song makes a big difference in bringing this verbiage across.

At times the proverbial leitmotif is already flagged in the title and then repeated several times in identical verses. In the song „Guilty as Sin?“ it happens to be a proverbial comparison, a folkloric genre not frequently used by Swift:

*I keep recalling things we never did
Messy top lip kiss, how I long for our trysts
Without ever touching his skin
How can I be guilty as sin?
(„Guilty as Sin?“; 2024, 302).*

In the song „Safe & Sound“ it is a so-called alliterative twin formula that has a long-standing history since at least the early sixteenth century (Wilson 1970: 691, Perone 2017: 53, Burt 2025: 192):

*Just close your eyes
You'll be alright
Come morning light
You and I'll be safe and sound
(„Safe & Sound“; 2024, 336).*

What a wonderfully touching and reassuring verse repeated three times, and yet what stark difference in the song „Bad Blood“ with the phrase *to be bad blood* expressing ill will, anger, or hostility (Haywardhani 2019: 175). The following stanza appears five times as a powerfully expressive leitmotif:

*'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
(„Bad Blood“, 2014, 130–131).*

And yet, Taylor Swift again and again is keen to write and sing about loving relationships that have endeared her to people everywhere and of all ages. The proverbial title „Sparks Fly“ signals that this is „a good solid song about passion“ (Perone 2017: 29)

brought to light by the three-time appearance of the following quatrain including the proverbial phrase *to see sparks fly* twice in each case:

*'Cause I see sparks fly whenever you smile
Get me with those green eyes, baby, as the lights go down
Give me something that'll haunt me when you're not around
'Cause I see sparks fly whenever you smile*
(„Sparks Fly“; 2010, 49).

And there is also the song „End Game“ whose title is a reduction of the proverbial phrase *to be the end game* meaning long-term in general but in a love song signifying a romantic commitment to the partner for the future. It forms the first line of a quatrain that also includes the proverbial phrases *to play first string* and *to be on the A-team* with the repetition of the end game image:

*I wanna be your end game
I wanna be your first string
I wanna be your A-Team
I wanna be your end game, end game*
(„End Game“; 2017, 153).

This proverbial verse appears five times in the song, and who could possibly claim that proverbial language, especially if sung in the first person by Taylor Swift, cannot serve romantic longings! With the serious love affair between Swift the star artist and Trevor Kelce the star football player moving towards marriage after their engagement, one might well wonder whether Taylor ever sang this song to Travis! Clearly their blossoming relationship has come *out of the woods* and *into the clear* proverbially speaking, if they ever had any doubts. But since Swift has a song pretty much about any relationship situation, there is indeed a song with the title „Out of the Woods“ that consists with three interruptions of nothing but the following verse with nine repetitions!

*Are we out of the woods yet?
Are we out of the woods yet?
Are we out of the woods yet?
Are we out of the woods?
Are we in the clear yet?
Are we in the clear yet?
Are we in the clear yet?
In the clear yet? good*
(„Out of the Woods“; 2014, 122–123)

To be sure, this is not one of Taylor's most inspirational poems with its tiring repetitions (Perone 2017: 59, Leung 2025: 95–96, Burt 2025: 121), but adding her spirited musical performance to it, the lyrics communicate in the simplest of figurative terms basic questions of relationships.

Doubling up proverbial expressions and proverbs is yet another trademark of Taylor Swift's reliance on figurative language as leitmotifs usually appearing three times in the songs, as for example:

*How's your heart after breaking mine?
"Always at the right place at the right time," baby
(„Mr. Perfectly Fine“; 2008, 45–46)*

*I've got some tricks up my sleeve
Takes one to know one
(„Cowboy Like Me“; 2020, 243–244)*

*'Cause I'm a real tough kid
I can handle my shit
They said, "Babe, you gotta fake it 'til you make it"
And I did
(„I Can Do It with a Broken Heart“; 2024, 330–331).*

It is interesting to note that Swift is up on the modern American proverbs current in the youth culture, with the earliest reference of “Fake it till you make it” stemming from 1982 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 73).

With this these deliberations can move on from proverbial expressions to proverbs that do not appear in poems and songs as frequently as proverbial expressions due to their formulaic structure and their claim of wisdom and truths. It comes hardly as a surprise that proverbs in poetry are often stated as mere allusions. Thus, it can be assumed that the *All roads* segment in the following verse is a reduction of the medieval proverb *All roads led to Rome* and could in this case be concluded as *All roads lead to you*:

*I find myself at your door
Just like all those times before
I'm not sure how to get there
All roads – they lead me here
(„The Last Time“; 2012, 93).*

In the song „Lover“ Swift does not express the modern proverb *My house (my place), my rules* from 1983 directly (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 126), but she clearly must have had it in mind:

*We could leave the Christmas lights up 'til January
This is our place, we make the rules
[...]
We could let our friends crash in the living room
This is our place, we make the call
(„Lover“; 2019, 191).*

Another telling reference appears in „Slut!“ where the longish proverb *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names [words] will never hurt me* appears as a truncated allusion and the proverbial phrase *to be at the right (wrong) place at the right (wrong) time* is cited in a mixed-up way:

*Send the code, he's waiting there
The sticks and stones they throw froze mid-air
Everyone wants him, that was my crime
The wrong place at the right time
And I break down, then he's pullin' me in
In a world of boys, he's a gentleman*
(„Slut!“; 2014, 144).

Such allusions might be almost undecipherable, but it could also well be that the modern proverb *Diamonds are a girl's best friend* from 1949 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 55) is hidden in the song „Bejeweled“ with such lines as *Diamonds in my eyes* and *Sapphire tears on my face* giving clues in addition to the title (Feder/Tatreau 2024: 193) and this verse:

*And you can try
To change my mind
But you might have to wait in line
What's a girl gonna do?
A diamond's gotta shine”*
(„Bejeweled“; 2022, 266).

The same song, however, also contains a straight-forwardly cited proverb appearing in three identical verses, letting people know that she is not given away personal secrets:

*They ask, “Do you have a man?”
I could still say, “I don't remember”
Familiarity breeds contempt*
(„Bejeweled“; 2022, 266–267).

Quite a few songs contain such directly stated proverbs as short but precise statements of fact that don't need any further explanation:

*Hey, Stephen
I know looks can be deceiving
But I know I saw a light in you*
(„Hey Stephen“; 2008, 28)

*I used to think that we were forever ever
And I used to say, “Never say never ...”*
(„We Are Never Getting Back Together“; 2012, 91)

*But you know what they say, you can't help who you fall for
And you and I fell like an early spring snow
But reality crept in, you said we were too different
(„I Bet You Think about Me“; 2012, 113)*

*Let them say what they want, we won't hear it
Loose lips sink ships all the damn time
Not this time
(„I know Place“; 2014, 137)*

*If you fail to plan, you plan to fail
Strategy sets the scene for the tale
(„Mastermind“; 2022, 273)*

*And you know what they all say
“Don't know what you got until it's gone”
(„You're Losing Me“; 2022, 288–289).*

Just these excerpts reveal that proverbs take on the role of explanation and rationalization, as they often do in normal discourse. The last two examples show once again that Swift's impressive repertoire of proverbs includes new ones together with those of times past. The first is also current in the variant *If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail* and the second one also exists as *You never know what you have till it's gone* (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 73, 135). Talking about planning, it has been observed that „Taylor Swift takes her own advice very seriously: ‘If you fail to plan, you plan to fail’. Like an architect, she draws up a plan and plants Easter eggs [her often repeated expression for surprises] in everything she does and creates. By hiding Easter eggs, Swift taps the deep-rooted human love for puzzles and fosters strong parasocial relationships with her fans“ (Kuipers 2025: 25).

In any case, of special interest is Swift's poem/song „Cardigan“ in which she writes/sings about a somewhat one-sided relationship in which her sporadic lover makes her feel like a worn sweater pushed to the floor. He leaves and comes back, declaring that she is his favorite, but as he does this with her and others, he really can't be a true lover (Ginting/Levana 2021: 40–42). The proverb *A friend to all is a friend to none* fits perfectly to this unfortunate situation where *friend* needs only be replaced by *lover* to state this more precisely:

*And when I felt like I was an old cardigan under someone's bed
You put me on and said I was your favorite
A friend to all is a friend to none
Chase two girls, lose the one
When you are young, they assume you know nothing
(„Cardigan“; 2020, 207).*

The song becomes somewhat of a message to young people to realize that love is not always what it seems, that one can get hurt by an insincere admirer, and that friendship and love need to be treated honestly. Even though Taylor does so rather indirectly, the proverb helps to underscore her somewhat didactic message.

Upon close scrutiny one discovers several songs in which a certain proverb appears two or more times. In fact, „You All Over Me“ contains three identical stanzas with a personalized version of the old alliterative proverb *Live and learn* that explain the end of a relationship with the proverbial phrases *to get burned* and *to waste time* added for good expressive measure:

*I lived, and learned
Had you, got burned
Held out, and held on
God knows, too long
And wasted time, lost tears
Swore that I'd get out of here
But no amount of freedom gets you clean
I've still got you all over me
(„You All Over Me“; 2008, 44).*

The traditional proverb is a didactic imperative of sorts, but in Swift's reformulation it expresses that she has already had her share of questionable experiences and has learned from them, even though in her mind the partner is still somewhat present. Certainly a situation with which her audience can empathize.

Another song, this time „London Boy“, contains the well-known proverb *Home is where the heart is* in two stanzas. In one she pays tribute to certain locales in the United States, and in the other she delights in stating that she feels at home at London with the British people:

*I love my hometown as much as Motown, I love SoCal
And you know I love Springsteen, faded blue jeans, Tennessee whiskey
But something happened, I heard him laughing
I saw his dimples first when I heard the accent
They say home is where the heart is
But that's not where mine lives*

[...]

*And now I love high tea, stories from Uni, and the West End
You can find me in the pub, we are watching rugby with his school friends
Show me a gray sky, a rainy cab ride
Babes, don't threaten me with a good time
They say home is where the heart is
But God, I love the English
(„London Boy“; 2019, 194).*

By employing the introductory formula *they say* in both instantiations of the old proverb, the internationally savvy Taylor Swift stresses its general truth value but widens it by claiming that one can have more than one home where one can feel at ease. In this case, as the rest of the song tells it, especially because she is in love with a London boy. The fact that she mentions her friend Bruce Springsteen in particular from among her musician friends (Sheffield 2024: 107), strengthens the conjecture from the beginning of this article that she knows his proverb song „My Best Was Never Good Enough“.

In another song, appropriately titled „Peace“, she once again declares her love that might give her partner solace. But there is so much to a meaningful relationship that is best described by the modern proverb *The devil is in the details* that originated in 1963 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 53–54). It appears in two identical stanzas with that big question mark at the end whether all the things (details) she does for him would be enough to overcome his doubts and cement their love:

*But I'm a fire and I'll keep your brittle heart warm
If your cascade ocean wave blues come
All these people think love's for show
But I would die for you in secret
The devil's in the details
But you got a friend in me
Would it be enough
If I could never give you peace?
(„Peace“; 2020, 223).*

The entire poem/song is a deeply felt reflection on what love means, and with Taylor Swift performing it on the stage in a memorable tune, it became a statement with which the audience could identify.

And then there is the proverb song „No Body, No Crime“ in which this relatively new American proverb from 1947 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 23–24) appears three times as part of this rather repetitive verse:

*I think he did it but I just can't prove it
I think he did it but I just can't prove it
I think he did it but I just can't prove it
No, no body, no crime
But I ain't letting up until the day I die
(„No body, no crime“: 2020, 233–234).*

The quite upsetting song with its proverbial title and leitmotif deals with a suspected murder resulting from an illicit love relationship – quite the harsh topic to be sure for Swift. One wonders, of course, what came first in the writing of the song: the recollection of the proverb or the idea of someone committing a murder whose perpetrator needs to be exposed. From a paremiological point of view it is surprising that Stephanie

Burt in her insightful book on Swift does not refer to „No body, no crime“ as a proverb in her discussion of the song (Burt 2025: 213–214).

This leads to the amazing self-reflective song „Me“ that begins with the anti-proverb *Think before you jump* based on the traditional English proverb *Look before you leap*. Typical for the introspective Swift (Burt 2025: 243), she personalizes the text and does the same with the proverb *Leave well enough alone*. In other words, she does not cite such proverbs as sapiential truths but takes their wisdom and applies it to herself. The result is the picture of a young person being different and going her own way by liberating herself from the expected proverbial canon:

*I promise that you'll never find another like me
I know that I'm a handful baby, uh
I know I never think before I jump
And you're the kind of guy the ladies want
(And there's a lot of cool chicks out there)*

*I know that I went psycho on the phone
I never leave well enough alone
And trouble's gonna follow where I go
(„ME“; 2019, 201).*

The proverbial phrase *to be a handful* is a well-chosen metaphor for this spirited and independent young lady. The Single version of this song includes the additional ditty „Hey, Kids. Spelling is fun!“ based on the modern American proverb *There is no 'I' in team*“ from 1960 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 128) that originated in the world of athletics:

*Girl, there ain't no "I" in "team"
But you know there is a "me"
Strike the band up 1, 2, 3
I promise that you'll never find another like me
Girl, there ain't no "I" in "team"
But you know there is a "me"
And you can't spell "awesome" without "me"
I promise that you'll never find another like me-e-e-eh
(„Hey Kids. Spelling is Fun!“; 2019, 201–202).*

This is a linguistic play with a proverb from the world of sports, but it also expresses that a person is very special. On another level, the little verse shows that Swift is interested in the inner works of language and knows how to get novel ideas from standard forms.

Following this brief interlude it is necessary to return one more time to Taylor Swift's different reactions to the proverb *Look before you leap*. In her very early song „Fifteen“ that seems to speak to a teenager the proverb appears as a warning followed by a personalized allusion to the proverb *Time heals all wounds*:

*'Cause when you're fifteen and somebody tells you they love you
 You're gonna believe them
 And when you're fifteen
 Don't forget to look before you fall
 I've found time can heal most anything
 And you just might find who you're supposed to be
 I didn't know who I was supposed to be at fifteen
 („Fifteen“; 2008, 26).*

Here is nineteen years-old Taylor giving advice to a teenager to be careful in finding a relationship, stating also that if it is not the right one, there will come along another opportunity. What is of importance is that as a young person one does confront one's own identity and values. Little wonder that such songs from the country music scene caught on quickly with young people.

But there is yet a third song that alludes to the proverb *Look before you leap*. Its title is „Jump Then Fall“ and it contains three stanzas in which these three words appear with the second one being extended to *Jump then fall into me*. This appears to be a return to her formulation *I never think before I jump* discussed above as being related to the proverb *Look before you leap*:

*Whoa, oh, I'm feeling you baby
 Don't be afraid to
 Jump then fall
 Jump then fall into me
 Baby, I'm never gonna leave you
 Say that you wanna be with me too
 'Cause I'mma stay through it all
 So jump and then fall
 („Jump Then Fall“; 2008, 18–19).*

Could *Jump then fall* be related as an anti-proverb to the proverb *Look before you leap* as well or even very remotely to the Old Testament proverb *Pride goes before a fall* (Proverbs 16: 18)? It is somewhat reminiscent of W. H. Auden's poem „Leap Before You Look“ (1940) with its first stanza containing the titular anti-proverb:

*The sense of danger must not disappear:
 The way is certainly both short and steep,
 However gradual it looks from here;
 Look if you like, but you will have to leap.
 (Mieder 1989: 189–190).*

Auden's title twists the wisdom of the old proverb around and encourages people to take the *leap* into absurdity. In the last stanza one even finds the line *Although I love you, you will have to leap*. Swift's song also deals with a love relationship where the one partner encourages the other to make the leap of faith and truly fall in love. Perhaps

Taylor Swift read Auden's poem by chance, but no matter what, she too emphasizes the importance of the jump/leap that seems to be necessary to really make love occur. Discussing this whole matter with two of my retired professorial colleagues, one of them also pointed out that *Jump then fall into me* might have an indirect sexual connotation. Let's leave it at that but stress that Swift's verse is plenty deep in its poetic indirection.

One thing is for certain, Taylor Swift as a phrasal wordsmith knows very well what she is doing. In fact, in a short you-tube clip, she has made this incredibly significant statement about part of her songwriting style:

I have a bit of a habit choosing something that is a phrase that people say in conversation. I love to take a common phrase and twist it.
(youtube-com/shorts/NYGJ-bqQ61Q)

As has been shown thus far in this discussion, her word *phrase* can more scholarly be replaced by proverbial expression and proverb. And she uses plenty of them more or less in their original wording with adding her own *I* stamp to them. But there are also occasions where she does in fact *twist* these common expressions (Thors 2024: 227). The paremiological term for modifying proverbs is „anti-proverb“ of which some have already been mentioned here (Litovkina/Mieder 2006). But it is time to take a closer look at Swift's ingenious ways of creating innovative anti-proverbs out of common proverbs that give some of her poems/songs unexpected formulations.

Of special interest in this regard is Swift's song „Miss Americana & The Heartbreak Prince“ that has a number of proverbial twists. There is first of all the following stanza that appears three times in the song:

*It is you and me, that's my whole world
They whisper in the hallway, "She's a bad, bad girl" (Okay)
The whole school is rolling fake dice
You play stupid games, you get stupid prizes
It's you and me, there's nothing like this
Miss Americana and the Heartbreak Prince (Okay)
We're so sad, we paint the town blue
Voted most likely to run away with you.*

She expands the proverbial phrase *to roll the dice* by the word *fake*, follows it up with the modern proverb *You play stupid games, you win stupid prizes* in its traditional wording from 2015! (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2025: 60) and then changes the proverbial phrase *to paint the town red* to *to paint the town blue* with the new meaning of being down emotionally as in the phrase *to feel blue*. In the following stanza she sees guys giving each other the proverbial *high fives* and then ridicules them by extending the proverb *Boys will be boys* into a cutting anti-proverb (Thors 2024: 228). After all, these fellows couldn't possibly be smart:

*My team is losing, battered and bruising
I see the high fives between the bad guys*

*Leave with my head hung, you are the only one
Who seems to care
American stories burning before me
I'm feeling helpless, the damsels are depressed
Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men?
Darling, I'm scared (Ah)*
(„Miss Americana & The Heartbreak Prince“; 2019, 187–188).

Of course, the *Heartbreak Prince* is an allusion to the proverbial phrase *to break someone's heart* that appears in many of Swift's songs (Pettigrove/Pettigrove 2025). Well done is also her twist of the medieval image of *damsels in distress to damsels are depressed*. There are doubtlessly plenty of poetic intricacies in these verses that need to be deciphered in order to appreciate their communicative depth (Burt 2025: 170–172).

Her song „New Romantics“ begins with a verse that contains the observation that *Life is just a classroom* that is a minute extension of the somewhat older proverb *Life is a classroom* with Swift perhaps having the modern proverb *Life is just one thing after another* with the word *just* in mind as well (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 144). But things are clearer with her anti-proverb *The best people in life are free* that is based on the proverb *The best things in life are free* that appears in three identical stanzas:

*Baby, we're the new romantics
Come on, come along with me
Heartbreak is the national anthem
We sing it proudly
We are too busy dancing
To get knocked off our feet
Baby, we're the new romantics
The best people in life are free*
(„New Romantics“; 2014, 142–143).

What a liberating message where the proverbial phrase *to get knocked off one's feet* does not apply in the life of free people in love, i. e., new romantics! In another song she declares quite optimistically *You had to make your own sunshine* and augments this proverbial expression with the proverb *Life is a song, it ends when it ends* („Opalite“; 2025, 5–6) that brings to mind the older proverbs *Life is a song, but it often goes flat* and *Life is a song – sing it* (Mieder/Kingsbury/Harder 1992: 374). And she is up on modern proverbs as well when she declares *But if you can't be good, then just be better at it* („Cancelled!“; 2025, 20) that intensifies the modern American proverb *If you can't be good, be good at it* (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 108) dating from 1986.

In yet another song Taylor Swift succeeds in changing the American proverb *Another day, another dollar* into the fitting anti-proverb *Another day, another drama* in light of problematic relations (Yastanti/Susilawati 2020: 145):

*I don't like your kingdom keys
 They once belonged to me
 You asked me for a place to sleep
 Locked me out and threw a feast (What?)
 The world moves on, another day, another drama, drama
 But not for me, not for me, all I think about is karma
 And then the world moves on, but one thing's for sure
 Maybe I got mine, but you'll all get yours
 („Look What You Have Done“; 2017, 160).*

All true regarding karma, and, of course, Swift also cites the proverb *The world moves on* to put a forward looking spin on matters (Dundes 1969).

In „The Archer“ Swift problematizes a relationship into a gloomy vision, changing the proverb *Easy come, easy go* into a personalized statement of how confrontational issues come and go:

*Easy they come
 Easy they go
 I jump from the train
 I ride off alone
 I never grew up
 It's getting so old
 Help me hold on to you
 („The Archer“; 2019, 183).*

Regarding this proverb, it could well be that Taylor Swift knew Elvis Presley's proverb song „Easy Come, Easy Go“ (1967) that deals with a similar matter:

*Takin' the shade out of the sun
 Whatever made me think that I was
 Number one?
 I oughta know easy come, easy go
 Sittin' it out, spinnin' the dial
 Thinkin' about the chump I've been
 I have to smile
 Didn't I know easy come, easy go
 She wasn't kind, I wasn't smart
 I lost my mind and fell apart
 I had to find myself in time
 Now I can start all over again
 Hangin' around, takin' it slow
 Happy I found
 I still can smile and dig the show
 Lettin' me know easy come, easy go
 (Sobieski/Mieder 2005: 185).*

In any case, in the same song Swift also reformulates the proverb *Don't cut off your nose to spite your face* into the actual act as expressed by its anti-proverb:

*And I cut off
My nose just to spite my face
Then I hate my reflection
For years and years
(„The Archer“; 2019, 183).*

There is also an occasion where Swift alters the beginning of a proverb without completing the text. This is the case with the proverb *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names (words) will never hurt me*. Changing *sticks* to *snakes* enables her to cut down nasty people who never have been able to upset or damage her:

*But I've learned the lesson
That stressing and obsessing
'Bout somebody else is no fun
And snakes and stones never broke my bones
(„You Need to Calm Down“; 2019, 198).*

And here is an interesting little poem by Jan Struther whose title „Variation on an Old Proverb“ (1941) flags that he too is having his critical reaction to its wisdom:

*Hard words will break no bones
But more than bones are broken
By the inescapable stones
Of fond words left unspoken.
(Sobieski/Mieder 2005: 219).*

Continuing along this line, it is also amazing what new meaning Swift can get from the proverb *If the shoe fits, wear it* by changing it to *If the shoe fits, walk in it*. The traditional proverb simply states that one has to deal with matters at hand, while the anti-proverb takes its message literally and condemns someone to walking in pain, as it were:

*If the shoe fits, walk in it
Till your high heels break
(„Long Story Short“; 2020, 245).*

But there is also one occasion where the linguistic game of twisting a proverb succeeds by the mere interchange of one letter! This is the case with the modern proverb *Don't get mad, get even* from 1956 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 95) in the following stanza where *mad* is changed to *sad*:

*I don't start shit, but I can tell you how it ends
Don't get sad, get even
(„Vigilante Shit“; 2022, 265).*

When Stephanie Burt calls *Don't get sad, get even* a *familiar motto* (2025: 229) she is not quite correct. Taylor's *sad* version is in fact a unique anti-proverb based on the original proverb.

In the song „The Black Dog“ Taylor Swift uses the anti-proverb *Old habits die screaming* of the proverb *Old habits die hard* in three different stanzas to add a drastic immediacy to her text:

*How you don't miss me
In the shower
And remember
How my rain-soaked body was shaking
Do you hate me?
Was it hazing?
For a cruel fraternity I pledged
And I still mean it
Old habits die screaming
(„The Black Dog“; 2024, 308).*

Finally then, Swift also changed the comparative adjective of the proverb *Life is truer than fiction* to the more appropriate anti-proverb *Life is sweeter than fiction* in a quatrain that appears four times in her „Sweeter Than Fiction“ song of love:

*There you'll stand, ten feet tall
I will say, "I knew it all along"
Your eyes are wider than distance
This life is sweeter than fiction
(„Sweeter Than Fiction“; 2013, 342–343).*

In some cases it took considerable research to discover what older proverbs were behind Taylor's anti-proverbs. And the question arose quite naturally whether one or the other text might not actually be „her own poetic inventions“ (Burt 2025: 250). Poet and songwriter that she is, she most certainly has the ability to form sententious remarks that could eventually be registered in quotation dictionaries and due to her world-wide popularity advance to the status of modern proverbs. In any case, for the following examples no prior references could be found by way of extensive Google searches. For now it is fair to conclude that they are her inventions. In the longing love song „Back to December“ her remark that *Freedom ain't nothing but missing you* is the first line of the following quatrain that appears three times:

*It turns out freedom ain't nothing but missing you
Wishing I'd realized what I had when you were mine
I'd go back to December, turn around and make it all right
I go back to December all the time
(„Back to December“; 2010, 50).*

Then there is also that sweet song „Innocent“ where her leitmotif *Who you are is not what you've been* is repeated three times as part of this verse:

*It's alright, just wait and see
Your string of lights is still bright to me
Oh, who you are is not what you've been
You're still innocent
(„Innocent“; 2010, 63).*

And in the love song „Ours“ one finds her phrase *People throw rocks at things that shine* as yet another created leitmotif in three identical verses:

*So don't you worry your pretty little mind
People throw rocks at things that shine
And life makes love hard
The stakes are high, the water's rough
But this love is ours
(„Ours“; 2010, 69).*

Of course, *Life makes love hard* could well be another candidate for possible proverbiality, but these few lines also include the proverbial phrases *to worry one's mind*, *to be high stakes*, and *to be rough waters* that altogether make this an incredible proverbial *tour de force*.

The song „State of Grace“ includes the following quatrain twice, and its two last lines have a certain sententious ring to them as well:

*This is a state of grace
This is a worthwhile fight
Love is a ruthless game
Unless you play it good and right
(„State of Grace“; 2012, 81).*

Talking about games brings to mind the proverb *Love is a game* going back to the seventeenth century and Swift's delightful question *Love's a game, wanna play?* in her song „Blank Space“ that speaks of loving the game (Lusiana/Qomariana 2017: 168). Even though the question appears but once, it probably has caught on among Swifties and others as a signal for a little romance:

*Nice to meet you, where you been?
I could show you incredible things
Magic, madness, heaven, sin
Saw you there, and I thought
“Oh my God, look at that face
You look like my next mistake
Love's a game, wanna play?”
(„Blank Space“; 2014, 119–120).*

In „I Did Something Bad“ Swift comes up with *You gotta leave before you get left* that also has the makings of becoming sententious in popular parlance:

*They never see it comin', what I do next
This is how the world works
You gotta leave before you get left
(„I Did Something Bad“; 2017, 154).*

A Google search found one reference of *Leave before you get left* from the late 1980s, but otherwise it has been attributed to Taylor Swift. But there is no doubt that she came up with *Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts* that appears several times as yet another leitmotif in her song „Death by a Thousand Cuts“:

*Saying goodbye is death by a thousand cuts
Flashbacks waking me up
I get drunk, but it's not enough
'Cause the morning comes and you're not my baby
I look through the windows of this love
Even though we boarded them up
Chandelier's still flickering here
'Cause I can't pretend it's okay when it's not
It's death by a thousand cuts.
(„Death by a Thousand Cuts“; 2019, 192–193).*

Most likely Taylor Swift based her sententious remark on the ancient Chinese torture and execution practice called *Lingchi* that involves slow slicing into the body or even death by a thousand cuts (Feder/Tatreau 2024: 142). Not knowing that might make her statement not quite as extreme since her cuts most likely refer to emotions and memories.

In her song „False God“ Swift introduces her twice repeated sententious comment *The road gets hard and you get lost when you're led by blind faith* with the formulaic marker *they say* that usually implies that what follows is commonly said like a quotation or a proverb. But no such statement can be found by way of yet another extensive Google search, and even though Taylor is implying general knowledge of it, she must be the actual author:

*And I can't talk to you when you're like this
Staring out the window like I'm not your favorite town
I'm New York City, I still do it for you, babe
They all warned me about times like this
They say the road gets hard and you get lost
When you're led by blind faith, blind faith
(„False God“; 2019, 197) .*

And what a surprise! Towards the end of her tenth album „Midnights“ (2022) Taylor Swift has a song called „Dear Reader“ with which she addresses her audience as the

poet that she is. And not just that! She takes this opportunity to instruct the readers in a didactic fashion for once to *Never take advice from someone who's falling apart*. This is certainly an unexpected switch from her usual approach, but her maxim could well become a proverb by way of her song:

*Dear reader, if it feels like a trap
You're already in one
Dear reader, get out your map
Pick somewhere and just run
Dear reader, burn all the files
Desert all your past lives
And if you don't recognize yourself
That means you did it right
Never take advice from someone who's falling apart
Never take advice from someone who's falling apart
(„Dear Reader“; 2022, 283).*

And then there is her song „The Albatross“ with its title alluding to the proverbial expression *to have an albatross around the neck* with the meaning of a burden or encumbrance. As is well known, the metaphor originated from Samuel Coleridge's poem „The Rime of the Ancient Mariner“ (1797/98) in which the seafarer kills an albatross for no particular reason. But in Swift's text the albatross becomes a vengeful and threatening woman with a *thoughtless heart* (Mills 2025: 234–235). The text begins with the two sententious remarks *Wild winds are death to the candle* and *One bad seed kills the garden* placed in quotation marks and announced by the introductory formula *wise men once said*. Is this yet another „trick“ by Swift to add authority to her lines by claiming them to be traditional wisdom? Be that as it may, my informed searches did not result in any precursors and as of this time I can conclude that they are Taylor Swift's inventions deserving to be recorded:

*Wise men once said
“Wild winds are death to the candle”
A rose by any other name is a scandal
Cautions issued, he stood
Shooting the messengers
They tried to warn him about her*

*Cross your thoughtless heart
Only liquor anoints you
She's the albatross
She is here to destroy you*

*Wise men once said
“One bad seed kills the garden”
“One less temptress*

*One less dagger to sharpen”
 Locked me up in towers
 But I'd visit in your dreams
 And they tried to warn you about me*
 („The Albatross“; 2024, 311).

What a song about a vengeful woman pictured as a dangerous albatross! Quite a difference from her country and romantic songs of love now in her eleventh album „The Tortured Poets Department“ (2024) with its many literary allusions, as for example also in the third line of this poem: „A rose by any other name is a scandal“ that is obviously an anti-quotation of William Shakespeare's *A rose by any other word (name) would smell as sweet* from his „Romeo and Juliet“. To add even more formulaic language, Swift also alludes to the proverb *Don't kill the messenger* in the fifth line. And if one more thought is allowed, there is a good chance that Swift modelled her *One bad seed kills the garden* on the fourteenth-century proverb *One bad apple spoils the lot (the whole barrel)*.

With this these deliberations can be brought to a conclusion with a few comments about her song „Shake It Off“ (2014) that was one of her „major hits [...] with the verse melody built from repetitions and variations“ (Perone 2017: 60). But how about the proverbial variations? How is it possible that in a book with the promising title „The Words and Music of Taylor Swift“ not here or in any other place a mention is made of her rich repertoire of proverbial language? And this is also the case with all the other major publications on Taylor Swift (see bibliography). In those instances where someone mentions something about such formulaic language, terms like phrase or idiom are used but never proverbial expression or proverb. This is amazingly also the case with the annotated catalogue in Rachel Feder's and Tiffany Tatreau's book „Taylor Swift by the Book. The Literature Behind the Lyrics, from Fairy Tales to Tortured Poets“ (2024). There the word proverb appears exactly once in connection with *I cut off my nose just to spite my face* (Feder/Tatreau 2024: 130) discussed above. I refer to all of this without malice but rather as an observation that is noticeable in much literary scholarship. So many colleagues simply are not tuned in on the significant role that proverbs and proverbial expressions play in literary works of all genres. Ignoring this, as in the case of Taylor Swift's poems/songs, is missing part of what makes her songwriting so appealing and memorable.

But enough of this mild diatribe and time to return to our proverbial mutttons, as it were. The title „Shake It Off“ of this last and ultimate proverb song is of course a reference to the phrase *to shake off* in the sense of getting rid of something or someone. In it Swift liberates herself or her readers/listeners from all kinds of criticism and disapproval, saying with healthy optimism that *It's gonna be alright* – a message that is certainly appreciated by all (Burt 2025: 112–115). And then comes a truly unique stanza built around the quite recent modern American proverb *Haters gonna hate* (Doyle/Mieder 2025: 76–77) from the year 2000 that she transforms into four anti-proverbs on its structure of *Xs (noun) gonna X (verb)*. The resulting message, certainly part of the

Taylormania reminiscent of the Beatlemania (Pomarico 2024: 177) of my college years, makes the best possible way to give the phenomenal Taylor Swift her richly deserved last proverbial words to her fandom of Swifties of all ages everywhere in the world:

*“It’s gonna be alright”
 ‘Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play
 And the haters are gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate
 Baby, I’m just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
 I shake it off, I shake it off
 Heart-breakers gonna break, break, break, break, break
 And the fakers gonna fake, fake, fake, fake, fake
 Baby, I’m just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
 I shake it off, I shake it off
 („Shake It Off“; 2014, 126–127).*

That was the conclusion of my article at the end of September 2025 as I awaited her twelfth album on the third of October. I have included some proverbial references from this new album above but wish to add some comments regarding two of her new songs. First of all the self-reflective title song „The Life of a Showgirl“ that contains the line *pearls of wisdom* (as some of her songs do) as well as the following twice-repeated stanza with the proverbial comparisons *sweeter than a peach* and *softer than a kitten* as well as the anti-proverb *The more you play, the more that you pay* based on the proverb *The more you play, the more you win*:

*You’re sweeter than a peach
 But you don’t know the life of a showgirl, babe
 And you’re never, ever gonna
 Wait, the more you play, the more that you pay
 You’re softer than a kitten so
 You don’t know the life of a showgirl, babe
 And you’re never gonna wanna
 („The Life of a Showgirl“; 2025, 23–24).*

Autobiographically interpreted this might well be considered as a lyrical cautionary tale for her love Trevor Kelce. Being a superstar “showgirl” obviously has its price and it will be a challenge to make a serious relationship work. But it is interesting to note that Taylor Swift once again relies on proverbial language to express these understandable concerns.

And finally, how about the song „Elizabeth Taylor“? Clearly the famed American actress came to Taylor Swift’s mind as she was working on her new album, meditating about her own future as a celebrated artist. Projecting herself unto Elizabeth Taylor’s fate, she once again relies on her natural proverbial prowess that is informed to a considerable degree on her *love to take a common phrase and twist it*. In this case her *I’d cry my eyes violet* is a twist on the proverbial phrase *to cry one’s eyes red*. Her keen

observation *You're only as hot as your last hit* is clearly an anti-proverb of the proverb *You're only as good as your last performance* (game, film, song, etc.) with its indicated variants (Doyle/Mieder 2025: 128) dating back to 1935. There is also the more negative variant *You are only as good as your last mistake* (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 168) from 1979. In any case, it is conceivable that Taylor learned the proverb from her football star fiancé Trevor Kelce, changing *good* to *hot* and *game* to *hit* with the latter referring to ultra-successful songs of hers! The following truly unique proverbial stanza appears three times in the song and even includes two more proverbial expressions to boot: *to leave someone high and dry* and *to be number one*. What a love song, indeed!

*And you look at me like you're hypnotized
And I think you know why
And if you ever leave me high and dry
I'd cry my eyes violet, Elizabeth Taylor
Tell me for real, do you think it's forever?
Been number one, but I never had two
And I can't have fun if I can't have you
Be my NY when Hollywood hates me
You're only as hot as your last hit, baby
Been number one, but I never had two
And I can't have fun if I can't have you*
(„Elizabeth Taylor“; 2025, 3–4)

And that is not all, for the introspective song concludes with the appropriate expansion of the modern proverb *Diamonds are forever* from 1948 (Doyle/Mieder/Shapiro 2012: 55):

*All my white diamonds and lovers are forever
Don't you ever end up anything but mine.*

As Taylor Swift sees herself as a modern Elizabeth Taylor who had her famous career, she is obviously also questioning what the future will hold for her. Can she forever be the number one showgirl, can she always reinvent herself and bring out new albums with super hits? Employing her gift of proverbial indirection, she assures herself that love will take care of her in the future that looks amazingly bright for Taylor Swift.

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The 26 pages of the lyrics of Taylor Swift's most recent twelfth album *The Life of a Showgirl* (released on October 3, 2025) were found on [Genius.com](https://www.genius.com)

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