

Media Review Assignment

March 3rd, 2025

Mass Media and Society

On April 19th of 2024, Taylor Swift released her eleventh studio album, “The Tortured Poets Department”, with 31 different tracks. There were certainly lots of mixed feelings about the album, and while I believe people listened to it, I don’t think they actually *listened*. I may be biased as a swiftie myself, but I truly believe this is one of Swift’s best work yet. This album manages to bring elements from her previous works and blend them into something that is entirely different. She brought the *folklore*-esque lyricism and *Midnights*-style synths to make something I have not heard before. The biggest excuse I’ve heard is that this album is ‘boring’ and sounds the same, but that is not the case. I specifically want to talk about Swift’s power as a wordsmith within this 2-hour album.

When fans think of Taylor Swift, one of the first things that may come to mind are the catchy and powerful bridges of her songs. “The Tortured Poets Department” only backs up the claim that Swift is a wordsmith. One of the first songs that comes to mind is “The Black Dog”, with the bridge starting off with “Six weeks of breathing clean air / I still miss the smoke / Were you making fun of me / With some esoteric joke?”. There are also plenty of other gut-wrenching moments within this album in songs such as “How Did It End?” or “So Long London”. Swift also manages to make some bold comments, with some of them gaining controversy. “I Hate It Here” features a verse with Swift singing about wanting to live in the 1830’s but “without all the racists” and without “getting married off for the highest bid”. In my opinion, a lot of people misheard her and assumed she was being ‘offensive’ with those lyrics, but I believe Swift had the right intentions with that verse.

I believe Taylor Swift gets bolder with each album she puts out, and there are a few great examples of this within “The Tortured Poets Department”. In “But Daddy I Love Him”, Swift calls out the public criticism she received for one of her relationships, with lyrics such as “God save the most judgmental creeps / Who say they want what’s best for me / Sanctimoniously performing soliloquies I’ll never see / Thinking it can change the beat / Of my heart when he touches me”. One of my favorite parts of this album is the way that Swift word-paints with ease. This colorful lyricism is backed up with a variety of different beats, whether it is with soft-synths or a melodic-sounding piano.

Swift does a nice job making the emotions she feels shine throughout these songs. Lucy Curtis, an editor from The Oberlin Review states how this is Swift’s most “brilliant” and “raw” work yet. Taylor isn’t afraid to write about the exact way she’s feeling behind metaphorical lyricism. Yes, this album isn’t for everyone, but I firmly insist that if you really want to understand this album, it’ll take more than just one listen. Swift plays around with different sounds that make for an exciting listen. “I Can Do It With a Broken Heart” is one of the best examples of the production in this album. At first, it sounds like an upbeat, sparkly type of song. The underlying and depressing message of the song is the kicker and really shows off Swift’s talent for using metaphors in not only her lyrics, but her production as well. This song is a great example of why I love this album, and why I encourage everyone to give it a chance.

Of course, this album isn’t 100% perfect, and at times it may come across as ‘boring’. In this anthology version, Swift saved some of her slower songs for the end, and if you don’t love super slow songs, you may not be a fan of “Robin” or “The Manuscript”. “loml” is another song that may sound boring at first, but it truly has one of the best bridges in Swift’s career, and it is devastatingly heartbreaking, but certainly worth the listen. I also think “Peter” puts a twist on the

beloved relationship between Wendy and Peter Pan and turns it into something truly devastating. At the end of the day, Swift's cheesier sounding songs (although there are few of those on this particular album) like "So High School" can be overlooked for her deeper and more emotional songs like "Cassandra" and "How Did It End?".

Circling back to "The Manuscript", I think this is a very overlooked song. It sums up the tone of the album overall, and Swift bids goodbye to this era in an emotional way. While some may describe it as "slow" or "snooze worthy", I think it is a simply perfect ending to a powerful album. The last lyrics of the outro are "Now and then, I reread the manuscript / But the story isn't mine anymore". I think this is a clever way to end the album, with Swift acknowledging that the themes that she described in these songs were based off her own experiences, and by saying this "story isn't" hers anymore, she's saying goodbye to that chapter of her life and sharing it with her fans. Hannah Boring, a production editor at The Fordham Ram, a blog from Fordham University, states that "this was not an album for the fans, the general public or for the Recording Academy, but finally, only for the tortured poet herself." This album is a love letter to Swift, and while only she will be the one to ever truly understand it, it sure is fun to analyze it as a fan, and this album is certainly one of the most diverse things I have heard in a while when it comes to her whimsy lyrics.

Works Cited

Curtis, Lucy. ““The Tortured Poets Department” Is Brilliant, Raw Work from Taylor Swift.” *The Oberlin Review*, 26 Apr. 2024, oberlinreview.org/32747/arts/the-tortured-poets-department-is-brilliant-raw-work-from-taylor-swift/.

Boring, Hannah. “Overwhelming, Opposing, Outstanding: “the Tortured Poets Department.”” *The Fordham Ram*, 2025, thefordhamram.com/culture/overwhelming-opposing-outstanding-the-tortured-poets-department/. Accessed 9 Mar. 2025.