
Irony, Denial and Retrospective Loss in Bruno Major's Songs**Figo Alfandi¹, Udur Delima Sibatuara²**

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¹figoalfandi345@gmail.com, ²sibatuaraudurd5@gmail.com**Abstract**

*This study analyses the use of emotional and temporal irony, as well as imagery, in expressing denial and retrospective loss in the songs *We Were Never Really Friends* and *Trajectories* by Bruno Major. The research explores how irony creates contradictions between expectation and reality, and how imagery contributes to the emotional construction of loss and self-protection in the lyrics. The study aims to answer two research questions: In what ways do emotional and temporal irony reflect denial and retrospective loss in the songs? How does imagery contribute to the expression of denial and retrospective loss? This research employs a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected by listening to the songs, transcribing the lyrics, and identifying lines containing emotional irony, temporal irony, and types of imagery, including concealment, auditory, visual, and physical imagery. The analysis was conducted by interpreting the lyrics based on theories of irony, denial, retrospective loss, and imagery. The findings reveal that temporal irony reflects the gap between past expectations and present reality, highlighting the speaker's inability to accept relational separation. Emotional irony functions as a defense mechanism, masking emotional pain through contradictory expressions of acceptance and happiness. Furthermore, imagery enriches the lyrical meaning by symbolically dramatizing emotional suppression, longing, and memory reconstruction. The study concludes that irony and imagery work together to construct denial as a psychological defense and to shape retrospective loss as an emotionally reconstructed experience.*

Keywords: *discovery emotional irony, temporal irony, denial, retrospective loss, imagery*

INTRODUCTION

Music is a sound that consists of rhythm, tone, and harmony. Music is used to engage or entertain people, and music can also be used to send a message or evoke and convey audience emotion, as well it also delivers a figurative word to the audience. As mentioned by Fisher (1929), music is a form of multiple combinations of a tone that creates a sound that sounds beautiful. Music consists of three important parts, that are tone, rhythm, and harmony; to organize or create a structured music, musicians must master these 3 components in order to create a good sound or harmony.

Lyrics can be written in different forms of languages. As a result, songwriters can use this as a form of communication. To be able to write lyrics human use language as its medium. By using language, human able to understand, communicate, and able to deliver a message to each other effectively. In song, language plays a crucial role, without it the song will only be an instrumental piece, it does not convey a complete meaning with an only instrument. As is stated by Syafitri and Marlinton (2018), language conveys emotion, feeling, and connection in human life. This implies that a lyrical song must have a meaning that conveys to the listener, not only as entertainment, but as a tool to communicate to a wide audience.

In order to write meaningful yet communicative lyrics, songwriter must combine word, phrase, and sentence to form a song. Songwriters are able to use different types of lyrics depending on what genre they are creating for. For example, hip-hop artists often use lyrics that are explicit, meaning their writing on their lyrics adapted from street life, while pop songwriter uses figurative language mainly because they are writing about love,

affection, and heartbreak stories. As mentioned by Choi et al (2018), lyrics that appear in a song can be seen as an emotional part of the writing of the songwriter, whether they take it from a personal life experience, or love experience.

To effectively convey emotion in song lyrics, songwriters must understand the use of figurative language such as symbolism and metaphor. Symbolism is often found in a song and poem. Symbolism used as a way to express an emotion, for example "Sun" in logical explanation, Sun is a star in our solar system, but poetically "Sun" is defined as something joyful and happy. As stated by Rosita et al (2019) Symbol expresses as a meaningful word in figurative language used to explain a situation using an object.

By using figurative language such as symbolism and metaphors, songwriting has become more engaging and aesthetically pleasing. Figurative language helps writer of a song to become more imaginative, helping them to approach and use different kinds of words in their lyrics.

This research will focus on how Bruno Major writes and uses figure of speech and how it interprets the lyrical writing of his lyrics, and as well how it enhances the emotional theme of the lyrics in his song named, We Were Never Really Friends and Trajectories.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Poetic is a group of word, phrase, or sentence that has different interpretation of meaning in English literature, so this interpretation often leads to an understanding of how different words are structured to convey emotional meaning and interpret ideas. Poetic can be in form of poetry which is written and used to deliver or send a message in emotional way, or it can be sung. Poetic explores the way words interpret meaning and send an emotional message to the reader. As it mentioned by David. O and Amao (2013), The possibilities that poetic words are used in different ways including to send hidden meaning through written form of text. Nowadays, poetic language is often used in songwriting and others literature work.

Defense mechanism defines as a way to overcome emotional pain and stress the character caused by several actions and experience the character felt. Defense mechanism is designed to protect people from emotional pain that leads to anxiety. As it is mentioned Freud (2018) defense mechanism cope as a denial to prevent emotional pain and denies it to prevent anxiety.

Denial is part of mental state that denied the truth of what its actually happen. Denial is shown as a person is not accepting truth and usually it ignores it to make the person that denied it. In psychology denial is called defense mechanism. Defense mechanism is the ego of human protecting his thought and action. According to Freud (2018) denial is a part of self-defense mechanism that hides self-traumatic, denial act to cope reality of what the character felt.

Emotional defines as a way of psychological mental of protecting emotional pain caused by action, event, or emotional thought. It functions as way to cope with emotional pain the person had. As it is mentioned by Freud (2018) denial is a part of defense mechanism to protect someone from heavy emotional burden.

Retrospectives define as a way person memorizes the reduced emotional pain. It acts as a way to cope with denial and emotional pain by reinterpreting past events, and by interpreting past memory, the person able to reduce psychological burden. As it is mentioned by Mureşan (2024) Retrospective denial helps character understand the reality and prevent it using past memory to cope emotional pain.

Symbolic refers to the expression of indirect meaning using imagery, scene, color, and object. Symbolic denial uses this definition to express indirect emotion the character felt by using an object, image, scene, and color to express emotional expression.

Retrospective loss is defined as an emotional recognition, where meaning of emotional is constructed by putting pieces from the past and connect it to create emotional loss. According to Ricoeur (2004) the emotion of what the subject felt is not from experiencing sadness suddenly, but it reconstructs and interprets from past and connects it.

The use of irony can depend on which type of irony the creator likes to use and imply it to the poem or song lyrics needed. There are three types of irony which are verbal, situational, dramatic irony, and deeper interpretation such as emotional and temporal irony. According to Booth (1974) mentioned that irony evolves writing literal meaning, and reconstructing words to create a contrast meaning of what it actually meant.

Temporal irony is a type of irony that occurred and used to create a differentiation between the first sentence of a literary work later at the end of a sentence. Temporal irony employs changes of structure of words, phrases, and sentences, which change over time in literary work.

Temporal irony defines that the situation changed from what the first sentence showed up to end of a sentence, but emotional irony used different types of approaches of uses in the lyrics, such as the song or lyrics contrasting between the imagery of the song, repetitive, and slow rhythm. This makes emotional irony added new layer of structure to the song such when the lyric mentioned “we don’t talk anymore” but the imagery showing they often always making a communication, the imagery showing of missing a communication, and the tone of the rhythm slowed uprising that the lyric implying longing of a person.

Imagery is a figure of speech that revolves around human connection, visual, communication, element, portrayed image, and sense of action. Imagery breaks into multiple types such as concealment imagery, auditory imagery, visual imagery, and physical imagery. According to Mauliga et al. (2025) imagery breaks an action, elements, and psychical touch into poetic interpretation of meaning, creating bunch of literary explanation that helps poet in richen literary work.

Concealment imagery is a figure of speech that uses a different structure of word to hide emotional states. Auditory imagery is a figure of speech that uses audio as it medium to express emotional expression. Visual imagery is a figure of speech that uses image, object, and scenery as it way to express emotion. Physical imagery defines as a descriptive language using sensorics body to explain and interpret emotional expression. Physical imagery uses body, movement, touch to express different kinds of expression.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method of analyzing data, especially in form of word, phrase, or sentence. This means the data will be formed on text rather than number. After collecting the data, the researcher will imply the method to find the meaning of a text by reading and interpreting it. According to Onwuegbuzie et al (2012) qualitative research is often used in literature text analysis, deeply use to interpret the meaning of a word, phrase, and sentence.

The song is going to be collected in form of MP3/FLAC Audio extension. The researcher is going to download it from an online social media platform. The song is going to be collected from multiple sources. These sources include Spotify, YouTube, and YouTube Music. The researcher will write down all the lyrics in form of line, and after that, the song will be analyzed whether it used figurative language or not, and interpret it based on the theories above.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the analysis conducted on two songs by Bruno Major, namely *Trajectories* and *We Were Never Really Friends*. The analysis focuses on two aspects: the use of emotional and temporal irony in reflecting denial and retrospective loss, and the role of imagery in expressing those emotional conditions within the lyrics.

A. Emotional And Temporal Irony Reflect Denial and Retrospective Loss in Bruno Major's Song and The Role of Imagery in Expressing Denial and Retrospective Loss

1. Trajectories

The song *Trajectories* portrays the reflective realization of a relationship that gradually diverges due to different life paths. The lyrics depict memories of intimacy, shared experiences, and emotional attachment, while simultaneously acknowledging the inevitability of separation. Rather than dramatizing the breakup, the song presents a contemplative acceptance of emotional loss.

Several lines demonstrate temporal irony and denial. In line 6, the speaker recalls having "hope in my bones" that the partner would share future experiences with him. This line reflects the speaker's strong past confidence in the relationship. However, the present reality contradicts this expectation, as the relationship ultimately fails. This contrast between past certainty and present separation illustrates temporal irony. At the same time, the speaker's romanticized recollection of hope suggests emotional denial, as the memory of past certainty softens the emotional impact of the breakup.

Similarly, line 7 contains retrospective reflection through the phrase "I thought you were my person." The use of the past tense indicates that the speaker once believed in the permanence of the relationship. However, this belief is revealed to be temporary. The phrase "my person" symbolically represents emotional possession and exclusivity, which contrasts with the current reality of separation. This contradiction reinforces retrospective loss while simultaneously revealing symbolic denial of relational instability.

Temporal irony is also present in line 16 through the phrase "I knew you were mine." The statement suggests certainty and emotional assurance in the past. However, the later realization that the relationship was unstable exposes the illusion behind that certainty. This contrast illustrates the gap between past belief and present awareness, reflecting both temporal irony and retrospective denial.

Lines 10 and 11 further demonstrate temporal irony by presenting the possibility that the relationship "could still work out differently." Despite acknowledging the present separation, the speaker continues to imagine alternative outcomes. This hypothetical future functions as a form of denial that delays emotional acceptance of the relationship's end.

Additional examples appear in lines 18 and 19, where the speaker claims to have learned that "real love is selfless." Although this statement suggests emotional maturity, the phrase "sounds like something you'd say" indicates lingering emotional attachment to the partner. This contradiction reflects emotional denial, as the speaker attempts to present personal growth while still longing for the former relationship.

Emotional irony becomes more explicit in lines 20 and 21. In line 20, the speaker claims that the partner's happiness is sufficient for his own happiness. However, line 21 immediately contradicts this claim by admitting that the emotional pain will remain as a reminder of the partner. This contrast between expressed acceptance and internal pain demonstrates emotional irony and highlights the presence of retrospective loss.

Overall, the analysis shows that *Trajectories* uses temporal irony to emphasize the gap between past expectations and present separation. At the same time, emotional irony reveals the speaker's attempts to conceal emotional pain through reflective language. These

elements collectively illustrate the psychological processes of denial and retrospective loss following the end of a relationship.

Visual imagery appears prominently in the song. In line 1, the references to “moonlight” and the “shade of blue” create a calm and reflective atmosphere. These images symbolize emotional intimacy in the past, emphasizing the contrast with the present separation. The aesthetic quality of these images also contributes to emotional denial by romanticizing memories of the relationship.

Another example of visual imagery appears in line 14 through the phrase “black and white,” which evokes nostalgic memories associated with old films. This nostalgic imagery reinforces the speaker’s longing for past experiences shared with the partner, thereby intensifying the sense of retrospective loss.

Physical imagery is also present in lines such as line 6 “hope in my bones” and line 9 “it runs through me deep”. These expressions embody emotional experiences within the speaker’s physical body, emphasizing the depth of emotional attachment. Similarly, the word “hurt” in line 21 represents emotional pain that remains present despite the relationship’s end.

Concealment imagery appears in lines 12 and 13 through the metaphor of “trajectories.” The image of two paths moving in different directions symbolizes the inevitability of separation. By framing the breakup as a natural divergence of life paths, the speaker indirectly conceals personal responsibility for the relationship’s failure.

2. We Were Never Really Friends

While *Trajectories* presents a reflective acceptance of separation, *We Were Never Really Friends* portrays a more defensive and emotionally conflicted response to relational breakdown. The song narrates memories of emotional support and intimacy, but the relationship ultimately collapses due to emotional instability and unclear boundaries between friendship and romantic involvement.

Temporal irony appears early in the song. In line 1, the phrase “through thick and thin” expresses loyalty and endurance in the relationship. This statement implies a strong commitment between the two individuals. However, the eventual breakdown of the relationship contradicts this promise, highlighting the loss of that loyalty. This contrast reflects retrospective loss as the speaker realizes that earlier commitment no longer exists.

In line 10, the speaker states that the situation “doesn’t have to be the end,” even though the relationship has already reached a breaking point. This contradiction demonstrates temporal irony, as the speaker continues to imagine the possibility of continuation despite the reality of separation. The statement reflects emotional denial because the speaker refuses to fully accept the finality of the relationship.

Emotional irony is evident in line 9, where the speaker says, “Don’t make me make the call.” The phrase indicates reluctance to formally end the relationship. The speaker’s hesitation reveals emotional attachment, even though the relationship is already deteriorating.

Lines 13 and 14 intensify the conflict through the ultimatum “you’ll never see my face again.” This statement contrasts sharply with earlier depictions of emotional support and intimacy in the relationship. The shift from closeness to complete separation highlights the emotional rupture and reinforces the sense of retrospective loss.

In line 15, the phrase “Guess I’ll never see your face again” softens the previous ultimatum. The use of the word “guess” weakens the certainty of separation, reflecting emotional distancing and partial acceptance of the loss. This line illustrates temporal irony by revealing the contrast between the speaker’s earlier expectations and the reality of permanent separation.

The most significant example of emotional irony appears in line 16: "Because we were never really friends." Earlier lines clearly depict emotional support, shared experiences, and intimacy between the two individuals. Therefore, redefining the relationship as "never really friends" contradicts the evidence presented throughout the song. This statement functions as emotional denial, as the speaker attempts to minimize the significance of the relationship in order to reduce emotional pain.

Overall, *We Were Never Really Friends* relies heavily on emotional irony as a psychological defence mechanism. The speaker repeatedly reframes the relationship in ways that reduce emotional attachment, thereby protecting himself from the full impact of the loss.

Visual imagery appears in line 3 through the object "hoodie," which symbolizes comfort and intimacy. This object represents the warmth and closeness once shared between the individuals, thereby emphasizing the loss of that intimacy.

Another example occurs in line 17 with the reference to a "Mercedes" crash. This dramatic image symbolizes emotional turmoil and personal crisis following the breakup. The imagery reflects the speaker's psychological instability and intensifies the sense of emotional collapse.

Physical imagery also appears in phrases such as "a shoulder to cry on" line 3 and "both of us are hurting" line 6. These expressions emphasize emotional pain through bodily sensations and physical closeness, highlighting the depth of the relationship before its collapse.

Auditory imagery is present in lines that involve spoken communication, such as "you said verbatim" line 12. The repetition of remembered dialogue suggests that the partner's words continue to echo in the speaker's memory, reinforcing the persistence of emotional pain.

Finally, concealment imagery appears in line 5 through the phrase "we let the lines get blurry." This metaphor represents the unclear boundaries between friendship and romantic involvement.

B. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that both songs employ irony and imagery as interconnected devices to portray emotional responses to heartbreak. Temporal irony highlights the contrast between past expectations and present reality, while emotional irony reveals contradictions between expressed and internal emotions. These forms of irony reflect the psychological mechanisms of denial and retrospective loss.

At the same time, imagery emphasized these emotional processes by creating vivid representations of memory, vulnerability, and separation. Visual and physical imagery emphasize nostalgic memories and emotional attachment, whereas concealment imagery symbolically masks the speaker's emotional pain. In conclusion, the findings suggest that the lyrical structure in Bruno Major's songs not only interpret heartbreak but also portrays the complex psychological processes through which individuals cope with relational loss.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how irony, denial, imagery, and retrospective loss are constructed in Bruno Major's songs *We Were Never Really Friends* and *Trajectories*. The findings reveal that both songs portray relational breakdown through the interaction between emotional contradiction and reflective memory.

In *Trajectories*, temporal irony emerges through the contrast between past intimacy and present separation. The speaker recalls moments of closeness and shared emotional connection yet simultaneously recognizes that both individuals are now moving forward in different life paths or "trajectories." Emotional irony appears when the speaker verbally

accepts the separation while still expressing lingering emotional pain. The use of visual and physical imagery strengthens the nostalgic atmosphere of the song by vividly depicting memories of intimacy. These images support retrospective denial, as the speaker tends to idealize the past relationship while avoiding the complete acknowledgement of its failure. Furthermore, concealment imagery frames the separation as something inevitable rather than a consequence of personal or relational mistakes. As a result, retrospective loss in *Trajectories* is expressed in a reflective and melancholic tone.

In contrast, *We Were Never Really Friends* portrays a stronger sense of emotional defense and psychological distancing. The song demonstrates temporal irony through the contradiction between the speaker's initial endurance of the relationship and the later attempt to redefine the relationship as insignificant. Emotional irony is particularly evident in the repeated statements that deny closeness despite the emotional experiences described in the lyrics. This repetition functions as a mechanism of emotional denial and retrospective denial, where the speaker attempts to reinterpret the past in order to reduce emotional pain. The imagery in this song appears more emotionally intense, reflecting vulnerability, blurred relational boundaries, and feelings of abandonment. For instance, concealment imagery such as "we let the lines get blurry" symbolizes emotional confusion and avoidance of responsibility. Consequently, retrospective loss in this song appears more conflicted and defensive compared to the reflective tone found in *Trajectories*.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that irony functions not only as a stylistic device but also as a psychological mechanism that reveals the gap between emotional expression and internal experience. Imagery plays an important role in intensifying this contradiction by making memories vivid while simultaneously concealing emotional truths. Denial, therefore, operates as a protective response to retrospective loss, either through romanticization of the past, as seen in *Trajectories*, or through reinterpretation and minimization of the relationship, as illustrated in *We Were Never Really Friends*. Through this interaction, Bruno Major's lyrics present a complex portrayal of emotional memory and relational dissolution.

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