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The Poetics of Darkness in Popular Culture: Amy Winehouse

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Abstract

This paper studies the significance of Amy Winehouse's music in popular culture, aiming to discover the depth of personal narrative and the themes of darkness in her lyrics. It explores her reflections on personal struggles, addiction, love, and relationships, revealing a distinctive blend of jazz, soul, and contemporary pop. Through both qualitative and quantitative analyses, together with sentiment polarity analysis and word frequency, the study shows how Winehouse deals with the wide range of human emotions, which in turn reveals her rather complicated relationship with intimacy and mental health issues. The paper emphasizes her music's notions on social challenges, which contributes to broader dialogues about addiction, mental health, and romantic intricacies. Characterized by raw honesty and a nuanced understanding of the human condition, her legacy continues to inspire artists and influences the narrative focus of pop music, encouraging more candid discourses on stigmatized topics. (примљено: 3. септембра 2024; прихваћено: 17. новембра 2024)

1. Introduction

Having evolved from ancient traditions and gaining mass appeal during the Industrial Revolution, popular culture now shapes societal norms and individual identities. By the 20th century, radio, cinema, and television had transformed popular culture into a powerful social force (Strinati, 2004: 3). Music now serves as a mirror of social values, with lyrics expressing a wide variety of themes from personal identity to social critique (Campbell, 2005: 59–60; Frith, 1996: 165; Bennet, 2001: 24–34). As a consequence of globalization and digitalization, music's reach has grown, making song lyrics a central part of popular culture debate (Tschmuck, 2012: 3).

Historically, lyrics have communicated personal and collective experiences, from ancient oral traditions to modern political protest songs (Tomlinson, 2008: 2). Today, research calls attention to lyrics' emotional and therapeutic power, linking them to identity and personal expression, and suggesting benefits for emotional healing and depression treatment (Jones, 2005; Maratos et al., 2008). Studies also reveal how lyrics reflect and shape social attitudes, and influence listeners at cognitive and cultural levels (Cole, 1971: 9–10; Choi, 2018: 1–2). Within this framework, the unique poetics of Amy Winehouse emerge as a critical lens through which to explore themes of darkness in popular music.

Known for her raw introspective lyrics and fusion of jazz, soul, and contemporary pop, Winehouse offers a deep exploration of personal struggles, including addiction, love, and mental health. Alongside her musical influences, Winehouse drew from poetic traditions, echoing lyricists like Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra and blues-influenced storytelling. She was inspired by confessional poets who approached intimate struggles with stark honesty, such as Laura Nyro, Carole King, and Alanis Morissette.

Winehouse's exploration of themes of darkness and personal struggle boldly contrasts more conventional portrayals, making her work profoundly influential in popular culture. She was authentic in expressing her struggles and the complexity of the human condition, which is why her work has resonated deeply with audiences, establishing her unique position in music history. Her approach to themes of darkness separates her from other artists like Kurt Cobain and Billie Holiday because she modernizes and personalizes the tradition of expressing life's darker aspects. (Brackett, 2016: 198).

Her music and public persona have also influenced fashion, media discourse, and the discourse around mental health and addiction (Brackett, 2016: 1–2). Her legacy is visible in the stylistic influences on artists such as Adele, Lilly Allen, Florence Welch, and Billie Eilish, who have navigated themes of darkness and complexity in their music.

This study examines Winehouse's lyrical narratives through qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover recurring themes and emotional depth, contributing to a broader understanding of music's role in addressing complex psychological and social issues.

2. Methodology

Amy Winehouse owes her iconic status in popular culture not only to her unique contralto, but also to her songwriting abilities and expressive depth. This study focuses on her self-penned songs to investigate her personal and artistic range. It also examines the elements that emphasize the poetics of darkness and the emotional layers within her lyrics. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of her creative output enable an in-depth examination of her lyrical style, thematic concerns, specific language use, and their possible evolution over time.

Her lyrics are filled with raw emotion, honesty, and poetic self-examination. They offer narratives rich in themes of struggles, love, independence, and complexities of life. The purpose of this study is to reveal the intricate meanings and feelings interwoven into her compositions, and to shed light on her contributions to the theme of darkness in popular culture. The analytical approach helps to find the core themes, emotional expressions, and storytelling methods in Winehouse's lyrics. Patterns and themes within the lyrics are identified and interpreted through thematic analysis. Narrative analysis shows how stories, characters, and settings are created to communicate messages and emotions. Additionally, exploring poetic and stylistic techniques reveals her linguistic abilities.

In order to gather information on her discography, I consulted various sources, including *Discogs*, *Allmusic*, *AZ Lyrics*, *SongLyrics*, and the transcription of lyrics from the original album editions. This comprehensive approach provided a solid basis for understanding Winehouse's unique contribution to music and culture. The quantitative lyrics analysis focused on content analysis to quantify the frequency of certain words, topics, and the intensity of emotions across 15 songs. This method highlights common themes in her work, complementing the qualitative analysis that adds depth and context. Using Python for quantitative textual analysis, the study employed Sentiment Polarity Analysis and Word Frequency Analysis. Sentiment analysis involved compiling lyrics, selecting 15 songs for a consistent dataset, and calculating sentiment polarity to indicate emotional tones. Sentiment scores were visualized through a bar chart to differentiate between positive and negative sentiments. Word Frequency Analysis involved text preprocessing, counting frequencies of meaningful words, and identifying the most frequent words to pinpoint key themes. The data was organized in a Pandas DataFrame for clarity. Additionally, word clouds provided a visual representation of dominant words in the corpus, aiding in identifying recurring themes and motives.

3. Qualitative analysis

3.1. "Beat the Point to Death", the early 1990s

Winehouse was between the ages of 12 and 15 when she wrote this song. As in reality, she tries to fight for her own identity but fails. The anaphoric use of the lyrics "Can't help, but bring it up and beat the point to death/but my words are for nothing, I'm wasting my breath", indicates the feeling of helplessness, worthlessness, and obsessiveness that will follow her until death. In contrast, poetic

images represent physical desire, "I justify attraction by your hands, your lips, your hair", which creates a clear contrast between emotional and physical needs. Her thoughts are a separate character in the song, contributing to the insecurity, "How can I concentrate when all the while my head/Throw me scenarios so I tease my self-esteem". The play between the desire for emotional connection and physical release, along with the frustration of unfulfilled wishes and ignored words, gave Winehouse the ability to clearly describe the complexity of the human psyche at a very early age.

3.2. "My Own Way", 2001.

Similar to numerous popular songs, this one follows a typical verse-chorus structure. Winehouse wove a narrative around her independence in intimate relationships, emphasizing the importance of personal freedom against vulnerability and irrationality as one of the main characteristics of romantic love. She criticizes those who do not understand the essence of infatuation. The repetition of the lines "I'll go my own way/I walk when I want to/Talk when I want to" indicates the decision to stay independent. The metaphors "temporary insanity" and "true love is blind" show that even at a young age, she recognized the fleeting and risky aspects of falling in love, although this awareness did not shield her from its "grasp" later in life. Lyrics like "Love that's unconditional/Give your heart to someone else/But save a little for yourself" create a clear contrast. Her attitude can be interpreted as a fear of vulnerability and/or a desire to protect herself.

3.3. "Heard Love Is Blind", 2003.

Winehouse uses various poetic devices to express longing and justify her infidelity. She describes someone who resembles the current partner, emphasizing the need to be unfaithful simply due to his absence and resemblance to the new young man. The central theme revolves around the perception of fidelity and the blurred line between physical and emotional betrayal. It could also be interpreted as her revenge for her partner's infidelities. The use of the comparison "His eyes were like yours" and "He looked like you" emphasizes her longing for her previous partner. In contrast, the repetition of the lines "He looked like you" indicates an internal conflict and an attempt at justification. Nevertheless, despite the justification, the irony in Winehouse's efforts to downplay this encounter by asserting that it was not cheating, even though there was an intimate relationship, is quite evident. The direct address of the lyrics, "Why're you so upset?" creates a sense of impulsiveness leading to confrontation due to problems in the relationship. Winehouse successfully portrays the complexity of the human struggle with loyalty and physical attraction.

3.4. "Fool's Gold", 2003.

Through free verse, Winehouse creates a narrative about a female character whose main preoccupation is the engagement ring and its symbolic meaning. She uses a conversational tone to describe the ring as a very superficial aspect

of an intimate relationship that contrasts sharply with the partner's actual behavior and/or loyalty. It is her apparent attempt to distinguish reality from illusion. The engagement ring and the phrase "fool's gold" are metaphors for love and commitment, on the one hand, and an illusion or entirely misplaced value in an intimate relationship, on the other. When she repeats the refrain, "For me it ain't real, it's fool's gold", Winehouse wants to emphasize the central theme of the song, which is essentially mistrust and skepticism regarding the permanence and authenticity of a relationship, and doubt about the very idea or concept of romantic love. She portrays women's expectations and final disappointment in the lines "she's seen a dress, she has the flowers planned" and "watch your tooth, don't break on that wedding band". There is also an ironic tone when she depicts this female character focused only on the material aspect, i.e., an engagement ring that essentially holds no meaning. With this song, Winehouse showed her early disappointment and distrust in the longevity of intimate relationships.

3.5. "Long Day", 2003.

Written after long, exhausting days in the studio, this song deals with Winehouse's loss of energy and identity as she struggles to balance work, desires, and the need for rest. She contrasts her past, when she had more "soul" and energy, with her current state of exhaustion and identity crisis, vividly portrayed in the repetition of the lines "Lately I've forgotten who I am/It's been a long day". Poetic imagery like "digging myself into a hole" and "My guitar through London town" mirror her experiences and emotional states, while the lyrics "Running down my batteries" and "let my energy just drain away" are metaphors for mental and emotional exhaustion. As she did during her elementary and high school years, Winehouse feels disconnected from her peers and, to a certain extent, regrets leaving formal education, which she expresses in the lines "while all my contemporaries are sitting in college now/My education is dragging, dragging".

3.6. "Procrastination", 2003.

As a continuation of the previous song, Winehouse wrote this one to protest being pressured to work in the studio. The central theme is repeated in the chorus "Try to put me in a room, distraction less" and its variations, thus emphasizing her pursuit of focus amid everything that distracts her and forces her to reconsider, such as buying cigarettes, earning money, and writing choruses. The song explores two extremes: on the one hand, the desire to be creative and productive ("in the studio I would finally burn"), and on the other, the reality in which serious and trivial things are constantly interfering with her focus. Given her enduring struggle with concentration, lyrics like "Glancing at my CD rack, eyes linger on Frank" specifically address her unstable attention, while the phrase "distraction less" serves as a metaphor for the ideal state of creativity that every artist needs, hoping nothing would hinder the creative process. Once again, Winehouse finds herself in a conflicting situation, unable to reconcile her artistic aspirations with her daily obligations.

3.7. "What It Is", 2003.

Using a conversational style, Winehouse discusses creating emotional distance and changing dynamics in an intimate relationship. Like her song "Take the Box", this one was inspired by her first serious relationship, exploring her coming-of-age experience. Through getting to know her partner better, she grapples with a complex mix of indifference, frustration, and regret. She sees how both of them have changed and points to the growing emotional distance in the lines "I can see you ahead of me" and in the repetition of the phrase "I don't know you anymore". As in her previous songs, Amy juxtaposes past and present events, describing how her experience of her partner has changed over time. To convey this, she uses the metaphors "running with some different crowd" and "we resonate on different planes". The song presents a sensitive description of an intimate relationship that has evolved from intimacy to a state where the partners no longer recognize or understand each other, highlighting the complexity and challenges of maintaining long-term relationships.

3.8. "When My Eyes", 2003.

This song showcases Winehouse's skills in portraying the escapist aspects of her personality. The central theme repeats in the lines "Whatever my imagination throws/So rugged, growing rose/When my eyes do close". The lyrics paint an almost surreal, dream-like world, in contrast to the monotony of daily life, represented in the line "like a waitress on skates". Winehouse briefly wanted to be a rollerblade waitress but found it too monotonous compared to her imagination, which paints a "growing rose" and "the leaves [which] are growing" when she hears Diana Washington and Frank Sinatra. The reference to the two musical icons attempts to connect with a broader cultural and musical context. The poem, therefore, represents a conflict between the ordinary, external, and the deep, internal world, expressing her longing to overcome the ordinary and stay in the complex world as stunning as a "rugged, growing rose."

3.9. "Rehab", 2006.

This globally popular song came from a conversation with Winehouse's father, during which she said that she would not go to rehab, adding that she could not afford to lose 90 days (Winehouse, 2013: 43). It speaks of her deeply intimate struggle with addiction and the refusal of any form of treatment. The central theme is rejecting anyone's help in the treatment because it opposes her perception of the problem. The repetition of the chorus highlights her persistent refusal to acknowledge the depth of her denial. Allusions to Ray Charles and Donnie Hathaway ("I'd rather be at home with Ray" and "there's nothing you can teach me that I can't learn from Mr. Hathaway") show her identification with their life paths marked by the abuse of marijuana, heroin, alcohol, and in Hathaway's case, the struggle with mental illness. Perhaps she was inspired by Ray Charles's song "I Don't Need No Doctor", in which he knows his problems but does not want to deal with them. "Rehab" offers

a balance between defiance and vulnerability, conscious and subconscious, opening a window into Winehouse's world at the time.

3.10. "You Know I'm No Good", 2006.

While Amy had previously explored the theme of infidelity introspectively, this particular song takes a slightly different approach. The central theme revolves not only around the partner's infidelity but also her own, as expressed in the verses "I cheated myself/Like I knew I would/I told you I was trouble/You know that I'm no good". In keeping with the jazz and blues tradition, the song's rhythm and phrasing tell a story of Winehouse's regret, evoking inevitability in her tendencies toward self-destruction. To set the opening scene and convey the emotions, she employs realistic imagery such as "your rolled-up sleeves and your skull T-shirt" and "lick your lips as I soak my feet". To describe the seductive and addictive nature of the present relationship, she references objects such as the gin brand Tanqueray and the beer Stella. The repetition of the chorus highlights Winehouse's self-awareness and the cyclical pattern of her actions, carrying a tone of irony – just as she would return to rehab, she keeps falling back into familiar destructive patterns despite understanding their consequences.

3.11. "Me and Mr. Jones", 2006.

The song explores themes of frustration, disappointment, and betrayal in a relationship, as evident in the lyrics, "Can't believe you played me out like that". Despite feeling wronged, there is an undercurrent of self-empowerment. When describing her emotional state, she makes cultural references to rapper Slick Rick and musician Sammy Junior, unintentionally connecting her personal experiences to broader phenomena. Colloquial phrases like "What kind of fu*ery is this?" create a sense of rawness and urgency. The repeated line "Me and Mr. Jones" through anaphora highlights how significant this relationship was to her during that period of her life. Winehouse likes irony and sarcasm, both personally and lyrically. Overall, the song provides a candid look into the ups and downs of a turbulent romantic relationship through her distinctive artistic lens.

3.12. "Just Friends", 2006.

Written during the dramatic affair with Fielder-Civil, this short piece deals with the drama of toxic relationships. At its core is Winehouse's recognition that what they need is a deeper friendship and emotional connection. However, other central themes emerge – desire, boundary-setting, time constraints and complicated circumstances. She talks about wanting to pursue something more than friendship while simultaneously feeling the need to set boundaries due to her partner's specific past and future relationships. She is aware of the toxicity of their relationship she expresses in the lines "It's never safe for us", acknowledging the risks and instability. There is a sense of forbidden love captured in the verses "And no I'm not ashamed but the guilt will kill you/If she don't first", hinting at an internal struggle while underscoring the addictive nature of this affair. Amy

longs for simplicity by repeating “When will we get the time to be just friends?”, contrasted with the desire in “I want to touch you” versus the sobering “but it just hurts”. Her inner restlessness and her hope for resolution is reflected in the rhetorical question “Can we be alone?”. The song perfectly captures the essence of forbidden or unrequited love.

3.13. “Love Is a Losing Game”, 2006.

Originally titled “Gutter” and written in free form, this song depicts Winehouse’s reflective emotional state. Despite talking about the familiar themes of romantic love, loss, and surrender – which remain central – she created a piece that avoids coming across as trite while still earnestly exploring the experience of being in love. In order to illustrate the risks and losses inherent to love, she uses metaphors like “love is a losing game” and “love is a losing hand”. There is also vivid poetic imagery such as “five-story fire” and “final frame”, which aim to describe romantic love’s intensity and dramatic end. The musicality is also reflected in the repetition of the sound “L” in the anaphoric “love is a losing game” line. Winehouse’s perception of love at the time is completely personified through identification with a game or a phenomenon that brings unhappiness and loss.

3.14. “Some Unholy War”, 2006.

Amy criticized songs that portrayed women leaving their partners without emotion or loyalty. In contrast, this song explores the themes of steadfastness and remaining devoted through difficult situations. The central focus is on offering one’s partner unwavering support, depicted through the metaphor of an “unholy war” – a pledge to fight for their love no matter what internal conflicts or morally complex challenges they face. There is also an underlying theme of personal struggles, resilience, and weathering storms within the context of intimate relationships. Amy paints vivid inner scenarios with lines like “straight shook up beside him” and “drunk on pride”. Abstract concepts like justice and pride are subtly personified, granting them a palpable presence within the song. The lyrical quality is further enhanced through alliteration and assonance in phrases like “straight shook up beside him”.

3.15. “Addicted”, 2006.

As the title states, the central theme is the disease of addiction. Amy began using marijuana, cigarettes, and alcohol from a very young age, which, in line with her personality, led to later experimentation with harder illegal substances like heroin and cocaine. While the primary focus is on marijuana dependence, the lyrics can be interpreted as exploring addiction to any substance or compulsive behavior. In addition to the theme of dependency, there are also undercurrents of boundary-setting and independence evident in lines like “I’m my own man” and “I’d rather have myself and smoke my homegrown”. The song’s narrative voice is direct and confrontational. It emphasizes respect for others’ possessions with lyrics such as “When you smoke all my weed man/You got to call the green man/So I

can get mine and you get yours". This raw quality is reinforced through the use of colloquial, street-wise language. The metaphor "I'm tighter than airport security teams" speaks to Winehouse's intense need to establish firm personal boundaries.

4. Quantitative and sentiment analysis

Based on the theoretical framework established in section 2, this segment will present a quantitative and sentiment analysis of Winehouse's self-penned songs. Primary analysis reveals the 30 most frequent words in 15 songs, without removing stop words:¹



Figure 1. Word frequency analysis results, 30 most frequent words including stop words, word cloud

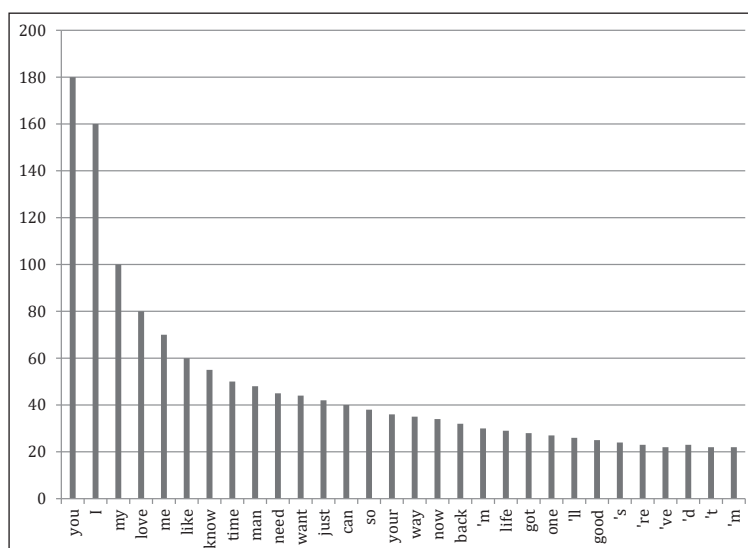


Figure 1.1. Word frequency analysis result, 30 most frequent words including stop words, graph

1 For more information on stop words visit <https://smlltar.com/stopwords>.

After removing the stop words, except for the pronouns “I” and “You”, the following 30 most frequent words are:

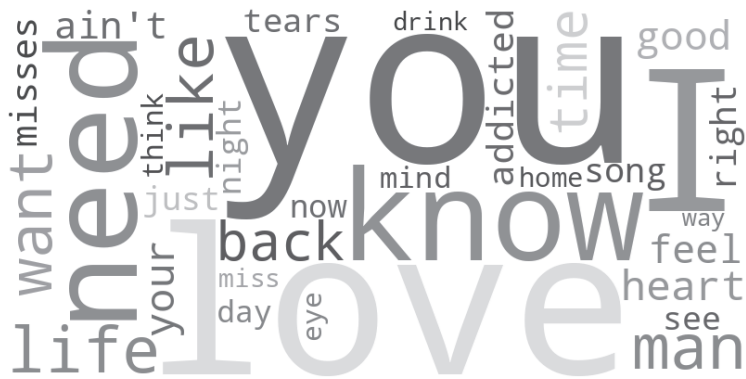


Figure 2. Word frequency analysis result, 30 most frequent words without stop words, word cloud

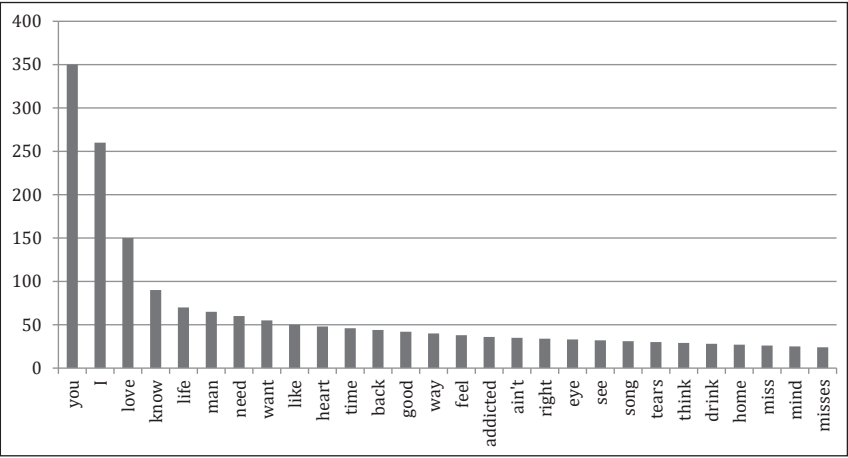


Figure 2.1. Word frequency analysis result, 30 most frequent words without stop words, graph

The quantitative analysis reveals that the personal pronouns “you” and “I” are the most frequently used, highlighting her tendency to focus on personal introspection and relationships. In songs like “What Is It about Men” and “Love Is a Losing Game”, “you” and “I” are the backbone of her narratives, drawing listeners into intimate dialogues that often explore her romantic relationships. These words place Winehouse at the center of her emotional experiences and create a sense of immediacy, as if the listener is spying on her. This personal tone mirrors her life, where relationships and emotional vulnerability were the central part of her identity and too often scrutinized in public, shaping her raw, confessional style.

“Love” is another recurrent word, which underscores its significance in her songwriting and her life. For Winehouse, love was extremely complicated and often fraught with conflict, as she navigated relationships marked by intense passion and heartbreak. In songs like “Love Is a Losing Game”, the word “love” appears as a force of vulnerability and turmoil, reflecting her own turbulent romances. The connotation of “love” in her lyrics is thus layered with the duality of desire and despair, capturing both the highs and lows that characterized her intimate relationships.

The frequent use of “heart”, “need”, “want”, “miss”, and “feel” reveals a profound emotional depth and longing, suggesting that for Winehouse, love was intertwined with yearning and a search for emotional fulfillment. In songs like “Just Friends” and “What Is It about Men”, words like “need”, and “want” express a sense of loss and unfulfilled desire, connoting the intense dependency she often felt in relationships, as well as the void left in their absence. These words also carry an undertone of addiction – not just to substances, which she battled throughout her life, but to the emotional highs and lows of love itself.

Words like “know”, “life”, and “time” reflect Winehouse’s introspective side and an existential curiosity. She often questioned her place in the world, the nature of her relationships, and the fleetingness of life, themes that surface in songs such as “What Is It about Men”, “When My Eyes”, “Long Day”, and “Rehab”. The word “time”, in particular, suggests an acute awareness of life’s brevity, perhaps intensified by her fast-paced lifestyle and struggles with addiction. This preoccupation with “time” adds a melancholic weight to her lyrics, as if she recognized her own vulnerability to the consequences of her choices but could not escape them.

Lastly, words like “tears”, “hurt”, and “addicted” offer insight into her battles with emotional and physical dependence. “Tears” and “pain” appear frequently in songs where she confronts the darker sides of love and self-identity, such as “Rehab” and “You Know I’m No Good”, portraying her relationships and personal struggles as sources of both sorrow and catharsis. The recurrence of “addicted” in her work goes beyond substance use, suggesting a broader metaphor for her addictive relationship to love and the emotional extremes she sought in her art and life.

Together, these words reveal a portrait of Winehouse as an artist profoundly shaped by personal conflicts, emotional depth, and a relentless search for understanding within her relationships. The nuanced connotations of these words paint a picture of an individual acutely aware of her own vulnerabilities, using her music to confront, and sometimes succumb to, the complexities of love, addiction, and self-discovery.

Although not among the most dominant words, darker poetic layers are detected in the presence of words like “alone”, “black”, “cry”, “hurt”, “sorrow” and others carrying heavy emotional weight.



Figure 3. Word frequency analysis results of the words of darkness, word cloud

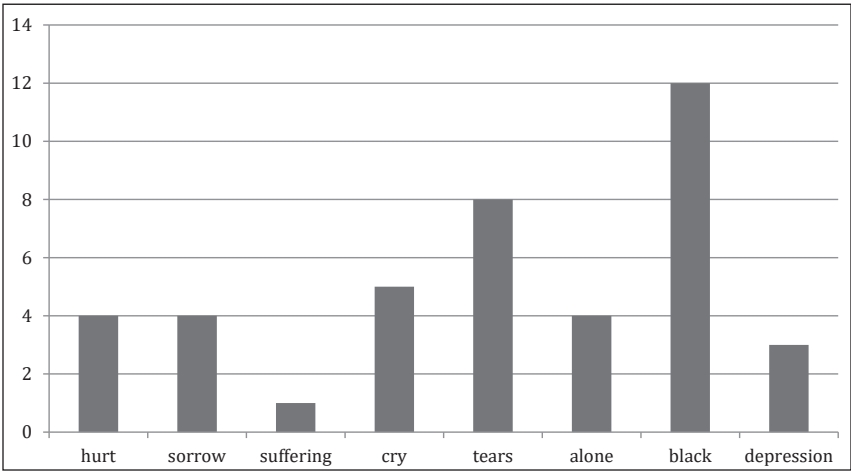


Figure 3.1. Word frequency analysis results of the words of darkness, graph

Although not mentioned as often, these words indeed indicate the existence of problems with depression, grief, and feelings of hurt. Given that, based on biographical analysis, Amy rarely talked about her problems and avoided even visiting a psychiatrist for a long time, it seems that she did not want to deal directly with what was most pressing in her songs.

In “Long Day” and “I Heard Love Is Blind”, for instance, the word “alone” resonates deeply, suggesting not only physical solitude but an emotional isolation that plagued her throughout her life and, especially, her career. The connotation of “alone” here goes beyond mere loneliness – it reflects her sense of disconnection from those around her, even at the height of her success. Despite being surrounded by fans and fame, Winehouse often felt misunderstood and isolated, a feeling she translated into her music. The word “hurt” in “Just Friends” and “Some Unholy War”

is imbued with layers of hurt related to love and loyalty. The connotation here is not just physical pain but a profound emotional suffering tied to her tumultuous relationships and personal sacrifices. This word captures her experience of heartbreak, which was a recurring theme in her life. In “Rehab”, the words “tears” and “black” reflect her view of love as both beautiful and self-destructive, a source of both intense joy and deep suffering. It signifies her repeated pattern of investing in relationships that ultimately left her hurt, which she continued to do despite knowing the likely outcome.

The last step in discovering emotional depth and narrative diversity is to find the least frequently used words which turned out to be as follows:



Figure 4. Word frequency analysis results of the words of the least frequent words, word cloud

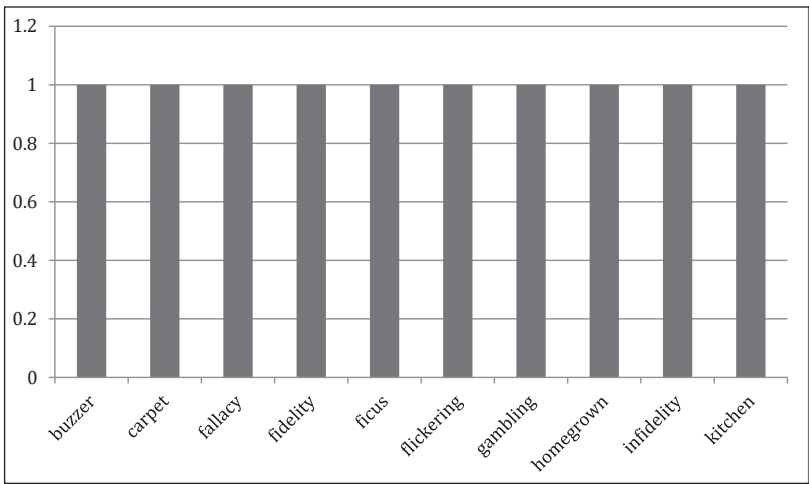


Figure 4.1. Word frequency analysis results of the words of the least frequent words, graph

The results show that Winehouse seldom used words like “buzzer,” “carpet,” “ficus,” and “kitchen,” yet she did not entirely overlook common, everyday elements. Her lyrics demonstrate a blend of ordinary experiences with more profound, abstract emotions, reflecting her ability to find poetic resonance in the mundane. For example, in “Addicted”, her mention of “homegrown” refers to marijuana and subtly highlights her desire for authenticity and independence, especially within her relationships. The word “gambling” is a metaphor for risk, and it symbolizes the stakes and uncertainties she faced in both love and life, especially in songs like “Love Is a Losing Game”.

Although “fidelity” and “infidelity” are not used often, these themes permeate her work. In “You Know I’m No Good”, Winehouse explores infidelity through introspective and confessional lines, capturing the tension between loyalty and betrayal, which echoes her own experiences in romantic relationships. The rare presence of words like “fallacy” in her lyrics hints at her nuanced view on truth and deception, topics that resonate with her reflections on the contradictions and dualities of love.

All of these words provide a foundation for the sentiment polarity analysis, where the mixed scores further reveal how she navigated between light and dark emotions. Sentiment Polarity Analysis yielded the following results:

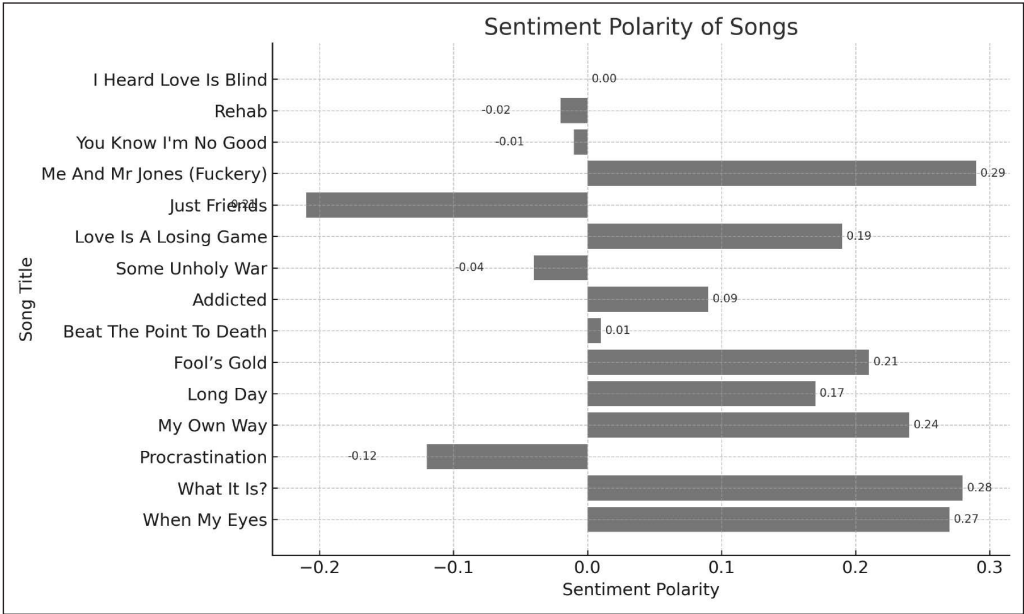


Figure 5. Sentiment analysis results

Examining the sentiment polarity scores of her self-penned songs offers a glimpse into the emotional range of her lyrics. The scores span from -0.236 to 0.288, revealing a blend of positive and negative sentiments woven throughout

her lyrics. Songs like “My Own Way” (0.265) and “When My Eyes” (0.243) feature high frequencies of personal pronouns like “I” and “love” and exhibit positive sentiment scores. These tracks explore themes of self-assurance, independence, and optimism in relationships, suggesting that the frequent use of personal pronouns correlates with expressions of confidence and hopefulness. Conversely, songs such as “Just Friends” (-0.236) and “Procrastination” (-0.126) contain words associated with emotional struggle, like “hurt” and “alone”, albeit less frequently. The negative sentiment scores of these songs align with the presence of these darker words, indicating themes of heartache, internal conflict, and frustration.

Though words like “alone”, “tears”, “black”, “cry”, and “hurt” are less common in her lyrics, their impact on the emotional tone of her songs is significant. These words contribute to the negative sentiment scores and deepen the emotional resonance of her music. For example, in “Long Day”, the word “alone” conveys a profound sense of isolation and fatigue, aligning with the song’s negative sentiment score of -0.064. This reflects Winehouse’s personal experiences with exhaustion and feeling disconnected despite her success. “Rehab” features the word “black”, symbolizing darkness and struggle, which complements its slightly negative sentiment score and themes of resistance to help and confronting personal demons.

The word “love”, while frequently used, is associated with both positive and negative sentiments in her songs, illustrating the complexity of her experiences. In “Love Is a Losing Game” (0.160), the moderate positive sentiment score suggests a melancholic acceptance of love’s challenges. The frequent use of “love” in this context reflects a nuanced understanding of love as both beautiful and painful. In “You Know I’m No Good” (-0.013), the lower sentiment score, combined with themes of infidelity and self-sabotage, indicates how love can also lead to negative emotional experiences, despite being a central theme.

Words like “gambling” and “homegrown”, though much less frequent, reveal significant aspects of Winehouse’s life and artistry. “Addicted” incorporates “homegrown”, connecting to themes of authenticity and independence, and carries a moderate positive sentiment score (0.096). This reflects her desire for genuine experiences and self-reliance in both her personal life and music. The metaphor of “gambling” in “Love Is a Losing Game” symbolizes the risks inherent in love, aligning with its sentiment score and themes of vulnerability and the potential for loss.

Amy Winehouse’s lyrics balance positive and negative emotions. They seem to mirror the multi-dimensional nature of the human experience. Her compositions speak of joy, love, anguish, and despair. While notes of positivity are present, there is an underlying negativity to many of her songs that deal with relationship struggles, inner turmoil, and existential reflections. These diverse emotions highlight her ability to channel feelings into her music in a way that resonates broadly. Her songs provided an outlet to articulate complex emotions like happiness, grief, love and loss – the hallmarks of a talented artist unafraid to confront and convey light and dark aspects of her existence.

5. Conclusion

Amy Winehouse's music has gained popularity due to her powerful vocals and her ability to express the depth and sophistication of human emotion. She explored the themes of personal struggles, love and the complex web of intimate relationships, offering a raw glance into her inner world. Despite the lack of the complexity of traditional literary devices, she used straightforward metaphors and vivid imagery to take listeners on a journey to the joys and agonies of intimate relationships and inner darkness. Her narrative skills also demonstrate a sophisticated approach to songwriting, turning personal anecdotes into universal truths.

Her songwriting had evolved remarkably from the dynamics of romantic relationships and few social observations to the more profound themes of addiction, loss, and gut-wrenching self-destruction. This artistic evolution was a testament to her talent for expressing emotions, as well as the abyss of her personal struggles, intensified by her mental health problems. However, sentiment analysis shows a delicate balance between positive and negative emotions, demonstrating Winehouse's ability to authentically make a statement about both the highs and lows of life.

Quantitatively, Amy Winehouse's lyrics revolved around personal and interpersonal themes evident in her frequent use of pronouns "you", "I" and "love". She frequently used the words related to emotions, such as "tears", "pain", "addicted", "miss", and "home", all of which reveal the significance of the themes of personal struggles and addiction in her music. There are also the themes of fidelity and betrayal that add depth to her narrative diversity.

What sets her apart from her contemporaries is her unmatched honesty in the exploration of themes like love, loss, as well as the unique blend of jazz, soul, ska, blues, R&B, and hip-hop. This approach offered a fresh perspective on universal experiences, resonating deeply with audiences around the world, and helped her stand out in the vast field of contemporary pop.

Amy Winehouse's work has had profound cultural implications. It has influenced changes in social attitude toward themes of romantic relationships, addiction, mental health and the role of public in her early demise.² By candidly communicating these taboo topics through her music, she contributed to broader conversations and encouraged a much more empathetic and subtle understanding of the challenges. Her honest and raw exploration of deeply personal darkness mirrored her generation's struggles and triumphs.

2 As the research into fame and celebrity shows (Fairclough, 2008).

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Sažetak

POETIKA TAME U POPULARNOJ KULTURI: EJMI VAJNHAUS

Sa ciljem da ustanovi dubinu ličnog narativa i mračnih tema u stihovima, ovaj rad istražuje značaj muzike Ejmi Vajnhaus u popularnoj kulturi. Zajedno sa saznanjima o njenim ličnim borbama, bolesti zavisnosti, ljubavi i intimnim vezama, stiće se uvid ne samo u dubinu njenog unutrašnjeg sveta, već i samo njoj svojstven spoj džez, soul i moderne popularne muzike. Uz pomoć kvalitativne i kvantitativne analize, koja podrazumeva analizu sentimenta i frekventnosti reči, rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da je Ejmi Vajnhaus, uprkos svojoj mladosti, uspešno i upečatljivo artikulisala različita ljudska osećanja i iskustva. Opisivanjem univerzalnih ljudskih istina, otkrila je i sopstvene teme tame, koje potiču od problema sa intimnošću i mentalnim zdravljem, čime je doprinela širem diskursu o bolestima zavisnosti, psihičkim izazovima i složenim romantičnim odnosima. Njena zaostavština, koja se ogleda u izrazitoj iskrenosti i razumevanju slojevitosti ljudskih doživljaja, predstavlja neprolaznu inspiraciju brojnim umetnicima i nastavlja da utiče na narativni fokus popularne muzike, ohrabrujući otvorenije diskurse o stigmatizovanim temama.

Ključne reči:

popularna kultura, Ejmi Vajnhaus, poetika tame, popularna muzika, lični narativ, analiza stihova, mentalno zdravlje, analiza sentimenta