

Interpreting the Metaphors and Meaning in Queen's Song "Another One Bites The Dust"

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ABSTRACT

Background: This A metaphor links two unlike things to convey complex ideas or feelings by drawing on familiar, concrete images. Widely used in poetry, novels, films, and songs, metaphor is the focus of this study, which conducts a metaphorical analysis of Queen's 1980 hit "Another One Bites the Dust." **Methods:** Employing a semantic framework, the research explores the song's layered meanings as read by fans and critics over time. **Purpose:** The paper closely examines the song's figurative language and functions—including the phrase "another one bites the dust," which is discussed as a euphemism for death in the context of the 2018 Santa Fe High School shooting, one of the deadliest mass shootings in the United States. **Result:** The authors identify 15 instances of metaphor and classify four distinct metaphorical functions in the lyrics. **Conclusion:** The study closes by considering the song's enduring popularity and cultural resonance, and by outlining the challenges and opportunities involved in interpreting metaphor in popular music.

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INTRODUCTION

A metaphor is a rhetorical device that links two dissimilar things by highlighting shared attributes. By equating one thing with another, it creates a more vivid and engaging image for readers or listeners. Unlike a simile, which signals comparison with words like "like" or "as," a metaphor asserts the comparison directly. For example, the phrase "Life is a journey" functions as a metaphor because it equates life with a trip despite their obvious differences. Metaphors are widely used in literature, poetry, and everyday speech to help people grasp complex concepts and emotions. They frequently employ tangible objects or actions to represent abstract ideas or feelings. For instance, the expression "he has a heart of stone" conveys emotional coldness and lack of empathy. Although effective at expressing emotional distance, such metaphors can be misleading if interpreted literally; taken at face value, the phrase could be read to mean the person's heart is literally composed of stone, which it is not. This tension underscores the semantic challenges metaphors pose. Their interpretation depends on shared cultural and linguistic knowledge, and meanings can shift with different contexts and audiences.

Analyzing metaphors within larger texts is well suited to treatment through semantic field theory. This approach holds that a word's meaning emerges from how it is used alongside related words, forming a network or semantic field of connected terms. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor theory by

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Lakoff and Johnsen (2003), metaphors are viewed not merely as decorative or figurative language but as structured conceptual mappings grounded in everyday experience. Semantic fields therefore consist of lexemes that share a conceptual domain and maintain semantic relations with one another.

Semantics and metaphor intersect because metaphors extend or divert words from their literal meanings by exploiting semantic connections to create new associations. Metaphors depend on these semantic links to forge relationships that may be unexpected or nonobvious. For example, the metaphor "her words were honey" uses "honey" figuratively to suggest that the woman's speech was sweet and pleasing; the semantic overlap between "words" and "honey" (both being associated with pleasantness) enables this figurative reading. According to Jakobson (in Soeparmo, 2013:18-19), metaphorical language serves six functions. According to Jakobson (1960), first, the emotive function expresses feelings such as sorrow, joy, or concern. Second, the conative (connotative) function aims to influence readers' thoughts and behavior. Third, the referential function points to objects or events in the world, making them the subject of discussion. Fourth, the poetic function conveys an aesthetic or message through language. Fifth, the phatic function (described here as the function of fatigue) helps establish social bonds and solidarity. Sixth, the metalingual function clarifies language rules or codes by using language itself to explain them. In metaphor studies, these communicative functions are particularly relevant because metaphors not only describe experience but also express emotions, persuade audiences, construct social relationships, and frame abstract concepts through more concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Zoltán Kövecses, 2010)

Metaphor has long been central to songwriting. Music communicates ideas, emotions, and perspectives acting as a universal medium through which creators share their thoughts. Song lyrics give voice to the songwriter's intentions and feelings so that listeners can connect with them. Lyrics often incorporate figurative devices such as metaphor, personification, and hyperbole; metaphors, in particular, add layers of meaning that make songs more resonant and memorable. In this study, the authors focus on metaphorical expressions within the lyrics of Queen's song "Another One Bite the Dust."

As indicated by its title, "Another One Bite the Dust" is a track by the British rock band Queen. The song appears on the band's 1980 album *The Game* and was written by bassist John Deacon. It reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 for three consecutive weeks, from October 4 until October 18 (becoming their second and final U.S. chart-topper). The single spent 31 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1980 the longest run of any single that year and accumulated a total of 15 weeks at the top position. The song experienced renewed recognition among younger listeners after being included in the 2018 film "Bohemian Rhapsody" which documents Queen's early years through their iconic Live Aid performance in 1985 and features "Another One Bite The Dust."

Nonetheless, the song became controversial when it was connected to a tragic event: the Santa Fe High School shooting in 2018, one of the most devastating high-school shootings in U.S. history. Ten people were killed, eight students and two teachers and thirteen others were wounded. The shooter, 17-year-old student Dimitrios Pagourtzis, was arrested after the attack. One survivor reported that the assailant entered a classroom and, while firing, sang lines from the song; Pagourtzis reportedly said "Another one bites the dust" after each shot. This association brought the song back into public attention decades after its release.

The song contains both favorable and problematic readings and includes multiple metaphors. To address this, the researchers analyze the lyrics through the lens of metaphor theory. This study explores the metaphors present in the song's words, interprets their meanings, and examines the relation between the song's metaphorical content and the Santa Fe High School shooting case from 2018.

Previous studies provide relevant background. Rahmawati et al. (2022), in research titled "Metafora Pada Pemberitaan Covid-19 Oleh Media Online CNN Indonesia Tinjauan Stilistika," applied Jacobson's theory to investigate metaphor functions and used Nurgiyantoro's framework to analyze stylistic features. Similarly, Rahmadhanti et al. (2022) in "Metaphor Analysis And Meaning Of The Song 'Different World'" examined a song's meaning by analyzing each stanza and identifying metaphor types. This present study differs from earlier work by examining the song's meaning stanza by stanza and applying Jacobson's metaphor functions (as presented in Soeparmo, 2013) while also incorporating a case-study analysis of the metaphor "another one bites the dust" in relation to the 2018 Santa Fe High School mass shooting.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research examines the qualities of relationships, activities, situations, or materials. The descriptive qualitative method is employed to observe and interpret the culture and behavior of the local community. According to Moleong (2005:4), a qualitative descriptive approach gathers data in the form of words and images rather than numbers. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research offers a way to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups attach to social problems.

The research object is the metaphors found in song lyrics, and the study's focus is the metaphorical content of the song "Another One Bite The Dust." Data were gathered using documentation techniques to identify metaphorical elements in the song. The research procedure began by listening to the song, followed by reading and carefully understanding the song lyrics. After that, the researchers identified metaphorical expressions found in the lyrics and then analyzed and interpreted the collected data using metaphorical analysis techniques. The next step involved examining the functions of the identified metaphors. In addition, the study analyzed the use of the metaphor "another one bites the dust" as expressed by the shooter in the Santa Fe High School mass shooting in 2018. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the results of the data analysis.

RESULTS

During the analysis phase, the researchers examined the lyrics of Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust" to derive the study's results. The findings are grouped into three categories: the interpreted meaning of the song, the functions of metaphors within its lyrics, and the connection between the phrase "another one bites the dust" in the song and the Santa Fe High School shooting in 2018.

Table 1. Metaphors in the song "Another One Bites the Dust"

Metaphor Data	Metaphor Function	Metaphor Data	Metaphor Function
Steve walks warily down the street	Referential	And another one gone	Poetic
With the brim pulled way down low	Connotative	Hey, I'm gonna get you too	Poetic
Ain't no sound but the of his feet	Referential sound	You took me for everything that I had	Emotive

Machine guns ready to go	Poetic	And kicked me out on my own	Emotive
Are you hanging on the edge of your seat?	Connotative	How long can you stand the heat?	Connotative
Out of the doorway, the bullets rip	Referential	There are plenty of ways you can hurt a man	Poetic
To the sound of the beat, yeah	Connotative	And bring him to the ground	Poetic
Another one bites the dust	Poetic		

DISCUSSION

The Meaning of The Song

Before conducting the metaphor analysis, this study first explains the meaning of the song. The overall interpretation of "Another One Bites the Dust" is presented by dividing the lyrics into stanzas and examining the meaning of each part.

First Stanza- Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*Oh! Let's go!
Steve walks warily down the street
With the brim pulled way down low
Ain't no sound but the sound of his feet
Machine guns ready to go
Are you ready? Hey, are you ready for this?
Are you hanging on the edge of your seat?
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
To the sound of the beat, yeah*

The song is told from the viewpoint of a character named Steve. The opening line, "Oh! Let's go! Steve walks warily down the street, with the brim pulled way down low," immediately establishes a mood of tension and unease. Steve is depicted wearing a wide-brimmed hat and steeling himself to act; his self-exhortation ("Let's go") suggests he is determined not to hesitate. As he moves along, he remains hypervigilant; the line "Ain't no sound but the sound of his feet. Machine guns ready to go" implies he is so alert he notices only his own footsteps and that he is armed and prepared to use deadly force. The question "Are you hanging on the edge of your seat?" reads like a taunt, challenging bystanders and testing whether they feel fear at the prospect of being shot. Steve then opens fire indiscriminately, and "to the sound of the beat" links the ripping bullets and gunshots to the song's driving bass riff. Despite the brutality of his actions, the lyrics suggest Steve derives a grim satisfaction from what he is doing.

Second stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

Another one bites the dust

*Another one bites the dust
 And another one gone, and another one gone
 Another one bites the dust, yeah
 Hey, I'm gonna get you too
 Another one bites the dust*

The chorus, which appears in the second, fourth, and fifth stanzas, functions as the song's emotional and rhetorical center. Its repeated refrain, "another one bites the dust," occurs six times and carries heavy connotative weight: the idiom "bite the dust" commonly signifies either sudden death or a decisive defeat. Historically a British euphemism for death, "bite the dust" has long been part of English vernacular; as the song unfolds, the metaphor grows in prominence, reinforcing a feeling of inexorable loss. Lines such as "And another one gone, and another one gone, another one bites the dust" amplify this sense of repetition and inevitability, which within the narrative the authors read from the lyrics—tracks Steve's deadly actions. The chorus's closing taunt, "Hey, I'm gonna get you too," further personalizes the threat, suggesting the narrator's intent to target the listener next.

Third stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*How do you think I'm going to get along
 Without you, when you're gone
 You took me for everything that I had
 And kicked me out on my own Are you happy, are you satisfied?
 How long can you stand the heat?
 Out of the doorway the bullets rip
 To the sound of the beat
 Look out*

The third stanza contradicts the first stanza a little bit. The lyrics here are written from Steve's point of view. We hear his inner monologue as he strolls along solemn street. In simple terms, he has lost everything. He has lost the one he loved, all the things he valued, and his possessions. Steve is kicked out of his own house for some unknown reason. We can see this in the line "You took me for everything that I had. And kicked me out on my own. Are you happy, are you satisfied?" But it should also be noted that people who have aggressive personalities and are heartbroken tend to exaggerate the suffering he is experiencing. It could be a sentence that illustrates that all of Steve's possessions were taken over by his original lover depicting real possessions but only sweet memories of the moment Steve and his girlfriend were still together. And he sarcastically asks this person if they have found contentment in doing so. Steve's only remaining concern is whether or not she is content with her decisions. She likely transformed him into a murderer, and now his footsteps are heading in her direction. In the line "How long can you stand the heat?" Steve seemed to want to show his ex-lover that these people died because of her and intend to make his ex feel even more miserable & guilty. The line "Out of the doorway the bullets rip" shows that Steve then vents His frustration with the bullets ripping.

Fourth stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*Another one bites the dust
 Another one bites the dust
 And another one gone, and another one gone
 Another one bites the dust
 Hey, I'm gonna get you, too
 Another one bites the dust*

The fourth stanza functions as the chorus and conveys essentially the same meaning as the second stanza. In this section, the line "Another one bites the dust" is repeated four times, reinforcing its central message. This stanza closely follows the third stanza and echoes its final warning, "Look out," which signals that an imminent act of violence is about to occur. The immediate return to "Another one bites the dust" suggests that the warning is realized, implying that Steve continues his actions and that additional victims fall as a result.

Fifth stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*Hey
Oh, take it
Bite the dust, hey
Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust, ow
Another one bites the dust, hey hey
Another one bites the dust, hey-eh-eh Ooh*

The fifth stanza serves as the bridge, linking the verse and the chorus. Its meaning closely aligns with that of the second and fourth stanzas, reinforcing the song's central theme. In this section, the line "Another one bites the dust" is repeated four times, emphasizing repetition and further intensifying the message conveyed throughout the song.

Sixth stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*There are plenty of ways you can hurt a man
And bring him to the ground
You can beat him, you can cheat him, you can treat him bad
And leave him when he's down, yeah
But I'm ready, yes I'm ready for you
I'm standing on my own two feet
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
Repeating the sound of the beat
Oh yeah*

In the sixth stanza, the lyrics shift toward a broader reflection on human struggle and vulnerability. The opening lines suggest that there are many ways a person can be broken or brought low, whether through physical harm, betrayal, mistreatment, or abandonment. These experiences point to both emotional and physical suffering. Despite this, the speaker claims readiness and resilience, as expressed in "I'm standing on my own two feet," which conveys a sense of determination and self-assertion after hardship. However, this declaration of strength is immediately undercut by violence: "Out of the doorway the bullets rip" signals a return to destructive action, with the gunfire once again synchronized "to the sound of the beat." This contrast highlights how the narrator channels personal pain into aggression, using violence as an outlet for unresolved emotional turmoil.

Seventh stanza - Another One Bite the Dust Lyrics:

*Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
And another one gone, and another one gone
Another one bites the dust, yeah
Hey, I'm gonna get you, too
Another one bites the dust Shoot out*

Alright

Lastly, the seventh stanza is the last chorus before the outro. The lyrics "Another one bites the dust" are repeated in this stanza four times. This stanza has the same meaning as the chorus stanzas. In the end, the line "shoot out" and "alright," as if Steve told himself to continue shooting without caring about the consequences.

The Metaphor Function in the Song's Lyric

This song contains a number of metaphors that serve different communicative functions. Referring to Jakobson's theory of metaphor functions (Soeparmo, 2013:18–19), metaphorical language is said to fulfill six functions: emotive, connotative, referential, poetic, phatic (fatigue), and metalingual. However, this study identifies only four of these functions in the song's lyrics, namely the referential, connotative, poetic, and emotive functions, as presented in the results table.

1. Steve walks warily down the street

The phrase down the street metaphorically refers to moving along a road or pathway. In this context, down indicates direction and movement. Steve is portrayed as walking cautiously along the street. This metaphor serves a referential function, as it describes an action and setting that become the focus of the narrative.

2. With the brim pulled way down low

The expression way down low describes the position of Steve's hat brim, suggesting that it is lowered enough to conceal his face. This metaphor reflects a connotative function, as it influences how the listener perceives Steve. Wearing a hat low implies concealment and secrecy, commonly associated with someone preparing to commit a crime.

3. Ain't no sound but the sound of his feet

The phrase the sound of his feet metaphorically represents the sound of footsteps. It emphasizes the silence of the surroundings, broken only by Steve's movement. Because this line describes the environment, it performs a referential function.

4. Machine guns ready to go

The expression ready to go suggests that the weapon is prepared for immediate use. This metaphor carries a poetic function, delivering a direct and vivid message that the gun is loaded and capable of killing at any moment.

5. Are you hanging on the edge of your seat?

The idiom hanging on the edge of your seat conveys intense tension, fear, or anticipation. In this context, Steve appears to mock and provoke his victims, challenging their readiness and amplifying their fear. This metaphor has a connotative function, as it is intended to unsettle and psychologically affect the listener or victim.

6. Out of the doorway, the bullets rip

The verb rip implies fast, violent movement. The metaphor the bullets rip describes bullets tearing through space or objects at high speed. As it depicts physical action within the setting, this metaphor serves a referential function.

7. To the sound of the beat, yeah

The phrase the sound of the beat metaphorically equates gunfire with musical rhythm. The bullets and gunshots are described as synchronizing with the bass line of the song. This metaphor functions connotatively, shaping how listeners emotionally experience the violence by blending it with music.

8. Another one bites the dust

This is the central metaphor and the song's dominant theme, repeated throughout the lyrics. The phrase refers to someone who has died or been defeated. As a British euphemism for death, it symbolizes each victim Steve kills. This metaphor performs a poetic function, as it delivers a clear and powerful message about death.

9. And another one gone

The phrase another one gone metaphorically refers to another life lost. It reinforces the meaning of another one bites the dust, emphasizing finality and absence. This metaphor also has a poetic function, as it reinforces the theme of death.

10. Hey, I'm gonna get you too

The phrase I'm gonna get you implies that Steve has targeted another person and intends to kill them next. This metaphor follows the narrative of ongoing violence and carries a poetic function, clearly signaling imminent death.

11. You took me for everything that I had

In this metaphor, everything may refer to material possessions, emotional support, or love. It expresses Steve's sense of total loss following his breakup. This line reflects an emotive function, conveying deep frustration, pain, and despair.

12. And kicked me out on my own

The phrase kicked me out on my own suggests abandonment and isolation. It reinforces the previous line by showing that Steve was left without support or belonging. This metaphor functions emotively, expressing loneliness and emotional suffering.

13. How long can you stand the heat?

The metaphor of the heat represents the emotional and violent consequences of Steve's actions. By posing this question, Steve attempts to make his ex-girlfriend feel responsible and guilty. This metaphor has a connotative function, as it is meant to affect the emotional state of the recipient.

14. There are plenty of ways you can hurt a man

The idiom plenty of ways refers to numerous possibilities of causing harm. This metaphor delivers a strong statement about the many forms of emotional and physical pain someone can inflict. It serves a poetic function, emphasizing the extent of the damage done.

15. And bring him to the ground

The phrase bring him to the ground metaphorically means reducing someone to their lowest point emotionally or mentally. Linked to the previous line, it suggests total defeat and collapse. This metaphor also fulfills a poetic function, highlighting how deeply Steve feels he has been broken.

The Metaphorical Connection Between The Song's

Overall, the song can be understood as a portrayal of the actions, emotions, and psychological process behind a shooting, as well as the narrative constructed around the shooter, represented by the character Steve. After examining the song's meaning and its use of metaphor, the writers are able to draw a connection between the metaphors in the lyrics and those reflected in the real-life case of the 2018 Santa Fe High School shooting.

The school shooting occurred at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas, on May 18, 2018. According to official reports, 10 people—eight students and two teachers—were killed, and at least 10 others were injured. The perpetrator, Dimitrios Pagourtzis, a 17-year-old student at the school, was charged with murder. Galveston County Sheriff Henry Trochesset later shared details about what happened during the attack, including accounts from survivors. One victim reported that the shooter repeatedly shouted the phrase “another one bites the dust” during the incident. Another student, Trenton Beazley, stated in an interview on Good Morning America that the suspect appeared to be “playing music, making jokes, having slogans and rhymes he kept saying.” He further explained that “every time he killed someone, he’d say, ‘another one bites the dust.’”

These testimonies led the authors to reflect on why the shooter might have repeatedly referenced the lyric “another one bites the dust” from Queen’s Another One Bites the Dust, one of the band’s most famous songs. The narrative of the song and the real-life event show striking similarities. In the song, the metaphor “another one bites the dust” refers to someone who has died or suffered a decisive defeat. Similarly, within the lyrics, the character Steve utters the line after killing someone. In the Santa Fe case, Dimitrios Pagourtzis reportedly used the same phrase after shooting victims. This suggests that the shooter employed the metaphor “another one bites the dust” to signify that he had just taken another life.

As of May 18, 2023, five years have passed since the Santa Fe High School shooting. In this period, developments in legislation have offered some measure of progress toward closure for the victims’ families. A new law now allows prosecutors to meet with families and share evidence in cases that have not yet gone to trial—material that was previously kept from public access. While no legal change can undo the harm caused, these steps mark an important moment for families as they continue to seek understanding and justice following the tragedy.

CONCLUSION

Although the song is widely known for its catchy rhythm and massive popularity, its lyrics are not easily interpreted at first glance. At its core, Queen seems to convey a strong sense of resistance and refusal to be defeated by an opponent. While the lyrics have often been left open to interpretation, they consistently revolve around the theme of death, with the phrase “another one bites the dust” functioning as a British euphemism. This death can be understood either metaphorically—such as the end of a relationship or the emotional removal of someone from one’s life—or as part of a narrative constructed within the song, as suggested by its storyline and setting.

Based on the analysis, the lyrics contain 15 metaphors, and four out of the six metaphor functions proposed in Jakobson’s theory are identified: referential, connotative, poetic, and emotive. A

significant finding of this study is the parallel between the metaphor “another one bites the dust” in the song and its real-world usage during the Santa Fe High School shooting. In the song, the character Steve utters the phrase after killing someone, while in the real incident, the shooter, Dimitrios, reportedly shouted the same line after killing a victim, as recounted by survivor Trenton Beazel. This parallel highlights how the

metaphor was employed in both contexts to signify death immediately following an act of violence.

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