

READING YOUTH ALIENATION AND MORAL TURMOIL IN AVENGED SEVENFOLD'S *CITY OF EVIL* (2005)

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Abstract

Avenged Sevenfold's *City of Evil* (2005) stands out as a unique cultural text that captures the intense emotional chaos and cultural uncertainty of American youth in the mid-2000s. This study aims to examine how youth alienation and moral turmoil are lyrically constructed in *City of Evil*, and to explain what this construction reveals about the sociocultural anxieties of mid-2000s American youth. Using a textual analysis of the album's lyrics, the study traces how alienation and moral turmoil are built through recurrent imagery of violence, displacement, betrayal, and existential strain. The analysis reveals that these lyrical patterns articulate a profound crisis of identity rooted in the anxieties of post-9/11 American consciousness, where notions of authority and purpose were destabilized. Crucially, the lyrics situate personal struggles—such as grief, addiction, and rage—not as purely individual problems, but as reflections of wider sociocultural tensions and national uncertainty. Ultimately, *City of Evil* is shown to mediate the fragile boundary between rebellion and resignation, demonstrating how contemporary metal encodes and expresses youth alienation as both an intimate emotional struggle and a symptom of collective cultural fracture.

Keywords: *City of Evil*, Youth Alienation, Moral Turmoil, Metal Music Culture, Avenged Sevenfold

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the early 2000s, American youth experienced a profound sense of instability, informed both by geopolitical tensions and shifting cultural values. This socio-cultural uncertainty, scholars argue, found powerful expression in the popular music of the time—especially in heavy metal, which frequently provided a generational outlet for disillusionment (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, & LeVine, 2009). Avenged Sevenfold's *City of Evil* (2005), released amidst this backdrop, stands out as an album in which youth alienation and moral conflict are not only articulated but woven into symbolic narratives of violence, war, and existential despair.

Metal music has long been associated with moral panic, particularly in how mainstream society frames it as a threat to youth morality and decorum (Hjelm et al., 2009). Such controversies, according to sociologists, are not peripheral but integral to



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how metal subcultures define themselves against normative social structures. In *City of Evil*, this tension is palpable: the lyrics carry prophetic warnings, moral reckonings, and apocalyptic imagery that resonate with a generation questioning the legitimacy of authority and tradition.

At the same time, heavy metal provides more than just dissident spectacle: it is a space for young people to lay bare emotional turmoil in deeply meaningful ways. As Paula Rowe's ethnographic study of young metal fans shows, metal identity can empower, offering social protection and emotional solidarity that challenge stigmatizing stereotypes of metalheads as alienated or self-destructive (Rowe, 2018). In the context of *City of Evil*, this suggests that the album's aggressive narratives may also serve as site of collective emotional articulation and communal resilience.

Scholarly studies affirm that heavy metal is not simply a reflection of youth crisis, but a cultural resource through which that crisis is negotiated. For instance, research examining heavy metal and higher education reveals that fan identities do not always correspond to social deviance; rather, such preferences often map onto structured positions in society which involve both risk and belonging (Hällsten, Edling, & Rydgren, 2019). This complicates simplistic readings of metal youth as merely marginalized or pathological, emphasizing instead their engagement with identity, meaning, and future life trajectories.

Moreover, academic frameworks in metal studies emphasize that generational alienation takes symbolic shape in the tension between individualism and community, between moral outrage and resignation. The volume *Heavy Metal Studies and Popular Culture* underlines how metal's meaning-making capacities are rooted in critique, memory, and ritual, suggesting that albums like *City of Evil* are not only musical artifacts but cultural texts embedded in discourses of power and belonging (Riches, Snell, Bardine, & Walter, 2016).

Turning to the album itself, *City of Evil* presents a rich semiotic terrain: its lyrical content is saturated with biblical, mythic, and apocalyptic imagery. In doing so, the band constructs a moral universe where youth are not merely passive recipients of social crisis but active participants in a metaphoric battle. Their struggle is framed not only as personal alienation, but as existential participation in a larger moral drama.

Parallel to this symbolic narrative is a recurring motif of identity fragmentation. Throughout the album, voices shift from defiance to despair, from confrontation to introspection, suggesting that young subjectivity is not stable but constantly under negotiation. This is particularly relevant when considering how moral dislocation—youth's sense of being morally unmoored—becomes a defining feature of the album's lyrical architecture.

In addition, *City of Evil's* cultural resonance is enhanced by its engagement with themes of violence, war, and betrayal. These are not incidental: in the post-9/11 era, popular culture was rife with anxiety over national identity and the morality of violence (Hjelm et al., 2009). The album, by weaving these themes into its storytelling, can be seen

as responding to collective trauma, moral ambiguity, and the disillusionment of a generation caught between duty and despair.

Crucially, the moral turmoil depicted in the album is not solely a lament but a site of contestation. The lyrics repeatedly call for prophecy, challenge authority, and envision the fall of corrupted power. In this sense, *City of Evil* is ambivalent: it mourns what is lost, but also imagines radical transformation. Such ambivalence mirrors the ambivalent social position of many young metal fans: distrustful yet hopeful, alienated yet yearning for purpose.

This study, therefore, aims to analyze how *City of Evil* narrates youth alienation and moral crisis by reading its lyrical structure through a dual lens of symbolic patterning and identity fragmentation. By doing so, it contributes to metal studies by offering a close reading of how subcultural music articulates generational discontent in symbolic, moral, and social terms. Finally, this research is significant not only for fans and scholars of heavy metal but also for cultural sociologists and youth studies scholars who investigate how music mediates socio-political consciousness. In revealing the semiotic architecture of Avenged Sevenfold's *City of Evil*, the study sheds light on how an album can encode, contest, and reimagine the moral and existential anxieties of its generation.

This journal article employs a structuralist textual-analysis approach integrated with cultural studies to examine the lyrical narratives of Avenged Sevenfold's *City of Evil* (2005), treating each song as a semiotic system whose internal structures, oppositions, recurring motifs, and narrative patterns reveal larger ideological and cultural formations. The primary data consist of complete lyric segments selected from each track, each representing a coherent thematic unit, which are then analyzed through Lévi-Strauss's notions of binary oppositions, Barthesian myth-making, and Greimasian actantial relations to trace how meaning is produced and circulated within the album's narrative universe. Simultaneously, the analysis situates these structural patterns within sociohistorical and pop-cultural contexts, guided by the cultural studies perspective of Hall (1997) and Hebdige (1979), focusing on how discourses of violence, trauma, addiction, existential dread, moral collapse, and resistance reflect mid-2000s American anxieties surrounding war, identity crises, and youth disillusionment. Secondary data—drawn from music journalism, interviews, magazine reviews, and accessible digital archives—function as contextual anchors that validate interpretive claims and map the album's cultural reception and relevance.

The methodological process follows three analytic phases: (1) Textual segmentation, in which specific lyrical passages are extracted as bounded narrative units; (2) Structural mapping, where the lyrics are coded according to symbols, narrative roles, metaphors, thematic oppositions, and patterns of tension-release to reveal their internal logic; and (3) Contextual embedding, where these structural findings are interpreted in conversation with external cultural discourses (e.g., critiques of American militarism, post-9/11 moral panic, subcultural alienation, and the aesthetics of early-2000s metal). By combining structuralist close reading with cultural studies' socio-semiotic lens, this methodology enables the research to move fluidly between micro-level lyric structures

and macro-level cultural meanings, producing an analysis that is both textually rigorous and historically grounded while maintaining coherence across all song analyses within the *City of Evil* corpus.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Beast and the Harlot

In the opening verse of *Beast and the Harlot*, Avenged Sevenfold constructs a vivid, almost apocalyptic image of a gilded city that conceals a far darker core beneath its surface. The lyrics describe a "shining city built of gold" that is nonetheless "a far cry from innocence," inhabited by a "seven-headed beast," upon whose throne sits a "symbolic woman" whom "hatred strips."

The diction chosen throughout this verse is precise rather than merely decorative. The pairing of "shining" and "gold" constructs an immediate impression of wealth, grandeur, and spectacle, yet this impression is undercut almost as soon as it is established: the qualifying phrase "a far cry from innocence" reframes the city's brilliance as a deceptive surface rather than a genuine virtue. In other words, the verse does not simply describe a beautiful city that later turns out to be corrupt; it builds the corruption into the very syntax used to introduce the city, so that glamour and moral decay are presented almost simultaneously rather than sequentially. This appearance-versus-reality split is intensified by the numerical exaggeration in "seven-headed": rather than depicting a single, containable threat, the multiplication of heads transforms the beast into something unmanageable and diffuse, suggesting a corruption that has already spread and metastasized throughout the system it inhabits, rather than remaining an isolated flaw within it.

Read through a structuralist lens, and drawing specifically on Lévi-Strauss's foundational concept of binary oppositions as the underlying architecture of cultural narratives, the verse can be understood as constructing a semantic system in which appearance and reality, purity and corruption, and order and chaos are held in continuous, unresolved tension with one another. Within this system, the "shining city" occupies the structural position of idealism and promised order, while the beast occupies the opposing position of chaotic, corrupting power. Crucially, however, the beast is not located outside the city as an external threat to be repelled; it is located inside the city, on its throne, at the very center of the idealized space the city represents. This spatial arrangement is itself meaningful in structuralist terms, since it collapses the expected opposition between an idealized "inside" and a threatening "outside," replacing it with a more unsettling configuration in which the threat has already occupied the seat of power that the idealized image was meant to protect.

The figure of the "symbolic woman" who "sits on his throne" only to have "hatred strip her" enacts this same structural reversal in miniature, compressing the song's larger appearance-versus-reality logic into a single image. Her initial position, seated upon a throne, ordinarily codes her as a figure of authority, reverence, or veneration within the visual and narrative conventions the song draws upon. Yet the verb "strips" performs an

abrupt reversal of that coding within the space of a single line, converting a position of enthroned authority into one of exposure and humiliation. This rapid collapse from elevation to degradation is precisely what licenses reading the woman not merely as an individual character, but as a broader stand-in for innocence, virtue, or moral order as such: the lyric does not simply narrate a woman's personal downfall, it stages, through her, the undoing of the very values that her enthronement had initially signified.

Read through the lens of youth cultural studies, this recurring structural pattern, in which a promised order both conceals and subsequently reveals its own corruption, maps closely onto the account developed by Arnett (1996, 2018) of why heavy metal music resonates so strongly with adolescent listeners. According to this account, metal's appeal lies not simply in the darkness of its imagery for its own sake, but in the genre's capacity to name a specific, already-felt alienation: many adolescents experience a disjunction between the institutions that surround them, such as family, school, and religion, and the promises those institutions make regarding trust, protection, and belonging. Arnett's research suggests that adolescents are frequently acutely aware of the gap between the security these institutions claim to offer and the security they actually deliver, and that heavy metal music provides a symbolic vocabulary through which this awareness can be articulated and shared rather than experienced in isolation. Understood in these terms, the "city built of gold" becomes legible not as a generic horror-genre trope deployed for atmosphere, but as a specific figure for this broader promise-and-failure structure that adolescents recognize from their own institutional experience; correspondingly, the beast enacts, in symbolic and narrative form, the systemic disappointment that Arnett (1996, 2018) identifies as central to the appeal of metal fandom during adolescence.

This structural and cultural reading also clarifies why the song functions as something more than mere spectacle for its listeners. Research on heavy metal subcultures conducted by Howe et al. (2015) suggests that long-time metal fans often describe the genre's darker imagery not as gratuitous shock content, but as a validated language through which alienation, distrust, and disillusionment can be named and shared within a community of listeners who recognize similar experiences in themselves. Applied to this verse, the phrase "city of evil" can accordingly be understood as naming a disillusionment that many young listeners already carry with them prior to encountering the song, with the lyric providing that pre-existing disillusionment a concrete, shared symbolic form rather than introducing an entirely new sentiment. In this sense, the verse's structural collapse of gilded surface into hidden corruption operates on two levels simultaneously: it functions as a mythic or allegorical image within the song's narrative world, and it functions, textually, as a precise vocabulary, built from specific word choices such as "shining," "a far cry from innocence," and "strips," for articulating a broader experience of betrayal by institutions that promise protection and belonging while ultimately failing to provide either.

Burn It Down

Where *Beast and the Harlot* stages its crisis of trust through myth and allegory, *Burn It Down* strips that same crisis down to a more immediate, interpersonal register. There is no gilded city or seven-headed beast here; instead, the song opens with something closer to a domestic rupture, gossip, jealousy, a sense of being talked about rather than talked to, before escalating into a language of open hostility and eventual severance. This shift in register matters structurally: whereas the earlier song located betrayal within an institutional or symbolic system, "Burn It Down" locates it within a single, unnamed relationship, making the song's binary oppositions feel more personal and less allegorical, even as they continue to operate through the same structuralist logic of trust versus betrayal that runs throughout the album.

The opening lines establish this scenario of social rupture rather than romantic betrayal alone: "*Jealousy's an ugly word, but you don't seem to care / Converse behind my back, but now I'm here.*" The adjective "ugly" attached to jealousy is notable because it does not describe the speaker's own jealousy but rather names jealousy as a quality perceived in, or directed at, the addressee, immediately reframing the conflict as one of social judgment and reputation rather than private emotional injury. The phrase "*converse behind my back*" reinforces this social framing: unlike a direct confrontation, conversation conducted "behind" the speaker's back implies a hidden, communal act of exclusion, positioning the speaker as the subject of discourse rather than a participant in it. The following declaration, "*but now I'm here,*" functions as a structural reversal of that exclusion, converting the speaker from an absent topic of gossip into a present, confrontational subject within the space of a single line.

This reversal continues in the subsequent declaration, "*Need no one to comply with me through everyone that I defeat / Don't need you, camaraderie, this rage will never go away.*" Here, the term "camaraderie" is worth isolating, since it names not betrayal by a single individual but a rejection of collective belonging as such. Structurally, this establishes a binary opposition between community and self-sufficiency, in which "camaraderie," ordinarily coded as a positive value associated with solidarity and support, is explicitly refused ("don't need you, camaraderie") rather than simply lost. This refusal is intensified by the verb "defeat," which recasts the speaker's relationship to others not merely as distant or distrustful but as adversarial: "everyone that I defeat" positions former companions as opponents to be overcome, a considerably more combative stance than the disillusionment expressed elsewhere in the song.

The chorus introduces a distinct apocalyptic register through the line "*One king to watch the horsemen fall,*" which departs from the song's otherwise interpersonal vocabulary. The image of "horsemen," conventionally associated with the biblical Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, situates the speaker's personal crisis of trust within a considerably larger symbolic frame of collapse and reckoning. Paired with "one king," the line constructs a position of singular, elevated authority from which collective downfall is merely observed rather than experienced directly, a structural contrast to the vulnerable, first-person "I" who elsewhere in the song admits "*I can't trust anyone.*" This

tension between sovereign detachment ("one king") and personal vulnerability (the surrounding confessional lines) suggests that the speaker's stated self-sufficiency is aspirational and performed rather than fully achieved, consistent with what Arnett (1996) describes as a common adolescent strategy of projecting invulnerability outward as a means of managing an underlying, unresolved sense of alienation from peers and social institutions.

A further structural pairing emerges in the second verse: *"You're on my back when the water gets too deep for you to breathe / A crutch for you that won't always be there."* The metaphor of deep water functions as a figure for crisis or overwhelm, and the phrase "too deep for you to breathe" locates the addressee, rather than the speaker, as the party in danger of being submerged. Against this image, the noun "crutch" is precisely chosen: unlike a rescuer or a partner, a crutch is an object used out of necessity rather than mutual relationship, implying support that is functional but not reciprocal, and explicitly temporary ("won't always be there"). This image reframes the earlier theme of broken trust in more explicitly asymmetrical terms: rather than two parties mutually failing one another, the speaker positions themselves as a depleted resource whose capacity to support the other has a defined limit.

The song's closing movement, *"Run towards the light exposing your soul / We won't be there by your side ... Salvation's dying ... Sweet child, we'll miss you,"* introduces a register of finality distinct from the anger of the earlier verses. The phrase "salvation's dying" is structurally significant because it does not simply deny salvation but frames it as an ongoing process of loss, mirroring the earlier construction of sorrow as something sustained rather than instantaneous. The address "sweet child, we'll miss you" is particularly notable for its shift in tone: the diction is tender and elegiac, sitting in stark contrast to the confrontational language of "burn it down" and "defeat" found earlier in the song. Read through Hebdige's (1979) account of subcultural expression as a means of processing loss and marginalization through stylized, often contradictory emotional registers, this juxtaposition of aggression and tenderness within a single song can be understood not as a structural inconsistency but as characteristic of how youth-oriented subcultural music frequently holds rage and grief together, rather than resolving one into the other.

Finally, the song's last lines, *"Falling away, can't buy back time / Burned it down anyways,"* bring the song's central action, burning, into contact with the theme of irreversible time for the first time. The phrase "can't buy back time" introduces an economic metaphor absent from the rest of the song, framing the relationship's damage as a debt that cannot be repaid, immediately followed by "burned it down anyways," in which the adverb "anyways" suggests the destructive act proceeds despite, rather than because of, this irreversibility. Read through Propp's (1968) narrative model, this closing sequence functions as a final resolution phase, distinct from the earlier phases of lack and recognition already identified in the song's opening verses, in which the narrative's central conflict is not repaired but definitively closed through destruction rather than reconciliation.

Blinded in Chains

The lyric *Blinded in Chains* presents a strong tension between withdrawal and confrontation, but its meaning becomes clearer when read closely at the level of specific images and oppositions. The opening idea in “Running, don’t go back and fight, too many you’ll lose” does more than describe escape; it frames resistance as an unequal struggle in which the speaker chooses retreat as a survival strategy. This line establishes the basic binary of flight versus fight, yet it also suggests a deeper conflict between the individual and a larger force that cannot easily be overcome. The lyric’s force comes from its compressed phrasing, which places urgency and fear in the same sentence and makes the speaker’s decision sound immediate, pressured, and emotionally charged.

The image “behind the blood between the red and white and blue” is especially important because it transforms a familiar symbol into something violent and unstable. The colors of the American flag normally suggest unity and national identity, but here they are interrupted by “blood,” which recodes patriotism as sacrifice, injury, and conflict. This is not simply a general statement about nationalism; it is a textual reversal that makes the symbolic structure of the flag appear damaged from within. The lyric therefore uses color imagery to expose the tension between public ideals and private suffering. In this sense, the line does not just refer to the nation; it reorganizes the nation’s emblem into an image of pain, making the speaker’s alienation legible through symbolic contrast.

That alienation becomes more personal in the line “I feel the hate you’ve built for me.” The phrasing shifts from collective symbolism to direct accusation, showing that the speaker experiences conflict not only as a social condition but also as a directed hostility. The word “built” is significant because it implies that hate is not spontaneous; it has been constructed over time, suggesting accumulation, design, and perhaps even systemic repetition. This makes the speaker’s alienation feel developed rather than momentary. The line therefore connects emotional experience to structure, showing how the speaker’s identity has been shaped by forces outside his control. The lyric’s power lies in that connection, because it turns broad conflict into a personal wound.

The phrase “too deep for you to see” adds another layer of complexity, since it suggests that the truth of the situation is hidden, delayed, or inaccessible to others. Rather than presenting alienation as simple anger, the lyric implies that there is a depth of meaning that has not yet been recognized. This creates a subtle distinction between surface conflict and underlying reality. The following line, “everyone eventually will take the step,” reinforces that idea of delayed recognition by suggesting that understanding will arrive, but only later and perhaps only after struggle. The word “eventually” introduces inevitability, while “take the step” implies a decisive moment of change. Together, the lines create a sense of movement toward awareness, though not necessarily toward reconciliation.

The final contrast in “you take the left, I’ll take the right” gives the passage a clear structural split. At the most literal level, it marks separation, but symbolically it represents diverging paths, incompatible choices, and a break in shared direction. The lyric does not explain what each path leads to, and that uncertainty is part of its meaning.

By refusing to define the destinations, the text emphasizes the division itself. The structure of the line turns difference into destiny, as if the speaker and the other figure can no longer inhabit the same moral or social space. In this way, the lyric builds a narrative of fragmentation through simple directional language.

A structuralist reading helps clarify how these oppositions work together. The lyric repeatedly organizes meaning through pairs such as running versus fighting, left versus right, and unity versus bloodshed. These binary structures are not random; they shape the entire passage and give it coherence. The song's symbolic system therefore depends on relational difference, where each image gains force through contrast with its opposite. This approach makes it possible to see how the lyric constructs meaning without needing to move immediately into broader social commentary. The structure itself already reveals a world of division, pressure, and unstable identity.

At the same time, the lyric can still be connected to youth alienation, as long as that connection grows out of the text rather than replacing it. The speaker's retreat, distrust, and sense of hostile surrounding forces are consistent with a broader cultural pattern in which young people feel detached from dominant institutions. Metal music often becomes a space where such feelings are expressed rather than hidden, allowing anger and disaffection to appear as meaningful rather than simply destructive. However, this sociocultural reading should remain secondary to the lyric's own language. The specific power of "Blinded in Chains" lies in how it turns alienation into image, conflict into syntax, and division into structure.

Brown et al. (2022) support the idea that darker metal themes often reflect internal emotional and psychosocial struggles rather than glorifying violence, which helps explain why this lyric should be read as expressive rather than merely aggressive. Arnett's (1996) discussion of adolescent outsider identity also fits the speaker's posture of distance and resistance, especially in the way the lyrics mark a conflict with surrounding norms. Rowe's (2018) work on empowerment through metal culture is useful here as well, because it frames alienation as something that can be negotiated through music. Still, these sources work best when they illuminate the lyric rather than dominate it. The main argument should remain anchored in the words "running," "blood," "hate," and "step," because those are the textual points where the theme is most clearly produced.

Overall, "Blinded in Chains" is best understood as a lyric of fracture, where each line contributes to a pattern of separation and unequal struggle. The song does not simply speak about society in general; it stages conflict through tightly chosen images and oppositions that reveal a divided emotional world. The flag colors, the blood, the directional split, and the language of hatred all work together to create a micro-narrative of alienation and withdrawal. That is why the discussion should stay close to the lyrical text: the broader social meaning becomes strongest when it is built from precise textual detail rather than from abstract explanation alone. APA-style citations can then support the interpretation without shifting attention away from the lyric itself.

Bat Country

In this passage, the speaker of *Bat Country* conveys a deep sense of internal collapse and isolation:

"Can't you help me as I'm startin' to burn (all alone) ... My confidence is leaving me on my own ... No one can save me ..."

This admission of emotional volatility and self-destructive isolation can be read, through a structuralist lens, as a system of binary oppositions: burning vs rescue, confidence vs self-doubt, and attention vs invisibility. The "burning" metaphor signals a self-consuming process—perhaps of emotional pain, alienation, or even existential crisis. The repeated notion of being "all alone" reinforces this sense of fragmentation: the subject's self is detached, lacking a stable support system.

From a semiotic-structuralist perspective, "confidence leaving me" functions as a signifier of a collapsing self-image, where youthful optimism is eroded by internal and external pressures. The self that once trusted itself is now deserted, and the lack of "attention" underscores a refusal—or an inability—to fully reach out for help. The structure of the lyric builds a relational web: *self* → *isolation* → *self-destruction*, suggesting that the act of burning is not merely figurative but part of a systematic breakdown in meaning.

Narratively, this segment resembles one of Propp's functions: the hero's internal crisis (lack of support, no helper) and a turning point of self-recognition. The plea "Can't you help me" marks a moment of potential aid, but the subsequent realization "No one can save me" confirms that rescue is unavailable. This arc from hope to resignation symbolically maps the youth's journey toward alienation—not as an immediate rebellion, but rather as a painful acceptance.

Viewed through Youth Cultural Studies, the lyrics also reflect broader patterns of adolescent alienation within American society. In his sociological study *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (1996) articulates how many young metal fans feel deeply isolated from societal institutions such as family, school, and religion—they perceive a chasm between their emotional realities and the normative systems around them.

Moreover, Paula Rowe's (2018) ethnographic research on young metal fans demonstrates that metal identity often forms as a source of empowerment in the face of marginalization. She argues that metal provides a space where youth reconstruct their self-image and redefine what it means to belong, turning alienation into a meaningful subcultural identity. In this context, the "burning" in the lyric can be interpreted not just as emotional destruction, but also as a metaphor for transformation—a painful process necessary to reforge a self that is "metal."

Psychologically, the lines also resonate with findings from recent youth studies: research in *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* shows that non-mainstream music preferences, such as heavy metal, are associated with both emotional hardship and psychosocial resilience. Many adolescents turn to subcultural music precisely because it

provides an outlet to articulate suffering, while also offering community and stylistic identity.

Thus, by combining structuralist and youth culture frameworks, we can see that this excerpt from *"Bat Country"* functions as a microcosm of alienation: the speaker is caught in an existential furnace, stripped of confidence, and unable to secure rescue. Yet, this emotional burn might also represent a crucible for self-transformation, through which the youth subject reshapes their identity within a metal subcultural world that both recognizes and validates their pain.

Trashed and Scattered

In this passage from *Trashed and Scattered*, Avenged Sevenfold presents a powerful narrative of emotional exhaustion, alienation, and defiance:

"Trashed and scattered again, I'm feelin' so low ... My destination always unknown ... You Goddamn Motherfuckers always wasting my time ... I won't be the victim, but the first to cast a stone ... Crawl on me you fuckin' parasite, and I'm gonna take you out."

From a structuralist perspective, the excerpt constructs a system of binary oppositions that serve to articulate a youth subjectivity under pressure. Key pairs include despair vs resistance, victimhood vs agency, and familiarity vs alienation. The "trashed and scattered" motif evokes fragmentation of self: a body and psyche that have been emotionally wrecked, only to be scattered once again. This fragmentation mirrors the structural notion of disintegration found in mythic and symbolic systems—where the hero/anti-hero is broken, then seeks to reassemble or retaliate.

Meanwhile, the speaker's declaration, *"I won't be the victim, but the first to cast a stone,"* represents a crucial inversion in the narrative structure. Rather than passively accepting victimhood, the speaker claims agency, affirming that they will not only respond but actively fight back ("cast a stone") against those who have wronged them. This creates a relational structure: oppressor vs oppressed, but also chooser vs chosen, suggesting that the young subject is not merely reacting but making a deliberate moral choice. The final lines, with explicit language ("parasite," "take you out"), intensify the emotional stakes, giving symbolic weight to the conflict: the "parasite" is not only a personal enemy but a parasitic system or individual that feeds off the youth's energy and trust.

When read through the lens of youth cultural studies, this lyric resonates strongly with themes of alienation and rebellion among adolescents. Sociologically, heavy metal has often been theorized as a refuge for disenfranchised youth. According to Yasemin Ata (2019), negative stigma toward heavy metal (from other social groups) often reinforces an "othering" process, which deepens the sense of exclusion for metal fans (Ata, 2019). In this excerpt, the speaker's struggle can be understood as part of that social marginalization; the "parasite" may represent those moralistic or judgmental social forces that reject or invalidate metal identities.

Additionally, individualism plays a major role. Arnett (2000, as cited in *Heavy-Metal*

Music, Individualism, and Adolescent Alienation) argues that American youth socialization promotes radical individualism, which can generate both independence and isolation (Arnett, 2000). This alienated selfhood appears in the lyric's repeated references to being "low," "scattered," and perpetually in motion toward an "unknown" destination. The unresolved journey metaphor suggests a life project that is both self-directed and estranged.

From a psychological perspective, the feeling of being "trashed and scattered" may be read as a manifestation of emotional dysregulation and possible existential dislocation. Empirical research suggests that listeners of heavier rock or metal music sometimes report using music as a form of catharsis and emotional processing (Springer, 2021). The speaker's open defiance—vowing to "take you out"—can therefore be seen not only as aggression but as a coping mechanism: a way to re-empower themselves within a hostile or neglectful environment.

Finally, the moral dimension of casting the first stone may reflect a kind of subcultural ethics. In metal subcultures, authenticity, confrontation, and refusal to submit often carry moral weight (Weinstein, 1991). The speaker's choice to resist, rather than passively suffer, becomes an ethical stance. By refusing to be a victim, they validate their own value, contrasting sharply with the parasitic others who have attempted to define or exploit them.

In conclusion, the excerpt from "*Trashed and Scattered*" exemplifies how Avenged Sevenfold use's symbolic structure and antagonistic narrative to articulate youth alienation and resistance. Through a structuralist analysis we see layered binaries of despair/agency and fragmentation/cohesion, while through youth cultural studies the lyric reflects broader subcultural dynamics of marginalization, individualism, and moral resistance. The result is a potent allegory of a disillusioned young self that nevertheless fights back — not just to survive, but to claim dignity.

Seize the Day

The excerpt from *Seize the Day* constructs a dense emotional landscape in which love, mortality, memory, and uncertainty are interwoven through repeated contrasts and symbolic images. Rather than functioning simply as a song about loss, the lyric stages a conflict between the desire to hold on and the inevitability of change. The opening line, "Seize the day or die regretting the time you lost," immediately establishes the song's central tension between action and regret. This is not merely a motivational statement; it carries the force of an ultimatum, suggesting that time is so limited that inaction becomes a form of self-destruction. The lyric then deepens this tension with the line, "It's empty and cold without you here, too many people to ache over," which transforms absence into emotional desolation. The phrase "too many people to ache over" broadens the scope of grief, implying that loss is not isolated but cumulative, distributed across relationships and memories.

A structuralist reading helps clarify how the song organizes meaning through oppositions. The lyric repeatedly sets up pairs such as presence and absence, action and

regret, life and death, and memory and forgetting. In this sense, the song does not simply express emotion; it structures emotion through language. The line “I see my vision burn, I feel my memories fade with time” is especially important because it links perception and memory to decay. The image of “burn” suggests sudden destruction, while “fade” indicates gradual erosion, so the lyric presents loss as both immediate and slow-moving. This combination gives the emotional world of the song a sense of instability, as if the speaker is watching meaning disappear in real time. The follow-up line, “But I’m too young to worry,” introduces a striking contradiction. Youth is usually associated with growth, possibility, and vitality, yet here it is connected to fear, vulnerability, and premature awareness of mortality. This paradox enriches the song’s meaning by showing that youth does not protect the speaker from existential anxiety; instead, it intensifies it.

The relational dimension of the lyric also deserves close attention. When the speaker says, “I found you here, now please just stay for a while,” the tone becomes intimate and dependent. The request is temporary in wording, but emotionally it carries a much larger desire for permanence. This is made even clearer in the line, “I hand you my mortal life, but will it be forever?” The phrase “mortal life” is especially powerful because it reminds the listener that even the most profound emotional attachment exists within the limits of human finitude. The question “will it be forever?” exposes the instability at the heart of the relationship: the speaker wants lasting presence, yet already knows that such permanence may be impossible. The lyric therefore creates a pattern in which love offers comfort while simultaneously revealing its fragility. The statement “We both know the day will come” reinforces that awareness, making separation sound unavoidable rather than accidental. In this way, the song presents love not as a stable refuge, but as a temporary resistance to time.

Another significant feature of the song is the way it turns memory into a fragile object. The phrase “A melody, a memory, or just one picture” condenses the emotional residue of experience into small, partial forms. A melody can be repeated, a memory can be distorted, and a picture captures only one moment, so each image suggests both preservation and incompleteness. The lyric therefore implies that relationships survive only through fragments. This idea becomes more explicit in the lines “Newborn life replacing all of us / Changing this fable we live in,” which shift the focus from individual emotion to generational change. The phrase “newborn life” suggests renewal, but this renewal comes at the cost of displacement, since one life replaces another. The word “fable” is also important because it frames existence as a story that is continually rewritten. The question “No longer needed here so where do we go?” expresses a sense of exclusion that goes beyond personal sadness. It reflects the fear of being left behind by a world that keeps moving forward without offering certainty or belonging.

Youth Cultural Studies can further illuminate why the song resonates so strongly with younger audiences. The lyric captures the intensity with which young people often experience love, loss, and uncertainty. The repeated urgency of “Seize the day” speaks to a youth culture that is deeply aware of time but not yet reconciled to its consequences. At the same time, the emotional dependence expressed in “I don’t want to leave you” and

"Please tell me what we have is real" reflects the instability often associated with adolescent attachment. Such lines suggest that emotional bonds in youth are experienced as both deeply meaningful and deeply vulnerable. The song also reflects a developmental tension between wanting certainty and confronting ambiguity. The question "But girl, what if there is no eternal life?" reveals that the speaker is not only afraid of separation in this world but also uncertain about any promise of transcendence beyond it. In this sense, the song's emotional force comes from its refusal to offer stable answers.

The closing lines further reinforce the song's atmosphere of loss and dislocation. "Silence you lost me, no chance for one more day" and "I stand here alone / Falling away from you, no chance to get back home" create a final image of separation that feels both emotional and spatial. The word "silence" implies the breakdown of communication, while "no chance for one more day" suggests that time itself has run out. The phrase "falling away from you" conveys movement without control, as if the speaker is drifting beyond reach. Meanwhile, "no chance to get back home" turns separation into exile, suggesting that the loss of the loved one is also the loss of security, identity, and belonging. These closing images bring together the song's major concerns: memory fades, love cannot be held indefinitely, and time moves forward regardless of emotional desire. The result is a lyric that transforms personal grief into a larger meditation on human vulnerability.

Overall, "Seize the Day" presents a carefully structured emotional narrative in which love, mortality, and memory are constantly shaped by oppositional meaning. Through repeated contrasts between presence and absence, youth and decay, and permanence and loss, the lyric reveals how fragile human attachment can be. Structuralism helps explain how these oppositions generate meaning within the text, while Youth Cultural Studies situates the song within the emotional world of adolescence and young adulthood. The lyric's power lies in its ability to make existential anxiety feel intimate and immediate. Rather than speaking about loss in general terms, it gives loss a voice, a syntax, and a series of images that remain psychologically vivid. For that reason, the song can be understood as both a personal lament and a broader reflection on the difficulty of preserving meaning in a transient world.

Sidewinder

In the selected verses of *Sidewinder*, the speaker grapples with an intense struggle over autonomy and self-determination:

"I can't regret, can't escape decisions made for me, no control ... Wrapped around I'll bury my fangs inside ... My instincts are cold blooded hate ... to you I'm the bearer of fate ... You can feel my strength destroy you ... from the venomous bite ..."

From a structuralist perspective, these lyrics construct a symbolic network organised around several interrelated binary oppositions, including agency versus destiny, control versus powerlessness, and life versus venom. The repeated declaration, "I can't ... no control," foregrounds the speaker's inability to determine their own course of action,

suggesting that crucial decisions have been imposed by external forces. This condition of powerlessness is subsequently disrupted by increasingly violent imagery, such as “*bury my fangs inside*,” “*bearer of fate*,” and “*venomous bite*,” through which the speaker symbolically reclaims authority. Rather than representing violence as an end in itself, these metaphors function as expressions of agency emerging from prolonged experiences of constraint, illustrating how resistance becomes the only perceived means of recovering autonomy.

This progression also establishes a narrative reversal in which the speaker moves from passive submission to active resistance. Initially positioned as someone whose life is directed by others, the speaker gradually assumes control by embracing a more confrontational identity. Such a transformation resembles Propp's narrative function of struggle, although the conflict unfolds primarily within the self rather than against an external antagonist. The recurring image of the fangs is particularly significant because it symbolises both instinct and self-defence. As an inherent part of the speaker's identity, the fangs suggest that resistance originates from an internal struggle to regain ownership over one's life rather than from an externally imposed desire for aggression.

Viewed through the lens of Youth Cultural Studies, the speaker's repeated insistence that decisions have been made on their behalf reflects a broader generational experience of negotiating autonomy within restrictive social environments. The lyric does not merely express frustration; instead, it symbolises the erosion of personal agency that frequently accompanies adolescence when institutional, familial, or social structures limit opportunities for independent decision-making. This interpretation is reinforced by Gomes et al. (2023), who argue that adolescents experiencing limited encouragement to exercise autonomy gradually develop a diminished sense of personal agency. Their findings provide an important interpretative framework for understanding the speaker's declaration, “*I can't escape decisions made for me*,” suggesting that the lyric represents not only emotional helplessness but also the internalisation of restricted self-determination.

The symbolic shift from resignation to aggression becomes even more meaningful when considered alongside research on autonomy-supportive environments. Tamura et al. (2023) demonstrate that adolescents who receive greater support for autonomous decision-making tend to experience stronger psychological well-being and a more secure sense of self. In *Sidewinder*, however, the speaker occupies the opposite position. The recurring emphasis on externally imposed decisions is followed by images of venom and destruction, implying that agency can only be reclaimed through symbolic confrontation. Consequently, the violent imagery should not be understood simply as an endorsement of aggression but rather as a metaphorical response to prolonged experiences of disempowerment, where resistance becomes a means of reconstructing identity.

This symbolic struggle over control can also be interpreted through the concept of perceived behavioural control. According to Totura et al. (2019), adolescents' beliefs about their ability to influence circumstances significantly shape both their emotional responses and behavioural choices. Their findings strengthen the interpretation of the recurring phrase “*no control*,” suggesting that the speaker's escalating hostility reflects

the psychological consequences of perceived powerlessness rather than an inherent disposition toward violence. Within this context, the metaphor of the “*venomous bite*” represents an attempt to restore agency after repeated experiences of external domination, transforming violence into a symbolic language of self-assertion instead of simple destruction.

Taken together, these textual and theoretical insights demonstrate that *Sidewinder* portrays youth alienation as a condition rooted in fractured agency rather than social isolation alone. Through its movement from enforced passivity to symbolic resistance, the song illustrates how the loss of autonomy generates emotional conflict that ultimately manifests through images of violence and defiance. The structural oppositions embedded within the lyrics, supported by contemporary scholarship on adolescent agency and perceived behavioural control, reveal that the speaker's rebellion is fundamentally an effort to reclaim ownership over identity and destiny. In doing so, *Sidewinder* positions youth alienation as a deeply emotional and cultural struggle, where resistance emerges as both a response to external constraints and a symbolic attempt to reconstruct the self.

The Wicked End

While in *The Wicked End*, Avenged Sevenfold constructs a lyrical landscape dominated by moral uncertainty and existential anxiety through a sequence of prophetic and biblical images:

“Voice your prophecy, shed us some light / Feel sorrow for mankind’s chance to survive / Swallowed lies ... A stab in the dark but it wounded our will ... Lust and power, indulgence, no fear / Left with his sins ... how does this end?”

From a structuralist perspective, the passage is organised around a series of interconnected binary oppositions, including truth versus deception, hope versus despair, sin versus redemption, and power versus vulnerability. The opening plea, “*Voice your prophecy, shed us some light*,” immediately positions the collective speaker within a condition of uncertainty, where knowledge is absent and guidance must come from an external source. This expectation is quickly undermined by the admission that humanity has already “*swallowed lies*,” indicating that deception has not merely been encountered but willingly internalised. The subsequent image of “*a stab in the dark*” intensifies this symbolic progression. Rather than depicting darkness as simple ignorance, the lyric presents deception as an active force capable of wounding collective moral resolve, suggesting that alienation emerges through the gradual erosion of ethical certainty rather than through physical isolation alone.

The biblical imagery further deepens this moral conflict. The reference to the apple and the declaration that “*Adam was right*” invoke the mythic narrative of the Fall, transforming the biblical account into a symbolic framework through which the speaker reflects on temptation, desire, and human imperfection. Instead of functioning as a theological statement, these images portray moral failure as an enduring condition embedded within human experience. The sequence linking “*lust and power*” with “*indulgence*” and finally “*Left with his sins*” establishes a recurring pattern in which the

pursuit of power inevitably culminates in guilt and existential uncertainty. The concluding question, "*How does this end?*" therefore represents more than fear of punishment; it expresses profound uncertainty about whether redemption remains possible once deception and desire have become internalised.

This progression also establishes a narrative movement from anticipation to moral disillusionment. The speaker begins by seeking revelation, confronts the consequences of deception, and ultimately arrives at an unresolved moral crisis. Rather than offering certainty, the lyric deliberately leaves the ending unresolved, reinforcing a sense of existential instability. The repeated anticipation of an ending reflects a condition in which moral clarity has collapsed, leaving the speaker caught between the recognition of guilt and the uncertain possibility of redemption. In this way, the song presents moral turmoil as an ongoing psychological and cultural struggle rather than a problem that can be easily resolved.

Viewed through the lens of Youth Cultural Studies, these biblical symbols function less as expressions of religious belief than as cultural resources for articulating youth disillusionment. Rowe (2018) argues that young metal fans frequently employ religious imagery to negotiate questions of identity, authenticity, and emotional struggle rather than to affirm theological commitments. This perspective supports the interpretation that references to prophecy, Adam, and sin operate as symbolic expressions of fractured identity and ethical uncertainty. Instead of presenting a religious narrative, the lyrics appropriate familiar biblical symbols to communicate the anxieties of young people confronting unstable moral landscapes.

The song's repeated concern with deception and corrupted authority also reflects broader patterns of youth alienation. Haenfler (2013) observes that many participants in metal subculture reject dominant social institutions because they perceive them as morally inconsistent or detached from their lived experiences. This insight strengthens the interpretation of "*swallowed lies*" and "*mankind's chance to survive*," suggesting that these images represent not merely personal disappointment but a collective distrust of social and moral authority. Consequently, the speaker's despair emerges from the perception that systems intended to provide guidance have themselves become sources of deception.

Likewise, the recurring emphasis on "*lust and power*" does not celebrate transgression but interrogates its consequences. Weinstein (1991) argues that heavy metal culture frequently redefines power through authenticity, confrontation, and self-awareness rather than through conventional measures of success. Read in this context, the lyric's movement from power and indulgence to the acknowledgement of sin illustrates that the pursuit of agency is inseparable from moral responsibility. The speaker ultimately recognises that the desire for power carries unavoidable ethical consequences, transforming rebellion into a moment of self-reflection rather than simple resistance.

Overall, *The Wicked End* constructs moral turmoil through the interaction of prophetic imagery, biblical symbolism, and existential questioning. Rather than

presenting a straightforward religious narrative, the song uses these symbols to explore deception, guilt, and the uncertainty surrounding moral choice. Supported by studies on youth culture and metal subculture, the lyrics reveal how religious imagery becomes a powerful medium through which young people negotiate identity, authority, and ethical responsibility. As a result, *The Wicked End* reinforces the album's broader portrayal of youth alienation as a condition shaped not only by emotional conflict but also by the collapse of moral certainty.

Strength of the World

Rather than portraying alienation through social rebellion alone, *Strength of the World* presents it as a consequence of profound personal loss. The song opens with images of family tragedy before gradually shifting toward emotional endurance:

"My story starts the day they said she can't be found / ... Mother lies with your father and sister too ... Shot down by the outlaws ... Sorrow swallows my screams."

"Strength of the world is on my shoulders ... Ice in my veins for those who'll die."

From a structuralist perspective, these lyrics are organised through several interconnected binary oppositions, including loss versus endurance, sorrow versus strength, silence versus expression, and death versus survival. The opening lines establish a narrative dominated by absence and grief. The statement "*she can't be found*" introduces uncertainty before the subsequent references to the deaths of family members intensify the emotional weight carried by the speaker. Rather than explicitly describing revenge or heroism, the lyrics foreground overwhelming bereavement, culminating in the phrase "*Sorrow swallows my screams*," where grief suppresses the speaker's ability to articulate pain. The metaphor suggests that suffering is experienced internally, leaving emotional expression silenced rather than resolved.

The chorus marks a noticeable shift in tone without entirely abandoning this sense of loss. The declaration "*Strength of the world is on my shoulders*" introduces the image of an overwhelming burden rather than an unquestionable position of power. Likewise, "*Ice in my veins*" does not necessarily signify emotional superiority or fearlessness; instead, it may indicate emotional detachment developed in response to trauma. Read alongside the preceding verses, the image of coldness appears less as a celebration of resilience than as evidence that grief has fundamentally altered the speaker's emotional state. The movement from sorrow to strength therefore reflects adaptation rather than complete recovery, suggesting that endurance emerges through suffering instead of replacing it.

This progression also creates a narrative transformation in which loss reshapes the speaker's identity. Rather than depicting a simple transition from victim to hero, the lyrics present strength as inseparable from grief. The speaker does not overcome tragedy so much as continue carrying its emotional consequences. Consequently, the burden described in the chorus derives its significance from the preceding experiences of loss, indicating that identity is reconstructed through memory and endurance rather than restored to its former state.

Viewed through the lens of Youth Cultural Studies, this negotiation between vulnerability and endurance reflects experiences that resonate with many young people confronting emotional hardship. Rowe (2018) observes that emotional struggle occupies a central place within metal culture, where expressions of pain frequently become important resources for constructing identity and authenticity. This perspective supports the interpretation of *Strength of the World*, in which grief is not portrayed as weakness but as an experience through which the speaker redefines their sense of self. The emphasis on family loss and emotional perseverance therefore reflects a broader process of identity formation shaped by adversity rather than by triumph.

The lyrics also resonate with discussions of belonging within metal subcultures. Haenfler (2013) argues that heavy metal communities often provide spaces where young people experiencing marginalisation can express emotions that are difficult to communicate within mainstream social settings. This observation helps explain why the speaker's private grief gradually develops into a language of endurance. Rather than suggesting that the speaker becomes a symbolic guardian or heroic figure, the chorus expresses an attempt to carry emotional suffering without surrendering to it. In this sense, strength functions less as domination than as perseverance in the face of continued loss.

The emotional transformation portrayed throughout the song can likewise be understood in relation to research on music and coping. Lepping et al. (2025) argue that music provides adolescents with opportunities to process grief and regulate intense emotional experiences. This perspective reinforces the interpretation that the movement from "*Sorrow swallows my screams*" to "*Strength of the world is on my shoulders*" represents an evolving emotional response to trauma rather than its resolution. The lyrics therefore illustrate how painful experiences can be reinterpreted through symbolic language, allowing emotional suffering to be acknowledged without being erased.

Overall, *Strength of the World* portrays youth alienation through the lasting emotional consequences of loss rather than through open rebellion or social confrontation. The structural progression from silence to endurance, supported by studies on youth culture and adolescent emotional development, suggests that the speaker's strength remains inseparable from grief. Instead of proposing complete redemption, the song presents resilience as an ongoing process in which identity is continually negotiated through memory, suffering, and the determination to endure.

Betrayed

Unlike several other tracks on *City of Evil*, *Betrayed* presents youth alienation through the intimate experience of emotional rupture rather than through external conflict or apocalyptic imagery. The lyrics centre on the collapse of trust within a deeply valued relationship, portraying betrayal as an event that fundamentally reshapes the speaker's emotional world:

*"Passion in my eyes, I lived it every day ... But how could you go throw it all away?
... I feel it burn inside ... Took away the only thing I loved ... When my life ends,*

I'll leave this scar."

From a structuralist perspective, these lyrics are organised around a series of binary oppositions, including passion versus loss, trust versus betrayal, presence versus absence, and permanence versus impermanence. The opening declaration, "*Passion in my eyes, I lived it every day,*" establishes emotional commitment as the foundation of the speaker's identity. Rather than describing passion as a temporary feeling, the lyric presents it as an enduring condition that shapes everyday life. This sense of continuity is immediately disrupted by the question, "*But how could you go throw it all away?*" The abrupt transition from devotion to disbelief creates the central structural tension of the passage, highlighting the collapse of an emotional reality that the speaker had previously regarded as stable. The betrayal therefore functions not merely as the end of a relationship but as the destruction of a meaningful emotional framework through which the speaker had understood both self and others.

The emotional intensity of this rupture is further reinforced through the recurring imagery of fire and physical injury. The phrase "*I feel it burn inside*" transforms psychological pain into a bodily sensation, suggesting that betrayal cannot be confined to memory or thought but is experienced as an immediate emotional reality. Importantly, the lyric does not elaborate on the specific circumstances of the betrayal; instead, it emphasises its emotional consequences. This absence of narrative detail directs attention away from the external event itself and toward the speaker's internal response. The image of burning therefore functions less as evidence of uncontrolled anger than as a metaphor for emotional suffering that continues long after the relationship has fractured.

This symbolic progression reaches its culmination in the final image of the scar: "*When my life ends, I'll leave this scar.*" Rather than suggesting literal physical injury or inevitable death, the lyric emphasises permanence. Unlike the burning sensation, which conveys immediate emotional intensity, the scar signifies what remains after the initial pain has subsided. The juxtaposition of fire and scar establishes a temporal movement from acute suffering to lasting emotional memory, implying that betrayal leaves traces that continue to shape identity over time. The reference to the end of life should therefore be understood cautiously. The lyric does not necessarily claim that betrayal leads directly to death; instead, it employs mortality as a rhetorical device to emphasise the enduring significance of emotional wounds. Within the textual structure, the scar becomes the final symbolic residue of a relationship whose emotional consequences cannot easily be erased.

The narrative progression throughout the excerpt reflects this gradual transformation of emotional experience. The speaker begins by recalling complete emotional investment, confronts the unexpected collapse of that commitment, experiences intense psychological pain, and ultimately recognises that the consequences of betrayal will remain part of their identity. Rather than depicting recovery or revenge, the lyrics leave the emotional conflict unresolved. This absence of closure is significant because it reinforces the sense that alienation is produced not only by separation from another person but also by the disruption of one's emotional certainty. The speaker no

longer questions only the actions of the other individual; they are also forced to renegotiate their own understanding of trust, attachment, and emotional security.

Such themes strongly resonate with broader experiences of adolescence and emerging adulthood, periods during which intimate relationships often become central to identity formation. From the perspective of Youth Cultural Studies, the intensity of the speaker's emotional response reflects the importance that young people frequently attach to romantic relationships as spaces of belonging, validation, and self-definition. Because these relationships often contribute to the development of personal identity, experiences of betrayal may be interpreted not simply as interpersonal conflict but as disruptions to the individual's broader sense of self. The lyrics capture this process by presenting emotional loss as something that extends beyond the relationship itself, reshaping the speaker's perception of identity and emotional continuity.

This interpretation is supported by Bernstein (2017), who argues that emotional attachment frequently occupies a particularly significant position within youth subcultures because close interpersonal relationships often provide stability amid broader experiences of social uncertainty. Bernstein's discussion helps explain why the speaker's repeated emphasis on passion and loss carries such emotional weight. The declaration that the other person "*took away the only thing I loved*" should not necessarily be interpreted literally as the loss of every meaningful relationship. Instead, it reflects the speaker's subjective experience that an emotionally central source of meaning has disappeared. Bernstein's work therefore reinforces the interpretation that the lyrics portray betrayal as an identity-disrupting experience rather than simply a failed romance.

The emotional consequences represented in *Betrayed* also align with observations regarding identity formation within metal culture. Rowe (2011) argues that heavy metal frequently provides young listeners with symbolic resources through which painful personal experiences can be interpreted and expressed. Rather than suppressing emotional suffering, metal music often transforms grief, anger, and disappointment into narratives that listeners can recognise and emotionally inhabit. This perspective strengthens the interpretation of the scar as a symbolic marker of lived experience rather than a romanticised celebration of suffering. Within the song, the scar signifies that emotional pain has become integrated into the speaker's identity, not because suffering is desirable, but because it cannot simply be forgotten. The lyric therefore reflects a process through which personal experience is given symbolic form, allowing emotional wounds to be acknowledged rather than concealed.

The relationship between betrayal and identity is further illuminated by psychological research examining adolescent emotional development. Rhoades et al. (2010) demonstrate that experiences of romantic rejection and betrayal can contribute to heightened emotional distress, including symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. While *Betrayed* should not be interpreted as a clinical representation of mental health, these findings provide a useful framework for understanding the intensity of the speaker's emotional language. The recurring imagery of burning, loss, and

permanence reflects how emotionally significant relationships may shape an individual's broader sense of well-being, particularly during developmental periods in which identity remains closely connected to interpersonal attachment. The lyrics therefore communicate the psychological depth of betrayal without requiring readers to assume consequences beyond those directly suggested by the text.

Music itself also plays an important role in shaping how such emotions are experienced and expressed. McFerran and Saarikallio (2009) argue that adolescents frequently engage with emotionally intense music as a means of processing difficult emotional experiences. Their findings support the interpretation that the emotional intensity of *Betrayed* functions not simply to dramatize suffering but to provide a symbolic language through which grief and disappointment become expressible. The repeated references to burning, loss, and scars therefore operate as emotional metaphors that enable listeners to recognise complex feelings that may otherwise remain difficult to articulate. Rather than encouraging despair, the song creates a space in which emotional pain can be acknowledged and interpreted through shared symbolic expression.

The emotional themes explored in *Betrayed* also reflect broader experiences of American youth during the early 2000s. This period was characterised by increasing uncertainty surrounding personal identity, social relationships, and future expectations, as young people came of age amid the cultural consequences of the September 11 attacks, prolonged military conflict, and shifting social values. Although the lyrics do not explicitly reference these historical events, their emphasis on fractured trust and emotional insecurity resonates with a generation negotiating instability in both public and private life. Within this context, the collapse of an intimate relationship becomes more than an isolated personal event; it symbolically reflects a wider experience of uncertainty in which previously reliable sources of security and belonging appear increasingly fragile.

In sum, *Betrayed* represents youth alienation through the gradual transformation of emotional commitment into enduring psychological loss. The structural progression from passion to betrayal, reinforced by the recurring imagery of fire and scars, demonstrates how intimate relationships contribute to the construction of personal identity and how their collapse leaves lasting emotional traces. Supported by scholarship on youth culture, metal identity, adolescent relationships, and emotional regulation, the lyrics reveal that betrayal functions less as a dramatic narrative event than as a sustained process through which trust, attachment, and self-understanding are fundamentally reconfigured. Rather than overstating the symbolic significance of the text, the song derives its emotional power from its careful portrayal of how deeply personal loss can become intertwined with the ongoing negotiation of identity among American youth in the mid-2000s.

M.I.A.

Closing *City of Evil*, *M.I.A.* shifts the album's exploration of youth alienation from personal grief and moral uncertainty to the psychological consequences of war. Rather than celebrating military heroism, the song foregrounds the emotional conflict of a young soldier whose physical presence on the battlefield is continually challenged by an

enduring attachment to home and family. Through recurring contrasts between warfare and domestic life, the lyrics construct alienation not as separation from society alone but as the fragmentation of identity under the pressures of violence.

"I walk your land, but don't belong ... I'm far from home and I'm fighting your war ... I see our mothers filled with tears ... Until I make it home to you ... Memories won't let you cry / Unless I don't return tonight."

From a structuralist perspective, the lyrics are organised around several interconnected binary oppositions, including belonging versus alienation, duty versus personal desire, home versus battlefield, and life versus death. These oppositions do not merely create dramatic tension but provide the underlying structure through which the speaker's identity is constructed. The opening declaration, *"I walk your land, but don't belong,"* immediately establishes spatial and emotional separation. Although the speaker occupies a physical place, that place never becomes home. The contrast between *"your land"* and the implied absence of *"my land"* reinforces the speaker's sense of displacement, suggesting that belonging depends not on geographical location but on emotional attachment and cultural identity.

This feeling of displacement is reinforced by the following confession, *"I'm far from home and I'm fighting your war."* The juxtaposition of *"home"* and *"your war"* highlights the distance between personal identity and institutional obligation. The possessive pronoun *"your"* is particularly significant because it creates emotional detachment from the conflict itself. Rather than claiming ownership of the war, the speaker positions it as belonging to someone else, while simultaneously acknowledging participation in it. The lyric therefore avoids presenting the soldier as either a patriotic hero or an unwilling victim. Instead, it captures the ambiguity of an individual caught between personal attachment and external responsibility, where participation does not necessarily imply emotional identification.

Throughout the song, memories of home repeatedly interrupt the imagery of conflict, creating a structural contrast between violence and intimacy. The reference to *"our mothers filled with tears"* introduces familial relationships into an otherwise militarised environment, redirecting attention from combat toward its emotional consequences. Rather than describing military action itself, the lyric foregrounds those who remain behind, suggesting that war extends beyond the battlefield into the lives of families waiting for loved ones to return. The repeated desire to *"make it home to you"* further reinforces this emotional orientation. Home functions not simply as a physical destination but as a symbolic space associated with safety, belonging, and emotional continuity. Consequently, the speaker's longing is directed less toward victory than toward reunion.

The closing lines intensify this emotional tension without abandoning the song's reflective tone. *"Memories won't let you cry / Unless I don't return tonight"* introduces uncertainty regarding both survival and remembrance. Importantly, the lyric does not explicitly describe death; instead, it leaves the possibility unresolved. This ambiguity strengthens the emotional impact because the speaker remains suspended between hope

and loss. The future is presented as uncertain, while memory becomes the only stable connection between the battlefield and home. Rather than constructing a heroic ending, the lyrics conclude with emotional vulnerability, reinforcing the fragile relationship between duty and personal attachment.

The narrative progression reflects this gradual movement from external conflict toward internal reflection. The song begins by describing physical displacement before increasingly focusing on emotional separation and the possibility of irreversible loss. Instead of presenting combat as the central experience, the lyrics consistently return to questions of belonging, memory, and human connection. This progression suggests that the greatest conflict is not fought against an external enemy but within the speaker's own struggle to reconcile military responsibility with personal identity. Such a narrative distinguishes *M.I.A.* from conventional war songs by prioritising emotional consequences over military achievement.

Viewed through the lens of Youth Cultural Studies, the lyrics reflect the uncertainties experienced by many young people confronting responsibilities that exceed their emotional preparedness. Although the speaker is represented as a soldier, the emotional conflict extends beyond military experience to broader questions of identity, belonging, and adulthood. The repeated longing for home illustrates the tension between institutional expectations and personal relationships, suggesting that identity remains closely connected to family and emotional attachment even in circumstances demanding discipline and sacrifice. Rather than presenting adulthood as a state of certainty, the song portrays it as a negotiation between competing loyalties and emotional obligations.

This interpretation becomes particularly meaningful when considered within the historical context in which *City of Evil* was released. Appearing in 2005, the album emerged during the height of the Iraq War, when many American youths were coming of age amid prolonged military conflict, continuous media coverage of war, and growing public debate regarding national policy. While the lyrics do not explicitly reference specific political events, the repeated emphasis on fighting "*your war*" and longing for home resonates with broader cultural anxieties surrounding military service and the human costs of armed conflict. The song therefore reflects a generation increasingly aware that war could profoundly affect not only national identity but also personal relationships, emotional well-being, and future aspirations.

The emotional distance expressed throughout *M.I.A.* also aligns with broader discussions of youth identity within periods of social uncertainty. Youth Cultural Studies emphasises that identity is continually negotiated through interactions between personal experience and larger cultural structures. In *M.I.A.*, this negotiation is represented through the speaker's simultaneous participation in war and emotional refusal to identify completely with it. The battlefield becomes a space occupied physically but never fully accepted psychologically, while home remains emotionally present despite geographical absence. The resulting tension illustrates how identity can become fragmented when external obligations conflict with deeply held personal attachments.

Rather than relying extensively on external psychological or military research, the

song itself provides sufficient textual evidence to demonstrate this emotional fragmentation. The recurring opposition between “*your land*” and “*home*,” together with the persistent references to memory, family, and uncertain return, consistently reinforces the central theme of alienation. Each symbolic image contributes to the same structural pattern: physical presence is repeatedly contrasted with emotional absence, while military duty is continually interrupted by intimate memories of those left behind. This internal consistency allows the lyrics to construct a coherent representation of displacement without requiring elaborate symbolic interpretation beyond what the text itself suggests.

Moreover, the restrained emotional language strengthens the authenticity of the speaker's voice. Instead of relying on dramatic declarations of patriotism or explicit condemnation of war, the lyrics communicate conflict through relatively simple expressions of longing and uncertainty. The understated quality of lines such as “*I'm far from home*” and “*Until I make it home to you*” makes the emotional tension more persuasive because the speaker remains focused on personal relationships rather than ideological positions. As a result, the song encourages listeners to understand war through its human consequences rather than through narratives of victory or defeat.

Ultimately, *M.I.A.* represents youth alienation as a condition produced by emotional displacement rather than physical isolation alone. Through the recurring oppositions between home and battlefield, belonging and estrangement, memory and uncertainty, the lyrics portray a young individual attempting to preserve a sense of personal identity while confronting circumstances that continually challenge it. Read within the sociocultural context of mid-2000s America, the song reflects the anxieties of a generation shaped by prolonged military conflict and growing uncertainty about duty, belonging, and the meaning of home. Instead of presenting war as a source of heroism, *M.I.A.* concludes *City of Evil* by emphasising the emotional costs of conflict, reinforcing the album's broader portrayal of youth alienation and moral turmoil as deeply interconnected experiences.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *City of Evil* demonstrates that Avenged Sevenfold constructs a coherent representation of youth alienation and moral turmoil through recurring symbolic structures embedded across the album's eleven tracks. Employing a structuralist approach, the study reveals that the lyrics consistently organize meaning through binary oppositions such as control versus powerlessness, belonging versus alienation, faith versus deception, life versus death, war versus home, and loyalty versus betrayal. These oppositions are not isolated within individual songs but function collectively to establish a unified narrative in which personal suffering, emotional conflict, and moral uncertainty become interconnected aspects of youth experience. Across tracks such as *The Beast and the Harlot*, *Sidewinder*, *Strength of the World*, *Betrayed*, and *M.I.A.*, the recurring symbolic patterns reinforce an overarching structure

that portrays alienation as a condition shaped by fractured relationships, loss of belonging, ethical conflict, and the search for meaning amid social instability.

Viewed through the perspective of Youth Cultural Studies, these structural patterns also reflect the broader sociocultural experiences of American youth during the mid-2000s. Rather than functioning merely as expressions of individual emotion, the lyrics articulate collective anxieties emerging from a historical context marked by post-9/11 uncertainty, prolonged military conflict, institutional distrust, and shifting moral values. The repeated imagery of violence, betrayal, displacement, and emotional suffering therefore operates as a symbolic language through which young people negotiate identity, responsibility, and belonging. By connecting intimate emotional experiences with wider cultural concerns, *City of Evil* presents youth alienation not simply as psychological isolation but as a shared cultural condition shaped by the tensions of contemporary American society.

Ultimately, this article journal demonstrates that *City of Evil* functions as a significant cultural text whose meanings are constructed through recurring symbolic relationships rather than isolated lyrical expressions. A structuralist reading reveals that the album develops a consistent narrative framework in which youth alienation and moral turmoil are repeatedly articulated through interconnected binary oppositions and narrative transformations. These findings affirm that contemporary heavy metal can serve as an important medium for representing the emotional and cultural experiences of American youth, illustrating how popular music reflects broader social realities while simultaneously providing symbolic resources through which listeners interpret identity, conflict, and belonging. By examining the album through structuralism and Youth Cultural Studies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how heavy metal lyrics operate as cultural narratives that represent the complexities of youth experience in mid-2000s America.

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