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THE REPRESENTATION OF EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY IN *CALLA* SONG BY WAVE TO EARTH: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF ROLAND BARTHES

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the semiotic meanings of the song "*Calla*" by Wave to Earth through Roland Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. The song portrays emotional intimacy, vulnerability, and healing using natural imagery such as rain, sunlight, clouds, and flowers. It raises a research problem regarding how linguistic signs in the lyrics represent love as a protective and transforming force within cultural contexts. The theoretical foundation is grounded in Barthes' semiotic theory, which uncovers multiple layers of meaning from literal narrative to deeper emotional and ideological associations. A qualitative descriptive method is applied by analyzing selected lyrics as textual data, carefully interpreting symbolic expressions of emotional vulnerability, hope, and resilience. Findings reveal that denotatively, the song captures moments of togetherness and care, while at the connotative level, natural metaphors like "*raindrops shine like stars*" symbolize emotional openness and release. Mythologically, the song constructs dominant ideologies portraying love as healing power, nature reflecting human emotions, vulnerability as beauty, and resilience as a process of ongoing growth. Overall, "*Calla*" serves as a poetic reflection on emotional recovery and human intimacy, demonstrating how music functions as a culturally rich system of signs that communicate universal feelings through specific symbolic language. This analysis contributes to the understanding of contemporary pop music as a medium for expressing complex emotional and cultural meanings.

Keyword: semiotics, Roland Barthes, song lyrics, love symbolism, wave to earth

INTRODUCTION

Music has long been recognized as a profound cultural medium that conveys the complexity of human emotions, experiences, and ideologies through sound and language. Among the various ways music communicates, song lyrics stand out as powerful texts capable of carrying multiple layers of meaning. Song lyrics not only present stories or descriptions literally but also trigger emotional responses and



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reflect broader social values and myths. Songs about love, suffering, hope, and vulnerability resonate across personal and cultural boundaries, offering listeners moments of shared reflection and connection. “*Calla*” by Wave to Earth is an example of the profound expressive power of music. This contemporary song uses poetic imagery such as rain, sunlight, clouds, and flowers to depict a narrative rich in emotional intimacy, vulnerability, and healing. These elements of nature become symbolic carriers to explore the themes of love as a protective force, the beauty of vulnerability, and the human capacity for emotional resilience.

In contemporary popular music, particularly within indie and alternative genres, lyrical simplicity is often combined with emotional depth, allowing subtle expressions of feeling to resonate strongly with listeners. Rather than relying on dramatic narratives, many modern songs communicate emotional experiences through quiet moments, repetition, and everyday imagery. This tendency reflects a broader cultural shift in which emotional openness and sensitivity are increasingly valued, especially among younger audiences who seek authenticity and emotional connection in music. As a result, song lyrics function not only as artistic expressions but also as emotional spaces where listeners can recognize, process, and reflect upon their own experiences.

One of the contemporary songs that strongly reflects emotional intimacy and symbolic expression is “*Calla*” by Wave to Earth. The lyrics of the song depict warm moments of togetherness and affection through simple denotative descriptions, such as standing together in the rain, while simultaneously inviting listeners to delve into deeper connotative layers of meaning, where rain symbolizes emotional release, and sunlight offers hope and strength. These metaphors place the song within a broader cultural mythology about the cycle of emotional experiences—sometimes dark and difficult, sometimes bright and refreshing. However, this symbolic richness invites deeper examination and critical analysis to uncover how “*Calla*” constructs meaning beyond its surface narrative.

In spite of the fact that the song appears gentle and minimalistic, its lyrical structure reveals complex emotional tensions, particularly between comfort and uncertainty, hope and impermanence. The repetition of certain phrases and images suggests an underlying anxiety about emotional loss while simultaneously expressing commitment and reassurance. This contrast positions “*Calla*” as a meaningful text for examining how contemporary music negotiates emotional vulnerability, not as weakness, but as an essential aspect of intimacy and care.

To engage with the song’s multiplicity of meanings, this study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory, which is particularly suited for exploring the layered significations within cultural texts. Barthes identifies three levels at which meaning operates: denotation, the literal or explicit meaning; connotation, which includes the emotional and cultural associations evoked; and myth, the ideological



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framework embedded in the sign [Barthes, 1972]. This framework enables a systematic approach to interpreting song lyrics where words serve as signs loaded with cultural and emotional significance. Previous research applying Barthes' semiotics to popular music has revealed how songs communicate ideological messages about identity, love, and personal struggles (Ishar & Irawan, 2023; Yuliana, 2023). Yet, despite growing scholarship, there remains a gap regarding the specific semiotic construction in "*Calla*," a song whose poetic use of nature imagery invites a nuanced engagement with emotional vulnerability as both a personal experience and a culturally valued ideal.

Most existing studies focus on mainstream pop songs or explicitly dramatic lyrical narratives, leaving limited attention to indie songs that employ understated language and emotional subtlety. This gap highlights the need for closer analysis of songs like "*Calla*," where meaning is conveyed through quiet imagery and emotional restraint rather than overt expression. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth semiotic analysis of selected lyrics in the song "*Calla*," focusing on how linguistic signs represent love, emotional closeness, and recovery. At the denotative level, the song's narrative about two individuals sharing a moment in the rain offers a simple yet touching depiction of togetherness and care. At the connotative level, the lyrics "*Raindrops shine like the stars*" become a metaphor for emotional openness and release, implying a process of shared vulnerability. Similarly, the calla lily serves as a symbol of purity and vulnerability, representing the emotional tenderness of the lover and their need for protection. Sunlight appears as a metaphor for hope and emotional energy, contrasting with the anxiety of losing precious moments, evoking a deep fear of impermanence.

On a mythological level, the song "*Calla*" constructs a dominant cultural ideology that frames love as a healing force, vulnerability as a form of beauty, and resilience as a continuous cycle of emotional growth. These myths extend beyond the personal narrative of the song, reflecting collective beliefs and aspirations regarding emotional experiences and human intimacy. Through poetic imagery—particularly elements of nature such as sunlight and rain—the song invites listeners to reconsider vulnerability not as a weakness, but as a transformative and empowering force that connects individual emotions to universal human themes. This multifaceted interpretation positions "*Calla*" not merely as a romantic ballad but as a reflective text on emotional healing, tenderness, and resilience.

Several previous studies support the relevance of this research and provide a theoretical foundation for its analysis. Ishar and Irawan (2023), using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, revealed that connotative meanings and myths in popular song lyrics often construct cultural ideologies surrounding love, loss, and emotional identity. Similarly, Yuliana (2023) found that pop music frequently represents emotional suffering as a normalized component of romantic experience,



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reinforcing cultural myths about love and vulnerability. Rais and Fadillah (2024) demonstrated that symbolic elements such as light and darkness in song lyrics function as representations of emotional struggle and recovery, aligning with the present study's interpretation of natural imagery as metaphors for emotional strength and healing. Furthermore, Fadillah (2025) emphasized that song lyrics serve as culturally rich texts that express emotional resilience and self-recovery through semiotic symbols.

Although these studies have extensively explored semiotics and emotional meanings in song lyrics, none specifically focus on "Calla" by Wave to Earth. Therefore, this research fills an existing gap by offering a detailed semiotic analysis of emotional vulnerability and healing through nature imagery within contemporary indie pop music, contributing to broader discussions on music, emotion, and cultural ideology. Through this analysis, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of contemporary pop music as a means of exploring complex emotions and cultural meanings. It highlights how semiotics provides tools for unraveling the rich and often subtle ways in which songs communicate beyond words, shaping listeners' emotional landscapes and cultural imaginations. Ultimately, this research affirms the importance of paying attention to lyrical content as a point of entry for understanding broader social and emotional dynamics, especially in music that is intimately connected to experiences of love and vulnerability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies in music and cultural analysis emphasize emotional vulnerability as a crucial focus in the examination of song lyrics. Scholars increasingly argue that lyrics do more than convey linguistic meaning; they actively shape listeners' emotional experiences, guide audience responses, and reflect broader cultural values and ideologies. A systematic review and meta-analysis published in *Psychology of Music* (2025) provides strong evidence that song lyrics exert significant psychological influence, particularly in shaping emotional reactions such as empathy, sadness, and resilience. The findings suggest that lyrical narratives play a key role in emotional engagement and cognitive processing during music listening, confirming that lyrics function as powerful emotional stimuli rather than passive textual elements.

Research on emotional perception in music further demonstrates how lyrical content influences listeners' affective experiences. A 2025 study published in *Computers* examined the lyrics of Ed Sheeran and Sia using text-mining and thematic analysis methods. The results reveal that contemporary popular songs rely



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on distinctive linguistic patterns to evoke emotional responses, embedding themes of vulnerability, personal reflection, and relational intimacy within their textual structures. This study illustrates how emotional meaning in lyrics can be systematically identified and measured, offering empirical support for interpretive approaches that view lyrics as emotionally resonant texts.

Beyond qualitative interpretations, computational research has also contributed to understanding emotional expression in song lyrics. The study *From Joy to Fear: A Benchmark of Emotion Estimation in Pop Song Lyrics* (2025) introduces a comprehensive dataset and modeling framework designed to predict emotional content in lyrics. By combining human-annotated data with machine learning techniques, the research maps core emotional dimensions such as joy, sadness, fear, and anger across a wide range of songs. These findings reinforce the notion that emotional vulnerability and affective expression are fundamental components of lyrical meaning and can be systematically analyzed across musical texts.

Emotional themes in lyrics have also been connected to mental health and mood regulation. A 2024 study investigating the relationship between lyrical emotion and depression risk found that individuals with higher vulnerability to depression tend to prefer songs characterized by low emotional valence and mixed emotional tones. This suggests that lyrical emotional patterns may both reflect and influence listeners' psychological states, highlighting the broader behavioral and emotional implications of vulnerability expressed through music.

Taken together, these studies align closely with semiotic perspectives that conceptualize song lyrics as dynamic cultural texts. While semiotic analyses focus on how signs, metaphors, and narratives construct connotative and mythological meanings, recent quantitative research confirms that these symbolic meanings correspond to identifiable emotional patterns that affect listeners across diverse contexts. By bridging qualitative and computational approaches, current scholarship increasingly views emotional vulnerability in song lyrics as a multidimensional phenomenon—constructed through symbolic language and narrative structures and experienced through measurable emotional engagement and psychological response.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to examine the meanings conveyed in the song "*Calla*" by Wave to Earth. A qualitative design is appropriate, as the study aims to interpret symbolic expressions and emotional representations



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within the lyrics, rather than to quantify variables or test causal relationships. In line with Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative inquiry enables researchers to treat texts as cultural artifacts through which meaning is shaped and understood within particular social and cultural settings. The study is informed by a constructivist orientation, which assumes that meaning emerges through social and cultural processes. This orientation is closely aligned with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which serves as the principal analytical framework. Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth are employed to guide the analysis and uncover multiple layers of meaning related to emotional vulnerability, intimacy, and healing as expressed in the song lyrics. The data consist of the official lyrics of "*Calla*," which are analyzed as textual material. Relevant excerpts were selected purposively, with particular attention given to lines that employ natural imagery and convey emotional closeness. Data collection was conducted through document analysis, involving careful and repeated readings of the lyrics to identify key signs, metaphors, and symbolic elements. Data analysis was carried out through an interpretative process by categorizing the selected lyrics according to Barthes' three levels of meaning. The analysis progresses from literal interpretation to deeper emotional and cultural readings, allowing broader themes and underlying ideologies to emerge. To maintain the credibility of the findings, the analytical process was conducted systematically and consistently, following established qualitative research principles as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). In addition, the researcher acknowledges the role of reflexivity in qualitative interpretation. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize, qualitative analysis is shaped by the researcher's theoretical position and interpretive engagement with the data. Therefore, the interpretation of the lyrics is approached with awareness that meaning is co-constructed between the text and the researcher, rather than discovered as an objective truth. This reflexive stance allows for a more transparent and context-sensitive reading of the song. To enhance trustworthiness, the study emphasizes analytical consistency by applying the same semiotic framework across all selected excerpts and ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in the textual evidence of the lyrics. Repeated engagement with the data also supports depth of understanding and reduces the risk of superficial interpretation. Through these procedures, the methodology aims to produce a credible and coherent semiotic reading of emotional vulnerability as represented in the song "*Calla*."

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the semiotic meanings of "*Calla*" based on Barthes' three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth.



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1. Denotative Meaning

At the denotative level, the lyrics of “Calla” describe a situation of togetherness during rainfall:

- *“It’s raining hard today / Let ourselves get wet inside the rain.”*
Literally, the singer and another person are standing together under the rain. The song also mentions a flower:
- *“Calla / Someone said that your time will be over soon.”*
Here, Calla refers directly to a calla lily, a type of flower. In addition, the singer expresses emotional support:
- *“If you don’t have enough sunlight / I’ll blow the clouds away.”*
This line literally indicates someone who tries to restore sunlight by removing clouds. The song also expresses the desire to preserve a beautiful moment:
- *“I hope this moment’s not a daydream.”*
Thus, on the denotative level, the song tells a simple story about emotional closeness, care, and the presence of two individuals sharing a moment in the rain.

2. Connotative Meaning

At the connotative level, the song presents deeper symbolic meanings.

a. Rain as Emotional Vulnerability

Rain symbolizes sadness, emotional release, and vulnerability. The lyric *“Raindrops shine like stars”* metaphorically portrays emotional openness as luminous and hopeful. Like stars lighting the darkness, this image conveys how vulnerability reveals inner truths and fosters intimacy. The phrase *“let ourselves get wet inside the rain”* invites shared emotional exposure and cleansing, highlighting rain as a powerful symbol of connection and healing in the song.

b. Calla as a Symbol of Purity and Fragility

The calla lily traditionally symbolizes purity, elegance, and fragile beauty. In the song, “Calla” metaphorically represents a beloved person who is gentle yet emotionally vulnerable, someone who requires care and emotional protection.

c. “Your Scent” as Emotional Presence

“The whole world is getting filled with your scent” symbolizes how the loved one emotionally dominates the singer’s inner world. The scent represents an emotional atmosphere rather than a physical smell.

d. “Sunlight” as Hope and Emotional Strength

“Sunlight” symbolizes emotional energy, optimism, and mental stability.



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The absence of sunlight implies emotional exhaustion, sadness, or depression.

e. *“Blowing the Clouds Away” as Emotional Protection*

“I’ll blow the clouds away” symbolizes the speaker’s protective role. It reflects a desire to remove emotional burdens and restore hope.

f. *Fear of Losing the Moment*

“I hope this moment’s not a daydream” reflects anxiety about impermanence. The speaker fears that happiness may be temporary or illusory.

g. *Eternal Commitment*

“Bloom yourself until the end / Wherever you are, I’ll be there for you” promises unwavering presence through all seasons of growth.

h. *Transformative Power of Love*

“Raindrops falls like comets” transforms destructive force into beauty through love’s presence.

3. Mythological Meaning

At the myth level, the song constructs several dominant ideologies.

- *Myth 1: Love as a Healing Power*

The song promotes the belief that love can heal emotional wounds and restore hope. Love is presented as a safe emotional space that brings light into darkness—*“Bloom yourself until the end / Wherever you are, I’ll be there for you / My whole world is filled with your scent, babe.”*

- *Myth 2: Nature as a Reflection of Human Emotion*

Rain, clouds, flowers, and sunlight serve as emotional metaphors. This reflects the cultural ideology that human emotions operate like natural cycles—sometimes dark and stormy, sometimes bright and renewing, yet continuously evolving. *“Raindrops shine like the stars / Raindrops falls like comets”* shows nature mirroring emotional highs and lows.

- *Myth 3: Vulnerability as Beauty*

The song promotes the ideology that emotional vulnerability is not a weakness but a valuable and beautiful human quality. Lines such as *“It’s a bit too much for me”* openly acknowledge emotional overwhelm, mythologizing honesty and emotional exposure as signs of deep intimacy.

- *Myth 4: Emotional Resilience and Re-Growth*

“But Calla, you can always grow back” conveys the ideology that emotional wounds are not permanent. Individuals are capable of emotional recovery and personal growth.



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- Myth 5: Emotional Impermanence of Happiness
The repeated line “*I hope this moment’s not a daydream*” constructs the myth that happiness and emotional connection are fragile and temporary. This reflects modern cultural anxiety about the fleeting nature of meaningful emotional experiences.
- Myth 6: Commitment Through Emotional Endurance
The willingness to “*get wet inside the rain*” suggests the myth that true love involves staying present during emotional discomfort. Love is constructed as endurance and shared struggle rather than constant happiness.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that “*Calla*” by Wave to Earth articulates themes of emotional vulnerability and intimacy through multiple layers of meaning embedded in its lyrics. Using Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework, the study illustrates how ordinary references to rain, flowers, sunlight, and togetherness extend beyond their literal sense to convey emotional sensitivity, reassurance, and resilience. At the denotative level, the song offers a simple depiction of shared moments and emotional support. At the connotative level, natural imagery functions as a medium for expressing emotional uncertainty, tenderness, and hope. At the mythological level, the lyrics construct broader cultural narratives that frame love as a source of healing, vulnerability as a meaningful human quality, and emotional renewal as a continuous process.

In conclusion, “*Calla*” highlights the capacity of contemporary music to communicate complex emotional experiences in subtle and reflective ways. The song encourages listeners to reinterpret vulnerability as an integral element of emotional connection and personal development. Through its poetic language and symbolic use of nature, “*Calla*” demonstrates how popular music can operate as a cultural text that bridges individual emotions and shared cultural meanings.

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