



The Semiotics of Romantic Pain: A Barthesian Analysis of Selected Lyrics in Arctic Monkeys' "505"

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 2026-03-28 Revised: 2026-05-28 Accepted: 2026-06-09</p> <p>Keywords: Connotation; Roland Barthes; Romantic Pain; Semiotics; Song Lyrics</p>	<p>This study investigates how romantic pain and nostalgia are semiotically constructed in the lyrics of Arctic Monkeys' "505," employing Roland Barthes' three-level framework of denotation, connotation, and myth as its primary analytical lens. Five linguistically rich expressions were selected from the song; "505," "the knife," "fall short of the mark," "the bite," and "crumble completely", and examined as discrete semiotic units through a qualitative descriptive approach informed by Miles et al.'s (2014) analytical model. The analysis reveals that each expression moves systematically from a literal, accessible meaning at the denotative level, through emotionally layered connotations of longing, fear, inadequacy, and vulnerability, to mythological meanings that naturalize these experiences as universal and culturally inevitable features of romantic life. Collectively, the findings suggest that the song constructs romantic experience not as a condition of joy but as one defined by the emotional weight of memory, unspoken expectation, and the dissolution of self in intimate attachment. These results affirm that popular song lyrics function as culturally embedded semiotic texts capable of encoding and reproducing shared ideological constructions of human emotional experience.</p>

Citation (APA): Harwan, I. F., & Hasbi, M. (2026). The Semiotics of Romantic Pain: A Barthesian Analysis of Selected Lyrics in Arctic Monkeys' "505". *Innovations in Language Education and Literature*, 3(1), 22-32.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always found ways to articulate what resists direct expression. Among the many forms this articulation takes, music occupies a particularly intimate space, one where personal feeling meets cultural convention, and where language is stretched beyond its ordinary function. Song lyrics, in this sense, are not merely aesthetic ornaments; they are semiotic constructions through which composers encode emotional experiences that listeners, often instinctively, recognize as their own. The study of how such meanings are built, layered, and culturally sustained has long been the concern of semiotics, the discipline devoted to understanding how signs produce significance in human life (Chandler, 2022; Eco, 1976).

Within this broader tradition, Roland Barthes offered one of the most enduring frameworks for reading cultural texts. His model of signification, moving from denotation through connotation to myth, provides a way of tracing how an expression that appears linguistically simple can accumulate emotional weight and eventually crystallize into something that feels natural, inevitable, and widely shared (Barthes, 1972). This progression from the literal to the ideological is precisely what makes song lyrics a productive site for semiotic inquiry. Words chosen by a songwriter do not merely describe feelings; they participate in a cultural conversation about what feelings mean, how they should be expressed, and what kinds of emotional experience deserve to be named at all.

This study focuses on "505," a track from Arctic Monkeys' second studio album *Favourite Worst Nightmare* (2007), written and performed by Alex Turner. The song has attracted sustained attention well beyond its initial release, experiencing renewed cultural visibility through social media platforms in recent years (Skinner, 2022). Its longevity is not incidental. Turner's lyrics operate at a register that is simultaneously confessional and elliptical, specific enough to feel personal, yet open enough to accommodate a wide range of listener experience. Lines such as "I'm going back to 505" or "the knife twists at the thought that I should fall



short of the mark" resist paraphrase precisely because their meaning exceeds what any literal reading could recover. It is this resistance that invites semiotic analysis.

The emotional terrain of the song; nostalgia, romantic longing, fear of inadequacy, and the pain of emotional exposure, reflects themes that recur across literary and musical expression precisely because they correspond to universal dimensions of human attachment. Research in psychology and relationship science has consistently shown that romantic love is among the most emotionally complex experiences people navigate, involving not only affection but also anxiety, idealization, and vulnerability (Fávero et al., 2021). When these experiences find their way into song lyrics, they do so through language that is rarely direct. Instead, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued in their foundational work on conceptual metaphor, abstract emotional states are systematically mapped onto concrete physical or spatial domains, a pattern clearly visible in "505," where emotional pain becomes a knife, and longing becomes a journey back to a numbered room.

Previous studies have applied Barthesian semiotics productively to popular song lyrics, demonstrating the framework's capacity to surface cultural meanings embedded in apparently simple expressions (Nurjanah & Nirwana, 2023; Menza & Hariyanto, 2024; Yasa & Djuharie, 2025). These studies have, however, tended to analyze lyrics at the level of the overall song or thematic clusters, with less attention paid to the specific linguistic units, individual words and phrases, through which semiotic layering is most precisely enacted. This study addresses that gap by focusing on five carefully selected expressions from "505," treating each as a discrete sign whose denotative, connotative, and mythological dimensions can be systematically unpacked. In doing so, the analysis aims not only to illuminate this particular song, but to demonstrate how close semiotic reading of lyrical language can reveal the cultural structures through which romantic pain is made meaningful and shared.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics as a Framework for Cultural Analysis

The study of signs and their meanings has occupied scholars across disciplines for well over a century, yet its relevance to the analysis of cultural texts including music has only deepened with time. Ferdinand de Saussure's foundational insight that language is a system of differences, in which meaning arises not from any intrinsic connection between a word and the thing it names but from the relations between signs within a structure, established the conceptual ground on which modern semiotics is built (Saussure, 1916/1983). Charles Sanders Peirce extended this framework by introducing a triadic model of the sign comprising representamen, object, and interpretant that drew attention to the active role of interpretation in the production of meaning (Peirce, 1931–1958). Together, these foundational perspectives established semiotics not merely as a tool for decoding texts, but as a broader inquiry into how human beings make sense of the world through signs.

Roland Barthes developed this tradition in a direction particularly suited to the analysis of popular cultural texts. In *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes demonstrated that everyday objects and expressions, from wrestling matches to margarine advertisements, carry second-order meanings that naturalize particular social values and ideological positions. His subsequent formalization of this insight in *Elements of Semiology* (1968) introduced the layered model of signification that informs the present study: denotation as the first-order, literal meaning of a sign; connotation as the secondary, culturally inflected meanings that accumulate around it; and myth as the ideological level at which connotative meanings become naturalized as common sense. As Barthes (1972) argued, myth does not deny meaning, it empties it of its historical contingency and presents it as natural and inevitable. This capacity to reveal the ideological work performed by apparently innocent expressions makes Barthes' framework especially productive for analyzing song lyrics, where emotional and cultural meanings are routinely compressed into brief, memorable phrases.

Semiotics and the Study of Song Lyrics

The application of semiotic theory to popular music is well established in cultural and linguistic scholarship. Scholars have long recognized that song lyrics function as layered texts in which musical, linguistic, and cultural codes intersect to produce meanings that exceed any single reading (Middleton, 1990; van Leeuwen, 1999). Within this tradition, Barthesian analysis has proven particularly generative, offering analysts a systematic means of moving from surface expression to cultural significance.

Recent studies have extended this tradition in productive directions. Nurjanah and Nirwana (2023) applied Barthes' three-level model to Olivia Rodrigo's "Happier," revealing how the song's lyrics encode culturally

specific beliefs about gendered grief and post-romantic emotional labor. Their analysis demonstrated that connotative meanings in song lyrics are rarely arbitrary, they consistently draw on, and reinforce, broader cultural narratives about how particular kinds of people are expected to feel and respond. Similarly, Menza and Hariyanto (2024) examined SZA's "Good Days," showing how the song constructs emotional resilience as a form of self-directed mythological ideal, happiness reframed as an achievement of inner discipline rather than a relational condition. Yasa and Djuharie (2025) brought the same framework to Kasabian's "Goodbye Kiss," identifying mythological meanings related to masculine emotional collapse and the cultural expectation that romantic loss entails a crisis of identity. Taken together, these studies confirm that Barthesian semiotics is well suited to popular music analysis precisely because popular songs, like myth itself, rely on culturally shared codes to make personal experience feel universal.

Love, Pain, and Emotional Language in Lyrics

The emotional content of romantic song lyrics has attracted sustained scholarly attention from both literary and psychological perspectives. Love songs, as a genre, have been understood as cultural scripts, socially circulated narratives that shape, as much as they reflect, the emotional expectations people bring to romantic relationships (Frith, 1996). Within these scripts, pain occupies a privileged position. Romantic suffering, whether expressed as longing, jealousy, fear of loss, or the aftermath of separation, appears across virtually every musical tradition and historical period, suggesting that it functions as a kind of emotional lingua franca, immediately legible to listeners regardless of their personal experience (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010).

This cultural prevalence of romantic pain in lyrics is not simply a matter of artistic convention. Research in relationship psychology suggests that the emotional experiences most commonly encoded in love songs, attachment anxiety, fear of abandonment, vulnerability in intimacy, correspond to genuine and widely distributed features of human romantic life (Fávero et al., 2021; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). When songwriters give linguistic form to these experiences, they typically do so not through clinical description but through figurative language, metaphor, synecdoche, and symbolic compression that allows abstract emotional states to be grasped concretely. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor provides an important theoretical complement to Barthesian semiotics here: their argument that abstract domains are systematically understood through mappings onto concrete source domains helps explain why emotional pain so frequently appears in song lyrics as physical sensation, spatial movement, or material damage. In "505," this pattern is unmistakable, longing becomes a return journey, fear becomes a twisting knife, and emotional vulnerability becomes the act of crumbling.

The Gap This Study Addresses

Despite the growing body of semiotic research on song lyrics, a consistent limitation runs through existing studies: analysis tends to operate at the level of overall thematic meaning or extended lyrical passages, with relatively little attention to the specific linguistic units, individual words, idiomatic phrases, and figurative expressions through which semiotic layering is most precisely enacted. As Bignell (2002) has noted, semiotic analysis gains much of its analytical power from close attention to the materiality of the sign, the specific choices of language, rhythm, and image that distinguish one expression from another. Studies that treat lyrics primarily as vehicles for broad emotional themes risk missing the ways in which particular words do particular cultural work.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on five carefully selected expressions from Arctic Monkeys' "505," treating each as a discrete semiotic unit whose denotative, connotative, and mythological dimensions can be systematically analyzed in relation to the cultural construction of romantic pain and nostalgia. In doing so, it contributes not only to the growing literature on popular music semiotics, but to a broader understanding of how figurative language in cultural texts encodes and sustains shared emotional meanings..

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to examine the semiotic layers embedded in selected lyrics from Arctic Monkeys' "505." Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate when the primary aim is to provide a careful, systematic interpretation of meaning within naturally occurring texts, rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In the context of literary and linguistic analysis, this design allows the researcher to engage closely with language as it functions in its cultural and aesthetic context, attending to nuance, ambiguity, and layers of significance that quantitative approaches are ill-equipped

to capture. The descriptive orientation of the study does not imply superficiality; rather, it signals a commitment to representing the complexity of the data as faithfully and transparently as possible, without forcing it into predetermined categories or reductive frameworks (Sandelowski, 2000).

The theoretical framework underpinning the analytical procedure is Roland Barthes' three-level model of signification, as elaborated in *Elements of Semiology* (1968) and *Mythologies* (1972). This framework was selected because it provides a structured yet flexible means of moving from the surface form of a linguistic expression to the cultural beliefs and ideological assumptions it encodes. Unlike approaches that treat meaning as a fixed property of a text, Barthes' model treats signification as a dynamic process in which signs accumulate meaning through their embeddedness in cultural contexts, a perspective that aligns well with the interpretive character of song lyric analysis.

Data Source

The primary data for this study consist of selected words and phrases drawn from the lyrics of "505" by Arctic Monkeys, as published on the official lyric platform Genius (2007). The song was chosen for analysis on the basis of several converging considerations. First, its lyrics are widely recognized for their figurative density and emotional complexity, making them particularly suitable for semiotic examination. Second, the song engages explicitly with themes of romantic longing, emotional vulnerability, and nostalgic attachment to place, themes that map directly onto the cultural dimensions of Barthes' mythological level of meaning. Third, its sustained cultural relevance across nearly two decades, including its recent resurgence on social media platforms (Skinner, 2022), suggests that its emotional and cultural meanings continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, lending the analysis broader cultural significance beyond the immediate text.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a systematic process of documentary analysis, a technique widely used in qualitative linguistic and literary research to examine written or recorded texts as primary sources of meaning (Bowen, 2009). The researcher read the full lyrics of "505" multiple times, initially to develop familiarity with the text as a whole, and subsequently with specific attention to expressions whose meanings appeared to exceed their literal referents. Expressions were flagged for inclusion when they met at least one of the following criteria: they employed figurative language such as metaphor, idiom, or symbolic reference; their meaning appeared context-dependent in ways that invited connotative or cultural interpretation; or they contributed directly to the song's central emotional themes of nostalgia, romantic pain, and vulnerability.

From this process, five expressions were identified as analytically productive: "505," "the knife," "fall short of the mark," "the bite," and "crumble completely." These items were selected not on the basis of frequency alone, but on the richness and diversity of the semiotic layers they appeared to encode, together, they represent a range of figurative strategies, from symbolic place reference to embodied metaphor to idiomatic expression, that collectively illuminate the song's construction of romantic experience.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising three iterative stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These stages are not strictly sequential; rather, they operate recursively throughout the analytical process, with each stage informing and refining the others.

In the first stage, data condensation, the five selected expressions were foregrounded against the full lyrical context of the song. Each expression was examined in relation to the lines immediately surrounding it, as well as in relation to the song's overall emotional and thematic arc. This contextualizing move is essential in semiotic analysis, because the connotative and mythological meanings of a sign are rarely recoverable from the sign in isolation, they emerge from its position within a larger signifying system (Barthes, 1968; Hodge & Kress, 1988).

In the second stage, data display, each expression was analyzed systematically across all three levels of Barthes' framework. At the denotative level, the literal, dictionary-accessible meaning of the expression was established. At the connotative level, the emotional, associative, and contextually inflected meanings produced by the expression within the song were identified and interpreted. At the mythological level, the analysis drew on relevant cultural, psychological, and social scientific literature to situate the expression within broader belief systems and ideological assumptions about romantic relationships, emotional pain, and human attachment. This three-column analytical structure; denotation, connotation, myth was applied consistently across all five data items to ensure comparability and transparency.

In the third stage, conclusion drawing and verification, interpretive claims were reviewed against both the textual evidence and the relevant literature to minimize the risk of unsupported or overly subjective readings. Where alternative interpretations were plausible, these were acknowledged and the most textually grounded reading was defended. This verification process draws on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research, particularly credibility and confirmability as a means of ensuring that the analysis remains accountable to the data rather than to the analyst's prior assumptions.

FINDINGS

This section presents the semiotic analysis of five selected expressions from Arctic Monkeys' "505," each examined across the three levels of meaning proposed by Roland Barthes: denotation, connotation, and myth. The analysis moves systematically from the most literal dimension of each expression to its culturally embedded significance, demonstrating how seemingly simple lyrical choices accumulate layers of emotional and ideological meaning. Taken together, the five expressions construct a coherent semiotic portrait of romantic experience defined by longing, self-doubt, fear of emotional harm, and the dissolution of personal boundaries in intimate relationships.

Data 1 "505"

Lyrical context: *"I'm going back to 505"*

Denotation

At its most literal level, "505" is a numerical designation, most plausibly a room number, an apartment, or an address. As a denotative sign, it refers to a specific, bounded physical location that can be identified, returned to, and associated with particular spatial coordinates. The number itself carries no intrinsic emotional content; it is, in the most fundamental semiotic sense, an arbitrary signifier attached to an equally arbitrary referent.

Connotation

Within the context of the song, however, "505" rapidly transcends its function as a neutral locator. The phrase "I'm going back to 505", particularly the verb phrase *going back*, transforms the number into an emotionally saturated destination. The act of return implies a prior departure, a sustained absence, and a persistent pull that has survived whatever distance or time intervened. The number ceases to designate a room and begins to designate a relationship, a set of memories, and an emotional state that the speaker cannot fully leave behind. In this sense, "505" functions as a condensation symbol, a single, compact sign in which an entire emotional history is stored and recalled (Firth, 1973, as cited in Chandler, 2022). The specificity of the number is itself significant: it is not "a place" or "her apartment" but "505", a detail so precise that it signals intimacy, the kind of knowledge that only sustained closeness produces.

Myth

At the mythological level, "505" participates in a broader cultural belief that places are not merely spatial but emotional that certain locations become inseparable from the relationships and experiences they once housed. This belief is deeply embedded in everyday language and cultural practice: people speak of "going home," "returning to where it all began," or being "drawn back" to places associated with significant emotional events, as though geography itself retained an affective charge. Lomas et al. (2024) describe this phenomenon as place attachment, a psychological bond between persons and places that is constituted through accumulated experience and sustained by memory. Crucially, this attachment is not merely nostalgic in a passive sense; it is active and motivating, capable of generating behavior including, as the lyric suggests, the compulsion to return, long after the original experience has ended. The myth encoded in "505" is thus the culturally naturalized idea that love leaves traces not only in people but in places, and that those places exert a gravitational pull on those who have loved within them.

Data 2 "The Knife"

Lyrical context: *"The knife twists at the thought that I should fall short of the mark"*

Denotation

Denotatively, a knife is a bladed instrument designed for cutting. Its primary associations are with sharpness, precision, and the capacity to penetrate and wound. As a physical object, it belongs to the domain of the concrete and the tactile, something that can be held, felt, and wielded.

Connotation

In the lyric under analysis, "the knife" functions entirely outside its literal domain. No actual knife is present; what twists is a feeling, specifically, the feeling of anticipated failure in the context of a romantic relationship. The verb *twists* is crucial here, as it transforms a static object into a dynamic process of intensifying pain. A knife that twists does not merely cut; it excavates, widening and deepening a wound already made. Applied to an emotional state, this image conveys not a sudden sharp pain but a sustained, worsening discomfort that the speaker experiences at the mere thought of inadequacy. The cognitive dimension, at the thought that, is equally significant: the pain is not triggered by actual failure but by its anticipation, suggesting an anxious, self-monitoring emotional orientation in which the imagination of falling short is itself sufficient to produce genuine suffering.

Myth

The use of physical injury imagery to describe emotional experience is not idiosyncratic to this lyric; it reflects a pervasive pattern in human language and culture. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified the mapping of emotional states onto physical sensation as one of the most fundamental operations of conceptual metaphor, arguing that abstract experiences become comprehensible, and communicable, precisely through their grounding in bodily and material domains. Bullo and Hearn (2021) extend this insight in the context of pain discourse specifically, demonstrating that speakers routinely describe emotional suffering through images of cutting, stabbing, and wounding, as though the body were the natural register of psychic experience. The myth at work in "the knife," then, is the culturally entrenched belief that emotional pain is most authentically expressed, and most readily understood, when rendered as bodily harm. This belief is so deeply naturalized that expressions like "a stab of jealousy," "a cutting remark," or "wounds that won't heal" pass without notice in everyday speech, their metaphorical status effectively invisible. The lyric makes this mythological structure visible by deploying it with deliberate, concentrated intensity.

Data 3 "Fall Short of the Mark"

Lyrical context: *"The knife twists at the thought that I should fall short of the mark"*

Denotation

"Fall short of the mark" is an idiomatic expression whose denotative meaning is straightforwardly understood: to fail to reach a required or expected standard. The idiom derives from archery or target-shooting, in which falling short of the mark literally means failing to reach the target with sufficient force or accuracy. At the denotative level, the expression signals simple inadequacy, a gap between what was attempted and what was achieved.

Connotation

In the context of "505," however, the expression carries a considerably heavier emotional charge. The speaker does not merely contemplate the abstract possibility of failure; he contemplates the possibility of failing in relation to someone specific, of being found inadequate as a partner, as a presence, as the person this relationship requires him to be. The connotative meaning is thus not generic underperformance but intimate insufficiency: the fear that one's emotional resources, one's capacity for love or constancy or courage, will prove unequal to what the relationship demands. This fear is rendered more acute by the grammatical construction that I should fall short, the modal verb *should* introduces a normative dimension, suggesting that the speaker measures himself not against a neutral standard but against what he believes he ought to be, invoking an internalized ideal that he suspects he cannot meet.

Myth

The anxiety encoded in "fall short of the mark" reflects a mythological assumption deeply embedded in contemporary romantic culture: that love entails not merely affection but performance, that partners are implicitly evaluated against standards of adequacy that, though rarely articulated, exert constant pressure on those within the relationship. Zagefka and Bahul (2021) identify this dynamic as a source of chronic relational dissatisfaction, arguing that idealized beliefs about how partners should behave create invisible benchmarks against which real behavior is inevitably measured and often found wanting. This myth naturalizes the idea that romantic relationships are structured by expectation as much as by feeling, and that the fear of not being enough, emotionally, physically, or otherwise, is not a personal pathology but a culturally conditioned response to the demand that love be earned and continuously re-earned through adequate performance.

Data 4 "The Bite"

Lyrical context: *"Frightened by the bite, though it's no harsher than the bark"*

Denotation

Denotatively, "the bite" refers to the act of biting, the application of teeth to a surface with sufficient force to pierce, grip, or wound. Like the knife, it belongs to the domain of physical action and bodily injury. The line also alludes to the proverbial expression "his bark is worse than his bite," in which bark denotes vocalization, specifically the threatening sound produced before actual aggression, while bite denotes the harmful act itself.

Connotation

Within the song, "the bite" signifies anticipated emotional injury, the harm the speaker fears will result from full emotional exposure within the relationship. The line's inversion of the familiar proverb is significant: where the proverb typically reassures ("the threat is worse than the reality"), the speaker's formulation reveals that this reassurance offers him little comfort. He remains frightened even while acknowledging that the bite may be no worse than the bark, a confession that his fear operates independently of rational assessment. This emotional irrationality is itself revealing: it suggests that what the speaker fears is not a specific, identifiable harm but the raw fact of vulnerability, the loss of the emotional self-protection that distance and guardedness provide. The bite, in this reading, is not so much a concrete danger as a symbol of the exposure inherent in intimacy itself.

Myth

The mythological dimension of "the bite" engages a cultural belief that is simultaneously widespread and rarely examined: the belief that anticipated emotional pain is experienced as more intense, more certain, and more threatening than the pain that actually materializes. Ip and Feldman (2025) provide empirical support for this tendency, demonstrating that individuals consistently overestimate the intensity of future negative emotional experiences, a phenomenon they term affective forecasting error. Culturally, this tendency is reinforced by narratives that frame emotional vulnerability as inherently dangerous, constructing intimacy as a space in which one is perpetually at risk of being hurt. The myth encoded in "the bite" is thus the naturalized cultural assumption that to love is necessarily to become vulnerable to a harm whose anticipated form is almost always worse than its eventual reality, and that this anticipation, rather than the harm itself, is what most powerfully shapes behavior within romantic relationships.

Data 5 "Crumble Completely"

Lyrical context: *"But I crumble completely when you cry"*

Denotation

At the denotative level, "crumble" describes the physical disintegration of a solid structure, the process by which something that appeared stable and cohesive breaks apart into fragments under pressure or over time. "Completely" intensifies this process, indicating total rather than partial collapse. Together, the phrase denotes an absolute structural failure, the reduction of something whole to its constituent pieces.

Connotation

In the lyrical context, "crumble completely" describes the speaker's emotional response to his partner's distress. The image of structural collapse conveys the totality and involuntariness of this response: the speaker does not choose to be affected by his partner's tears, nor does he experience a moderate or manageable emotional reaction. Instead, whatever composure, restraint, or self-containment he ordinarily maintains gives way entirely in the face of her pain. This is not depicted as weakness but as an involuntary consequence of deep emotional connection, the self becomes structurally dependent on the other's wellbeing in such a way that the other's suffering becomes, quite literally, destabilizing. The adverb completely forecloses the possibility of partial resilience: there is no aspect of the speaker's emotional composure that remains intact when confronted with his partner's vulnerability.

Myth

The mythological level of "crumble completely" engages the cultural construction of emotional interdependence as the defining characteristic of genuine intimacy. In contemporary romantic culture, the capacity to be profoundly affected by a partner's emotional state is widely understood as evidence of authentic love, to remain unmoved by a partner's suffering is to reveal a deficiency of feeling, while to be overwhelmed

by it is to demonstrate the depth of one's attachment. Sels et al. (2020) provide empirical grounding for this cultural intuition, demonstrating that emotional interdependence, the degree to which partners' emotional states become coupled over time, is a measurable and meaningful feature of sustained romantic relationships. The myth, however, goes beyond the empirical finding: it naturalizes emotional permeability as not merely common but desirable, constructing the boundaries of the self as appropriately dissolved by love. "Crumble completely" encodes this myth with particular force, presenting the total collapse of emotional self-sufficiency not as a crisis but as the inevitable and perhaps welcome consequence of loving someone deeply.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the five expressions selected from Arctic Monkeys' "505" operate as a coherent semiotic system through which romantic experience is constructed and culturally naturalized. Taken together, they constitute a portrait of romantic subjectivity defined not by the presence of love but by its emotional consequences: the pull of memory, the fear of inadequacy, the anticipation of pain, and the dissolution of self that deep attachment produces. This section situates these findings within broader theoretical conversations, addresses their implications for popular music semiotics, and reflects on the limitations of the approach adopted.

The Body as the Language of Emotional Pain

Perhaps the most consistent pattern to emerge across the findings is the use of bodily and material imagery to encode abstract emotional experience. "The knife," "the bite," and "crumble completely" all render psychological states, anxiety, fear of vulnerability, emotional overwhelm, through images drawn from the domain of physical sensation and structural collapse. This pattern reflects what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified as conceptual metaphor: the systematic cognitive strategy by which abstract experiences are made communicable through grounding in the familiar texture of bodily life. Importantly, however, this is not merely a linguistic convenience. Within Barthes' framework, such mappings operate at the mythological level, naturalizing the belief that the body is the authentic register of emotional truth. When listeners encounter "the knife twists," they do not process a metaphor, they experience recognition, the sense that the lyric has named something real. This phenomenology of recognition is precisely what Barthes (1972) meant by naturalization: the cultural construction of emotional experience disguises itself as its direct expression. The semiotic achievement of "505" lies in its capacity to activate this mythological structure with unusual intensity, which helps explain the song's remarkable and sustained cultural resonance across nearly two decades.

Place, Memory, and the Geography of Longing

The analysis of "505" as a sign demonstrates how a numerical designation, stripped of any inherent emotional content, can be transformed through lyrical context into a condensed symbol of an entire emotional history. This transformation illustrates Tuan's (1977) concept of the conversion of space into place: the process by which abstract spatial coordinates acquire meaning and emotional weight through human experience and memory. Lomas et al. (2024) extend this by showing that place attachment persists and intensifies through mnemonic reconstruction, often exceeding the emotional charge of the original experience. What the semiotic analysis adds to these psychological accounts is the cultural dimension: the belief that places retain emotional traces and exert a gravitational pull on those who have loved within them is not merely an individual psychological response but a mythological structure widely reproduced across cultural texts. Turner encodes this myth with particular economy, the room number stands for everything without explaining anything, simultaneously specific enough to feel intimate and open enough to accommodate each listener's own emotional geography.

Inadequacy, Expectation, and the Cultural Demands of Love

The expressions "fall short of the mark" and "the bite" together illuminate how romantic suffering is produced not only by what happens within relationships but by what culture leads people to expect of them. The fear of inadequacy and the fear of emotional exposure encoded in these expressions are responses to a mythological construction of love that places simultaneous and often contradictory demands on romantic subjects: to be emotionally available yet resilient, vulnerable yet dependable, fully present yet not overwhelming. Zagefka and Bahul (2021) demonstrate that idealized relational beliefs generate chronic dissatisfaction by creating invisible normative benchmarks against which real behavior is perpetually measured and frequently found wanting. The song's renewed cultural visibility among younger audiences navigating romance in an era of social media comparison suggests that these mythological demands have not diminished

but intensified (Skinner, 2022). Reading "505" through Barthes' framework thus reveals not only what the song means, but why it continues to resonate so powerfully at this particular cultural moment.

Emotional Interdependence and the Limits of the Self

"Crumble completely" raises the most philosophically significant question in the analysis: what becomes of the self under conditions of deep romantic attachment? The image of total emotional collapse in response to a partner's distress encodes the mythological belief that authentic love is incompatible with emotional self-sufficiency that to love deeply is to become structurally dependent on the other's wellbeing in ways that compromise the coherence of the self. Sels et al. (2020) provide empirical grounding for emotional interdependence as a genuine feature of sustained romantic relationships. The lyric, however, goes further than the empirical finding: it encodes interdependence not merely as common but as desirable, presenting the dissolution of emotional self-containment as evidence of love's depth and authenticity. This mythological construction sits in productive tension with equally powerful cultural narratives that valorize psychological resilience and emotional self-regulation as markers of maturity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). "505" does not resolve this tension; it inhabits it, and it is precisely this capacity to hold contradictions without resolving them that, as Frith (1996) argues, distinguishes enduring popular songs from merely competent ones.

Implications and Limitations

This study demonstrates that close semiotic reading of individual lyrical expressions — rather than extended passages or overall thematic content can reveal cultural meanings that broader analyses tend to overlook. The approach confirms Bignell's (2002) argument that semiotic analysis gains its distinctive power from attention to the materiality of the sign: the specific word choices that carry, in their particularity, the ideological work that thematic readings miss. Future research might extend this approach comparatively across songs, genres, or cultural contexts to examine how the semiotic construction of romantic experience varies across musical traditions and historical periods. Multimodal extensions that incorporate melody, vocal delivery, and musical arrangement alongside lyrical analysis would also represent a significant methodological advance, given that meaning in song is never produced by language alone. Several limitations merit acknowledgment. The analysis is restricted to five expressions, a scope that, while analytically productive, cannot claim to represent the full semiotic complexity of the song. Additionally, the mythological interpretations offered here necessarily reflect the analyst's own cultural positioning; alternative readings remain possible and, in some cases, equally defensible. These limitations do not undermine the findings but point toward productive directions for future inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how romantic pain and nostalgia are semiotically constructed in Arctic Monkeys' "505" through Roland Barthes' three-level framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. Analyzing five carefully selected lyrical expressions; "505," "the knife," "fall short of the mark," "the bite," and "crumble completely", the study demonstrates that each expression operates simultaneously as a literal sign, an emotional articulation, and a vehicle for culturally naturalized beliefs about romantic experience. At the denotative level, these expressions carry straightforward, accessible meanings. At the connotative level, they encode complex emotional states, longing, self-doubt, fear of vulnerability, and the destabilizing force of deep attachment. At the mythological level, they participate in broader cultural narratives that present these emotional experiences as natural, universal, and inevitable features of romantic life. Taken together, the five expressions construct a coherent semiotic portrait of love as something experienced less through joy than through the weight of memory, expectation, and emotional exposure. These findings affirm that popular song lyrics are not merely aesthetic expressions but culturally embedded semiotic texts capable of encoding and reproducing ideological constructions of human experience. Future research would benefit from extending this close semiotic approach across wider lyrical corpora and integrating multimodal dimensions of musical meaning beyond language alone.

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