EXPLORING LOVE AND LONELINESS IN SZA'S *KILL BILL, NOBODY GETS ME, SNOOZE, SATURN, OPEN ARMS, GOOD DAYS*

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Abstract. This study explores how love and loneliness are represented in six selected song lyrics by SZA are Kill Bill, Nobody Gets Me, Snooze, Saturn, Open Arms, and Good Days. The research applies a thematic literary approach to examine how these emotional themes are expressed through poetic language and symbolic signs. This study uses a qualitative method. Figurative language is used to analyze the representation of love, focusing on metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism. Meanwhile, semiotic theory by Roland Barthes, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth is applied to interpret how loneliness is communicated through symbolic signs within the lyrics. The findings reveal that love is expressed with emotional intensity, vulnerability, and deep attachment, while loneliness appears through strong symbolic elements that reflect isolation, emotional pain, and longing. The combination of figurative and semiotic analysis helps to uncover the complex emotional experiences embedded in the lyrics. This study concludes that SZA's song lyrics provide rich and layered representations of love and loneliness, conveyed through both figurative expressions and symbolic signs.

Keywords: song lyrics, figurative language, semiotics, love, loneliness

INTRODUCTION

Love and loneliness are among the most deeply felt and universally experienced human emotions. In literature and music, these two themes are often intertwined rather than treated as separate. As Mijuskovic (2012) notes, love and loneliness frequently coexist, with one emotion often triggering the other. This emotional interdependence makes them significant topics for literary exploration, particularly in the context of modern song lyrics.

Like poetry, song lyrics employ figurative and symbolic language to express complex emotional states. According to Bradley (2017), song lyrics follow a poetic structure that makes them appropriate for literary analysis. Far from being mere entertainment, lyrics

often convey layered meanings and emotional intensity that provide insight into the songwriter's inner world and resonate personally with listeners.

In many contemporary songs, expressions of love and loneliness extend beyond literal language. Through devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, and symbolism, lyricists construct emotional depth and meaning. Moore (2012) argues that lyrics function as compressed narratives, capable of expressing emotional truths in brief but powerful ways. This makes them suitable for literary interpretation, much like traditional texts.

The study aims to answer two questions: (1) How is love expressed through figurative language in the lyrics? and (2) How do semiotic elements represent loneliness? Using a thematic and symbolic interpretive approach, this research contributes theoretically by demonstrating the literary depth of modern song lyrics and practically by offering a framework for analyzing non-traditional literary texts.

This study analyzes selected lyrics by SZA *Kill Bill*, *Nobody Gets Me*, *Snooze*, *Saturn*, *Open Arms, and Good Days* as poetic texts. Focusing on themes of love and loneliness, the research explores the use of figurative language (metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism) and applies Barthes' semiotic theory to uncover how loneliness is represented through signs and symbols at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines the theoretical framework applied to analyze the representation of love and loneliness in selected song lyrics by SZA. Given the centrality of these two emotional themes, the discussion draws upon theories of love, loneliness, and figurative language. These perspectives support the interpretation of lyrical expression as a form of poetic narrative and symbolic communication. The aim is to establish a clear conceptual basis for understanding how emotional meaning is constructed in the lyrics.

The selected theories function as both analytical instruments and interpretive lenses, offering insight into how emotional depth and symbolic content are embedded within the songs. They allow the study to explore the lyrics not only from a literary standpoint but also within a wider cultural and emotional context.

Love is a deeply complex emotional experience marked by closeness, passion, and commitment. Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory identifies these three components as essential elements of romantic relationships. Through the lens of literature and song lyrics, love is often expressed as vulnerability, emotional dependence, and the desire for union. The self-expansion theory (Aron et al., 2022) supports this, proposing that individuals seek emotional growth through romantic bonds by incorporating their partner's identity into their own. Similarly, Tobore's (2020) quadruple theory emphasizes trust, respect, attraction, and connection as pillars of enduring love. Attachment theory (Ouyang, 2025) further explains how emotional expression varies based on personal attachment styles, which can be reflected in how songwriters portray emotional intimacy or detachment.

Loneliness, on the other hand, is defined by Perlman and Peplau (1981) as a subjective emotional state arising from the lack of meaningful social connection. Eldesouky et al. (2024) expand on this by describing loneliness as a dynamic state with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Individuals may cope with loneliness through emotional regulation or expressive behavior, including through creative means like songwriting.

Figurative language refers to expressions that go beyond literal meaning to convey deeper emotional or conceptual ideas. As Perrine (2017) explains, this type of language introduces imaginative alternatives to ordinary speech, enabling authors to express feelings such as love or loneliness with greater intensity and resonance. Similarly, Abrams and Harpham (2015) emphasize that figurative language intentionally departs from literal usage to create richer and more vivid impressions, especially in literary texts and song lyrics.

One important form of figurative language is hyperbole, which involves deliberate exaggeration to emphasize emotion or dramatic effect. For instance, saying "I've waited a thousand years" highlights emotional intensity rather than factual accuracy. As Ruzimbaevna (2022) and Desai, Bailey, and Filik (2024) suggest, hyperbole enhances emotional impact and memorability, particularly in expressive forms like poetry or music. Another common device is the metaphor, a direct comparison between two unrelated things that share similar traits, without using comparative words. As Perrine (2017) notes, metaphors deepen understanding by suggesting one thing is another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) view metaphor as a central part of human cognition, helping people conceptualize abstract ideas through familiar terms, for example, using travel metaphors to describe love ("we hit a dead end").

In contrast, simile uses explicit comparison words such as "like" or "as." According to McArthur (1992), similes clarify abstract qualities by comparing them to more tangible concepts, such as "quiet as a mouse." Perrine (2017) also highlights how similes allow clear, vivid parallels between seemingly unrelated things.

Personification gives human traits to non-human elements, making abstract emotions or objects more relatable. For example, describing loneliness as "a shadow that follows" externalizes emotional states in a way that listeners can easily imagine. Perrine (2017) and Aulika & Gunawan (2024) note that personification strengthens the emotional power of language by making internal experiences appear active and visible.

Finally, symbolism involves using objects, actions, or characters to represent deeper meanings beyond their literal interpretation. As explained by Abrams and Harpham (2015), symbols often reflect broader themes like identity, love, or loss, such as a river symbolizing time or a broken mirror signifying fractured identity. Waham (2023) adds that symbols in literature invite readers to interpret meaning more deeply, creating layers of understanding that go beyond the surface of the text.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on descriptive analysis to explore how themes of love and loneliness are expressed in selected song lyrics by SZA. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth examination of textual meaning, allowing the researcher to interpret symbolic and emotional content rather than rely on numerical data.

The main method used is textual analysis, which emphasizes close reading and interpretation of the lyrics. As a literary approach, textual analysis is suitable for uncovering underlying themes, figurative language, and symbolic meanings within poetic texts such as song lyrics. This method provides a structured yet flexible framework for exploring the emotional and cultural significance embedded in the songs.

The study applies a thematic approach as its analytical foundation. This approach allows the researcher to identify recurring patterns and central ideas related to love and loneliness across different texts. By examining metaphors, similes, hyperbole, personification, and symbols, the study uncovers how these devices contribute to emotional expression. In addition, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is used to analyze symbolic signs that represent loneliness. Barthes' model of denotation, connotation, and myth helps reveal how meaning is constructed and interpreted within a cultural context.

The data source consists of six song lyrics by SZA: *Kill Bill*, *Nobody Gets Me*, *Snooze*, *Saturn*, *Open Arms*, and *Good Days*. These songs were selected due to their rich emotional content and relevance to the themes under investigation. The analysis focuses solely on the lyrics, excluding musical elements such as melody or rhythm. The researcher manually collected and interpreted the lyrics, highlighting figurative and symbolic expressions that support the study's objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and interpretation of the study, focusing on how love and loneliness are expressed in SZA's selected song lyrics through figurative and symbolic language. The analysis emphasizes how metaphor, hyperbole, personification, simile, and symbolism convey the emotional complexity of love, while semiotic elements reflect the depth of loneliness through signs and cultural associations. Each song is examined thematically and interpretatively to explore how SZA's lyrics communicate emotional narratives that reflect personal vulnerability, romantic longing, and existential solitude. The discussion is structured around six selected songs, *Kill Bill*, *Nobody Gets Me*, *Snooze*, *Saturn*, *Open Arms*, and *Good Days*

1. **Kill Bill** explores how love, once lost, can lead to emotional obsession, extreme thoughts, and deep loneliness. Through hyperbole, SZA expresses overwhelming emotional responses, such as "If I can't have you, no one should" and *"Rather be in jail than alone,"* highlighting how love becomes a psychological necessity for the speaker. These exaggerated expressions reveal how heartbreak distorts logic and intensifies emotional dependency. Metaphors such as *"not the one drivin'"* and *"this text is evidence"* reframe love and betrayal as struggles for emotional control and

justice. Personification gives emotional forces life-like power, especially when a text message is described as *"evidence,"* and when the speaker asks, *"How'd I get here?"* suggesting she's been emotionally carried away by forces beyond her control. Symbolism is central in the song: *"drivin'"* symbolizes control, *"Jail"* and *"Hell"* represent emotional punishment, and "perfect peach" reflects feelings of inadequacy and jealousy.

From a semiotic perspective, *Kill Bill* represents loneliness not as quiet sadness but as emotional chaos. Signs like *"Hell,"* *"jail,"* and *"murder"* shift from their literal meanings to connotations of despair, abandonment, and loss of identity. On the myth level, the song questions dominant cultural narratives: the belief that true love should last forever, that romantic pain is noble, or that doing anything for love is justified. SZA deconstructs these myths by showing that loneliness after love's collapse can lead to obsession and self-destruction. Ultimately, *Kill Bill* reveals how love, when unmet, doesn't just break hearts, it can dismantle one's sense of self, morality, and reality.

2. **Nobody Gets Me** portrays love as a force that shapes identity and self-worth, while revealing loneliness as emotional dependence and inner fragmentation. Hyperbole is used to emphasize the overwhelming intensity of post-breakup emotions. Lines like *"Only like myself when I'm with you"* and *"If I was you, I wouldn't take me back"* dramatize self-blame and loss of identity, illustrating how deeply love defined the speaker's sense of self. Metaphors such as *"butt-naked at the MGM"* reflect emotional vulnerability, not physical exposure, while *"Nobody gets me like you"* frames love as a private language only one person could understand. Personification appears in *"'Fore the memories get to kickin' in,"* giving memory an active, intrusive presence that haunts the speaker with recurring emotional pain. Symbolism is also central: places like the MGM symbolize exposure and regret; *"the ballet"* and *"the road"* reflect the tension between stability and avoidance, and the repeated line *"Nobody gets me"* becomes a symbolic anchor for lost emotional connection and personal meaning.

From a semiotic perspective, the song constructs loneliness not as isolation, but as a feeling of being emotionally unseen. Denotatively, the speaker describes regret, memories, and longing. Connotatively, these expressions suggest that without her partner, she feels incomplete and emotionally invisible. On the myth level, the lyrics challenge cultural ideals of soulmates and romantic salvation, revealing the emotional cost of internalizing such myths. *Nobody Gets Me* shows that loneliness can persist even in memory when love has become the only mirror in which one recognizes themselves.

3. **Snooze** reveals how love can consume identity and create emotional dependence, where separation triggers loneliness and loss of self. Through hyperbole, SZA dramatizes her devotion, such as in *"I'll touch that fire for you"* and *"I can't lose when I'm with you,"* suggesting that love becomes a force so intense that even rest

feels dangerous. These exaggerations emphasize how love overwhelms her logic and defines her stability. Metaphors like *"fire"* represent emotional risk, while *"growth"* signifies personal development made possible only by the presence of love. The speaker compares herself to iconic figures like Scarface and Mia Wallace, using similes and metaphors to express how love makes her feel powerful and irreplaceable. These references are not mere name-drops, they become metaphors for how love transforms her self-image. Personification appears in phrases like *"Ain't a home when you not here"* and *"Hard to grow when you not here,"* where *"home"* and *"growth"* are humanized, revealing how love animates her surroundings and shapes her emotional landscape. Symbolism runs throughout: *"fire"* symbolizes sacrifice, *"snooze"* becomes a symbol of emotional absence, and *"home"* reflects the security that love provides. The pop culture icons she evokes also become symbols of how she sees herself through the lens of romance.

From a semiotic viewpoint, *Snooze* constructs loneliness not as emptiness but as intense emotional reliance. Denotatively, the speaker speaks of missing someone, but connotatively, she reveals fear, fragility, and a loss of direction. Lines *like "How can I snooze and miss the moment?"* highlight how deeply her identity is tied to one person. On the myth level, the lyrics reinforce and critique cultural beliefs that romantic love is the only source of growth, wholeness, and emotional security. *Snooze* shows that beneath declarations of love lies a deeper solitude, where absence is not just loss, but disorientation.

4. **Saturn** portrays love as a source of emotional collapse and longing for escape, while simultaneously depicting loneliness as a disconnection not just from others, but from life and meaning itself. Hyperbole is used throughout the lyrics to express the overwhelming impact of heartbreak, as in *"This can't be life"* and *"This must be what Hell is like,"* where pain is described with exaggerated emotional intensity to reflect how unbearable and paralyzing it feels. Metaphors such as *"me, myself, and my past"* and *"life's better on Saturn"* illustrate how the speaker's identity has been shaped by emotional wounds and her yearning for distance from suffering. Personification is seen in lines like *"intrusive thoughts, they paralyze,"* where emotional distress becomes an active force that takes control over her, turning internal struggle into something almost physical. Symbolism plays a major role in this song, particularly through the recurring image of *"Saturn"* as a distant, peaceful place representing emotional detachment, escape, and the dream of healing.

Using Barthes' semiotic theory, Saturn operates on three levels: denotatively as a planet, connotatively as a metaphor for isolation and imagined peace, and mythically as the belief that a better emotional world might exist elsewhere. Loneliness in this song is deeply existential, shown through signs like *"another universe," "don't believe in paradise,"* and *"the good die young and poor."* These lyrics express emotional alienation, disillusionment, and the collapse of cultural myths that promise healing, fairness, or reward for emotional effort. Through cosmic imagery and poetic

language, *Saturn* reveals that loneliness is not only about losing love, it is about losing meaning, hope, and connection to the self and the world.

5. **Open Arms** explores how love can evolve into emotional dependency and self-erasure. Through hyperbole, the speaker dramatizes her vulnerability, such as in *"Please put a leash on me"* and "I hate myself to make you stay," illustrating the lengths she would go to avoid abandonment. These lines reflect not only devotion but a deep loss of self-worth. Her repeated claim, *"You're the only one holdin' me down,"* exaggerates the emotional weight she places on this single relationship, turning love into her only source of stability. Metaphorically, the song frames love as both grounding and restrictive. Lines like *"You lost and found me"* and *"put a leash on me"* depict love as a force that controls identity and freedom. The partner becomes the speaker's emotional compass, she exists fully only when loved, and fades when neglected. This duality intensifies the emotional cost of staying. Through personification, abstract concepts are made emotionally potent. Love is portrayed as an active force that capable of pushing, pulling, holding, and even losing her. She is not in control of her emotions; love moves her, restrains her, and defines her reality. This is seen in *"You lost and found me"* and *"Push me away, I'll be right here,"* where love takes on human-like agency, showing how powerless the speaker feels.

Symbolism emerges through key phrases like *"leash," and "holdin' me down."* *"open arms"* symbolizes unconditional emotional exposure, readiness to embrace pain for connection. *"Leash"* suggests emotional captivity voluntarily chosen to avoid separation. *"Holdin' me down"* becomes a symbol of duality: love both supports and restrains her. These symbols convey the speaker's conflicting emotions, security gained at the cost of freedom.

From Barthes' semiotic lens, loneliness in *Open Arms* is conveyed not through isolation, but through desperate attachment and unreciprocated love. Denotative meanings express emotional events, while connotations unveil dependency, emotional sacrifice, and the illusion of stability. Myths such as "any love is better than none" and "true love means suffering" are challenged, exposing how culturally accepted ideas romanticize emotional harm. Even in togetherness, the speaker remains profoundly alone.

6. **Good Days** captures the lingering emotional aftermath of heartbreak through rich figurative and symbolic language. Hyperboles such as *"You be heavy in my mind"* and *"Got me a war in my mind"* dramatize the weight of emotional memory and internal chaos, revealing how love continues to affect the speaker long after it has ended. Metaphors like *"war in my mind," "armored fate,"* and *"Good day living in my mind"* portray the speaker's emotional pain as a persistent inner struggle, where past joy still lives and influences her present. Similes such as *"Feelin' like Jericho"* and *"Feelin' like Job"* elevate personal heartbreak into the realm of biblical suffering, suggesting that her emotional collapse is both deeply spiritual and existential. These figures of speech transform private grief into universal imagery.

The song's personifications make emotions feel active and alive, her thoughts *"wage war,"* the *"world breaks,"* and *"youth is laid to waste."* Symbolic language further deepens the theme of emotional entrapment, with *"heavy in my mind"* and *"fountain of youth"* standing in for lingering heartbreak and the search for peace.

Through Barthes' semiotic lens, loneliness is conveyed through connotations of emotional isolation, despite attempts at strength and healing. Phrases like "*hold my own, my cross to bear alone"* and *"always in my mind"* expose the myth that independence guarantees peace. Instead, *Good Days* presents loneliness as a quiet, cyclical state where grief and longing persist beneath the surface of strength, and the hope for emotional renewal feels just out of reach.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored how love and loneliness are represented in six selected song lyrics by SZA using literary and semiotic approaches. The analysis reveals that love is predominantly expressed through various forms of figurative language such as metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism that reflect emotional vulnerability, deep attachment, and identity formation. These literary devices are used not only to articulate romantic affection but also to convey psychological intensity, longing, and internal conflict.

In contrast, loneliness is communicated through symbolic signs that transform ordinary images and phrases into emotionally charged representations. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the lyrics reveal how signs such as *"jail," "hell," "open arms," and "good days"* move beyond their literal meanings to express isolation, despair, and the pursuit of healing. Myth, as the final layer of meaning, helps illustrate how the emotional experiences in the lyrics resonate with broader cultural narratives of love, heartbreak, and self-worth.

Overall, SZA's lyrics offer a layered and nuanced portrayal of human emotion, where love becomes both a source of empowerment and fragility, and loneliness is depicted not merely as absence but as a deeply symbolic state of disconnection. These findings affirm the literary richness of song lyrics and demonstrate how contemporary music can serve as a valuable text for emotional and cultural analysis.

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