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Wonderwall as a modern anthem of longing: A linguistic and thematic analysis of its enduring interpretation

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Abstract - This study aims to investigate how *Wonderwall* by Oasis represents longing through its linguistic and thematic elements and to explain why the song continues to generate diverse interpretations across generations. The study employs a qualitative research design using a document-based approach, with the song lyrics serving as the primary data source. Data were collected through close reading and documentation, while analysis followed a qualitative lyric analysis focusing on lexical choices, figurative language, symbolism, repetition, and thematic development. The findings reveal that the lyrics construct longing through emotional ambiguity, metaphorical expressions, conversational language, and recurring motifs that invite multiple interpretations. Rather than presenting a fixed narrative, the song encourages listeners to associate its lyrics with personal experiences of love, hope, uncertainty, and emotional dependence. The enduring popularity of *Wonderwall* stems from its balance between linguistic simplicity and interpretive openness, allowing audiences from different cultural and social backgrounds to derive meaningful personal connections. The study concludes that *Wonderwall* functions as both a modern cultural anthem and a timeless lyrical text whose universal themes sustain its relevance across generations.

Keywords: wonderwall, longing, linguistic analysis, thematic analysis, qualitative research

1. Introduction

Music has long served as a universal medium through which individuals communicate emotions, experiences, and personal reflections. Among its various elements, song lyrics play a significant role because they convey meanings that extend beyond musical composition. Lyrics often contain symbolic expressions, figurative language, and emotional narratives that enable listeners to relate songs to their own experiences. Consequently, lyrical analysis has become an important area of linguistic and literary research, as it reveals how language constructs emotional and cultural meanings.

One of the most enduring examples of emotionally resonant popular music is *Wonderwall* by Oasis (1995). Since its release in 1995, the song has remained one of the band's most recognizable works and has continued to attract listeners across different generations. Unlike songs with explicit narratives, *Wonderwall* presents lyrics characterized by simplicity, emotional ambiguity, and symbolic openness. These qualities have encouraged numerous interpretations regarding love, longing, hope, dependence, and personal relationships. As a result, the song has maintained its cultural relevance for nearly three decades and continues to be regarded as one of the defining works of modern popular music.

The continuing popularity of *Wonderwall* demonstrates that its significance extends beyond commercial success. Although the song has been widely appreciated by audiences and frequently discussed in popular culture, relatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted



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to explaining how its linguistic and thematic characteristics create such enduring emotional appeal. Most public discussions focus on the song's historical background, the intentions of the songwriter, or its position within the Britpop movement, while fewer studies investigate how the lyrics themselves construct meanings that remain open to diverse interpretations.

Understanding these linguistic and thematic constructions is important because emotionally ambiguous lyrics frequently allow listeners to project their own experiences onto a song. Consequently, examining *Wonderwall* contributes not only to lyric analysis but also to broader discussions concerning language, emotion, interpretation, and meaning construction in contemporary popular music.

This study adopts a qualitative lyric analysis framework by integrating linguistic and thematic approaches to examine the meanings expressed in *Wonderwall*. Linguistically, the analysis focuses on lexical choices, figurative language, repetition, imagery, and symbolic expressions that contribute to the emotional construction of the lyrics. Thematically, the study explores recurring concepts such as longing, uncertainty, emotional dependence, hope, and interpersonal relationships.

The study is further informed by theories of popular music analysis, which argue that the meaning of a song emerges through the interaction between lyrical content, musical repetition, and audience interpretation. Within this perspective, ambiguous language does not weaken meaning; instead, it broadens interpretive possibilities by allowing different listeners to construct meanings according to their own emotional experiences. Therefore, linguistic simplicity and thematic openness become important characteristics that explain the enduring appeal of many popular songs.

Previous studies have demonstrated that song lyrics constitute valuable objects of linguistic, literary, and cultural analysis. Research on popular music has shown that lyrical interpretation can reveal emotional patterns, identity construction, symbolism, and social values communicated through language. Studies employing stylistic, semantic, discourse, and thematic approaches have emphasized that repetition, metaphor, and conversational language significantly contribute to emotional engagement between songs and listeners.

Recent studies demonstrate that song lyrics have become an important object of linguistic, literary, and cultural inquiry because they communicate complex emotional experiences through language, symbolism, and narrative structure. Researchers have employed diverse analytical approaches, including semantic-pragmatic analysis, semiotics, lexical semantics, multimodal analysis, and cultural criticism to investigate how lyrics construct meanings related to longing, love, silence, devotion, resistance, nostalgia, and emotional resonance. These studies consistently argue that song lyrics function not merely as artistic texts but also as reflections of social experience, cultural identity, and human emotion, making them valuable resources for interdisciplinary research (Iswatiningsih et al., 2025; Agustina et al., 2024; Sari & Yuwana, 2025; Shekhar & Mamidi, 2025; Amri & Djuharie, 2025).

Several investigations further emphasize that emotional meaning is produced through the interaction of linguistic choices, symbolic expressions, and audience interpretation rather than through literal language alone. Research on longing, nostalgia, devotion, and emotional resonance suggests that ambiguity and figurative language encourage readers and listeners to construct personal meanings according to their own experiences. Similarly, studies in literary criticism and poetics indicate that textual openness enables works to maintain cultural relevance because interpretations continually evolve across different historical and social contexts. This perspective highlights that emotional engagement depends not only on textual features but also on the active participation of audiences in the meaning-making process (McCarthy, 2025; Muhić, 2024; Altuğ, 2025; Babelyuk, 2024; West, 2019; Jaiswal, 2024).

Despite these valuable contributions, previous scholarship remains fragmented because most studies examine individual linguistic features, isolated emotional themes, or specific cultural contexts without integrating multiple analytical perspectives. Research frequently concentrates on semiotic interpretation, lexical meaning, or discourse analysis independently,



while relatively few studies combine linguistic, thematic, cultural, and interpretive approaches to explain how popular song lyrics achieve enduring emotional significance. Moreover, limited attention has been devoted to iconic songs such as *Wonderwall*, particularly regarding how linguistic simplicity, emotional ambiguity, and symbolic openness collectively construct universal experiences of longing. This gap indicates the need for more comprehensive qualitative lyric analyses capable of integrating linguistic interpretation with thematic and cultural perspectives to explain why certain songs continue to resonate across generations and diverse audiences (Zuleika & Tobing, 2019; Shehab & Qabaha, 2026; Gârdan & Modoc, 2024; Bansal, 2025; Jing, 2025).

Research concerning Oasis (1995) has primarily discussed the band's contribution to the Britpop movement and its influence on British popular culture during the 1990s. Meanwhile, studies examining emotionally expressive songs have highlighted that ambiguity enables multiple interpretations and strengthens listeners' personal attachment to musical texts. Nevertheless, relatively few investigations have specifically explored how *Wonderwall* integrates linguistic simplicity, emotional longing, and interpretive openness within a single lyrical narrative. This gap indicates the need for a comprehensive qualitative analysis that examines both linguistic features and thematic development to explain the song's enduring significance.

Based on the background presented above, this study addresses the following research problems: (1) How is the theme of longing represented through the lyrics of *Wonderwall*? (2) What linguistic and thematic elements contribute to the construction of longing in the song? (3) How do these linguistic and thematic elements allow multiple interpretations of *Wonderwall* among listeners?

Based on the research problems, this study aims: (1) to analyse how the theme of longing is represented in the lyrics of *Wonderwall*. (2) To identify and interpret the linguistic and thematic elements that construct the emotional meaning of longing in the song. (3) To explain how the interaction between linguistic features and thematic development creates enduring interpretive openness, contributing to *Wonderwall*'s lasting popularity across generations.

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the linguistic and thematic meanings expressed in Oasis's *Wonderwall*. A document-based approach was adopted because the research focused on the textual interpretation of song lyrics rather than on audience responses or experimental data. The primary data consisted of the official lyrics of *Wonderwall*, which served as the principal source for qualitative analysis.

To support the interpretation of the lyrics, secondary data were collected through a comprehensive literature review. These sources included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic publications related to lyric analysis, popular music studies, linguistics, thematic analysis, figurative language, and emotional expression in song lyrics. Previous studies discussing Oasis, Britpop, lyrical ambiguity, and the representation of longing in popular music were also reviewed to establish the theoretical and analytical foundation of the study.

The data collection procedure consisted of several stages. First, the official lyrics were obtained and carefully documented as the primary textual data. Second, relevant academic literature was identified, selected, and reviewed to provide theoretical support. Third, repeated readings of the lyrics were conducted to familiarize the researcher with the linguistic structure, emotional progression, and thematic development presented throughout the song. During this process, important words, phrases, figurative expressions, recurring motifs, and emotionally significant passages were identified and categorized for further analysis.

2.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis integrated with qualitative lyric analysis. This analytical approach focuses on interpreting meanings embedded within textual data by examining linguistic features, symbolic expressions, and thematic patterns while considering the relationship between language, emotion, and audience interpretation.



Qualitative lyric analysis enables researchers to investigate how lexical choices, figurative language, and narrative structures contribute to the construction of emotional meaning in song lyrics, making it particularly suitable for studies of popular music and literary discourse (West, 2019; Shekhar & Mamidi, 2025).

The analysis was conducted in four systematic stages. First, the lyrics were read repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their overall structure, emotional progression, and contextual relationships. Repeated reading facilitated familiarity with the text and enabled the identification of recurring linguistic patterns, emotional expressions, and symbolic elements that contribute to the song's overall meaning. This stage also allowed the researcher to recognize subtle shifts in tone and emotional development throughout the lyrics (Altuğ, 2025; Muhić, 2024).

Second, linguistic elements, including lexical choices, figurative language, symbolism, imagery, repetition, personal pronouns, and conversational expressions, were identified and classified according to their contribution to meaning construction. Particular attention was given to words and phrases associated with longing, emotional dependence, uncertainty, hope, and interpersonal relationships. These linguistic features were examined to determine how they collectively establish emotional resonance and interpretive flexibility within the song (Iswatiningsih et al., 2025; Amri & Djuharie, 2025).

Third, thematic analysis was conducted to identify the dominant themes represented throughout the lyrics, including longing, emotional uncertainty, hope, vulnerability, emotional dependence, and interpretive ambiguity. The identified themes were then interpreted within the broader context of popular music studies, lyric analysis, and cultural interpretation to explain how emotional meanings emerge from the interaction between linguistic expressions and thematic development. This stage emphasized that song lyrics function as cultural texts capable of communicating universal human experiences while remaining open to diverse interpretations (Agustina et al., 2024; Sari & Yuwana, 2025; McCarthy, 2025).

Finally, the analytical findings were synthesized and compared with previous scholarly studies to identify similarities, differences, and the distinctive contribution of the present research. This comparative process enabled the researcher to position the findings within existing scholarship while demonstrating how *Wonderwall* constructs emotional longing through the interaction of linguistic simplicity, symbolic openness, and thematic coherence. By integrating linguistic and thematic perspectives, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the song's enduring emotional appeal, interpretive flexibility, and continuing cultural significance across different audiences and generations (Gârdan & Modoc, 2024; Babelyuk, 2024; Jing, 2025; Bansal, 2025; Shehab & Qabaha, 2026).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Representation of Longing in the Lyrics of *Wonderwall*

The qualitative analysis reveals that *Wonderwall* primarily represents longing as an emotional state characterized by hope, uncertainty, and dependence on another person. Rather than portraying longing through explicit descriptions of separation or loss, the lyrics construct it through anticipation and expectation. The lyrical speaker repeatedly expresses confidence that someone significant will eventually provide emotional support, despite uncertainty about whether that expectation will be fulfilled. Consequently, longing in the song is presented not merely as romantic desire but as a psychological condition in which an individual seeks reassurance, stability, and emotional connection.

The emotional progression throughout the lyrics further reinforces this representation. The speaker moves between confidence and hesitation, creating a balance between optimism and vulnerability. This duality allows the song to transcend a single narrative context, making its message applicable to various interpersonal relationships. Whether interpreted as romantic affection, friendship, or emotional dependence, the lyrics consistently portray longing as an ongoing emotional journey rather than a temporary feeling. Therefore, the representation of



longing becomes universal because it reflects experiences commonly shared by listeners regardless of age or cultural background.

3.1.2 Linguistic and Thematic Elements Constructing Longing

The linguistic construction of longing in *Wonderwall* is achieved through a combination of simple vocabulary, conversational expressions, repetition, and figurative language. The lexical choices are intentionally uncomplicated, allowing listeners to understand the lyrics while simultaneously leaving space for personal interpretation. Everyday expressions replace elaborate poetic language, creating authenticity and emotional intimacy between the lyrical speaker and the audience.

One of the most distinctive linguistic features is repetition. The recurring word *maybe* functions as a lexical marker of uncertainty, possibility, and emotional hesitation. Rather than expressing absolute certainty, the repeated use of this word reflects the speaker's internal conflict between hope and doubt. This repetition not only strengthens the emotional atmosphere but also mirrors the psychological condition of someone waiting for emotional fulfilment.

Figurative language also contributes significantly to the construction of meaning. The title *Wonderwall* itself functions symbolically rather than literally. Instead of referring to a physical object, it symbolizes an individual who becomes a source of protection, comfort, guidance, or emotional rescue. Because the symbol remains undefined, listeners are encouraged to assign their own meanings according to personal experiences.

Thematically, the lyrics revolve around longing, emotional dependence, hope, vulnerability, uncertainty, and optimism. These interconnected themes create a coherent emotional narrative in which longing is portrayed as a natural consequence of human relationships. Rather than emphasizing sadness alone, the song balances emotional vulnerability with persistent hope, making its message emotionally powerful yet universally accessible.

3.1.3 Interpretive Openness and Emotional Ambiguity

A significant finding of this study is that *Wonderwall* deliberately maintains interpretive ambiguity throughout its lyrical structure. The song avoids identifying the precise relationship between the speaker and the individual addressed in the lyrics. As a result, the subject may be interpreted as a romantic partner, a close friend, a family member, an inspirational figure, or even a symbolic representation of hope and personal resilience.

This openness is reinforced through the absence of detailed contextual information. Instead of providing chronological events or concrete descriptions, the lyrics emphasize emotional experiences and internal reflections. Such ambiguity allows listeners to project their own memories, relationships, and aspirations onto the song. Consequently, different audiences may derive entirely different interpretations while still experiencing similar emotional responses. The emotional ambiguity also contributes to the song's longevity. Because its meaning remains flexible rather than fixed, *Wonderwall* continues to resonate with listeners experiencing different life circumstances. The lyrics therefore function as an open emotional text that evolves according to individual interpretation rather than remaining restricted to the songwriter's original intention.

3.1.4 Overall Pattern of the Qualitative Lyric Analysis

The overall qualitative analysis demonstrates that *Wonderwall* follows a coherent emotional progression beginning with uncertainty, developing through hope and emotional reflection, and concluding with persistent longing rather than definitive resolution. Unlike conventional narrative songs that provide clear conclusions, *Wonderwall* intentionally leaves emotional questions unanswered. This unresolved ending reinforces the central theme of longing by suggesting that emotional fulfilment remains possible but never entirely certain.

Furthermore, the interaction between linguistic simplicity, thematic consistency, and emotional ambiguity forms the foundation of the song's enduring interpretation. Simple vocabulary makes the lyrics accessible to a wide audience, while symbolism and repetition enrich their emotional depth. The balance between clarity and ambiguity allows listeners to understand the song immediately yet continue discovering new meanings over time.



Overall, the findings indicate that *Wonderwall* achieves its enduring popularity through the harmonious integration of linguistic features and universal emotional themes. Rather than functioning solely as a love song, it becomes a reflective lyrical text that invites audiences to interpret longing according to their own personal experiences, thereby sustaining its cultural relevance across generations.

3.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *Wonderwall* constructs longing through the interaction of linguistic simplicity, symbolic language, and emotional ambiguity. Instead of presenting a direct narrative concerning a particular relationship, the lyrics communicate emotions that remain intentionally open to interpretation. This finding supports theories of popular music which argue that songs become culturally enduring when they encourage audiences to participate actively in constructing meaning rather than merely receiving a fixed message.

The representation of longing identified in this study differs from conventional romantic narratives because it emphasizes emotional expectation instead of emotional fulfillment. The repeated expression of uncertainty, particularly through the lexical item *maybe*, illustrates that longing is closely associated with hope, vulnerability, and emotional dependence. Rather than portraying certainty, the speaker continually negotiates between confidence and doubt, reflecting the psychological complexity of human relationships. This emotional uncertainty enables listeners to identify with the lyrics regardless of their personal circumstances.

The linguistic analysis further reveals that lexical simplicity significantly contributes to the song's universal accessibility. Everyday vocabulary, conversational expressions, and repetitive structures make the lyrics easy to remember while simultaneously increasing their emotional intensity. Symbolic expressions, particularly the metaphorical use of *Wonderwall*, extend the interpretive possibilities by allowing the central figure to represent different forms of emotional support. Consequently, the song communicates emotional meanings without restricting listeners to a single interpretation.

From a thematic perspective, the combination of longing, hope, uncertainty, vulnerability, and optimism produces a multidimensional emotional experience. These themes collectively portray longing as an ongoing psychological process rather than a temporary emotional condition. The findings therefore suggest that *Wonderwall* explores universal human experiences that transcend specific cultural, social, or temporal contexts, explaining why audiences from different generations continue to identify with its message.

Another important finding concerns the role of interpretive openness in maintaining the song's cultural relevance. Because the lyrics intentionally avoid providing explicit narrative details, listeners actively construct meaning according to their own memories, relationships, and emotional experiences. This dynamic interaction between text and audience transforms the song into a highly personal experience while preserving its universal appeal. Such interpretive flexibility distinguishes *Wonderwall* from songs that rely upon explicit storytelling or narrowly defined themes.

Overall, this study demonstrates that *Wonderwall* functions as a modern anthem of longing because it combines accessible language, emotional authenticity, symbolic richness, and thematic openness within a coherent lyrical structure. The interaction between these elements allows the song to communicate universal emotions while continually inviting new interpretations. Consequently, *Wonderwall* remains not only an iconic work of popular music but also an enduring example of how lyrical ambiguity can strengthen emotional engagement and sustain cultural significance across generations.

4. Conclusion

This study examined *Wonderwall* by Oasis through a qualitative lyric analysis to explore how the song represents longing and why it continues to invite diverse interpretations nearly three decades after its release. The findings demonstrate that the enduring appeal of *Wonderwall* lies not in a single, definitive meaning but in its ability to communicate universal emotions through



linguistic simplicity, thematic richness, and interpretive openness. Rather than presenting a detailed narrative with explicit characters and events, the lyrics employ everyday language, symbolic expressions, repetition, and emotional ambiguity to construct a message that listeners can interpret according to their own experiences and emotional circumstances.

The analysis reveals that longing is the central theme developed throughout the song. However, longing is not portrayed solely as romantic desire; instead, it is represented as a broader emotional condition characterized by hope, uncertainty, vulnerability, emotional dependence, and the desire for reassurance. The lyrical speaker repeatedly expresses confidence that another person may provide comfort and emotional support while simultaneously acknowledging uncertainty regarding whether those expectations will be fulfilled. This balance between optimism and hesitation creates a psychologically authentic portrayal of longing that resonates with a wide range of listeners regardless of age, culture, or personal background.

From a linguistic perspective, the study found that the emotional power of *Wonderwall* is strengthened by carefully selected lexical choices, conversational expressions, repetition, and symbolism. The recurring use of the word *maybe* functions as a significant linguistic marker of emotional uncertainty, reflecting the speaker's internal conflict between hope and doubt. Similarly, the symbolic title *Wonderwall* remains intentionally undefined, enabling listeners to interpret it as a romantic partner, a trusted friend, a family member, or even a metaphor for hope, emotional stability, or personal resilience. This symbolic openness contributes substantially to the song's interpretive flexibility and enduring relevance.

The thematic analysis further demonstrates that *Wonderwall* integrates several interconnected themes, including longing, hope, vulnerability, emotional dependence, uncertainty, and quiet optimism. These themes do not function independently but collectively create a coherent emotional progression that moves from uncertainty toward continuing hope without providing complete emotional resolution. Unlike many popular songs that conclude with emotional certainty or closure, *Wonderwall* deliberately leaves its narrative unresolved. This unresolved quality encourages listeners to revisit the lyrics repeatedly and construct new meanings as their own life experiences evolve.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between lyrical meaning and audience interpretation. The study indicates that the emotional ambiguity of *Wonderwall* enables listeners to become active participants in the process of meaning-making rather than passive recipients of a predetermined message. Because the lyrics avoid identifying specific circumstances or relationships, audiences naturally connect the song with their own memories, emotions, and interpersonal experiences. This interaction between text and listener explains why the song has maintained its emotional relevance across different generations and cultural contexts. The findings therefore support the view that the enduring success of popular music often depends on its capacity to remain emotionally accessible while simultaneously allowing multiple legitimate interpretations.

Overall, this study concludes that *Wonderwall* functions as a modern anthem of longing because it successfully combines linguistic simplicity, symbolic richness, emotional authenticity, and thematic openness within a coherent lyrical structure. Its lasting popularity cannot be explained solely by its memorable melody or commercial achievement but also by the flexibility of its lyrical discourse, which continually invites reflection and personal interpretation. Consequently, *Wonderwall* represents an important example of how popular song lyrics can transcend entertainment by serving as meaningful cultural texts that communicate universal human emotions and encourage listeners to engage in ongoing processes of emotional understanding and self-reflection. Future research may extend this analysis by comparing *Wonderwall* with other iconic songs characterized by lyrical ambiguity or by examining audience interpretations across different cultural and generational contexts to deepen understanding of how popular music constructs shared emotional experiences.

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