



LEWIS CAPALDI'S SOMEONE YOU LOVED: A READER RESPONSE ANALYSIS OF THE LYRIC

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Abstract

This research analyzes Lewis Capaldi's song *Someone You Loved* using Reader-Response Theory. The study focuses on how listeners give meaning to the song lyrics based on their personal feelings and experiences. Reader-Response Theory, especially Louise Rosenblatt's transactional approach, explains that meaning is not fixed in the text but created through interaction between the text and the reader. The researcher used a qualitative descriptive method and collected data through a Google Form questionnaire based on seven reader-response strategies from Beach and Marshall (1991): describing, engaging, conceiving, explaining, connecting, interpreting, and judging. Twenty respondents from different countries shared their emotional and personal reactions after listening to the song. The findings show that most listeners interpreted the song as a story about love, loss, and emotional healing. Each listener's background and experience influenced how they understood the song's message. This study proves that song lyrics can be studied as modern literature and that listeners play an active role in creating meaning from popular music.

Keywords: Lewis Capaldi, reader-response theory, *Someone You Loved*, song lyrics, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a way for humans to express emotions, thoughts, and experiences, and it can appear not only in poems or novels but also in song lyrics that reflect human feelings in artistic and symbolic ways. Song lyrics are considered a form of modern poetry because they share literary elements such as imagery, metaphor, rhythm, and emotional depth (Dewi & Handayani, 2019). As Perrine (1969) states, poetry uses language in a more intense way than ordinary speech, and Peter Barry (2002) also notes that the line between poetry and song lyrics is increasingly blurred. Lewis Capaldi's *Someone You Loved* (2018) is one of the best examples of a song that combines poetic language and emotional power. The song, which expresses love, loss, and healing, has touched millions of listeners worldwide. However, each listener may interpret and emotionally connect to the song differently depending on their own life experience.

This research focuses on that process by applying Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) Reader-Response Theory, which states that meaning is not fixed in the text but created through interaction between the reader (or listener) and the text. The problem under study is how listeners from various backgrounds construct personal meaning from the lyrics of *Someone You Loved* based on their emotions, memories, and cultural context. This topic is important because most literary studies focus on poems or novels, while few explore how people respond to songs as literary works. By analyzing this song, the study shows that popular music can also be a meaningful medium for reflection and interpretation. The urgency of this research lies in the growing influence of music in digital culture, where listeners share their interpretations online and collectively shape the meaning of songs.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with data collected through a Google Form questionnaire based on the seven reader-response strategies by Beach and Marshall (1991): describing, engaging, conceiving, explaining,

connecting, interpreting, and judging. Twenty respondents from various countries participated, providing diverse emotional and cultural perspectives. The analysis, based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory, focuses on how each listener's background influences their interpretation of the song. This research contributes theoretically by expanding Reader-Response Theory to popular media and practically by showing how song lyrics can be used as literary material in education. By exploring how listeners emotionally interact with *Someone You Loved*, this study highlights that song lyrics are not just entertainment but a form of modern literature that allows people to find meaning, healing, and connection through art).

METHOD

This research is based on Reader-Response Theory, especially the Transactional Approach developed by Louise Rosenblatt (1978), which explains that meaning is not fixed in the text but is created through an active interaction between the reader and the text. In this study, the "reader" is the listener who constructs meaning from the lyrics of Lewis Capaldi's *Someone You Loved* through emotional and personal engagement. Rosenblatt's idea of aesthetic reading, which focuses on feelings, imagination, and experience, fits this study because it explores how listeners emotionally respond to a song rather than extract information. Supporting concepts from Wolfgang Iser (1978), Hans Robert Jauss (1982), and Stanley Fish (1970) strengthen the analysis by showing that interpretation is influenced by imagination, social background, and shared cultural experience.

To organize the responses, the study uses the seven reader-response strategies by Beach and Marshall (1991): describing, engaging, conceiving, explaining, connecting, interpreting, and judging. This research applies a qualitative descriptive method because it aims to understand and describe the meaning of listeners' responses rather than measure them statistically. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire shared online, containing open-ended questions based on the seven strategies. Twenty respondents from various countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Japan, Turkey, Germany, Switzerland, Vietnam, Canada, and the United States participated in this study, representing diverse emotional and cultural perspectives.

Each participant listened to the full song before answering to ensure authentic responses. The primary data came from their written answers, while secondary data included books, journals, and past studies related to Reader-Response Theory. The data were analyzed by grouping responses according to the seven strategies, identifying emotional and interpretive themes, and interpreting them through Rosenblatt's theory to show how each listener's background and experience shape personal meaning. This approach highlights that every response is valid and unique, proving that song lyrics can function as a form of modern literature that expresses human emotion and allows for multiple interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research are based on the responses of twenty listeners from various countries who participated in a qualitative questionnaire about Lewis Capaldi's song *Someone You Loved*. Their answers were analyzed using the seven reader-response strategies from Beach and Marshall (1991) to understand how listeners constructed meaning from the song through their emotions and personal experiences. The results show that the song successfully connects deeply with listeners because of its relatable themes of love, loss, and emotional healing. The diversity of responses also proves Rosenblatt's (1978) claim that meaning is created through a transaction between text and reader, and that each interpretation depends on the listener's background, feelings, and life experience.

Describing: Remembering the Content and Emotion of the Song

In the first strategy, describing, respondents recalled specific lyrics, melodies, and emotional impressions that stood out to them. Most listeners mentioned the lines "Now the day bleeds into nightfall" and "I guess I kinda liked the way you numbed all the pain," which they felt expressed sadness and emotional emptiness after losing someone. Some respondents, such as those from Indonesia and Germany, focused more on the melody, describing it as soft, emotional, and comforting despite the sadness of the lyrics. This shows that listeners are not only influenced by the words but also by the musical tone that creates the mood of the song. Through Rosenblatt's concept of aesthetic reading, the song acts as a trigger for emotional engagement, and each listener's memory of

the lyrics reflects how the text resonates personally.

Engaging: Expressing Emotional Reactions

In the engaging stage, listeners shared their emotional reactions after listening to the song. The majority felt sadness, longing, and reflection, while others described feelings of calmness and emotional release. For example, several respondents admitted to remembering someone they had lost or separated from, showing empathy and personal identification with the lyrics. One participant from Sri Lanka wrote that the song made him “remember someone who has come and gone,” while another from the United States said that it reminded her of “the pain of missing someone who used to be a big part of my life.” However, a few respondents reported not feeling a strong emotional reaction, stating that they appreciated the melody but did not personally relate to the lyrics. These differences show that aesthetic experience varies widely, depending on emotional readiness and personal background. According to Rosenblatt (1978), this emotional transaction between text and reader is what transforms simple reading or listening into a meaningful experience.

Conceiving: Imagining the Intention and Story Behind the Song

When asked what they thought Lewis Capaldi was trying to express, most participants interpreted the song as a portrayal of heartbreak, emotional dependence, and the struggle to move on. Many listeners imagined that the song tells the story of someone who has lost a loved one and is learning to live with that pain. Some respondents described it as a song about “needing someone to heal the loneliness,” while others viewed it as “a reflection on love that once brought comfort but now brings emptiness.” This stage shows that listeners not only understood the literal meaning but also engaged imaginatively to fill in the “gaps” in the text, as described by Iser (1978). The song’s open and universal language allows listeners to construct their own stories around the lyrics, making each interpretation personally meaningful.

Explaining: Interpreting the Message or Theme

In the explaining category, listeners tried to interpret the message behind the song. Most agreed that the central theme is emotional vulnerability and the difficulty of coping after losing someone important. Some respondents connected the message to the idea of accepting loss as part of human experience, while others saw it as a warning about emotional dependence. One respondent from Turkey said, “The song reminds me that we sometimes rely too much on others to find happiness,” showing a reflective understanding of the song’s deeper meaning. Another listener from Vietnam mentioned that the song’s message is about “the process of grief and the strength to face loneliness.” These findings demonstrate how listeners actively make meaning beyond the surface of the lyrics, turning a personal song into a universal reflection on human emotion.

Connecting: Relating the Song to Personal Experience

The connecting stage produced the most emotional and varied responses. Many participants linked the song to their personal experiences of heartbreak, loss of a family member, or separation from a loved one. A respondent from Indonesia said that the song reminded her of losing her grandmother, while another from Canada related it to the end of a romantic relationship. Several participants described how listening to the song provided comfort and emotional release during difficult times. This finding strongly supports Jauss’s (1982) idea of the horizon of expectations, showing that each listener’s background and life story influence their interpretation. The song’s power lies in its universality; it allows people from different countries and cultures to find their own stories within its words.

Interpreting: Giving Personal Meaning

In this stage, respondents gave their personal interpretations of specific lines from the song, particularly the lyric “Now the day bleeds into nightfall, and you’re not here to get me through it all.” Many saw this line as a metaphor for emotional emptiness and the difficulty of facing life without someone they love. Some interpreted “day bleeding into nightfall” as the transition from hope to despair, while others saw it as a symbol of time passing and memories fading. A few listeners viewed the lyric more positively, interpreting it as a process of healing and acceptance. These varied interpretations demonstrate Rosenblatt’s (1978) claim that meaning is not static but dynamic, changing according to the reader’s or listener’s emotional and psychological state. The lyric serves as a

“textual space” that invites multiple meanings, proving the richness of song lyrics as literary texts.

Judging: Evaluating the Emotional and Artistic Quality

The final category, judging, asked listeners to evaluate whether the song effectively conveyed emotional pain and vulnerability. Almost all respondents agreed that it did. They praised Capaldi’s sincere voice and simple yet emotional lyrics, which made the song feel real and relatable. One listener described the song as “a perfect example of how music can express feelings that words alone cannot,” while another said that “the song feels like an emotional confession that helps people accept their own sadness.” A few respondents also highlighted the song’s universal appeal, stating that its message can be understood by people of any age or background. This shows that listeners are not only passive consumers of music but also active critics who can assess emotional quality and authenticity.

Discussion: Meaning Creation and Reader Involvement

Overall, the findings reveal that the interaction between listeners and the song is deeply emotional, reflective, and personal. Each participant created meaning through their own life experiences, confirming Rosenblatt’s (1978) idea that reading or listening is a transactional process. The song acted as a mirror that reflected each listener’s inner world, while their emotions gave new life to the lyrics. Listeners from different countries interpreted the song differently, influenced by their cultural background and emotional state. For instance, respondents from Asian countries tended to describe the song in terms of emotional healing and patience, while those from Western countries focused more on personal independence and acceptance. This difference supports Jauss’s (1982) concept of the horizon of expectations, showing that social and cultural factors shape how meaning is received.

Furthermore, the study highlights that song lyrics function as modern literature that connects directly to everyday emotional life. *Someone You Loved* uses simple language but carries deep emotional symbolism that resonates universally. Its effectiveness lies in its openness; listeners can enter the song’s world and build their own meaning without being restricted by the songwriter’s original intention. Through the combination of words and melody, Capaldi’s song successfully bridges personal feeling and shared human experience.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that the listeners’ responses to *Someone You Loved* are varied, emotional, and meaningful. The song encourages reflection, empathy, and personal interpretation, showing that popular music can be analyzed through literary theories like Reader-Response. This proves that literature is not limited to books or poems but can exist in modern forms such as songs, which continue to play an important role in expressing human emotion and creating collective meaning across cultures.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Lewis Capaldi’s *Someone You Loved* is a powerful example of how song lyrics can function as modern literature that connects deeply with listeners’ emotions and experiences. Using Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978) Reader-Response Theory, the study proves that meaning is not fixed in the lyrics but created through the personal interaction between the listener and the song. Each of the twenty respondents constructed their own understanding of the song based on their emotions, memories, and cultural backgrounds. Through the seven reader-response strategies by Beach and Marshall (1991), it was found that listeners experienced the song through several stages: remembering emotional lines, expressing feelings of sadness or healing, imagining the story behind the lyrics, explaining the message, relating it to personal life, giving personal meaning, and finally judging its emotional and artistic impact.

The study shows that *Someone You Loved* is interpreted by most listeners as a song about love, loss, and the process of emotional recovery. However, each listener’s meaning was unique; some saw it as a reflection of heartbreak, others as a reminder of family love, and a few as a message of hope and acceptance. These varied interpretations confirm Rosenblatt’s idea of the “transactional” nature of reading (or listening), where the text and reader work together to create meaning. The results also support the ideas of Iser, Jauss, and Fish, who emphasize imagination, cultural context, and interpretive communities in shaping literary understanding. In a broader sense, this research highlights that popular songs like *Someone You Loved* can be studied academically just like poetry or fiction because they evoke deep emotional and intellectual engagement. The song’s simple but expressive lyrics allow people from different countries to connect through shared feelings, proving that music can be both an

artistic and literary medium. This study also suggests that song lyrics can be used as learning materials in literature and language education, as they help students relate to texts emotionally and critically.

In conclusion, *Someone You Loved* demonstrates that meaning in art is not determined by the author alone but is co-created by the audience. Each listener brings their own life experience into the act of interpretation, turning the song into a personal and emotional journey. Through this interaction, Lewis Capaldi's song becomes not only a story of loss but also a mirror of human resilience and emotional connection.

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