Spiders from Mars. (Re)Configuring Musicians' Stories through their Songs

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Abstract

The present article investigates the idea of movement in terms of re-generation, re-writing and re-semiotization, where movement is not to be intended only as the one from one code to another, but from one dimension to another (from experiential to textual), from one position to another (from surface to core, from general to particular, and vice versa), from one discursive perspective to another (from extended to brief, from detailed to synthetic, and vice versa). More specifically, this analysis focusses on Popular Music artists' biographies and autobiographies, where the artist's life experience is morphed into a textual artefact, a story, and, notably, the focus will be on the type of titles that writers choose for these stories. Being musicians known for their musical output – simply put, their songs – the present investigation seeks to see how biographers and autobiographers resort to song references in order to provide impactful and coherent handles for their stories, that is to say, titles that will, firstly, help identify the artists in connection to a recognizable part of their production, secondly, that may embody and condense the sense of such stories in catchy one-liners and, thirdly, that will anticipate and cohere with the contents to be found in the ensuing texts.

1. Introduction

1.1. Texts as Cultural Objects

Besides being configurations of meanings or communicative events, texts are first and foremost cultural products. As such, they are meant to be relevant within a given culture or community as "agents of socialization that can evoke curiosity, respect or concern" (Kesebir, Kesebir 2017: 259). Cultural artefacts do not just reflect the creator's mind in terms of ideas, creativity or intentions, but, for them to be relevant, they need to be both appealing and accessible for audiences, and this goal can be attained, on the one hand, by referring to epistemological repositories of meanings available to a given community (cf. Higgins 1996; Markus, Kitayama 2010) – thus participating in forms of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981), where contents and ideas branch off and feed off reciprocally – and, on the other, by resorting to shared formal repertoires, codes or frames for meaning codification which, ultimately, will also be the pointers to their own decodification (Even-Zohar 2005; Halliday 2003; Consonni, Sala 2023).

In the specific case of narrative texts, these formal codes are the discursive and narratological conventions through which we represent time and space; state and events; characters, action and thought; logic, sequencing and complexification; correlation, co-occurrence and causation; figure and ground; finiteness and indefiniteness; completion and fragmentation, etc. (Bal 1997). In any act of creation, in fact, ideas, intuitions and epiphanies have to percolate such representational filters (i.e. notably, the temporal, the sequential and the structural axes) for ideas to converge into structures, for fragments to acquire narratological coherence, for fabula to become plot, and for a series of functions to be perceived as a story (as unconventional as it may be, cf. also Wolff 1993).

At a more superficial and eminently textual level, chapter segmentation and titles are among such formal conventions. But while the division of long texts into chapters is not a universal feature in narrative, the use of title, indeed, is: "[a] text without a title lacks the pragmatic dimension, and thus cannot reach the outside world. It is confined to the home of its author [...], imageless, without a public, without a destiny" (Besa 1997: 328). In fact, as has been observed, "how

[could we] manage to handle anything, especially things fabricated from words, without verbal handles?" (Levin 1977: xxiii). But titles are not just useful handles to locate and access a given text, they are instead linked to the ensuing text by a solid and binary relation of signification, whereby a title is "a sign apropos another sign, a sign that is none other than its text" (Besa 1997: 324). In the light of this, it appears to be particularly worthwhile to investigate the function of titles as the key to, the bridge towards, or the reflection of the associated texts. On this basis, this study discusses processes of semiotization (or, more precisely, of re-semiotization, as we will see) by focussing on the specific case of titles of musicians' autobiographies and biographies (A&Bs), both of which are a particular kind of narrative, analysing how musicians and their biographers use song lyrics to epitomize, condense and synthesize – typically in catchy one-liners – the artists' lives or the sense of their stories. To orderly do this, it is relevant to point out the main difference between fictional and non-fictional narrative, in that the appeal of the related titles depends on the epistemological character of the two (sub-)genres.

1.2. Semiotization of the Immaterial

Fictional literature hinges on semiotizing principles which are, not only typical, but exclusive to it. Firstly, in fiction, the 'story' coincides with the structure(s) it has been given through writing, or, more simply, the story is its own writing: "Because it is made up, a story ends where it ends. In this way there is a connection between the kind of shape and the kind of truth we expect in fictional narrative" (Abbott 1988: 597). Fictional narrations, as open, incomplete or fragmented as they may appear, are always self-contained and self-sufficient: all elements needed for their processing are text-internal or made available text-internally. When they are not, they so are by design.[1]

Secondly, precisely on the basis of the above, the reading of a fictional text presupposes on the part of the reader "a willing suspension of disbelief" (as Coleridge put it), whereby anything that does not cohere, infringes expectation or goes against our experience of reality is unproblematically accepted within the economy of the text. In other words, "to write fictively is to mystify; to read fictively is willingly to be mys-

tified" (Abbott 1988: 606). Free from constraints to "external validity" (Lucaites, Condit 1985), narrative fiction is typified by some intrinsic 'satisfying wholesomeness' (Buckley 1984) where, within the text, everything (action, thought, dialogue, voice, plot, language, style, structure, etc.) holds together, and this guarantees for the text's 'artistic' self-sufficiency (Abbott 1988: 610; Middleton 2002; Barounis 2016; Olsen 2016). In this context, one of the main concerns for the writer "is to give presence, via words, to that which is in fact absent [and] to underline certain elements which are in fact offered to our consciousness, by enhancing their presence. [….] One such procedure, and one that is far from innocent, is the title" (Besa 1997: 323) which provides readers with *a priori* ideas and expectations about what they are going to read, and offers them hermeneutic perspective and orientative guidance (Weinrich 1976).

1.3. Semiotization of the Material

The same 'satisfying wholesomeness', which is inherent in fiction, is the goal that non-fictional narrative – notably A&Bs – aims to attain (Buckley 1984: 40).

In fact, although narratologically similar to fictional texts, A&Bs are indeed meant to codify parts of experiential and factual reality, really occurred events or 'true stories': as with fiction, here, too, ideation needs to be processed through recognizable semiotization codes for stories to be appreciated as 'satisfying' and 'wholesome', but, unlike fiction, here ideation reflects portions of actual reality (Heilbrun, Weimer 1993) and is accountable for their external validity (on this basis, semiotization here is indeed an act of re-generation or re-creation – namely, turning experiential matter into textual content).

While fictional texts can be compared to landscape paintings, non-fictional ones – and markedly A&Bs – are maps and, as such, are meant for a purpose: they provide ways to read, understand, find direction and navigate a specific territory following a preferred trajectory (for instance, in order to get from point A – an individual's actual or symbolic beginning – to point Z – the actual or symbolic end). Secondly, there is a motivation justifying their writing and reading: A&Bs are not just intended or expected to present some potentially interesting story, but rather to bring to light some little known real-life anecdotal elements and

place them into some overarching context, to shed light on specific events, dynamics or developments, to present points of view, evaluation, etc., either subjectively and through internal focalization, typically in the case of autobiography (Karpiak 2003), or from a more external and, possibly, detached perspective, with biography (Schabert 1982). In both cases texts are driven by context and external reality that can be resorted to – both by writers and readers – as a reference point against which to measure, balance (for writers) and verify (for readers) the factual accuracy of what is told in the text. In fact, autobiography is "fiction that uses facts, […] designed, even when the author does not say so, to make a fable of his life [and] present a public image of himself" (Kazin 1964: 211; Skilleås 2006), where "underlying all of [these promptings] is the desire, implicit in any imaginative literary undertaking, to record what for the writer is 'the truth'" (Cavaliero 1985: 156). The case of biography is not different in that "because of its peculiar relationship to what we call 'fact' – [biography] seems to have an obligation to the empirical world that the novel does not have" (Rose 1982: 111; Edel 1978). This external verifiability determines the response of the reader who, based on his/her understanding, "validates or rejects the work [by] comparing the real and the represented [through] the visual, mental and verbal comparison of what we read with what we think we know" (Nadel 1984: 2; Harrison 2003).

One way to point to the 'truth' in the text is by co-signifying it in titles, either metatextually, through labels like 'autobiography'[2], 'biography' or 'true story' – or, referentially, by using references immediately recognizable or easily verifiable in connection to a given individual's life. When the narratee is a politician, this reference could be a quote form one of his/her popular speeches (think of titles such as *Churchill: We Shall Never Surrender. The Life and Legacy of Winston Churchill*; *Yes We Can: A Biography of President Barack Obama*; *I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King Jr. The Unauthorized Biography*); in the case of sportspersons, it could be a metaphor reflecting their physical prowess or an expression used by commentators to refer to their exploits (*Air. Michael Jordan Biography Book: The Life of a Basketball Legend* – 'Air Jordan' being the player's nickname; Mike Tyson's autobiography *Iron Ambition* – 'Iron Mike' being Tyson's nickname); in the case of actors or directors, the title

or a line from one of their films (*John Cleese: And Now for Something Completely Different* – the latter expression being a line from the Monty Python's movie of the same title; *Audrey Hepburn: Fair Lady of the Screen* – where *My Fair Lady* is the title of a movie where Hepburn has a leading role) etc. In the case of musicians, truth-related framing can be attained by a reference to their songs.

1.4. Pop Musicians

As mentioned above, this analysis focusses on how musicians' A&Bs use intertextual references to songs to introduce the artist's life, career, rise to fame and even fall from grace and, more specifically, how song-based titles (henceforth SBTs) can be used to *inform* (in its etymological sense of conferring form), re-shape or re-frame the musicians' public persona (from social and factual to textual), with respect to the public's expectations and knowledge of the artist.

For the scope and purpose of this paper, we label as 'artists' or 'musicians' those involved in writing, playing or performing popular music (PM) in English as native speakers, and active mainly in the Anglophone world (i.e., UK, US, Australia and Anglophone Canada). Not being this a study in musicology or music theory, we take here the label PM as an umbrella term to include a variety of genres, ranging from pop to rock, from folk to punk, to new wave, ska, reggae, hip-hop, etc., however restricting, or over-general, or obsolete these labels may be. What is the rationale behind the selection of PM artists? Because, unlike classical musicians and composers – whose identity, work, and impact are critically assessed and academically framed (being extensively studied by music experts, critics, scholars, etc. and being their opus operationalized and institutionalized through modelization and pedagogy) – PM artists, despite having their niche of appreciation (or fandom), are likely to strive to find their place in music history or PM 'mythology' – be it for purely recognition purposes, or to re-launch their career, or for some economic return. In fact, even though PM has been, and is, the subject of thorough examination in established research domains such as Popular Music Studies and musicology (Tagg 1982; 2012; Frith 1988; 1996; Middleton 1990; 1993), the focus of such research tends to be on aspects of creation, performance, circulation, impact, and cultural relevance of PM as a product, rather than on its producers and their stories. Hence, a possible way for PM artists to claim their cultural relevance is indeed by providing a complementary dimension and context to their musical output, that is by disclosing what is 'behind the scene' – i.e., what background they are from, what they managed or failed to accomplish, what brought them to make certain decisions, why they wrote/sung a given song and what is the meaning of it, etc. On account of the fact that PM artists are appreciated for their songs, and that they are very often associated to or remembered in connection to some of those songs (i.e., David Bowie-'Heroes'; John Lennon-'Imagine'; New Order-'Blue Monday'; Frankie Goes to Hollywood-'Relax'; Blur-'Boys vs Girls'; Lush-'Deluxe', etc.), it will be interesting to see whether and how such songs are used in A&B titles as attractors to intrigue potential readers or as key through which to interpret the musician's story.

2. Material and Methods

This is an exploratory analysis intended to broadly outline the possible commonalities found in musicians' SBTs, without ranking them in terms of frequency or distribution over times, contexts and cultures.

Given its exploratory character, this investigation carries out a qualitative analysis of a relatively large collection of A&B titles – notably, 150 autobiographies and 150 biographies – collected through Google and Amazon searches (via the platforms' search boxes and the 'related searches' options) by using as few restrictions as possible, so as to have a sample that is as general and varied as possible. Searches were wide-ranging, little controlled, and not restricted to particular music genres (pop, rock, reggae, etc.), movements (punk, shoegaze, Britpop, etc.), decades (60s, 80s, etc.), or in terms of the artists' success (chart ranking, record sales, sold-out dates, media exposure, etc.), persona (engaged artists, singer-songwriters, chart toppers pop stars, etc.), public image (audience favourites, media hypes, press 'darlings', etc.), or longevity (one-hit wonders, decade-lasting careers, etc.), etc. – although all of these criteria may be covariates worth investigating in the future and sure to provide interesting results. The only filters applied here, in order to make mate-

rials coherent, concern, firstly, the musicians' provenance and language – as seen above, all artists considered here are from Anglophone cultures, and their songs and A&Bs are written in English – and, secondly, the presence of some chronological discontinuity between the musicians' heyday and the moment of A&B writing – therefore, only artists mainly active (in terms of record releases, touring, etc.) before the year 2000 were selected, thus excluding contemporary and currently active artists at the beginning or in the early stages of their artistic career. The latter choice is related to the specific focus of this research on re-writing, in that the gap distancing past success/fame from the moment of writing allows space and perspective for re-semiotization: for example, in autobiographies, the artist-as-writer, now, tells the story of the artist-as-musician, back then; in biographies, we are presented with the story of an entire career from the vantage point of its later stages – which may help give shape, direction and relevance to an articulated series of events. The third criterion used for corpus selection is represented by the title's intertextual character. In fact, not all A&B titles are constructed around reference to songs: for this analysis only SBTs (either openly and verbatim or in ways to be worked out) were considered.

Analysing the way musicians' stories are re-configured in the titles of books telling their lives is not meant for purely classification purposes, but mainly because titling strategies are, on the one hand, cognitive attractors for readers, favouring text location and selection and, on the other, hyper-condensed informative shortcuts to the musician's life, and, as such, expectations setters (Nile Rodgers' *Le Freak* anticipates the artist as an eccentric maverick; the SBT *Heroes & Villains* [The Beach Boys] anticipates the story of the band in terms of conflict between individuals, etc.).[3] The assumption is that crystallizing life stories and complex experiences through songs is indeed an impactful re-codification strategy, where ideational transparence and interpersonal attractiveness are textually channelled through and made memorizable by the recognizability of the cited song. From a different angle, this analysis will allow us to see how the cultural object represented by the musician's A&B is re-configured in the terms of another cultural object, that is the musician's opus.

2.1. Titles

Titles are pre- or early-textual resources (Virbel 2002; Hartley 2004; 2009) consisting of single words, phrases or relatively short (mostly verbless) expressions, that are linked to longer texts which they end up being inextricably associated to (i.e., *Ulysses* 'is' the novel authored by James Joyce, and not just its title; similarly, *Psycho* is one of Hitchcock films; the 'Sunflowers' is Van Gogh's painting; *Loveless* is one of My Bloody Valentine's album releases; 'Flaxen Nuance' a song by Hectic, etc.). Since they are produced to be consumed (Even-Zohar 2005), and, as such, they need to be appealing, most cultural objects – with very few exceptions (see advertising) – are assigned a title. With written artefacts, appeal – i.e., "the power to invoke interest in reading and to set off an action of reading" (Dali 2014: 22) – is a cognitive stimulation that has to be negotiated with the potential reader's interests, and expectations (Beard, Thi Beard 2008) which, in the specific case of A&Bs, are likely to be related to what one already knows about the narratee's life and the reader's willingness to 'find out more' about it.

To better operationalize the notion of appeal, the various functions of titles (van Dijk 1988; Kronrod, Engel 2001; Virbel 2002; Hartley 2005; Moncomble 2018) are here systematized in relation to the systemic-functional metafunctions (Halliday 2003), namely, the ideational one (concerning content codification), the interpersonal (codifying the rhetorical relationship between writer and reader), and the textual (related to the materiality of the language).

At the ideational level, SBTs account for informativeness, transparency and framing. Informativeness and transparency are responsible for making the content of the ensuing text cognitively accessible, typically by making the identity of the musician easily identifiable (i.e., Woody Woodmansey's *Spider from Mars: My Life with Bowie* is a title which is relatively easy to process in that the namesake The Spiders from Mars, before/besides being the name of Bowie's backing band where Woodmansey was the drummer, comes from one of Bowie's songs – namely, 'Ziggy Stardust' – then replicated in the title of the album release containing it – *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders from Mars*). Framing, instead, refers to the angle through which a giv-

en content is presented, which may vary in terms of focalization (either internal, in the case of *We Are the Clash* – implied by the use of the first person – or external, in third-person formulations like *A Man Called Destruction: The Life and Music of Alex Chilton*) or of sematic dimension (i.e., Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* presupposes a dynamic, open and positive dimension; the participle in *Torn Apart* [Ian Curtis], instead – based on Joy Division's song 'Love Will Tear Us apart' – posits a static, conclusive framing).

At the interpersonal level, SBTs are responsible for attractiveness and impact, both of which are negotiated on the basis of previous knowledge (referential, affective, evaluative, etc.) that readers may have: the reader is thus offered hints and cues – stimulating curiosity rather than satisfying it – which need to be processed or worked out, thus producing a 'crossword' effect (Pendleton 1990; Isani 2011) which is particularly rewarding once the song reference is spotted and processed (i.e., John Lydon's *Anger is an Energy: My Life Uncensored* or Kim Gordon's *Girl in a Band* are likely to be particularly engaging for those who recognize, in the former case, the closing line of PIL song 'Rise' and, in the latter, a reference to the lyrics of the Sonic Youth number 'Sacred Trickster' – while the same phrases would sound purely referential for those lacking such knowledge). On this basis, SBTs at this level enhance engagement by presupposing a privileged and almost private communication between writer and readers, where 'competent' readers are expected to be able to detect references which are diluted, dissipated or only evoked rather than plainly worded out.

At the textual level, SBTs account for recognizability and processability, and – within the boundaries of linguistic, structural, and formal constraints of the language – are responsible for enhancing naturalness and idiomaticity (Sinclair 1991) in the codification of meanings, and for maximizing their memorizability. One of the resources to favour recognizability and memorizability is represented by intertextuality, in that mention – producing a 'slogan' effect, (Strutton / Roswinanto 2014) – facilitates retention (i.e., a biography with *You Really Got Me* in the first part of the title is likely to be easily recognized – and memorized – as being connected to The Kinks, authors of the eponymous song, even before reading the disambiguation in the second part of the title, which reads in fact *The Story of the Kinks*).

Given this distinction, or, more appropriately, given the interplay between metafunctions, the assumption guiding this analysis is that ideational transparency and informativeness, on the one hand, and interpersonal attractiveness and impact, on the other, are channelled through and enhanced by intertextual references to songs, at the textual level. In other words, we will see how song-based intertextual references can be exploited with the function of both ideational and interpersonal facilitators.

The most common title structure found in our corpus is represented by compound formulation, where two self-standing parts (phrases, clauses or full-sentences) are separated by a punctuation sign (usually a full-stop or a colon) or are semiotically distinguished in terms of letter size, style, font, colour, position on the page, etc., where one part contains the intertextual song reference while the other some metatextual information (lexicalized though labels like, *biography, autobiography, book, memoir, tale,* etc., often including modifiers like, *uncensored, official, authorized,* etc.) or referential information (*the life of…, the world of…,* etc. associated to the name of the musician, especially in the case of biographies), as in the examples below:

> *Read & Burn* [intertextual]. *A Book* [metatextual] *about Wire* [referential]
> *Under the Ivy* [intertextual]. *The Life and Music of Kate* [referential]
> Ranking Roger's *I Just Can't Stop It* [intertextual]. *My life in the Beat* [referential]
> Gary Numan's *Praying to the Aliens* [intertextual]. *An Autobiography* [metatextual]

For this analysis only the intertextual part of titling structures will be considered.

3. Analysis

3.1. (Inter)textual Elements for ideational Re-configuration

Ideation-based appeal can be attained by using in titles song excerpts which are taken to reflect and epitomize the musician's persona, life, and work. Writers may resort to song lyrics to portray the musicians

in at least three sensibly different ways: as *protago-nists* of their own experience, as *wanderers* through contexts, and as functions in *story-telling* (either as story-tellers themselves or as object of story-telling).

The musician as protagonist is alluded to by SBTs where the artist is depicted as the active agent (or the doer) of his/her own story, that is typically found in formulations lexicalizing the musician's internal hypostases (i.e., character, psychology, attitude, emotion, beliefs, etc. cf. Barthes 1977) which are therefore presented as character-defining and key to understanding the dynamics between musicians and external situations and, ultimately, to interpret the ensuing narration. By using the notional cluster figure vs. ground, these SBTs can be said to represent the musician as a self-standing context-independent figure, or the figure against (or even without) the ground, as in the following cases:

Andy Taylor's *Wild Boys*
Typical Girls? The Story of the Slits
Billy Idol's *Dancing with Myself*
Whores: An Oral Biography of Perry Farrell and Jane's Addiction
The Light Pours out of Me [John McGeoch]

As we can see, protagonist SBTs, on the one hand, posit a subjective framing for the ensuing A&B – whereby the musician is configured as the semantic centre of the narration – and, on the other, are essentialist in character, in that, mainly due to their inherent brevity, such formulations rhetorically exclude character development or change. In fact, in the examples above, by the title Andy Taylor chooses for his story, one expects him to be and (always) behave as a wild boy, the Slits to always approach life as atypical girls (note that the expression *Typical Girls* in the SBT is followed by a question mark which falsifies the denotation of the expression), Billy Idol to behave as mavericks and loners normally would, Jane's Addiction to be outcasts flaunting or unintimidated by stigmatizations, or John McGeoch to be a continuous source or carrier of inspiration (if we take the term 'light' as a metaphor for inspiration).

The musician as wanderer is found in those formulations portraying the musicians as a thematic patient (i.e. passive observer, undergoer of an action or participant in a situation), where the emphasis is on the ground behind the figure, which confers relevance to it as if through a backlight effect. This is represented by SBTs configuring the musicians' story through his/her external hypostases (i.e. place, time, experience, background, education, etc.), that is as a (more or less linear) ride through times and contexts, as can be seen in the examples below:

Chirs Hillman's *Time Between*
There Was a Light. The Cosmic History of Chris Bell and the Rise of Big Star
Perfect Sound Forever. The Story of Pavement
Stephen Stills. Changing Partners
Tricky's *Hell Is round the Corner*

Formulations like these establish a circumstantial framing, for instance positing a temporal scaffolding – in Chris Hillman's, Chris Bell's (note the use of the simple past, which distinguishes the past time, where the light was, from the present) and Pavement's SBTs (note the adverb 'forever') – or alluding to external constraints, upon which the artist has little or no control, as the experiential conditions determining the musicians' life – i.e. constant change for Stephen Stills' story, or the dealing with dangerous situations for Tricky's story. Moreover, wanderer SBTs imply semantic openness, fluidity and movement – especially along the temporal axis – and presuppose possible changes – suffice to consider Stills' SBT where change is not only semantically represented through the verb, but also morphologically expressed through the progressive form.

The musician as story-telling function is found in those SBTs which configure the artist as the narrator of his/her own story, that is the initiator and director of the act of writing, notably in autobiography or, when the artist is referred to as the metatextual object of narration, that is as a narrative role rather than just a text-external individual, in biography. By evidencing the presence of the narrator, A&B SBTs flaunt and explicitate a narratological framing, which not only presupposes a narratee, a narration, and a reader, but also forms of narratological filtering (selection, sequencing, organization, prioritization, etc.) which are inherent in any act of narration. This can be seen in titles like the following:

Tony Hadley's *To Cut a Long Story Short*

Bob Dylan's *Chronicles*
Adam Ant's *Stand and Deliver*
Sara & Keren's *Really Saying Something. Our Story
Are You Receiving?* [Killing Joke]

These formulations posit a discursive framing, in that the musician's life is not primarily presented as experience, but as semiotization, that is as a narrative re-configuration of experiential reality. As such these semiotizations may be expected to be biased, or at least one-sided, and possibly lacking detail or referential completeness (see Tony Hadley's SBT), but, at the same time, they are also rhetorically presented as being delivered by someone who, as story-teller, is a reliable source of information (see Sara & Keren's SBT). In addition to that, from a purely narratological perspective, these SBTs imply ideas of conclusiveness, in that a story is told only once it has occurred, or can be 'cut short' (see, notably, Tony Hadley's SBT).

3.2. (Inter)textual Elements for Interpersonal Engagement

In SBTs, interpersonal appeal can be achieved by formulations attributing roles to the author of A&Bs which reflect and presuppose a certain level of interest and competence on the part of the reader, and play with those assets, thus intriguing the readership by creating expectation through either open song-based references, allusions or hard to be worked out cues. This cognitive stimulation can be carried out by portraying the writer as an *usher*, a *guide* or a *charmer*.

The writer as usher is found in those formulations which engage the reader as a devotee, that is someone who gets the song reference in SBTs because it is obvious, that is impossible not to be noticed by appreciators of a given musician. The appeal of usher SBTs resides precisely in their being easily accessible and immediately recognized as quotes from some popular songs, as in the following cases:

House of Fun. The Story of Madness
In a Big Country [Stewart Adamson]
Dark Entries. Bauhaus and Beyond
Forever Changes. Arthur Lee and the Book of Love
Peter Hook's *Unknown Pleasures*

By articulating the usher metaphor, we can say that usher SBTs invite 'visitors' into the story by signalling where the main entrance is (i.e. the reference to the musician's most popular piece(s) of work). In these cases, no special knowledge of the artist's entire output is required. In fact, in the former three examples above, the book titles replicate the title of (one of) the most successful songs by Madness, Adamson's band – Big Country – and Bauhaus, respectively, while the latter cases reproduce the titles of critically acclaimed albums by Love and Joy Division, respectively.

The writer as guide addresses the reader as a connoisseur, someone having archival knowledge of the musician's output (in terms of chronology, discography and song lyrics) not restricted to its most successful segments, but encompassing also rare and unreleased material, and extending to include also side-projects and collaborations between the musician and other artists. The ideal readers are expected to be able to detect references to less known or obscure songs and are likely to find such testing of their archival knowledge to be particularly intriguing. Instances of guide SBTs are the following examples:

Steve Jones' *Lonely Boy*
Stewart Copeland's *Strange Things Happen*
Steve Kilbey's *Something Quite Peculiar*
Paint My Name in Black and Gold. The Rise of the Sisters of Mercy
On the Periphery. David Sylvian. A Biography

Through such formulations the writer as guide welcomes readers into the text, not from the main entrance, but rather by providing specific cues and direction as to how to navigate the musician's story on the presupposition that they are already familiar with the main outline of the artist's production. For instance, the first example above references a song co-written by Jones (with Paul Cook), original member of the Sex Pistols, which is not as popular as any of the songs featured on the band's only official album release (before their 1978 split and 1996 reunion) – namely, *Never Mind the Bollocks* – and is instead taken from the less popular OST for the movie *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle.* The second example uses a title taken from Copeland's output as a solo artist (under the pseudonym of Klark Kent), which is

markedly more obscure than any reference to the work of Copeland's main band – The Police – would have been. Kilbey's autobiography title reproduces the opening line of one of the Church's songs ('Under the Milky Way'), whose intertextual aspect is likely quite hard to detect for the general public, and, similarly the Sister of Mercy's biography SBT quotes a line from one of the band's earliest and lesser known numbers ('Heartland'). On the same basis, even more rewarding for expert readers is detecting in Sylvian's biography SBT an excerpt from a Nine Horses song ('Snow Borne Sorrow') – Nine Horses being a collaboration between Sylvian and other artists, whose output is arguably less known than anything issued by Sylvian's original band – Japan – or by him as a solo artist.

The writer as charmer is found in SBTs which engage the reader as a maven, that is someone who is familiar with the artists' production not just in terms of discography, chronology and lyrics, but also in terms of song structure and content: in other words, someone who knows both what is in a song – words, rhyme, rhythm, style, sound, etc. – and what is beyond a song – notably, its genesis, inspiration, purpose, hidden references, etc. On the basis of this advanced knowledge, maven readers can detect semantic allusions or structural alterations (i.e. truncation, wording modification, term substitution, syntactic calques, etc.), and the writer as charmer typically offers such 'puzzles' to be worked out, as in the following cases:

> *Paperback Beatles*
> Lol Tolhurst's *Cured. Tales of Two Imaginary Boys*
> *Fool the World. The Oral History of a Band Called Pixies*
> *Gang of Four. Damaged Gods. A Biography*
> *Love with a Passion called Hate. The Inside story of the Jam*

Charmer SBTs can be said to discursively 'take the readers for a ride', both literally – accompanying them along narrative pathways or through little know territories – and figuratively – dazzling, deceiving or cheating them, by offering information that is not as expected, or, more precisely, providing fragmented hints on the assumption that readers will be able to work them out. In the examples above, for instance,

the impact of the SBTs is achieved when the reader detects the pun in the Beatles biography SBT, which calques the Beatles' song 'Paperback Writer', or the alteration in Tolhurst's SBT, which modifies the Cure's song 'Three Imaginary Boys' – besides containing the pun Cure (band's namesake) vs cured (participle of a semantic verb) – or the French-to-English translation in the Pixies biography title (translating the Pixies' album title *Trompe le Monde*), the punning calque in the Gang of Four biography, modelled after the band's number 'Damaged Goods', or the syntactic modification of a line from the Jam song 'Start!' ("someone in this life loves with a passion called hate") in the band's biography.

4. Discussion

The outline of the different SBT typologies provided above allows us to see how intertextual song references in A&B titles can function as re-semiotizatizing resources. In fact, they are used to re-write the musician's story – told over hundreds of pages in the associated A&B – in the most synthetic and appealing way, that is through one-liners meant to epitomize the sense of the musician's story, notably by giving priority to certain meanings over others and presenting them as key for understanding the artist's life. At the ideational level, meanings that are prioritized concern the musicians' attitude towards their own experience and the telling of such experience, while at the interpersonal level they are meant to signal the degree of detail about the musician's life the narrator is willing to disclose to readers. In other words, at the ideational level, SBTs posit a horizontal re-semiotizing dimension, pointing to different ways of moving through life and approaching events, while at the interpersonal level SBTs establish a vertical reading, presupposing a dichotomy between a surface and a deeper level of detail in the story – controlled by the writer – and of knowledge and interests – on the part of the reader.

More precisely, as far as ideation is concerned, musicians' stories can be re-semiotized from either an internal or external angle, that is by conferring priority to either the musicians themselves, as agents, or to their stories, as action. The internal dimension is implicit in protagonist SBTs where the artist is portrayed in terms of agency and persona, through song

references that often co-signify attitudinal meanings which can be read as expressions of honesty, self-confidence or even bolstering arrogance (see, for instance, the case of *Whores: An Oral Biography of Perry Farrell and Jane's Addiction*). External framing, instead, is found in re-semiotizations which depict the musician's life as a series of events favoured or limited by external conditioning (wanderer SBTs) or as the assemblage of memories and recollections then discursively organized and structured for them to be recognized as (more or less) coherent stories (story-telling SBTs). Both cases presuppose some form of distance – either circumstance-based or narratological – between actors and their agency, on the one hand, and actions, on the other, which allows rhetorical space for perspective, that is for potential explanation, commentary, and justification (besides self-assertion) that are made possible by interpreting experience from different angles, distant standpoints and through broader outlooks. At the interpersonal level, SBTs, by presupposing an ideal reader (appreciator, connoisseur, maven), also implicitly reflect the sense of importance attributed to the musician as producer of cultural objects. In fact, usher SBTs, by referencing songs that contributed to the artist's popularity (as limited and relative as it may be), on the one hand, appeal to wider audiences – thus implying that wider audiences may be interested in the musician's story – and, on the other, they implicitly purport the musicians' contribution to PM, whose relevance is depicted in terms of popularity with, impact on and accessibility for the general public. The other title typologies (guide and charmer SBTs), instead, by variably codifying forms of gate-keeping, overrule appeal to general public and favour appeal to competent readers with various degrees of knowledge of the musician's output (connoisseur, maven). By presupposing an 'inner circle' accessible only to those who are capable of getting obscure references (guide SBTs) or capable of 'cracking codes' (charmer SBTs), this form of engagement not only implies and strengthens special bonds between musician and readers, but belies a specific sense of relevance for the musician which is not to be measured in quantitative terms or in terms of public response, but possibly according to more qualitative criteria, such as the musician's creativity, originality, diversity of output and exceptionality – which, as such, may not be immediately apprized by all PM appreciators.

5. Conclusion

PM artists' A&Bs are cultural products and, as such, they are expected to "carry the footprints of the social context in which they were created […], reflect their creators' minds, which are in turn shaped by the surrounding social scene, […] strive to maximize the relevance of their messages to their audiences [so as to] evoke an interest in, and elicit a response from, their audiences" (Kesebir, Kesebir 2017: 259-250; Markus, Kitayama 2010). The specificity of these cultural artefacts lies in the fact that they are demand-based structures (Consonni, Sala 2023), i.e., meant to fulfill the readers' curiosity, interest or knowledge gaps concerning some specific individual(s), therefore the audience's response is likely to depend on the text's ability to address such demands. As a consequence, the relevance of these texts depends on the degree to which the story presented is perceived as mirroring the narratee's reality. The musicians' output, i.e., their songs, is indeed a portion of such recognizable reality: in fact, "the idea that there exist some correspondence between the biography [or autobiography] of the singer-songwriter and his or her songs seems unquestionable" (Brackett 1995: 14).

In this analysis we have seen that song references in SBTs are not simply used for their attractive potential or aesthetic quality, but they are indeed resources though which to re-create and re-write the musicians' story in hyper-synthetic, concise, and condensed ways.

The notions of re-creation, re-writing or, in general, re-semiotization are all grounded around the idea of movement, not just from one code to another, but, more generally, from one position to another, one dimension to another, one system to another (i.e., from where one stands to where one wants to be, from what we know to what we want to know, from what is charted out and clearly mapped to what needs framing), all of which presuppose a sense of dynamics, direction and, ultimately, purpose. Indeed, re-semiotization brings with it two essential characteristics, namely novelty and purposefulness. Novelty, in that re-semiotizing operationally corresponds to and brings about some form of content updating, upgrading, or is meant to make content appropriate

to novel settings. This is precisely the embodiment of purposefulness, in that re-semiotizing is almost necessarily triggered by the awareness of new concerns (i.e., the need for transparence, completeness, impact, appropriateness), of existing constraints (hence the need for transformation), and of representational possibilities (offered by different channels, media and modes), and is driven by the desire to make meanings relevant for new contexts of use.

However, while novelty is the effect of any re-semiotizing process, movement and purpose are its driving forces. In the light of this, and on the basis of what has been observed throughout this analysis, the function of SBTs as re-semiotizing structures becomes clear. As a matter of fact, SBTs do codify both movement and purpose at both the ideational and interpersonal level. Ideation embodies movement going from the experiential dimension (the musician's life) to the textual one (the musician's story), while purpose transforms extended texts (hundred-page narrative) into concise formulations (one-liners). Similarly, at the interpersonal level, movement turns what is distant and public (the musician as a social figure, as producer of cultural objects) into what is close, accessible and private (the musician as the character of a story expressly written for the reader to enjoy), while purpose favours the merging of the referential and informative dimension (what the reader already knows) with engagement and attractiveness (what the reader still wishes to find out).

Notes

¹ From another angle, while it is virtually impossible to determine to what point an author deliberately decides to make a text demanding, obscure or impenetrable, it is instead plain that with fictional narrative the reader has very few text-external elements to which to resort in order to disambiguate what does not seem to cohere in the text.

² De Man (1979) goes as far as defining autobiographies purely on the basis of this criterion, as "any book with a readable title-page […] where the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding" (1979: 921-922).

³ Henceforth, autobiography titles will be indicated as "Musician's *Title*", while biographies as "*Title* [Musician]" – unless the name of the musician is already part of the title, in which case the specification in square brackets is omitted. The name of the biographer and other editorial details (date of publishing, publisher, etc.) will be omitted for space constraints and also because little relevant to the present analysis.

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