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FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES  
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Platform, Position, and Purpose  
Analyzing the Studio Recordings and Live Performances of U2

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Platform, Position, and Purpose  
Analyzing the Studio Recordings and Live Performances of U2

Matthew Smith

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the music of rock band U2, utilizing two perspectives: current research in popular musicology, specifically the work of Albin Zak, Allan Moore, and Lori Burns, and the thoughts of the band members of U2. These two perspectives provide the framework for the discussion that covers several examples from across the bands discography (1980-2000). The role of music in communicating with the listener is discussed from the perspective of the band members of U2. This discussion highlights the desire of the band members to actively participate in the songs meaning by shaping the musical performance to the themes and ideas discussed within the text. The way that the text shapes the understanding is examined through a discussion of the songs “All Along the Watchtower,” and “Playboy Mansion.” The bands live performances are also considered, through a discussion of the Elevation Tour. The songs “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” and “Bullet the Blue Sky” are discussed in-depth, taking into account the music, text, and performance from their initial studio recordings in the 1980s, to the recent performances in the Elevation Tour. The focus centers on the messages communicated through the bands music, the choices made in shaping their sound, and the importance of the details in fully understanding each performance.

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## Forward

My interest in the music of the rock band U2 goes back to high school. I recall several lunch hour discussions with fellow students where we talked about deciphering the meaning of their lyrics, the sound of the electric guitar and the groove of the bass line. The themes that emerged ranged from love to religious ideologies to politics. “With or Without You” from their 1991 album *Achtung Baby*, seemed to engage Christian doctrine within the form of a love song. “Sunday Bloody Sunday” from their 1983 album *War* juxtaposed the violence in Ireland with the crucifixion. Some songs exhibited interesting experiments in sound and composition. For example, the song “Miami” from the 1997 album *Pop* is in two distinct halves. The first half of the song is the second half backwards. In “Wake Up Dead Man” (also from *Pop*) the vocals are sung through a blown amplifier. While these early discussions were by no means holistic, they developed my personal interest in the band and the music they made.

The ideas developed here began through these casual conversations with friends, my personal interest, and Lori Burns’s undergraduate course on popular music analysis. The readings assigned in Burns’s seminar showed me the developing body of work in the field of popular musicology. The work of Albin Zak in *The Poetics of Rock* stirred my interest in the subject. With the opportunity to do a Master’s thesis, I decided to explore the music of U2 from the perspective of an analyst. As U2 consistently engages political and religious themes, the idea of communication became very interesting. I felt that analysis of their music and lyrics could reveal some unique perspectives about the messages in their music, and the role of the music and live performances in those messages. How are these ideas approached? How are the lyrics constructed to convey a

message? Is the music connected to what Bono sings about? If so, what strategies does the band employ in supporting these ideas? Additionally, as U2 is known for their massive world tours, how do all the above questions apply to their live concerts? These questions went through a refining process and shaped the development of my research.

My thesis explores how the music of the band U2 is communicated to listeners through the analysis of audio recordings as well as live performances. The recorded albums that I discuss range from their first album *Boy* in 1980, to *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, released in the year 2000. In discussing live performances, I will focus on the bands recent tour, entitled the *Elevation Tour*, which took place in the year 2001. As the *Elevation Tour* incorporates songs from U2's career, I will have the opportunity to look at the way the songs "Sunday Bloody Sunday," and "Bullet the Blue Sky" have evolved over time.

The three terms utilized in the title of this thesis were chosen to reflect the importance of popular music analysis. Music is a platform for the band U2 to discuss their ideas, religious beliefs, political ideologies, and personal thoughts. The band takes a position in discussing their ideas, by the way the songs are sung, and the music is played (as I will show throughout this thesis). Finally, there is a purpose behind this: connecting with an audience. Through numerous quotes by the band members of U2, I will reveal the bands thoughts on communicating with an audience, and the power of music in getting across their ideas.

In chapter one, I examine the band's thoughts about the relationship between music and the themes and ideas discussed in the lyrics. I begin by exploring current thoughts on this relationship by popular music analysts Albin Zak, Walter Everett, Allan

Moore, Robert Walser, and Lori Burns. I discuss how the music supports the themes and ideas in the lyrics. I then apply the ideas presented to an analysis of U2's song "Where the Streets Have No Name."

In chapter two I discuss the role of lyrics in U2's music. Utilizing analytic categories from popular music analyst Lori Burns, I examine the role of the *story*, *narrative voice and perspective*, *vocabulary*, and *vocal melody and phrase design* in shaping the text. These elements are illustrated in the first example "Playboy Mansion." I will show the way that the lyrics engage and mislead the listener, ultimately giving the song its social statement. In the second example, "All Along the Watchtower," I examine the cover version of this song by U2, utilizing the analytic categories of *perspective*, *lyric additions and alterations*, and *influence* emerging to compare their version to that of Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix. This analysis reveals the position of each artist in relation to the story told through the lyrics.

In chapter three, I look at the role of live performance in the band's communication of their music. This discussion focuses on the presentation of performances in the Elevation Tour, which took place in 2001, the most recent tour at the time that I began my research. The stage design, lighting, and the way the band utilizes the performance space all have a direct impact on the listener. I will use the Boston concert, which is recorded on DVD, as a model representative of the entire tour. I dissect the songs played, and the way that they assemble a set list. Taking a selection of the songs that appear in the Elevation tour, I discuss some of the themes that emerge through their performance, showing connections between songs in the set list.

In chapters four and five I take the opportunity to integrate the interpretive perspectives presented in the first three chapters in analyses of the songs “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” and “Bullet the Blue Sky.” I analyze the content of the music, the meaning of the lyrics, and the presentation of live performance. In examining the latter I broaden the perspective, looking at recorded performances from the inception of these songs in the 1980s to present day. In these two songs, the live performances present new introductions, and spoken sections where Bono directly addresses the audience. I will discuss these spoken sections, which I call the *monologue*, and the way that the *monologue* and introduction impact the songs performance. This reveals an evolving meaning that looks back to the original context of the song, while taking into account current events and issues.

Throughout the thesis I will refer to the four members of the band. U2 is Bono (Paul Hewson) on lead vocals, the Edge (Dave Evans) on guitar, Adam Clayton on Bass, and Larry Mullen Jr. on drums. The full lyric transcriptions to the songs referenced throughout this thesis can be found in the appendix at the back. In some cases, where variations in the words and formal structure have occurred, I have noted multiple versions of the same song. In the bibliography under *CD Resources* and *DVD Resources*, I have provided a full list of U2’s studio and live recordings and videos.

## Chapter One: Context for Analysis: Popular Musicology and U2

*You see our love of music is not just for the sound,  
but for the fact that you can communicate with people through it.*<sup>1</sup>  
- Bono

### Introduction

In the above quotation, U2 lead singer Bono notes that the music allows the band and their audiences to communicate. Many assume that popular music has little or no meaning, thinking music follows conventions, and is unrelated to the meaning or understanding of themes and ideas discussed in the lyrics. The idea that there could be something significant to the music is quickly dismissed. The discipline of popular musicology has worked to erase this myth by stressing the importance of the music and its relationship to the text: music as a critical and informative voice in a song adds a new dimension of meaning to the listening experience.

The analysis of music can take many different directions ranging from the abstract and ethereal to the direct. Regardless of the level of analytic scrutiny, there is agreement on the importance of music. I am interested in investigating the theoretical framework utilized within the discipline of popular music analysis. These approaches range from the general (looking at categories applicable to music in general), to the refined (categories aimed at a particular genre and/or sub-genre), and on to the specific (looking at an individual band or body of work). In all these scenarios, the focus turns to the ability of popular music to communicate. This chapter will present two perspectives: first I will

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<sup>1</sup> John Hutchinson, "Luminous Times: U2 Wrestle with their Moment of Glory," in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 74.

discuss current research in popular musicology. Secondly, I will highlight the views of the band U2. These two perspectives will act as the governing ideas for the entire thesis.

### Perspectives on Popular Musicology

The writings of musicologists Albin Zak and Allan Moore were highly influential in both developing my interest in popular musicology, and establishing a theoretical and analytical framework for rock analysis in this thesis. These two books stand out for a several reasons. First, there are many similarities between Zak's *The Poetics of Rock: Writing Tracks, Making Records*, and Moore's *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, as both address the genre of rock, and the need for a new perspective on its investigation, exploration, and discussion. Secondly, while both books utilize several examples, drawing from various artists, producers, and critics, neither book centers specifically on one artist or style. Finally, both works are prefaced with the authors' desire to broaden the discourse of rock analysis.

Albin Zak presents an extensive discussion on the role of the record album in rock, from the onset of recording technology, through the creative process of composition, and the transfer of performance(s) to recorded sound, to the places, tools, engineers, and producers involved in making all this happen. The focus of his work can be summed up by his claim that rock analysis must move from talking about what a record "contains" to what a record "is."<sup>2</sup> I will discuss this concept in more detail subsequently.

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<sup>2</sup> Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 23.

At the onset of *Rock: The Primary Text*, musicologist Allan Moore identifies two fundamental questions concerning the analysis of popular music.<sup>3</sup> First, he asks, “What is rock?” Throughout the course of the introduction, he states that a simple definition is problematic. Instead, Moore suggests that we “evolve an understanding” of rock as a genre, as establishing rules about the broad and diverse qualities of rock is beyond the scope of a single definition. Secondly, Moore asks, “What is the primary text” when it comes to analyzing and discussing rock music. This second question is the focus for the chapters that follow. He identifies the sound(s) of rock as the primary text for study, stating that it has received insufficient attention, adding, “Our concern has to begin with the sounds, [as without their consideration] we have no musical entity to care about, or which to give value.”<sup>4</sup>

Zak’s focus on the recording, and Moore’s discussion of sound both cover the role of timbre, and texture in shaping the identity of a track. The main difference between these two books is that Zak’s analysis of rock music focuses on the process of recording an album, while Moore’s analysis stresses a more broad discussion of the importance of the “sound” of rock (including and going beyond the recording process).

### Albin Zak

Zak highlights the role of the recording studio in shaping the way music is made, heard, and thought about. He explores the process that moves a song from its initial conception and initial performances to a recording that is available for consumers to purchase. His discussion centers on the identity and nature of the record, beginning with

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<sup>3</sup> Allan Moore, *Rock the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2001), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

the origins of sound recording and the thoughts surrounding the technology, to a detailed discussion of the recording process, and a consideration of the impact of recording on modern society. Throughout the book, references are made to various artists, producers, and engineers, supporting the claims made by Zak. This is not a technical book; rather Zak's interest in the medium of recorded sound is expressed through an exploration of the creation and impact of an album.

I will now outline the focus of each chapter, highlighting the theoretical and analytic framework utilized in his analysis. The first two chapters sketch the conceptual terrain, providing a foundation for the chapters that follow. He begins by exploring the origins and impact of sound recording on artists and listeners at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, Zak points to a recording of a jazz improvisation: while originally a moment of spontaneous creativity, the recording makes the performance repeatable. The notes will never be heard differently.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the recording captures an interpretation of a classical symphony. Instead of listening to a Beethoven Symphony, the listener becomes accustomed to the particular interpretation of that symphony. It gives a background on why Zak feels that the record and recorded sound deserve attention.

Zak then discusses the way that this recording technology was perceived. He highlights two opposing views on recording technology: one that embraces it as a new frontier of musical expression, and one which sees the medium as problematic, and useful only as a document viable for preservation of ideas.<sup>6</sup> Moving forward to the middle of

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<sup>5</sup> Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 3-10.

the twentieth century, Zak highlights the development of the genre of rock: a genre that is connected with the record. For example, he points to Elvis' rise to fame, which did not initially come through live performances in front of fans. Rather, the singles he recorded with Sam Phillips at Sun Records transformed him into a celebrity.<sup>7</sup> In his discussion about the origins of Rock, Zak stresses that the record removed the physical presence of the artist from the listener.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of the record led to the advancement of the recording process through the developments of new technology and techniques of capturing sound.

Zak introduces the question of authenticity in recorded music, asking the question “what is a record?” If the recording changes the way music is made, heard, and thought about, how has it changed? Zak references Theodor Gracyk’s discussion of *autography* in rock music.<sup>9</sup> In the book *Rhythm and Noise*, Gracyk identifies the work of Nelson Goodman in defining the terms *autographic* and *allographic*. An *autographic* work, such as a painting or musical recording, can never be truly duplicated. No matter how close a forged Van Gogh painting resembles the original, it will never be exactly the same. In contrast, an *allographic* work, such as a musical score or book, is authentically recreated when someone performs a musical piece, or reads a novel. Zak states that the identity of the artist(s) involved in a recording is transferred to the recording, much like the strokes of a paintbrush on a painting. He worries that rock criticism has generally focused on the interpretation of lyrics, and in academic circles the technical details regarding melody, harmony, meter, and the like. In response to this tendency, Zak presents the concept that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 21.

everything about a record is part of its identity, aiming to broaden the discourse from “what records ‘contain’ to what they ‘are’.”<sup>10</sup> In looking at what records ‘are,’ there is far more for the analyst to explore: the autographic details found within a recording.

In answering the question “what is a record?” Zak establishes the components that make up a record. He identifies the three elements as follows: first, the song, which includes words, melody, and chords (which he compares to what you would find on a lead sheet). Secondly, the arrangement, a particular arrangement of a song. Finally, the track, which is the recording itself.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the song and the arrangement, the track is a fixed item that cannot be changed.

In the third chapter, “Sound as Form,” Zak moves away from the conceptual terrain, covered until this point, to an exploration of the process of composition. At the end of chapter two, Zak addressed the fact that the making of a record is a compositional process. Now he looks at the elements of composition, broadly divided into the categories of *musical performance*, *timbre*, *echo*, *ambience*, and *texture*. These analytic categories are explained and explored.<sup>12</sup> These analytic categories will be utilized in my discussion of U2’s music.

The first category of *musical performance* relates to the transferal of the performers' personality to the recording. This refers to the *autographic* nature of the record. Zak references several artists and producers about the “magic” that takes place in transferring the live performances to tape.<sup>13</sup> Later in this chapter, I will discuss U2’s approach to composing and creating their music. Zak stressed the uniqueness of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 50-96.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 20.

recording studio, and how it differs from live performance as within the recording studio it is possible to go over parts indefinitely, capturing exactly what the performer wants to hear.

The second category introduced by Zak is *timbre*. The timbre is the sound made by an instrument. Zak states that timbre is “a sonic distinctiveness that places [instruments] in a thematic role within the track,” and adds that timbre allows “the greatest range of experimentation in rock music.” In his discussion of timbre, Zak introduces two concepts that shape his analysis. These concepts provide a framework for the discussion of timbre from two perspectives. The first term is *physical timbre*. This relates to the properties of sound: frequency, content, volume, overtones, etc. – what Zak terms the “timbre signature of an instrument.” Physical timbre represents the nature of the sound itself, and describes the aspects of a particular sound from an objective perspective. The second term, *rhetorical timbre*, relates to the associations carried within sounds, which are unrelated to the properties of sound. This is by far more abstract and subjective, as it is possible for different individuals to have unique and personal interpretations of what sound suggests. In my analysis of U2, I will discuss physical and rhetorical timbre, highlighting the way the sound works with the ideas and themes discussed within the text.

In explaining these two terms, Zak utilizes a song from U2’s repertoire entitled “Zoo Station,” from the band’s 1991 album *Achtung Baby*. This example is particularly relevant to the discussion of timbre, as this song simultaneously looks back to the band’s sound from the 1980’s, and gives the listener a new and very different sound, as the album is their first in the 1990’s. Zak notes the way the sound captures the opening line

sung by Bono: “I’m ready, I’m ready for what’s next.” Later in this thesis, during my discussion of U2’s song “Bullet the Blue Sky,” I will examine the way that timbre captures the themes and ideas discussed in the songs lyrics.

The next two categories Zak presents, *echo* and *ambience*, relate to the acoustic space created in a recording studio. In this section, he provides a thorough discussion of the ways that a recording studio can create “timbre, rhythmic, [and] atmospheric possibilities.”

The final category, *texture*, incorporates the previous categories, and Zak defines it as “characterizing that quality of composite sound images created by the interaction of diverse elements.” Thus, Zak’s chapter “Sound as Form,” provides a theoretical and analytical framework for approaching the *texture* of a rock song.

In the chapters that follow, Zak explores the process of recording an album from the perspective of the physical location and tools contained in a studio (chapter 4), to the tracking and mixing process (chapter 5), and finally the individuals involved in working in a studio (chapter 6). In the final chapter, “Resonance,” Zak discusses the impact of the record on modern society, noting the way that records can be referenced and understood in relation to other records.

### Allan Moore

I would now like to move to a more thorough discussion of Moore’s book *Rock: The Primary Text*, identifying the theoretical framework utilized in his analysis of rock music. As I have stated, the focus of his work centers on the importance of sound; the framework utilized reflects this fact. In the first chapter, “Issues in Theory,” Moore argues for the development of a musicology specific to rock music. Here he addresses the

split between popular and classical music. He states that the differences and uniqueness of popular music, specifically the genre of rock, must be identified, as existing analytic structures fail to effectively convey the intricacies and nuance created.<sup>14</sup>

In the second chapter, Moore identifies elements of an analytic musicology of rock, expanding on his desire to see a musicology specific to the genre. He identifies four layers that, although not exclusive to rock music alone, are appropriate for the analysis of rock.<sup>15</sup> The first layer is an “explicit rhythmic layer,” where “pitch is irrelevant.” Moore places the drums and percussion in this layer. The second layer contains deep frequencies, usually associated with the bass guitar. The third layer contains higher frequencies, typically the guitar(s), keyboard(s), and any background vocal(s). The fourth and final layer contains the “tune,” the melodic line sung/played by the singer/instrument. These layers provide a way to approach the musical arrangement utilized by a band. In discussing the music of U2, I will reference these layers.

In chapter three, Moore begins to discuss and explore the sub-genre of progressive rock. This analysis is not directly related to any of my research. It is however a demonstration of his analytic framework using several examples from progressive rock.

In chapter four, Moore further develops an analytic musicology of rock. Under the sub-heading “Technology and Texture,” Moore explores the impact of recording technology on rock music.<sup>16</sup> He looks at the impact of recording sound on the development and growth of popular music. The points Moore raises here are essentially

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<sup>14</sup> Allan Moore, *Rock the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2001), 11-15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 120-126

the basis of Albin Zak's research in *The Poetics of Rock*. With the foundation of discussing the impact of recording technology on rock music, Moore moves to the analysis of several sub-genres of rock, identifying their key characteristics.<sup>17</sup> This area approaches the aesthetic split between the various sub-genres. Moore then approaches the difficult question of authenticity within the realm of rock music.<sup>18</sup>

The final chapter of *Rock: The Primary Text* addresses the impact of rock, and "meanings" generated from rock recordings. It is in this chapter that room for an extended discussion of an individual artist or band becomes apparent. Moore identifies the analytic areas discussed throughout the book, discussing their meaning in a larger context. Moore looks at *communication, self-expression, style and identity, meaning and style, authenticity and intertextuality, performance, and stylistic development*.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout this thesis, all these analytic categories will be approached within the context of U2. I will explore *communication* through analysis of U2's music, lyrics, and live performances. All these considerations will be included in my discussion. I will explore *self-expression, style, and identity* through a discussion of particular songs by U2, and their origins, which have led to Bono writing particular songs. I will explore the impact of the music, lyrics, and live performance or the meaning of particular songs. In discussing the live performances of U2's songs "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and "Bullet the Blue Sky," I will approach a discussion of *authenticity and intertextuality*. As my analysis will look at various versions of these songs, I will incorporate an analysis of

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<sup>17</sup> The sub-genres explored by Moore include Glam Rock, Punk, Progressive Rock, Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Synthesizer Rock, and Britpop.

<sup>18</sup> Allan Moore, *Rock the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2001), 157.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-216.

*stylistic development*, and how it relates to *meaning*. These elements will not be sub-heads in any of my analysis; rather these analytic categories will be discussed simultaneously as they appear in the music of U2.

### Walter Everett

In his article, “Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can be a Sticky Substance,” Everett stresses the importance of popular music analysis, and finding a framework that will accurately reflect the genre of rock. His article comes at the end of *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, a collection edited by Everett that focuses on popular music analysis. The aim of his article is to illustrate that “rock musicians express their originality according to all significant musical parameters...”<sup>20</sup> His analysis of these parameters uses the analytic categories of *form and design*, *vocal and instrumental color*, *rhythm*, and *tempo*. Everett then extends his analytic framework to include elements of Schenkerian analysis by looking at *tonal systems*, *approaches to harmony and voice leading*, *linear progressions*. This article presents an extensive framework for popular music analysis, focusing on the theory of rock music.

In *The Beatles as Musicians*, Walter Everett refines the focus of his analysis to one band: the Beatles. His research on the music of the Beatles specifically addresses the role of the music in shaping the understanding of their music, stating that the musical choices made are as rich as the lyrics.<sup>21</sup> This further supports the view that the analysis of sound is crucial in popular music. In examining the role of the music, Everett identifies

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Everett, “Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can be a Sticky Substance,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, Ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 271.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), vii.

several considerations that make up his musical analysis: “melodic shapes, contrapuntal relationships, harmonic functions, rhythmic articulations, formal designs, timbral colors, and textures” and how they “bring individual tonal meanings to their poetry.”<sup>22</sup> Everett’s work is important as he also stresses elements of the musical composition as crucial in establishing and enforcing the ideas and themes within popular music.

### Robert Walser

Robert Walser also stresses the importance and significance of timbre in rock analysis.<sup>23</sup> He focuses extensively on the sub-genre of rock known as heavy metal. However, his discussion can be applied to rock music in general. Similar to the writings of Albin Zak and Allan Moore, Walser stresses the importance of moving “beyond the vocals” to the analysis of the music of popular music. The particular example discussed in his book *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* explores the significance of feedback and distortion in heavy metal, stating timbre is often overlooked in analysis, but “its significance can hardly be overstated.”<sup>24</sup> He notes the intricate connection between the use of feedback and distortion and the subject matter and image of the musicians involved in the style. Together, the writings of Zak, Moore, and Walser stress the importance of a popular musicology that explores the role of sound in the development of meaning.

### Lori Burns

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: the Quarry Men through Rubber soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), vii.

<sup>23</sup> Walser

<sup>24</sup> Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: power, gender, and madness in heavy metal music* (Hannover: University Press of New England), 41.

How does the music contribute to the themes and ideas within the lyrics? Popular music analyst Lori Burns's analysis of "The Garden" by artist PJ Harvey is an excellent example of how the guitar participates in the themes and ideas of a song. She examines many aspects of the guitar part, from the melodic lines and harmonic structure to the way the guitar integrates with the vocal melody and instrumental texture. Burns notes how the role of the guitar personifies the "other" (male character) described in the lyrics.<sup>25</sup> She looks at the melodic and harmonic movement of the guitar and the connection to the vocal line.<sup>26</sup> This analysis focuses extensively on what the instruments are playing, and how the arrangement creates layers in the musical texture. The development of the instrumental parts as dramatic roles gives further understanding to the lyrics. Burns notes that the music "plays a significant role in the representation of [the] characters" and that the music "narrates the sexual plot that is only implied in the lyrics"<sup>27</sup>. This analysis shows the importance of music analysis in developing themes and ideas within popular song.

The discussion of musical importance must be balanced by an analysis of text, determining the way that the words of a song work in developing the listeners' understanding. In Burn's book *Disruptive Divas*, she presents an analytic framework for approaching the lyrics of a song.<sup>28</sup> I will be using her categories *story, narrative voice and perspective, vocabulary, and vocal melody and phrase design* in approaching U2's songs "The Playboy Mansion," and "All Along the Watchtower" in chapter two.

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<sup>25</sup> Lori Burns, *Disruptive Divas* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2002), 196.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 51-56.

## John Covach

In the article “Progressive Rock, “Close to the Edge,” and the Boundaries of Style,” musicologist John Covach explore the music of the band Yes, discussing their approach to the sub-genre of rock known as progressive rock. His analysis looks at both the musical and lyrical setting of Yes’s song “Close to the Edge.”

The musical analysis looks extensively at formal structure. He approaches each section of the song, looking how they contribute to the overall structure, and the way motifs, themes, and key-areas are utilized in each section.<sup>29</sup> He provides a detailed chart that documents each section with capital letters, followed by the timeline, (the intro runs from 0:56 – 1:21) a description of what is occurring, and the key being emphasized.<sup>30</sup>

Covach’s analysis of the text is particularly interesting. He notes the connections between the lyrics of “Close to the Edge,” and the novel *Siddhartha* by writer Hermann Hesse. He continues his text analysis by noting the connections between the lyrics and the novel, showing the way the lyrics (and in turn the formal structure of the song) follow the themes and ideas of the novel.<sup>31</sup> Covach states that his intent is not to portray this piece as a musical realization of the novel, rather that the piece “both plays out the dialectic of the material and physical versus the spiritual and intellectual,” and “captures the timelessness that is so central to the novel.”<sup>32</sup> Utilizing references from band members, quotations from the book, and analysis of the music, Covach emphasizes the relationship between the novel *Siddhartha*, and the lyrics and music of “Close to the

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<sup>29</sup> John Covach, “Progressive Rock, “Close to the Edge,” and the Boundaries of Style,” in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, Ed. John Covach, and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 17.

Edge.” Using Covach’s discussion as a model, I will discuss in chapter two how the lyrics and performance of Bob Dylan’s song “All Along the Watchtower,” (as performed by U2), connect to the Biblical narrative of the fall of Babylon in the book of Isaiah.

### Application to the Music of U2

While the claims made by popular musicologists provide a framework for the analysis and discussion of rock music, finding a subject for analysis can change the depth that this analysis reveals. In looking at the music of U2, I have incorporated several of the considerations by these popular music analysts. I began with many questions: Is there a connection between the music and the text in the music of U2? Is there a conscious effort to make the music an important aspect of their music? If so, what establishes this connection? In pursuing these questions, I have decided to approach U2’s music from three perspectives. I will begin by looking at the band’s thoughts on the power of music in communicating the thoughts and ideas discussed in the lyrics. This will be followed by a close reading of the lyrics.

In chapter three, I will then consider the role of live performance in shaping the understanding of the musical setting, and lyrics. In approaching the live performances of U2, I became particularly interested in the construction of the set list – the songs, and the order that they are played. For this reason, I will begin by discussing the *Elevation Tour*, and follow by providing a reading of the set list, and how it communicates the theme of freedom and healing with the audience. I will also focus on the presentation of the song “Until the End of the World,” showing the way that the live performance emphasizes and extends the subject matter discussed in the lyrics.

Finally I will look at two songs, “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” and “Bullet the Blue Sky” in depth, using the framework established in the first three chapters. I believe that U2’s music acts as an excellent model for analysis.

### Music, Text, and U2

#### “Serving the Song”

*When you’re making a record either the instruments serve the song, or the song serves the instruments... sometimes, everyone is playing a part, and it’s all very correct and musical, but this isn’t like that. It’s more like we’re serving the song, we’re playing to the song, and we’re also playing to the vocal. It’s a different approach and one we’ve not taken before.<sup>33</sup>*  
- Larry Mullen Jr.

I will begin by looking at the role the music plays in shaping the composition and performance practice of the band U2. Until this point I have provided an overview of popular musicologists and their approaches to analyses. Bassist Adam Clayton introduces the terminology “serving the song,” “playing to the song,” and “playing to the vocal.” These terms suggest a focus for the conception, reflection, and performance of U2’s music. These ideas show the approach the band takes to making a record. They are important as an analytic consideration in approaching the music of U2, as one can look at how the music “serves the song.” Clayton clarifies that the “correct and musical” performance does not necessarily connect to the themes and ideas discussed in the lyrics. In stating this he implies that far too often the conventions of rock dominate, foregoing a consideration of lyric content. He clearly states that this “new approach” is the careful thought of the content of a song, and how the music can “serve” those ideas.

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<sup>33</sup> U2, “The Joshua Tree: The four members of U2 talk about the new album and the current tour,” in *U2: The Best of Propaganda – 20 Years of the Official U2 Magazine*, ed. Ian Gittens (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), 75.

This discussion raises an important question that Clayton's statement fails to address: How does the music "serve the song"? In order to explore this idea in the music of U2 I would like to present two examinations of their music by popular music analysts Allan Moore and Simon Reynolds. Their analyses focus on the importance of the arrangement in shaping the sound of U2. Musicologist Allan Moore discusses the instrumental arrangements in U2's early albums and how they provide a "sense of space" in the music.<sup>34</sup> Moore addresses this space through an analysis of the open-endedness of the harmonic sequences, the bass playing, the guitar playing, and Bono's voice.<sup>35</sup> In looking at the song "Where the Streets Have No Name," Moore highlights the role of the guitar, bass, and drums in creating a texture of "great energy" where anything that would clutter the sound is removed. Simon Reynolds analyzes the "sense of space" in the music of U2, but goes a step further by connecting the arrangement to the subject matter in their songs.<sup>36</sup>

The comments of Moore and Reynolds on "Where the Streets Have No Name" both identify a "sense of space" in the song. The subject matter of "Where the Streets Have No Name" discusses Heaven and freedom. The song alludes to biblical descriptions of Heaven stating, "I'll go to a place where there's no sorrow or shame, where the streets have no name."<sup>37</sup> The place where the streets have no name is one of freedom, one where things that held you back are no longer present. The chorus states,

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<sup>34</sup> Allan Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, (Brookfield, V.T.: Ashgate, 2001), 162-164.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Reynolds, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 80.

<sup>37</sup> The Biblical reference can be found in the book of Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

“We keep building and burning down love,” suggesting that all the efforts to bring world peace are short lived. Despite the desire to live in a world that is peaceful and free, the reality is a world filled with conflict. Throughout the lyrics, Bono sings of this new place: heaven, where this conflict will no longer exist.

The sound of the instruments in “Where the Streets Have No Name” emphasizes a sense of space through open arrangements, and timbre. The song begins and ends with a synthesized string sound played in a chorale style. The sound is very quiet and has a lot of depth, covering a wide frequency range. The guitar plays alongside the strings, utilizing heavy reverb and delay on the sound. The guitar plays a cyclic motif – a repeated arpeggiated figure. The repeated motifs open voicings, and extensive reverb all help to make a big open space. This is an excellent example of how the music can serve the song. All of the aspects of the performance work together in supporting and enforcing the themes and ideas found within the lyric text sung by Bono.

#### “Serving the Music”

There is another perspective that sees the elements of the musical sound and performance as the inspiration for the ideas and themes expressed in the lyrics. Speaking about the way music affects the lyrics Bono states:

The music tells you what to do and in the end that’s what you gotta do. The music tells you what clothes to wear, it tells you what kind of stage you should be standing on, it tells you who should be photographing you, it tells you who should be your agent... And so if I want to take my sunglasses off, I just gotta change my tune.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Fast, “Music, Contexts, and Meaning in U2,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 33.

In this quote Bono comments on the way the music shapes the ideas and themes found within the lyrics, concluding that everything – down to the smallest detail of sunglasses – responds to the music. Bono recognizes the way all the elements of the sound and arrangement carry rhetorical implications. Within these two directions of influence – the music reacting to the text, and the text reacting to the music – is an inherent problem. How can these two philosophies of composition and performance co-exist? Speaking about the process of composition in their music Adam Clayton states:

It seems like it takes a very long time for everyone to commit, and it can only get finished or function if everyone has committed. So Larry can't commit to a drum part unless he has some idea of what the vocal is gonna be and what the lyric is gonna be. Bono won't commit to what that's gonna be until he feels the music is a bit more developed... So it's everything moving around itself for quite a long time, then, a bit like musical chairs, everyone has to commit and sit on something.<sup>39</sup>

In this quote, Clayton stresses the importance to commit to ideas to move the composition process forward. The process of “serving the song,” from both the perspective of the musician who aims to emulate and capture the themes in the lyric text, and the singer who intends to reflect on what the music is saying, happens simultaneously. The singer is constantly trying to respond to the music, and the musician is constantly trying to respond to the singer. As Clayton describes, the process can only begin when someone commits to something, allowing for the germination of an idea, and the development of a musical setting and narrative. Some songs began with the musical

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<sup>39</sup> U2, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb: Bonus DVD*, dir. By Richie Smith, 43 min. Island, 2004, DVD.

inspiration, adding the lyrics and text afterwards. Bono states that the song “Bullet the Blue Sky” began as an extended improvisation: he stepped in saying, “Whatever you guys are doing don’t stop,” and the lyric text began to take shape.<sup>40</sup> The process then works back and forth until a final product materializes. In the case of “Bullet the Blue Sky,” Bono’s desire to express his frustration about his experience in El Salvador lined up with the intensity and direction of the improvisation. With these two starting points, the song began to take shape.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified two perspectives on rock music. The first stressed the current research and state of popular musicology, by highlighting the analyses and frameworks utilized by Albin Zak, Allan Moore, Walter Everett, and Robert Walser. This discussion showed the importance of sound in shaping the understanding and identity of popular music. In this discussion, no particular band or artists were highlighted – instead I aimed to provide a view relevant to the study of rock music in a general way.

Secondly, I have identified the thoughts of members of the band U2 on the importance of music, and the relationship between the music and the understanding of their lyrics, themes, and ideas. I have explained how these two approaches can co-exist in the composition and performance of their music. The example of “Where the Streets Have No Name” provided an example of how the music can speak to the themes and

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<sup>40</sup> Gregory Isola, “Reluctant Rock Star: How U2’s Adam Clayton Learned to Play – And Conquer the World Onstage,” in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, Ed. Hank Bordowitz (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 196.

ideas found within the lyric text. The music created an atmosphere and musical aesthetic appropriate for the discussion of freedom and heaven.

The correlations between the instrumental arrangement and timbre and the lyrics are a clear example of how the music “serves the song” and “plays to the vocal.” This appears in the examples utilized throughout this chapter. U2 makes an explicit attempt to not rely on the “traditional sound” of rock music. The band members and lead singer actively aim to work together by carefully considering the roles and influence of each part.

## Chapter Two: Lyrics

### Introduction

How does an analyst approach the lyrics of popular music? When presented with the text of a song, what do they look for or isolate? The lyrics found in popular music discuss a full range of subjects, from the romantic to the political, the religious to material. For example, U2 is known for approaching all these themes in their music, incorporating their political ideologies and religious beliefs into their music. For example, the title of the track “Mothers of the Disappeared,” from the album *Achtung Baby*, refers to the organization in Argentina that aimed to discover the truth about murder squads operating under the Argentinean military.<sup>41</sup> “Zooropa,” from the album *Zooropa*, connects a number of commercial slogans to create a narrative about materialism. “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” from the album *The Joshua Tree*, opens up a discussion about their struggle with religion.

In engaging the song “The Playboy Mansion” by U2, I will utilize a framework presented by Lori Burns in *Disruptive Divas*. In this book Burns presents analytic categories for lyric analysis.<sup>42</sup> The first category I will utilize is *story*. In discussing the *story* I will focus on a linear and literal reading of the song text. This relates to questions including: what is this song about? What do the words describe? What events take place in the text, and how does it impact the understanding of the song? The second category I will utilize is *narrative voice and perspective*. In this category I want to look at who is telling the story, and how they are describing the events that take place within the lyrics.

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<sup>41</sup> Niall Stokes, *Into the Heart: The Story Behind Every U2 Song* (Dubai: Carlton, 1996), 77.

<sup>42</sup> Lori Burns, *Disruptive Divas* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 51-56.

I will then move to a discussion of *vocabulary*, and how the words chosen in the lyrics impact the song. Finally, in discussing *vocal melody and phrase design*, I will explore the lyrics within the context of the musical setting answering the questions: Is the melodic line significant? Do the musical phrases emphasize the text in a particular way? How does this effect the listeners understanding? All these categories will be utilized in my discussion of the song “The Playboy Mansion,” showing the true focus as materialism and secular society, not as a male fantasy world.

In his analysis of the song “Close to the Edge” by the band Yes, John Covach approaches lyric analysis from a literary perspective. He looks at the connection between the lyrics and the Hermann Hesse novel *Siddhartha*.<sup>43</sup> In his analysis the literary connection between the book and the lyrics to “Close to the Edge” form the basis of understanding both the themes of the song, and its structure. Later in this chapter, I will be discussing U2’s cover version of Bob Dylan’s song “All Along the Watchtower,” noting the unique elements of their performance. In this analysis I will show how the Biblically inspired text impacted U2’s interpretation of the song, including new words, and an altered formal structure.

U2’s songs “Playboy Mansion,” and “All Along the Watchtower” will act as analytic examples in this chapter. In “Playboy Mansion,” I will be using the analytic categories of *narrative voice and perspective, vocabulary, vocal melody, and phrase design* from Burns, to show how the lyrics work in misleading the listener to the nature of heaven described in the lyrics. My analysis of “All Along the Watchtower” will focus on

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<sup>43</sup> John Covach, “Progressive Rock, “Close to the Edge,” and the Boundaries of Style,” in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, Ed. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

the cover version played by U2. This will consider the analytic categories of *perspective*, *lyric additions and alterations*, and *influence* in their cover version of the song. This will reveal the unique qualities of U2's performance, and the way that U2, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix tell the story contained in the lyrics. While these two examples take on different approaches, both these analyses focus on the way in which the lyrics engage the ideas and themes of a song, and the effect this has on the listener.

### Perspective and Ambiguity: "The Playboy Mansion"

#### Story

I will begin by providing a reading of the lyrics in the order they occur as context for the discussion that follows. U2's song "Playboy Mansion" describes the difficulty of living a moral life in a materialist world full of temptation. It describes the transformation of the protagonist from a religious man to one fully taken in by worldly desires. The song begins with the protagonist questioning everything that surrounds him, trying to find perspective in a modern society. The first two verses present "a list of temptations... to break a modern pilgrim's will," asking how they relate to gaining entry to "the gates of that mansion." In the next verse the focus moves from external observation to self-analysis as the "modern pilgrim" ponders whether he is qualified to enter "that mansion."

<sup>44</sup> Doubt follows, as he describes his difficulty in waiting and holding on, then a resurgence of faith as he states "I know I've got to believe." It is at the end of the song that the listener realizes the object of his desire is not heaven in the religious sense, but the worldly heaven of the Playboy mansion.

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Taylor, "Pop," in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, Ed. Hank Bordowitz (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 226.

## Narrative Voice and Perspective

The “Playboy Mansion” is almost entirely told from the perspective of a “modern pilgrim” considering both religious and worldly values.<sup>45</sup> The perspective shifts from doubt and disillusionment to faith and conviction as he considers the society that surrounds him, and his personal desire to gain entry to “that mansion.” The listener overhears the pilgrim’s personal thoughts, convictions, struggles, and longings.

There is one instance in the song that utilizes narrative voice in perspective in a way that affects the meaning and understanding of the song. At the end of “Playboy Mansion” Bono utilizes a new voice to provide commentary on the themes of desire and longing. As the final verse concludes Bono sings “But they don’t mention the pain to reach,” referring to the cost of embracing everything the world has to offer (represented in the lyrics by the Playboy mansion). The use of falsetto contrasts this voice from the rest of the song. It is further distinguished by reference to an “other” through the pronoun “they.” While the narrative suggests that arriving at the Playboy mansion will result in the end of “shame and sorrow,” this new perspective warns the listener that they are not seeing the entire picture, and that “they” are not being transparent about the cost, the “pain to reach.”

## Vocabulary

The choice of vocabulary is significant as it adds ambiguity to the themes of desire and longing expressed in the song. It is unclear throughout the song that the mansion described is the Playboy mansion. Did worldly desire overwhelm the pilgrim

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<sup>45</sup>Nicholas Jennings, “Pop: Millennial Dancing,” in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, Ed. Hank Bordowitz (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 224.

from the outset of the narrative? Was this a gradual shift? Throughout the song, the lyrics reference the source of desire and longing as “that mansion.” The mixing of references to popular culture with religious jargon makes it increasingly unclear whether the protagonist is trying to remain faithful in a worldly society, desiring everything the world has to offer.

Religious jargon is utilized in the song to confuse the listener. Several terms point toward a description of heaven, and the righteous desire to get there. The idea of heaven is suggested by the numerous references to “the gates of that mansion,” and the process of the protagonist arriving there. There are some important words here that deserve attention. In the first verse, he questions if he has the “gift” to make it to the mansion. In the second verse, the text speaks of his desire to continue to “push” forward. Finally, in the fifth verse he recognizes that entry can be granted by knowing the right people: “It’s who you know that gets you through.” These terms all describe elements of Christian life: the “gift” of salvation, the need to “push” and persevere through this life, and the one way to heaven: “know[ing]” God. In the chorus, the lyrics add further religious terminology to describe life in “that mansion.” Bono sings about the end of “shame and sorrow,” as described in the book of Revelations in the Bible.<sup>46</sup> In this way, religious jargon provides one interpretation of the songs lyrics.

These religious terms and references begin to lose their potency when placed alongside several references to popular culture. There are several moments in the lyrics where the meaning of words becomes entirely ambiguous. When Bono sings about his

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<sup>46</sup> The Biblical reference can be found in the book of Revelation 21:4: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

“numbers coming around,” and the “colours and lights flashing” the physical location of “that mansion” becomes unclear. These terms simultaneously suggest the protagonist to witnessing the splendor of heaven, and the desire to win at a casino. Numerous references to celebrities (“Michael Jackson,” “OJ”) and products (“Coke,” “Big Mac”) further confuse the story. By the time Bono sings “Don’t know if I can wait that long,” it is difficult to decide what he is talking about. While this song is entitled “Playboy Mansion” it is not until the end of the song that this term appears, clarifying the exact nature of “that mansion.”

### Vocal Melody and Phrase Design

The phrasing of the vocal melodic distinguishes the protagonist’s personal insecurities with his desires to enter “that mansion.” The phrasing of the vocal melody in “Playboy Mansion” emphasizes the questioning nature of the lyrics. The first two verses share the same melody, in which Bono emphasizes his questioning with musical call and response figures. The phrase rises on each subject (“Coke,” “Michael Jackson,” “surgery,” “OJ,” “Big Mac,” “Perfume,” and “Talk Shows”) and falls on the defining of each subject (for example, “If Coke *is a mystery*, Michael Jackson *history*, if beauty *is truth* and surgery *the fountain of youth*) [descent of the phrase in italic]. A long musical phrase in which Bono asks how they relate to gaining entry to “that mansion” follows the short questioning phrases. The third and fourth verses utilize a new melody that matches the evolving subject of the lyrics.

In the final verse of “Playboy Mansion” the melody returns to the initial register. Melodically the chorus represents the high point for the entire song. The short phrases of the verses are abandoned for one long phrase that spans the chorus. The melody returns to

the lower register utilized in the verses at the beginning of the song. This suggests an anti-climactic reaction to the arrival that has been discussed throughout the entire song.

### Conclusion

The song title “Playboy Mansion” suggests a superficial narrative that follows the trend of references to sex, money, wealth, and power in popular music. The lyrics to the song however paint a much more potent question: where do the values of society lie? Is the shift from a religious society to one taken up with materialism beneficial? Are we able to see this shift clearly, or do thoughts, feelings, items, and meaningless desires become important? The story, narrative voice and perspective, vocal phrasing and melody, and vocabulary communicate this message.

### Three Perspectives on a Biblical Text: Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and U2

#### Introduction

I will now look at the song “All Along the Watchtower” by Bob Dylan, looking at the original recording by Bob Dylan, the popular cover version by Jimi Hendrix, and the version included on U2’s album *Rattle and Hum*. I will look specifically at elements related to the lyrics, how these elements affect the performance, and why they are significant in understanding the perspective of the song. These elements relate to the narrative perspective, overall structure of the song, word choice and declamation. I will briefly touch on the musical elements in order to provide an understanding for how the lyrics are heard. Utilizing these analytic categories I will show how each artist, through the choices they make, position themselves differently in relation to the story told through

the lyrics. I will begin by looking at the background of the lyrics, then highlighting the performances of Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and U2.

### Lyric Overview

An overview of the lyrics will give context and understanding to my observations that will follow. The lyrics of “All Along the Watchtower” are a paraphrase of the Biblical account of the fall of Babylon recorded in the book of Isaiah. The city of Babylon had turned from God, and its ruler King Balshazzar was involved in many pagan practices, contrary to what God desired. During one of the King’s feasts, a hand appeared and wrote of the city’s destruction on the wall. This prophecy presented the people with a choice: either wait for the prophecy to be fulfilled and be killed, or leave immediately and survive. The story features many characters: those within the city of Babylon, the King and his subordinates, and the invading party who approaches to destroy the city. The story told in Isaiah has multiple times of fulfillment. The text is a warning to modern times above that of Babylon and its destruction in 539 BC.

The joker and the thief referenced throughout the lyrics of the song represent two characters commenting and contemplating their life and surroundings. It is plausible that the joker was hired for entertainment for the festivities. The thief may have intended to rob or steal from the numerous rich people attending the party. The first two verses present the dialogue between the joker and thief. They seem to separate themselves from the fate of everyone else in the story, noting, “none of them along the line know what any of it’s worth.” In the second verse they say that what befalls everyone else is “not their fate.” The final verse features a shift in perspective. The listener no longer overhears the conversation between the joker and the thief. Rather, a much broader perspective is seen

– one in which the city of Babylon, and the approaching attackers can all be seen. The song ends ominously, stating, “two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.”

I would now like to move to a reading of the song “All Along the Watchtower,” highlighting the performances and recordings of Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and U2. I will introduce the recordings of Dylan and Hendrix, providing comment on the way that the lyric setting affects the understanding and perspective of the lyrics. I will then turn my attention to U2’s cover version of the song, performing a close reading of their performance.

#### The Original Recording of Bob Dylan (1967)

The original version of “All Along the Watchtower,” composed and performed by artist Bob Dylan, appeared on his 1967 album *John Wesley Harding*. As the writer and original performer of “All Along the Watchtower,” Dylan’s recording was foundational in providing the framework for the numerous cover versions that followed. His approach to the song is distant -- he does not directly engage the listener. He speaks as if reading a poem set to music. While the words are clear, there is no urgency in his declamation. No explicit attempt is made to bring forward any message. There is minimal use of dynamics, and the tone of voice is consistent. In this way, the listener is presented with an objective recollection of events that took place long ago.

This song does not adhere to the conventional structure of a rock song. There is no chorus or bridge to connect the verses. The first two verses are presented identically, and the alteration to the third verse (where the melody is changed on the line “all along the watchtower”) is minor. There are no full solos, although the harmonica acts as the solo instrument during the four bar transitions at the introduction and between verses.

The instruments in the texture do not play an explicit role, save as accompaniment for Dylan's text, which comes through with great clarity.

#### The Cover Version by Jimi Hendrix (1968)

Jimi Hendrix's version of "All Along the Watchtower" has achieved a monumental position in American rock music. The first two bars of the introduction are immediately recognizable. The formal structure remains faithful to the original, but with broader dimensions. The introduction, transitions between verses, and solos are expanded. This changes the weighting of the sections, allowing the extended solo to play a large role in the overall song. This puts the time devoted to the music in line with the time devoted to the text, changing the aesthetic that made up the version by Dylan entirely.

Hendrix's performance is far more aggressive than that of Dylan: his declamation is emotional and passionate; he makes use of a wide range of dynamics, and introduces shouting into the narrative. This creates an entirely different tone in the song: one that engages the listener and draws them into the world of the narrative.

#### U2's version from *Rattle and Hum* (1988)

##### Introduction

There are many elements of U2's performance that set it apart from the original recording of Dylan, and the popular cover version by Jimi Hendrix. Their version of "All Along the Watchtower" is more than a simple cover version. They bring a fresh perspective to the narrative, and incorporate changes that reference the original

recordings (as discussed above) and introduce their own ideas and viewpoints. Bob Dylan, when asked about the band U2 spoke highly of their contribution to popular music.

[Their music is] just more of a thread back to the music that got me inspired and into. Something which still exists which a group like U2 holds on to. They hold on to a certain tradition. They are actually rooted someplace and they respect that tradition. They work within a certain boundary which has a history to it, and then can do their own thing on top of that. Unless you start someplace you're just kind of inventing something which maybe need not be invented.<sup>47</sup>

One other important detail to examine is whether or not U2 was aware of the Isaiah interpretation of "All Along the Watchtower." There is a minor alteration in the third verse that proves they were aware of the biblical reference. Below I have placed both versions of the line.

*Original:*

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view while  
**all the woman** came and went, barefoot servants too.

*U2:*

All Along the watchtower Princes kept the view  
while **horsemen** came and went barefoot servants too.

While this may seem inconsequential, the Biblical text reads "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he

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<sup>47</sup> Bill Flanagan, *U2 at the End of the World* (New York: Delta, 1996), 160.

hearkened diligently with much head” [Emphasis added].<sup>48</sup> It is clear that U2’s alteration more accurately reflects the text. This would only be possible if U2 were aware of the source.

### Influence

Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix’s versions had tremendous influence on the band U2 when they chose to cover *All Along the Watchtower*. This can be seen in the text declamation, timbral setting, and guitar style of their performance. The rock sound characterized by Hendrix acts as the foundation for U2’s version. Bono’s vocals seem to mimic Hendrix’s style: the tone, volume, and inflection capture the same aesthetic as Hendrix. Shouting “yeah” throughout the performance – something that appeared in the Hendrix version often, further emphasizes this. Alongside the rock style are references to Dylan’s performance, namely the strumming style of the guitar, and the focus on clear delivery of the text. The introduction accurately follows Dylan’s performance, only in a louder more rock-infused way. In this way, U2 references the two foundational recordings of this song two decades after their release.

### Lyric Additions and Alterations

Bono alters the original lyrics that bring forward the context and understanding of the narrative. I will now discuss U2’s strategies in establishing a unique point of focalization. The use of new lyrics is one technique that the band uses to bring forward a new perspective. The second half of the third verse is altered in U2’s performance, and

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<sup>48</sup> The Biblical reference can be found in the book of Isaiah 21:6-7: “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed.”

utilizes the addition of new lyrics. The original line “Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl, two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl,” changes to “All I have is a red guitar, three chords and the truth - All I have is the red guitar, the rest is up to you.” This new lyric adds a new understanding to the song.

The reference to a “red guitar” alludes to another U2 song *Desire*, also from the album *Rattle and Hum* (1988). These words are particularly appropriate when considering the feasts that King Balshazzar had in Babylon. These feasts are described in the Bible in Daniel, chapter 5. In this way, the band invests their history into the cover version of the song. The line that follows, “three chords and the truth,” is a reference to the harmonic structure of the song, and an admission that Bono understands the context and message contained in Dylan's lyrics. It places Bono as one who speaks over the story by claiming something outside the narrative. This critical perspective is not found in the Dylan or Hendrix recordings. The final addition, “the rest is up to you,” directly challenges the listener to pay attention. Again, this line breaks the flow of the narrative by directing the perspective away from the story and towards the individual who is hearing the song.

Another technique used by Bono is changing the perspective of the speaker: breaking the flow of the narrative by speaking in the first-person. Bono interjects “At least not today” after the line “And that is not our fate.” In this way he brings forward the narrative of the entire song: it is no longer a recollection of an event that took place long ago, the lyrics bring the listener into the world of the narrative.

U2's version of the song features a completely altered formal structure. The greatest change lies in the repetition of the second verse at the end of the song. The

original recording ends, "Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl, two riders were approaching, and the wind began to howl." The repeated second verse changes the ending line to "But you and I have been through that, and that is not our fate, so let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late." This alteration changes the overall effect of the narrative. In Dylan's version the song ends with the armies approaching, signaling the fall of Babylon. By repeating the second verse, Bono gives room for the protagonist to escape: the line "this is not our fate," and "the hour is getting late" signal the knowledge that Babylon is no longer a safe place to stay.

The use of new lyrics, first-person interjections, and an altered formal structure (which directly impacts the lyrics) all make U2's performance of "All Along the Watchtower" unique. U2 adopts a critical perspective in their version of the song. Bono aggressively engages the lyrics, often disrupting the flow of the narrative to speak in the first person. The repeated second verse enforces the idea of a choice. The altered third verse along with the aside "at least not today" (in the repeated second verse) brings the story to modern time. U2 employs lyrical strategies to bring the song forward to modern time. Their version acts as more than a cover version – it incorporates aspects of Bob Dylan's message and recognizes the influence of Jimi Hendrix. Their critical viewpoint appears above these elements, making their performance unique.

### Conclusion

Lyrics present a fascinating area of examination for a popular music analyst. The examples that I utilized in this chapter presented two main points on lyric analysis. The first focused on the way lyrics can provide social commentary through the misdirection

of the listener. While the title “Playboy Mansion” seems to suggest the typical theme of sex, the lyrics actually explore materialism and religion. In discussing the song, I showed how the narrative voice, perspective, vocabulary, vocal melody, and phrase design shaped the initial understanding of the story, and created uncertainty about the song’s subject matter. Bono’s closing statement, “they don’t mention the pain to reach,” spoke of the fallacy of materialism as a way to find fulfillment.

The second example focused on various versions of the same lyric text, and the way in which these texts are approached. Different artists approach the delivery of lyrics in unique ways, changing the understanding of a song. In highlighting the three versions of “All Along the Watchtower,” I showed how the delivery of a lyric text, and the interpretation of a song affects its understanding. Together these examples show the value the band U2 gives to the lyrics when composing, recording, and performing their (and others’) music.

### Chapter 3: Communicating an Intimate Atmosphere:

Staging, Song Selection, and Set-List Construction in the Elevation Tour.

#### Introduction

*To me a rock 'n' roll concert is 3-D. It's a physical thing - it's rhythm for the body. It's a mental thing in that it should be intellectually challenging. But it's also a spiritual thing, because it's a community, it's people agreeing on something even if it's only for an hour and a half.<sup>49</sup>*  
- Bono

Tour designer Willie Williams states that the grandest myth about rock concerts is that they are entirely spontaneous.<sup>50</sup> He states that rock shows are more like a theatrical production where everything, sound, lighting, video, and staging is carefully planned. While it may seem that every song segue, and speech is chosen at the moment, there is plenty of time spent making these decisions.

The band U2 has an extensive touring history from their genesis in the early 1980s. This thesis will focus on their recent tour in 2000, the Elevation tour, which followed the release of their album *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. The tour began on March 24 in Ft. Lauderdale, and concluded on December 2 in Miami.<sup>51</sup> In this chapter I will explore how U2 uses the venue of live performance. I will begin by discussing the strategy and aesthetic of the Elevation tour, looking at comments from the band members, and the tour

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<sup>49</sup> Diana Scrimgeour, *U2 Show* (London: Orion, 2004), 50.

<sup>50</sup> Willie Williams, "Art, Commerce, and Logistics: Designing a U2 Show," in *U2 Show*, ed. Diana Scrimgeour (London: Orion, 2004), 15.

<sup>51</sup> There were three stages to the Elevation Tour: The first leg – March to June 2001 (North America). The second leg – July to August 2001 (Europe). The third leg – October to November 2001 (North America).

designer. In their comments, the vision for the tour emerges: I want to stress the focus on creating an intimate atmosphere, one where the three-dimensional elements of a rock concert develop. I will begin by looking at the staging of the Elevation tour – how the stage is constructed, and the physical setup required for the *Elevation* tour. I will also discuss the band member's presence in the tour, and their approach to performing in the live concert setting. Following this I will provide an analytic discussion of U2's song "Until the End of the World" and how staging and gesture enhance the understanding of the songs themes. In looking at this song I will utilize the analytic categories *lyrics*, and *staging and gesture*. I will then proceed to discuss the set list construction – the way the numerous songs performed in U2's concert are put together. The discussion of set list construction will conclude with several examples, focusing on the way that the music, lyrics, and performance bring the songs together, and communicate the themes of healing and freedom. Bono introduces the themes of healing and expresses his thoughts on how he wants the audience to feel when leaving U2's concerts.

#### Design of the Elevation Tour.

In the Elevation Tour, the band made a grand shift in their performance strategy moving from elaborate spectacle to a focus on performance and clear communication. Elevation tour designer Willie Williams states, "Obviously the last two tours have been fantastic, huge public arts spectacles. But within that it's easy to lose sight of, say, the fact that Edge is a great guitar player. For me, this

one had to be about performance.”<sup>52</sup> The reviews that followed the tour also sensed this return to a focus on performance. Danny Eccleston of *Q* magazine states, “After the broad, churchy strokes of the Love-town show, and the sensory assault of Zoo TV and the garish, high-concept japery of PopMart, here are U2 playing their songs hard, straight and in your face.”<sup>53</sup> In the last quote, Eccleston refers to the numerous tours that have preceded the Elevation tour, noting the extensive focus on creating a large spectacle.

This focus on performance and direct communication appears throughout the tour, in both the song selection and set list (which will be discussed later in this chapter) and the staging of the concert; the way the band uses the stage and interacts with the audience, the audience, the way songs are performed, the use of gesture, and lighting. The Elevation tour moved from the outdoor stage (that was utilized for the two previous tours) to the indoor arena. This allowed for the construction of a more intimate atmosphere by placing the audience in close proximity to the band. The stage utilized allowed the audience unobstructed view from virtually any angle. A rectangular platform housed the numerous instruments, amplifiers, speakers, and cables. A thin walkway connects to this platform, outlining the shape of a heart with standing room on the inside for additional fans. This created a much more intimate atmosphere, where quiet acoustic performances were possible, or conversely, loud up-tempo numbers had the audience jumping alongside the band.

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<sup>52</sup> U2, *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston*, dir. by Hamish Hamilton, 107 min., Island, 1988, DVD.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

Unlike previous tours where the band members assumed radical persona, or dressed up in outlandish costumes, the Elevation tour featured the band members as real and transparent individuals. Bono talks to the crowd about performing with the band, the loss of his father during the Elevation tour, and mourns the passing of fellow musician Joey Ramone. Additionally, there are no fireworks, elaborate acrobatics, or elements of spectacle to take away from the musical performance. Speaking of the role of live performance, and the connection between the band and the audience they are playing for, Bono states:

U2 on its own is a very interesting group and all, but U2 with its audience is a culture. You get to meet the people who've given you this great life and you have to prove yourself in front of them. If you stop meeting your audience you start mistrusting them and they you. And you cease being a cultural entity, just a musical one. So you could still put out a great record and people might buy it but it's not the thing, the wave that carries you like we're used to.<sup>54</sup>

In this quote, Bono emphasizes the importance of being authentic and having trust. The elements of staging that I have discussed so far show a conscious effort to create an authentic performance – one that allows the audience to be up close, and one that allows the musicians to be open about real issues.

The use of lighting is also significant throughout the concert. A harness high above the stage housed the bulk of the lights utilized in the concert. Additionally, there are spotlights, lights directly on the heart-shaped stage, and video monitors hidden in the main rectangular stage that appear in certain songs.

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<sup>54</sup> U2, *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston*, dir. by Hamish Hamilton, 107 min., Island, 1988, DVD.

Unlike previous tours, the lighting utilized in the concert is mostly subtle, turning the large arena into a small club setting, putting the focus on the music.

#### Communication through Staging and Pantomime: “Until the End of the World”

I would now like to discuss the way staging and gesture extend the understanding of the lyrics in the Elevation tour by analyzing U2’s song “Until the End of the World.” This song was included in every concert of the Elevation tour as the third song following “Elevation” and “Beautiful Day.” The performance makes use of the entire stage and incorporates physical gestures and lighting to enhance the lyric narrative. Before the song begins Bono states, “Jesus, this is Judas,” introducing the subject matter about to be discussed.

#### Lyrics

In order to follow the significance of the staging utilized in this performance, I must discuss the lyric narrative. The lyrics describe the last supper of Christ and the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. In addition to Bono’s opening statement, there are several references in the text to this event. The first verse states, “We ate the food, we drank the wine - everybody having a good time except you: You were talking about the end of the world.” This describes the last supper, when all Jesus disciples gathered before the crucifixion. In the second verse the lyrics discuss Judas’ betrayal stating, “I took the money,” referencing the thirty pieces of silver he received for revealing Jesus’ location. He continues, “In the garden I was playing the tart, I kissed your lips and broke your heart.” In

the third and final verse, Bono describes Judas' sense of remorse after realizing the events his actions triggered.

### Staging and Gesture

Bono and guitarist the Edge play out this narrative in the live performance by pantomiming Jesus and Judas during the guitar solo. Their performance brings out many of the ideas and the message of the text through physical gesture, staging, and lighting. Throughout the song, Bono sings from the perspective of Judas, and in the live performance, he acts out this role on stage. While the Edge does not speak, the use of lighting and physical gesture establishes him as Jesus.

Early in the performance, Bono and the Edge are set apart from the rest of the band. Bono walks up stage left, and the Edge walks up stage right, working their way up the thin walkway of the heart shaped stage. A white spotlight illuminates them both. After the second verse, a short guitar solo occurs on the thin walkway on the side of the heart-shaped stage. While the Edge plays, Bono approaches nervously and uses his hand to block the spotlight that illuminates the Edge. The way the light is used to blind Bono is significant, as Jesus referred to himself openly as “the light of the world.”<sup>55</sup> Bono reaches forward giving him a kiss on the forehead, re-enacting the biblical text and the lyrics of verse two. After the third and final verse, Bono once again approaches the Edge, positioning his hands like small horns on his head as he is bent forward and looking upwards. This gesture has two suggestions – the first being the horns that one would associate with a devil, and secondly one similar to a bull that is preparing to

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<sup>55</sup> The Biblical reference can be found in the book of John 8:12, 9:5

charge. As Bono charges, the Edge continues to play until Bono falls back onto the stage. Bono kicks the guitar strings while lying on the stage, and as a final gesture, reaches out and grabs the strings. Unable to pull the Edge down, Bono falls back, and the lights go out leaving the stadium in darkness. This song is evidence of the use of staging to enhance and explain a lyric narrative in the Elevation tour.

### Set List Construction

I would now like to move from the form of the Elevation tour, the physical appearance of the stage and how the band utilizes this space, to the content – the songs selected, and how these songs form a set list. I will use the concert captured on the DVD *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston* as a model representative of the entire tour for analysis. The set list utilized in the Boston concert features nineteen selections that divide into the opening set (fourteen songs), and the songs that are performed later when the band comes back to the stage in response to the applause from the audience – the encore set (five songs).

The Elevation tour followed the release of U2's tenth studio album *All That You Can't Leave Behind* in the year 2000. The songs from this recording are featured prominently throughout the concert: seven of the eleven tracks from the album are performed. The first two singles from the album, "Elevation" and "Beautiful Day," open the concert. The tracks "Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of," "Kite," "New York," and "In a Little While," are played in the opening set. The song "Walk On" closes the concert.

The set list also incorporates a selection of songs from across U2's discography which appear throughout the opening and encore set. This accounts for four of the nineteen songs played. Each of the four songs are well known singles from their major albums.

Finally, the set list features a number of songs that are grouped together both thematically and musically. The grouped songs account for thirteen of the nineteen songs played in the Boston concert. For example, the songs "Elevation," "Beautiful Day," and "Until the End of the World," are the opening songs performed throughout the entire Elevation tour. "Stuck in a Moment" and "Kite" consistently appear beside one another. "Desire" and "Stay (Faraway, so close)" are unplugged acoustic performances. "Bad," "40," and "Where the Streets Have No Name" are seamlessly linked together through musical segues. Throughout the tour "Bullet the Blue Sky" and "With or Without You" open the encore set. Finally, only the opening of "Wake Up Dead Man" is played as a lead in to the closing number "Walk On."

#### Healing and Freedom: Themes emerging from the Construction of the Set List

*I don't like music unless it has a healing effect. I don't like it when people leave concerts still feeling edgy. I want people to leave our concerts feeling positive, a bit more free.*<sup>56</sup>  
- Bono

I would now like to explore the themes and ideas that emerge from the choices made by the band in creating the set list. In this quote, Bono identifies a key desire for the live performances U2 puts on in their world tours. In the quote

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<sup>56</sup> Diana Scrimgeour, *U2 Show* (London: Orion, 2004), 49.

utilized at the beginning of this chapter, Bono speaks of the musical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects that make up a rock concert. U2 tour designer Willie Williams states that establishing the set list, the beginning, middle, and end was the first priority in creating U2's tours.<sup>57</sup> There is a conscious effort to communicate the themes of healing and freedom throughout the set list of the Elevation tour. Individual selections and grouped songs develop themes that go beyond the context of one song.

I have chosen three examples of grouped songs within the set list in the Boston concert for analysis. Smooth segues are utilized to connect these songs. Each example I have chosen has a unique purpose and effect on the understanding of the individual songs within the concert. The first example, "Bullet the Blue Sky" and "With or Without You," is a study in contrast. The second example, "Bad," "40," and "Where the Streets Have No Name" develops an extended narrative that spans the three songs. The final example, "Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of" and "Kite," gives the listener a personal insight into Bono's struggle with losing his father.

#### Freedom and Healing through Personal Struggle

The themes of freedom and healing emerge early in the set list utilized throughout the Elevation tour. In the songs "Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of" and "Kite" they are expressed through Bono's personal experience of losing his father. Before the Elevation tour, his father's health was failing.

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<sup>57</sup> Willie Williams, "Art, Commerce, and Logistics: Designing a U2 Show," in *U2 Show* (London: Orion, 2004), 16.

During the first leg of the tour he passed away, making the performances that followed very emotional for Bono.

Both songs express the need to let go. “Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get Out Of” speaks of getting beyond a difficult situation - breaking free of the pain and frustration of being stuck in one particular situation. The lyrics encourage the listener to begin the healing process by “pulling themselves together,” being strong, and to move forward. The song “Kite” expresses the need to let go of a loved one. Introducing the song Bono states, “This song is about letting go of somebody you don’t want to let go of. It could be a lover, it could be a father, it could be a child, it could be a friend.”<sup>58</sup> During the Slane Castle Ireland concert, also from the Elevation tour, Bono introduced “Kite” in a similar fashion, dedicating the performance to his father.<sup>59</sup> The process of losing a loved one requires a time of mourning, and space for healing.

These two songs position themselves differently in relation to the themes of freedom and healing. “Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get Out Of” focuses on encouraging one who is not prepared to move on with life. The opening line of “Kite” states, “Something is about to give.” The title of the song, “Kite,” suggests a release and letting go. In this way, “Kite” expresses Bono’s desire to move beyond the passing of his father.

#### Freedom and Healing from Addiction

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<sup>58</sup> U2, *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston*, dir. by Hamish Hamilton, 107 min., Island, 2001, DVD.

<sup>59</sup> U2, *U2 Go Home: Live from Slane Castle Ireland*, dir. by Hamish Hamilton, 132 min., Island, 2001, DVD.

The themes of freedom and healing can be found within the songs “Bad,” “40,” and “Where the Streets Have No Name,” which are grouped together to close the opening set of the Boston concert. I will now analyze the way these themes emerge in the songs individually and as a combined group.

The lyric narratives in these songs express the themes of freedom and healing. In the first song of this grouping, “Bad,” Bono discusses the frustration and difficulty of confronting someone with a drug addiction. He uses this perspective to explore irresponsible choices and their consequences stating, “With those characters I wanted to admit to those things, those sides of yourself, that want to run away from responsibility, and that find people who have run away attractive.”<sup>60</sup> The lyrics of “Bad” speak of his desire to see the drug user overcome this problem. He states, “If I could through myself set your spirit free, I’d lead your heart away, see you break, break away.” How is this rebellion attractive? A young man in Bono’s position, as a new rock star, would be confronted by numerous temptations, and the allure of a lifestyle that can be potentially destructive.

Throughout the song Bono expresses the desire for freedom and healing, wishing that the user would let it go. There is no suggestion in the lyrics that he is successful in convincing the implied listener to lose the habit. U2 music analyst Niall Stokes speaks of the restlessness and frustration of the narrative, and the thoughts that appear in “disconnected fragments.”<sup>61</sup> Bono links a number of

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<sup>60</sup> Niall Stokes, *Into the Heart: The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (Dubai: Carlton, 1996), 58.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

terms: "Desperation, dislocation, separation, condemnation, revelation, in temptation, isolation..." All of these terms show the internal dialogue, the struggle that the implied listener is experiencing.

These terms are significant, and present the difficulties of being drawn to drugs, realizing the problem of addiction, and attempting to break free. The first term, desperation, suggests a reason for doing drugs – a way of coping with the frustrations and difficulties of life. Dislocation refers to the way drugs take the user out of a normal life, and into a new "realm of consciousness," where the user is separated from their loved ones. The term revelation speaks of the recognition that there is a problem, and that something must be done. "In temptation" suggests the desire to return to the destructive drugs. "Isolation" as the user feels like they are doing this all by themselves. These terms paint an evolving narrative from the initial desire to do drugs, to the eventual recognition of a problem, and the final attempt to deal with the addiction.

The lighting utilized in the performance of "Bad" also enforces the themes found in the lyric narrative. As the song begins, several short beacons with numerous perforations allowing the light to escape surround the heart-shaped stage. These lights turn, spreading white light around the stadium in horizontal motion. Alongside these beacons, the stage is bathed in a blue and red glow with a light covering of smoke. This is significant as the narrative makes continual reference to the desire to get through the night, past the fire, and to the light of day. Throughout the song Bono appears under a spot light, walking slowly and deliberately around the stage. The spotlight on Bono enforces his clarity and

ability to see the situation of the drug-addicted implied listener clearly. He states, "I'm wide awake, I'm not sleeping" and continues to express his desire to see freedom for the person bound by drug use.

Bono sings "How long to sing this song?" while the band continues to play "Bad." This line is taken directly from the chorus of U2's song "40." While the original understanding of "40" relates to the Biblical text of Psalm 40, sung alongside "Bad," the line suggests a continuing plea and desire to see the implied listener break free. While this line is sung the soft blue and red lights fade away, leaving the several beacons surrounding the stage and the spotlight on Bono as the only light source. As the band begins to play the opening of "Where the Streets Have No Name" the lighting begins to change. The rear video wall begins to rise providing a bright red and yellow light behind the band, and some yellow lights shine over the audience. At this point Bono gives a short prayer:

What can I give back to God for the blessings he's poured out on me?  
What can I give back to God for the blessings he's poured out on me?  
I lift high the Cup of Salvation as a toast to our Father, to follow through  
on a promise I made to you from the heart.<sup>62</sup>

The prayer stated before the performance of "Where the Streets Have No Name" connects the narrative of restraint and bondage to drugs to the themes of release and freedom. It speaks about Heaven, where we can escape the frustrations of this life. As the prayer ends, the horizontal beacons cease to spread light through the stadium. Instead, beacons mounted vertically along bars high

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<sup>62</sup> U2, *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston*, dir. by Hamish Hamilton, 107 min., Island, 2001, DVD.

above the stage start spinning white light vertically throughout the building. Whereas the horizontal lights accompanied the sense of restraint and bondage, these vertical lights accompany the discussion of freedom and healing. The opening line "I want to run, I want to hide, I want to tear down the walls that hold me tonight" coincides with the desire to get past addictions, and to sing a new song - one that is about freedom and moving forward. Bono runs around the circumference of the stage, abandoning the slow and deliberate movements utilized in "Bad" and "40." As the song progresses the lighting becomes stronger, filling the stadium with a bright yellow glow. This provides a complete contrast to the previous songs, enforcing a sense of arrival. This arrival is accompanied by intensely bright lights accompany this change with Bono running around the stage accompany this. "Bad" and "40" express a desire to break free and move forward. In the lyric narrative of "Where the Streets Have No Name," these desires are realized and fulfilled.

#### Freedom and Healing from Violence and Loss

In "Bullet the Blue Sky" and "With or Without You" the themes of freedom and healing are explored from the converse perspective of violence and loss. These songs explore violence and loss in very different ways. "Bullet the Blue Sky" discusses undeclared war and the miss-use of freedoms. It is a reaction to America's foreign policy in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The verses describe the ongoing gunfire, mortars, and bombs that go off in the air, and the people who run for safety on the ground. Bono also addresses misuse of American freedoms.

The song aims to illuminate the "worst side of the American dream," the onset of "undeclared war in Nicaragua and El Salvador."<sup>63</sup> The song is sonically aggressive, providing a hard sound - the electrical guitar full of distortion and loud drums that are driven by a bass and drum ostinato. Bono approaches the performance of this song deliberately in a very confrontational manner as he intensely delivers the lyric narrative.

Conversely, "With or Without You" is a love song full of Biblical references. It describes a violent crucifixion of Christ, speaking of "the thorns that twist in His side," and the willing sacrifice at the cross. The narrative describes the sense of loss, the gaping hole left by a loved one who is no longer alive. The protagonist cannot live with the person because they are gone, but he is not ready to live without the person either. "With or Without You" is musically subtle and quiet. There is an ebb and flow to the musical arrangement. The harmonic progression builds through the course of the song. Most of the performance of the song has Bono lying down on the stage gazing at the lights near the top of the arena with a female companion pulled from the audience.

The juxtaposition of "Bullet the Blue Sky" and "With or Without You" reveals numerous contrasts. The lyric narrative, staging, and musical setting are drastically different. There is however common ground as both describe violent acts: war and the crucifixion: the former is expressed through anger and frustration, the later through mourning and loss. U2 takes advantage of the

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<sup>63</sup> Bill Flanagan, *U2 at the End of the World* (New York: Delta, 1995), 52.

differences in these songs, providing a compelling exploration of the themes of freedom and healing.

### Conclusion

The Elevation tour presented a focus on communicating U2's music with the audience. The move from the outdoor stage to the indoor arena created a smaller more intimate atmosphere. The design of the concert stage brought the audience close to the band. Through the analysis of "Until the End of the World" and the grouped songs, I showed how the themes and ideas within U2's songs were presented. In these examples, every element of the performance – the lighting, staging, and gesture – contributed to the understanding of the songs. This discussion incorporated the elements of music and lyric analysis introduced in the first two chapters.

The venue of live performance presents a new way for a band to communicate with its audience. The wealth of "bootleg" recordings, photographs, and legitimate live recordings and videos stresses the importance that music fans place on experiencing a band outside of the studio. Sometimes the live performances mimic exactly the studio recordings, and other times – such as those discussed in this chapter – bands take chances, and utilize the opportunity to make changes and new versions of well-known songs. In the case of U2, there is extensive planning and thought about the shape and direction that the concert will take. This covers the songs chosen, the order they are played in, the messages and dialogue with the audience, the lighting, and every conceivable aspect of the show.

## Chapter 4: “Sunday Bloody Sunday”

### Introduction

The lyrics and live performance of the song “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” has evolved to reflect current events. I will begin with lyric analysis of the original studio recording, looking at the *story, narrative voice and perspective, vocal melody and phrase design, and vocabulary* as outlined in chapter two. I will then turn to the monologue section of the song, which was introduced in the live performances of the song, exploring the way U2 has changed this section to reflect current events and aspects of terrorism. This will introduce several performances of “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” from U2’s albums *Under a Blood Red Sky, Rattle and Hum, and the Elevation* tour.

“Sunday Bloody Sunday” describes the horror of violence in Ireland and the hope for resolution and reconciliation. The song takes its title and subject matter from the bloody Sunday massacre of 1921, but also relates to modern day by calling for an end to the ongoing violence that has resulted in the injury and death of innocent people. It is Bono’s attempt to confront his complacency about the conflict in Ireland. He states, “It was only when I realized that the troubles hadn’t affected me that they began to affect me.”<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the song utilizes religious symbolism, drawing parallels between the violence in Ireland and the crucifixion of Christ.

I will begin by examining the role of the lyrics in the song. This treatment will examine the story, the narrative voice and perspective, vocal melody and phrase design, and vocabulary. The lyrics of “Sunday Bloody Sunday” enforce both the band's

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<sup>64</sup> Niall Stokes, “War: Sunday Bloody Sunday,” in *Into the Heart: The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (Dubai: Carlton, 1996), 37.

frustration with the ongoing violence in Ireland, and their pacifist approach to resolving the conflict. Bono explains:

What I was trying to say in the song is: there it is, in close up, I'm sick of it. How long must it go on? It's a statement. It's not even saying there's an answer. The song simply illustrates the need to open up the discussion – the recognition that there are problems, and the plea to try and stop the violence. It was meant to take the image of Northern Ireland out of the black and white and into the grey, where it truly belongs.<sup>65</sup>

### The Lyrics of “Sunday Bloody Sunday”

#### Story

A reading of the lyrics in the order they occur will be helpful in providing an understanding for the analytic discussion that follows. In the first verse, the song places the listener in 1921, awaking to hear of the violence that has occurred. The opening line, “I can't believe the news today, I can't close my eyes or make it go away,” describes the reaction to the bloody Sunday massacre. The next line, “how long to sing this song,” expresses the sense of disbelief and hopelessness. Bono states, “Tonight, we can be as one,” calling for the reconciliation of the opposing groups in Ireland.

The second verse exposes the effect of the revolution on the people of Ireland: “Broken bottles under children's feet, bodies strewn across a dead end street.” Here Bono describes the brutal aftermath, and the innocent children who are unable to walk down the street safely. In the second line, Bono gives his reasons for not taking sides in the conflict: “But I won't heed the battle call, it puts my back up, my back up against the wall.” The first line speaks of a “dead end street,” the second has the protagonist with his

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<sup>65</sup> Jim Miller, “Stop in the Name of Love,” in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews* (New York, N.Y.: Hal Leonard, 2003), 169.

“back up against the wall.” The consequent of the first and second line describe the futility of violence, as the people who are killed, and those who kill are no closer to a resolution.

The third verse continues to expose the ugly truth of the revolution. Bono states, “There’s many lost, but tell me who has won?” The focus once again turns to the innocent affected by the violence as he sings “Trenches dug within our hearts, brothers children, brothers, sisters torn apart.”

In the fourth verse, the text speaks of the current reaction to the ongoing violence in Ireland. Bono refers to the propaganda surrounding the revolution: “It’s true we are immune, when fact is fiction, TV a reality.” He expands the scale of the song to conflict and violence in the world stating, “And today the millions die, we eat and drink while tomorrow they die.” The chorus enters over the final two lines of the fourth verse. Bono sings, “The real battle’s yet begun, we’ll claim the victory Jesus won.” In this context, “Sunday Bloody Sunday” no longer refers to the violent act of 1921, or the violence in Ireland and the world as a whole. Furthermore, Bono’s suggestion that the innocent are hurt through the violence parallels the innocence of Christ.

### Narrative Voice and Perspective

There are numerous shifts in the perspective throughout the lyrics of “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” As I have stated in the reading of the lyrics, the song begins as told from the perspective of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. The listener is allowed to experience the event as if it is occurring right in front of them.

At the same time, there are several moments in the song where the narrative voice speaks in present day, pleading for the ongoing violence that has continued in Ireland to

stop. In addition, the end of the song presents an even larger perspective that looks beyond the conflict and violence in Ireland. Bono sings “But the real battles yet begun, to claim the victory Jesus won on a Sunday Bloody Sunday.” This perspective raises an important point on the violence in Ireland. As both the Catholic and Protestant denominations belong to Christianity, Jesus already “won” the battle. Why are they fighting if they seem to agree on what would seem the most important part of their belief system?

### Vocal Melody and Phrase Design

The verses utilize an antecedent and consequent structure. These two parts correspond to one another. For example, the opening line “I can’t believe the news today” is completed by “I can’t close my eyes or make it go away.” The second verse utilizes two antecedent consequent figures: “Bodies strewn against a dead end street” is followed by “Broken Bottles under children’s feet.” In these examples, the corresponding line completes the thought stated in the opening line. This occurs throughout the four verses of the song.

### Vocabulary

The terms utilized in “Sunday Bloody Sunday” highlight both terms related to violence and war, with terms related to loved ones. This contrast suggests that there must be a better way to overcome the problems, as the current situation is only seeing innocent ones killed. There are several terms that reference the military: “battles,” “trenches,” “bodies,” “news,” lost,” “won,” and “victory.” There are also several references to family throughout the song that make the themes of the song personal. Bono speaks of children,

mothers, brothers, and sisters. Also, the line “tonight, we can be as one.” While it is possible to interpret this line as a reference to a romantic love, it would make more sense within the context of the song to see the ‘we’ as the two sides in the ongoing conflict in Ireland.

### The Monologue of “Sunday Bloody Sunday”

I would like to explore the changes that have happened in performances in “Sunday Bloody Sunday” from the initial studio recording from 1983 to the recent performances of the song during the Elevation tour. Looking at these numerous versions reveals an evolving perspective that looks back to the original event of Bloody Sunday, and current concerns about conditions in Ireland.

The lyrics of the original studio recording act as the foundation for the additions that occur in subsequent live performances of “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” The themes and ideas established in the text are expanded and extended by new sections. These sections include introductions, monologues, melodic and lyric additions, and antiphonal singing. This discussion takes into account recordings of the song from 1983 to 2001. The performances of “Sunday Bloody Sunday” on *Rattle and Hum*, and *U2 Go Home: Live from Slane Castle Ireland* both reference specific events of terrorism that have happened after the bloody Sunday massacre. Each performance stands as a monument to those who were injured, killed, and affected by the violence.

### Under a Blood Red Sky

The recording *Under a Blood Red Sky* (1983) introduces the antiphonal section where Bono and the audience chant “no more.” The performance lacks the refinement of

the studio recording. During the song's introduction, Bono marches towards the microphone stating, "This is not a rebel song." There is a contradiction here between the image of marching, and the declaration that the song is against violence. This conflict is resolved later in the song when Bono plants a white flag, symbolizing surrender and peace, at the center of the stage.

### Rattle and Hum

The next performance of the song appears on the album and video *Rattle and Hum* (1988). The day of the performance, November 8 1988, a Remembrance Day celebration was bombed injuring many and killing thirteen. This had an emotional impact on the band that can be seen in "Sunday Bloody Sunday." Speaking about the recording Bono states, "I'm not even sure about including that video [in *Rattle and Hum*] because I - you know... that day, the day of the Enniskillen, uh... bombing you know, will soon long since be forgotten, and people will not understand the way we felt onstage."

Before the music begins to play, Bono steps forward to deliver a spoken introduction. In it he speaks of how and why the Irish came to America. At the time of his speech, there were only eleven confirmed casualties. The entire speech has no musical accompaniment – in this way, it is a direct address to the audience.

Well, here we are, the Irish in America. The Irish have been coming to America for years, going back to the great famine when the Irish were on the run from starvation... and the British government that couldn't care less... right up to today. You know, there are more Irish immigrants here in America today than ever – some illegal, some legal. A lot of them are just running from high unemployment. Some run from the troubles in Northern Ireland - From the hatred of the H-blocks, the torture. Others from wild acts of terrorism like we had today

in a town called Enniskillen, where 11 people lie dead, many more injured, on a Sunday Bloody Sunday.<sup>66</sup>

The monologue is an extension of the spoken introduction. He begins by talking about Irish Americans approaching him to talk about the “glory of the revolution.” This recalls his discussion of how the Irish came to America in the introduction. He then describes the Enniskillen massacre in detail, focusing on the victims and the lack of any progress and resolution in the aftermath.

And let me tell you something: I’ve had enough of Irish-Americans who haven’t been back to their country in 20 or 30 years come up to me and talk about the resistance - the revolution back home, and the glory of the revolution, and the glory of dying for the revolution. Fuck the revolution! They don’t talk about the glory of killing for the revolution. What’s the glory in taking a man from his bed and gunning him down in front of his wife and children? Where’s the glory in that? Where’s the glory in bombing a Remembrance Day parade of old-age pensioners, their medals taken out and polished up for the day? Where’s the glory in that? To leave them dying or crippled for life or dead under the rubble of a revolution that the majority of the people in my country don’t want?<sup>67</sup>

### Elevation Tour

The Elevation Tour, in the recordings from Boston and Ireland, features new realizations of “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” Like *Rattle and Hum* these performances utilize a monologue that brings the song forward to modern day. In the Boston performance, Bono references Bob Marley’s song “Get Up, Stand Up.” Marley’s text also speaks about

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<sup>66</sup> Transcribed from recording of “Sunday Bloody Sunday” on U2’s album *Rattle and Hum*

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

social reform. He alters the lyrics, speaking to the context of “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” The new line “Get up, stand up – not gonna take the line” recalls the sentiment of the second verse of “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” where Bono states, “... I won’t heed the battle call.” Like *Rattle and Hum* the performance of “Sunday Bloody Sunday” in Ireland is related to a recent act of violence. On August 16, 1998, a car bomb went off in Omagh, North Ireland killing twenty-nine people and injuring over 220. The bombing killed both Catholics and Protestants. The blame for the bomb was laid on a group of individuals calling themselves the “Real IRA.”

In response to the event, Bono adds a new section to the song that moves the perspective outward. Throughout the lyrics of “Sunday Bloody Sunday” the pronouns “I” and “we” are used: “I can’t believe the news today,” “We eat and drink while tomorrow they die.” The new lyric states, “put your hands in the sky, put your hands in the air, if you’re the praying kind, turn this song into a prayer.” This directly challenges the audience. The second stanza of the new section includes the band, as Bono states “we’re not going back there.” This leads to the antiphonal chanting of “no more,” which first appeared in the recording *Under a Blood Red Sky*. He expands this chanting by identifying weapons and political groups: “No more paratroops, no more petrol bomb, no Saracens, no UDA, no IRA, we’re not going back there.” Up until this point, there are few explicit references to the Omagh bombing. Bono then sings, “Three years after Omagh, turn this song into a prayer.” The song ends while Bono reads out the names of the twenty-nine individuals killed in the bombing, stating “twenty-nine people too many.”

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented three performances of U2's song "Sunday Bloody Sunday." These range from the original studio recording in 1983, to the recording captured on their album *Rattle and Hum* in 1988, and finally the performance from the *Elevation* tour. While the lyrics refer to the event of Bloody Sunday, the band has continually updated the song to reflect the current state of violence and fighting in Ireland. This was accomplished primarily through the addition of a monologue setting. The performance captured on U2's album *Rattle and Hum* made the song personal as the performance coincided with the Enniskillen massacre. In this instance there was an extended monologue that addressed specific details of a pensioners parade, and Bono's intense anger at the onset of violence. In the *Elevation* tour, Bono referred to the Omagh bombing subtly, stating only "Three years after Omagh, turn this song into a prayer." This performance is an excellent example of how the venue of live performance contributes to the understanding of the narrative. Not only has "Sunday Bloody Sunday" raised awareness of Irish political issues in the past, Bono has used the song to speak out against current acts of violence. In all performances, the focus has remained on finding peaceful resolution.

## Chapter Five: “Bullet the Blue Sky”

### Introduction

“Bullet the Blue Sky” is a reaction to America’s foreign policy in South America. U2 biographer Bill Flanagan recalls Bono wanting to write about the dark side of life in America: “the imperialism that was manifesting itself in undeclared war in El Salvador and Nicaragua.”<sup>68</sup> This will combine the analytic considerations of the first three chapters – music, lyrics, and live performance – toward a close reading of this song.

I will begin by examining the lyrics. In this discussion of the lyrics I will utilize the analytic categories established in chapter two: *story* (I will incorporate my discussion of vocabulary into the discussion of *story*) *narrative voice and perspective*, *vocal melody and phrase design*.<sup>69</sup> I will then turn to a discussion of the monologue of “Bullet the Blue Sky.” Unlike “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” discussed in the previous chapter, “Bullet the Blue Sky” features a monologue in the original studio recording. In my analysis of the monologue, I will show the changing focus of the song from the original recording in 1987 to the recent *Elevation* tour in 2001.

Finally, I will turn to an analysis of the music of “Bullet the Blue Sky,” discussing the roles played by each instrument. This will incorporate a discussion of the *layers* identified by Moore in chapter one. These remaining three layers, *explicit rhythmic layer*, *deep frequencies* (bass), *higher frequencies* (guitar / keyboard / background vocals), will be examined. I will begin with an analysis of the role played by the electric

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<sup>68</sup> Bill Flanagan, *U2 at the End of the World* (New York, N.Y.: Delta, 1996), 51.

<sup>69</sup> In this chapter, my analysis of *vocal melody and phrase design*, the analytic category established in chapter two, will incorporate Moore’s layer of *melody* discussed in chapter one – hence the analysis will focus solely on the roles of the instruments in “Bullet the Blue Sky.”

guitar. My analysis of the guitar will proceed linearly through the structure of the song. I will then move to an analysis of the *lower frequencies* bass instrument, and the *explicit rhythmic layer* drum kit. Throughout the discussion of the music of “Bullet the Blue Sky,” the focus will be on how the band “serves the song.”

### Lyrics of “Bullet the Blue Sky”

#### Story

The first verse describes the horror of war in Nicaragua and El Salvador. While the verses of “Bullet the Blue Sky” omit any geographic references, the monologue clearly mentions South America and the United States. Additionally, Bono’s recollection of his experience in the village of San Salvador is described by the text in verse one. During an air raid, filled with fear, he ran to the local inhabitants asking what to do. He realized that this was their way of life: “Those guys lived with it all their lives, and it meant nothing to them. But the fear I felt that day...”<sup>70</sup> The lyrics utilize metaphors for the gunfire, mortar shells, and bombs that filled the sky: “stinging rain”, “driving nails”, and “firefly” that light up the sky in a “red-orange glow”. The final line spoken in first-person, “I see the face of fear running scared in the valley below”, speaks to both the local citizens, and Bono’s personal reaction as they ran for shelter.

By comparison, the second verse is abstract and enigmatic. The opening line, “In the locust wind comes a rattle and hum” seemingly prepares the listener for further description of the war in South America. However, Niall Stokes sees the text as a

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<sup>70</sup> Jay Cocks, “Band on the Run: U2 Soars with a Top Album, a Hot Tour, and Songs of Spirit and Conscience,” in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews*, ed. Hank Bordowitz (New York, N.Y.: Hal Leonard, 2003), 48.

description of the positive and negative aspects of the United States, what he terms “America: land of paradoxes.” This interpretation coincides with the album *The Joshua Tree* and the text of “Bullet the Blue Sky” in some compelling ways. When asked about the primary inspiration for the album Bono states:

America – the continent as opposed to the country. It has had quite an effect on me, and on my own life. I love being there, I love America, I love the feeling of the wide-open spaces, I love the deserts, I love the mountain ranges, I even love the cities. So having fallen in love with America over the years that we’ve been there on tour, I then had to ‘deal with’ America and the way it was affecting me, because America’s having such an effect on the world at the moment. On this record I had to deal with it on a political level for the first time, if in a subtle way.<sup>71</sup>

In the next line “Jacob wrestled the angel, and the angel was overcome”, Bono makes reference to the biblical story recorded in the book of Genesis<sup>72</sup>. In the story, Jacob tells the angel that he will not let go, or give up until he is blessed.<sup>73</sup> The United States has fought for the rights and freedoms that are enjoyed by citizens today. In this context the line that follows “You plant a demon seed, you raise a flower of fire” speaks of the election of Ronald Reagan as President, and the act of undeclared war in South America. Bono and Edge have clearly stated their feelings on Reagan and American policy in the 1980s. Edge stated, “People were so behind everything Ronald Reagan

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<sup>71</sup> U2, “The Joshua Tree: The four members of U2 talk about the new album and the current tour,” in *U2: The Best of Propaganda – 20 Years of the Official U2 Magazine*, ed. Ian Gittens (New York, N.Y.: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), 72.

<sup>72</sup> Genesis 32:22-32

<sup>73</sup> There are numerous ways that the Biblical account of Jacob can be interpreted in this context. I have chosen to focus solely on the excerpt described in the lyrics where Jacob wrestled to be blessed.

stood for, but now I think when we go back to America we'll see a broken country. Either that or people refusing to look – which is a more frightening prospect.”<sup>74</sup> Bono elaborates: “I still believe in Americans, I think they're a very open people. It's their openness which leads them to trust a man as dangerous as Ronald Reagan.”<sup>75</sup> The final line “See them burning crosses, see the flames higher and higher”, suggests the Ku Klux Klan: another example of “raising a flower of fire”, where racist ideology creates a group that is ignorant and destructive. The final two lines express the “land of paradoxes”, as the desecration of the cross by the Ku Klux Klan is juxtaposed with Jacob's blessing. The themes discussed within the first and second verse are the foundation of the monologue, where Bono expands and extends the ideas in the lyrics.

In discussing the categories that follow, I would like to highlight the contrast that the monologue section provides to the song. Listening to “Bullet the Blue Sky,” there is a clear distinction between these two sections. The focus and aim of each are quite different, yet they work together to provide a recollection of Bono's personal experience, and his thoughts on the current conditions of life in the United States and South America. I will discuss the use of narrative voice, perspective, vocal melody, and phrase design.<sup>76</sup>

### Narrative Voice and Perspective

The narrative voice in “Bullet the Blue Sky” has two sections: the verse and chorus that make up the beginning of the song, and the monologue section that follows. In the verses and chorus, the lyrics are detached from the listener. There are no personal

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<sup>74</sup> Niall Stokes, “The Joshua Tree: Bullet the Blue Sky,” in *Into the Heart: The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (Dubai: Carlton, 1996), 68.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>76</sup> As the discussion under the heading “story” incorporated the use of vocabulary, I will not discuss the use of vocabulary again here.

pronouns, or individuals referenced. Bono sings a highly stylized account of the air raid on the village of San Salvador. While his personal testimony about the inspiration and direction of the song reveals the connection to his personal experience, the two verses in the song fail to clearly and markedly reference this.

The monologue provides a complete contrast to the delivery of the verses and chorus: Bono speaks in the first person, addressing individuals (“This guy comes up to me...”) and uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> person perspective with the listening audience (“You take the staircase to the first floor...”). In this way, the monologue directly involves both Bono’s perspective, and incorporates those listening in to the story. Additionally, the references utilized are no longer abstract and metaphorical like the verses. Bono speaks directly about the conditions in South America, and the ignorance of those living in the United States about the result of Reagan’s policies regarding Nicaragua and El Salvador.

### Vocal Melody and Phrase Design

The melody utilized in the verses of “Bullet the Blue Sky” is fragmented. The melodic phrases appear in halves that answer one another. For example, the opening line “In the howling wind,” is followed by “comes a stinging rain.” The range of the melody is very small. The chorus features an echoing of the statement “Bullet the blue sky” over and over. Conversely, the monologue section has no melody as it is entirely spoken. Bono delivers the text with passion and a wide range of dynamics.

### Monologue

*There is no question in my mind that the people of America through their taxes are paying for the equipment that is used to torture people in El Salvador... I*

*doubt if the people of America are even aware of this. It's not my position to lecture them or tell them their place or to even open their eyes up to it in a very visual way, but it is affecting me and it affects the words I write and the music we make.*<sup>77</sup>

- Bono

I would now like to turn my attention to the monologue of “Bullet the Blue Sky.” I will address the numerous performances of the song captured on video, and the way that Bono’s monologue has altered the understanding and context of the lyrics. The monologue that appears at the end of “Bullet the Blue Sky” is an explicit statement of Bono’s thoughts. This will begin with the original monologue from U2’s album *The Joshua Tree*, and go on to consider the subsequent recordings that appear on *Rattle and Hum*, *Elevation 2001: Live from Boston*, and *U2 Go Home: Live from Slane Castle Ireland*. This will take into account the text itself, the changing perspective and the staging (how the monologue is integrated into the live performance), and the integration (the way the band links the ideas presented in the introduction with the monologue). This discussion will explore how Bono’s experience affected the words he wrote and the music they made.

#### The Original Monologue from *The Joshua Tree*

The inspiration for the original recording of “Bullet the Blue Sky” is Bono’s experience in the small village of San Salvador. This is where the lyrics to the verse and chorus come from, and the point of reference for understanding the monologue. Because this is based on Bono’s personal experience, the use of first person is significant. I

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<sup>77</sup> U2, “The Enduring Chill: Bono and the two Americas,” in *U2: The Best of Propaganda – 20 Years of the Official U2 Magazine*, ed. Ian Gittens (New York, N.Y.: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), 63.

would like to briefly give an overview of the direction of the monologue. This will be expanded in my discussion of subsequent versions and performances. Here is the original text:

So this guy comes up to me, his face red, like a rose on a thorn bush,  
like all the colors of a royal flush... and he's peeling off those dollar bills,  
Slapping 'em down: 100! 200! And I can see those fighter planes - - I can see  
those fighter planes.

Across the mud huts where the children sleep, through the valleys and the quiet  
city streets, we take the staircase to the first floor, we turn the key and slowly  
unlock the door: A man breathes into his saxophone, and through the walls, we  
hear the city groan: Outside, it's America... Outside, it's America...

Across the field you see the sky ripped open, see the rain pour through a gaping  
wound, pelting the women and children, who run into the arms of America.<sup>78</sup>

In the first stanza, Bono speaks of how the American government (through the tax dollars of the American citizens) is financing the war in South America. He draws a direct correlation between the individual putting down the money and the fighter planes that he witness flying overhead.

The discussion then moves to a juxtaposition of the harsh living conditions families face in South America (the "mud huts where the children sleep") to life on the north side of the border ("taking the stair case to the first floor..."). Here the monologue moves from first person ("this guy comes up to *me*," "*I* can see those fighter planes") to third person ("*We* take the staircase..." "*We* turn the key," "*We* hear the city groan").

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<sup>78</sup> Transcribed from recording of "Bullet the Blue Sky" on U2's album *Achtung Baby*.

This shift in perspective changes the focus from Bono's experience to the experiences of all those in America, and the life that is taken for granted. After the guitar solo Bono speaks of the result of this undeclared war: the citizens "running into the arms of America." The grand irony of "Bullet the Blue Sky" is that the citizens in South America run to the very country that created the violent conditions. With this basic understanding of the monologue established I will move to the analysis of subsequent performances of the song.

#### The Monologue utilized in *Rattle and Hum*

In the performance from *Rattle and Hum* a new introduction is utilized. The footage begins with bassist Adam Clayton sitting at the bar talking to a reporter. He states, "There are people who say you shouldn't mix music and politics, or sport and politics, or whatever, but I think that's kind of bullshit."<sup>79</sup> The performance clarifies the purpose of this statement, as the song explains how politics and music combine to make a social statement. Overall, the focus of this performance enforces the same themes as the original with an expanded perspective. The interview shifts to footage of fireworks that make up the American flag. As the camera pans out the American flag begins to dissipate, and the stage that U2 is performing on becomes visible. This is accompanied by Jimi Hendrix performance of "The Star Spangled Banner." The band appears, Bono wearing a cowboy hat thus emphasizing the focus as the USA, and the song begins.

The monologue begins with the text from the original recording. The monologue is divided into two parts separated by the guitar solo. The first half of the monologue is

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<sup>79</sup> U2, *Rattle and Hum*, dir. by Phil Joanou, 98 min., Paramount, 1988, DVD.

virtually the same as the studio recording. The new section focuses on the differences between North American and South American culture, specifically looking at problems in the United States. The second half of the monologue speaks more about life in America. Bono mentions John Coltrane and the Love Supreme, which harkens back to the line “A man breathes back into his saxophone” from the first half of the monologue.

The direction of the monologue changes when Bono specifically mentions the inability to distinguish between various television shows. While it seems that this is unrelated to the song, the connection to South America can be understood by reading between the lines. He speaks of the hypocrisy of television evangelists who misuse their position: “Well, I can’t tell the difference between ABC News, Hill Street Blues, and the preacher of the Old Time Gospel Hour, stealing money from the sick and the old.” He states, “Well the God I believe in isn’t short of cash mister.” While it may seem at first that these two discussions are distinct and unrelated, this is another example of a large organization (here the world of television evangelism) utilizing its position to oppress citizens who are less fortunate. Bono immediately moves back to the original theme of oppression in South America stating, “... I feel a long way from the streets of San Salvador where the sky is ripped open...”

While the monologue recording in *Rattle and Hum* is expanding, the theme and focus remains the same. The concert footage also allows Bono to express himself through his gestures. Throughout the guitar solo and the monologue the lighting is minimal. Bono utilizes a spotlight to illuminate himself as he speaks. This continues to be used in the performances that follow. I will discuss the significance of the spotlight when looking at the versions that follow. There is over a decade between this version of

“Bullet the Blue Sky” and the performances I will discuss from the Elevation tour in Boston and Ireland.

### The Monologue in the Elevation Tour

#### Elevation Tour: Boston

The performance captured in the live DVD from Boston features a cinematic introduction and a central monologue. These expand the context of the lyrics to the problems of violence and handguns within the United States. This is dramatically different from the original context of “Bullet the Blue Sky.” While the song was originally related to America, its focus was the politics of undeclared war, and the effect on South America. In this performance the focus shifts to within the borders of the USA, and the way violence occurs between individuals, not governments and countries.

The introduction makes use of music, interviews, and powerful images. The concert itself is structured to bring attention to the carefully edited introduction: “Bullet the Blue Sky” occurs as the first song in the encore set. It is preceded by “Where the streets have no name.” At the conclusion of “Where the streets have no name” the stadium is cloaked in darkness. An old Negro spiritual recording by the Blind Boys of Mississippi is played while the lights slowly turn on. The words to the song ring through the stadium “Come down in the evening... I’m here to tell that the sun... the sun is going down.”

As these words are being sung, the video-wall is displaying National Rifle Association president Charlton Heston approaching a cluster of microphones for a press conference. The music fades to the background as the voice of a reporter is heard

questioning Heston: (the quote enters mid-sentence in the concert) "...point you want to make on what your agenda is toward, toward the NRA. What is your policy, on theirs?" Heston responds, "Well, here's my credo: there are no good guns, there are no bad guns. A gun in the hand of a bad man is a bad thing. Any gun in the hand of a good man is no threat to anyone except bad people." The statement is written out for all to read on the two center monitors (there are four in total), while the video appears on the outer two. Heston walks away from the microphones, and the video wall switches to a rapidly changing montage of guns, military warfare, and protests. The montage stops on the video of a young African-American girl pulling a handgun out of a grocery bag left on the floor. It is at this point the song begins.

There are two possible interpretations of the words "only bad people" spoken by Heston in the context of the introduction and themes of "Bullet the Blue Sky." The first is one of confirmation, where the written text is used to emphasize Heston's point. In this interpretation, the song speaks out against one side of America; namely the "bad people" who are the cause of problems surrounding handguns. The second interpretation sees the words "except bad people" surrounding both Charlton Heston and his "policy" towards the NRA as a fallacy. This interpretation is aided by the addition of the video clip that follows Heston's statement. This image speaks about the danger of handguns, and is clearly a situation (the young girl) where a "good person" is in danger because of a gun.

This introduction presents the listener with the theme that will run through this performance: the effect of gun violence on America. While the introduction is not spoken by Bono, or for that matter heard over the music played by the band, it is a

monologue that sets up some key questions and problems that will be dealt within the monologue.

### Monologue

The central monologue continues the theme of the introduction, as Bono wrestles with the idea of handgun violence. As the monologue begins the video screens once again display a montage of images that accompany the themes of the song. Each screen has rapidly moving images similar to that of the introduction. Unlike the original studio recording, the guitar solo occurs before the monologue. As the guitar plays, Bono approaches the video screens – a spotlight held in one hand, while the other arm covers his eyes from the images. He walks steadily and methodically, carefully placing each step as he walks around the heart-shaped circumference of the stage. As the solo comes to a close, Bono stops, turning on the spotlight and passing it over the audience.

The monologue begins similar to that of the original recording with some minor alterations. The focus is subtly put on the individual and away from the government: “And he’s peeling off those dollar bills, slapping them down, right there in the Wal-Mart.” Whereas the “he” before suggested the American government as led by Ronald Regan, the reference to Wal-Mart clearly positions the target of the song as the general public. The monologue then shifts to entirely new material: Bono states, “I can feel the cold steel... I can make a wound that won’t heal.” He begins to hold the spotlight like a gun, panning it slowly over the audience. In speaking about how guns are utilized in the first person, Bono assumes the perspective of someone intending to inflict harm on another. Up until this point there is no suggestion that Bono is taking the role of a

specific individual or for that matter speaking of a specific event. Through a series of clues and references, it becomes clear that there is one event that is being discussed.

First, he mentions the individuals and the location: the home of John Lennon and Yoko Ono (“I’m at the door where John and Yoko live in love and peace”). The lyrics suggest this plan will end in tragedy, as Bono states that he will soon be killed. He also alludes to the more recent murder of rapper Notorious B.I.G., who was shot by a handgun (“Pull the trigger on the rock’n’roll nigger, bigger than Jesus on a bumper sticker”). Bono, stepping out of character, introduces statistics about gun violence in America, trying to get the point across that this is a serious and relevant issue. He makes use of a different tone of voice that clearly differentiates this voice from the monologue until this point. He states that violence and murder is a “business of bitter tears” that is destroying the country.

The subject then turns to the murder of John Lennon. It becomes clear that Bono speaks as Lennon’s murderer Mark Chapman, stating, “My pulse is pacing, my eyes are chasing...” In the monologue, Bono connects the murder of Lennon with the problem of gun violence in America. The perspective shifts back and forth between Lennon and statistics of deaths in America. The monologue reaches a climax at the ending as Bono shouts “Hey John, we don’t need your help, America is making war on itself.” He continues, “What’s my name? Mark Chapman?” repeating this over and over again. As he says this, the spotlight moves from the crowd to his head, back and forth, until the light goes out while aimed at his head (and he motions as if the light has shot him), leaving the stadium in silence. The video screens display a blank white background, while Bono states “And we run into the arms of America.”

It is interesting to note how seamlessly “Bullet the Blue Sky” moves into the next song “With or Without You.” It would seem that the band connects the two songs, intentionally juxtaposing the harsh and aggressive tone with the tender and transparent lyrics of “With or Without You.” The song equally speaks to the understanding of “Bullet the Blue Sky.” The exact song combination and placement occurs in the Slane Castle concert.

### Elevation Tour: Ireland

The concert footage captured in Ireland presents another perspective that works throughout the entire performance from introduction to finish. Like the concert in Boston, an introduction establishes the themes that are extended in the monologue. Similar to the Boston concert “Bullet the Blue Sky” is the first song of the encore set.

As the lights fade on the outdoor venue, a recording of Sinead O’Connor signing chant is heard. The chant is unaccompanied and has a mournful and dark tone. Out of the darkness words appear on the video screen:

The Five Permanent members of the U.N. Security Council: USA, UK, France, China, Russia. The Five biggest arms traders in the world: USA, UK, France, China, Russia.

The simplicity and clarity of the chant puts the focus entirely on the text – the crowd is very quiet as the words appear on the screen. As the chant reaches a high point the band enters and the song begins. The text of the central monologue continues the subject of international arms trading established in the introduction. Like the concert in Boston the guitar solo precedes the spoken monologue, and the first section of the

monologue is Bono walking around the stage with a spotlight in one hand, and his eyes covered by his arm. Rapid montages of violent images are shown across the video screen while the guitar solo is played. Near the end of the guitar solo, all the lights go out, and the spotlight turns on, pulsing on and off rhythmically to the guitar and the drums. The monologue then begins in the typical fashion as established in the original studio recording.

While the text is succinct, numerous alterations mark this version of the song. Rather than focusing on America, the focus turns to international politics. This is obvious from the opening video presentation that mentions the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The band makes use of digital delay to emphasize the lyrics, drawing attention to individual words. The word “Outside” is given an extensive echo while the word that follows is dry and flat. This emphasizes the outdoor venue for the concert, and through the repetition of the term via echo the fact that the concert location – the UK – is involved directly in this very issue. Bono continues the sentiment by moving the attention outside the U.K. to the other members of the U.N. Security Council. The first statement “Outside it’s America” is followed by “Outside... UK,” “Outside France.” The most striking alteration is the final line, which no longer says America. Instead, Bono says, “We run into the arms” and fades out, thus enforcing the international focus of this particular performance. The climax of the monologue occurs when Bono lists several political organizations: EU, UDA, IRA, and British Army. Bono yells, “I can see you” as he speaks about the EU. Throughout the beginning of the monologue the spotlight focuses on his face. When stating “I can see you” the light shines out into the country, the repetition of the various organizations sees the light turn back towards his

body, and (similar to the Boston concert) shooting him leaving the concert in darkness for the line “And we run into the arms...”

The theme of violence and politics is retained in this version of the song, but unlike the Boston concert, the focus turns back to the political organizations that allow arms trading and international violence to occur. Bono takes aim directly at the various groups throughout the United Kingdom that act in this respect.

### Instrumental Roles in “Bullet the Blue Sky” Introduction

The instruments “serve the song” throughout “Bullet the Blue Sky” by responding to the text sung by Bono. I will focus on the instrumental arrangement and timbre, and how they correspond to the lyrics. This will begin by analyzing the guitar, and follow with the bass and drums. In order for this to read easily, I have provided this reading in chronological order, from the introduction to the conclusion of the song.

### Electric Guitar and “Serving the Song”

#### Introduction

This analysis will highlight three key areas: first – through the use of motifs, secondly – through the use of sound (the timbre of the guitar itself), and thirdly – through the arrangement, and the way the guitar fits into the performance of this song. These considerations will not be isolated in my analysis. Many times, motifs, timbre, and arrangement work simultaneously in supporting the lyrics.

The introduction to this song presents the key motifs. It divides into three distinct sections: the first is the two-bar drum introduction. Secondly, the guitar enters in bar

three with an arpeggiated chord (Ab – Db – Eb) that is subjected to feedback. The initial pitches fade away, and only the feedback (which gradually slides from a high-register Db to Eb) is sustained for six bars. Finally, Edge plays a second-inversion Gb chord and slides it downward four times (at the beginning of each measure). These motifs appear throughout the song in their original and altered form. As the lyrics become clear these fragments “serve the song” through their connection with the themes and text, sung by Bono. As this analysis progresses, I will highlight the connection between these motifs in the guitar and the lyrics sung by Bono.

Through the introduction the idea of high and low register is introduced: a motif that will appear throughout the entire recording. The sustained arpeggiated chord makes an ascending gesture, as the feedback raises the pitch-frequency. The downward sliding chords make a descending gesture. In both cases there is smooth motion from the high to the low and vice versa. This is a key characteristic of the role taken by the guitar throughout the performance of this song.

The guitar hardly plays in the first verse, providing a contrast to the introduction. This leaves a sense of open space in the mix when the verse begins. The small part the guitar does play largely develops the lyrics by text-painting many of the terms sung by Bono. Gradually, high frequency feedback can be heard subtly in the background on the line “from the firefly, a red orange glow.” The timbre is barely recognizable as a guitar. There are many descriptive terms in the first verse that support the strange sound: “howling wind,” “stinging rain,” and “face of fear” all suggest something frightening and disturbing. The high-frequency pitch also provides a large registral space between the guitar and the bass, providing lots of room for Bono to sing.

The guitar plays a much larger role in the second verse. It begins like the first verse, with high-register feedback distant in the texture, but then acts as a comment on several of the lines within the text. On the line “Jacob wrestled the angel, and the angel was overcome” the guitar plays an ascending melodic line in the extreme high-register. This has a dizzying effect, as the slide ascends with extensive use of pitch bending. On the line “you plant a demon seed,” the guitar brings back the descending motif from the introduction, now heard in a higher register. In this specific instance, the descending motif acts as a form of text painting for the concept of planting a seed. On the line “see them burning crosses, see the flames higher and higher, the guitar makes an ascending slide to the high register once again. This links both the image of flames higher and higher with the upward motion, and connects the burning crosses (upward motion) with the “demon seed” (downward motion) that was planted earlier.

The role of the guitar in the chorus is unlike that of the verse, as it is responsible for the contrast provided by the chorus. Here the arrangement of the guitar is crucial.

There are three ways that the guitar works to provide contrast in the chorus: the layering of voices, the way in which the layered

voices work with the ostinato played by the bass and drums, and the sound of the guitar. These elements relate directly to the instrumental arrangement (or roles) and timbre discussed in chapter one.

Through the analysis of these areas, it will become clear how the guitar “serves

The image shows a musical score for three voices, labeled Voice 1, Voice 2, and Voice 3. The score is written on three staves. Voice 1 is the top staff, Voice 2 is the middle staff, and Voice 3 is the bottom staff. The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. Voice 1 consists of a series of chords and a single note. Voice 2 consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. Voice 3 consists of a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a slide. The score is enclosed in a double bar line on both sides.

the song” in the chorus.

The guitar has three distinct voices that work together to form the chorus. The first is a chorded motif that anticipates the beginning of the bar. It outlines a movement from V-I and leaves room for the additional two voices of the guitar to enter (by leaving beats two and three empty). The second voice is a short melody that fills the second and third beat of the bar. It covers the interval of a second (from Db to Eb) and makes use of syncopation. The third voice is an Eb minor chord that sounds over the second voice. Unlike the other two voices, this voice is sustained over the bar, and fills the space left by the bass and drums creating a full texture. It has the effect of a cymbal crash that rings over everything else.

The image shows a musical score for a four-piece band. The top staff is labeled 'Electric Guitar' and contains a complex arrangement of chords and a melodic line. The second staff is labeled 'Bass' and shows a bass line. The third staff is labeled 'Snare' and shows a snare drum pattern. The fourth staff is labeled 'Bass Drum' and shows a bass drum pattern. The score is written in a key with one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar part features a chorded motif in the first measure, followed by a melodic line in the second and third measures, and a sustained chord in the fourth measure. The bass line follows a similar pattern, with a bass line in the first measure, a syncopated melody in the second and third measures, and a sustained chord in the fourth measure. The snare and bass drum patterns are simple and rhythmic, providing a steady accompaniment for the guitar and bass.

In these voices the registral gap between high and low register is emphasized. This occurs on a small scale between the three voices played by the guitar. The first voice is echoed by the second: in doing so the difference in register is emphasized. The third voice emphasizes the movement back to a higher register. The use of registral space can be seen in the guitar as it relates to the bass and drums.

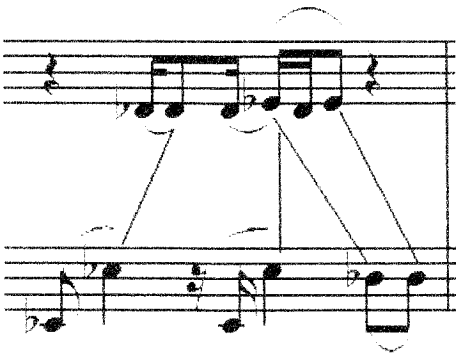
The live performance venue provides some challenges to perform all three voices of the guitar simultaneously. In the Elevation Tour footage from Boston, Edge plays only the first and second voice, opting to remove the sustained chord that sounds over the

other instruments. In the Elevation Tour footage from Ireland, and the 1988 video *Rattle and Hum*, the third voice is overdubbed.

The three voices of the guitar part work with the ostinato played by the drums and bass guitar. Throughout the song (verse and chorus), the drums and bass provide a solid foundation through an ostinato. In the verses, and monologue the guitar responds to the words sung by Bono. However, in the chorus the guitar is arranged to fit in with the ostinato.

As I showed when discussing the individual voices in the guitar, the first voice emphasizes the push to the beginning of the bar.<sup>80</sup> The guitar works with the bass and the drums by playing the same rhythmic figure on the fourth beat. In this way the push is even stronger than in the verse. The guitar provides an additional layer to the ostinato, which makes the eight note hits on the fourth beat even stronger.

In a general way the second voice of the guitar part (the short melodic motif) works with the snare hit on beat two, and the bass-kick on beat three. A closer analysis



reveals a tighter connection with the bass. First, the short motif outlines movement from Db to Eb, the two pitches played by the bass throughout the entire song.

Whereas the bass reaches up an octave to fall down to the Eb, the guitar compresses this registral gap.

Secondly, there are similarities to the bass in the rhythm. The guitar compresses the rhythmic figure played by the bass from four beats into two (so that the electric guitar motif occupies beats two and three of the bar). Both

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<sup>80</sup> In the transcription, I have excluded the third voice (the sustained Eb chord) as my intent is to focus on the first and second voices exclusively.

the bass and electric guitar feature a sixteenth note anticipation of the initial pitch, and repeat that anticipation. Finally, both the guitar and bass lines emphasize the final beat through repeated eighth notes (fourth beat in the bass, third beat in the electric guitar). In the electric guitar, the repeated eighth notes are embellished with a lower neighbor, however the effect is the same as repeated eighth notes. In this way, the second voice is a diminution of the bass line.

Finally, the guitar plays with a clean discernable sound. Notes, chords, and melodic figures are heard instead of the ethereal sustained pitches that appear in the verses and monologue. This detail alone provides an incredible contrast from the verse. The change in sound parallels the movement of the lyrics from poetic metaphor to simple statement.

The melodic line sung by Bono and Edge is a simple call and response. The only words utilized are “Bullet the Blue Sky.” In order for the chorus to stand out, there must be a contrast to the verse. Since the bass guitar and drums essentially assume the same role throughout the piece the guitar is crucial in establishing the chorus.

The guitar introduces Bono's central lyrical monologue by playing the descending gesture from the introduction (a second-inversion Gb chord that slides downward). The monologue spoken by Bono (as addressed in the discussion earlier) appears in two parts, and specifically addresses the concept of high and low (the attack from the sky, and the inhabitants below).

This sense of high and low mirrors Edge's guitar playing, which appears throughout the monologue. The monologue begins with a long sustained pitch of Eb, similar to the introduction. This time, Edge quickly moves to a higher Eb, and then down

to a C fluidly. This style of playing – sustained pitches that change register and pitch - continues throughout the first part of the song. The second motif established in the introduction (downward sliding chord) is also present, as the guitar plays on the line “and through the walls you hear the city groan” and “outside it’s America.” In this respect, the first half of the central monologue follows the introduction, however, this time the spoken text predominates to give context to the musical arrangement.

The second half of the central monologue enters as the guitar sustains a high pitch. Edge utilizes distortion and feedback, providing a vast range of frequencies. Here the guitar captures the sentiment of the text: “Across the field you see the sky ripped open, see the rain pour through the gaping wound pounding the woman and children.” The choice of high-register is in keeping with the discussion of the sky.

The live performances of “Bullet the Blue Sky” captured in the recordings *Rattle and Hum*, *Elevation 2001: U2 Live from Boston*, and *U2 Go Home: Live from Slane Castle Ireland* provide a platform for Edge to extend what appeared in the original studio recording. When Edge spoke of the role of the guitar in the song, he stated “... Whenever I hear that track I think about how far it could have gone. As a guitar player I’m only barely getting into that style. The guitar playing is much better live than on record, where I was only exploring possibilities.”<sup>81</sup> The monologue evolves into something larger in the live performances captured on film: the length is extended, and content is added: Edge experiments with new ideas that continue to “serve the song” through the

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<sup>81</sup> John Hutchinson, “Luminous Times: U2 Wrestles with Their Moment of Glory,” in *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 76.

connections to the song. These new strategies will be explored when I discuss “Bullet the Blue Sky” and live performance.

Whereas the guitar is relatively reserved through the monologue, the solo section gives the guitar room to play without reservation. At 34 bars the guitar solo is the longest section of the song. The motifs established in the verse, chorus, and monologue combine to form the structure of the solo, which makes use of registral highs and lows. In the studio recording of “Bullet the Blue Sky,” the entire solo builds to a high-register climax, and ends with the low-register Eb that started the song in the introduction. The sound of the guitar is distorted, and uses extensive reverb, giving the sound a long decay. There are two aspects of the guitar solo that stand out: first, the way in which it opposes and works against the bass and drum ostinato, and the use of high and low register.

The solo begins with a four bar figure that is repeated. This figure goes against the key characteristics of the bass and drum ostinato: the solid rhythms, and marked

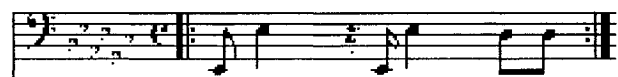


pitch-bending) moving down again. This leads into an explicit juxtaposition of low and high, where Edge plays a low pitch followed by a high chord. The solo ends with a sustained low-register pitch that is overwhelmed with feedback, bringing the pitch to the high register. In this way, the overall structure of the solo revolves around registral movement.

The use of high and low register in the guitar is consistent throughout the recording. The motifs established in the introduction re-appear throughout the verses, and parallel the discussion that occurs in the central monologue. The guitar solo emphasizes the use of high and low in its overall structure. The song itself juxtaposes high and low in the composition: there is an overall motion from the initial low Eb played in the introduction, to the extremely high frequency that ends the song. The guitar “serves the song” by emphasizing this registral gap, which parallels Bono’s lyrics and central monologue.

#### Bass and Drums in “Bullet the Blue Sky”

The bass and drums form an ostinato that underpins the entire song. Although their parts are independent and unique, they form a cohesive unit. The ostinato is a short one-bar figure, but it is significant in enforcing the themes of the song. The one-bar figure “serves the song” through the sense of space and use of high and low register. The bass line also focuses on registral space in the arrangement, much like the guitar. The bass makes use of the extreme low-end frequency (Eb), and reaches up an octave, then falls down a tone to Db (see transcription). The simplicity of the



bass line makes it easy to hear the motion between the octaves. This characteristic matches the guitar part, which constantly moves fluidly between registers.

The bass line enforces a repeated Eb pedal point. This “serves the song” in two ways: first, it contrasts the high-frequency pitches in the guitar, creating a large-scale juxtaposition of high and low in the musical texture. Secondly, there are several references within the text that refer to the repetitive nature of the bass pedal point:

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a drum set. The top staff is labeled 'Hi-Hat' and shows a series of sixteenth notes with stems pointing up, indicating closed hi-hat sounds. The middle staff is labeled 'Snare' and shows a pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing up, indicating snare hits. The bottom staff is labeled 'Bass Drum' and shows a pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing down, indicating bass drum hits. The notation is set in a 4/4 time signature and spans four measures.

"stinging rain," "driving nails," "running scared," and "pelting the woman and children."

The drums play a simple but unusual beat. It has elements of a military marching beat in the snare drum, which emphasizes beats two and four. There is very little clutter in the rhythmic pattern.

The closed hi-hat sounds out the sixteenth notes in the bar. On the fourth beat, Mullen utilizes the open hi-hat on the offbeat of the snare hits (which are represented with upward stems in the transcription). The simplicity of the part allows the two snare hits that occur on the fourth beat to be heard clearly. This gives the arrangement a lot of space, as the drums avoid clutter. When asked about the sense of "open space" in his music, Larry Mullen Jr. responded: "Yes, I like gaps; I like to be able to feel the music - not to clutter the songs." Mullen "plays to the song" and considers what the music is doing.

The discussion of gunfire and bombs ("firefly," "stinging rain," "sky is ripped open, "gaping wound") is evoked by the loud snare which hits that mark the fourth beat

of each bar. There is a built-in echo effect to the drumbeat whereby the bass kick (on the third beat) is followed by the snare hits (on the fourth beat) and the open hi-hat (on the off-beats of the fourth beat). Again, this suggests the discussion of gunfire and bombs that I mentioned above in the context of the monologue where Bono speaks of the gunfire and bombs “pelting the woman and children, who run...” The drums “play to the song” and “serve the song” by providing a solid military-like beat that echoes the sentiment of the text. The use of space and loud hits on the fourth beat relate directly to the words sung by Bono, and interact with the bass and electric guitar to form a solid unit.

### Conclusion

U2’s song “Bullet the Blue Sky” began as a statement about undeclared war in El Salvador and Nicaragua based on Bono’s personal experience in the small village of San Salvador. While the song essentially has remained the same over the years (the first performance being in 1987, and the most recent in 2001 during the Elevation tour) there have been drastic changes to the monologue section that have evolved the impact and understanding of the song. As I have shown in my discussion of the monologue section of the song, the focus has turned to current issues. In the Boston performance, Bono speaks about the problems of gun control in the National Rifle Association (NRA), referencing both the NRA, the comments of Charlton Heston, and the murder of John Lennon by Mark Chapman. In the Ireland performance, the focus shifted to global arms and the conflict that continues between Irish political groups. In both the Boston and Ireland concerts the addition of a video introduction accompanied by music added to the understanding of a context of the lyrics. The performance of “Bullet the Blue Sky” in the

Elevation Tour is an excellent example of how the venue of live performance can influence the understanding and direction that a song takes. While the lyrics to the verse and chorus stay the same, the Elevation Tour performances represent a new version of the song.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored the music, lyrics, and live performances of the rock band U2. It has been an opportunity to explore and expand the early conversations and analysis of their music that took place while I was in high school, and as an undergrad. It has also given me the chance to explore their music within the context of current research in the field of popular musicology. In chapter one, I discussed research in popular musicology, and the thoughts of the band member's of U2 in order to provide two governing perspectives for my thesis. In discussing these approaches, I stressed the importance of broadening the discourse of popular music analysis. The writings of Burns, Covach, Everett Moore, Walser, and Zak all present new perspectives. In referencing the thoughts of the band members of U2, I introduced the concept of "serving the song" – the self-described approach to composing and performing by U2 bassist Adam Clayton.

In chapter two, I explored the way lyrics are utilized by the band U2, analyzing U2's songs "The Playboy Mansion," and "All Along the Watchtower." While the first chapter focused on the role of the music in shaping the understanding of the lyrics, this chapter explored the way that the lyrics are utilized. In "The Playboy Mansion," I showed how the superficial and materialistic lyrics actually comment on the fallacy of earthly values. In my analysis of "All Along the Watchtower," I explored the cover version by U2, and the performances of Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix, noting the way each artist approached the Biblically inspired text, and the uniqueness of U2's adaptation of the song.

In chapter three, I moved to a discussion of U2's recent *Elevation* tour, exploring the way the band utilized the live performance venue. After providing some background on the conception of the tour by looking at thoughts by U2 band members and U2 tour designer Willie Williams, I turned my attention to the performances. In analyzing the performance of "Until the End of the World," I showed the way that the live performance expanded the lyrics of the original studio recording by acting out the actions described in the text. I then moved to the analysis of the set list construction, discussing the way groups of songs were linked together.

In chapter four, I combined the analytic framework utilized in chapters two and three to explore the lyrics and live performance of U2's song "Sunday Bloody Sunday." This explored the background to the song, and the way that subsequent performances have evolved to remain relevant to current issues, namely terrorism in modern day. In chapter five, I also combined the analytic framework utilized previously in analyzing the music, lyrics, and live performance of "Bullet the Blue Sky." In looking at this song, I explored the origins and inspiration of the lyrics, the significance of the musical setting in establishing a representation of the violence experienced by Bono, and the live performance in re-creating the intensity and power of Bono's experience in El Salvador. I also showed the way that the live performances of this song in the *Elevation* tour added new perspectives to the song – discussing gun control in the Boston performance, and Universal Arms Trade in the Ireland performance.

I had no idea that a collection of record albums, and tickets to U2's *Elevation* tour in Montréal would someday be the basis of research on popular music at the graduate level. I set out with the task of approaching U2's music from the perspective of an

analyst, considering both recorded and live performances. My analysis of the music, lyrics, and live performances reveal a conscious effort on the part of U2 to express their ideas in a creative way while working within the genre of rock. This thesis is being completed after the release of the bands newest album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, and the onset of a new world tour entitled *Vertigo 2005*. I am excited to see how the band continues to develop their live performance, and the way that their material is utilized in putting together a show.

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