

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND MUSIC IN THE BTS DISCOGRAPHY

---

Šarić, Paula

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2022

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split / Sveučilište u Splitu, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:172:899869>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2023-03-29**

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of Faculty of humanities and social sciences](#)



Sveučilište u Splitu  
Filozofski fakultet  
Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Paula Šarić

**The Relationship Between Literature and Music in the BTS Discography**

Završni rad

Split, 2022.

University of Split  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English Language and Literature

**The Relationship Between Literature and Music in the BTS Discography**

BA Thesis

Student:

Paula Šarić

Supervisor:

Dr Brian Daniel Willems, Assoc. Prof.

# Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>1. Introduction to BTS</b> .....	3
<b>1.1. The road to success in a BTS way</b> .....	4
<b>1.2. The Storyworld of the BTS Universe</b> .....	7
<b>2. Literary theories in relation to the BTS Universe</b> .....	9
<b>2.1. Intertextuality</b> .....	9
<b>2.2. David Herman’s narrative theory through the BTS Universe</b> .....	12
<b>3. Notion of the concept album through Coldplay and a connection to BTS</b> .....	17
<b>4. Conclusion</b> .....	21
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	22

## **SUMMARY**

This paper deals with influence of literature on BTS discography. The importance of literature has never been lost to the world – going on from ancient times to the modern centuries. With the influence it has on people, it is not strange for the currently most popular band BTS to use literature and methods of storytelling to convey their message. Continuing the on-brand creation of concept album, BTS additionally venture into creating a whole alternative universe. BTS, being primarily musicians, focus on music. However, reading their work through lenses of literary theories showcases additional layer of interpretation to their music that ties directly to a continuous storyline.

## **KEYWORDS**

Literary theory, storytelling, alternative universe, concept album

## **SAŽETAK**

Ovaj rad se bavi utjecajem književnosti na BTS diskografiju. Važnost književnosti svijetu nikada nije bila izgubljena – polazeći od antike do modernog vremena. S obzirom na utjecaj koji ima na ljude, nije čudno što trenutno najpoznatiji bend BTS koristi književnost i metode pripovijedanja kako bi prenijeli svoju poruku. Nastavljajući sa izdavanjem konceptualnih albuma, BTS se dodatno upušta u stvaranje alternativnog svijeta. S obzirom da su BTS glazbenici, primarno se bave glazbom. Ipak, čitanje njihovih pjesama kroz književne teorije prikazuje dodatnu interpretaciju glazbe koja je izravno povezana s kontinuiranom pričom.

## **KLJUČNE RIJEČI**

Književna teorija, pripovijedanje, alternativni svijet, konceptualni album

## INTRODUCTION

BTS, a group of seven young men from South Korea, are currently taking over the world at a rapid pace. Everyone is baffled by such global domination, so many papers have been written about them. While researchers mostly concentrate on the fandom phenomenon, economic profit, and Hallyu Wave<sup>1</sup>, this paper focuses on another important aspect of BTS's success – literature. There is not much research on the relationship between their music and literary pieces.

Considering the overwhelming amount of content BTS produces, in this paper I chose different works that analyzing through different literary theories can showcase how influence of literature on the reader changes the interpretation of their music.

First section introduces BTS and puts them in the context of K-POP industry showing the way they use storytelling in their discography, but also to create their own fictional world. Considering that the paper focuses on the analysis of their work through literary theory, this section follows reconstruction of specific lyrics using Fisher's narrative paradigm.

Additionally, there is a short summary of the BTS Universe storyworld since the second section of the paper talks more in-depth about the literary theories, such as intertextuality and Herman's theory of narrative and how the reading of the fictional universe changes through them. There is a discussion about the *WINGS* album and its connection to the intertextuality through retelling of Hesse's *Demian*, while Herman's theory is used to analyze textual media of the BTS Universe storyworld and therefore present it as a continuous narration.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Korean Wave (Hallyu) refers to the global popularity of South Korea's cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, music, TV dramas and movies.

The last section covers the topic of concept album considering BTS's extensive production of them, but also the comparison between a western artist such as Coldplay and BTS since both artists showcase how concept album does not only tie all the songs in one storyline but goes beyond that to create a transmedial storyworld.

This paper mainly talks about BTS's work viewed through literary theories of narrative to showcase it can also be seen as a continuous narrative or a storyline, not just as songs.



## 1. Introduction to BTS

BTS, an acronym of the Korean name 방탄소년단 which translates to Bulletproof Scout Boys, is a South Korean group that consists of seven members, RM, Jin, Suga, J-hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook. They debuted on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013, under then-called management company Big Hit Entertainment, now Big Hit Music. They started as a hip-hop group with their 1<sup>st</sup> single album 2 *COOL 4 SKOOL* which led them, with their other work, to rise in the global music industry.

Among other things, like fandom phenomenon, economic profit, and Hallyu Wave, BTS engaged in what has been called transmedia storytelling, meaning “Transmedia stories are delivered across multiple distribution platforms, in various formats that can include feature films, short films, episodic television, streaming content, social media, games, print media, music and audio clips” (McErlean, 2018). In BTS’s case, they introduce a BTS Universe storyworld through their music videos and print media, which will be mentioned further in the paper. My affinity towards literature and BTS’s ability to use it with music prompted me to discuss how they use theories of intertextuality and narrative in order to not limit themselves in their creativity of music and how those theories change the perspective of a reader.

This paper talks about BTS lyrical work and their fictional storyworld. Being musicians, BTS's main line of work is music, but viewing it through literary theories of narrative, such as Herman's theory and intertextuality, it can be seen as a continuous narrative or a storyline and not only as songs.

## 1.1. The road to success in a BTS way

This section brings a simple overview of the BTS discography and how they make use of storytelling. That is to give you a basic idea of their work process and how BTS fits in the K-POP narrative, but also in which way they differ by extending usage of storytelling not only through music videos, but also through narration in songs. When reading BTS lyrics through Fisher's Narrative Paradigm, it can be seen that they do not have just one interpreted meaning but are in fact connected to the storyline.

At the beginning BTS were supposed to be a hip-hop group, but Bang Shi Hyuk changed his mind. Such liberty, which is very difficult to acquire in the K-POP industry, allows them to expand through the notions of intertextuality and storytelling. BTS's own stories influence their music, but down the line they simultaneously offer stories with extensive themes such as troubling youth, society, suffering, temptation, but also happiness, hopefulness, healing, and dreams. All the themes appear throughout their discography, but BTS went one step further and decided to express them via the storylines in their music videos and conceptual timeline. "The timeline traces the growth narrative outlined in their branding, moving from the school trilogy to the youth trilogy, to the darker themes of WINGS, and finally the Love Yourself series and the Map of the Soul series. Each series focuses on a different set of themes and tells a different part of the story, but all of BTS's albums and related content contribute to the ongoing growth narrative" (Lazore 52).

BTS is no exception to the K-POP model of making concept albums and having a storyline occupy most of the content. Storyline by definition implies a series of related events or experiences, whether nonfictional or fictional. Therefore, when applied to a number of idol groups who actively implement storytelling strategy, Moonjeong Kim and Myun Kim present three categories in their

analysis article from 2018. Analyzing six groups (BTS, GFRIEND, EXO, B.A.P, SHINEE and VIXX), the authors categorize them in this manner:

- 1) storytelling through consecutive series
- 2) storytelling through group plot and character creation
- 3) storytelling through organic connection between albums (Kim qtd. in Lee 47)

The conclusion authors provided was the three common shared elements – simple and universal theme, borrowing from preexisting literary or film works, and leaving a room for fandom participation – whether it be interpretation or expanded reproduction (Kim qtd. in Lee 47).

However, they differ in their focus and implementation of the “content” element. K-POP groups rely on concepts for each album, but many albums are self-contained stories or narratives limited to a music video (Lazore 55). With BTS it is important to realize how storytelling is weaved within them as artists and as the brand. Together with their creative team they create their own fiction story that connects throughout their whole discography. BTS’s focus is producing content that relates to their story – whether that is their lyrics or album concepts. Constantly participating in song and lyric writing and giving input for concepts, they thematically link all their work together. With reliance on storytelling, they can live up to their foundational goal of telling their own stories and in process expressing brand and company values.

Even though storytelling is the oldest form of communication, in literary theory there is a concept of the Narrative Paradigm, as developed by Walter Fisher, that helps analyze human communication. It suggests that human beings are natural storytellers and that a good story is more convincing than a good argument. Fisher states, “When I use the term ‘narration,’ I do not mean a fictive composition whose propositions may be true or false and have no necessary relationship to the message of that composition. By ‘narration,’ I mean symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—

that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (Fisher qtd. in West and Turner 351). The way this interpretation works for BTS is that lyrics of their songs that have official connections with the BTS Universe can have a different meaning for someone who is not in contact with the story. For example, the song *Run* (2015) heavily focuses on the plotline of the storyworld. The music video shows different plots for all the characters that are tied together.

Someone might read lyrics such as “Memories, like dry flower petals,/ get shattered into pieces/ from my fingertips, from underneath my feet,/ towards your back who’s running away/ Like chasing a butterfly, life wandering in a dream,/ I follow your traces/ Please tell me the way, please stop me/ Please let me breathe” (Doolset) and apply them to their own personal life or an unrequited love they are chasing therefore using these symbols and create their personal meaning, just like Fisher mentions. However, if you are prior familiar with the storyline, then you are influenced by the knowledge of the story and will apply the symbolic actions of these lyrics in sequence and meaning of the storyworld. In that interpretation, it is about the character Seokjin who goes through butterfly effect and chases his friends in order to save them and in the process acquires a magical flower called Smeraldo. Moreover, a parallel can be drawn years later when these symbols are used in an opening scene of music video for *Fake Love* (2018) where Seokjin stands in an empty room with the Smeraldo flower in focus, but the room windows shatter while he tries to protect the flower (0:44), only for it to disappear later on (1:43).

With just these two interpretations, it is noticeable what Fisher is trying to present as a narrative gives more power to storytelling since it is not just a story but has a meaning for many people.

## 1.2. The Storyworld of the BTS Universe

In order to analyze the BTS Universe through the literary theories, it is necessary to be familiar with the brief summary of how the story was created and what is the basic plotline. This section covers it in short.

Like previously mentioned, all BTS lyrics have a story that unfolds. But in 2015, something more prominent appeared with their 3<sup>rd</sup> mini album called *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.1* but it is usually called HYYH. The abbreviation is the initial of the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters 花 樣年華 (화양연화, Hwayangyeonhwa) which translates to ‘the most beautiful moment in life’ (Big Hit Music) and the acronym will be used below to replace this phrase.

The core theme of the BU (acronym for the BTS Universe) comes down to seven boys who go through growing pain but overcome difficulties and try to find dream, happiness, and love together. It allows BTS to examine darker topics that happen in real life to young people. However, what makes it more interesting is as the fans try to piece more information together, they come across magic realism as one of the main plots. Once the group of friends from high school fall apart and their lives take different routes, they come together through the magical elements of time travel by applying the butterfly effect. Seokjin, one of the characters, is in the loop of the same day – April 11<sup>th</sup>, in order to save his friends from their doom and every time he fails, he is taken back. All the information that currently exists about this storyworld was carefully collected and put in chronological order by diligent fans to make more sense of it (<http://bucontentgui.de/>). Even though the company released two books, *HYYH The Notes 1* and *HYYH The Notes 2*, they are written in a diary form and in first person, like all the snippets in physical albums, so just by the additional notes, fans were able to fill some plot holes they had before. The next section of this paper shows

how BTS use intertextuality in their music and its contribution to the relationship between music and literature. The BTS Universe, including the books mentioned before, is analyzed through the Herman's literary theory of narrative to prove the integrity of the BU as a narration.

## 2. Literary theories in relation to the BTS Universe

### 2.1. Intertextuality

Intertextuality as a concept has a great history of different theories and expressions, starting with Julia Kristeva who introduced the term “intertextuality” for the first time in literary linguistics. Considering BTS use intertextuality throughout the whole discography, for the analysis, I chose the *WINGS* album. Reading lyrics of the *WINGS* album, on the surface it seems like they talk about freedom but viewing it through intertextuality shows it is retelling of Hesse's *Demian*.

However, in order to continue with the analysis, this section first deals with the intertextuality as a literary theory. In her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva says that intertextuality is "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*" (Kristeva qtd. in Moi 37). In other words, Kristeva argues that all signifying systems are established by the way they transform earlier signifying systems. To put it in the perspective of literature, literary work then is not a product of one author, but of their relationship with other texts.

Later on, Roland Barthes adds his position on intertextuality and argues that literary meaning can never be fully grasped by the reader considering the intertextual nature of literary works. “Any text is a new tissue of past citations” (Barthes 39). Therefore, all literary works take place in the presence of other texts.

This is not to say that intertextuality can be only applied to literary works. It does stem from literary theories; however, it is adapted by critics of non-literary art forms, including music. Many scholars have included the concept of intertextuality in analyzing musical artists and their works (Lee 41).

Lee mentions both Robert Hatten and Mark Spicer as important authors that discuss intertextuality in music. Firstly, it is Hatten who suggests in his article “The Place of Intertextuality in Music Studies” that musical intertext has two contexts: style and strategy (70), but it is Spicer who uses his idea to analyze popular music, such as Beatles. Lee defines the stylistic intertextuality, as according to Spicer, as something that happens when composers adopt special characteristics of a pre-existing style or genre, but without referring to it. On the other hand, strategic intertextuality is defined when a composer intentionally refers to a specific earlier work by different techniques including paraphrase, quotation, variation, and structural modeling.

Spicer notes that “the goal of an intertextual analysis is to unravel the many ways in which the stylistic and strategic references contribute to the meaning of the new piece” (Spicer qtd. in Lee 42).

Considering these theoretical classifications, it is noticeable that BTS’s stories, even though fragmented, fit both stylistic and strategic intertextuality. Themes, images, and specific phrases appear at different moments in BTS’s stories, whether it’s in their music, videos, BU content, or films. Even live performance stages sometimes contain hints or clues that tie to past and upcoming releases, and recurring images are often utilized, such as the desert and the sea.

Lazore has already in her essay compiled most important texts where intertextuality occurs, when BTS is in question. Besides the BTS Universe storyworld that cuts across multiple albums release, there is *WINGS* album’s references to Hermann Hesse’s novel *Demian* and another important song *Spring Day*, which references Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” In their *Map of the Soul* album there are additional ties to Carl Jung’s psychoanalytical ideas.



In the example of *WINGS* album, if we do not take into consideration the strategic intertextuality that is at work here, we potentially lose the meaning behind the album. The title track of the album called *Blood Sweat and Tears* (2016) is completely based on the novel. Before finding out that they based it on *Demian*, I thought of it as a basic plot of fallen angel tempting humans and my interpretation stopped at that. This ties well with Barthes' beliefs mentioned before. Without the background knowledge or awareness of intertextuality at place, the whole piece loses meaning. Besides the heavy symbolism used in the music video, one of the members, Namjoon, quotes *Demian* in the video, "He too...was a tempter. He, too, was a link to the second, the evil world with which I no longer wanted to have anything to do" (4:05). It fits well with the overall song being about temptations – "Close my eyes with your hand/I can't even resist it anyway/I can't even run away anymore/because you're too sweet too sweet" (Doolset) – just as the premise of *Demian* is a young boy caught between good and evil, fighting off the temptations of the immoral world. This prompts the consumer to deepen their knowledge and try to get as close as possible to the meaning the artist wanted to convey.

## 2.2. David Herman's narrative theory through the BTS Universe

In this section the BTS Universe is seen through the lens of Herman's narrative theory to highlight the presence of narrative in the whole storyworld. Even though it appears to be a complex fictional universe, it is possible to frame it with four basic elements of narrative. Therefore, using Herman's theory of narrative, it is argued that BTS work is possible to read as a united narration instead of a fragmented story.

The references to a storyworld throughout the paper come from the field of narrative theory. In order to present how BTS, as a band, utilize literature and storytelling, *The Notes*, which is a book written in a form of a diary as an extension of the BTS Universe, is analyzed through four basic elements of narrative: situatedness, event sequencing, worldmaking/world disruption, and what it's like. David Herman notes that the narrative practices can be conducted in various semiotic environments to which he refers as storytelling media (Herman, Preface 12). Even though the BU storyworld has a written form, story opening is still *I Need U* music video which serves as a prompt for future worldmaking for both BTS and the fans. It supports Herman's claim that "not all storytelling media are created equal. Some afford multiple communicative channels that can be exploited by a given narrative to evoke a storyworld, whereas others afford only a single channel when it comes to designing blueprints for storyworlds." (Herman, Preface 12)

To understand Herman's view on a storyworld, his definition of a narrative needs to be mentioned. Herman claims that "rather than focusing on general, abstract situations or trends, stories are accounts of what happened to particular people – and of what it was like for them to experience what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences." (Herman 2). It is to show that even though the BU storyworld starts in the form of a music video and only

later on acquires its written form, it is accepted as a narrative since it presents a story about seven particular characters of that world. The quote from the first book highlights it well:

“Would I be able to straighten out the errors and mistakes and save all of us? I didn’t grasp the depth and weight of this question. It was true that I desperately wanted to save all of us. No one deserves to die, to despair, to be suppressed, and to be despised. On top of that, they were my friends” (*The Notes* 176). This contemplation of the character Seokjin has a deeper meaning in the context of the whole story. Just the fact that he is full of desperation in this particular moment already sets the foundation for the narrative, according to Herman. This is happening to a particular person – Seokjin and he wants to save his friends from their demons by going back in time when he fails, which makes this a particular circumstance that does not happen to anyone.

According to Herman, stories can be analyzed into four basic elements:

I characterize narrative as (i) a mode of representation that is situated in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling. This mode of representation (ii) focuses on a structured time-course of particularized events. In addition, the events represented are (iii) such that they introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld, whether that world is presented as actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamed, etc. The representation also (iv) conveys what it is like to live through this storyworld-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousnesses undergoing the disruptive experience at issue. (Herman 9)

For convenience, Herman abbreviates these characteristics as (i) situatedness, (ii) event sequencing, (iii) worldmaking/world disruption, and (iv) what it's like. And as such they will continue to be mentioned in the rest of the paper.

The first basic element of narrative that Herman mentions is its situation in a “particular discourse context or occasion for telling” (9).

On the example of *The Notes*, the situatedness is noticeable in the way BTS Universe storyworld is created. Seven members of the group that exist in real life are put in a fictional storyworld by using their real names and appearances to highlight difficult topics they wanted to discuss but are unable to do so from their personal experiences as these topics cover abuse, homicide, and suicidal ideation.

“TaeHyung and HoSeok yelled out in excitement and dashed ahead. As they beckoned. JiMin and SeokJin joined them. They called out to me. “JungKook!” I waved at them and smiled joyfully” (*The Notes* 1, 22). For example, this quote mentions a few names in connection to each other and if taken out of context, it looks like something that could possibly happen in real life between the members, considering these are their real names. Therefore, it is important to interact with the story in this specific context and think of these people as seven characters from another world even though they resemble in real life people.

Naturally for *The Notes* to be a narrative, the events described should have a “structured time-course”, however that is not enough to frame it as a narrative. There must be the distinction between the what and the how, or what is being told versus the manner in which it is told. From this perspective, Herman claims that narratives feature two different layers or levels of temporal sequence that can be more or less (dis)aligned. Namely, “it is the sequence of events in the

storyworld evoked by the narrative, and the sequence in which those events are ordered in the narrative representation itself” (Herman 94).

In strictly chronological narration (ABC), these sequences match up. However, BTS Universe as a whole and *The Notes* respectively are not narrated in chronological order. It is showcased in, what Genette calls, analepses (= flashbacks of the form BCA or BAC) and prolepses (= flashforwards of the form ACB) which makes these two sequences diverge. For example, the first time an audience was introduced to the written text of the BU was in booklets that carry the same name as the book, *The Notes*. These booklets were first introduced in *Love Yourself: Her* album and each version of the album had different booklets. Not only was the story distributed in intermittent order, but depending on which album a consumer bought, they get different notes of different years.

The quote from first note from the L version of the album reads: “I had already visited several places, and I couldn’t find even one florist who knew of that flower’s existence. They had only shown me flowers of a similar color. [...] After hearing a name of the flower, the store’s owner looked at me for a long time” (Seokjin, 15 August Year 22, trans. origamifirefly). However, the second note reads from Year 19: “A damp smell came from the principal’s room as I followed my father in. It had been ten days since I came back from America...” (Seokjin, 2 March Year 19, trans. origamifirefly)

These two notes seemingly have no connections, but they are the thoughts of the same character just not in the chronological order. The second note could be seen as a flashback to a moment where it all started once Seokjin got transferred to a new high school. However, the first note leaves us with many questions about the flower and why it is so important. There is a specific temporal reference of the occasion that will be revisited later in the future.

*The Notes* are written in a diary form from seven points of view in first person. Every character talk about different events that are happening at the same time, but they are not in a sequence. It is written as random events that occurred to every character on their way to doom (Namjoon getting in a fight so he ends up in prison, Yoongi overdoses and burns the hotel room, Jungkook commits suicide, etc.). For instance, all the notes from the albums, make appearance in *The Notes* in correct year order, however once a time sequence of dates comes to an end for one character the reader goes back in time to follow the narrative of another character.

“I ran down the hall making a clumping sound and took a slide at the end. Namjoon was standing in front of ‘our classroom.’ Our classroom. That’ s what I called the classroom-turned-storage room” (Taehyung 20 March Year 20, *The Notes* 1, 33)

“I cut across the classroom-turned-storage room, which served as a hideout for the seven of us, straightening up some chairs along the way. I picked up an overturned desk and wiped the dust off it with my palms. Today was my last day at this school” (Namjoon 15 March Year 20, *The Notes* 1, 35). From these two examples it can be seen that there is quite a lot of information missing and since the narration is in the first person, the reader is often left wondering what is happening in between.

Just analyzing it through two basic elements of narrative it is showcased that the snippets do not act like a fragmented story that appears in the album, but rather that the connection runs deeper through the proper narration, not only in the books, but also in other songs that were mentioned before.

### **3. Notion of the concept album through Coldplay and a connection to BTS**

To provide additional information on how story is created with the music, this paper also introduces the elaboration of the concept album. This section provides history of the concept album and another example of implementation through Coldplay. Concept albums are usually defined as song cycles which connect all songs in one storyline, but comparing BTS and Coldplay, it shows that BTS's storyworld cuts across many albums, not just songs.

By the definition of Martina Elicker, it is “an album by either one artist or a group which contains a unifying thread throughout the songs –be it musical, thematic, or both” (qtd. in Burns 94). The idea here is that the concept album is a song cycle which connects all songs in one storyline instead of every song presenting its story individually.

Before the idea of a concept album was introduced by the folk singer Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads* in 1940, and then later on popularized by jazz musicians, only for the western audience to associate it more with rock music, there were different forms of art in the past that had cohesive musical and lyrical work that presents a unified theme. Klein brings up three examples of such art – medieval lai, the song cycle, and the symphonic poem (Klein 2019). The Medieval lai is a lengthy poem that scholars believe was recorded in mid to late twelfth century for the first time. The song cycle and the symphonic poem come from the classical realm and are also referred to as a tone poem reflecting the early roots of the concept album. The correlation is seen in the definitions of these terms. The song cycle is a body of songs composed in a specific sequence that implies a narrative or certain consistency while a symphonic poem is a story from literature or history that has been translated into a classical work. It is unknown if the artists of concepts albums in the twentieth and twenty first century aimed to channel the ideas of medieval lais, song cycles, and

tone poems, but Klein concludes that these early works have helped formed the roots of the concept album we know today (Klein, 2019).

Like mentioned above, the concept album was mostly utilized by jazz musicians and even though they do not present the typical protagonist and storyline, they present a consistent theme, and the production is deemed a higher degree of musical organization.

However, the concept album kicks off its popularity in twentieth century with rock music coming on the scene. Burns mentions a few popular musicologists, like Lambert who deems the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966) as an important starting point for the rock-era concept album followed by Moore who mentions Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* (1967) (94). The concept album becomes extremely common as lots of artists from different genres – art rock, progressive rock and metal and alternative rock - started to experiment with its potential.

It might not be a revolutionary tool in the modern ages as it was in twentieth century, but it still sets the artists apart and allows them to advance their musical composition. This tool gives albums a higher purpose and challenges the audience instinctively giving more meaning to their musical experience.

Subsequently, British rock band Coldplay expands the idea of the concept album and creates a range of supplementary materials using a variety of media such as music videos and books to extend the reach of their album far beyond the level of the album sales. Lori Burns examines the transmedial storyworld of Coldplay's *Mylo Xyloto* concept spectacle. *Mylo Xyloto* is their fifth studio album released in October 2011. Not only is it branded as a concept album, but also a thematic rock opera. Burns goes deeply into this spectacle focusing on selected materials, but what is important to share here is her thoughts on the potential of taking the concept album to a new



level of mediation by the creation of a transmedial storyworld. We do not receive the full narrative through the songs on the album, nor do we receive the full narrative in any other medium, but rather it is presented as different parts of narrative through different media. These parts of the whole work together relying on the multimodal, intermedial and transmedial storytelling strategies to build the complete story world of Mylo Xyloto.

At first the band only vaguely describe the story about two characters (Mylo and Xyloto) and their struggle to find love in a difficult situation (Burns 98-99). The story as a whole only comes up once all the materials released between 2011 and 2013 are connected. The album was released in connection with graffiti art painted by artist Paris and the members of the band. Later on, different materials, other than songs, were published, such as artwork, videos, and concert staging, among which the greatest impact on the plot had a series of six comic books written with Mark Osborne and Dylan Haggerty, and illustrated by Alejandro Fuentes, that were promoted by the music video for “Hurts Like Heaven”, an animated film that introduces the storyworld of the comic book series (Coldplay 2012-2013). Considering that it is a multi-dimensional artwork and a complex network of materials it allows the receiver of a narrative to go through the process of identifying every piece of information and put it together to understand the storyworld.

To briefly outline the story of the album, it talks about a war against sound and color by a supremacist government, set in the world of Silencia and follows Mylo Xyloto, a “silencer”, a soldier in an army tasked to hunt and track down “sparkers”, people who harness light and energy and use it to create sparks, comparable to graffiti in real life. Here we need to notice that even though the band said that Mylo and Xyloto are two different characters, later on in the comics that is the name of the protagonist – a “silencer”. Each song can be seen like it has its own narrative, but it is more important to create intermedial connections out of the network of linked texts. The

central piece is the song “Charlie Brown” and along with other songs the lyrics capture what it is like to be a part of the oppressed community (Burns 92).

Not only is this an amazing example of tapping into all potential that a concept album can give and therefore take the experience of music to another level, the storyworld of Mylo Xyloto directly ties to BTS. As a part of Coldplay’s ninth studio album *Music of the Spheres*, a collaboration between the bands was released in September 2021 through an English and Korean song *My Universe*. The single was announced through a coded message on Coldplay's Alien Radio FM social media account and then on 24 September 2021 a space-themed lyric video, featuring animated handwritten lyrics from both bands in English and Korean, was released together with the song. Later on, was released a music video set in the Spheres planetary system. The video depicts Coldplay, BTS, and the fictional alien band Supernova 7 performing “My Universe” together. Though located on different planets, the three groups are united as holograms through “HOLOBAND” technology controlled by alien DJ Lafrique, who broadcasts their performance throughout the system from her radio ship while being hunted by the Silencers (Rolling Stone India).

Watching all behind the scenes of this collaborative project, it can be concluded that compared to their similarities in work process, these artists were the right match for such a concept. Even though with BTS the outline of the concept album is still present, and they greatly stand in comparison to Coldplay, BTS takes it a tad bit further and creates a complex storyline for a universe that requires active theorizing about the years of content.

## 4. Conclusion

Both music and literature can be read in numerous ways by different people and as forms of art they are allowed to be of many interpretations. This paper tried to cover the reading of BTS music through literary theories arguing that in fact their music is a continuous narration cut across many albums. Presented in western artists, such as Coldplay, but more commonly found in K-POP, concept albums act as a bridge between music and storytelling.

From the first album BTS went along with telling the stories, but presenting a whole fictional universe strays a bit from the work of a musician and therefore brings the question of how one should read such music. However, theory of intertextuality was never limited to literary works, but rather fits well as a connection between music and literature. Specifically in the example that was brought up in the paper, it is entirely acceptable to disregard the influence of Hesse's *Demian* on the *Wings* album and interpret it in your own volition. However, reading it through the intertextuality theory, it is impossible to ignore that another text completely influenced the creation of the album, following *Demian*'s notion of struggles between good and evil.

Furthermore, to strengthen the relationship between music and storytelling, BTS Universe is presented in the textual form. Even though publishing the books by the name *The Notes* seems like unrelated action, it is read differently if viewed through theory of narrative. Analyzing *The Notes* by fitting them in the basic elements of narrative shows the consistency of the narration and connection to the music that is viewed in the context of the story.

## Bibliography

1. Barthes, Roland. "Theory of the Text." *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young, Routledge, London, 1981, pp. 31–47.
2. Big Hit Entertainment. *花樣年華 HYYH The Notes 1*. BeORIGIN Co., Ltd, 2019.
3. BTS. "Blood Sweat & Tears". *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 9 Oct. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmE9f-TEutc>
4. BTS. "FAKE LOVE". *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 18 May. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7C2z4GqqS5E>
5. BTS. "I NEED U". *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 10 May. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjskoRh8GTE>
6. BTS. "RUN". *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 29 Mar. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKysONrSmew>
7. Burns, Lori. "The Concept Album as Visual—Sonic—Textual Spectacle: The Transmedial Storyworld of Coldplay's Mylo Xyloto." *IASPM@Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2016, pp. 91–116., [https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871\(2016\)v6i2.6en](https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2016)v6i2.6en).
8. "Coldplay and BTS Unveil Galactic Music Video for 'My Universe'." *Rolling Stone India*, 30 Sept. 2021, <https://rollingstoneindia.com/coldplay-and-bts-unveil-galactic-music-video-for-my-universe/>.
9. Doolset. "Run." *Doolset Lyrics*, 5 Dec. 2020, <https://doolsetbangtan.wordpress.com/2018/07/02/run/>.
10. Doolset. "피 땀 눈물 (Blood Sweat & Tears)." *Doolset Lyrics*, 5 Dec. 2020, <https://doolsetbangtan.wordpress.com/2018/06/20/blood-sweat-tears/>.

11. Herman, David. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. A John Wiley & Sons, 2009.
12. Klein, Savannah. "The Development of the Concept Album." *Honors Projects*, 2019, <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/761>.
13. Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva Reader*. Edited by Toril Moi, Columbia University, 1986.
14. Lazore, Courtney. "Success Story: How Storytelling Contributes to BTS's Brand." *ASIA MARKETING JOURNAL*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2021, pp. 47–62., <https://doi.org/10.15830/amj.2020.22.4.47>.
15. Lee, Dongkyung. *INTERTEXTUALITY AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN K-POP: Focusing on the Content Analysis of BTS*, Waseda University, 2019, [http://www.f.waseda.jp/glaw/CLASSES/5616A301\\_Dongkyung\\_Lee\\_TH.pdf](http://www.f.waseda.jp/glaw/CLASSES/5616A301_Dongkyung_Lee_TH.pdf). Accessed 2022.
16. McErlean, Kelly. *Interactive Narratives and Transmedia Storytelling*. Routledge, 2018.
17. origamifirefly. "( Eng Trans ) 화양연화 HYYH The Notes (L, O, V, E)." *Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/i/events/918138828581347328?lang=en>.
18. "The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.1: BTS." *BIGHIT MUSIC*, <https://ibighit.com/bts/eng/discography/detail/hwayangyeonhwa-pt1.html>.
19. West, Richard, and Lynn H. Turner. *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application*. McGraw-Hill, 2010.

SVEUČILIŠTE U SPLITU  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

**IZJAVA O AKADEMSKOJ ČESTITOSTI**

kojom ja \_\_\_\_\_Paula Šarić\_\_\_\_\_, kao pristupnik/pristupnica za stjecanje zvanja sveučilišnog/e prvostupnika/ce \_\_\_\_\_engleskog jezika i književnosti i pedagogije\_\_\_\_\_, izjavljujem da je ovaj završni rad rezultat isključivo mogega vlastitoga rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima i oslanja na objavljenu literaturu kao što to pokazuju korištene bilješke i bibliografija. Izjavljujem da niti jedan dio završnog rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno da nije prepisan iz necitiranoga rada, pa tako ne krši ničija autorska prava. Također izjavljujem da nijedan dio ovoga završnog rada nije iskorišten za koji drugi rad pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj ili radnoj ustanovi.

Split, \_\_\_\_\_22. 9. 2022.\_\_\_\_\_

Potpis



IZJAVA O POHRANI ZAVRŠNOG RADA U DIGITALNI REPOZITORIJ FILOZOFSKOG  
FAKULTETA U SPLITU

STUDENT/ICA	Paula Šarić
NASLOV RADA	The Relationship Between Literature and Music in the BTS Discography
VRSTA RADA	Završni
ZNANSTVENO PODRUČJE	Humanističke znanosti
ZNANSTVENO POLJE	Filologija
MENTOR/ICA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	izv. prof. dr. sc. Brian Daniel Willems
KOMENTOR/ICA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	
ČLANOVI POVJERENSTVA (ime, prezime, zvanje)	1. izv. prof. dr. sc. Brian Daniel Willems 2. izv. prof. dr. sc. Simon John Ryle 3. izv. prof. dr. sc. Gordan Matas

Ovom izjavom potvrđujem da sam autor/ica predanog završnog/diplomskog rada (zaokružiti odgovarajuće) i da sadržaj njegove elektroničke inačice u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenog i nakon obrane uređenog rada. Slažem se da taj rad, koji će biti trajno pohranjen u Digitalnom repozitoriju Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Splitu i javno dostupnom repozitoriju Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu (u skladu s odredbama *Zakona o znanstvenoj djelatnosti i visokom obrazovanju*, NN br. 123/03, 198/03, 105/04, 174/04, 02/07, 45/09, 63/11, 94/13, 139/13, 101/14, 60/15, 131/17), bude (zaokružiti odgovarajuće):

a.) u otvorenom pristupu

b.) rad dostupan studentima i djelatnicima Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu

c.) rad dostupan široj javnosti, ali nakon proteka 6/12/24 mjeseci (zaokružiti odgovarajući broj mjeseci)

U slučaju potrebe dodatnog ograničavanja pristupa Vašem ocjenskom radu, podnosi se obrazloženi zahtjev nadležnom tijelu u ustanovi.

\_\_\_\_\_ Split, 22.9.2022. \_\_\_\_\_

mjesto, datum



\_\_\_\_\_ potpis studenta/ice